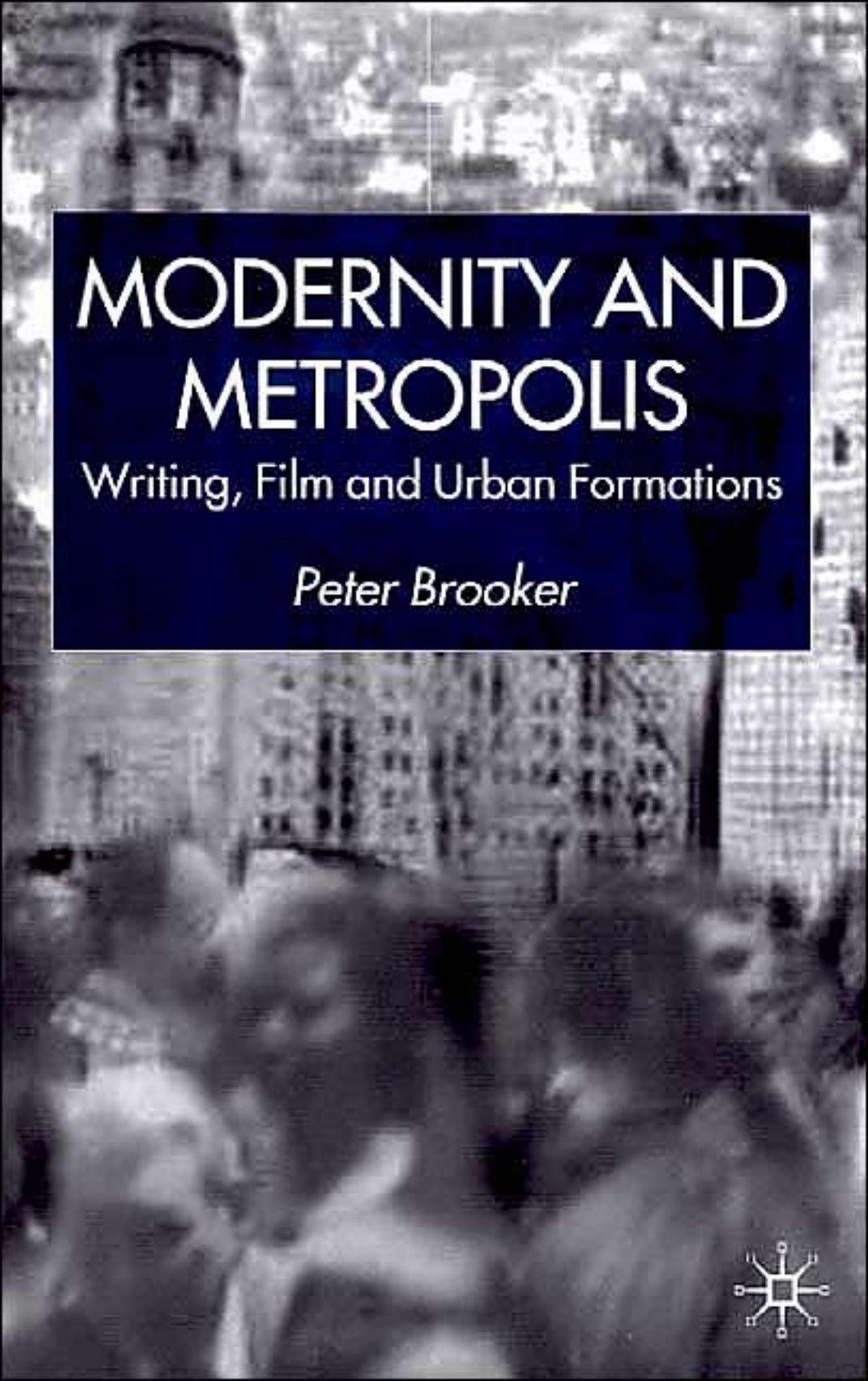
MODERNITY AND METROPOLIS
Writing, Film and Urban Formations
Peter Brooker

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'We all have to deal with the uncertainty of the modern'
Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

To Roger, Michelle and Mark

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Introduction: Beginnings in Endings

Modernity and metropolis

Doreen Massey describes cities as 'the intersections of multiple narratives', a nexus of distinctive and coexisting stories (1999: 171). I am interested in what follows in certain kinds of urban stories, those comprising some of the texts of modernist and postmodernist literature and film, and in how they interpret the changing physical forms, subjective and social experience of the city. I read these texts, so to speak, to understand how they have read the city, but also to discern how urban forms and processes have enabled or limited those readings. As this suggests, I see the 'imaginary' and the 'actual' as existing in a constitutive dialogue and therefore depart from recent post-structuralist accounts of the entirely discursive or written city (Wolfreys, 1998, Donald, 1999). Iain Sinclair speaks of the 'city as a darker self: a theatre of possibilities in which I can audition lives that never happened' (1999c: 7), and this captures my sense of the exploratory role of fiction and the symbolic imaginary as it uncovers alternatives within present realities. Above all I am interested in how single and collective urban identities are in this way made, undermined or re-imagined. My primary examples are of London and New York, commonly recognized as the leading 'modern' cities at the turn of and into the first half of the twentieth century, and described as exemplary 'global', 'postmodern' or 'postcolonial' cities at the century's end. For some commentators this millennial moment is the time too of the 'post-metropolis', as urban life, even in established Western cities, moves decidedly beyond its earlier classic forms. I turn most directly to this theme at the volume's close.

How are we to understand these changes and these terms? Modernity and metropolis are, as this book's title suggests, a place at

least to begin. 'Modernity' we might suppose serves as a generic description of the social, economic and political developments structuring the development of twentieth century urban life. As we shall see, however, even so apparently straightforward a definition already suspends a number of problematic associations – of modernity with Western capitalism and the Enlightenment or 'modern project' – and distinctions – between social modernity, cultural modernism and postmodernism. A restricted sense of 'modernity' brings problems enough however. Ward and Zunz's *The Landscape of Modernity* (1992), for example, presents New York City at the turn of the century and up to the 1930s as a precursor of today's global cities. They characterize the New York of the earlier period as a city of harmonious 'rationality' and 'pluralism'. The late twentieth century, they say, has witnessed an imbalance, as the homogenizing influences of the post-war period have receded and the tendency towards pluralism, associated now with new patterns of immigration and an awareness of ethnicity, has become accentuated. 'Ethnicity is back in full force', they declare (13). Their response is to urge a new reconciliation between these competing 'kinds and visions of modernity' (12); between, in short, the capitalist and cultural versions of the 'modern project', pulling one way towards commercial interests and civic uniformity and the other towards social diversity.

The obvious problem here is that Ward and Zunz seek balance and harmony when there are, in their own account, tensions and shifts of emphasis across the century. Thus, though they present New York of the 1910s and 1920s as a precursor of the global city, suggesting a narrative of mirror-like continuity, the City is clearly not the same at these times, even in its basic configuration of forces. Their earlier New York is in fact less a precursor than a model of how the interests of business, planners and citizens were at one time accommodated. To invoke it now means suppressing the complications of the City's discontinuous history, squeezing the present back into the shape of the social democratic settlement of the pre-war period. All this is reinforced, moreover, by their choice of the single term 'modernity', when others (social planners, architects as well as cultural critics), would recognize the story they tell as one in which the keynote of modernity (rationalism), gives way to the keynote of postmodernism and postmodernity (pluralism). The historical narrative here is neither a linear one of before and after, nor of prediction, repetition or sameness. Nor will it quite do to think only of a later 'intensification' of earlier features already in place – not if we think, for example, of the

differences embodied in the internal immigration of African-Americans from the southern states to major Northern cities including New York in the 1920s, and the immigration of Hispanic and Asian groups to these cities in recent decades. The New York of the early century is not the global city of the end of century, nor does it 'still define[s] global cities throughout the world' (3).

A different kind of explanation and sense of historical process is therefore needed to account for the persistence of similar features, for their augmentation and transformation, reversal and recession in the face of the newer tendencies a city such as New York illustrates. Does this mean we must think of 'postmodernity' as overtaking 'modernity'? The problems with the designation 'post' and divergent meanings of this term across different disciplines are well known. The major theoretical scenarios associated with Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and J-F Lyotard present us with either a radical economic and cultural break *from* the modern, or an avant-gardist push beyond present paradigms which is understood as constitutive *of* the postmodern. David Harvey suggests we overcome these differences by understanding both modernism and postmodernism as an expression of the dynamic of capitalism and employ 'modernity' to describe this whole movement. This is at least to embrace both terms. It's clear, however, that Harvey himself remains committed to a 'modernist' perspective, both in the priority he gives to social class above other social indicators, and in his off-hand dismissal of postmodernity as modernity's 'chaotic nemesis', its 'nihilistic downside' or as 'unconstrained ... eclecticism' (1996: 419, 425, 433). As so often, postmodernism is made to figure as modernity's other – the superficial or 'merely' playful, the derivative or discordant – the 'chaos', in short, which threatens modernity's harmony and common purpose and to which it must be returned.

We might want to resist the nostalgia for wholeness and presence in this common denigration of postmodernism but wish still to confirm the grounding of culture in capitalism. As a general proposition this does not take us very far, however, or rather it takes us too far, since it would apply, in general terms, across two or more centuries of industrial society. A closer inspection is likely to reveal marked changes, even progress, as well as sameness, or decline. Lawrence Rainey (1997), for example, has shown how modernism was significantly implicated in commodity production and shaped as much by commercial as artistic priorities before anyone thought to suggest this of postmodernism. Rainey's intervention is an extremely useful one for the study

of modernism but again there is little gain in describing modernist culture as if it belonged to the financial world of the 1990s rather than the 1910s. The radically changed conditions and technologies of production, ownership, distribution (including the role of film and TV), affecting the market place for authors and printed books should tell us that both culture and commerce have been involved in a more complex narrative than one where the whole story is given in the first chapter.

A broad concept of modernity can therefore simply be a way of dismissing postmodernism. It can doom culture to a sorry after-effect of underlying economic turbulence, and bolster the assumption that there's nothing new; that modernism or New York in the 1920s got there first; that the past, in other words, embodies the future; even that we can recover an – inevitably – fuller and more harmonious moment of past wholeness. The real problem, however, is that to favour modernity and modernism in such terms is to ignore the tensions and dynamic of both the past and the present. For it is not simply – as in Ward and Zunz – that 'rationality' has receded and might return, but that capitalist rationality continues to operate, though on an entirely different scale and in a different sphere. The relevant comparison in this case would not be between the mirror images of latter-day New York and its supposed precursor, but between *kinds* of global city then and now.

But when does a city become a global city and is this the same as a 'metropolis'? And what of the 'modern' city? In one of its main uses, emphasizing the economic, technological and social character of urban development, the 'modern' city was the 'industrial city', with nineteenth century Manchester as its pre-eminent example. In the related sense deriving the modern from the Enlightenment tradition of rational scientific and human progress, the example would be late nineteenth century Paris (King, 1995: 110–111). Other European cities (and this is a Eurocentric tradition), such as Vienna or Berlin, though of lesser stature and with their own distinctive characters, followed this second modern type. But both types were then decisively outdistanced by London at the end of the nineteenth century. The term 'metropolis' had been used earlier in the century to help comprehend London's growing size and its national and international function, and by the 1840s it had emerged ahead of Manchester as 'the Empire's commercial stronghold and as the world's financial capital' (Garside, 1984: 229). By 1890, London was the largest city the world

had known with a population of 5.5 million (Sutcliffe, 1984: 5), and easily qualified for the description, 'A modern big city of international importance' as Andrew Lees glosses the related term 'Weltstadt' (1984: 67–68). London was, however, a distinctively imperial capital, at 'the heart of the empire' in C.F.G. Masterman's pointed title of 1901, whose every advantage, especially its ports, maintained its commercial, administrative and political hegemony in the world. Schneer (1999) prefers on these grounds to describe the London of 1900 as an 'imperial metropolis'. And this helps emphasise the *type* of global city London was – one whose pre-eminence was founded on a commanding economic and political position and depended on the mechanisms of military, ideological and administrative power. Globalization in this case, therefore, or this kind of globalization, implied conquest and exploitation, and the ideological processes of conversion, assimilation and subordination. The term 'metropolis' (from Greek 'mother city'), further implied that London performed a co-ordinating role in the nexus of power and control that defined Empire. Arguably, the shape and style of the city as well as its major forms of employment supported it in this role. Thus, in the 1900s, London employed 20,000 colonial administrators, while colonial investments enabled the wealthy to settle in the West End and to enjoy its developing communications systems, theatre and new department stores (Selfridges opened in 1909, Heals in 1917). The very physical appearance of turn of the century London – the use of 'Edwardian' or 'classical baroque' for buildings in Whitehall and elsewhere and the construction of Kingsway as an imperial avenue from the Strand to Holborn – played its part too in asserting the merits and magnificence of Empire (Schneer, 1999: 18–28).

Other European cities developed as variations on this model of world or imperial global cities. New York, however, introduced a new type. For it was not a political but a commercial capital, and was above all a cultural city in which the famous symbolic verticality of its skyscrapers, the ambitious iron work of its first bridges and its elevated transport system conveyed a sense of the modern as 'newness' in the here and now. By the 1920s, New York was 'the type of the modern metropolis' (Keating, 1984: 140), a model which spoke of the present and of an imagined future society in a way London, Berlin or Paris did not. This symbolic role was part, we have to recognize too, of New York's own global identity: the shape of things to come, calling other older nations and their citizens to a new future.

Saskia Sassen suggests this future has come to pass, after a fashion at

least. For 'the agglomeration of high rise corporate offices we see in New York, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo ... has emerged as a kind of representation of advanced city form, the image of the post-industrial city' (1996: 23). But this homogeneity of urban forms in the economic sectors of cities worldwide, is intersected, Sassen adds, by other tendencies in outlying districts associated with the traditional working class and new immigrant communities 'beyond the central urban core' (23). Thus finance capital and old labour, white middle class and immigrant poor, coexist in uneasy juxtaposition and Sassen goes on to detail the disparities as well as the connections between these groups and neighbourhoods.

How is this different from an earlier New York? In terms of its general structural morphology it is not different. Like other global cities, New York continues to exhibit tensions throughout the period between homogenization and decentralization, between the transnational and the local, or between rationality and pluralism. There are differences in scope and scale, however, bordering on a difference in kind. For in the later period globalization has produced a different 'World Order' in which the technologies of power are controlled by an 'electronic herd' (Friedman, 1999), rather than Tammany Hall, and the instrumental rationality which served mid-century capitalism has shifted from the boardroom to the faceless, indeed placeless, information and finance networks or 'flows' which circuit the globe (Castells, 1996). The last two decades have seen the undermining if not erosion of the manufacturing base of first generation global cities, the widely noted expansion of the service sector, the growth of uniform consumer outlets, the recruitment of workers in all sectors to short term contracts and the extremely rapid development and inescapable penetration of information and media technologies.

These are the features of 'post-Fordism', so named because of the passing of a way of work and of life embodied in the production techniques, work practices and controlling influence of the magnate Henry T. Ford over his workforce and their families. Fordism presents a model of monopoly capitalism, or of early to mid-century modernity: the emblem of a productivist economy before the swing into predominantly consumer societies. In post-Fordism the rock-like associations instilled by the Fordist factory regimen between class, masculinity, workplace and hours of work, and of women and the home, have proved porous, while our social, ethnic, sexual and psychic lives have been further moulded by media technologies. The world is in the home: by way of the PC monitor or TV screen, or, what might be the

same thing, is nowhere particularly. The effect, as many writers and commentators have noted, is dramatic, especially in the city, where these developments have produced a sense of new possibility and self-invention alongside a sense of unbelonging and an urban mentality of fear, paranoia or nostalgia (Kennedy, 2000).

I would add some further observations to this account, related to Sassen's analysis of coexistent extremes. Firstly, that the wealthy, the working class and social minorities are now different people, by number, age, gender, ethnic group and relations to kinds of work, education, technology and mainstream culture. Secondly, that there is an unprecedented combination across the urban spaces of contemporary cities of physical proximity and socio-economic distance: as, for example, in the face to face encounter between advancing corporate capitalism with its everyday accoutrements of wine bars, boutiques and high price warehouse conversions and the Bangladeshi community in London's Spitalfields, or the uneasy coexistence through the 1980s and early 1990s of a gentrified middle-class and the homeless of New York's East Village (see Abu-Lughod, 1994 and chapters 4 and 6 below). Thirdly, there is a commonly recognized generalization of these features. That is to say, the complex connections and disconnections across extremes are themselves common to global cities, both East and West. The effect, belatedly recognized in the West as Anthony D. King points out (1995: 120–121), is the coexistence of polarized modes of production (from manual to high-tech) or of housing (luxury lofts above cardboard cities), together with their associated classes and ethnicities, which bring the 'Third World' into the 'First'. If parts of New York are felt to resemble Singapore and others to resemble Beirut or Cairo, as King and others aver, this is, I suggest, an expression of the present City's distance and difference from an earlier New York.

In effect, this is to sketch the economic and social forms of the metropolis in an age of 'pluralism'. Ward and Zunz associate this term with a resilient ethnic and cultural diversity, with 'diverse people shaping neighbourhoods' (12) in competition with the corporate builders, regulators and real estate speculators who see 'seeming chaos' and 'undisciplined suburban sprawl' (5, 9). But there is more to say about the historical composition of New York's neighbourhoods and about the recent movement of business and peoples out of the City. For the transformation in recent years, which Ward and Zunz point to, of the minority population of African-Americans and Hispanics, Asians and other new smaller groups into the majority population of New York City, once more distinguishes the City in this period from

earlier decades, both in numbers, ethnic groups and their associated neighbourhoods (Brooker, 1996 127–130). Furthermore, changes of this kind are accompanied, and indeed in part explained by the effects of recent de-industrialization and out-migration. Both these latter tendencies, as Peter Hall (1984) observes, have again been common to major Western cities. Of the USA, he writes:

> economic activities of all kinds, it seemed, no longer required the immediate, dense face-to-face contacts that – as recently as the 1950s – had provided the basis for metropolitan agglomeration ... Thus technological and economic forces were taking entrepreneurs in the newer, expanding activities far away, while social forces – residential preferences, fear of crime, the search for a better environment – took the people away too (444)

Not all the people moved away however. For the age of de-industrialization and 'white flight' to the suburbs and small towns has seen a concentration in the inner city of both older and newer ethnic groups, and of a disadvantaged underclass to which they and a displaced white working class now belong. As identified by William J. Wilson (1987), the creation of an underclass in the urban ghettos has resulted from the shift from manufacturing to an informational production basis. They are in Scott Lash's account, a 'new class', which is at once excluded from access to information and communication structures, and 'downwardly mobile from the working class' (1994: 130). We can understand then, in one of the most divisive ambiguities of the post-modern, how 'pluralism' and the diversity, decentralization, or deterritorialization this term implies, can be read as either positive and liberating or as evidence of unprecedented inequality, destitution and neglect.

In Peter Hall's view these tendencies are signs of the 'new reality of metropolitan decline' after 'the golden age of dynamic capitalism' in the 1950s and 1960s (1984: 431). London, he believes, shares this experience with New York. The 'assumption that planning could lead to a harmonious steady state' in London, he argues, was confounded by 'unplanned' fluctuations in the birth rate and the movement of people first from the North to the South and then away from London in the late 1970s and 1980s (34). In the newly recognized 'inner city' of the period, contraction of the manufacturing base produced unemployment which helped ignite 'race riots' in Notting Hill, Brixton and Tottenham, as second generation African Caribbeans protested against

social disadvantage and institutional racism. Though these conditions continue, African Caribbeans and an expanding South Asian community (together numbering over 1m of the city's population), are established in distinct areas in South and West London and the East End. In London, as in New York and elsewhere, 'ethnicity', as Ward and Zunz put it, ' is back in full force'. This is an important emphasis for an understanding of changed identities and perceptions of the self and other, and is of interest throughout this volume. What should be clear, however, is that the range and awareness of ethnicities (with all the associated issues of cultural difference, social inequality and political policy), mean that these cities, at this stage of globalization, differ, as a matter of detail, from each other, and in social and economic terms differ quite radically from the global cities of earlier decades.[1]

Political leaders in the US and Great Britain seek to maintain a collaborative settlement between business and the state. As Slavoj Zizek has pointed out, for the British Labour Party under Blair and American Democratic Party under Clinton, this so-called 'Third Way' 'brings us back to the first and only way. Global capitalism with a human face' (1999: 7). Nick Cohen views Charles Leadbetter's volume *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy* (1999), as an apologia for the Blairite conception of modernity 'as a computer driven global knowledge economy' whose slogan is 'Globalization is Good' (1999: 33, 34). Blair of course insists his way is the 'modern' or 'modernizing' way. To hold to a belief in an alternative political modernity means challenging this monocular view of a monopolizing capitalist economy in the name of social diversity and a different unity founded on social equality. Raymond Williams was one of those who tirelessly posed this challenge. Hence Williams's belief not simply in socialism (an unpronounceable concept for Blair and Clinton and an unthinkable one, one suspects, for George W. Bush), but in 'socialisms' – 'since there are many peoples and cultures, there will be many socialisms', said Williams (1989b: 297). A future common culture, indeed 'any society towards which we are likely to move', as Raymond Williams also liked to point out, will be more complex, not simpler, nor more 'singular and unilinear' than earlier forms (1989b: 37, 295). We cannot approach this complexity by dissolving the distinction between modernism and postmodernism into the uninflected all-embracing dynamic of capitalism, as inescapable as this system appears; nor hearken back to the supposed harmony of an earlier moment. Instead we need to re-articulate the relation between these moments in terms

of the distinction Williams also emphasised between dominant, residual and emergent cultural tendencies in a given conjuncture, allowing for both continuities and discontinuities within an economic order which can only paradoxically maintain itself and remain 'the same' by pursuing a commitment to flexibility, expansion and diversification.

We need, what is more, to adapt such a model to different moments within and across cultures. The experience of 'space-time compression' identified by David Harvey, and the altered sense of personal and social identity accompanying this change, is generally recognized as a principal effect of globalization. I take this up again in the later chapters of this book. There is something to add at this point, however. John Berger has argued that 'modern history' begins 'at different moments in different places' (1992: 203). Homi Bhabha similarly identifies modernity's 'ambivalent temporality'. For just as cultures follow their own sense of the passage from the past to the modern present, so 'each repetition of the sign of modernity is different, specific to its historical and cultural conditions of enunciation' (Bhabha 1994: 247). There is such a thing too as 'becoming modern' and we might, after Lyotard, and Homi Bhabha, understand the 'post' as a sign of this emergence: a movement 'beyond' existing conditions which germinates within a present dominant order until the point of unmistakable breakthrough. The dominant in other words was once subordinate; the taken for granted a mere possibility. But we need then to see this process less as the 'perpetual' drive towards newness, as Lyotard would have it, than as activated at different times within specific histories and cultures. Thus it is, as Clyde Taylor comments in relation to African cinema, that 'Blacks can only dubiously be post-modernists' when a first modernist phase 'has in fact hardly begun' (1988: 108). In similar vein, Jeremy Seabrook detects a pattern of change in the rapidly developing, 'post-industrial' societies of the East which echoes the experience of workers in Great Britain at a much earlier point of industrialization (1996: 1–3). The implication is that if microtechnologies work in league with a globalizing economy to compress space and time and to homogenize world cultures into a single market, these same processes have simultaneously helped to foreground worldwide disparities in wealth and opportunity, to reveal parallels and divergencies across space and time, and to produce combinations of the premodern, modern and postmodern in the one culture, community or city which jostle the regular into an irregular sequence.

Reflexivity

My argument is that the distinction between the modern and post-modern, as usually understood, will not capture the process of mixed and uneven development characterizing contemporary globalization nor the concentrated intersections of the local and global in the overlapping modes of modern life experienced in present day cities. By 'modernity' I mean to imply this patterning, in urban sites particularly, of shifting relations, layered tropes and common but divergent narratives moving in a process of recession, becoming and realization. For as Harvey argues, we need a theoretical model which comprehends both becoming and being: both 'spatial forms and temporal process' for 'the dynamic of urbanization [process] and the construct of the city [being] exist in a fundamental creative tension' constituting 'a critical point of socio-ecological transformation' (Harvey, 1996: 436). I join Harvey here too in seeking to formulate a perspective upon what he describes as '"uneven spatio-temporal development"' or '"uneven geographical development"' (1996: 429–30). I want consequently to stress the coexistence of 'modernities', each realized in its own time of the present and bearing the traces of past forms and possible alternative futures. Modernity is therefore at once a retrospective and forward looking project in which a present or prospective form can, as Beck and Giddens imply in their concept of 'reflexive modernization', critique and radicalize an earlier expression. Giddens points to the susceptibility of all social and institutional forms to 'chronic revision in the light of new information and knowledge' (1993: 293–4). The reflexivity of modernity confounds Enlightenment thought, though it is its product, undermining Enlightenment certainties and installing a 'methodological principle of doubt' which disrupts intellectual paradigms and is '*existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals' (1993: 294).

As this suggests, reflexivity operates also upon conceptions of selfhood and identity, since individuals, now bereft of the certainties of family, community and nation, are, Giddens concludes, bound to create their own biographical narrative. Individual lives become a lived instance of the 'risk society' where unexpected economic, social or ecological disruption lurks within the mechanisms of a late capitalist order. In itself, the internal operation of 'reflexive modernization', Beck argues, is spontaneous and unmotivated. 'Risk' results from the unlooked-for side effects of unrelenting modernization, as for example in the advent of global warming. Nevertheless,

Beck reasons, this unconscious reflexivity will produce a more reflective and interrogative mentality which is a necessary foundation for a more responsible society. The result, he declares, will produce '"new" modernities of the present and future' (1994: 183).

I am interested in this book in the appearance of something similar in the realm of the aesthetic. My hope is that now the 'post' has fired us away from the complacencies of modernist orthodoxies, we might look, reflecting upon the reflexivity of the cultural order, not to less but to more modernism – or, more precisely, new modernisms. Scott Lash offers some thoughts in this direction. Beck and Giddens, he says, present a one-sided emphasis upon 'individualization': a theory of reflexivity in which individuals are freed from the structural constraints of simple modernity so as reflexively to monitor its structures and their own identities. The theory can only realize its role as critique, Lash argues, by reckoning in its other 'cultural' side or 'double'. This means addressing the role of new information and communication structures, elaborating an aesthetic and not simply cognitive reflexivity, and advancing the case for community rather than individualization, for 'we' rather than 'I' (1994: 110–174, 198–215). In the process, Lash discerns a reflexive aesthetic akin to modernism in the work of Zygmunt Bauman for whom modernism stands as the subversive opponent of Enlightenment reason. It exercises this role through an association with contingency and ambivalence which Bauman links in turn with the figure of the Jew, the representative type of the stranger (141–2). Bauman therefore sketches the parts of an expanded ethical and ethnicized aesthetic project.

There are two problems with this extrapolation, however. The first is that an association of the Jew with contingency and indeterminacy and thus with modernism, is flatly contradicted by the anti-Semitism of modernists like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. The second is that although the 'stranger' (who can only be defined of course against assumed norms), has been and remains the Jew (Bauman's key contemporary reference is the Holocaust), this type has also been figured in altered urban conditions as the African-American, Hispanic or Asian-American of New York City or the African-Caribbean youth or Bangladeshi Muslim of parts of London, to take only these two cities. In addition, the alien is not only the ethnic but also the gendered or sexual other. Recent debates and a tradition of 'science' and 'speculative fiction' alert us also to the alien who is the other of the 'human', or is, in the era of communication technologies, the

'human' transformed, through a linkage with the machine or microchip or the effects of biotechnology and genetic engineering. Bauman's reflexive modernism is therefore neither consistent with earlier artistic high modernism, nor appropriate to the much-changed circumstances of a later modernity.

Joel Kahn and Walter Kalaidjian help us reflect further on the configurations of earlier and later modernisms. Kahn takes issue with Charles Jencks' view that Los Angeles represents the present and future city, that its decentred multi-ethnic society and hetero-architecture make it uniquely new. The New York of the early years in the century showed similar features, Kahn argues. Significantly, however, he does not suppose that there has been no change and that late century LA and early century New York are *identical*. The difference, he concludes, derives from a different 'particular *representation* of the city, an *image* of a culturally diverse rather than culturally homogenous city' (1995: 108). Again importantly, he does not assume these modes of representation record a 'pre-given cultural reality' but should be understood as constitutive of it, as '*part of* a modern imaginary' (112). Kahn demonstrates the working of this imaginary over the course of the century by reference to a popular novel of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vetchen's *Nigger Heaven* (1926). The novel was a popular success but poorly received by the black intelligentsia who saw its exoticism as a betrayal of the idea of the 'new Negro' and as merely confirming the stereotypes of a white readership. Jazz, or its evocation in art or literature, met with a similar response, since, as Kahn points out, jazz too embarrassed conservative New York black intellectuals by its primitivism and erotic associations.

The observation of internal differences and tensions in formulations of black identity and culture within the Renaissance is an important one which I take up below with reference to Langston Hughes, one of the few black authors sympathetic to Van Vetchen's novel (see also Brooker, 1996: 184–200). Kahn suggests *Nigger Heaven* adopts an 'ethnographic' perspective which shows a distinctive black culture existing in the everyday life of Harlem. He argues, moreover, that this perspective, or way of representing and constituting blackness, has since prevailed over the norms of mainstream white America and the internalized self-image of many blacks. In the terms suggested above, if the culture and idiom of black street culture was at first subordinated (patronized by white society and repressed by black intellectuals), it was later viewed as a positive means of agency and self-definition.

Kahn draws in this thinking on Walter Kalaidjian's study of a

'revisionary modernism' in American artistic and literary culture. Thus for Kalaidjian (1993), the early collectivist-bohemian modernism of journals such as the *Masses* and *Liberator* was renewed and revised in the inter-war years. The later manifestations of this left modernism, in 'Language Poetry', community and installation art, he views (though not without some qualification) as examples simultaneously of post-modern critique (8–18). Thus the radical liberal democratic impulse of an earlier avant-gardist modernism, obscured by the orthodoxies of high modernism, is reconfigured as a collaborative, interventionist aesthetic, and mobilized against the codes of today's consumerist, information and media driven society. Since the forms of this society are inescapable, says Kalaidjian, a radical art must campaign from within, using media and advertizing styles and technologies against themselves. Radical art therefore exercises a 'homeopathic' strategy (249) to promote a progressive contemporary agenda on ethical, sexual, ethnic and ecological issues, and does this on behalf of new social groups and subcultures.

Kalaidjian enlists Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht in a tradition connecting the historic avant-garde with post-structuralist critique (14–15). Indeed, Brecht's concept of 'Umfünktionierung', the 'functional transformation' of cultural institutions, sites and modes of production, might be said already to describe the governing strategy of a 'revisionary modernism'. Both earlier figures also continue to influence contemporary theory in other ways and in revising and re-articulating their ideas (Benjamin's concepts of the 'loss of aura' and of the *flâneur*, for example), postmodern theory comes to display its own reflexivity. As the theory *of* the postmodern, moreover, it reflects upon this very condition, presenting a symptom and conceptualization at once of the concern with time and history and hence with our own contemporaneity which underlies reflexivity.

One such concept is Jacques Derrida's notion of 'de-limitation' by which he means to capture the contradictory movement between the marking of boundaries or norms and the simultaneous undoing of and going beyond these markers. Like other terms in Derrida's work, 'de-limitation' describes his own deconstructive practice: a foregrounding of relations of difference and the deferral of meaning. What is of further interest, however, and indicative of theory's own reflexiveness is the perception by Beatrice Hanssen (1998), of an affinity between Derrida's concept and Benjamin's materialist historiography. Benjamin sought to counter the assumption of history as a series of

self-evident facts or events moving along the linear path of progress by highlighting the shocks, blind spots and dangers exposed in a materialist reading. At such moments history famously 'flashes up', producing a constellation of past and present in 'the time of the now', or 'Jetztzeit'. What is particularly important is that Benjamin saw historical phenomena as most expressive when they were at the point of decline and in the process of becoming something else. The decline from one moment to another presents the moment of revealed history. Hence Benjamin's interest in the Parisian arcades at the point of their passing in his major study of Baudelaire (1968).

We need, as I have been suggesting, to understand modernity in some such way: as always passing and always becoming, at a point of ending and new beginnings. Hanssen suggests that Benjamin's historiography is echoed in Derrida's deconstruction. Elsewhere, Homi Bhabha evokes Benjamin's concept of 'continua of transformation' in a deconstructive perspective upon postcoloniality (1994: 235). For both contemporary thinkers, Benjamin and Derrida critique a unified or evolutionary view of modernity, and the assumption of a moment of harmonious 'presence' which we have seen haunts some versions.

Does this mean that Benjamin and Derrida are, to all intents and purposes, saying the same thing? Does theory's self-reflexiveness result in deconstruction or historical materialism or a materialist deconstruction? Certainly, to view the present in deconstructive fashion alone, as composed of both traces of the past and anticipations of the future, would fail to take the measure of Benjamin's sense of such moments as 'punctual', as marked by violence, by a zig-zagging backward looking progress rather than linear movement straight ahead. As Buck-Morss comments, Benjamin's concept of the 'now time' gives a focus and political intent to historical change which deconstruction would render as an endless and eternal scene of interpretation (1995: 359). This suggests the 'constant nascent state' of Lyotard's concept of the postmodern (Brooker, ed. 1992: 148), must be historicized as the reflexive dynamic constituting modernity's self-movement. At the same time, can Benjamin's historical materialism focus a political intent which is appropriate to late modernity? Kalaidjian thinks not. Benjamin's belief in the proletariat as the agent of revolutionary change – 'The myth of an immanent proletarian revolution' – says Kalaidjian, 'remains one of the definitive hallmarks of modernist culture'. Benjamin's solidarity with the working class therefore puts him on one side of 'the *coupure* severing the modern from postmodern epochs' (214). The implication which many would

endorse, is that contemporary society is to an unprecedented degree a consumer and socially pluralist and not a manufacturing or predominantly class society. Earlier exponents of left modernism such as Brecht and Benjamin, and indeed the Marxist tradition of which such figures were a part, accordingly stand in need of profound, self-conscious revision. In principle one might say this is consistent with what is an already reflexive tradition. For it was as an enemy of dogma and friend to dialectical materialism of the kind Benjamin describes that Brecht conceived of his plays as necessarily open to re-staging and interpretation. In the event, however, Marxism, socialism and socialist modernism have met with both a blank wall and open minds. For while this heritage has been petrified, demonised and dismissed (with greater ease after the fall of Communism in 1989), it has also been re-articulated, through a reading especially of Antonio Gramsci and theories of ideology, with later concerns in feminism, race and ethnicity, and ecology. Kalaidjian's study is an example of just such a re-articulated cultural politics.

Such are the workings of reflexive modernity and revisionary modernism, at least in general terms. I want in the remainder of this Introduction to consider two further aspects of a reflexive modernist project which relate more closely to the authors and texts discussed below: the theme of community and the use of modernist artistic tropes and devices.

Community

Scott Lash argues that community must be understood as being 'in-the-world' and 'rooted in shared meanings and routine background practices' (1994: 157). These meanings and practices are first learnt, but 'become unconscious', he says, 'as if inscribed on the body' (157). Young (1990) and Harvey (1996) are suspicious of the conservatism and exclusivity which attends such an idea or ideal (the actual existence of such homogenous communities is in doubt for both thinkers), particularly when this is founded upon a valorised model of face-to-face interaction. I take this up directly again in Chapter Five below. Neither position, I should say here, is adequate. The first because it fails to see how communities and especially artistic communities are founded not only upon accustomed practices but on shared interests ('Communities are not about shared *interests*', Lash insists, 157), and the second, because no modern communities, especially in the metropolis, will depend either entirely upon face-to-face

interaction or upon the difference and otherness emphasised by Young and Harvey.

Raymond Williams's reflections on community and social class are of interest here. The mining communities he describes both in prose and in fiction depend upon an active sense of neighbourliness which is intimately connected to an attachment – though not, he says, an idealizing one – to location and place. A 'common culture' or shared 'structure of feeling', in Williams's terms, is sustained by such a 'knowable community'. At the same time, the class identity of modern industrial communities was, as Williams describes it, both rooted in a particular 'place' and developed as a conceptual and political relationship across space. Reflecting on the situation of signalmen such as his father and fellow workers in the general strike of 1926, for example, Williams describes their common local circumstances and how they were also connected – through modern communications, including the railway – in 'a community with other signalmen over a wide social network, talking beyond their work with men they might never actually meet but whom they knew very well through voice, opinion and story' (1989: 105–6).

Williams' account of a class identity echoes Benedict Anderson's idea of the 'imagined community' of modern times where a shared national identity is similarly understood as a necessarily mediated one, uniting people over geographical distance. Interestingly, too, Anderson connects this with a realist narrative mode and a sense of time captured in the term 'meanwhile'. This permits a 'transverse, cross-time, marked … by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar' (1983: 30). Synchronous time linked actors who were entirely unaware of each other upon the national stage as upon the pages of a novel. 'This,' Homi Bhabha comments, 'is the time of cultural modernity' (1994: 158).

Williams' collective community combines face-to-face neighbourly contact with a common political attitude across different places at a given historical time. What he importantly came to realize, however, was that the bridge or projection from the local neighbourhood to a collective identification with a political movement intent on transforming the 'total relations of a society' (1989: 115) became increasingly problematic under the conditions of advancing capitalism. The concentration of ownership and its attendant social relations obstructed the extension of the values of the local rural-industrial community beyond itself. And Williams suggests this was particularly felt in the distant, dehumanizing power centres of the

metropolis, where he finds a negative and abstract politics which mirrors capitalist reification. The obstacle to community has been in a sense then a mentality and the abstract economic and political discourse it has produced, even in its opponents.

There is a problem here, however, of time – the time of this modernity, in Homi Bhabha's and Williams' remarks, and in modernity's sense of time. If we think of modernity as engendered particularly in the metropoles of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, it is clear that the imagined or class based community here met another difficulty. For, from the beginning of the century, 'metropolitan time' was felt not as the 'meanwhile' of dual, parallel moments along a common time-line, but as an experience of instantaneity and all-at-onceness. Its 'mental life', as described by Georg Simmel, was marked by *anomie*, a protective indifference and mutual subterranean hostility (1995 [1903]).[2] Though some commentators welcomed the image of a new modernized future, most tended to bemoan the speed, turmoil, anonymity and loss of human association modern urban life entailed (Lees, 1984). The metropolis was thought to be without balance and harmony, a landscape of physical and psychic extremes in which the modern citizen was subjected to the mayhem of the city's ungoverned, shapeless sprawl, or to the tedium of its unrelieved sameness. Either way, the metropolis appeared to spell the end of community. Both the imagined national and collective class communities were in a sense defined by these conditions but constituted themselves outside and against them.

At least one further kind of community of a different type did emerge from within these conditions, however: the artistic community comprised of a temporary and fragile alliance of émigrés who, as Williams puts it elsewhere, shared the medium of their art and the divergent project we have come to know as modernism (1992). The artistic medium, which centrally held their interest, was reworked to express an altered mentality and simultaneously register the time of a new modernity. For if realism was the representational mode of the earlier type of community and experience of synchronous time, new modes were required to capture the experience of the anonymous crowd and multiple times of the metropolitan scene. Hence the use of montage and collage and a description such as Francis Picabia's of New York, the most modern city of the century, as a 'Cubist City' (Tallack, 1991: 81).

Along these lines we can see the modernists as a community or communities of artists formed in, and alert to, a modern metropolitan

spatio - temporal environment. But this does not tell us how these groups saw themselves or functioned in the broader society. Williams' additional term, 'formation' which he introduces as a way of conceptualizing the terms of association across a broader social and historical canvas, of cultural groups, artistic movements and tendencies, is useful here (1980: 149–169). His particular examples are the Godwin Circle, the Pre-Raphaelites and, in the twentieth century, the Bloomsbury Group. Formations such as these, Williams argues, were an assembly of individuals held together by a social ideology and class position as well as an aesthetic project, and just as importantly by a pattern of professional and personal liaisons, friendships, partnerships and marriages. They were marked by a shared sense of purpose and even a common personal style but also by internal differences and friction, as well as by tensions between their artistic and social perspectives and those of the general society. They were, in a sense, in a dialogic relation with the broader social formation, in different measures countenanced by and critical of its dominant character.

I suggest that the Bloomsbury Group's contemporaries, the London Imagists and Vorticists in the 1910s and the Harlem Renaissance in New York City in the 1920s, can also be seen in this way, and explore how these groups were constituted in chapters 1 and 2 below. A further question, related to later chapters, which I also want to address here, is what conception of community or formation (if these terms retain their currency), are relevant to writers and artists in recent decades? What class or class fraction, urban mentality or 'structure of feeling' do contemporary writers, film makers, critics and theorists represent or speak to; what social actors and agents will be addressed by a 'refunctioned' and resituated political and cultural modernism?

To answer some of these questions we need to think of 'community' in relation to the other themes and tendencies considered above – post-Fordism, consumerism, globalization and post-colonialism – which shape reflexive modernity. Two especially helpful contributions have come from within cultural studies, in theorizations, respectively, of subcultures and the diaspora. Scott Lash comments in relation to Dick Hebdige's work on the first that 'this focus on subculture is also a focus pre-eminently on *reflexive* community' (1994: 147). 'Reflexive' here carries two related senses. Firstly that, compared with the inherited customs and habits of a simple community to which we belong but do not join as a matter of personal decision, we 'throw ourselves into the communal world of youth subculture' (147). Secondly, that subcultural identities are formed and reformed through

a process of symbolic construction – in 'the "bricolage" of a discontinuous set of signifiers from previous styles' (147).

Walter Kalaidjian (1993) further links subcultural groups with the collaborative artistic work connecting post-war artists with the suppressed radical democratic forms of early modernism. Those he sees as 'revisionary modernists' use techniques of defamiliarization, bricolage and montage to intervene in, and question a world of, advanced consumerism and corporate power. Thus, he argues, through the 'collaborative aesthetic practice' of the new social movements, 'articulated as they are to class, environment, racial, feminist, gay rights and public health issues' the American 'avant-garde legacy of cultural critique will live on' (263). I want to investigate the presence and strength of some of these affiliations and social networks in both British and American examples below.

The concept of the diaspora, secondly, describes the connections across an 'imaginary community' founded not on ideas of nationhood or class (though it does not exclude these categories), but on ethnicity. It captures the dispersal of peoples over time and space and the struggle to maintain what Roger Bromley terms 'a critically imagined collective community' (2000: 9). That is to say, though the experience of diaspora can invite nostalgia for an 'authentic' homeland, prior to dispersal and migration, as a *critical* concept it engages in the necessary re-telling and re-imagining of a changing inheritance as this interacts with, absorbs, and combats the features of mainstream modernity. Thus, in Paul Gilroy's study of the diaspora of 'the Black Atlantic' forged by the intellectual and cultural exchange between African Americans and Europe, the reworking of tradition in art, writing and memory gives rise to 'the articulating principles of the black political countercultures that grew inside modernity', and express, he says, an 'antagonistic indebtedness' to it (1993: 191).

As Gilroy's study makes clear, the diaspora is not new to late modernity. It had of course been constitutive of Jewish experience for centuries before its association with diasporic African American identities and the Harlem Renaissance (Kahn, 1995: 116–122, Gilroy, 1993: 209–217). What Gilroy looks toward is a contemporary and future political articulation of diasporic identities in response to the changing conditions of reflexive modernity. Kobena Mercer sees it acquiring this new cultural force in the late 1970s and 1980s in Britain when, 'the emerging *cultures of hybridity* forged among the overlapping African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas … point to ways of surviving, and thriving in conditions of crisis and transition' (1994: 3–5). This

collective awareness developed especially in the nation's cities, as in Mercer's own case in multicultural South London, and came, he argues, to form 'communities of resistance', (9) mobilized against right-wing governments, widespread discrimination and racist policing in the early 1980s.

The diaspora is therefore by its nature reflexive and politicized, always in a dialogic relation with the dominant and with the past, drawing upon both for its critical resources in the present. Its conception of place is stereoscopic; of time, non-synchronous; and of identity, anti-essentialist. Thus, the diaspora implies, says Gilroy, an 'infinite process of identity construction' (1993: 223). More than this, however, the concept of the diaspora is important for the way it reconfigures not only 'identity' but also 'community' and thus relations of 'sameness and difference' and of the 'self and other' over space and time. I want briefly to reflect further on this aspect.

Some would see the binary distinction of 'self and other' as itself the product of a modernist and colonialist problematic (Appiah, 1999: 69). Thus, reinforced by the assumptions and methods of early anthropology, the Western modern and colonizing 'self' was perceived as stable and normative and the 'other' as undeveloped, aberrant or inferior. In imperialism's more blatantly racist formulations, the white Western 'civilized' self and non-Western, non-white other are encoded as 'human' and 'non-' or 'sub-human'. The controlling simplicities of racist stereotyping meanwhile converted the 'difference' this 'other' represented into an image of unthreatening sameness. While modernism accepted, indeed bolstered, the model of the Western centre and the non-Western periphery, absorbing a selective 'world culture' into the modern artistic project, it did not necessarily share Western imperialism's political presumptions, nor in many cases identify with the social project of modernity. It is worth remembering too, with Raymond Williams once more, how many of the modernists were outsiders. They were not 'Third World' migrants to be sure, but they were frequently émigrés who brought their own otherness and the otherness of world cultures to Paris, London and New York.

Iris Marion Young's reaction to the 'ideal of community' is a reaction to the 'modern' binary of the 'self and other' which she would deconstruct into a politics of difference founded on 'an openness to unassimilated otherness'. Her own and others' theoretical commitment to 'difference', is consistent with the intensified social awareness in contemporary modernity of difference in gendered, ethnic and

sexual social relations, including the appearance of an ethnicized and gendered underclass in major Western metropolises. In some cases this has prompted a re-reading of sources in modernism. Thus Hanssen, once more, finds an affinity between Walter Benjamin's openness to the future and Derrida's attentiveness to the strangeness and illegibility of the other. This in turn, she argues, brings both authors close to the ethico-political imperatives of Emmanuel Lévinas for whom the 'other' represents the self's limit; a sign of incommensurability, or, with Young, of the unassimilable, in contemporary social relations.

These thinkers help us to a recognition of the radical difference which cannot be converted and will not yield to sameness. At the same time, as Scott Lash complains, the deconstructive sensibility that sees endless and ungrounded difference and allows for no sameness, eliminates all prospect of solidarity and common action. Instead of community, the tradition of 'allegorical' thought, as Lash terms it, proposes a radical aesthetic individualism. But if community depends on sameness, what, in a world of mobile peoples and circulating commodities, where local, national and global intersect, remains the same? Stuart Hall puts this question to James Clifford's notion of 'travelling cultures'. Hall's own conception of diasporic identity shares the post-structuralist emphasis on difference and constructedness evident in Gilroy and Mercer's remarks above. Thus, 'Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (Hall, 1990: 235). Elsewhere, Hall suggests, by way of an answer to his own question and to the political detachment of post-structuralism, that 'sameness' can be thought of as a point of provisional solidarity around pressing contemporary issues; a provisional full stop which brings a necessary 'arbitrary closure' to the discourse of difference, since it is such a pause 'which makes both politics and identity possible' (Hall, 1997: 137). Hall's thinking is echoed in Paul Gilroy's important description of the value of the diaspora. It 'should be cherished', he writes, because it critiques essentialism in the name of 'innovation and change' and 'for its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a *changing* same' (1993: x, xi).

The advantage of the concept of the diaspora, understood in this way, is that as a concept of community it embraces both Scott Lash's unconscious 'habits and common practices' and the more politicized moments of provisional solidarity and self-conscious will to change. It provides us, moreover, with an example of the intersection of the local and the global in a community of both face-to-face and spatialized

connections whose cross-cultural networks run athwart the forms of capitalist globalization. Community, so understood, has a strong personal, familial and collective historical sense and reworks this in a hetero-cultural present where much may be 'unassimilable'. [3]

The positions I've sketched above on both subcultural and diasporic communities, particularly in the vocabulary of creative practice they use, give a direction to the discussion in the following chapters of this book. I am interested in the kinds of reflexive communities the writers and film makers I discuss are part of, help produce, or imagine, in how and where they 'place' themselves in London and New York and in the East-West locations of Tokyo, Hong Kong and Bangkok, and how the fictions they create address the conditions of the multi-ethnic, global metropoles of the 1980s and 1990s. Ideas of community also bring me to the thoughts with which I want to close this Introduction. Where modernism sought to unify a fragmentary culture and social identity, the 'postmodern' arts, it is said, are open-ended and responsive to contingency. The result is a combined art and social technique of bricolage, a way of creating identities, communities and 'solidarity' in Richard Rorty's words ' out of little pieces' (quoted Bhabha, 1994: 235). Certain key and recurrent terms therefore – estrangement, collage, hybridity, syncretism – begin to offer a common vocabulary for reflexive modern and postcolonial communities and for the mixed discourses of a reflexive aesthetic.

A reflexive aesthetic

I have wanted above to outline the ideas of a reflexive modernity, a reflexive modernism and reflexive community. At the risk of over-simplification we might say that underlying each of these is a self-conscious historical sense, a critical engagement in the present with the past of industrial or Fordist modernity, with modernism, and with Empire and colonialism. Early twentieth century modernism was, of course, itself reflexive. As T.S. Eliot had said: what distinguishes us from our forebears is that we know more than them, 'and they are that which we know' (1951: 16). Eliot did not assume that 'we' (a 'we' his writing willed into being), might not know this tradition. A common refrain of postmodernism, on the other hand, has been that we have lost a sense of history, that we are swept up in the operations of consumer society and recycled along with other unconscious products. Beck and Giddens' idea of reflexive modernity as a spontaneous

modernizing force, in fact helps reinforce this view. Seen this way, as Lash argues, it does not account for the 'reflective' domain of culture, including theory, literary and other cultural forms. In the extended definition embracing culture, reflexivity can be said to open a 'space of re-evaluation', to adopt Roger Bromley's phrase (2000: 1), in which both conceptual thought and critical fictions work to clarify, retrieve or reinvent a lost historical narrative.

I want to reflect finally on the artistic strategies and devices appropriate to a 'reflexive modernism'. We remember first of all that Charles Baudelaire famously defined modernity as comprising 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable' (1964 [1863]: 13). This he connected with the experience of modern Paris and the artist's response to its crowds, movement and pace. What his leisurely *flâneur* sought was the thrill of the passing moment embodied in the lone woman 'street-walker' of the poem 'A Une Passante', an object of fevered but forlorn desire, consummately here in the present but forever gone (See Benjamin, 1973: 44–6).

'Metropolitan time', as this once more confirms, was felt not as the 'meanwhile' of dual, parallel moments along a common time-line, but as the experience of an evaporating presence, of instantaneity and fugitive all-at-onceness. It became difficult, as a result, to apprehend the city in a comprehensive form which would produce the parts and whole as an integrated, legible text. So at least thought Henry James on his return to New York in 1904. He found the city unreadable and in a sense unwritable, beyond comprehension and beyond literature. 'The *il*legible word', he observed '... hangs in the American sky ... belonging to no known language' (1968 [1907]: 82–3). As Peter Keating shows, James was reacting not simply to the baffling spectacle of the modern city, but to the, for him, facile ambition in Emile Zola and H.G. Wells to render the totality of the modern in a literature of fact and record, however sweeping and energetic. Zola lacked 'penetration' and Wells was more 'journalist' than artist (Keating, 1984: 134–5).

James's comments of course helped initiate a criticism of the pretensions of a 'scientific' realism and of an external, quantitative view which was taken up most openly later by Virginia Woolf. Woolf's essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924), confirmed the separation of modes of apprehension and narrative mode James had introduced, setting art and the imagination (the province of the 'Georgians', including Joyce and Eliot, in Woolf's account) on one side, and the social realism of the 'Edwardians', Arnold Bennett, Wells, and

John Galsworthy on the other. '[I] n or about December 1910 human character changed', declared Woolf famously in the same essay (1992: 70). And this new character living in a modern metropolitan time and place seemed to demand new techniques. The job of the 'modernist' artist was not to represent the modern panorama but to render the shifting internal life of an individual consciousness, to present 'the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure' (87). If realism was the representational mode of the earlier moment, earlier character and type of community too, then internal monologue, stream of consciousness, Imagism, montage and collage emerged as the modes corresponding to the new sense of individual identity and social collectivity in the metropolitan scene. Crucially, however, this objective did not prevent modern artists from seeking to extrapolate a universal truth from the significant detail or to place the fragment in a shaped and coherent whole.

In effect, for the 'high modernist' writers, the first half of Baudelaire's classic formulation of the modern, characterized the experience of social modernity, while its second, described the function of modern art in relation to it. Modern art was to present the permanent in the merely contemporary, to perceive the whole in the fragment, to hold time still. We hear this in Eliot's claim that the merit of the 'mythic method' he learned from James Joyce's *Ulysses* was that it gave an 'order to the anarchy and futility which is modern society' (Kolocotroni et al., eds. 1998: 373), and in Ezra Pound's motto that 'literature is news that STAYS news' (1961[1934]: 29). Modernist techniques – Joyce's epiphany and the clarity and directness of the Image – sought similarly to present the essence of a passing gesture of moment, or, in Vorticism, to capture the still point at the centre of dynamic movement (See Charney, 1998).

We come here in these perceived relations between contingency and permanence, chaos and order or presence and drift, to a key difference between the earlier and later periods. Derrida and Benjamin can again assist us in understanding this change. For in critiquing the illusions of continuity and totality, their work has helped release the first half of art in Baudelaire's classic definition. Whereas in modernism the changing and chaotic in the city, story and poem are brought under the control of formal design or urban plan (both attempts generally thought to fail), the 'ephemeral, fugitive, the contingent' are freed by post-structuralism from their other half: the immutable and eternal. It is the first set of features – which Derrida theorizes as trace, dissemination, *différance* – which commentators

agree are intensified in postmodern, global, or late modern society, and this experience therefore which a reflexive modernism must again confront.

How does it do this? By repeating or refunctioning the modernist past? For clearly – for all that is said of our cultural amnesia – contemporary art, writing, media, film, and architecture do in fact know the past of 'traditional' or historic modernism. In Eliot, as in Pound and others, techniques of irony, juxtaposition, allusion, montaged narrative and mixed idioms are employed in the interests of new conservative order. In Constructivism, Breton's surrealism, Brechtian epic theatre they were employed in the interests of a more 'progressive' social order; in Dada to defy all notions of order. Which of these options might a reflexive modernism adopt?

There is no simple answer. Two things are, however, clear. First, that a vocabulary of 'modernist' technique (estrangement, defamiliarization, montage, collage, bricolage), along with allusions to selected works and authors (pre-eminently to Walter Benjamin), do frequently appear in contemporary discussions of art, literature and architecture. Second, that these devices need to be re-articulated if they are to engage with present-day questions of identity, cultural politics and the contemporary physical and social environment. The way a revised modernism works in company with a postcolonial discourse of hybridity, migrancy, syncretism, liminality and the diaspora is one sign of this engagement. As is the introduction of allied terms from other literatures and cultures such as the 'mestiza', creolization, or 'reprendre' (Mudimbe, 1999: 31), and in another direction, the way a new modernism draws upon concepts from post-structuralism such as decentring, marginality, the rhizome, deterritorialization, and an emphasis upon 'writing' or narrativization for its theoretical framework. The result is an appropriately hybridized discourse: Bakhtin or Benjamin crossed with Baudrillard or Derrida; Fanon with Foucault.

The question, however, is whether the fragmented ephemerality of social modernity is being differently addressed in the reflexive modernism of this later moment. Fredric Jameson presents the most pessimistic scenario for any progressive aesthetic. All cultural opposition is defused, he argues. Not only has the scandal of historic modernism been neutralized by its incorporation into the academy, postmodernism operates now as a lackey of consumer society: 'indeed, it constitutes the very dominant or hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society itself and significantly serves the latter's commodity production as a virtual laboratory of tastes and fashions' (1988: 196). The

problem is succinctly posed once more by David Harvey: it is 'that the emphasis upon ephemerality, collage, fragmentation, and dispersal in ["postmodern"] philosophical and social thought mimics the conditions of flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1989: 302; and see Allan Pred, 1997: 130)

How then can montage, collage or estrangement have the subversive or transgressive effect claimed for them? The answer would seem to set artistic montage (and theory by montage), against a montaged hypermodernity in a homeopathic exercise where everything depends upon the strength of the dosage and who administers it. Walter Kalaidjian presents one of the most vigorous counters to Jameson's pessimism along these lines. Contemporary 'progressive critique', he argues, remobilizes the collaborative democratic tradition of the avant-garde in the context of late capitalism's 'current legitimation crisis' (1993: 15). But if it is bounded by this system, criticism is not disabled by it. Rather, it 'taps the aesthetic possibilities of postmodern contingency' (15) to breach the facade of the '"new world order"', utilizing the spectacles, media forms, icons and myths of the mainstream culture industries to expose contradictions in wealth, fiscal irregularities, sexual inequalities and a 'myriad other forms of social barbarism and waste' (18). Importantly too, the purpose of the interventionist art Kalaidjian describes is to open and interrogate late capitalism in the spirit of 'undecidability' not of a new social blueprint: '"undecidability"', he writes, quoting Henry Sayre, '"is the condition of conflict and contradiction which presents no possible 'solution' or resolution"' (15).

This principle emerges as a key emphasis in a viable reflexive modernism, and the fundamental difference between itself and a high modernism seeking in Eliot's terms to readjust but renew the '*whole* existing order' (1951: 15). Amongst other contributions along these lines there are two I wish to mention which address the conditions of global capitalism and the shift away from a Eurocentric project which a reflexive aesthetic for these times must also entail. In 1999, London's Hayward Gallery staged an exhibition 'Cities on the Move' which drew upon the art, architecture and film of the Asian diaspora in both East and West. The exhibition, designed by the architect Rem Koolhaas, itself recycled the designs of earlier installations at the Gallery. It echoed, said Koolhaas, the 'Merzbau' construction of the early modernist Kurt Schwitters – described as 'an accumulation of (urban) debris that was reassembled a number of times' and was '"unfinished and on principle"' (Koolhaas, 1999a: 16). The exhibition's curators

spoke also of the response in the emerging global cities of East Asia to the economic meltdown of the early 1990s in the 'Tiger economies' of the region. Architects, they reported, 'are debating how to change the model of modernization' (Hanru and Obrist, 1999: 14). In Bangkok architects sought to transform and 're-function' half-built and now abandoned skyscraper sites:

> Taking inspiration from the homeless living in constantly-changing cardboard houses, architects in Bangkok are developing a new, flexible, relevant and constantly changing language of urban architecture and art. There is an acknowledgement that urban space should be able to rebuild itself to deal with the movement, change and mutation (including crisis) that is a condition of urban life (14–15).

Essentially this is an art of bricolage: an art of *différance* and purpose combined, in which the failed and waste products of capital are appropriated to serve more local needs. Alive, once more, to the ephemeral, fugitive and contingent, it eschews the temptation of the immutable totality that completed historic modernism. Rem Koolhaas's concept of 'the City of Exacerbated Difference' sums up the features of this new reflexive aesthetic. In this new urban system, exemplified, it is said, in Asian urban areas:

> Each part is both competitive with and has a relationship to each other part. Now these parts are being stitched together by infrastructures so that every part is connected, but not into a whole. [The 'City of Exacerbated Difference'] does not imply the stability of a definitive configuration because each part is fixed, unstable and in a state of perpetual mutual adjustment defining themselves in relation to all other parts (quoted Hanru and Obrist, 1999: 10–11)

The concept of 'exacerbated difference' and the examples of flexible but socially relevant bricolage, like the contestatory populist interventions described by Kalaidjian, suggest how a critical 'postmodern' art will be engaged in a dialogic relation with the host postmodern culture, sharing its language, as it were, but contesting its meanings, converting and hybridizing its forms and products anew in the light of its own 'indeterminate' ends. Its activities are anchored provisionally – along the lines of Stuart Hall's thinking above – in the interests of contemporary social movements, in issues, which come to life on its

margins, or at moments of crisis. Peter Wollen, in a final example here, describes modernism as 'a battlefield on which purists struggled to expel difference, excess, hybridity and polysemy from their brave new world' (1993: 206). Postmodernism therefore can be seen as the 'belated surfacing' of those suppressed aspects which had 'always been there' (206). This is consistent with the idea of reflexivity outlined above. What in addition Wollen draws attention to, is the circulation of these now released modes and combinations across 'high' and 'low' and 'First' and 'Third' world cultures. Like Kalaidjian, and in other ways Paul Gilroy, Wollen sees a vitality and guile in this circulation across hierarchies sufficient to confound the circuits of global mass consumption. Instead of (as in Jameson above), the appropriation of popular forms by the 'core', Wollen detects the emergence of a 'baroque' hybrid art, developed on the periphery 'in a complex composite of differential times and cultures' (209). This diasporic cultural aesthetic, as it might be termed, substitutes a dialogic set of relations for the binary of sameness (or of unity and order) and difference. Wollen ends:

> Modernism is being succeeded not by a totalising Western postmodernism but by a hybrid new aesthetic in which the new corporate forms of communication and display will be constantly confronted by new vernacular forms of invention and expression. Creativity always comes from beneath; it always finds an unexpected and indirect path forward and it always makes use of what it can scavenge by night (209–10).

Such, I believe, drawing upon this hybrid assemblage of commentators, are the features of a possible politicized reflexive aesthetic. The last examples I have referred to have been chiefly from art and architecture. My own examples in what follows are of literary and film texts. My question therefore must be whether and in what ways these contemporary texts bear out the features of this creativity and how they develop the 'exacerbated' dialogue between 'more modernism' and 'more modernity'.

1
American Modernists in Modern London

The major modernists, as is well known, were frequently exiles and émigrés who formed communities of shared artistic practice in non-native metropolitan centres (Williams, 1992: 92). American artists and writers played an important part in this, but often – in what for many years has counted as the modernist mainstream – in the settings of European rather than American cities. New York, the city of twentieth century modernization, was a place Henry James, Whistler and following them, Pound and Eliot, were keen to leave. We see early in the century, therefore, a disjunction between an emerging modernist aesthetic and urban modernity (Brooker and Perril 2001). Over a generation or more, American artists were motivated by a sense of the antagonism between artistic culture and advancing modernization to shift to Europe, to London and in the 1920s especially to Paris, because here, as they saw it, was the home of a redeeming civilization.

But neither modernism, of course, nor expatriate American modernists, were in themselves homogenous entities. Nor were Europe, London or Paris perceived and experienced in the same way. Modernism is now commonly recognized as a retrospective construction and as internally differentiated in terms of its aesthetic and ideological project as well as its cultural location. Pound and Eliot, also, though generally coupled together as canonic and characteristically reactionary modernists, have never been equally received into the canon nor into British culture (a small but telling sign of their status is that tourist guides to London identify Eliot's work place and post-war home on the Chelsea embankment but ignore Pound's association with the city). But there was much else distinguishing their careers, beginning with the period of their respective association with London. Pound lived in the city between 1908–1919; Eliot from

1915–1965 and they knew different, if at points overlapping Londons. As Ford Madox Ford observed, London could not be conceived as a totality, but only as a mosaic of places, perceived, lived and remembered differently (Ford, 1995 [1905]). I want to elaborate on these different Londons and how they were involved in the making of different modernisms below.

Ezra Pound: Vortex South Kensington

In 1912, in his fourth year in London, Pound was introduced to the political journalist A. R. Orage, and began to contribute to his *The New Age*. The editor and contributors met on a regular basis on Mondays and Thursdays in Orage's office near Fleet Street and in the ABC restaurant nearby. On one of these occasions, the actor journalist and critic Arthur F. Thorn met Pound and they walked afterwards to Pound's lodgings in Kensington. '"It was"', reports Patricia Hutchins, '"a wonderful summer day in July"' as Pound set off with '"such long strides"' that Thorn had difficulty keeping up. Hutchins takes up the story in this way:

> The two young men went up Chancery Lane and along High Holborn, past the Holborn Empire where Orage and some of his friends often went to see George Robey or Harry Lauder, and then along Oxford Street, past the all-too-new outline that Selfridge had built some years earlier and later as a bankrupt watched from a window across the way. At Marble Arch they turned down below the site of the old Tyburn gibbet, its associations annulled by the age of public lavatories. Along the avenue running parallel to the main road stood a few carriages under the heavy-leaved trees, the horses' tails tossing the flies away in the afternoon heat.
>
> Where Kensington Gardens are railed off from Hyde Park, under the low-branched chestnuts, nursemaids or couples sit in the shade and the path dips down to the little valley and the Italian garden. Four great pans of water soften over the reflected sky, and only partly hidden by the trees, is the high background of houses along the Bayswater Road.
>
> The walkers, one more conventionally dressed than the other, both good-looking, were probably too busy talking to notice how the ground again moves upward and the limes with their sticky sweetness leave a brown dust on the bleached grass, or to do more than glance at children and parents at the Round Pond. Crossing

> the Broad Walk, they would have ignored William III in his cumbersome clothes outside the Palace windows, and passing that group of Ilex trees on the corner, found themselves under the London planes of 'Millionaire's row'. Then the narrow passage between the walls of a residence and the barracks took them out into Church Street, and they went by the café in Holland Street where Pound often used to lunch. Eventually they reached the small courtyard behind St. Mary Abbots.
>
> 'I remember Pound letting himself into number 10 and leading the way up to the first floor room. There he flung off his jacket and set to work to make tea on the gas ring.'
>
> For a couple of hours they talked of books and people connected with *The New Age* or other publications. 'I remember Ezra gave me his visiting card and I must still have it somewhere. As I left that evening to go back to a settled home, I had the impression that Pound was a good bit on his own at that time'.
>
> (Hutchins, 1965: 108–9)

There are some significant features to this account. Hutchins depends on Thorn's memory of this day as recalled in conversation with her in the mid-1950s, and builds on this in her own study published in 1965. The original incident is based upon some verifiable facts (*The New Age* meeting, the walk to Pound's room at 10 Church Walk), but these depend for their character and meaning on Thorn's memory (it was a beautiful July day, the way Pound walked, what he did on arriving home), and supposition, on Thorn's part, that Pound was much on his own and on Hutchins' that the walkers did not notice trees, people, or the statue of William III. In addition, Hutchins sets this already layered reconstruction in a picture combining asides on George Robey, Harry Lauder and Selfridge with evidence of changes to the fabric of the city. These references reinforce the passage of time since the actual meeting, which her much later account seeks to render in its contemporary immediacy. This mixed temporality reveals the problematic nature of the whole, exposing how the apparent authenticity of external and interior details rests not upon a basis in fact but upon a 'rhetoric' of authenticity in a twice mediated textual reconstruction.

Hutchins' description shows how memory and biography have to climb back over a terrain of scattered fragments and empty time to set the figures of an earlier moment in motion in an embodied material setting. I do not mean to fault or 'correct' this picture, but to

underline, in part in anticipation of what follows, how such a narrative of the past is necessarily selectively constructed – indeed imagined as much as reported. The world of London is composed of physical and social facts but these are never absolute and are in themselves inert, or as if invisible, without the interested eye and mind to give them meaning and value. Hutchins recreates an Ezra Pound in Kensington in the 1910s. Tourist guides of the city do not recognize or value this association and therefore do not record it. The past lives in the present, that is to say, or not at all.

Thorn remarks that Pound was 'a good bit on his own at that time'. That he should remember Pound this way is surprising. They had crossed London talking together, and had come from a regular meeting with others involved in a common concern with art and politics. What's more, Pound had broken into London literary society before any contact with Orage and *The New Age,* and soon, too, would exchange his one room for a 'settled home' with Dorothy Shakespear. Thorn points nevertheless to one side of the rhythm of privacy or apartness and community in Pound's London years. We know little of his domestic married life with Dorothy Shakespear, for instance, and a great deal of his part in the public life of art and letters. The composition and role of this metropolitan artistic community is extremely important to the making of Pound's modernism in the pre-war and war years. Just as important, however, were its decimation and retreat in the post-war years, as artistic 'society' came up against a newly resilient and conservative society in the broader sense. A feeling of isolation and betrayal came then to mark Pound's final years in London. After three years in Paris when he was more on the periphery than at the centre of avant-garde activity (Clearfield, 1978: 130; Wilhelm, 1990: 277), he settled in Rapallo, Northern Italy. Modernism may be associated with the city, but the bulk of Pound's major modernist work, the *Cantos,* was composed here, at a considerable distance from any metropolitan community.

Hutchins was prompted to contact Thorn, she says, by a note from Pound on the *New Age* meetings. This was written in 1953 from St Elizabeth's Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Washington, where he had been placed after being found unfit to stand trial on a charge of treason. Clearly Pound was himself operating at a distance of both time and place from this remembered London. One thinks too of his earlier reminiscences, in the *Pisan Cantos* and Canto LXXX, especially, written in 1945, of early acquaintances and of Kensington. His thoughts here play over what remains (the Serpentine, the round pond, the sunken garden,

the gulls in Kensington Palace Gardens), over what has gone, and what might be (now that Churchill's out, labour is in and money might be free again, 1975: 516, 514). From his present time and place, in the DTC Pisa, Pound projects another place in a dimension of remembered time past and possible time future, in which selected physical sites, moments, and personalities evoke a personal history and sense of value. Thus, along with the physical icons of Kensington Palace Gardens, *Canto* LXXX recalls a visit in 1911 to Maurice Hewlitt's house in Salisbury, and a visit with Dorothy Pound to a Yorkshire abbey owned by a cousin Charles Talbot where they viewed a copy of the Magna Charta. Amidst a welter of allusion and reference, this and surrounding Cantos refer to Yeats, Ford, Eliot, Lewis, Orage and in Canto LXXXI an honorary dinner staged in 1914 for the poet and critic of imperialism, Wilfred Scawen Blunt. While these figures move past in a highly elliptical montage, the more public literary events, the war and Pound's reasons for leaving London, go unmentioned. The London of the 1910s is given definition in 1945, that is to say, through a kind of fragmentary personal anecdote. The dominant note is set by the lines echoing Browning, 'Oh to be in England now that Winston's out' and the plaintive 'and God knows what else is left of our London/my London, your London' (1975: 514, 516).

We might simply call this nostalgia – but for the fact that Pound sets these incidents in a general scheme of time passing and of possible new beginnings, and that the Magna Charta and the anti-imperialist Blunt, for example, play a thematic part in the Canto's reflections of rights and justice and what Davie terms 'the matter of England' (Davie, 1975b: 77). This London is therefore a selective but pointedly selective one. It also significantly brings a memory with it, within the scheme of the Cantos as a whole, of the earlier judgement in *Cantos* X1V and XV composed in 1919 of London as hell (Paige, 1971: 191, 210, 239).

Evidently, the 'same place' was for Pound a different, because a changing, place from his changing perspective and circumstances. 'His London' followed an evaluative structure from a first period of 1908 to the years of the First World War, and a second period up to his point of departure and the composition of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and the 'Hell Cantos' in 1919–1920. The Second World War, we might say, changed this view once more since it was only in its aftermath, from the personal hell of imprisonment, that Pound could in the *Pisan Cantos* return to a sense of London's early promise.

It is this early period that I am particularly interested in. Pound

wrote to Patricia Hutchins that her book on these first years up until 1913 could not be called 'Pound's London' but should be titled 'Pound's Kensington'. Pound had taken the force, we might think, of Ford Madox Ford's perception of the decentred and necessarily partial experience of the expanding metropolis. But, in truth, the one was in these years (and perhaps even more so in the *Pisan Cantos*), a metonym for the other: Pound's Kensington *was* Pound's London. His activities did not extend further East, he said, than Cursitor Street (the office of *The New Age*). He knew nothing, therefore, of the East End, and shunned 'the implacable dullness of suburbia' whose expansion was in other terms a mark of the city's modernity (Wilhelm, 1990: 4). His London was emphatically sited in the West End, therefore, but more to the point in the literary society of the West End. He came to London, he said, because Yeats was there. Almost his first port of call was the Poetry Bookshop in Vigo Street, run by Yeats's publisher Elkin Matthews. Opposite, was John Lane's which had published the Yellow Book and was to publish the two numbers of *Blast*. Once installed in 10 Church Walk, Pound regularly stopped off at the Bookshop *en route* to and from the British Museum. At Vigo Street he met Ernest Rhys, who helped publish Pound's *The Spirit of Romance* with his own publisher, Dent, and other figures of an older generation such as Victor Plarr and Laurence Binyon, with whom Pound was most notably to meet Wyndham Lewis in the Vienna Café in New Oxford Street in 1909, a scene recalled again in Canto LXXX (1975: 506–7).

Other meetings took place at the ABC restaurant, Dieudonné's, the Tour Eiffel restaurant in Soho, at Gaudier-Brzeska's and Pound's favourite haunts, The Café Royal and London's first night club, The Golden Calf, off Regent Street. Other favourite restaurants were Pagani's, where in 1909 Pound took D.H. Lawrence to supper, and Belotti's in Old Compton Street. Otherwise Pound attended readings at Yeats's rooms in Woburn Buildings and at Hulme's rooms in Frith Street. In Kensington he met and regularly visited Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt at South Lodge on Campden Hill. In 1911, he was spending his afternoons, he said, with Ford and his evenings with Yeats (Hall, 1962: 36). Ford's *English Review* offices were on Holland Park Avenue, just to the north, and nearby lived Edmund Dulac, Edward Wadsworth, Brigit Patmore, May Sinclair and the Shakespears, whom Pound regularly visited for tea. Other writers, D.H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, John Cournos, John Rodker and Miscio Itow, the Japanese actor/dancer, visited him at Church Walk, the latter two taking over his room when he vacated it. Richard Aldington and H.D.

lived opposite, and when they, and Pound and Dorothy Shakespear married in 1914, they occupied adjacent apartments in Holland Place Chambers. Here Pound met Eliot and introduced him to Wyndham Lewis. In the local café in Holland Street, he is said to have edited H.D. and Aldington's poems before posting them as the first instalment on Imagisme to *Poetry* (Chicago).

Significant encounters, conversations and events literally 'took place' therefore at these sites.[1] In the language of the vortex, Kensington was London's 'vibrant node or cluster', the centre point from which Pound radiated out and 'into which and through which' he and others passed with their work and ideas. This is not to say he did not journey out of this orbit, he did – to Hewlitt's, to Stone Cottage in Sussex with Yeats, to Paris, the South of France, and in 1912 to New York. He also corresponded at an energetic rate with those outside London – with Harriet Monroe and Margaret Anderson in Chicago, with John Quinn in New York, with William Carlos Williams and, unstintingly, with his parents. But these connections with people and places were almost exclusively on literary matters and served both to plug an augmented charge into the hub of Kensington and to send back campaign messages for a modern 'renaissance' from the London base.

'Pound's Kensington', we have to add, was not simply what London meant to Pound, but *Pound's* Kensington, another Kensington from the Kensington of new department stores and of the underground opened in the 1880s which for others made it 'new'. Unlike the Futurists or Vorticist painters, Pound showed little interest in such signs of modernization. He meant rather to join and orchestrate the 'cultural level' of the metropolis. His routines and characteristic itinerary would accordingly show a cognitive or better cultural map of the city rather than the relevant pages of an A-Z. Even so, the 'culture' of the city no more presented a unity than did the city itself. Most obviously, the literary and artistic community Pound joined and helped to shape, held itself separate from another differently constituted and differently sited movement, namely Bloomsbury. Eliot would relate positively to this formation in a way Pound never did, but the composition of the Kensington based formation itself requires closer scrutiny.

First of all, London presented Pound with both the cultural capital America lacked, and with 'cultural capital' in another sense too: a living tradition embodied in a social network of writers and artists. Thus the senior members of this circle, Elkin Matthews, Harold Monro, Binyon, Rhys, Plarr, Selwyn Image, Ford and Violet Hunt, not only befriended and helped publish Pound, they connected him with the

Pre-Raphaelites and the Rhymers Club of the 1890s. The Shakespears, in turn, not only provided Pound with female companionship but also introduced him to Yeats. Olivia Shakespear, moreover, was first cousin to Lionel Johnson and related to the ancient English family, the Talbots, recalled in the Pisan Cantos.

Pound knew 'all the Swells', as D.H. Lawrence remarked (Stock, 1974: 97). He was intent on making a name for himself and was delighted to have joined this society. He reported his success to his parents, and to Williams wrote 'Am by way of falling into the crowd that does things here. London, deah old Lundon, is the place for poesy' (Paige, 1971: 7), immediately appending a list of what Williams should read and advice that he should follow suit and 'come across'. Evidently, Pound was himself still the American abroad, 'born in a half savage country', in the words of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and ambitious for 'civilization'. What the latter meant to Pound, we can see as much as anything by the figure he cut in London streets and drawing rooms. Invariably, his contemporaries commented on his appearance, on the shock of red (or to some eyes golden or auburn) hair and pointed beard, on his jade earring, grey silk coat and square, lapis lazuli buttons, and ebony topped cane. What you saw was what you got; a bohemian after the style of the 1890s, steeped in Romance literature and in Rossetti and Swinburne. For its part, Edwardian literary society in England had moved into a conservative to liberal mode: the world of Henley and Newbolt, and Wells, Shaw and Galsworthy. Those who Pound admired were at the end rather than the beginning of something, 'decadents' and aesthetes from the previous century. Like them Pound was, again in the words of *Mauberley*, 'out of date' and 'out of key with his time'. In this respect, the early Pound was less 'modern' than a novelty, less the *flâneur* than the dandy and more spectacle than spectator, kitted out in his striking but somewhat *passé* idea of the poet. At the same time this image was combined with an unusual purposefulness and campaigning didacticism which suggested the Yankee rather than the dandy. Thus Pound stepped out in London literary society as an 'American Europeanist', in Donald Davie's description, acceptably eccentric to Edwardian sensibilities in his out of date Frenchified non-conformity, but less acceptable in his show of learning, ambition and professionalism (Davie, 1975a: 23). That London was, in one breath, the place to be and to get on and the place for 'poesy' suggests exactly this combination of end of century aesthete and twentieth century go-getter.

The story of Pound's subsequent London years is the story of how

this second side of his artistic personality, his 'Americanness', as it were, modernized the first to a point when he was too up to date for the English metropolitan literary establishment. The society which was ready to tolerate this eccentric who knew Romance literature and could turn out 'The Goodly Frere', found him less acceptable as he accelerated into a modernist form and idiom and sought to create rather than join a literary intelligentsia. His 'creative translations' of Anglo Saxon, Latin and Chinese gave offence to academic orthodoxy while his contribution to *Blast,* in the infamous judgement of G.W. Prothero, editor of the *Quarterly Review,* was found to stamp a man 'too disadvantageously' (LE 358). Pound lost commissions and income as a result, and never ceased to cite Prothero as the source of his own ruin and the symptom of a nervous and moribund culture which had neither the courage nor the intelligence to support its artists. But its artists too had gone or were defeated. Ford retired to Sussex and then shifted to France and America; Imagism had surrendered to Amygism and was bested by the Georgian anthologies. Lewis admitted that the war did for Vorticism. Orage turned to spiritualism and retired to France. Hulme and Gaudier-Brzeska had been killed in combat. Both developments, a strengthened cultural conservatism and the loss of community and connection, prompted Pound's exit from London and later exile.

Pound's bitterness, as expressed in the 'Hell cantos', for example, is unqualified, and the reversal is complete. In the end, London provided him not with a model of civilization but with the hell his long epic poem needed if it was to follow the structure of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The city shaped the *Cantos* and shaped what we have come to recognize as the characteristically oppositional stance of the lone reactionary modernist to contemporary social and economic modernity.

Iris Barry: life and contacts

Did Modernism and modern London need to diverge in this way? Perhaps in a sense this is Pound's own question, as he glimpses another way in the other time before (or after) world wars in the *Pisan Cantos*. The most obvious 'other way' of course was Eliot's who alone of the 'Men of 1914' found a settled accommodation with the city and the English. The price was an institutionalized modernism, and I examine the terms of this bargain below. I want to suggest here that other possibilities circulated in the vortex of Pound's Kensington and that they concern questions of gender and sexuality and the role of

women in this formation. Several women writers with an association with London – Dorothy Richardson, H.D., May Sinclair (and of course Virginia Woolf) – represent a different, sometimes urban based modernism, and these have been fruitfully explored elsewhere (du Plessis, 1986; Bowlby, 1988; Radford, 1991). I want, however, to illustrate these aspects of Pound's Kensington through a single and quite singular essay, Iris Barry's memoir 'The Ezra Pound Period', written in 1931.

Iris Barry's essay returns us to this London in interesting ways. It is, once more, a – necessarily – selective and evaluative construction of the past, partly because of the operations of memory, and partly because it sees the artistic milieu sketched above at the transitional moment of 1914–18 through Pound, as its title suggests. Of most interest, however, is what it reveals – in what is *not* noticed, recalled or reported on – of the creative, gendered and sexual dynamics of this formation.

The essay tells of a meeting with Pound on a windswept Wimbledon Common in 1916, he discoursing in his remarkable heteroglot accent[2], of further discussions and weekly gatherings in the war years at first 'at an inexpensive restaurant in Soho' and then, as Barry blends different incidents into a generic episode, of regular dinners at an unnamed restaurant in Regent Street (164–165). A coda from 1931 sees Pound as 'invisible', and aside from his poetry, 'comparatively inaudible nowadays' (171). But beyond this, the years from 1917 or 1918 to 1931 are not referred to, nor is there any mention of the correspondence between herself and Pound before her arrival in London (Paige: 76–106). Nor does she refer to her own life respectively in Birmingham and in London and the United States before and after this particular period (see Meyers, 1980, 1984; Wilhelm 1990).

Restaurants were very important to the life of the literary and artistic community of this period. T.E. Hulme and the Poets Club had met at the Restaurant de La Tour Eiffel in Soho where in 1909, Pound read 'Sestina: Altaforte', one of his first new poems published in London. A favourite was Dieudonné's on Ryder Street, off Piccadilly, where first, on 15th July 1914, the Vorticists held a dinner to mark the publication of *Blast*, shortly after Wyndham Lewis had decorated the dining room, and two days later, Amy Lowell held her own celebratory dinner for the Imagists. An apparently later meeting of Vorticists dated 'Spring 1915' at the Tour Eiffel Restaurant is the subject of William Roberts' painting (used, such are the vagaries of literary history, as the cover illustration for a popular anthology of Imagist verse). Iris Barry does

not name either of these restaurants in her account, nor refer to these associations. Her second restaurant is also unnamed (the Café Royal and Mme. Strindberg's 'Cabaret Club' were in the area but it is neither of these). Both Norman and Stock say it was a Chinese restaurant (Norman 1969, 197; Stock: 1970: 242) though there is no basis for this in her account. What or precisely where it was are unimportant, however, since it becomes not a place so much as the spirit of a place, a blurred venue where people came 'during 1917 and 1918' (165) to be reminded that 'war was not perpetual' and that 'new music and new and fresh writing and creative desire' were in 'the long run more important' (168). Pound is the fixture, the place they come to: less himself now the newcomer and outsider than the established impresario of old and new, orchestrating the rhythms of Vortex London. He attempts, as she says, 'to draw everything together' (170).

Barry introduces the regular and irregular attenders at this virtual assembly. The company is varied, spanning scholarship and the arts across the generations. Minor figures such as Edgar Jepson and Edmund Dulac (a regular) are there, along with Arthur Waley and 'once or twice', Arthur Symons. Ford appears, now in uniform, and so occasionally does Yeats, along with younger figures, such as Aldington, Lewis (both also in uniform) and Eliot. Several others are mentioned as present: Arundel del Re, May Sinclair, Mary Butts and John Rodker. At the same time, many who figured in the Ezra Pound 'period' are neither at the restaurant, nor appear much, if at all, in Barry's account: Elkin Matthews, Pound's publisher, Hulme, F.S. Flint, Amy Lowell, sometime companions and sometime rivals in the narratives of Imagism, and D.H. Lawrence, a protégé of Ford's who got to 'modern subjects' first (Stock: 175), contributed to *Some Imagist Poets,* and was involved, so it is said, with H.D. (Wilhelm: 222). A.R. Orage is also not there, though Pound depended on *The New Age* for his livelihood and for his knowledge of economic theory. Others, vital to the American axis of Pound's project as editors and patrons such as Harriet Monroe, Margaret Anderson and John Quinn are not mentioned in Iris Barry's account. The other new American, Eliot, was a sometime visitor to the restaurant, says Barry, but was unaccompanied by Vivienne Eliot. Ford sits away from Violet Hunt, his now estranged mistress. Pound's present mistress, Iseult Gonne is not present; no more is Maud Gonne though she was in London with Yeats at this time. Pound's long time mistress, Bride Scratton, is in no sense 'there' and was never publicly seen with Pound. Dorothy Pound moves delicately like 'a young Victorian lady out skating' (165); H.D. is 'more silent even than Mrs Pound' (166). Harriet Shaw Weaver, 'lion-hearted' patron

of the *Egoist* sits up straight and severe with a 'nervous air' like 'a bishops daughter' (167). And Iris Barry is herself more a witness to, than a player in, this assembled scene, one of the 'three or four young females' who sit adoring Eliot or are pounced on by the 'chattering', inconsequential Violet Hunt (165–6).

Women, we cannot help noticing, are somewhat demeaned and peripheral. They talk among themselves, they are quiet or silent spectators, or they are simply absent. As the faces and figures are painted in, Vortex Pound in Vortex London becomes a masculinist group portrait. However, the role assigned to women in this picture is not simply a subordinate one, it is also highly sexualized as the number of liaisons alone suggests.

Pound's thinking of the period confirms this. In Rémy de Gourmont's *Natural Philosophy of Love* and *Latin Mystique*, he found a combined theory of sexual and intellectual or creative faculties: an 'osmosis of body and soul' and a view of sex as integral to 'the domain of aesthetics' (Pound, 1960: 341). Man spurts up and is the inventor, associated with 'the new gestures ... the wild shots ... the new up-jut', while woman is 'the conservator, the inheritor of past gestures ... not inventive, always the best disciple of any inventor' as Pound extrapolated on De Gourmont's text (1958: 204, 213). Elsewhere, he had pictured 'new masses of unexplored arts and facts ... pouring into the vortex of London' (1970: 117) and, describing the symbolism of the male phallus 'charging head-on the female chaos', volunteers that, 'Even oneself has felt it, driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London' (1958: 204). This then (London, literary culture, woman), is what Pound sought to penetrate. Ideas are literally 'disseminated' by the charging male phallus/intellect; ejected and sent off to propagate like semen. The war years, said Pound, were his most sexually active period (Wilhelm: 210). They corresponded too to his most productive period as a publicist and essayist and his emergence in *Ripostes* (1914), *Cathay* (1915) and *Lustra* (1916) as a 'modernist' poet. What the modern movement needed, Pound consistently urged, was the magazines, journals, publishers and patrons to 'disseminate' its best work. These: the *English Review*, *Poetry, Des Imagistes, Blast*, the *Egoist,* the *Little Review,* the *Dial* and others, gave the café society of Pound's Kensington its cultural network and infrastructure. At the same time, it was at this level of production and publication, that it met with hostility, as in Prothero's reaction to *Blast.* And if production and distribution (of the creative and sexual energies and, as Pound came also to think, of the economy and body

politic), were blocked, you had not culture and civilization but their absence, which was hell.

Pound chose to include Prothero's letter at the close of his 1920 essay on De Gourmont. The essay is subtitled 'A Distinction', since France, Pound believed, and De Gourmont (the father figure of a 'vortex' of younger Parisian based French poets, 1973: 386), would support an international journal to foster civilization, whereas England would not (1960: 356–7). Paris appeared to offer the permissive alternative in social sexual and artistic manners to obstructive, puritanical, 'foetid' London. England's rejection of him confirmed his view that it had itself abandoned a historic common culture shared with France and Western Europe (Davie, 1975b: 79).

Pound's letters to Iris Barry from April 1916, prior to her coming to London, read, in the context of his interest in De Gourmont, as evidence of his sense of the exchange of ideas as a sexualized transmission. They are flooded with reading lists; outlining an impossible 'KOMPLETE KULTURE' (Paige: 86) with Pound as teacher demonstrating his prowess as the lists get longer. And accompanying these there are editorial comments on her poetry and plays, and advice on where to eat and find lodgings in London. He is Polonius, pedagogue and phallus all in one. Needless to say, perhaps, we do not have Iris Barry's letters to Pound. Nor to my knowledge has anyone examined her 'Imagiste' style poems (Paige: 76). She appears as a willing pupil and receptacle, up from the provinces, and entirely dependent on Pound. 'The Ezra Pound Period' says nothing of this, certainly not directly, nor of what transpired in her own life and contacts. She became, as Jeffrey Meyers has established, both sitter and mistress to Wyndham Lewis between 1918 and 1921 in what sounds like a disastrous relationship (Meyers, 1980: 89–93, 351–2; 1984, and see Wilhelm, 185–7; Carey, 1992: 183–4)[3]. She is said to have had two children by Lewis, both of whom he disowned or simply did not recognize as existing. Lewis's views and conduct (he hid his wife and mistresses, boasted of having dropped a child and killed it), are simply indefensible. What is of interest here, is the way Lewis enlisted them in an aesthetic. As Carey points out, Cyril Connolly's warning that 'the pram in the hall' was the enemy of good art was openly shared by Lewis and other modernists (Carey: 170). We are accustomed to thinking of the paradoxes of right-wing politics and revolutionary modernism. We should add an exploitative and profoundly disturbed attitude towards women, and at best an indifference towards children to this picture.

Extraordinarily, Iris Barry offers no hint of this relationship in her essay on Pound, nor in any other of her published writings. Maybe she simply wanted to forget it. However, her experience can perhaps be put another way, as embracing the anti-bourgeois and bohemian attitudes of a liberated metropolitan set. She speaks in her account of Pound of the need to resist 'Mrs Grundy' and links this, citing Pound, with the need to respond to the suppression of Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and the timidity of Joyce's printers (163). It is not impossible that this café society of art and letters, ideas and affairs, was in some way what she was seeking, that she shared Pound's (and Lewis's) view of 'provincialism the enemy'. Certainly she didn't return to Birmingham.[4] She worked as a secretary and stenographer, helped Harriet Shaw Weaver prepare the second edition of *Ulysses,* co-founded the London film society, and discovered a career, firstly as the film critic for *The Daily Mail,* and *Spectator* and then, (after a first marriage), as curator of the film library at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She had published two novels and a book *Let's Go to the Pictures* (1926), in England, and published a monograph on D.W. Griffith in the USA, where she married a Director of the Museum. When Lewis came to New York to paint her husband's brother's portrait, she loaned him money. The situation as Meyers puts it was 'delicate' (1980: 251; and see 1984: 288).

How are we to view these relationships and this career in social and cultural terms? And how are we to view the attitudes of the London modernist set, with Pound at its centre, towards family, children, sexuality and sexual freedom? Iris Barry describes Harriet Shaw Weaver – patron and publisher in the *Egoist* and *Egoist Press* of Joyce's *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, Eliot's *Prufrock* and Lewis's *Tarr* as 'lion-hearted' but severe. She does not mention Dora Marsden, the co-founding editor of the weekly paper, the *Freewoman* (November 1911–October 1912), editor of the *New Freewoman* (June–December 1913) and also the *Egoist*, when the earlier journal adopted this title shortly after Pound was recruited as literary editor. Dora Marsden sought in the *Freewoman*, to expand feminism beyond the cause of suffrage to a consideration of sexuality. As Lucy Bland shows, contributors to the journal, despite divisions on a number of topics, were agreed on a conception of women as sexually active, on a woman's right to control her own body, and were consistently critical of male sexuality (Bland 1996). Dora Marsden herself supported the 'New Morality' which favoured 'limited monogamy' and 'free unions' (Bland: 86), linked to economic independence, women's employment and broad sexual

reform which required a profound change in men's attitudes and conduct. Stella Browne, the paper's most radical contributor, argued for sexual pleasure rather than the fulfilment of a sexual duty or mutual self-control in marriage. In 1915, she wrote, 'Let [women] set their own requirements, and boldly claim a share of life and erotic experience as perfectly consistent with their own self-respect' (Bland: 92–3).

We do not know whether Iris Barry knew of or read the *Freewoman* or *New Freewoman*, or Browne's later essay. However, Dorothy Shakespear, H.D., Brigit Patmore, May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson were subscribers to the second paper (Handscombe and Smyers: 167). Dorothy Pound and H.D. had recently married, the first in a more conventional and the second in a more open '"modern marriage"' (Wilhelm, 1990: 132). Violet Hunt and Ford had been through the scandal of divorce after his first wife had refused to allow Violet Hunt to call herself Hueffer as she had insisted. They too were soon to separate, as Ford and Stella Bowen embarked on a life together. Marriage was a convention women in this group followed, accepted, suffered, or subverted in open relationships. Iris Barry would seem to be a radical instance of this last; living a combination of Dora Marsden's 'anarchist individualism' in a relation of 'limited monogamy' (Bland: 79, 86) and of Browne's bold claim to erotic experience.

If she did not know these arguments directly from the *New Freewoman*, Barry did know of the *Egoist*. Lucy Bland suggests the earlier arguments disappeared from the paper as Pound took over ('its original feminist concerns were nowhere in sight', 79). Hanscombe and Smyers suggest otherwise, and point out that Dora Marsden agreed to Pound's introducing a literary side to the paper (168) and agreed to the change in title. The literary content, they say, matched that of *Poetry* in the United States while the rest of the paper carried Dora's 'individualist' editorials, as well as radical articles on social issues of special significance for women (169). It would be misleading in a more profound sense, too, to see the literary campaign associated with the *Egoist* as divorced from the case for sexual reform, or, more precisely, from the attempt to develop a language of sexuality. Joyce, Lawrence and Pound all experienced censorship: Pound in *Lustra* from a hitherto friendly publisher, as well as the blacking out of words in his poems in *Blast*. The terms which gave offence now seem more esoteric than erotic, but this reaction was a mark of the puritanism which so frustrated Pound and, we might say, forced him out. The *Freewoman* had suffered from this same climate when it was

boycotted by W.H. Smith & Sons in 1912. The campaign for liberalization of sexual attitudes was conducted in feminist journals but also in literary texts – and most likely too in the way that members of this set conducted their personal lives. This is what Iris Barry has in mind, perhaps, when she writes of 'a "new" aesthetic and morality' (161) and of 'liberty to uphold, injustice and Mrs Grundy to combat' (163). Pound's case against a censorious establishment appears to be hers too.

But if we can discern an affinity between Pound and Barry here, a significant difference had emerged between them outside the frame of her essay. Pound's case for the arts was linked with an unambiguous elitism while her work as a curator at MOMA matched a broad conception of art. Both Chaplin and 'Felix the Cat' were sophisticated, popular and 'distinctly high brow', she wrote in *Lets Go to the Pictures* in 1926 (166). She praised both European and American cinema, showed an empathy and respect for film's mass audience (mainly composed of women), called for an end to the stereotypical characterization of women and standard plots of romance and marriage, urged women viewers to support original, realistic cinema, and argued for their enhanced role as workers in the industry. Her study presents a neglected early example of a modern feminist approach to a modern mass medium. Its open, but discriminating attitude towards contemporary modernity's major commercial and popular art form would have sent a shiver through at least three of the Men of 1914. That she did not connect the parts of her story in recalling 'the Ezra Pound Period' is symptomatic of the difficulty, then and since, of making an argument for a different kind of popular or 'vernacular modernism'[5].

T.S. Eliot: between lives

In betraying its historic alliance with France, England, in Pound's view, had in effect seceded from Europe, while London had fallen from the heights of a desired cultural capital to the depths of a modern hell. Eliot meanwhile, was to pronounce Pound's inferno a hell for *'other people'* (Eliot, 1934: 47). For him, contemporary history was synonymous with 'futility and anarchy' rather than venality (Kolocotroni *et al.,* eds. 1998: 373). The London of the war years and twenties was a dystopian place, a hell of burning frustration, perhaps, but more a purgatory of pervasive emptiness and lack of connection. And crucially, Eliot saw this in others and in himself; indeed he experienced it first in himself. *The Waste Land* projected an inner world of

frayed nerves and breakdown and spoke to a cultural condition of the kind commentators associated especially with the modern metropolis. But Eliot's *Waste Land* was more than a report; it enacted a condition and was also a place of struggle, in which a life of personal torment, petty, unrelieved fretfulness battled with the need for stability and order.

Asked to reminisce on Eliot in early London, Wyndham Lewis commented that he realised he 'had no idea where Mr Eliot lived' (1965: 32). He appeared in Lewis's memory only ever to occupy the Pounds' triangular sittingroom in Holland Place Chambers where Lewis first met him, sometime, as he puts it, between the first and second numbers of *Blast* in June 1914 and July 1915. Pound, Lewis confesses, dominates his perspective; ever active, 'full of bombast and germanic kindness', a chuckling 'ole uncle Ezz' who like a conjurer produced this, his latest new find, the poet, T.S. Eliot, out of nowhere (29, 26). Giving Pound pride of place in a memoir of Eliot effectively restores Lewis too, at a time when his own fortunes had declined, to the triangulated modernism associated with that triangular room, circa 1914–15. But his picture nevertheless has some truth in it. The Eliots gave dinner parties of a 'conventionally convivial kind' (Ackroyd: 94) but they did not hold literary parties of the kind orchestrated by Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt, nor teas of the kind Pound attended at the Shakespears and elsewhere, nor evening readings and discussions of the kind Yeats, Pound and Hulme put on the timetable of literary London. Partly this was a sign of how the war had changed things. But the Eliots also put off engagements because of her migraines or his exhaustion or some other obstacle. A few years into their marriage they lived separately for some months, she at a cottage in Bosham, near Chichester, he in London for the week (Ackroyd: 95). Sometimes Eliot would attend dinners or visit without Vivienne. They lived, in sum, another kind of London life than either Pound or Lewis: the life of the young married couple, in financial and personal difficulties and in poor health. Vivienne's letters in particular are full of the day to day anxieties of this existence, over money, food and clothes, Eliot's health and work, and, above all, her illnesses and mental state.

From the middle of 1916 in the first years of their marriage the Eliots lived in a small flat at 18 Crawford Mansions, off Baker Street. At first they were 'very proud' of it (Eliot, 1988: 139), but a year later it became 'a little noisy corner' (186). It felt, wrote Vivienne, 'like being in a wilderness, we are just 2 waifs … perched up in our little

flat' where 'no-one around us knows us, or sees us, or bothers to care how we live or what we do' (186 and see Ackroyd: 94–5). On his arrival in London, Eliot had responded especially positively to its sound. The differences of its peoples and languages, at a time when he was himself still dipping in and out of French, presented a vibrant cosmopolitan atmosphere. At Crawford Mansions the 'noise and sordidness' of their neighbourhood became loathsome to them both (1971: xx), the 'slums and low streets and poor shops' contrasting strongly, for Vivienne at least, with the airy rooms and pleasant peace and quiet of her parents' suburban house at Campayne Gardens in Hampstead (Eliot, 1988: 186).

Subsequently they moved, in 1920, with characteristic difficulty, to Clarence Gate Gardens, East of Regent's Park. Neither address figured in Eliot's verse or memory the way Pound remembered Kensington. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Eliot's home address didn't register with Wyndham Lewis. There were other addresses, however, and other rooms where Eliot was known. These joined him to an alternative modernist literary formation and English middle-class at which both Lewis and Pound scoffed (Ackroyd 73–74). The Eliots were friends with Lady Ottoline Morrell and Virginia Woolf (though both women were unsympathetic to Vivienne and she on occasion excused herself from seeing them). Lewis's memoir in fact appears in the same volume as an essay by Clive Bell who remembers Eliot, alone, in 1916, at 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, at Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor on the publication of 'Prufrock', as a 'frequent visitor' to the Woolfs' house at Rodmell and at a dinner party in the twenties at the Bells' house, Charleston, in Sussex (Bell, 16). He names others who were present: Huxley, Maynard Keynes, Katherine Mansfield, Middleton Murry. There is no mention at all, not surprisingly, of Lewis and Pound, but nor is there any mention of Vivienne Eliot.[6]

In the midst of all this, Eliot had a further important address: a work address, from March 1917, at The Colonial and Foreign Department, Lloyd's Bank, 17 Cornhill in the City. Iris Barry suggests in her essay on Pound that Eliot had come directly from the Bank to the 'Chinese' restaurant. He also pointedly asked Pound to use his address at the Bank in their correspondence on the *Criterion*. Later, when he had left the Bank and separated from Vivienne, and was in effect in hiding from her, he took lodgings and then from 1934 lived a 'monastic' life in barren rooms at the Presbytery of St Stephens, Grenville Place, Kensington (Ackroyd, 210–212). As his reputation climbed, his address became effectively his public, cultural address at Faber and Gwyer

(since Faber), Woburn Square – in a building now tellingly marked by a brown plaque. Eliot became a Director here in 1925, entering upon a life where business and poetry went hand in hand. In these years, Vivienne could not get in touch with him and felt that he had disappeared (even advertizing in the press for his return). And for a time she too disappeared, letting the world believe she was in America while a 'Daisy Miller' occupied their last but one home together, 9 Clarence Gate Gardens (Ackroyd: 157). They had moved here in November 1920, before Eliot's 'nervous breakdown' took him to Margate and to Lausanne under the care of Dr Vittoz. This was the period of the composition, or as we might almost say, the 'compilation' of *The Waste Land*, given its collage of extant parts, and Pound and Vivienne's role as editors and readers.

Pound at this time felt he 'had not the slightest interest in England' and thought it did not deserve a literary magazine like Eliot's new *Criterion*, nor any other (Eliot, 1988, 511). He had been 'ruined', said Vivienne, by London's bickering social life (301), and it was a 'stain on the English that he got out' (570). For her part, she felt 'an awful down on London', which was 'so horrible' (570). On the publication of *The Waste Land,* she felt the poem 'had become a part of me (or I of it)' (584). Later she was to declare 'As to Tom's *mind*, I am his mind' (Gordon, 79). She was his muse and nightmare: to the point that we might view 'the substance of the poem' – 'what Tiresias *sees*' (Eliot, 1974, 82) – as the psychodrama of her distressed half dozen years with him. Its London is consequently very much 'her London'.

For Eliot himself, *The Waste Land* was famously, 'just a piece of rhythmical grumbling … the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life' (1971, np). The trial and torment sketched in the letters of serial ailments and shattered nerves gives us an idea of the personal life he had to grumble and grouse about. But the poem was always both personal and more than personal, just as the Eliots' lives echo descriptions of a contemporary metropolitan mentality. Its title alone generalizes Eliot's grumble into the rhythms of a cultural malaise: a 'complaint' in which personal ill-health, the bickering, cross-purposes and insecurity which marked a failed marriage and stuttering literary career, found their objective correlatives in the psychic landscape of the unreal city.

Hugh Kenner comments that 'The big cities of Europe and North Eastern North America were turning into huge machines, primarily machines for shifting large numbers of people rapidly to and fro underground' (1987: 26–7). Eliot, he suggests, belonged to this society

of new technologies and their corresponding cultural forms – if he was much else, Eliot was 'undeniably his time's chief poet of the alarm clock, the furnished flat, the ubiquitous telephone, commuting crowds, the electric underground railway' (25). Kenner contrasts Eliot in this respect with Yeats ('it is a parodic effort just to imagine a Yeats poem with a telephone in it': 25). But if Yeats was oblivious to the signs of modernization what of Pound? There is no poem by Pound with a telephone or alarm clock or underground train in it, though other Imagists made poetry of this material (Thacker, 1993). We think of course of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'. But the urban location of this poem – in Paris we notice and not London – was exceptional. Pound walked across London (but not along the routes of the commuter crowds), and, expenses permitting, took a bus rather than the underground. When he wrote a bus poem it was characteristically titled 'Dans un Omnibus de Londres'. His places were aesthetic and textual: the Provence of the warrior-troubadour Bertran de Born, the China of the poet Li Po, mediated through the writings of the American Sinologist, Ernest Fenollosa, the Rome of Sextus Propertius. The London of Pound's 'farewell to London', *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, published in 1920, is referenced more by poets and painters than by place names, of which there are no more than two single references – to Ealing and Fleet Street.

As Pound reported on seeing 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in 1914, Eliot had 'modernized' himself more immediately than all the rest (Paige: 40). And this was in large part, we might think, because he was more keenly attuned to the signs of modernity. As Kenner confirms, Eliot knew the small life of furnished rooms, and could well imagine the modern, melancholy scene of the typist's return at evening to her tinned food, her divan (which doubled as a bed), with across it her 'stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays' (Eliot, 1974: 71). From the Eliots' own furnished rooms South and East of Regent's Park, which were a cause of frustration to them both, Eliot travelled to Lloyds by underground to Moorgate (Southam 1977: 88). Between the alarm clock and the stroke of 9.30 am he joined the 'commuting crowds' which Poe, Baudelaire and Georg Simmel had identified in the parallel discourses of literature and sociology as a defining feature of the modern city.

The most relevant section of *The Waste Land* depicts the start of a commuter's day in the City. Ackroyd suggests Eliot's job at Lloyds inaugurated a 'remarkable double life' (79): a period of eight years during which Eliot was bank official and poet, almost as if by day and

by night. It is the way this tension structures this section of the poem which is of most interest:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
> There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying:
> 'Stetson!
> 'You who were with me in the ships of Mylae!
> 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
> 'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
> You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon
> frère!'

The new commuter crowds travelling in from the new suburbs were created by and for the expanding operations of the City. They included a new generation of lower middle-class clerks and typists (it was not long since that a 'typewriter' had been for Henry James a person and not the machine itself). In accepting the post in Lloyd's Colonial and Foreign Department Eliot joined this crowd, helping to service the operations at the financial centre of the imperial metropolis. Pound was consistently opposed to Eliot's choice, even before his venomous campaign against the evils of banking, but it was by any account a compromise with the workings of capitalist modernity. We only have to compare Eliot with the early Pound to see what in other respects this entailed. Eliot's starting salary was £270 per annum and slightly higher than that of general clerks not in banking, though it was still, he felt, inadequate, even when it rose to £500 in 1920 (Ackroyd: 77; Eliot, 1971: xviii). Pound reckoned he earned £42.10.0 in the year from October 1914–15 (Hall, 1962: 32). He 'was short of money for years to come' (Stock: 234) and was living in the 1930s, said Phyllis Bottome, '"in the utmost simplicity"' (cited Davie, 1978: 300).

Eliot adopted the formal City uniform of black jacket and sponge bag trousers and was, if anything, more punctilious than his colleagues. To readers who guessed that the figure 'Stetson' in the above passage was the American Pound, Eliot replied that his friend would have looked 'rather out of place in King William Street' (Southam: 79). The same would go for Eliot in Kensington or Soho, or indeed amongst the Bloomsbury set for whom Virginia Woolf's remark about his 'four piece suit' became a standard joke (Bell: 16). Pound's 1890s get-up was itself a pose of sorts but it told Londoners what he was: an artist. Eliot's formality was deceptive. He looked like a churchman at the office and a businessman in church (Ackroyd), but on no occasion like anybody's idea of a poet. While he joined the flowing commuter crowd, Pound's long strides took him across miles of London, alone or with close companions and associates, his mind and talk in his 'wholly original accent' on literature (Barry: 159; Hutchins: 108; Lewis: 31). He was 'on the tips of his toes with aggressive vitality' in Lewis's description (29), 'his head thrown back, seeing everything meeting everybody' according to Iris Barry. The City workers as Eliot depicts them approach their place of business with their heads down (each man's eyes 'fixed … before his feet'). They are the commuters of Poe's story 'The Man of the Crowd' which was set in London, and whose type of preoccupied demeanour and abrupt gestures Walter Benjamin was to see as mimicking 'both the machines which push the material and the economic boom which pushes the merchandise' (1973: 53). Pound's movements and talk were devoted to the production of 'civilization'; the city crowds imitated 'the "feverish … pace of material production" and the business forms which go with it ' (Benjamin: 53).

But if Eliot was one of this crowd, he was not at one with them. He looked the part, but for all his conformism presented a more challenging, more modern type of the artist. For if he looked like them he did not look as they looked, downwards, but at and even through them. Benjamin sees the mechanical jammed-up movements of the crowd as clown-like and Eliot in similar vein, in the drafts of *The Waste Land*, struggling to describe this 'striving, huddled, dazed … spectral' mass had found the lines '(London! your population is bound upon the wheel) / record the jerky motions of these pavement toys' (1971: 37). His eye and mind were upon this subject at this time and place, but also, and here he was more like Pound, detected other figures moving through the 'brown fog' of a London morning from the other times and places of myth and literature: from Baudelaire's Paris, Dante's hell, or Mylae. These allusions contextualize and place this scene, of course, through

something like a dissolve or superimposition in cinema. They evoke a receding tradition and argue for its value in supplying just this layered perspective, supplying, in fact, the 'real' measure by which the present day city appeared 'unreal'.

The Liberal politician and social commentator, C.F.G. Masterman had recognized the new phenomenon of the commuter crowd, 'numberless shabby figures hurrying over the bridges or pouring out of the exits of the central railway stations' (1911: 104). Like Eliot, his crowd also 'flows' like a stream or river, its progress baulked occasionally by some interruption, like 'a whirlpool in the water' (104). But Masterman views this multitude and its potential menace from a distance ('little white blobs of faces borne upon little black twisted or misshapen bodies', 105). In the aggregate, the traits of individual distinction are lost: 'Humanity has become the Mob' (106). Eliot's rejected drafts show something of this fear and contempt, but the above section admits to his part in the flow as both insider and outsider. This ambivalence might suggest that Eliot or the speaker in the poem occupies the position of Baudelaire's *flâneur*. But this is clearly not the case, nor are the tensions the same (Eliot significantly quotes from Baudelaire's poem 'To the reader' rather than from 'To a passer by' on the *flâneur*). The differences have to do with place and with time. The *flâneur* moves through the nineteenth century Parisian arcades at his leisure whereas Eliot travelled to a place of work, indeed to the city's financial centre, and not to a place of consumption. He arrived and left on time, a timekeeper and employee, neither Thames bargeman nor Elizabethan fisherman, nor (yet) a churchman, nor a dilettante stroller, sketch book in hand.

On the other hand, outside of hours, he was a poet. And watching, witnessing, writing about the crowd, he was a poet. This section gives us both clerk and poet, a double life in which the routines of work are played over and startled out of themselves by the estranging eye and voice of the poet. Thus, that most somnambulant of morning clichés of the English middle-class – conversation about the garden – is exposed to its gothic underside, as if the morning paper had confused the report of a local flower show with a juicy murder mystery.

> That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

This passage as a whole is structured upon doubles: the real with the spectral, the mundane with the macabre, the past with the present,

literature with the literal. One of its literary allusions is especially relevant here, and has been unnoticed until recently. Robert Crawford argues that Eliot draws on Kipling's tale 'The Finest Story In the World', which tells of a bank clerk who is also a poet who experiences his former life as a galley slave and seaman from the Vinland sagas as 'a confused tangle of other voices' in his present day London existence (Crawford 1987: 132–6).

As with Eliot, this double life of banker and poet was a source of distress for Kipling's character. We can sense this elsewhere in contemporary literature, though it is less internalized than in these examples. As John Carey (1992) shows, a number of novels dealt with the figure of the clerk; in some a new model type, in others a gauche and vulgarly pretentious intruder. Eliot's 'small house agent's clerk,' 'the young man carbuncular' who has mechanical sex with the typist is of this second type. But the reason for Eliot's contempt was left behind in the manuscript. Like the clerks, Leonard Bast in Forster's *Howards End* and Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the house agent's clerk has aspirations to the literary or artistic life. He has, says *The Waste Land* manuscript, been at the Café Royal, and lets drop that he has been 'with Nevinson today' (1971: 33). Both Forster and Woolf do away with their clerks: Leonard Bast is murdered and Septimus Smith commits suicide. Their fate is tied up with the destiny of the middle-class, for whom Bast is an upstart who must be put down, returned to the 'abyss' from whence he came, and for whose social and psychic uncertainty Smith can serve as a surrogate.

In Eliot's case the clerk is a closer threat, and his contempt, in the manuscript, is less controlled. The cocksure young man who name drops leaves the typist and groping his way out 'delays only to urinate and spit' (1971: 47). Only Pound's intervention prevented Eliot from exposing these attitudes more. It is left to the poetry as it stands and its show of learning (Baudelaire and Dante and the rest easily defeating 'Nevinson'), to put a distance between the clerk and poet. *The Waste Land* does more than depict a double life; it enacts it and, most importantly, seeks to effect the separation of its author, the poet T.S. Eliot from T.S. Eliot the bank clerk. Once across the bridge, the broken parts of this life are behind him, or rather transfigured, in the composition of a single unified existence. This is the ideological intention of the poem and of Eliot's *oeuvre*, of course, but as above, it has a personal as well as cultural aspect. The *Dial* award to the poem, the editorship of *The Criterion* and the post with Faber and Gwyer, who soon took over the running of the magazine, were the outward

confirmation of what the poetry had achieved internally: the social identity of poet, critic, and businessman, a match for its desired unities of faith and culture. *The Waste Land* was the first move, therefore, in the making of the poet-cleric to replace the poet-clerk.

This distancing upon a fractured past also evidently entailed a separation of the poet (by means of this poem), from the personal materials which were its substance and subject. In other words, a separation from Vivienne Eliot. There had been periods of separation in the latter 1910s and Eliot began to think of this openly from the mid-1920s. His entry into the church, whatever other function this fulfilled, prepared the way for a vow of celibacy which put an end to the sexual difficulties of the marriage and rationalized his own sexual disgust. Earlier he had valued Baudelaire for providing a store of urban imagery. His essay of 1930 on the poet identified Baudelaire's belief in sin with the 'evil' of sex and his associated 'vituperations of the female' (1982: 429 and Carey, 1992). Eliot read Baudelaire in such a way that he could, at the end of the essay, splice him with Hulme in the defence of a radical conservatism which was 'classical, reactionary and revolutionary' (Ackroyd: 143). Thus emerged the peculiarly eccentric position from which Eliot hoped to speak to the condition of whole national culture and make it a Christian community. It was premised on a removal from – one might say a hollowing out of – the tensions of the early London years. These we find, along with the effort to overcome them, in *The Waste Land*. That this attempt to close off the present from the past was not entirely successful, we see from the content of Eliot's later plays. Like a corpse planted in the garden, the sexual frustrations and guilt connected with Vivienne, especially, would not stay buried. Only with marriage to his secretary Valerie Fletcher in 1957 did Eliot relax and his Giaconda smile broaden. Now, rid once and for all of the clerk, the successful poet and man of letters could be reconciled with the secretary. He could, in effect, start his London life again, blessed with fame and a happy marriage. Fittingly enough the Eliots' wedding breakfast was held at Pound's old room at 10 Church Walk, occupied now – aside from a few ghosts – by the presiding clergyman.

2
Modernism Deferred: Harlem Montage

Blues on 1814 N. Street, NW. Washington

On 15th January, 1926, Langston Hughes read first at the Washington Playhouse, then in Baltimore, and at the end of the month at a venue in Claremont Avenue near Columbia University in New York, from his newly published first volume of poetry, *The Weary Blues*.[1] The volume was published by Alfred A. Knopf in a striking red, black and yellow wrapper. It carried a drawing of an angular blues pianist on its cover by the Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias and an introduction by the white author, Harlem impresario, friend to Hughes and others of the 'Negro Renaissance', Carl Van Vetchen. Vetchen had been instrumental in securing the publication of Hughes's book with Knopf and had hosted a party in Hughes's honour in November, 1925. His own controversial novel *Nigger Heaven*, was also to appear later in 1926.

The reading in Washington was presided over by Alain Locke, Professor of Philosophy at Howard University in Washington, and editor the previous year of the special issue of the *Survey Graphic* on black arts and culture and of the celebrated collection *The New Negro. An Interpretation* based upon it.[2] This had announced the arrival of a 'new group psychology' and 'collective effort, in race co-operation' and a social project led by 'the more advanced and representative classes' to reclaim the inspiration and advantages of American democracy (Locke [ed.] 1925: 10,11). 'The Negro mind', wrote Locke, 'reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideals' (11–12). Locke's emphasis upon the signs of cultural renewal, the evidence of this in the pages of the collection in work by poets, fiction writers, illustrators and essayists on the spirituals, jazz, Africanism and the

uniqueness of Harlem, made *The New Negro* the symbolic representative text of what came to be called the Harlem Renaissance.

Some of the excitement of this new cultural identity for American blacks must have been in the air at the time of Hughes's reading, but so too, undoubtedly, were some of the tensions and friction comprising this formation. Many of the familiar positions and cross-currents of the Renaissance move across the face of this moment and it is this dynamic, conflictual, intra- and interracial composition of the Renaissance as a whole that I mean to draw attention to. In itself, this evening in January 1926 stretched back, in a still modestly defined period, to the composition of the title poem 'The Weary Blues' in 1920 and pulled a crowded set of events and experiences forward into itself: amongst them the experience of Hughes's first published poems, notably 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'; his final break with his father in Mexico; his travels to Africa and Europe; his first meetings with Locke and Countee Cullen, with W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, Blanche Knopf and others, at Harlem parties and literary events; his 'discovery' as a new young Negro poet by Vachel Lindsay at the Wardman Park Hotel in November 1925, and his recent decision to attend Lincoln, a black University when his contemporaries pressured him to return to Columbia or apply to Harvard.

In one emerging antagonism, Van Vetchen had suggested the title of Hughes's volume but this had disappointed Hughes's fellow poet Countee Cullen as catering to whites 'who want us to do only Negro things' (Rampersad 1986: 113), and who wondered in reviewing the volume whether blues made for poetry at all (Mullen [ed.]: 37–9). Cullen, who was 'in certain ways Hughes's exact opposite' (Rampersad: 63), preferred traditional European stanzaic forms and diction to folk forms and idioms. Like Du Bois, eminent editor of *Crisis* magazine and leader of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), Cullen felt the new Negro must show the race's best artistic and intellectual side. Du Bois's opinion appeared in his offended reviews of Van Vetchen's *Nigger Heaven* and of *Home to Harlem,* the uninhibited novel of the lives, loves and music of Harlem blacks by the Jamaican born Claude McKay, whose example and contribution as associate editor of the socialist journal *The Liberator* had much impressed Hughes.[3]

There were, that is to say, profoundly conflicting views on the proper sources and definition of 'art' circulating at the very outset of the movement. These differences were compounded by the relation of black intellectuals and writers to white friends, supporters and

patrons, of whom Van Vetchen was one. Patronage was common but, not surprisingly, often thought to risk personal and artistic integrity and a loss of 'race pride'. Much of this thinking was targeted at Van Vetchen, who it was later felt had distorted Hughes's work – a charge refuted by Hughes who had, for his part, spoken out in defence of *Nigger Heaven*. They remained lifelong friends, whereas his friendships with Cullen and Locke evidently cooled. One factor was that all three men were homosexual, though Van Vetchen and Cullen both married. Hughes's sexuality remains mysterious, but it is clear he was propositioned by both Cullen and Locke. Locke had met him in Paris to ask for a contribution to the *Survey Graphic*, and both men had travelled to Italy before separating there. On his return Hughes was affronted by Cullen's advances. This personal history of affection, ardour and misunderstanding also preceded the publication of Hughes's volume, and was no doubt a further undertow on 1814 North St. as Hughes read his verse.

The moment of Hughes's arrival as a poet of the Negro Renaissance with his first published volume was a moment, therefore, of genuine common purpose but also of less evident internal differences, upon key matters of race, art and sexuality. As such, I suggest, it provides a picture of the complex configurations of this cultural formation as a whole. There are three factors, either immediately or more distantly active in these months in 1925 and 1926, which filtered out into Hughes's work and the identity of the 'Renaissance' which I want to expand upon. The first is the major site of this formation in Harlem, the second, the role of the blues and jazz in developing a racialized black aesthetic and identity, and the third, the meanings given (and which we might give), in this specifically located context and history to modernism.

Renaissance jazz

One of the most striking facts about the young Hughes is the extent of his travels – in one way anticipating his prolific output across genres as one of the first self-declared professional black writers. Before *The Weary Blues* in 1926 when he was 24, he had lived in Cleveland, Mexico and Washington, sailed as cabin boy on a six month trip to West Africa, sailed twice to Holland and lived, worked and hustled in Paris and Italy.[4] Harlem was hailed in *The New Negro* as the 'race capital', 'a city within a city', and Hughes had felt its affirmative impact on first arriving for his abortive period of study at Columbia

in 1921. In *The Big Sea* he writes in what was a common trope in writings of the period, of arriving at the subway of 135th Street in 1921: 'Hundreds of coloured people! . . . I went up the steps and out into the bright September sunlight. Harlem! I stood there, dropped my bags, took a deep breath and felt happy again' (81; and see Mulvey 1990). However, Hughes did not reside for any length of time in Harlem until later years. After reading in New York in January 1926, for example, he returned immediately on the night train to Washington where his mother was living. Either side of this date in the twenties, when he was not travelling outside the United States, he lived as a student at Lincoln University in Philadelphia and later in New Jersey, coming into Harlem for the weekends. Here – judging from the accounts in *The Big Sea* – he joined a round of literary and social gatherings, readings, shows, 'parties and parties' (247) in which he sometimes felt out of place and disenchanted by the bourgeois airs of the proceedings.

For Hughes, therefore, Harlem was a vibrant centre, 'a radiant node or cluster' in the language of European imagism; a vortex, even, 'through which ideas were constantly rushing', and through which he himself moved, in an irregular pattern of departure and return. Just as James Weldon Johnson wished to define the area as neither colony nor ghetto, but 'a city within a city', (1925: 301), so too for Hughes, as for a figure like McKay who opted for self-exile in Paris, it was a centre within a broader geo-social and artistic network, whose energies travelled back and forth along the lines of force of their lives and work. Hughes's connections with other places and peoples, including artists and writers, consorts with the view of the diasporic nature of the Renaissance, elaborated especially by James de Jongh. This was clear from the outset, however, in the recognition in *The New Negro* of the mixed West-Indian and Afro-American identities of Harlem blacks, in the connection with Europe, and especially Paris, of intellectuals like Du Bois and Locke and of jazz entertainers and celebrities like Paul Robeson and Josephine Baker

Harlem was, therefore, the dynamic hub in a dispersed 'travelling' culture: at once a definite place on the map, where artists and residents discovered an enriching cultural community, 'a paradise of my own people' as Claude McKay had put it of his arrival in 1914 (Cooper: 70–71), but whose symbolic value was felt beyond itself and beyond this immediate sense of a utopian belongingness. We need to recall too, how these meanings and connections radiated outwards from an evolving rather than fixed physical locale, how the place on the grid map of Manhattan dramatically changed its literal shape as

well as its economic and cultural identity over these two or more decades. In the 1900s, blacks lived in the Tenderloin district of lower Manhattan. By 1910, with the migration to the North from the rural South, New York's black population had increased from a few hundred to five thousand. It was at this point that blacks began to move North within the city into Harlem, first into rented accommodation, then as a house-owning bourgeoisie into what Kellner calls the 'beige colony' of the first block West of Fifth Avenue (xv). Whites resisted and then deserted the neighbourhood and house prices dropped. In the early 1920s, black Harlem comprised six blocks between 125th and 131st Streets, bounded by the overcrowded crime and poverty-stricken tenements of Fifth Avenue to the East and the luxury middle-class apartments of Eighth Avenue and Sugar Hill to the West. To the North, from 145th St, the less than two square miles of 'Coogans Bluff' was also black and contained some 200,000 residents. Lenox Avenue was a line of pool halls, cabarets and dives with some restaurants and theatres. The show piece, however, was 'Black Broadway' on Seventh Avenue from 127th to 134th Streets: a fanfare of churches, theatres, businesses, restaurants and speakeasies. Seventh Avenue, writes Kellner, 'was thriving and well groomed and active all day, and from five in the afternoon until after midnight it was brilliant and glamorous and exciting' (xviii).

This is the Harlem James Weldon Johnson described in *The New Negro*, expanded now to 'twenty five solid blocks' North of 125th Street (301); an 'inner city' of fine, well-priced housing and economic independence, booming entertainment and active artistic cultural life. Even so, *The New Negro* omitted to describe the poverty and discrimination originally reported in *The Survey Graphic*, and other writers – James Thurman, Hughes and McKay, for example – were in their turn to represent even the Harlem of the heyday of the Renaissance differently. By the end of the decade, Harlem was sliding into the recession and the further dramatic decline into the ghetto of the 1930s described by Gilbert Osofsky.

In the twenties, Harlem, we might say, 'jes grew', but, as above, this dynamism brought with it both an intensely felt collective unity and a complex pattern of social and racial differentiation. By the mid-twenties Harlem was unquestionably black. Its population numbered 175,000 black residents and in the most densely populated areas around Lenox and Fifth Avenue, supported 233 residents per acre, compared with 133 per acre in Manhattan. Most were employed as manual labourers or in menial, servicing or domestic work. Many were

destitute and trapped in crowded, crime and vice – ridden tenements without the mobility of the elite blacks of the literary and artistic intelligentsia (Osofsky: 137–8). Like whites, the latter came and went, though, once again, on different terms and even at different times of day. There were 120 entertainment spots in the ten block area off Lenox Avenue, 25 or so along 'Jungle Alley' along 133rd Street (Ogren: 62; Shaw: 59–60) but, as is well known, some were for mixed audiences and some, notably the Cotton Club, were for whites only. Rent parties for blacks took place in Harlem, other kinds of parties downtown.

A revealing illustration of these kinds of differences, involving Hughes, occurred, casually enough so it would seem, on an occasion in May 1925. Charles S. Johnson hosted an impressive banquet to announce the winners of a poetry competition run by *Opportunity* magazine in a Fifth Avenue restaurant near 24th Street in downtown Manhattan. Here, writes Rampersad, was 'the greatest gathering of black and white literati ever assembled in one room' (1986: 107). Hughes won first prize for the poem 'The Weary Blues' and after the banquet accepted Van Vetchen's invitation to meet him and some others 'for a night on the town' in Harlem at the Manhattan Casino and then the Bamville Club. Musicians from the Cotton Club were going on to the more egalitarian Bamville where blacks and whites danced in mixed couples.

Evidently, Harlem – in its internally differently coded sites and protocols – was for whites a place of spectacle; an exotic 'marginal zone' (Ogren: 57) or 'erotic utopia' (Osofsky: 186) where whites could explore their late night darker selves. Van Vetchen, who Hughes visited the next day with his manuscript of poems, lived downtown on West 55th Street. Here Hughes often stayed or attended Vetchen's celebrated parties. Another guest and herself a party-giver *extraordinaire* was the black heiress A'Leila Walker. She had asked Wallace Thurman to secure her an autographed copy of Hughes's *Weary Blues* in January 1926 and decorated a wall of the elaborate 'Dark Tower' tea room at her mansion on 126th street with a section of the title poem. Harlem too had its wealthy black middle class.

The 'city within a city' was itself internally coded therefore, as a residential area (for poor, working-class blacks), and entertainment centre (for middle class blacks and whites), and intimately connected to the white and black world of Manhattan and beyond. Emerging technologies and modes of production reinforced this social and spatial hybridity. The offices of the important journals and white owned

publishing industries, for example, were in Manhattan, and the NAACP and National Urban League had been established there since the 1910s. It was this materially based cultural apparatus of (in Harlem), theatres, clubs, fugitive magazines, the important meeting place of the 135th St. branch of New York Public Library, and of (in Manhattan) patrons, publishers and related organizations which supported the Renaissance writers and brought them to public attention. And it was this development which at the same time distinguished Harlem from Washington where Hughes first read *The Weary Blues*. Harlem was more 'modern' than Washington because New York was more modern, in its technologies, communications, and more egalitarian culture; a locus for the publication of ideas of the modern 'New Negro' and in the NAACP and National Urban League, a centre for reform and organized resistance to racial injustice.

Within the larger modernizing metropolis, Harlem was more of a magnet, a 'Mecca' in the sub-title of the special number of the *Survey Graphic* than an enclave. It drew peoples and ideas towards it but also expanded and exhaled in ways that re-shaped and patterned the developing city in a series of indentations and cross-hatched lines of communication. The picture emerges of a stratified and permeable heteropolis, experienced simultaneously as an autonomous but dependent and, in significant ways, subordinate community within the metropolis. As such, the dynamic physical site of Harlem itself expressed the very 'twoness' of the American Negro as famously described by W.E.B. Du Bois, embodying in its spatial relations the paradox and hope of being at once black and American. In James Weldon Johnson's description, in what turns out to be an unintended but telling echo of aesthetic modernism, Harlem was 'a large scale laboratory experiment in the race problem' (310).

In January 1926 at the Washington reading, once more, Hughes had planned a jazz performance for the interval. His chosen musician was from the slum area of Seventh Avenue. Alain Locke had, however, stepped in and hired a performer who could provide more polite jazz (Rampersad: 123). The incident clearly reveals how differences of class and artistic sensibility helped determine the public image and consumption of the new Negro art. That this should be expressed through music is especially significant. Hughes had already decided on an aesthetic which drew upon African-American and 'folk' sources, but folk art and music, most conspicuously, had an ambiguous status for Renaissance intellectuals and supporters. Locke, like Du Bois, looked

more to the spirituals for this folk source, the 'kernel' indeed for Locke of black folk song, praised for its 'universality', intricacy and 'tragic profundity' (1925: 210, 199–200). As such, spirituals promised to stand not only as the 'classic folk expression' of the Negro but as 'America's folk song' (199). His thoughts were accompanied in *The New Negro* by an essay on jazz by J.A. Rogers. Hutchinson (423) and Gilroy (1997: 108) have stressed Rogers' case for the democratizing influence of jazz but this view in the essay is combined with much else which echoes contradictorily through Rogers' own argument and discussions of black music elsewhere.

This tension surfaces especially in Rogers' view of 'the jazz spirit' as 'being primitive' (223). In one set of associations where 'being primitive' is equated with 'frankness and sincerity' and 'naturalness' it can be extrapolated as 'a leveller [which] makes for democracy' (223). On the other hand, where the spontaneity and 'physical basis' of jazz's primitivism is responsible for 'its present vices and vulgarizations, its sex informalities, its morally anarchic spirit' (223), it stands in need of musical refinement and cultivation. This is provided, says Rogers, by 'white orchestras of the type of the Paul Whiteman and Vincent Lopez organizations that are now demonstrating the finer possibilities of jazz music' (221) and in the flattering adoption of American Negro jazz in 'serious modernistic music ' notably by French composers (222). What in one sentence is 'vulgarization' becomes 'primitive new vigor' in another. Rogers ends with a call 'to lift and divert it into nobler channels' (224); a sentiment and mission echoed, without the tensions of his essay, in the evolutionary schema proposed later by Locke (1936). In this thinking, the crudities of Chicago's 'hot jazz' are put through the sieve of the more melodic 'sweet jazz' of New York to produce the third, elevated category of the 'jazz classics' of the big orchestras and the 'symphonic' or 'classical jazz' of Paris. Though Negro, Locke comments, jazz is 'fortunately, ... human enough to be universal in appeal and expressiveness' (72, and see Burgett).

Locke was wary of commercialization and, for all his evident cultural elitism, positively acknowledged the technical expertise of jazz performers. Others like Countee Cullen would ignore the folk source altogether. Reviewing *The Weary Blues*, Cullen questioned whether blues or jazz poetry should be admitted to 'that select and austere circle of high literary expression which we call poetry' (1926, repr. Mullen (ed.) 1986: 38). He wished, he said, repeatedly, to be 'a poet, not a Negro poet' (Jemie: 7). His theme was taken up by George Schuyler, and Hughes replied to both positions in his famous essay 'The Negro Artist and the

Racial Mountain' in June 1926. Here he hit out at 'the smug Negro middle class' dogged by the subconscious whisper that 'white is best' (in Meier et al (eds.): 115). Instead, he turns to the 'common people' and to jazz, 'their child', an 'inherent expression of Negro life in America' and 'the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world' (112, 114; and see Brooker 1996: 181–2, 187).

Hughes's riposte to Cullen and Schuyler served as a manifesto of the task of an 'American Negro' poet – at the risk of offending either or both whites or blacks, but in a way which re-articulated blackness in a white America. Two contemporary incidents suggested how fraught this enterprise was, however. Van Vetchen, reports Rampersad, had hailed jazz as 'the only indigenous American music of true distinction' (1986: 109), and as part of his researches into its black roots had consulted Hughes on the blues for an article in *Vanity Fair*. After reading in Washington, Hughes met Bessie Smith at Baltimore and asked her opinion of Van Vetchen's essay. She dismissed it and saw the blues as a means to making money. If Hughes meant to be in touch with *this* black blues sensibility he was not, any more than he shared Van Vetchen's innocent new enthusiasm and taste for light jazz. As an 'American Negro' poet he was positioned somewhere between and to the side of both raw blues singer and white essayist, and as if in another part of town from American Negro leaders.

At the heart of differences on the new Negro, therefore, there were problematic constructions of folk art, the blues and jazz; the culture of 'the black folk' or 'masses' who artists and intellectuals sought to represent and direct. The ambiguities were such that spirituals or blues or jazz could be equally esteemed as a positive and authentic cultural expression or rejected as a demeaning presentation of racial identity. The uncomprehending 'coloured near-intellectuals' of Hughes's essay tended to view spirituals, pre-eminently, and the blues, less comfortably, in primitivist or essentialist terms as expressions of an Africanist or southern rural folk culture. Jazz they saw as the degraded culture of modern urban blacks. For those seeking uplift, jazz was too evidently tainted with inartistic and untutored performance, with an unabashed display of sexuality and with juke joints, drink and prostitution: in short, with 'low' parts of the city, mind and body. But jazz too, was constructed in divergent ways. The dives and cabarets arguably provided the core of Harlem's symbolism, the compound 'chronotope' of its identity in space and time, and the jazz played here echoed its ambiguities: at once in Rogers' terms 'a joyous revolt', the 'release of all the suppressed emotions' (217) and the scene of vice, vulgarity and anarchy.

What Renaissance leaders feared was that 'jazz abandon', in Rogers' coinage (220), confirmed the worst stereotypes of the Negro to white voyeurs and cultural arbitrators, and thus to themselves. Hence the arguments for its necessary refinement and the defence of its diluted and European 'classical' forms. On the other hand, 'the primitive' was esteemed for being precisely this. Both Hughes and Zorah Neale Hurston were on this count recruited by the immensely rich white patron, Mrs Charlotte (Rufus Osgood) Mason to recover the lost African essence of the American Negro. From 1928 she financed Hughes at college, on his travels, and in his New Jersey lodgings. The experience was to prove traumatic and the relationship broke down (with some conniving by both Hurston and Locke), over the issue precisely of 'being primitive'. In Hughes's own, evidently selective and compressed account in *The Big Sea*, Mrs Mason had objected to the poem 'Advertisement for the Waldorf Astoria' which exposed how the new hotel exacerbated discrepancies between the poor blacks of Harlem and vast wealth of whites on Park Avenue. He sat silently while she told him how he had failed himself and her. It came down, he reflected later, 'to the old impasse between white and Negro' (325). But if this was the governing division, it carried with it manifest differences of social class, as well as notions of the black primitive and artistic creativity and the personal psychological needs on both sides, of the young brown man, estranged from his family, and the dowager patron who insisted on being called 'godmother'. The involvement of Hurston and Locke, throughout, and more distantly of Van Vetchen in the final squabbles and separation in this episode, confirm how these general issues were woven once more into the fabric of gendered, sexual and professional relationships between friends and collaborators. The cultural and artistic movement we unify under the name of the 'Harlem Renaissance' proved once more to be a mutable formation showing all the marks, on these different levels of personality and idea, of divergent and common endeavour, of support and rivalry and of unequal power.

The traumatic break with Mrs Mason in 1930 was a break with a sentimentalized version of Hughes's own project and the accompanying appeal to an essentialized blackness. 'I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me,' he wrote, '... I was only an American Negro – who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa – but I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem.' (325). He emerged with the socially grounded sense of black cultural identity of the 'Negro Mountain' essay and his

own class based allegiance confirmed. It was out of this, I believe, paradoxically as the Renaissance neared its end, that Hughes came to evolve an urban based populist modernism.

Modernisms: Langston Hughes and Melvin B. Tolson

The thirties underlined Hughes's allegiance to black proletarian experience and cultural forms, now more emphatically expressed in favour of jazz rather than blues. J.A. Rogers had equated jazz with Americanism: it 'ranks with the movie and the dollar as a foremost exponent of modern Americanism', it had absorbed 'that tremendous spirit of go, the nervousness, lack of conventionality ... of the American, white or black, as compared with the more rigid formal nature of the Englishman or German.' (216, 220). For their part, Europeans and the German avant-garde, in particular, welcomed jazz and America as joint symbols of the machine age (Tower 1990). The black jazz entertainer and America were admired as discordant emblems of an exotic otherness and frenetic modernity combined: a fevered collision of the primitive and new world. Meanwhile, the vocabulary of 'newness' and 'renaissance' which percolated through the decade, the association of jazz, particularly with urban life, and with the developing technologies of transport (conveying musicians on an emerging 'circuit' from city to city and continent to continent), of radio, recording and promotion, only confirmed this metaphorical association with progress and social modernity.[5]

But if Harlem and the new Negro and jazz were 'modern' was the latter also 'modernist'? The answer, I think, is that the jazz of the 1920s was new, but evolutionary rather than revolutionary, that its sexual aura was an affront to middle class respectability in the way that some European modernisms were, but that for all the differences of colour and commercialism between, say, the Fletcher Henderson and Paul Whiteman bands, it was primarily a dance music and, unlike those modernisms, a broadly social, popular art. A 'modernist' jazz appeared, I believe, in the 1940s and 1950s, well after the generally recognized period of the Renaissance, and along with it the most conspicuous and sustained examples of modernist 'jazz poetry' by Hughes, in the sequences *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Ask your Mama* (1961). I want to discuss the first poem in these terms below and to offer some brief comparative remarks on the work of another quite different black modernist poet, Melvin B. Tolson (1898–1966).

Much depends in all this, of course, on how we conceive of modernism. At its least controversial, this implies a marked degree of formal experimentation within the terms of a given medium. Modernist art comes therefore to claim a self-regarding autonomy – in the way that earlier jazz and swing bands did not. More depends, however, on how this internal innovation addresses the newness of social modernity, on how it is received in this society, on its ideological inflection by class, gender and ethnicity and on its relation to popular culture. The terms of debate on the construction of modernism in relation to black writing and culture are most usefully mapped in the positions taken by Houston Baker, George Hutchinson, and Michael Bérubé, all of which bear interestingly on how Hughes' and Tolson's work has been, and might be read. I want to consider these positions first.

In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), Baker directly challenged the hegemony of the Anglo-American-Irish canon of literary modernism. In place of its limited ideas of 'civilization' and supporting critical categories, he proposes a '"renaissancism" in Afro-American expressive culture as a whole' (8) stretching across the longer modern period of the 1880s to the 1930s. He views this black tradition as exercising either a 'mastery of form' or 'deformation of mastery': discursive strategies by which African-American culture has assimilated and remobilized dominant white discourse in the interests of a 'quintessential' Afro-American spirit or racial 'genius' (1988: 5). Hutchinson critiques the binarism of Baker's model and the essentialist notion of black identity it invites. He stresses instead the 'diverse interracial and interethnic cultural resources' impinging upon, and in tension with, a conviction of the 'cultural wealth of black America' in the Harlem Renaissance and 'African American literary modernisms' (1995: 25). However, this is in the end itself unpersuasive. Firstly, because the description of an 'intercultural matrix' and of '*kinship*' across 'ostensibly opposite racial traditions' (31), risks flattening out what are artistic, social and racialized inequalities, and, secondly, because while he speaks of 'American modernism' and of 'African American modernism', Hutchinson does not define these sufficiently in aesthetic or formal terms.[6] Modernism abuts in his study upon the leading 'problematic of cultural nationality' (7) and is composed of tendencies in pragmatist philosophy, anthropology and democratic theory which Hutchinson tends to assume, moreover, were an active part of the thinking of the participants (30). No doubt he avoids a definition of aesthetic modernism because this has been corralled by advocates of

European high modernism. The result, however, is that this domain of artistic activity is surrendered rather than reoccupied.

What is needed, however, is less a formalist definition or redefinition than an account of the terms and criteria – which would be an extended version of Hutchinson's intellectual and institutional conditions of production – by which 'high modernism' was established as a settled orthodoxy. What this would make clear is that, excepting Graves and Riding's *Survey of Modernist Poetry* in 1927, definitions of modernism, as such, did not appear until American critics of the 1950s began to ruminate on the *passing* of this paradigm (Brooker, 1992: 5–13). 'Modernism' was therefore a retrospective construction which did not exist in the mind of its participants in the same terms as it did for its conservers. It was only at this later point also that alternative modernisms and 'post modernism' began to come into view. Baker's 'renaissancism' of 1987 refutes this earlier, already waning model, and the limitations of its historical as much as racialized perspective. In reconfiguring black writing and arts of the earlier twentieth century (and thus beyond this era), he was in effect refuting the criticism of the mid-century. Though this critical orthodoxy is his opponent, he tends, like Hutchinson, to ignore it, and by the same token to ignore the literature it construed this way.

Bérubé directly addresses the construction of a canonic modernism, and charts the changing reception of Tolson from the 1950s through to the 1990s when, as he hopes, a changed critical temper means we are ready to understand the conditions of Tolson's neglect over two or more decades and to envision 'his work in such a way as to effect its re-vision' (1992: 188). This perspective offers newly to historicize the practices of 'renaissancism' and 'interethnic intertextuality', and can thereby help situate both Tolson and Hughes in the making and remaking of modernism.

Something needs to be said, however, about these poets' respective projects. Hughes had modelled his verse upon American, populist or democratic examples, both black and white, namely: Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg and Claude McKay. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, the resources of this tradition were joined with jazz idioms and structure under the organizing concept of 'montage' drawn from the vocabulary of European film and painting. Hughes had titled a poem 'Montage' in *One-Way Ticket* (1948), and Rampersad reports that he viewed montage as 'the crucial medium of the twentieth century', adding, moreoever, that this coincided with Hughes's awareness of the transformation in jazz by Dizzy Gillespie, Theolonius Monk and other

musicians producing bop and bebop (1988: 151). This was the modernist moment of jazz composition, when New York became known as 'the jazz capital' rather than 'race capital' of the world, and a moment too, when leading black musicians, notably Miles Davis at the end of the forties, began to play with white musicians such as Gerry Mulligan, Gil Evans and Kenny Baker.

Hughes's intentions are clear in the original prefatory note to the sequence of poems:

> In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed – jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-pop – this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition. (Quoted Jemie: 63).

Montage consequently tracks this community through the psychogeography of Harlem locales (Lenox, Minton's, Small's, The Harlem Branch Y), following life on the street and in time through the passage from morning to night in an echo of the twilight areas and stark contrasts between black and white. The poem's social content, vernacular idiom and jazz form are unmistakable. As a poem of sound and speech, its jazz riffs, trills, neologisms ('combinate', 'trickeration'), and the occasional blues refrain, punctuate a sequence of often juxtaposed 'conversationing' voices – of children, women and men expressing resignation, defiant self-affirmation, cynicism and the humour of laughing back 'in all the wrong places' ('Movies', 1986b: 230).

These voices speak of the embedded inequalities of this world ('I know I can't be president', 223), of its racism and discrimination and the relative safety of Harlem ('Not a Movie'); the passing equivalence of white and black (at 'Subway Rush Hour', 'mingled so close . . . so near no room for fear', 265), and most profoundly of their persistent, complex, reluctant interdependence ('a part of you, instructor. / You are white – / Yet a part of me, as I am part of you / That's American', 'Theme for English B', 248). So the poem moves in a zig-zag of single notes, asides and solos against the emotional drumbeat ('Harlem's heartbeat', 227) of the dream, and the dream deferred which rumbles underneath, breaks the surface, and runs the poem to its cumulative end in a jam session of its structuring motifs, themes and phrasing.

We can think with some justice of Hughes's poem as being at once 'dialogic', in the full sense of combining consensual and dissident voices in Bakhtin's use of this term, and as a 'jazz poem' which matches the rhythms, harmonies and dissonance of jazz performance. One of the best descriptions of jazz, so conceived, remains Ralph Ellison's, who felt he had played a role in introducing Hughes to bop, and to whom, with Fanny Ellison, 'Montage' was dedicated. Ellison wrote of jazz, with bebop and Charlie Parker in mind, as a dialogic and combative art in which each improvised solo flight springs from a challenge with other musicians – 'each true jazz moment' he saw as 'a definition of identity: as individual, as member of a collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition' (1967: 234).

Ellison's account closely echoes the general description offered above and by Harvey of modernism (1991: 135–7). Jazz is 'modernist' by virtue of its internal formal experiment and bebop answers especially to this definition. We can go beyond this, however, if we read into relations between the innovative solo, group dynamics and tradition of jazz, the tensions between the individual and the social mass marking social modernity. Indeed, Nanry's account of jazz and modernity suggests just such a homology between jazz composition and the relation of the individual to the social collective in the new modern city. Jazz, and bebop in particular, comes to model the 'disjunction and uprootedness' experienced by city dwellers and their enforced, 'often painful' search for 'commonality' (1982: 149).

The sense of community in the poem is splintered and dormant. The underground 'boogie-woogie rumble' of the dream surfaces as common knowledge ('ain't you heard?') or supplies the rhythm of a shared consciousness which knows this deferral as its own experience. The poem's vignettes present strategies for survival and sociality; seizing the times which bring a lucky break or a sunny Sunday (when 'Harlem has its/washed-and-ironed-and-cleaned-best out'). On occasion, the community experiences a moment of joy and oneness in song or dance or in a street parade, and towards its close, the poem extends its sympathies towards other ethnicities, to Jews and Hispanics in Harlem and (though barely), to whites downtown ('Likewise', 'Good Morning', 'Comment on Curb').

The disadvantaged experience a common frustration of their desires and it is on their behalf that the poem asks 'What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up, fester, sag, *Or does it explode*?' (268). The poem warns, therefore, of unrest and riot, such as had occurred in Harlem in the 1930s, but there is no sense that this would be mobilized through

any organized social agency. As an expression of collective frustration the poem seeks a collective solution. This was provided in its first appearance in the credo of America's political character and destiny embodied in the poem 'Freedom Train'. Hughes removed this poem, however, from the *Selected Poems* of 1959. What remains of the '*Dream within a dream'* of American democracy, is a fantasy of jitterbugging, singing unity in Harlem ('Projection'), and its two-tone 'gold and brown' wrapped in 'dancing sound' (College Formal; Renaissance Casino', 'Island'). The change withdraws the earlier, wilful conviction that democracy for blacks will be realized with the inevitability of a train ride, but does not abandon this ideal. The resulting tension, we might say, embodies its eventual structure of feeling, an unresolved duet of black in white, white in black ('a part of me, as I am a part of you').

We might argue too that this tension, felt in the registration of a fragmented, expectant consciousness and an uneasy, because rhetorical conviction in a renewed cultural and ideological unity, is characteristic of many 'classic' modernist poems. This does not mean that we need to think of Hughes's *Montage* as finally or fundamentally like *The Waste Land* or the *Cantos*. It shares a topology or problematic with these and other modernist texts, a structure of aspiration and failure to achieve coherence, but there is much too that it does not share – in its sources, its social complaint and democratic sympathies. Conventional periodization might want to label Hughes's modernism as 'belated'. Baker's argument that black writing renews itself outside the confines of the orthodox Anglo-Irish-American paradigm would suggest we view it instead as a counter modernism. Either way, in important respects, Hughes's poem acquires its meaning from its relation with modernist orthodoxy. The same is true in the 1950s and into the 1960s of other versions of 'black modernism' developed by Ralph Ellison and Melvin B. Tolson, both of which differed significantly from Hughes's work. I want briefly to reflect on the differences between Tolson and Hughes.

Tolson's early life in the family of a Methodist minister gave him a relaxed acquaintance with European arts and philosophy. Thereafter, his formal education at Fisk and Lincoln Universities and a teaching career in Texas and at Langston University in Oklahoma City, situated him more firmly in African American society. His first poems, short narratives in an easy black vernacular, emerged in the late 1930s and derived from his studies of the Harlem Renaissance as a graduate student at Columbia in 1930–31. His first collection

Rendezvous with America (1944), probed the forgotten names and events of black history, before, in the late forties, his sense of poetic mission was dramatically overhauled by a self-conscious commitment to modernist experiment. 'This is the age of T.S. Eliot', he declared; there could be no deviation from 'the modern idiom' (Bérubé, 1992: 65,66). The result was 'E.& O.E' (1951) and *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953). The first, a highly allusive fifteen-page text appeared with footnotes in *Poetry* magazine (which had had a long association with literary modernism), championed there by Karl Shapiro who had earlier rejected poems by Hughes. Tolson's *Libretto* was hailed by *The New York Times* as the equal of Eliot's *Waste Land*, Crane's *The Bridge* and Williams's *Paterson*. Allen Tate's 'Preface' to the poem praised Tolson as the first Negro poet to have 'assimilated completely the full poetic language of his time and by implication the language of the Anglo-American poetic tradition.' (Rampersad: 235). For his part Rampersad describes the *Libretto* as 'the most hyper-European, unpopulist poem ever penned by a black writer' (235 and see 193, 201). Tolson, or so it might seem, had succeeded in producing an erudite modernism for a minority, and in producing himself as a latter day, modernized version of Countee Cullen who wanted to be 'a poet, not a Negro poet', a distinction which assumes, as did Tate's 'Preface', that 'poetry' is properly a colourless art, above race and ethnicity.[7] Had Tolson, though a black poet, produced a 'white modernism' for the admirers of T.S. Eliot? Alternatively, had he, in Baker's terms, performed a 'deformation of mastery', re-appropriating hegemonic modernism for the purposes of black culture? The contemporary reception of the poem would suggest the first. Bérubé argues, however, that the effect of Tate's 'Preface' as of Shapiro's well-meaning rejoinder that 'Tolson writes and thinks in Negro' was to obscure Tolson's own project. As Tolson put it late in life: 'I, as a black poet have absorbed the Great Ideas of the Great White World, and interpreted them in the melting-pot idiom of my people. My roots are in Africa, Europe, America'. (Tolson: 1999: xii). *Harlem Gallery*, the first part of an epic of black American life, in progress at Tolson's death in 1966 is, for Bérubé, the poetic testimony of this project.

Harlem Gallery's 24 sections, each introduced by a letter of the Greek alphabet, are presided over by 'the Curator' whose arguments position other artist figures and concepts of art and contrast especially with the debunking balladry of the figure of Hideho Heights. This contest, which enacts, says Bérubé, the long-standing debate on artistic autonomy and mass society at the heart of modernism, is what

the poem is centrally 'about' (1992: 67). The conflict is resolved in the poem in favour of the Curator's avant-gardist predilections and a 'trickle down' theory of culture: 'art', so constituted because of its difficulty and the resistance it meets, will, over time, instruct the 'little people' of mass society (127–32). While such a conclusion might gain entry into the modernist gallery and win the approval of the academic establishment, Bérubé feels Tolson adopted this 'mythology' of the aesthetic as a ruse, a 'disguise', under cover of which the poem could pursue its true aim (131, 139). For if T.S. Eliot represented an inescapable model, Tolson meant, Bérubé argues, precisely to 'deform' this model in an act of 'marronage', raiding and robbing the host in the manner of the runaways of slave times (Bérubé: 145, 190). His purpose, therefore, in words which direct Bérubé's study, was to 'master T.S. Eliot' (64) and thus rearticulate European modernism as an African-American modernism.[8]

Bérubé suggests the terms of critical understanding and judgement have changed sufficiently to re-read Tolson along these lines. Much, aside from his own study, would support this view: Tolson's appearance on college courses, in anthologies and on websites, the publication of critical essays, scholarly annotations and a new edition after twenty years of *Harlem Gallery*. But all of this only raises a broader issue, concerning the very terms and assumptions of reading, as they are established and revised within critical opinion and literary culture. The modernism of the 1950s and 1960s was determined by a prevailing cultural 'taste'; a compound of the power of the critic, an institutionalized 'modernist' tradition and an aesthetic which esteemed complexity, seriousness and artistic dedication. Tolson was admitted, if ironically, as a serious modernist artist on these terms while Hughes was excluded, his verse dismissed or patronized because of its supposed simplicity, commericalism and use of folk idioms. In essence, this was to enforce the gulf between the serious and the popular on which modernism or its orthodox construction as 'art' depended. Shapiro, one of Tolson's firmest defenders, could only shudder at the thought of a 'really popular' Eliot or Pound (Bérubé: 42). Notions of modernism and the avant-garde have continued to depend on this separation of a critical, necessarily minority, art and the conformities of mass society. This is not, it is worth noting, equal to a distinction between white or black modernism since canonic cultural 'taste' did not break along colour lines. Ellison committed himself to a serious dedication to 'art' and distanced himself from Hughes on that count. Likewise, the jazz of the 1940s and 1950s

sought to create a taste for complexity, so as to outrun the white business industry and the standardized black and white jazz of the previous era and so establish itself as a black avant-garde art form.

If both Hughes and Tolson drew on jazz, Hughes was more concerned to negotiate between its experimental forms in bebop and a common language than conjure a new polyglot idiom. His is the more evidently vernacular, populist modernism, the local combo to Tolson's international touring orchestra. In Charles Bernstein's assessment, Hughes produced in *Montage* 'one of the great antiepics'; 'a poem embodying the present' rather than 'including the past', as Ezra Pound had defined the epic poem. Hughes shared 'the project', says Bernstein, 'of rooting American poetry in ordinary rather than literary language, in relying on spoken idioms as sources for music rather than literary symbolism and traditional English meter' (1992: 149). On two prime counts – the conception of epic and the language of poetry – Tolson is Hughes's opposite. How – once rescued from the misrepresentations of the 1950s and 1960s – we now view their respectively populist and avant-gardist modernisms, is as much as anything a question about how far and in what terms academic literary culture has revisioned, or chooses to revision, not simply these poets but its own assumptions and values. Did Tolson 'deform' high modernism so as to set its demanding intellectual and literary materials in a productive relation with popular, newly foregrounded African–American sources? Was his purpose alternatively to 'raise up' the popular? And, in one way more fundamentally, does an admiring literary academy celebrate in Tolson not only the familiar hierarchy of minority over popular culture but find here a way of bolstering a still traditional conception of 'modernist' art and technique against the culture of late modernity? The editors of a consciously interventionist anthology of modern and postmodern poetry for classroom use, pose this issue in an interesting and slightly different way. Accepting the revolutionary claims of Tolson's verse, they comment: 'For all of which there remains on all sides a curious lack of recognition for his work: the bigness of it & the way it does or doesn't link with the cultures & subcultures that he knew' (Rothenberg and Joris (eds.), 1995: 614).

As this suggests, the question of the claims and valuations of minority and populist modernisms is a question about their connectedness and constituencies. I have posed this as a question about Tolson but in these terms it applies equally to Hughes, of course, and also, as I've wanted to emphasise, to the literary academy which comes

to comprise or to invoke such constituencies. With what cultures and subcultures do these modernisms and this critical discourse connect? The answer that comes back tends to look like the initial question; any advance impeded by the embedded antimonies of an older modernism. Raymond Williams, perhaps, and finally here, can suggest a way beyond this impasse. We can make the necessary move beyond the fixities of modernism (and postmodernism) in both the past and present, says Williams, by reflecting on how we make 'a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again' (1989a: 35). Hughes's 'populist modernism' was generally, and in the terms of one of the poems of *Montage*, a 'Projection', oriented, in its propagandist simplicities, its serious whimsy and unresolved complexities, towards the future. It dreamed, we might say, of an untraumatized existence as modern, black and American. Tolson, in a divergent, unquestionably more challenging mode, invoked a future black accented cosmopolitanism, the global to Hughes's local. We can view them now in the earlier period as both counter-modernists, struggling against the fixities of which Williams speaks. Both were, and remain, anticipatory. They contribute to a 'modern future', therefore, by, in a sense, posing the problem of the present, as above, and by prompting the imagining of a constituency, or community, in Williams's word, where present extremes are bridged. And together, *Montage* and *Harlem Gallery* do carry an unmistakable imprint of this future: a world of counterpoint and coexistence, of uptown and downtown, the erudite and the colloquial, the minority and popular, the rooted and diasporic, the black and white. Beyond fixed pairings such as these, their differences give way to *différance*: in touch and out of reach, including the past and embodying the present, but above all, while that modern future is still in the making, necessarily deferred.

3
Inside Ethnicity: Suburban Outlooks

Black Britishness

Stuart Hall's essay 'New ethnicities' (1996 [1988]) attempts to describe and conceptualize a 'shift' in black cultural politics in Great Britain in the 1980s. Hall's argument belongs with related tendencies in a period which saw the formation of independent black film units and co-ops, the advent of Channel 4 and a new commissioning policy for minority programmes, and the appearance of new black authors, dramatists, bands and singers. These changes had been described by Kobena Mercer in the essay 'Recoding Narratives of Race and Nation', and this had been included, along with Hall's essay, in the publication *Black Film/British Cinema* (1988), following a conference at the ICA in London, an event which itself signalled the shift in the terms of debate Hall sought to identify. Other contemporary essays by Hall, especially, ('Minimal Selves', 1987, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', 1990), helped frame this new thinking as did the earlier film and literary texts discussed below. Together, this work and associated debate can be said to register and respond to the broader social and political trends which saw 'race relations' in Great Britain move into the critical and confrontational stage of direct clashes with police as Thatcherism took hold. The analyses by Martin Jacques and Hall (1983, 1988) of Thatcherism as a form of 'authoritarian populism', and their arguments for a radical and progressive populism which would contest this hegemonic form, had also begun to appear from the early 1980s.

The essay 'New ethnicities' therefore finds its general context in the events and changing political-cultural climate of the 1980s in Britain. Indeed it seeks to situate and re-articulate these. Hall argues that there has been a change from a concern with the 'relations of

representation' to the 'politics of representation'. The first, he says, was mobilized around 'blackness' as a posited common identity. But 'blackness', as Hall had reported in his own case in the essay 'Minimal selves', had been an identity he had come to recognize and adopt, not one he automatically assumed. Increasingly, also, the essentialist implications of 'being black', and the simplifications of such an all embracing description for Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, were proving false and disabling. There was a need instead therefore, Hall argues, to recognize difference and diversity and to bring an end to the 'ideological innocence' which, in evoking an essential common 'blackness', assumed this could replace a hegemonic 'whiteness' in an act of simple reversal. The 'politics of representation' consequently takes heed of the critique of binary divisions and the accompanying emphasis in European post-structuralist thought upon difference and the deferral of meanings. Hall is wary, however, of the formalism and political quietism which can result from the perception of 'an infinite sliding of the signifier' (1996: 447). Instead, in a move akin to Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism', he looks for a strategy of representation which will allow for provisional moments of identity and positioning and make 'political action ... possible' (1997: 137). As he puts it in the essay 'Minimal selves', such a moment is like the punctuation point in discourse; a pause but not a final stopping place in the stream of difference: 'we call these unfinished closures', he says, '"the self", "society", "politics"' (136).

At the same time, 'New ethnicities', as its title suggests, seeks to articulate a move beyond the category of 'race' (which lends itself to the essentialism of 'blackness' and to racism), to a new understanding of ethnicity which would be distinct from and indeed counter the more traditional conception of ethnicity used to buttress a conservative nationalism. Ethnicity had been mobilized to evoke a common hegemonic national identity of 'Englishness' in just this second way during the episode of the Falklands War, and here, Hall's argument on 'race' and identity joins his critique of the ideological project of Thatcherism. In this respect, he proposes to intervene '*inside* the notion of ethnicity' (1997: 447), so as to emphasize its culturally situated and changing entailments in language, belief and customs, and to set this understanding against the supposed permanence of its ideological construction for the purposes of nation and state.

This conception of ethnicity, Hall suggests, had been already explored in the generation of films made in the early 1980s: Black Audio Film Collectives' *Handsworth Songs*, Sankofa's *Passion of Remembrance*

and *Territories* and Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Kobena Mercer agrees that films such as these marked a turning point. *Handsworth Songs* and *Passion*, for example, were the first 'black' films to secure a West End release and they contributed, Mercer confirms, to the transition to a 'politics of representation'. Nevertheless, these films are quite different kinds of texts, in form, intent and political content, as well as in their modes of production, distribution, audience and 'popular' success – conspicuously so in the case of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Hall closes his own essay by posing the question of what kind of critical vocabulary would be consistent with what might be called a 'cultural' rather than essentialist notion of ethnicity? If we cannot assume, as he says, that a film is good because it is 'black' then what kind of criteria can we appeal to or develop? What newly politicized aesthetic, in other words, would accompany the politics of new ethnicities?

Clearly this is an area of difficulty, and Hall's discussion trails an earlier disagreement on *Handsworth Songs* with Salman Rushdie, which he tries to address here once more. Rushdie (1992 [1987]) had felt the film was another 'riot film' whose standard footage and evocation of earlier, more promising times only reinforced a sentimental nostalgia along with the view of blacks as a problem. Its stated intentions he found abstract and jargonized. Above all, Rushdie argued that the film had spoken of but failed to deliver the many 'stories' in the riots. Hall had defended the film's struggle precisely to find a new film language against what he took to be Rushdie's superior tone. Darcus Howe had in turn defended Rushdie's contribution to the making of 'a critical tradition ... in black arts and culture' (Mercer, 1988: 16–18).

It would be a mistake to try to arbitrate between these views. They are of interest precisely as a symptom of the debate which ensues when the security of stable binary, good/bad judgements are undermined, and witness to the difficulty in practice of surrendering a loyalty to 'black' identities and developing a new critical aesthetic which will be at once open to the challenge of difference and committed to a common political aim. What is, however, quite clear to a later viewer, if it was not at the time, is the differences between the films as well as the associated written fictional texts of this period. Dick Hebdige and Kobena Mercer, for example, suggest that the use of interviews, found sound, didactic voice-over news footage and the like in *Handsworth Songs, Passion* and *Territories* displays a common politicised post-modern aesthetic of 'collage and intertextual appropriation' (Mercer, 1994: 89). In general terms this is persuasive. However, *Handsworth Songs*, while it includes music, song and verse, employs a

non-fictional and predominantly documentary mode, whereas *Passion* cuts between two fictionalized narratives: the first a scripted, schematic 'dialogue of ideas' between a black man and woman in a symbolic desert landscape, and the second, a day in the urban life of the 'character', Mags, her friends and members of her family. A further difference is that *Handsworth Songs* is concerned visually and thematically with relations between the black and Asian community and the police. If *Territories* shares this theme, it contextualizes its contemporary expression in Notting Hill in relation to the broader cultural theme of 'carnival' which it seeks also to incorporate into its visual form. *Passion* again, noticeably distances itself from the issue of 'the police and the black community', most clearly in the screening of Mags's student film which colours footage of police and street clashes pink, thus shifting attention to black and white gay pride marchers. The discussion which follows of her film within the film quickly moves from unanimous praise, and thus of felt common 'black' identity, to the issues of sexual politics which separate the young gay and homophobic blacks. Mags's lesbian feminism in particular challenges the authority of the black male leader of an older generation. *Territories* similarly raises questions of sexuality as well as race and has a voice-over of two young women speaking in unison on the need for 'history/her story'. By contrast, there are few women on screen in *Handsworth Song*s and issues of sexual politics are simply absent. In comparison with *Passion*, it belongs arguably, in Hall's terms, more to 'the relations of representation' than to the 'politics of representation'. Once this shift and the accompanying exploration 'inside' ethnicity to consider questions of generation, gender and sexuality, for example, is made, *Passion* shows, moreover, how the complications of difference produce not only diversity but internal dissension and antagonism within 'blackness'. The 'politics of criticism', as this tells us, needs to be doubly sited: 'inside the notion of ethnicity' and 'inside' the forms, idioms, and narrative modes of artistic representation.

A little identity crisis: Hanif Kureishi

Hanif Kureishi had raised the question of Britishness and belonging at the end of the essay 'The Rainbow Sign' which first appeared in 1986, contemporaneously with *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Kureishi describes here how the shame and humiliation of racism and prejudice in the Britain of his teenage years had made him 'deny my Pakistani self' (1996: 73), but how he accepted he 'had to live in England, in the

suburbs of London, with whites' (78). He explores this 'little identity crisis' (81) by journeying to Pakistan to encounter the 'alien' side of his own formation. There he discovers a zone of internal class, religious and generational difference. His middle class uncles imitate a bygone idea of English life while their contemporaries commit themselves to an anti-Western version of Islam. The traditional extended family offers a warmth and support unknown in London, but binds its members in custom and conformity. He is called 'Paki', unable 'rightfully [to] lay claim to either place' (81). His work in the theatre is thought to be an excuse for idleness. He is more sophisticated than the sexually repressed young men who listen to Western rock and roll, but shares with them 'the going away fever', the cocktail of 'ambition, suppressed excitement, bitterness and sexual longing' he had known in the suburbs (84). His journey across continents and history does not therefore resolve so much as foreground new aspects of the question of identity formed from the closeness and distance of the two societies (91). He considers staying to regain more of his past and so as to 'complete himself' (99) but finds Pakistan's illiberalism impossible. He returns, therefore, to London, to 'home', in England, '... to my country' (99).

What these terms mean, in a land where injustice and racism have trounced the Orwellian stereotypes of tolerance and decency, is a challenge, says Kureishi, for 'the white British who have to learn that being British isn't what it was' (101). The questions for this now complexly mixed society are how 'humane' it can be, what 'respect it accords individuals, the power it gives to groups and what it means when it describes itself as "democratic"' (102). These closing reflections echo the glimpse in the first section of the essay, set a decade earlier, of a 'political commitment to a different kind of whole society' of 'a wider political view or cooperation with other oppressed groups.' (79)

Kureishi's thinking here moves back and forth across the changing societies of Britain and Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s. *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) transposes these directly personal reflections into the fictionalized chronotope of London in this same period. It opens with a similar recognition of internal and national cultural divisions and of a more knowing, throwaway sense of an incomplete self:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I

> don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere (1990: 3).

The tone of this opening is already noticeably different from 'The Rainbow Sign', however; an early indication of the often misunderstood shift of register from autobiography to art (in drama and film as well as fiction) which is a significant part of Kureishi's address to the question of identity. A further related and marked difference is that whereas Kureishi investigates a family and cultural past in 'The Rainbow Sign', the impulse and momentum of the lives in *Buddha* is consistently forward. Karim, like the novel's other major characters, moves conspicuously through the cultural epoch of the late 1960s and 1970s in a questing desire for selfhood which is intimately connected to his movement through physical and social space, namely from the South London suburbs to the 'real' city of central London. The seventeen year old Karim of this opening is an *ingenue* compared to Kureishi *in propria persona*; a Candide to his professional playwright and ethnographer of the self. Untroubled by the past, Karim means only to move on, to get out of it: 'Anyway why search the inner room', he says, 'when it's enough to say I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find.' (3).

Stuart Hall argues how ethnicities should be understood as culturally and historically situated. *Buddha* shows the complexity of what this might mean in the observed detail of lives shaped by class and ethnicity but also, significantly, by place and generation. The suburbs are not simply 'the' suburbs, any more than 'blackness', as Hall says, can signify a uniform ethnicity. The one thing the suburbs share is that they are not central London. However, inside the different neighbourhoods providing the five places Karim has to stay after the break up of his family (93), there are stark and subtle distinctions of social experience, manners, morals and aspirations, even within the suburban middle or lower middle class. Thus, Charlie's mother and Haroun's lover, Eva, and Karim's mother are clearly different in these ways, and different again from the respectable, gin drinking Tory, Auntie Jean, just as Jean and Ted's house in Chislehurst, Haroun's in Bromley and Eva's in Beckenham differ from each other and from Anwar's down at heel 'Paradise Stores', and the communal house Anwar's daughter Jamila later moves into in Deptford. Inspired by Eva, the civil servant Haroun enters the world anew as a self-taught Buddhist ('a renegade Muslim, masquerading as a Buddhist', comments Karim, 16), led by Eva's ambition and desire for 'life'. For

Eva and Karim, especially, the suburbs share an oppressive dullness; they are 'a leaving place' (117). The place to be, to get on and make it, is not the margins but the centre, 'the city, London, where life was bottomless in its temptations' (8). But 'life' in London proves heterogeneous and hierarchical, positioning West Kensington 'in between' (127) Hammersmith ('like the country'), the seedy Earl's Court, and the 'unforced bohemia' of wealthy Kensington (174) in a social geography of 'class, culture and money' (174).

The quest for identity in the novel is mapped across these socio-spatial co-ordinates. But most of all this movement of self-transformation is figured in terms of the openings and *kudos* provided by the artistic and contemporary popular music cultures of the metropolis. While Eva propels Haroun, from remodelled house to house and so to West Kensington, it is Charlie her son and popstar in the making, who beckons Karim. Pop music offers Charlie and Karim a sub-cultural identity in which style and talent can subsume class identity. Hall (1998) points out how music became a vehicle in the 1980s for the self-expression coded as style and 'attitude' of black youth, providing an affirmative scene in a world of prejudice and inequality. Karim's music is of an earlier generation: the Beatles, the Stones, Van Morrison and Bowie (said to have been a pupil at his and Charlie's school), and, following Charlie's lead, the Pink Floyd. Compared with the specificities of Afro-Caribbean inflected styles of a later decade, this generation of British pop brought little more than a routine recognition of blues or black blues roots. The seventies pop of *Buddha* offers a 'life', but not one that expressly articulates an ethnicity other than English or Anglo-American.

A local pub in Bromley presents a compact range of non-conformist youth cultural styles – ageing Teds, rockers and skinheads, with Karim's school friends amongst them. The scene betrays something else of significance, however. Karim enters the pub with Helen and Jamila, 'two hippies and a Paki', as he puts it (75). The Pakistani is Jamila. Remarkably, the character Karim does not speak of himself as a Pakistani or present himself at all in terms of colour. In a world where who you are is how you look, he regards this external sign as if it were neutral or invisible. The suburbs are witness to racist abuse and outbreaks of Powellism in the novel and are in some ways coded by ethnicity, as in the example of Haroun's cultivated image of himself as the exotic vaguely 'Eastern' other. Arguably, too there are moments when the relationship between Charlie and Karim echoes classic descriptions of the compounded desire and contempt between

colonial master and colonized slave. But these feelings operate at an unconscious depth and surface in moments of perplexity ('what am I that you hate so much? I managed to say' (132), or of self-contempt (249). And for Karim ('why search the inner room?') this is where they stay. For this 'funny kind of Englishman' (3), at this cultural time and place, the alternative or 'counter' to suburban racism is to be somewhere (and somebody) else; the solution to 'the odd mixture of continents and blood' (3) is to think – or to desire – it colourless. In other words the subculture of pop and the future it offers are silently coded white.

In other, related terms, Charlie serves to underline a metaphor of theatricality and the theme of artifice and authenticity which informs much of the novel. Once in London, the waning paradigm of post-hippy rock snaps into another phase. Punk opens Charlie's eyes to what's next. 'The Sixties have been given notice tonight', he declares, 'They're the fucking future' (131). But this also marks the emerging difference between the two young men. Karim understands that punk is a class style which would be 'artificial' for privileged boys from the suburbs (132). And in a later episode when Charlie and his band have re-emerged as the punk act 'Charlie Hero and The Condemned', Karim contrasts Charlie's 'manufactured rage' with his own controlling emotion: 'ambition' (154, 155). Eva introduces him to the pretentious wannabe theatre director, Shadwell. And it is from this point that the theatre, the material cultural apparatus rather than Charlie's staged performativity, becomes the sphere in which Karim 'acts out' the issues in his personal formation.

Berthold Schoene suggests that Karim is in some way exempt from the 'chaotic scramble for identity and self-authentication' the novel presents (1998: 115). He is, Schoene believes, 'a radically deconstructive presence' who questions clear-cut definitions or the search for a centred stability on the part of others 'caught up in a permanent, irresolvable identity crisis' (117). 'His subjectivity,' says Schoene, 'stays intact' (117). This reading is at odds with the above account, clearly enough, but also with itself, for it presents Karim both as a stable and unified and indeterminate and destabilizing influence. In particular, Karim 'never loses himself in his acting' (115), never confuses 'being with acting, personality with pose, confining his performances strictly to the stage' (117). Not only does this suppose Karim has an identity to lose, it ignores the transformative effect acting has upon being and the process by which Karim discovers an incomplete, hybrid, but developing sense of identity. More precisely, it is through acting, first

as Mowgli and then in Matthew Pyke's avant-garde theatre group, that Karim is brought to productively acknowledge his own ethnicity. The first mention he makes of his colour occurs, (pointedly in parenthesis), in the episode where he has joined Pyke's company. 'Two of us were officially "black"', he says, '(though truly I was more beige than anything)' (167). Pyke asks him to draw on 'someone black' (170) for a pilot drama. Like Shadwell before him, he presupposes Karim's racial background. ('I didn't know anyone black', Karim responds, 170). He works up the character of his uncle, Anwar, and when he presents this character is confronted with the politically correct judgement of the black actress Tracey, who feels his portrayal panders to white stereotypes of 'black people' as 'irrational, ridiculous . . . fanatical' (180, 181). Karim answers with a sense of both the specificity and abstract value of his work (he has shown 'One old Indian man – ' and appeals to a 'truth' above 'our culture' 181). Meanwhile, Pyke, the white director, described in this scene as 'Judge Pyke', sits silently, but – true to the power relations Kureishi is depicting – has the last word. He tells Karim he must start again from scratch and Karim decides on his friend Changez whom he coverts with gusto into the character Tariq:

> There were few jobs I relished as much as the invention of Changez/Tariq . . . I felt more solid myself . . . This was worth doing, this had meaning, this added up to the elements of my life. (217)

Dismissing Karim's fellow actors' discomfort, Pyke announces that the play (about 'class', 'the only subject there is in England', 164) is actually about him, that 'Karim is the key to this play' (221). It is certainly the key to him. In finding his 'character', Karim finds himself in the 'creative life' of being an actor. Other events confirm this performative identity and vocation all in one. At Anwar's funeral, he feels an affinity with 'these strange people . . . – the Indians' but knows that if he wanted the 'personality bonus of an Indian past' he 'would have to create it' (212). Later when he asks his mother if he is part Indian, she tells him he's an Englishman, to which he responds 'I'm an actor. It's a job' (232). This doesn't mean that he unites acting and being in a seamless whole any more than it implies they are separate, but that the 'creative life', which defines him, means working upon and working through his available resources as 'an Englishman, born and bred, almost' (3) who feels also that 'these strange people . . . – the Indians' were in some way his people.

A remarkable additional feature of the novel, which shows how

Kureishi himself works upon but does not simply repeat or narrativize the materials of a single life in the conventions of an autobiographical fiction, is that Jamila represents another way of being. Critical throughout of the superficiality and artifice of London life, she warns Karim that he is losing touch with 'the world of ordinary people and the shit they have to put up with' (195). She emerges, to Karim's admiration, as a confident, campaigning feminist, illuminated by her knowledge and beliefs, who 'went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England' (216). Jamila is the exception who (perhaps along with Changez) stays to live and work in the suburbs. For its other central characters, identity is a matter of class and location, overlaid with the apparently classless and countervailing culture of intellectual and artistic society. Being admitted to this new (at first fairly low-grade) metropolitan avant-garde means you have arrived and have left your provincial or suburban self behind – though nothing could be more suburban and lower middle class than 'suburbanites repudiating themselves' before the altar of a metropolitan, artistic middle-class (134). Similarly, while at first questions of colour and ethnicity as well as class appear to be neutralized by the discourses of youth culture, they are in fact transposed and recoded into the vocabulary of personal cultural style and the harsher ambition for fame. In the event, questions of race, racism and ethnicity are played out for Karim in the displaced analogical realm of the theatre. Acting becomes a way of acknowledging but re-articulating the raw material of a racialized life and of dramatizing its inner issues in an idiom that allows for both commitment and impersonality.

But acting is not indistinguishable from being. Nor is all acting equal. Playing Mowgli to order is a world away from the risk and self-discovery involved in the part of Changez/Tariq, just as this created self is of a radically different kind from the role Karim accepts in a new television soap on his return from New York. After the minority appeal of Pyke's avant-garde theatre, and the experience of cruel indifference which underlies its socialist pretensions, Karim is persuaded that this popular form with its guaranteed mass audiences will be a way of treating social issues with some seriousness and positive effect. His 'creative life' thus brings him closer to Jamila's 'real world' and politics. It would be a mistake, however, to think that Jamila eventually replaces Charlie as a role model. She represents one way of being Indian and British, while Karim's quest is unfinished and differently inflected. At the great 'unsullied event' of the final party to celebrate his new role and the announcement that Haroun and Eva are to marry,

Karim feels he can 'think about the past and what I've been through as I struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is' (283). He is 'centred' in the city and surrounded by people he loves. But Jamila is significantly absent from these celebrations, and the 'struggle' of his 'creative work' upon himself must continue in its own vein. He is positioned between moods and moments as if between roles, 'happy and miserable at the same time', reflecting that the mess of the past will give way to a better future. The novel has discovered a depth in the transformative self-creation of acting, understood as a metaphor for living, and Karim, the actor, distanced from the superficial example of Charlie, centred provisionally within the coordinates of location, class and ethnicity, hopes that perhaps he 'would live more deeply' (284).

For second generation British Asian youth Kureishi was a 'talismanic figure', says Sukhdev Sandhu (34). His work of the eighties and early nineties had captured a particular structure of feeling, 'a precise historical juncture' (2000: 35) which confirmed young Asian lives and gave a lead to a new way of being Asian British. In the sexual brio, pop music culture, street style and playful, provocative language marking his characters and his own persona, Kureishi showed there was a way to both slip the confines of their parents' traditionalism and the rituals of 'home' and oppose the then dominant models of Thatcherism. Five years after the inspiration of his second novel, *The Black Album* (1995), however, Kureishi was a lost leader. Sandhu greets his short story collection, *Midnight All Day* (1999) as 'the third instalment' – after *Love in a Blue Time* (1997) and *Intimacy* (1998) – in the ongoing decline of a once vital writer' (2000: 35). The introspective concerns in this later work with the failing relationships and disenchantment of ageing members of the cultural establishment, are 'sapped and weary'; out of tune with a vibrant Asian British presence in the media, music and writing.

Whether or not in conscious response to this 'decline', Kureishi's fourth novel *Gabriel's Gift* (2000) returns to his earlier mode, even to the point of handing walk on parts to Karim and Charlie Hero. Gabriel's 'gift' is a talent for drawing which the novel makes sure we understand is a token of the transfiguring power of the imagination. Here, however, the 'creative life' serves as a means less to self-knowledge than to fame and 'being someone' – the model of which is a David Bowie sounding Lester Jones. Also, while Karim in *Buddha* races forward into the future away from 'home', the teenage Gabriel (who is white) needs first to patch up his broken home and rescue his superannuated pop guitarist father from a shambolic decline before starting

on his own first short film. It is as if the youthful promise of the earlier youthful work had been called on to sort out problems of Kureishi's later characters and the later Kureishi. The struggle is interesting but the writing is often gauche, the argument lumpy and repetitive and as a portrait of the artist in millennial London simply hard to take seriously. These times, in short, demand more imagination.

Real magic: Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, Bernadine Evaristo

Schoene, once more, opens his essay by apparently concurring with Salman Rushdie that 'magical acts of the imagination' of the kind associated with postcolonial fiction, have helped effect a 'tropicalization' in the British intellectual climate (110). He concludes, however, that 'real political change is unlikely to be prompted by magical conjuring tricks, wishful literary "tropicalization", or the colourful enactments of a utopian, fancifully shape shifting imagination' (126). I do not want to comment on what does and does not amount to 'real political change' (Schoene's own remarks are inspired at this point by Alan Sinfield's discussion of hybridity and gay politics, an example which suggests how socially referenced such discussion in fact needs to be). I do, however, want to take up the question of the imagination and the role more fabular or realist modes might have in the making of identities.

Rushdie has famously described the twentieth century as 'the century of the migrant' (1987: 63) and written of how men and women have been 'translated' across languages, traditions, continents and cultures (1987: 63; 1992: 16–17). His thoughts have gained an authoritative status in theorizations of personal and cultural hybridity and reflections on a new cosmopolitanism, though some have objected to the implicit social privilege of this perspective. Certainly Rushdie does not consider the pain and frustrations likely to attend an enforced 'translation'; nor the kind of self-denial and contempt Kureishi reports on as his own early reaction to racism in 'The Rainbow Sign'. Hybridity has an ugly, uncoordinated and unwanted aspect as well as the richness and mobility Rushdie and others want to emphasize. Perhaps this is simply explained by the advantage of a middle class background and the consequent ease of transition for Rushdie and some of those others to the vocation of successful writer or academic via the privilege of an Oxbridge education. Rushdie mentions his pale skin and Western, educated accent as factors making for his

relatively comfortable entry into British social and intellectual life. Paradoxically, it is perhaps significant too that Rushdie – unlike Kureishi – was born outside the UK, since a birth place, although an undoubtedly complex determinant on identity (and extremely so for Rushdie), confers an undeniability upon one's sense of self, as 'Indian' or 'Indian-British' or 'Anglo-Indian', whereas 'Indianness' is not an immediately available (or wanted or even visible) identity for those born 'British' or considering themselves 'English'. Rushdie is determined to think of what is gained rather than lost in this transaction and to appeal for an expanded universe rather than the ghettoized existence which can follow emigration ('"For God's sake open the universe a little more!"' he ends the essay 'Imaginary Homelands', 1992: 21). Rushdie's metaphors of 'translation' and 'tradition' are also noticeably linguistic and literary. More exactly, he is concerned, above all, with the form and function of writing. Thus 'literature' he writes, 'can and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts', it is 'self-validating' and entails risk:

> The real risks of any artist are those taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what it is possible to think. Books become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it – when they endanger the artist by reason of what he has, or has not, artistically dared. (1992: 14, 15)

The writer is the pioneer and explorer, at the edge of new worlds (the Columbus of a story in the collection *East West*); a figure who expands the universe by discovering affinities between separated traditions of storytelling, by bringing the irrational, the fabulous and fantastic to a Western literary tradition and culture governed by fact, reason and realism. In effect, Rushdie is arguing the case for the imagination, for its power of estrangement more than its 'esemplastic', connective power in the Romantic tradition, and for its capacity to reveal an order of truth in a world where supposed facts are the poorest of fictions and serve only to disguise official lies and half truths. Thus, the imagination and storytelling can come to have a political role; for they present a crooked, digressive, indirect path to more of the whole story than straight-talking can be relied on to deliver.

What is interesting here is less the difference between Rushdie and other writers, than their common recognition of the idea of the transformative, revelatory role of art and the imagination. For, in other terms, this is the 'creative life' and means to self-creation Kureishi

means to promote. There is a difference, however. Rushdie comes to think in these essays that 'home' exists pre-eminently not in a physical location but in the place of imagination, and that is to say in the place and act of writing (1987: 61). That this notion became tragically true in the period of Rushdie's having literally no fixed abode other than his published work, should not deflect us from the profound association it implies, not only between home and writing, but between writing and selfhood. Being Rushdie (or Kureishi or Isaac Julien or Zadie Smith or Bernadine Evaristo, discussed below), is being an author, playwright, film-maker or poet, since the activity these words name of imaginative transformation and creation, is the narrative of the making, invention and re-invention of possible selves. Their work enacts this argument for the creative life through the exemplary figure of the artist and to this degree it is 'autobiographical'. Not at all because it attempts a perfect recall which will be true to the facts, but because it seeks to demonstrate the very process of creating a picture, an image, a role, a character and self out of the ravelled story of lived experience. Stories of 'translated' men and women are no less than this very act of translation; a crossing over, a plaiting of fact with fiction, of origin with destination in the 'place' of narrative. They are allegories of an exploration inside identity, surveying and re-arranging the coordinates of class, gender, generation, sexuality and location which situate ethnicity. Echoing Hall's discussion earlier, such stories, like the identities they tell, cannot simply yield to *différance*. For if 'the self is always, in a sense, a fiction' and discourse is potentially endless, any project seeking to transform society and reconstitute subjectivity must 'accept the … arbitrary closure which is not the end but which makes both politics and identity possible' (1997: 136–7). Coming to an end means having an end, a prospect and purpose, in view.

This reminds us that fiction and political identity and purpose do after all have to make a connection. The politicized imagination does have to be grounded. The dissatisfaction with Kureishi's work after *Buddha* and *Black Album* has been that in forsaking the comic social realism of these works for middle-aged soul searching, he had lost connection with a generation and the quest for identity as Asian British which shaped a collective reality. In the opening of *Gabriel's Gift*, Gabriel's father has left and the world is sympathetically estranged ('all the weather seemed to be coming at once' 13). His 'gift' is a magical talent which can bring objects he copies from painting literally to life. Perhaps because a fantastical imagination of this kind is not Kureishi's

accustomed mode, he drops the idea as Gabriel devotes his talents to repairing his broken home. There is an early, somewhat jarring description of 'this new international city called London', where 'every race was present' and there is 'little chance of being understood' (8), but this too recedes beneath the attempt to refloat a memory of the sixties in North London. Meantime, Kureishi's role as novelist of contemporary multi-ethnic London has been taken by (or imposed upon) Zadie Smith, whose *White Teeth* was greeted as *The Buddha of Suburbia* of 2000. This, said readers, was what it was like to live in multiracial Willesden. There are two important differences between these two novels. Karim wants nothing so much as to leave the suburbs for the city and the future. In *White Teeth* comically realized characters belong to complex families and aside from one son being sent to Bangladesh, these families stay put. In this sense the novel is grounded, less in an identity crisis or divided ethnic consciousness, than in the quotidian period details of nineties North London and in a ready acceptance of the decentred mentalities of the now thoroughly decentred capital city.

A further difference, however, is that the comic realism of these suburban lives is twinned with a more fabular and multi-branched storytelling than Kureishi's fiction ever sustains. For if the characters of *White Teeth* stay put, their author's imagination runs free: concocting plot strands involving a North London Islamic sect called 'Kevin', a Jewish scientist committed to cloning a mouse; a Jehovah's Witness born in an earthquake in Kingston, Jamaica, and two twins, one sent to Bangladesh who returns a scientific rationalist and the other, the streetwise Millat who joins Kevin. Reviewers responded by likening the novel to a 'rudely comic Jane Austen', Dickens, and Michael Ondaatje, amongst others. The nearer example is of course Rushdie. Rushdie's writing of the period of exile (including *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and a monograph on *The Wizard of Oz*), has accentuated his commitment to metaphor and fabulation in spiralling, self-reflexive tales of the beleaguered artist. Thus *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) layers story upon story, fancy upon fancy, much like the painting of the novel's title, a palimpsest showing on its surface a self-portrait of the commercial artist Vasco Miranda as Sultan Boadbil, with beneath it a rejected portrait by Miranda of the artist Aurora da Gama, the mother of the narrator Moraes, and beneath this, according to the vengeful Miranda, the figure, at once, of Aurora's murderer, husband and the narrator's father, Abraham Zogoiby. This hidden truth of art Rushdie sets against a real world of family mischief and political

intrigue. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) clearly recognizes the plight of the separated artist in the parallel myths of Orpheus and the world renowned popstars, Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, while it strives to connect East with West, classical with pop and the underworld with the contemporary overworld.

Readers have found Rushdie's later fiction over lavish. Such judgements remain as inevitable as they are problematic. But the general questions here concern less the success or failure of individual writers or novels than the operation of a particular literary mode. 'Magic realism', as James Wood (2000) noted, had become fashionable with the new millennium. For all its apparent inventiveness, the novel of bizarre coincidence, symbolic incident and emblematic character came to read like the imagination on auto-pilot. Wood's thoughts were occasioned by *White Teeth*, whose very profusion, he believes, converts realism's probabilities into stories of 'unconvincing possibility' (62). The wonderful becomes at once overwrought and conventional. Wood would prefer the satirical realism of the 'great novelists' (Dickens, Dostovesky, Tolstoy, Mann), whose strength, for all their use of caricature, lay in the presentation of live characters and 'strong feeling' (63). Today's 'excess of storytelling' is thin in feeling; its authors are 'unable or unwilling to create characters who are fully human' (63).

Wood sees Smith as poised, symptomatically, between 'human stories' and the overblown, 'hysterical realism' becoming prevalent. Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* wobbles between the two and shows how overfamiliar the first can also be. I suggest that an alternative third mode can be found in the novel which draws on culturally grounded myth and fabulation rather than on random fancy and does so in order to explore the problematic formation and deformation of contemporary identities rather than to confirm 'the fully human'. The fiction of Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Toni Morrison is often discussed in these terms. I want to suggest that Bernadine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997) is a novel of this kind for the multicultural London suburbs.

In the novel, Lara's Nigerian father Taiwo yearns for the places, people and the ragtag iconography of Englishness ('the rolling Yorkshire moors, King George, Big Ben, cream teas … spotted dick, new towns; two up, two downs, snow!', 132). Like the West Indian emigrants of the 'Windrush' generation, and like the young Haroun in Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia*, he is drawn by an 'England of the mind', the converse of Rushdie's 'Indias of the mind'. The immigrant narrative invariably reveals this distant 'paradise' as an immediate hell of disadvantage, solitude and racism. Taiwo is forced accordingly to forgo

his ambitions to study English literature and to work as a welder, with the adopted name Tom. He hates England as the English hate him, but he cannot return 'home' unsuccessful. He suppresses his feelings at the loss of his twin sister and suppresses his past; all but the 'discipline' he had learned at the belt of his father and an inherited notion of manliness (men don't cry), which has its distant source in his ancestor's suppressed rage at the brutal injustice of slavery. When Lara takes him back to Lagos, his 'home' is, in a further recurrent narrative trope, unrecognizable. The novel recalls the past of slavery in Brazil and freedom in Lagos through his grandfather, Baba, and this history returns Taiwo to the point of his own departure. Migrancy here has entailed a riven, disconnected and shrunken rather than enlarged universe. The translated man 'Tom' has lost a language and tradition.

Rushdie's argument for the gains of 'cultural translation', alongside Kureishi's kindred belief in a 'different kind of whole society' (1996: 79) holds true, however, for the character Lara. She is visited, in an instance of this novel's grounded 'magic realism', by 'Daddy people', ghosts of Taiwo's Nigerian ancestors. He beats her because of her 'daydreaming' and thus brutally suppresses her imagination and a link with his own past. Lara is born in South London, neither black like her father, nor white like her mother, and discovers her colour only through the racist discourse of the dominant culture (she's a 'nig nog', 'a monkey', her lips are too thick, her hair is like 'a Brillo pad'). She seeks an image which mirrors back herself and ventures a description 'café noir' which counters the simplicities of standard English stereotypes with her own sophisticated 'translation'. But the parts of herself are at odds, and from this point on the novel tracks her explorations of a newly articulated, possible self. Unlike Karim in *Buddha*, she does not venture from the suburbs to the metropolitan centre, nor does she settle for the racism and incompleteness of her South London existence. Rushdie's fiction spirals upwards sentence by sentence, digressive and self-generating, for all the world like the magic carpet of fable. Evaristo's Lara digs down and travels across a personal and historical geography, archaeologist and anthropologist of the self. Unlike Kureishi's characters for whom the past is at most a recent past, Lara can only come to think of a future by translating an unknown and uncommunicated past across continents and centuries. Her full name, 'Omilara', means 'the family are like water' and she swims through family histories to Lagos, Brazil and the Amazon jungle before her return to London, when she is ready to swoop back again to Nigeria 'over a zig-zag of amber lights/signalling the higgledy energy of Lagos' (140).

The novel has mapped this zigzagging journey from its Prologue in 1844, through a chronicle of the fifties to the nineties when it veers back to the 1930s, 1839 (in Brazil), 1949 (in Lagos), before Lara's own journey to Brazil and return 'home'. Evaristo's language crosses English with French, Spanish, Yoruba and Brazilian, a heteroglossia which estranges as it expands the English reader's and Lara's own cultural vocabulary. Its setting on the page as if in lines of verse and its crafted, page long, semi-autonomous episodes, combine Western conventions of 'poetry', in a use of precise imagistic description and metaphor, with the pattern of call and answer of African origin. This amalgamated verse-song then joins the parts of a story or rather of many branched stories (of Lara's mother Ellen and her respectable suburban, Irish mother, Edith, as well as of Taiwo and Lara). This personal, family and cultural chronicle is told, moreover, through a series of voices, presented in dialogue and monologue, including a foetus's tale of its own birth and ancestral voices from beyond the grave, and threaded upon an authorial third person account which itself employs poetry, storytelling and chronicle. Catholicism, missionary zeal and a love of Jesus coexist with sexual love, ancestor worship and the gods of the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomble. In the Amazon, once more, before her return home, Lara hears 'Catholic hymns hybridized by drums' (139). She internalizes this 'congregation' of cultures – 'I become my parents, my ancestors, my gods' – but directs it onwards too in place and time, from the jungle to the city and towards a future ('my future'), which 'means transformation' (138, 139).

Lara's great-grandfather, Baba, remembers the storytelling of his own 'magical memory grandmother' who 'dip dip down into the deepest part of she-self'. He describes this as 'poetry oratory' and it is this style which we infer Evaristo's own tone and register remembers. Here, a hybridized 'magical' mode of story telling, as open to the fabulous and the foreign as to the familiar – swerving back and forward and sideways in time and place – does indeed make the world larger. Here too, the creative work of the author is represented through the 'creative life' of a character who is herself an artist. Revitalized, having realized the meaning of her full name which connects the family through and across water, she is 'baptised' and resolves 'to paint slavery out of me/the Daddy People onto canvas with colour-rich strokes' (140). This she means to do in 'my island' with 'the "Great" Tippexed out of it', a Britain she sees now (as if itself a member of a newly extended family), as a island, 'tiny amid massive floating continents' (140). Salvador, Lagos and London are open to her, places to which she will wing back as she steps out into her future – 'an embryo

within me' (140), she notes in parenthesis, hinting at a new birth and coming creation swimming inside.

Kureishi's and Smith's and Evaristo's novels differ from each other and in significant ways from the implications of Rushdie's account of migrancy and a migrant imagination housed in the place of writing. In their use of magic realism such fictions work, we might say, by analogy and allegory, a mode identified by Fredric Jameson as belonging quintessentially to the postmodern. This is so, Jameson argues, because in a life of elaborate, overlapping and recycled surfaces we can only reach to a larger meaning beyond, if not beneath, these surfaces through a non-mimetic mode. The aesthetic means to a relocated subjectivity in the hyperspaces of postmodern architecture and by extension within the social and informational networks of global capital, Jameson styles 'cognitive mapping' (Jameson 1991: 44, 50–4). It is to this activity that we must look, he argues, for 'some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing' our positioning as citizens and global subjects (1991: 54). Allegory, in other words, operates, as we all must, in this now enormously complex world of symbolic representations. In Rushdie's case, the place of home, self and writing belong similarly to an overwhelmingly and perhaps inescapably textual domain. That this exacts a certain price was seen on the day in October 1998 when it was announced that the ordeal of the fatwa was (formally at least) now over. Rushdie chose to walk the streets of North London. His action conspicuously claimed a physical location and territory for this liberated self, which was in marked contrast to the creation of fantastic or allegorical locations in his fiction since the more recognizable London, Bombay and Saudi Arabia of earlier novels, including *The Satanic Verses*.

The major protagonists of *Buddha, Gabriel's Gift* and *Lara* discover themselves through art and the 'creative life' or imagination. *White Teeth* does not invest this imaginative power in a character. But the comparison with Rushdie reveals a distinction between his own more fabular and textualist and these writers' more grounded imaginations. Revealingly, his characters often fly or dream across space where the others set down their striving, self-creating subjects in the shaping geographies of named streets and neighbourhoods and the identifiable regions of cities and continents. Returned from New York at the end of the seventies, Karim is centred in London, the city and family he loves. Lara steps out at Heathrow in 1995, confident that she will travel as the fluid, revitalized artist she now is, back and forth

'across international time zones' (140). The risk of Rushdie's fiction is the risk of a postmodernist discourse of self-generating narratives, connected by the ropes of allegory to present social and political history. His art 'alludes' to the real and reminds us of Jean-François Lyotard's description of a postmodern art, whose 'business is not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented' (1992: 150), or which 'works through' an irrepressible but only indirectly accessed past through 'analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis' (1993: 50). The result is the 'distorted', non-mimetic representations of fabulation: an example of the aesthetic of the 'sublime' in Lyotard's thinking, or, once more, of Jameson's 'cognitive mapping' which seeks similarly to 'present the unrepresentable'.

Evaristo's and Smith's novels and Kureishi's earlier writing, on the other hand, resemble the 'wordly' textualism which Alex Callinicos (1989: 85) finds in Michel Foucault's and Edward Said's attempts to articulate the discursive with the non-discursive. Their stories run their course in time and place, or, we might say, 'inside' these co-ordinates as the narration follows the rearranged chronologies and mental maps their characters draw of London and beyond. Stuart Hall suggests that the appreciation of 'new ethnicities' means contesting nationalistic or imperialist meanings inside the concept of ethnicity. In this way, ethnicity can be understood as historically and culturally situated within a congeries of factors including class, gender, sexuality, and as open to change. What in addition they (and the significantly titled *Handsworth Songs* and *Territories*) show is how conceptions of place and location should be understood as joining too, in an intimate and direct way, in the construction of postmodern identity. Who you are depends on the dynamics of where and when you are, how you find yourself within the chronotopes of suburb and city.

If these authors participate in the drawing of 'cognitive maps' of the kind Fredric Jameson has in mind, they suggest how this aesthetic and related 'pedagogical political culture' can look *both* to a referenced and 'worldly' and non-mimetic mode. After all, however, Evaristo's novel differs in the ways I've described from Kureishi's wonted topical comic realism, the more fanciful narrative contrivances of *White Teeth,* and the concerted imaginative architecture of Rushdie's fiction. Above all, its story of the making of a 'new ethnicity' differs in its exploration of a geocultural past which can be returned to a present life in post-colonial London. Importantly, this is neither a permanent stopping

place, nor one to simply escape, but one place amongst others where Lara, in touch with herself, can now touch down. She is the migrant as cosmopolitan, a type of 'new citizen', whose new knowledge and resources enrich this passing exchange of artist and metropolis. Important too, as I've wanted to stress, are the terms of this connectedness; the novel's adoption, that is to say, of a culturally hybrid artistic mode to match a new hybrid ethnicity and way of being British. Evaristo shows us how the deeply figurative or 'imagined' 'alien' modes of cognition of a repressed cultural past can articulate (in the double sense of both represent and connect with) the physical worlds of the contemporary city. In so doing they give newly conscious subjectivities a located cultural meaning in the historicized intersections of the local, the metropolitan and the global. This is impressive enough. So too is the way this connection is forged across radically different *ways* of knowing and imagining or 'mapping' the world: at once human and magical.

4
Re-imagining London

The workings of 'reflexive modernization' brought Britain in the 1980s to the experience of 'Thatcherism'. 'Politically and Intellectually', says Fred Inglis, Margaret Thatcher oversaw 'the most destructive period in our social history' (2000: 21). In London, the centre piece of her eleven year rule was the Docklands redevelopment at Canary Wharf, 'an extremely expensive fiasco', concludes architect Richard Rogers, which produced 'a chaos of commercial buildings', 'without real civic quality or lasting communal benefit' (1997: 109). Though now roundly condemned in these terms, in the period itself Thatcher's revolution effectively saw off Labour Party and left opposition; most conspicously in the form of the GLC, banned in 1986 and in the defeat in 1984 of the miners who had stood as the classic representatives of the organized working class. There was, as Margaret Thatcher liked to claim, 'no alternative' to her iron-clad laissez-faire economics. The prevailing national mood polarized as one of ostentatious greed and impotent resentment rather than active protest. Under a regime of revamped 'Victorian values' the nation's industrial base eroded and was superseded by an 'enterprise culture' of unconstrained commerce and private ownership. This in turn entailed a shift of emphasis from the North to the South which coincided with a heady boost to the operations of finance capital in the City of London and a related perception of the 'problem' of the inner cities. As Minister of the Environment, Michael Heseltine oversaw the first plans for inner city regeneration, and in 1980 inaugurated the commercial redevelopment of Docklands while, all too blatantly, the Dockyard industry was allowed to fall into near terminal decline.

The East End was interestingly placed in this episode and subsequent history. It had been a 'social problem' a century earlier, a gothic

'darker England', sunk, in a recurrent metaphor, in a social and psychic 'abyss' of poverty and crime, and had later gained a reputation for dissent and political agitation. As always, it stood symbolically adjacent to the power-house of the City of London. Now in the eighties it was sandwiched between the City and Canary Wharf, twin monuments to finance capital and property speculation. In addition, the East End had been a traditional place of transit for immigrants, and over the course of the century had become a place of settlement for substantial Irish, Jewish and Bangladeshi populations (Merriman, 1993; Kershen, 1997). If, at the turn of the last century the East End represented the 'other' to the nation's preferred self-image of middle-class respectability, it now presented the 'postcolonial other' returned to the post imperial capital. Tower Hamlets and Spitalfields, in particular, were the scene of these changes and they have been a primary location for writings by Iain Sinclair and others who I want to consider here.

'The great shame, and dishonour, of the present regime', wrote Sinclair in *Downriver*, 'is its failure to procure a decent opposition' (1991a: 72). I want to reflect below on this work's own character as an oppositional text and to compare Sinclair's writings at earlier and later points in the 1990s with others who see a different East End or wider London, and find sometimes a different political voice: Syed Manzarul Islam, Patrick Keiller, Rachel Lichtenstein and Janet Cardiff. Margaret Thatcher famously declared there is no such thing as society. I want in particular to ask how these writers and artists respond to this side of the aggressive individualism she represented. What conception of urban community or the social does their work produce? My question then, as elsewhere, but posed here in the phase of high capitalism in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, is how art can intervene in the realm of the social imaginary and so help re-imagine the 'postmodern' metropolis.

Vortex Spitalfields: Iain Sinclair and Syed Manzarul Islam

The East End, John Marriott reports, has experienced a volatile and ambiguous political mentality, one which in the early years of the century was more plebian than class-based, and in a sense remained 'pre-modern'. (Marriott 1996: 119). As Marriott and others have shown, this mentality has informed a tradition of political independence and protest (associated with George Lansbury and the Poplar rebels of 1920s, with anarchist groups at the beginning and end of the

century, and with anti-fascist and anti-racist protest in 1930s and 1970s) which has been antagonistic to capitalist modernity and to mainstream political traditions (Gillespie, 1989; Fishman, 1997). Arguably, too, this political style has found an analogous literary and artistic mode in the Gothic, exploited, often in association with East End locations, in the late nineteenth century novel and in the new urban based genre of detective fiction running aslant of contemporary high modernism. The result is that an almost instinctive non-conformity, attracted to the eccentric, idealistic, populist, and anti-rational has been associated with the area.

Sinclair is situated in these discourses and in some ways arguably their inheritor. Thus his appeal in *Lights Out for the Territory* to London's dispossessed, those he describes as 'deregulated shamans' and their associated 'strategies of derangement' (1997: 269). Where Charles Baudelaire in late nineteenth century Paris had seen the figures of the ragpicker, the apache of the left bank, the demobbed soldier, prostitute and dandy as the heroic detritus of the modern metropolis, Sinclair mythologizes a new gallery of East End types: the Kray twins patrolling their manor, survivors of the 'swinging sixties', minor personalities of showbiz and the criminal underground, itinerant bibliophiles, out-of-print pulp writers, sometime movie-makers, anarchists, avant-gardist poets and artists. Heading this regular cast there are the principal figures who accompany Sinclair on his London walks or appear as characters in his writings: novelist and film-maker Chris Petit, photographer Marc Atkins, and above all, perhaps, the 'wandering scholar and magician', as Sinclair calls him (1997: 268) the sculptor-poet-performance artist, Brian Catling, elsewhere likened to Wyndham Lewis (1991b: 51). 'The health of the city', Sinclair continues in *Lights Out*, 'and perhaps of the culture itself, seemed to depend upon the flights of redemption these disinherited shamans (there were women too, plenty of them) could summon and sustain. They were associated in my mind with other avatars of unwisdom: scavengers, dole-queue antiquarians, bagpeople, out-patients, muggers, victims, millennial babblers' (1997: 247).

In his own role of street-wise mystic, Sinclair offers to front this band of lumpen-intelligentsia, the 'mad ones' of Ginsberg's *Howl* reborn as the deracinated minds of a later generation and joined now by the assorted fall-out of an ailing welfare state. The social bearings and temper or 'structure of feeling' of Sinclair's work would seem to lie chiefly with such groups, and then to reach back to the uncertainties of casual labour and militant plebeian sympathies of the earlier era

indicated above. To this social base he brings an echoing range of literary sources: in Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, the Black Mountain poets, Allen Ginsberg and the Beats, David Gascoyne, Arthur Rimbaud, and William Blake, 'grandfather' says Sinclair, 'of psychogeographers'. This personal tradition is then overlaid with reworkings of the standard East End gothic of Jack the Ripper and the Elephant Man, together with the figure of the Elizabethan necromancer John Dee, and the supposed occult designs of Nicholas Hawksmoor's London churches which Sinclair shares with the novelist Peter Ackroyd. These names and references join as points of Blakean or Vorticist energy, pulled into in a cultivated disorder to serve the motley social army of present-day recruits against the single minded foe: Sinclair's enemy, 'the Widow', Mrs Thatcher.

This highly eclectic take on the past, including the modernist past, is embodied in the figure of the walker, the Sinclair persona or his fictionalized equivalents and a companion who traverse the contemporary East End, the City and South London. Theoretically, Sinclair is endebted here to Walter Benjamin's perception of the urban phantasmagoric, as well as (though ambiguously as we shall see), to the idea of the *flâneur*, and to the French situationalists, especially to the strategy of 'dérive' or drift, the open embrace of the unexpected in the urban scene. 'Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode … in alert reverie', writes Sinclair, but this is no fin de siecle decadence: 'the born-again *flâneur*, he says, 'is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing everything' (1997: 4).[1] Attending Ronnie Kray's funeral, he concludes, 'The concept of "strolling", aimless urban wandering, the *flâneur*, had been superseded. We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and unsponsored. The stalker was our role model: purposed hiking, not dawdling, nor browsing … This was walking with a thesis' (1997: 75). If Sinclair is a *flâneur,* he's on fast forward. He doesn't amble – he legs it, moving at pace in pursuit of a prey, on the scent of secret London, or 'the powerful dose of fiction', he slyly adds, which will bring this to light. This 'alternate cartography' he tracks and sometimes finds in unread graffiti, forgotten script, concealed statuary, ignored gargoyles, neglected plots, rivers and ruins which become the tokens and sites of an underground occult energy, vibrant with meaning. But, if his walks drift, they do not begin this way. Unlike the desultory *flâneur* or 'nomadic' postmodern walker, Sinclair moves off from and returns to a centre, the homely and symbolically named Albion Road, Hackney.

His routes expose the rationality of modernist planning to the cultivated rupture of those plans; walking modernist intent, as it were, into the path of postmodern contingency. Thus, he hopes for some accident to revise the 'near-arbitrary route' of a V-shaped quest he has planned from Hackney to Greenwich Hill and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount in *Lights Out for the Territory*, and finds it in the chaos of his desk in a forgotten invitation to visit an installation by Richard Makin at the University of Greenwich in Woolwich. He is sure then of digressing on an adventurous tangent into the zombie spaces of South London. 'Already the "purity" of the V had been despoiled,' he comments, 'Good' (1997: 8).

In the opening of *Downriver*, a walk-on, walk-off character, Sabella, asks, "And what … is the opposite of a dog?"' (1991a: 3 and see 407). This is a question, we realise, about the nature of opposition to Thatcher's Isle of Dogs and to the pit bull terrier which is, for Sinclair, the emblem of the period, a prosthesis parading the vicious maleness of Thatcher Man. The question is raised again directly in *Lights Out*. The contrary to the pit bull and Isle of Dogs will have a 'special quality', Sinclair writes, 'that by its nature will be impossible to define … a movement in the air, an unpredictable shift in the intensity of light … A music. A ravished inattention.' (60). This then is the true object of the stalker's quest and Brian Catling is its exemplar. His work *The Stumbling Block its INDEX*, says Sinclair, 'is the stalker's ur-text; a somatic investigation of the interface of dream and memory' (75).

The quest then is for this contrary. On the ground, it falters and fails, however. As Sinclair and Marc Atkins belatedly complete the V to Chingford Mount, he realizes that they have discovered 'not the "opposite" of a dog, but the contrary to the leyline' (85): not the connected time-lines of energy following natural geological and geographical forms, but 'dog lines', a mongrel relation to the soft-footed pursuit of the light, air and music of rapt inattention. 'There was then', Sinclair writes, 'a wilder system in play: the improvisations of the dog. The retreats, spurts, galloping loops and pounces of the stalker' (85). He could not better describe the obsessive, digressive movement that drives his sentences and waylays his narrative.

The movement and risk of this writing enacts, we could say, the spiralling movement inside 'Vortex Sinclair', churning to the point of regenerative energy or dizzying frenzy when the contents spill out of control, when the narrative slips off the planned route entirely or is brought to an encounter with the unknown and inexpressible. The stalker discovers the sublimely 'special quality … impossible to define'

or slips into a crazed gothic which crumbles in the fingers. In important respects, however, the 'impossible to define' proceeds all too plainly from the already defined, from a given angle which sees and hears this but not that other. Sinclair's wayward rocketing prose, bursting with meaning, is launched, in other words, from a standing position.

His dogged *flâneur* is interested, we remember, in 'noticing everything'. The disinherited shamans upon whom the redemption and health of the city and culture depend include 'women too', he says in parenthesis, 'plenty of them'. When we look, we find the companion stalkers are always male, always white. I want therefore to comment on the determining absence of women and of ethnic others (or other ethnics) in Sinclair's writing and on what this says of its character as an alternative cultural formation.

An apparent exception to the absence of women is the story of the character Edith Cadiz in *Downriver*. Her name and the circumstances of her life are invented, so it transpires, from a photograph picked up from a Bermondsey trader. In this fiction she is a dancer working as a stripper and then as a half-time nurse and prostitute. In her act she clothes herself in photocopied areas of a map of London. When the punters call out the right place name, her dog pounces and pulls off one of the sections. Later she becomes the mistress of a Labour MP whose Left credentials are a sham. For him she performs another act, bringing to life a painting that has haunted him since boyhood. She performs sex with his Alsation dog which has, he says, 'absorbed most of his masculine virtues'; it manifests 'his warrior soul ... his power' (76).

After the affair with the MP she disappears. Then on a train journey Sinclair later takes to North Woolwich he hears her voice quoting the real-life authors T.S. Eliot and Stella Bowen. Bowen, she tells Sinclair, introduced her to Mary Butts, sometime social worker in the East End, associate of Jean Cocteau, poet, film-maker addict and dabbler in black magic. In an extraordinary, whirling passage, Edith Cadiz materializes and merges with a resurrected Mary Butts, 'pale, powdered in arsenic' as if 'buried alive' (174) and is assaulted by her grotesque contrary, Aleister Crowley, a 'male thing' which 'rolls and lisps, stuttering its obscenities' (175). Sinclair detaches himself from the viscous spasm of 'formless horror' he has imagined: 'I do not possess the technical language to justify the completion of my account,' he announces (175). What follows, in passages of 'compulsive associationalism', is an overlayered analysis of the sexual fantasies encoded in John Tenniel's

drawing of 'Alice in the train' for Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Alice has the 'will', Sinclair writes, 'of my daughter, of all daughters: mothers of daughters' (180) and he comes, in an astonishing passage, to appeal to women as an exit from the accumulating implications of guilt and confession. 'I must draw on the anger of women to escape from this quilted cage,' he writes, 'a strength we will never understand, and transcribe as "will", "stubbornness" or some other biological imperative' (183). He is transported, in what may be the sole occurrence in his writing, to the domestic interior of his home in Hackney. There, in a loft of books – any word from which might further derail his already 'unfocused' quest – he discovers a set of drawings by 'my daughter' and accompanying narrative explanations by 'her mother' (184). His daughter's thin figures and 'hot whirlwind ... vortex of crayoned blues and greens' (184) are glossed as the tale of a dead woman killed by a train and a baby who the woman rises to take home by the light of a candle.

This troubled tale at one level confesses the guilty fantasies of misogyny, voyeurism, and paedophilia, or opens the narrative to such fantasies, in the same gesture as it pulls back. It is 'formless' and 'unfocused' but its incoherence belongs to another world, surely, than the serenity that Sinclair speaks of in connection with Catling's work and which in the text's allegorical structure comprises the contrary to Thatcherism. Women figure in this story, but less as actors than the creations and creatures of man's fevered sexual imagination. A story about a woman turns out to be a story about man's struggle with the shame of his other who is like a dog: the stalking beast who would hunt down a fantasized feminine and come home to woman's idealized 'anger' and 'strength'.

Thatcher was removed from power in 1990. The question of a 'decent opposition' belongs in the first instance therefore to the late 1980s. This was the decade not only of high capitalism but a flurry of debates on the postmodern and the guiding issue – raised in particular by Fredric Jameson – of whether postmodernism could be understood as the reflex or the critical reaction to late capitalism. Sinclair's opposition lies in the search for the sublime 'special quality' experienced in moments of transfiguration. He poses this momentary 're-enchantment' of the city's fabric to Thatcher's contemporary 'regeneration'. We have seen above where his gothic intertextuality might lead in respect of gender. A further question would ask not about the postmodern and late capitalism, however, but about postmodernism and

the postcolonial. In other words, how does postmodern art register the presence of the colonial 'other' in the late century metropolis, when that other is no longer the distant stranger or newcomer of modernism, but a near neighbour?

Here Sinclair's strategy and vision are limited. In *Downriver* he notes the variety of multi-ethnic life in the East End, in shops, in Kurdish, Turkish, Afro-Caribbean peoples and organizations; he explores the fabricated rituals of colonial life in a scrutiny of 12 photographs; honours the grave of the Aboriginal cricketer 'King Cole', buried in Victoria Park, and more besides – including the remarkable story, to which he later returns, of the unexplained disappearance of the Jewish scholar David Rodinsky. However, whereas these earlier immigrants and colonized others are an acknowledged, sometimes considered presence, the newer ethnic community of Bangladeshis, whose great Mosque now occupies the site of a former synagogue in Whitechapel's Fournier Street, are as if invisible. Bengalis are twice observed in groups, once having sex in their break from work and once shifting leather goods up to the West End. The artist who would notice everything in his chosen territory and redeem the culture, barely registers the existence of the majority population of that area. In one vituperative charge towards the river, Sinclair throws out the accusation that 'Banglatown, as it was vulgarly known, replaced the perished dream of Spitalfields' (265).

What provokes this reaction? There are, I suggest, two complex and underlying issues. One is the power of 'whiteness' whose apparent transparency is the very sign of its undeclared but hegemonic ethnicity (Dyer, 1997). The second is the continuing, unresolved relations of Islam and the West. A challenging example of some of these themes and in a sense a reponse to Sinclair, occurs in Syed Manzarul Islam's collection *The Map Makers of Spitalfields* (1997), especially the title story. In this story, a mythical figure called Brothero-man is pursued by two white-coated 'mad-catchers'; bovver booted agents of the repressive state. Brothero-man is known to everyone: a ubiquitous presence in the shops, the pool room, a poet's squat, a children's play area along and off Brick Lane. He chastises them for their greed and laziness and has no need himself of the mosque at Fournier Street because the mosque is inside him. Nevertheless, he has the community's fondness and protection. He is their conscience and wise fool, an eccentric even within this off-centre community: a sharp suited magician who can produce sweets from his deep pockets, comfort for the depressed and lonesome, defiance and leadership against white racism.

He speaks a jaunty argot of Bengali and English, 'bending the English tongue to the umpteenth degree' (69), and he is a mapmaker, a walker who is mapping an alternative world within his mind which corresponds to the confines of Brick Lane. As he walks he sketches in miniature 'a map at the very heart of this foreign city' (63), 'drawing the blueprint of a new city … always at the crossroads, and between the cities of lost times and cities of times yet to come' (69). The narrator seeks him out to warn him of his pursuers but the next day comes himself to assume Brothero-man's identity. So the mythological outsider and defender of the community dies and lives on. He is a vital spirit in solution: manifest and invisible, at once presence and absence, seen and unseen.

Brothero-man is a 'psychogeographer', a crazed holy man, and Sinclair's path, you feel, ought to have crossed his. But these East Ends are like parallel worlds with little traffic either way. The English are not on Islam's agenda and his use of the colour of whiteness is enigmatic. Aside from the overalled madcatchers in the title story, the elusive Brothero-man is said to dress in wild colours, including an immaculate white flannel suit, white shoes and broad brimmed white felt hat. Is this a flamboyant appropriation of the colonizer's garb, a mirroring back of the showiness of the cockney spiv; the white pimp turned Bengali street walker? Is it mimicry, parody or pastiche?

Together both sets of writings, I think, present us with a mutual sense of otherness at the determining edge of a contemporary social consciousness; prey to stereotypes and gut reactions, painted in broad brush outlines and a dash of colour, but washed out on both sides into a kind of invisibility. Sinclair virtually 'blanks' Bangladeshis, Syed Islam treats whiteness with cartooning allegory. The result is that the ordinary day-to-day coexistence of Bengalis and 'English', as well as other white ethnic groups on the streets of the East End, is not, for whatever complex reasons, directly acknowledged or centred in narratives of this life.

A reviewer of the anthology *A Various Art* (1987), in which Sinclair appears, counted up the number of white male contributors. Sinclair dismisses this as hypocritical political correctness (1996: xvi). But any simple condemnation or defence on this issue is inappropriate. Sinclair's aesthetic and spleen derive at their core from the libertarianism of the mid-1960s. The welter of cultural and literary affiliations crowded into this vortex supply the extra energy Sinclair needs to do battle with a regime which vilified precisely this decade. The deviant and deranged, occult and oddball are as much as anything

a product of this contest between the 'Widow's' vision and the poet's super-charged imagination. Part, too, of the strength of this oppositional formation, as it is remade and mythologized in the 1980s and 1990s, are the personal histories, friendships and contacts which give it its social and mythological materials; which make it a networked subculture and alternatively imagined world. The result is highly inventive and compelling but governed, nonetheless, by a corporate white male consciousness. Sinclair's project is limited, therefore, not because it fails some pure and external standard, but because it colludes in the very norms of Thatcher's Britain: not in the dangerous proximity of 're-enchantment' and 'regeneration', but in attitudes towards women and ethnicity. An alternative to her project would have required a more 'various art' for a more various metropolitan society. I am interested in what follows in how this challenge is addressed in examples from the post-Thatcher years.

The problem of London: Patrick Keiller

'Patrick Keiller's London', Sinclair remarks in *Lights Out*, 'is not your London' (1997: 309). Not untypically, however, he lassoes Keiller's 1992 film *London* into his own orbit, seeing it as the twin to Chris Petit's Soho novel *Robinson* and other Petit TV shorts – seduced perhaps by their protagonists sharing the same name. Keiller and Petit's Robinsons belong, he suggests, to a genealogy working its way from Louis Ferdinand Céline through American writers, Weldon Kees, William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, and on to J.G. Ballard and the present (315). But Keiller's aesthetic does not follow this route, nor does his film suggest that subsequent London cinema will necessarily be, as Sinclair has it, 'a cinema of vagrancy' and 'surveillance' (314, 317), though Petit's work arguably does.

There are stronger similarities between Sinclair and Keiller than between Keiller and Petit, but significant differences here too. Thus both seek to make visible an alternative history embedded in an unseen layer of the city, but while this prompts the psychic excursions across London that make up Sinclair's riposte to Thatcherism, Keiller is intent on a cooler and more overtly political analysis of London in the becalmed days of continuing Tory rule under John Major. *London* achieves this distance through its objective chronicling of dates in the political calendar of 1992, a seeming simplicity of naturalistic film style, and the mediating narrative device of two companion walkers, one of whom, the narrator, is unnamed and the second, Robinson, is

never seen. Moreover, while the city is marked out for both Sinclair and Keiller by revered historic and literary sites, the literary figures Keiller's film honours are less those in the Anglo-American tradition Sinclair names than British and European writers: Laurence Sterne, Daniel Defoe, Baudelaire, Poe, Verlaine and Rimbaud (whose 'uneasy, bickering, sexual relationship' is mirrored in the history of Robinson and the narrator). Further sources are also more European than American – Kafka (whose *Amerika*, an entirely imaginary portrait of the United States, rather than Céline is the source of his protagonist's name), Walter Benjamin, Alexander Herzen, Apollinaire and the French surrealists and Situationists.

Sinclair writes of Keiller staring at London with 'autistic steadiness' (1997: 310). The long-held medium distance shots of picture postcard sites of London gives his film a deceptive amateurism and above all a hypnotic stillnesss which works, as Sinclair puts it, like 'a charm against frenzy' (133), inadvertently posing its serenity to the swirling energies of his own work. Keiller's technique lies in minimizing technique. *London* is in effect a set of stills set to an intermittent soundtrack of dampened city sounds and music from Brahms, Beethoven and snatches from forties' thriller films. Above this there cruises the commanding, debonair voice-over of its one unmistakable actor, Paul Schofield, whose reports on Robinson (hardly the 'stalker' Sinclair suggests) contrast with the plainness of the unmoving images and Robinson's melancholy struggle with contemporary London.

Robinson's project, and perhaps Keiller's own, is the 'problem of London'. His conclusion is that it has no society at its centre. Though this appears to confirm Thatcher's dogma, it in fact contradicts it. For while Thatcher set her face against collective feeling and action (hence her assault on Trades Unions and the GLC), Keiller/Robinson lament the absence of a public sphere: a civic culture which would support a cosmopolitan artistic and intellectual community. His thinking on this derives not from a contemporary literary counterculture but (departing decidedly from Sinclair and Petit), a broader historical and political analysis of the British state.

In interview Keiller draws a distinction between 'old' and 'new space', the latter being the servicing outlets, out-of-town shopping malls and business parks of the 1990s, while the old is the receding if not obliterated places of industrial manufacture (Wright, 1999: 232). Paul Dave (1997) links this process with 'heritage cinema' and with Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson's arguments on the British state.[2] The Nairn-Anderson thesis proposes that the English revolution of the seventeenth century

'occurred too soon for the bourgeoisie to fulfil its historic destiny as the agent of modernity' (Dave: 113). While the bourgeoisie installed a modern capitalist economy it left intact an *ancien régime* which 'had no reason to modernize the social order' (113). The effects are apparent in the persistent structure of patrician/plebian relations in British society and the gulf between the new aristocracy and the new poor in the Thatcher period. 'The failure of the English revolution is all around us', comments Robinson, as Keiller's camera surveys the rituals of Trooping the Colour and the Lord Mayor's Show which testify to the old order's longevity. Robinson/Keiller's complaint is more specific than this, however. It is that, unlike France, Britain has set its face against the city and a metropolitan public sphere whose cultural sign lies less in the afterlife of the Beats or counterculture network which sustains Sinclair, Petit and others, than the café society of modernist Paris – in a somewhat surprising echo of Ezra Pound's perception of London discussed earlier.

Paul Dave links the peculiarities of the English 'bourgeois paradigm' with contemporary debates on the heritage industry's rendering of the national past. Where some see in this movement an elitist reproduction of 'Little Englandism', others highlight popular democratic attempts to reconstitute an alternative past 'from below'. (Dave: 111–12) The second enterprise, Dave implies, would contribute to 'the reinvention of working-class political culture' (126). Dave suggests that *London* seeks in this spirit 'to rescue democratic counter-images of London' (113) – in its celebration of the Routemaster bus for example – but that it fails to do so consistently. The outcome, he suggests, is an ambivalent combination of postmodern stylishness and deflating melancholy (114). Melancholy *London* certainly is, but 'postmodernism' is an unconvincing description of Keiller's film-making. I think too that Dave misreads Keiller's general project.

On the first point, Keiller's films can be instructively compared with the joint Sinclair/Petit project *The Falconer* (1998), whose highly self-conscious montage and layered fabulation are in absolute contrast to Keiller's straight-dealing. While Keiller's images are indexical *The Falconer's* are detached from their ostensible documentary subject, the sixties minor celebrity, film-maker, mystic and occultist, Peter Whitehead, and are authenticated only by Whitehead's own self-mythologizing career. *The Falconer* presents a cinema of 'style' and 'spectacle' which for Dave signifies postmodernism. Keiller's allegiance is less to this 'postmodern aesthetic of bricolage' (Dave: 113) than to surrealism, as suggested above, or rather to an English surrealism

which spliced this predominantly French movement with the documentary mode of the 1930s in the work of the film-maker Humphrey Jennings, for example, and the earlier work of the Mass Observation Movement.[3] It is in this vein that Keiller picks out the quirks, incongruities, and the irrational latent in everyday life, and also detects the contradictions and absences in the broader economy. We might therefore see more a reconstituted modernism in his films than a postmodernism of style and surface.

Robinson's/Keiller's project, secondly, is to seek an alternative civic culture. This is to put in positive terms Robinson's conclusion that it is precisely this which is lacking. But this pessimism is qualified at a number of points. Dave notes Robinson's reflections on the Routemaster bus. We might add his evident admiration, which is Keiller's too, for the LCC Boundary estate at Shoreditich and the glimpse he is afforded in a café in the Ealing Road, Wembley, of a convivial civic community. At another moment he attends Divali with a colleague. 'Society', as Keiller/Robinson conceive it, might be frustrated by an ironic combination of John Major's nostalgia for an England of warm beer, cricket on the green and the drive of market forces which erodes this very landscape, but London is not without traces of an alternative sociality all the same. We should remember too that Robinson is a device and that neither he nor the narrator represent Keiller's undeflected voice. What Robinson thinks or what is said is not necessarily what Keiller thinks, nor what he sees or shows. On the Boundary estate, for example, children play regardless of the film's text. In Brixton the camera cannot but show a multi-ethnic community going about its business. Robinson may be most happy alone in a field, but images such as these evoke a social history in which a progressive municipal ethos finds a continuity with African-Caribbean and Asian traditions. This is not a connection which runs in an unbroken line, any more than a multi-ethnic cosmopolitanism is an accomplished fact of British society. The double-sidedness of hope and pessimism in such a process of uneven development is captured in a reference to the Marxist cultural geographer Henri Lefebvre in *Robinson in Space*. Robinson's belief here, 'that other people could become friends and neighbours', is contradicted by the narrator who quotes Lefebvre as saying that the space containing 'the preconditions of another life' is the same space which prohibits their realization (Keiller, 1999: 5). But neither side of this statement is uppermost; the preconditions and prohibitions coexist in an urban dialectic. Keiller's own announced project in both films meanwhile, is to 'change the

experience of its subject' (Wright: 1999: 223), to 'reimagine where you live' (Keiller,1998: np). The test of his reinvented documentary surrealism is whether it helps bring this about.

Drifting, disappearing: Iain Sinclair, Rachel Lichtenstein

Sinclair has written three books in the late 1990s, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997), a graphic novel with drawings by Dave McKean, the volume *Liquid City* (1999), with the photographer Marc Atkins which works over key sites in *Lights Out for The Territory* and *Downriver*, and *Rodinsky's Room* (1999), co-authored with Rachel Lichtenstein. This last was accompanied by Lichtenstein's *Rodinsky's Whitechapel* (1999), and Sinclair's *Dark Lanthorns*. *Rodinsky's A–Z* (1999), in which Sinclair walks over routes marked in David Rodinsky's *A–Z* in the company of Chris Petit and Marc Atkins. In 1998 Sinclair and Petit made the film *The Falconer* on Peter Whitehead for Channel Four. This re-stages material in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*. Sinclair's oeuvre, therefore, begins to look like a canny exercise in recycling, rotating a core set of locations and themes through different media, co-workers and second selves through whom he can then ventriloquize a new version into being. This is true also of Sinclair's writing on David Rodinsky, a Jewish recluse who disappeared from his attic room in 19 Princelet Street, Spitalfields in 1969, leaving a chaos of books, papers and personal effects, and the mystery, when the room was opened 11 years later, of its crowded, silent contents.

Sinclair was first introduced to the Rodinsky story by Patrick Wright and conveyed this into *Downrive*r and later *Lights Out*, along with a review there of an installation by Rachel Lichtenstein in Brick Lane. *Rodinsky's Room* is a unique collaboration for Sinclair since it is with a woman writer, though their alternate chapters proceed more in counterpoint than as a joint project. As Sinclair concludes of his own and Marc Atkin's contributions to *Liquid City*, it is 'a collaboration that never happened', an occasional fusion of discrete worlds (Atkins and Sinclair, 1999: 223). For Lichtenstein, the question of the Jewish presence in the East End and her own relation to it are uppermost. She is 'obsessed', she says, by Rodinsky, and accepts the role of his amanuensis as her destiny. While she quests for the 'true story' of Rodinsky's life, Sinclair animates the life of story, spinning out the yarn of this 'found narrative' in a sampler of analogies and conceits, the magician and speculative cartographer to her painstaking archaeologist.

The result is a palimpsest which writes Pinter's *Caretaker*, the myths

of the golem and 'dybbuk', tales of the West End playboy, East End hustler, David Livitnoff across the ur-Rodinsky story, and takes Sinclair once more round some familiar narrative haunts. His consistent sense is of Rodinsky's room as a stage set awaiting its performers. In the event, the performers are less those he conscripts to this drama than Lichtenstein and himself. Like the two sides of the classic detective, they go off in different directions, she in pursuit of the facts, he on a meditative perambulation. The puzzle of this case is there is no body. While she pores over the detritus of Rodinsky's room, seeking its imprinted shape, he turns over the room' s mystery, affixing its hieroglyphic scraps to a corpus of legend and myth.

As Sinclair allows, all the spiritual and personal commitment are Rachel Lichtenstein's, but in the end his working assumptions illuminate her methods more than the reverse. Contrary to her beliefs and wishes, the room is inescapably 'a set' for them both. The unblemished truth waiting at the end of her quest is occluded at every turn. Thus, the first photograph of the room when it was opened in 1980 is 'beautifully lit and composed' (Lichtenstein and Sinclair, 1999: 32). The room had been tampered with and material had gone missing (45–46). The first visitors forget who was first and what precisely they saw, while she is 'greatly confused' as to Rodinsky's 'true identity' (44), and the photograph assumed to be of him proves to be a photograph of his sister. He was a genius, he was backward, a linguist or mere copyist. 'We excavate the history we need', says Sinclair (177), and so it is with Lichtenstein. The Rodinsky she unearths answers to her fantasized image of the lone Jewish scholar and cabbalist. She remarks at one point how Russian and Polish refugees of the late nineteenth century had attempted to transport their synagogue and community unaltered from Eastern Europe to the East End (22). In Rodinsky she sees this strategy maintained, his room a last outpost against the modernizing community below.

Thus she moulds him into a golem (224) – at a point where her own and Sinclair's interpretations meet – the 'caretaker' (which he was not), of the synagogue and ghetto, its protector against invasion. As Sinclair perceives, the Holocaust and its bequest of irreparable loss hovers over all she does. As she realizes that the truth of Rodinsky lies not in his room but in the scattered memories and symbolic deposits of this broader history, her quest extends across the Jewish diaspora, to points of connection in New York, Israel and Poland. Her 'human' narratives spread out to become 'global', while Sinclair's are determinedly local and textual. Her broader quest for meaning repeats its

earlier structure, however. For though Poland persuades her to see in Rodinsky a displaced model of the traditional ascetic life, 'pious and holy' not 'eccentric and poverty-stricken' as it seemed (232), this original history is itself undermined by 'fake histories' (230), by the evident erosion of the older Jewish community and by the contrast between the lives of the now ageing Polish 'mames' (caretakers), who serve the community in its last days, and Rodinsky's shuttered isolation in a world of one in London. As she resolves the tensions in her own identity which are otherwise mapped on to this story, deciding against the adoption of Jewish orthodoxy, so she begins to delineate this other ordinary story of loneliness and unbelonging. In the same movement she finds a place too, not only for the hieroglyphics, but for other paltry left-overs, the beer bottles, the cinema tickets, the visits to Indian restaurants and the walks across London which were Rodinsky's attempts to connect beyond his personal ghetto.

In 1998, Susie Symes ('terrifyingly effective bureaucrat, ex-Treasury, well-connected', 276), took over the running of the synagogue, now the Spitalfields Centre. 'You novelists', she chides Sinclair and Michael Moorcock, 'You can only see the romance' (277). She might have been addressing Sinclair and Lichtenstein. Only when Lichtenstein discovers Rodinsky's pauper's grave in Epsom is she ready to tell the unromantic truth of his wretched last years, that he was literally and culturally unhoused, separated by the authorities from the room which was his mind and life. But the room containing everything inside it, is by definition unconnected, as this one was, to everything outside. The still harsher truth was that this transplanted type of the Jewish scholar was isolated from the community life of the synagogue below his attic. Neighbours who thought they remembered him, confused him with the caretaker and a more lively 'Ginger' Rodinsky. He was unseen and unknown, as invisible in his time as when the room was opened. The missing body was the central truth to his history and would never be recovered or rehabilitated, since it never was in fact 'at home' in Spitalfields, London. His sister too had been earlier removed to a mental institution and died there. Her story weaves in and out of Rodinsky's as does Lichtenstein's own, but remains untold, ousted by the more compelling mystery of the brother.

Sinclair, meanwhile, tries to conjure another kind of home for Rodinsky's life story but cannot succesfully prise him into Pinter's play, the myth of the Golem nor the story of Livitnoff, nor persuade others – Brian Catling, Kathy Acker and Michael Moorcock – to take

him in. Both Lichtenstein and Sinclair need to close the account, to divest themselves of the Rodinsky persona. The course of Sinclair's involvement and withdrawal can be seen especially in the supplementary volume, *Dark Lanthorns. Rodinsky's A–Z*. Here Rodinsky is viewed first as a kindred type, the psychogeographer stepping out along the borderline of the actual and imagined, in touch with this time and place and another. Thus Sinclair sees the walks as prophetic of events in Rodinsky's own life and in Sinclair's own circle. He seizes, accordingly, on the Dagenham street name 'Pettits Place' and the next, 'Robinson Road' (remembering Petit's 1993 novel *Robinson*), as if Rodinsky had prepared for their coming. At the same time, he begins to slough off this kind of contrivance. For two reasons, I suggest. Firstly, because Rodinsky was being 'colonized by the imaginations of lowlife artists' and the room prepared for 'museum status' (Lichtenstein and Sinclair, 1999: 261). Secondly, because of the real-life wretchedness of Rodinsky's final days. The legend grew cheap while the common pathos of the historical record resisted even Sinclair's concoctions. So he turns away, oblivious to his own colonizing role, to declare himself after all 'redundant' and ready to 'fade into a chorus of echoes and reverberations' (263, 269). It is Rodinsky who fades, however, a receding imprint to the emerging Sinclair. Thus in *Rodinsky's A–Z*, he and Petit meander across their final route in a respectful exit from the Rodinsky narrative: 'Another quest was forming' Sinclair writes (44), getting the scent of the next project which had led him on: a circuit of the M25 (273).

The 1990s have seen considerable development in the East End and 'East London Gateway', amongst them the erection of the Millennium Dome, the completion of the extended Jubilee underground line and the establishment of the University of East London at its new Dockland campus[4]. The City meanwhile further encroaches upon Spitalfields. In *Downriver* and *Lights Out,* Sinclair had set the 'secret history' of an alternate London against a Thatcherite enterprise culture, pitching his re-enchanted city against plans for its 'regeneration'. In *Rodinsky's Room*, both he and Lichtenstein are involved in a closer battle, not only against the forced pace of change but the 'frozen time' and casual tourism induced by the heritage business. Lichtenstein would seek, in vain, to restore the past to the fullness latent in its remainder. Sinclair has a keener sense of the irreversible passage of time and of the force of lateral, contingent meanings. In Blair's England, as in Thatcher's and Major's, he opposes the driving

one-dimensional London of the City developers and the artificial enclaves of the heritage trail with a London of 'Endlessly intersecting narratives … Lives that fade into other lives', the inevitability of mistranscriptions, corrupted intentions and thus of the improvised assembly and reassembly of words and images (1999: 44).

The main works of the post-Thatcher period are true to this aesthetic and epistemology: open, digressive, unfulfilled. But this has a second effect which undermines any oppositional force. Away from home ground, Sinclair symptomatically loses his footing. The last two sections of *Downriver* had seen him stranded 'in the middle of the estuary' (366), and lost to a timeless reverie in the 'river mud' at Horse Sands near Leysdown on the Isle of Sheppey. He tramps in *Radon Daughters* (1994) to Cambridge and the fields of South Wales to do battle with an alter ego, and ventures in *Lights Out* into the South London suburbs as if they were alien territories. These narratives tug at the magnet of the city but the Thames arguably remains their main character, as also of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997). The watery surface of superimposed text, image and story in this and the related *The Falconer* answers precisely to the idea of postmodermism as a self-generating world of detached signifiers. An art so open has insufficient purchase to oppose anything, since it allows, in *Downriver*, in an unwitting concession to Thatcher's own mantra, and in Sinclair's last words of *Rodinsky's Room* that 'anything was possible' (1991a: 336, 401; Sinclair and Lichtenstein: 278).

If the sure ground of physical, narrative and political space is in this way circumscribed, so too is its interval in time. The moments of inspiration and revealed truth are here and gone in a nanosecond. (Atkins and Sinclair, 1999: 8). But time is limited in another sense too, which further contradicts the claims of Sinclair's art. Part of the appeal of the Rodinsky story may well be that his life and story ended in 1969. The difficulty for Sinclair is in finding positive value in the Spitalfields and London that have emerged in recent times, not simply, or at all, in the process of gentrification and the spreading eastwards of the City, but in the emergence, as above, of a multiracial Spitalfields with a majority non-white, non-Jewish, Bengali population. As Anne J. Kershen confirms, there was 'By the 1960s only a remnant of elderly Jewish residents remained' in the area (1997: 77).[5] It is in confronting this contemporary East End and what it says of contemporary Britain that Sinclair is at a loss. [6]

For all Sinclair's mastery of the historical record, this is a failure of historical sense. For there is another recent history, as detailed by

Anne J. Kershen (1997), John Eade (1989, 1997), and others of the emergence of the Bangladeshi community and by Jane M. Jacobs (1996) of the related commitment to conservationist strategies in the area by the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust, the Spitalfields Development Group and the Left Labour organized 'Campaign to Save Spitalfields from the Developer'. The particular value of Jacobs account is that it demonstrates how we cannot invoke an undifferentiated ethnic or Bengali 'other', whether invisible or visible to writers such as Sinclair, Lichtenstein, Syed Manzarul Islam, or to conservationist or political groups. The Bengali 'community' has different identities, articulated both from without and within itself. Thus it was 'bathed' in a hypocritical 'rhetoric of cohabitation' by the Spitalfields Trust (86); patronised as 'pre-capitalist, pre-modern and in need of protection from the City' by the Left (95) and presented from within as 'Banglatown' by vocal but unrepresentative male businessmen organized as the Spitalfields Community Development Group (97–99). The Bengali community, as Jacobs underlines, is an 'imaginative construction' (101). In the example of Banglatown and in the 'Rich Mix' venture, supported by the local council and government funds, this community presents a copy-book example of the Blairite project, endorsing the collaboration of local business and corporate capital. The resulting 'multicultural consumerism' (Jacobs 100, and see Phil Cohen, 1998), is an example, we might think, of 'reflexive modernization'.

What would a 'decent opposition' to this project look like in this London? Is opposition conceivable when, as the trajectory of Sinclair's writing seems to imply, there is no firm ground to stand on? I began above with Richard Rogers' criticism of Thatcherism. The Millennium Dome, built under Tony Blair's leadership by the Rogers Partnership, is slandered by Sinclair. But, like others, Sinclair ignores Rogers' wider plan for a milliennium village. Its mixed use and ecological design match his vision of London as a new 'compact and polycentric city' of diverse neighbourhoods combining residential, cultural and business uses. He endorses the role of the abolished GLC and the tradition of civic responsibility inaugurated by its predecessor, the LCC, as a model for a future metropolitan administration, committed to a strategy of participatory planning, ecologically sensitive building and transport, dedicated public space and creative citizenship (1997: 103–175)

The GLC returned also as a popular political memory in the broad and overwhelming support for the significantly independent candidature for Mayor of London of its former leader, Ken Livingstone. The

'problem of London' at this juncture was not that it had no society at its centre, but that the political centre and 'society' in the shape of the popular will were shown to be seriously at odds. A 'decent opposition' was led, therefore, to secede from a system rigged against majority opinion, not so as to withdraw, but to mobilize the disaffected in realizing an alternative democratic imaginary which offered to link difference across regions, parties, urban neighbourhoods and ethnicities and so pose the question of political and civic identity in a new way. Rogers 'compact city' responds to the contemporary metropolis with a similar conception of unity in diversity, offering to redesign and reclaim London's physical and political past in a 'reflexive architecture' which will rethink, reinterpret and recycle ideas, functions and materials in a 'humanist' alternative to the commercial imperatives of reflexive modernization.[7]

The ideas of a new political and architectural order which inspire these examples of an alternative London suggest that the 'critical distance' of an interventionist art, commonly thought to have ended with the modernist project, remains possible. Certainly they encourage us to imagine a critical and independent culture and to understand how a 'various art', as in the earlier discussion of Sinclair, can be open to the unvoiced and unrepresented without acceeding to Robinson's exile, Sinclair's 'redundancy' or Lichtenstein's sense that 'we no longer belonged' (306). Sinclair speaks of 'the city as a darker self, a theatre of possibilities in which I can audition lives that never happened' (Atkins and Sinclair, 1999: 7). It's a stirring conception. Even more so if Sinclair were to walk these possibilities out into the light of a different London, re-imagined by a new architecture and 'various' political art.

Untold stories: Janet Cardiff

I want to close with some thoughts on the voice – in this case literally – of a further artist who chose to use the East End, or more precisely, Spitalfields, as the location for a work which speaks in a different way to the conditions for a various urban art. In 1999, the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff made an audiotape of a walk from the crime section of Spitalfields Library to Liverpool Street Station. This consists of instructions and narrative fragments in her own and other voices to a 'companion', the listener to the tape, who is enjoined to follow the route Cardiff has taken. 'The city', she remarks on the tape, 'is infinite/ no one has ever found an end/ to the pattern of the streets'. The simple

device of the audiotape records a segment of this endless patterning, capturing the everyday complexity of multiple, criss-crossing lives 'heading off / in different directions / one story overlapping with another' (1999, CD and printed script, np). Cardiff is guide and story-teller, walker and dreamer. She 'drifts' away from the actual setting to reminisce, to invent 'false dangers and love affairs', map a route as pursued woman and female pursuer through the paranoid urban scene and reflect on how she is being tracked on the Net from the distance of another continent. She 'was' in this place, though 'displaced' by her thoughts, and is now 'here' as a voice, though physically elsewhere. Her voice would seem to anchor 'Janet Cardiff' in these swimming dislocations. Its apparent authenticity is itself problematic, however, since Cardiff says she felt estranged from its sound on tape as if she were hearing 'another woman . . . a companion of sorts' (66). The voice of this created narrative persona, second self, and actor, as we must think of it, is further intercut with Cardiff's recorded voice at an earlier time, with text from a crime novel, dialogue from a Hollywood thriller and two additional male voices. One of these is English and is named as a 'Detective' who is pursuing the mystery of a woman with red hair who has disappeared and might be murdered (and who is possibly the Janet Cardiff persona wearing a wig or a woman whose photograph she finds). The second male voice is Canadian and is perhaps her collaborator and partner, Georges Bures Miller, who videotaped her walk, and is said on tape to track her movement from 'the other side of the world'. For the silent listener, meanwhile, caught in this nest of voices, the streets of Spitalfields are geographically as described (as a two-dimensional arrangement on a map), but jolted into another time and domain which might or might not correspond with what the male or female companion listener sees and thinks in their own here and now. In a final 'virtual' analogue to the city's infinite byways, the CD can be listened to at any time and at any distance from the scene of the walk.

What is especially fascinating is how the finite exercise of a short walk and recording generates the open play of presence and absence, proximity and apartness, long thought to characterize urban life, but produces this as a generic rather than particularized set of meanings. In *Rodinsky's Room*, Sinclair seeks to recruit Kathy Acker and Michael Moorcock as 'visitors' to the Spitalfields synagogue so as, in the same gesture, to discover his own thoughts and a way out of this mystery. They choose not to participate. The brevity of Janet Cardiff's piece has the externality and accumulated, unresolved density precisely of a

short visit. Though, like Sinclair's visitors, she does not participate in the Rodinsky mystery, she lifts Spitalfields away from the vortex of the Rodinsky attic into the domain of generic urban meanings, in part by refurbishing the familiar devices of the generic urban narratives of the detective novel and *film noir*. On tape 'Janet Cardiff' contemplates 'the urge to disappear', and does indeed disappear leaving the 'ghost' of a voice. She is able therefore at once to borrow, dramatize and report on the urban theme which possesses Rachel Lichtenstein and which Sinclair struggles to translate or transfer onto a sufficiently distancing fiction. Cardiff 'visits' this urban trope in a register which is both intimate and abstract. Lichtenstein reports how Sinclair warned her that the Rodinsky room/story was a 'trap'. The spell of the place and its objects seduce her into a lost past and thence into a traumatic re-entry when she discovers that she too no longer belongs. Unlike the consuming intimacy which fuels her quest, and the invariable collaboration with male companions in Sinclair's work, Janet Cardiff offers, as above, the generic form of intimacy with a 'companion of sorts' who is the many possible 'you's' who take this ghosted walk, and who know 'Janet Cardiff' only through the impersonal go-between of the Walkman. She writes that:

> most often the stories I use are about the difficulties of relationships and real communication. I see the device of the Walkman as a way to have surrogate relationships. I talk with someone intimately, create a relationship, but I am at a safe distance (1999: 66)

She presents, she hopes, 'a sense of knowing someone a little, even if it is only with a unknown voice, a missing one' (66). The listener/companion in this surrogate relationship is not only 'someone', however, but many possible people; approximating, one by one, to a small city crowd, brought to experience this surrogate relationship and prompted inevitably to superimpose their own stories upon Janet Cardiff's own as they walk. This complex dialogic weave enacts the mental life of the city as a limited but endlessly variable and creative experience, in effect dramatizing the running base-line of contemporary urban co-existence. Indeed, we might see here a modelling of, in Philip Kasinitz's words, a newer form of 'increasingly symbolic and abstract' urban community which requires neither 'common histories, deeply held common values or even – thanks to electronic communication – face to face interaction' (1995: 388).

Critic Kitty Scott writes that Janet Cardiff's work 'has no name',

since she is neither painter, sculptor nor installation artist – nor, though she is something of 'a movie or theatre director, a screenwriter, novelist, radio producer, composer, performance artist and recording engineer', is she entirely any of these. She 'hovers somewhere in the interstices' of these forms, says Scott, borrowing from but inhabiting none of them (Cardiff, 1999: 4). Even so, as multi-tracked and many branched as it is, this single work cannot itself be the 'various art' a various city requires, since no work (s) – as *The Missing Voice* itself tells us – can contain its infinitude. No more can its abstract template of 'community' encompass all possible contemporary forms of this term. Vidich and Hughey write of how 'our communities become networks of friends, relatives, associates, co-conspirators, co-authors and collaborators' (cited, Kasinitz: 388). Sinclair evokes and helps sustain this more embedded kind of 'cultural' community, bound by a common *musée imaginaire* of artistic work and predilections, and recruited to Sinclair's own case studies on the East End and South London. This project, in turn, through his own extrapolations on the Rodinsky affair, overlaps but does not coincide with the local and diasporic Jewish community Rachel Lichtenstein discovers at the point of its decline. Again, in a different interpretation than her own, but which would match the life of her own parents, this same community might be seen less as at a point of disappearance than of successful assimilation, entailing secondary immigration from the Spitalfields area. And, going beyond the life of this 'historical' community, Spitalfields has seen the emergence of the communities of taste and principle devoted to restoration and heritage, and the 'Bangla' and Bengali communities described above, themselves distinguished by class, gender and access to local power. 'Any particular neighbourhood or public space', write Bensman and Vidich, as if in proof of this ongoing social palimpsest, 'may be jointly occupied by several ethnic and class groups'; indeed people can 'create an almost infinite variety of communities' in their own neighbourhoods (Kasinitz: 200,198)

The writers and artists discussed here present something of this variety, over space and time, venturing, according to inspiration, across the narrow but imaginatively inexhaustible map of Spitalfields to the point where another voice and story begin. Together, they neither compose one story nor propose a summative conception of community. The particular merit of Janet Cardiff's piece is that while it is open to this boundless pattern of streets and stories, it acknowledges the limits of its own form and appended 'surrogate

relationships'. For as these works know intuitively at their edges and hers explicitly and inherently, there is always something outside, some other untold, untranslated, untranslatable story: hers, yours, theirs. There is always a 'missing voice'.

5
‘Hymn to the Great People’s Republic of Brooklyn’

All postmodern roads lead to Los Angeles. Or so it often seems. For here, as David Lyon reports, is ‘the world’s first truly postmodern city’ (Lyon, 1994: 59). Lyon cites the city’s accelerated de-industrialization, concentration of high-tech occupations, low-paid service and manufacturing jobs, its ‘constantly moving, fragmentary urban flow’, squalid slums and gentrified neighbourhoods, airports, hotels and shopping malls as paradigmatic of postmodernity (59–60). For Edward Soja, one of the city’s leading interpreters, LA is ‘the world’s most symbolic space of urban decentralization’ (Soja, 1995: 23) and this ‘symbolic centrelessness’, in particular, says Lyon, makes LA ‘a metaphor for postmodern consumer culture in general: all is fragmented, heterogeneous, dispersed, plural and subject to consumer choices’ (Lyon: 61).

Obviously, much critical discussion and cultural expression have gravitated towards and emanated from LA, but surely the general claims here are questionable. Aside from the troubling idea that here is the centre of centrelessness, can any single instance (city, event or text) be thought to express a pure and achieved postmodernism when the descriptions and dimensions of this are so evidently fluid and contentious? Does LA represent the common destination of other contemporary cities, even of other major North American cities? How well does it apply, for example, moving back across the continent and back in time through the layers of modernity, to New York City, founded on the grid system which is such a graphic emplotment of Enlightenment principles? The substantial growth of banking, financial services and other nationally and internationally dominant aspects of the ‘producer service sector’ in this city, along with the growing influence of the culture industries, dramatically altered

employment patterns, ethnic composition and social polarization make New York a postmodern city in its own right. Indeed a 'paradigmatic example' (King (ed.), 1996: vii). In one view of this development, Saskia Sassen argues that the advanced economic sectors of global cities such as London, Tokyo and New York share a 'transnational urban space' marked by the concentration of control and management in downtown financial districts, and that this is contrasted in a hierarchy of urban forms with gentrified residential areas, 'old working class districts and immigrant communities' with their own supporting sub-economies and a 'growing mass of poor, displaced people who occupy devastated areas of the city' (Sassen, 1996: 23, 29). Thus, if in one version of postmodernism, 'decentralization' produces LA as the quintessential postmodern city, another model, concerned to identify the forms and effects of globalization, sees New York as a leading example. Where, in one account, there is heterogeneous sprawl, there is, in the other, a dual agglomeration of functions and marked social and economic division.

But if globalization, along with internal social and economic differentiation and inequality, make New York a postmodern city, these trends have arguably only intensified features in an earlier phase of monopoly capitalism, immigration and employment patterns. Rather than the linear development Lyon proposes, therefore, where the 'premodern city, such as Venice' and 'the modern city, such as New York' give way to the postmodernism of LA, (Lyon, 1994: 59), we are witness to an uneven development in which New York presents a palimpsest of layered times and economic and cultural forms, the talismanic skyscrapers of its modernist moment rubbing shoulders with the postmodern buildings of a Philip Johnson. A further set of relations comes into view, moreover, if we look beyond Manhattan, which is the object of Sassen's analysis, to consider its relations with the Boroughs, which of course have their own distinctive physical character and social and economic histories. How do the Boroughs relate to the 'centre' of Manhattan, itself so internally differentiated? Are the Bronx and Brooklyn postmodern or modern, or anti-modern or premodern, or some combination of these?

All this suggests that in thinking about the postmodern city, as in thinking about postmodernism at all, we need, as I've argued in other chapters, a flexible analytic model, alert to newness and the reflexive traces of the modern in postmodern times. This is true too, as we have seen, of notions of place and community. I want here directly to survey some of the recent commentary on ideas of community, before

sketching the changing conception of relations between the self and other in the work of the novelist Paul Auster, and the important representation of community in the two films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, made in the late 1990s by Auster and Wayne Wang. I should make it clear, should it be necessary at this stage in the argument, that I do not view these novel and film texts as the proof of a given theoretical argument, or as a solution to theoretical or empirical questions. Fiction, as I have wanted to argue, helps us re-think and re-imagine problems and solutions. We need to bring an appropriate complexity to our thinking about questions of identity, public space, and the interleaved and uneven relations of the modern with the postmodern in the city, and Auster's work and these films help us do this. They also especially highlight the forms and functions of narrative or storytelling in establishing relations between the self and other. In that way they come too, I believe, to present an idea of dialogic urban exchange which can enrich current debates on urban communities.

Place and identity

Iain Chambers writes of how we need maps to get around in the city, but how this modernist device – 'with its implicit dependence upon the survey of a stable terrain, fixed references and measurement' contradicts the 'fluidity of metropolitan life' (Chambers, 1993: 92). 'The fluctuating contexts of languages and desires', he says, 'pierce the logic of cartography and spill over the borders of its tabular, taxonomic, space' (92). Chambers consequently urges us to leave the modernist map behind, to go to encounter the disturbance of the everyday in the gendered and ethnic city, 'the territories of different social groups, shifting centres and peripheries' (93). These 'complexities of fugitive, heterogeneous ideas and experience are opposed', he says, to 'linear argument and certainty' and present 'us' in the city or the modern metropolis, especially, with 'a reality that is multiform, heterotopic, diasporic', whether this city is Lagos, London, Beijing or Buenos Aires (93).

Chambers talks of challenging what 'passes for critical "common sense" in this field' (111). However, his vocabulary and libertarian rhetoric place value, indeed 'reality', all on the side of migrancy, borders, drift, mobility and a series of other cognate terms – apertures, intervals, interruptions – in what is only the newer common sense of postmodernist or postmodernized cultural studies. Here, in a world of differences, 'subjects, languages, histories, acts, texts, events' exist, he

writes, 'under the sign of "homelessness"' (98). In an unrecognized double contradiction, Chambers treats these perceptions of urban living as a universal experience, referring loosely to 'our differentiated but increasingly connected lives' (110) and 'our destiny', and secondly, reinforces the binary thinking he would otherwise seek to topple in the denigration, on the bad side of his dividing line, of the ideas of home, community, continuity, or the activity of mapping. These, he argues, posit an impossible authenticity or are conservative and reactionary.

Chambers provides a relatively unqualified example of a common polemic in the new cultural geography. Unfortunately, its insights are undermined by what sounds like the romanticized self-projection of a nomadic intellectual middle-class. An earlier, influential, but also problematic statement on urban identities emerged from within the feminist engagement with deconstruction and postmodernism. In 'The ideal of community and the politics of difference', Iris Marion Young brings a deconstructive perspective to what she sees as the homogenizing notion of 'community'. In privileging the supposed transparency of face-to-face relations, this ideal, she argues, 'devalues and denies difference in the form of temporal and spatial distancing', excludes where it cannot assimilate and is politically unrealistic, if not indeed incipiently racist, chauvinistic, or sectarian (Young, 1990: 302, 301). Contemporary mass urban societies set strangers in proximity with each other, she argues. A more appropriate ideal will therefore acknowledge that 'city life is the "being-together of strangers"' (318) who cannot hope for an immediate, mutual and reciprocal understanding, and will aim instead – in a key formulation – to achieve an attitude or ethos of 'openness to unassimilated otherness' (301). This, Young defines as the utopian norm of 'the unoppressive city' (301).

A 'politics of difference' is thus opposed to a universalizing and essentialist ideal of social relations. The problem with this argument, however, is that this conservative tendency is imputed to the ideal of community with little evidence or reference to community's variant historical or political forms. A Mormon community is not the same as that established in a rural English village, no more than a Masonic Lodge is the same as a fan club, though these too might constitute communities. Nor within the city is the community of an African-American neighbourhood the same as that of an environmentalist lobby, a gun club, a criminal network, or a revolutionary working class splinter group. Moreover, face-to-face contact in such groups is by no means necessarily privileged above relations with strangers

connected at a physical distance; nor is shared subjectivity, which Young attributes to the ideal of community, assumed as a fact or aim. Some groups or communities might be exclusive, closed totalities, but some will be more open: some communities are conservative while some are radically progressive, some will be of long, others of short duration. Obvious though these reservations are, Young's argument has been an influential one, directly and indirectly endorsed in recent writings.[1] In similar vein, the editors of *Space and Place. Theories of Identity and Location* (1994) advertize the essays in their volume as questioning neo-liberal and essentialist or communitarian notions of identity, location and the public sphere. 'The presumed certainties of cultural identity', they write, 'firmly located in particular places which housed cohesive communities of shared tradition and perspective, though never a reality for some, were increasingly disrupted and displaced for all' (Carter, Donald, Squires eds, 1994: vii). The broader assumption supporting this thinking is offered by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson in their collection *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (1995). They conclude:

> In the new conceptualization of identity politics the old binary oppositions of class and gender and race are disrupted and dispersed, and new formations and alliances come together in different forms to erupt in new places and new forms. Instead of assuming single subject positions it is now commonplace to recognize that people represent several groups at once and occupy multiple subject positions and identities which shift and change all the time (262).

Indeed, it is commonplace to see subjectivity this way. But the kind of overstatement in these formulations is again questionable. How and why is it that identity is now disrupted for all, but was not ambivalently and unevenly experienced in the past? Isn't the view of past identities as 'single' and new contemporary identities as 'multiple' more of the same old binarism that is said to be superseded? Are the 'people' (a unifying category), referred to as representing different subject positions and identities, to be understood as everyone, everywhere? Is this a surreptitious, unacknowledged and inconsistent universalism? And are people's multiple identities, if we concede this much, to be understood as shifting and changing 'all the time'?

Of more positive interest here, perhaps, is the implication in the first statement by Carter et al. above, that such 'presumed' identities were

themselves narrative or ideological fictions which, it is allowed, 'continue to resonate throughout the imaginations of displaced communities' (1994: vii). Unlike Chambers, the editors here see the force of such past fictions of identity and 'aim to show how and why they are so powerful as a prelude to acting on them' (xiv). They accordingly seek a newly conceived heterogeneous public sphere 'of contestation between groups of distinct, located identities' (xiv); an agenda in which older notions of individual autonomy or cohesive communities are to be 'acted on'; that is to say, critiqued and surpassed. Watson and Gibson talk similarly of a postmodern politics of strategic contestation, which 'allows for optimism and possibility, since it celebrates struggles and new possibilities at many sites – both marginal and mainstream – recognizing that victories are only ever partial, temporary and contested … shifting with the fast-changing circumstances of cities today' (262).

As I suggested, this discourse is coming to comprise an academic common sense on place and identity, one which accords with the work of Edward Soja in cultural geography and presents a politicized Baudrillardian or Derridian take on postmodernism. In fact, however, as Kevin Robins shows, a range of contrasting but often still 'post' modern alternatives to this idea of place and community has been quite evident in the realm of theory and public discussion. Cultural critics, planners, architects and British royalty have invoked the need for a sense of the local, of tradition and community in terms which have been conservative, even aristocratic in perspective, but also radical and progressive. In the fuller extent of this debate, as Robins shows, Prince Charles's appeal to neo-classical and vernacular styles and its associated idea of an organic community, takes its place alongside Mike Rustin's observation, for example, that 'territorial locations remain nodes of association and continuities, bounding cultures and communities' and Mike Featherstone's view (echoing Chambers above), that postmodernism in the city presents a 'no-place space' of consumer and leisure sites (malls, museums, theme parks, shopping centres and the like), in which urban identities can be eclectically composed and recomposed (Robins, 1994: 310, 311).

A further important contribution to this discussion has been made by Doreen Massey who questions the stark contrast of an idealized sense of place and community and postmodern fragmentation and disruption, and along with it the assumption that a sense of place or community is necessarily static or reactionary. Communities, Massey argues, are thoroughly mixed in their ethnic composition, political

groupings and historical development, as well as in the co-presence they exhibit of the global and local. Mobility, ownership and control, advantage some and disadvantage others. Formulating 'an adequately progressive sense of place', she argues, means questioning 'the idea that places have single, essential identities', dissociating communities from a fixed place, understanding their internal structures and conflicts and the many linkages connecting local experience and activities with global economic and communication networks and political events (Massey, 1997: 236, 237). 'In this interpretation', Massey writes, 'what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history, but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus ... each "place" can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection' (239).

There is therefore a conflicted discourse on notions of place and community. I do not think the answer to this is to take sides, so as either exclusively to favour a lexicon of complexity, displacement, dispersal, heterogeneity or contestation, or to defend the fixed stabilities of home, the claims of continuity or linear argument. I am more sympathetic to the first, more usual postmodern discourse, but opposed to its simplifications of the past – and thus of the present and future, and unsympathetic to a dismissal of notions of stability, coherence, tradition or community as if these are always experienced and imagined as fixed and unbroken, and are not – differently conceived – necessary to any contemporary progressive politics. Relevant here once more is Stuart Hall's argument in the essay 'Minimal selves' that the discourse of difference must come to a temporary stopping place, a point of punctuation in a continuing narrative of identity, when the individual says, 'But just now, this is what I mean: this is who I am' for there to be a necessary consciousness of solidarity (Hall, 1997: 137).

A second issue, as Robins suggests, is that all of these arguments – from Iain Chambers to Prince Charles – involve attitudes towards modernity. This, as he says, lies at the heart of current debate on the crisis of the city. Invariably, modernity is seen as abstract, impersonal, universalizing, as eliding or repressing difference and particularity, and these vices are then seen as invested in homogenizing notions of place, community and identity. For all their differences, these discourses are therefore commonly 'postmodern', but give to the prefix 'post' the meaning of anti- or non-modern. This demonizing of modernity along with the assumption that the 'epoch' of modernity is simply over, leaving no trace or vestige, is, however, of a piece with the

binarism and simplified historical sense of these otherwise opposed views. Once more, a way forward lies not in endorsing either position, but in developing a vocabulary adequate to the complex particularities of city life in its uneven transition from the modern to the postmodern which will recognize the reflexive imbrication of one set of terms in the other.

Paul Auster: time for stories

Paul Auster is known chiefly for *The New York Trilogy* (1987), whose abstract use of the popular genre form of detective fiction in a sequence of three related self-referential stories about language, writing and identity, have established it as an acclaimed postmodern text. These are persistent themes in Auster's writing, refracted through the figures of author, narrator, and writer-protagonist – each, like boxed Russian dolls, a version of the other and on occasion bearing Auster's name or initials. In Auster's world of chance and contingency, identity is plainly unstable; a casualty of postmodernism, thrown between the limited perimeters of a lonely room and peripatetic quests across city and country to pursue what is lost: friend, father, family and, beneath these of course, the self.

Pattern, but not order, is brought to this existence through linguistic echo and repetition and the social rhyme of coincidence, as unnerving as they are consoling, in the confirmation of some apparently governing but unmotivated design. In human society, doubles or twins, or the most troubling relation of all for Auster, between fathers and sons, play this same role, simultaneously connecting and disconnecting characters across space and time.

The New York Trilogy had been preceded by *The Invention of Solitude* (1988 [1982]), a prose work in two parts – 'The Portrait of an Invisible Man', written after the unexpected death of Auster's father, and 'The Book of Memory'. In the second, he proffers a conception of the individual as compounded of self and a universe of others, of 'myself as everyone' and of the 'multiplicity of the singular', as he puts it (1995a: 136, 147). In this view only the truly solitary individual can connect with others through deep introspection and memory (see 1982: 79, 114, 136, 139). This is less a postmodernist than a modernist conception of the self and the world. Indeed, many of Auster's literary essays, on Mallarmé, Hugo Ball, Celan, Kafka and Ungaretti, would confirm his affinity with European modernism, or more accurately, Symbolism, since it is Mallarmé's 'ideal book' and Rimbaud's 'je est un autre', directly

cited by Auster, which give the most obvious expression to this idea of monadic plenitude. This leads him to talk – somewhat perversely – of 'The Book of Memory' as a 'collective work', since the intertextuality of voices discovered in looking down to the bottom of the self 'speak through me' (1995a: 144).

The *New York Trilogy* serves to critique this assumption both in the first two stories, where, in their isolation Quinn and Blue discover only the emptiness of self reflection, and in the third, 'The Locked Room' where the idea of the individual replete with its others vies with an important recognition of the other beyond the self. The unnamed narrator finds here a sense of connection with 'everyone else' through his 'belonging' to Sophie Fanshawe:

> My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable. This was the tiny hole between self and not-self, and for the first time I saw this nowhere as the exact centre of the world (1987: 232).

In terms of the many literary and philosophical influences which play over Auster's writing, 'The Locked Room' brings him to an art which in Samuel Beckett's terms 'admits the chaos' (Auster: 1990: 113) but allows too for a human connection of the kind described by Martin Buber.[2] Buber writes that 'the fundamental fact of existence' depends on the individual's 'living relation with other individuals':

> It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as a particular other being in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere ... the sphere of 'between' (Buber, 1973 [1947]): 224).

In the vocabulary to which Auster himself turns in his own thoughts on writing and the world, this delicate relation between self and other has the fragility and magic of coincidence in a world beset by contingency and chance. For Quinn, in *New York Trilogy*, 'everything is reduced to chance ' (1987: 91). Like him, Marco Stanley Fogg in the later *Moon Palace* (1989), is reduced to minimal life in a bare room as his inheritance peters out. Both they and other characters are pushed or, in a self-imposed regimen, push themselves to extremes of hunger and isolation. If we think of this in terms of Anthony Giddens' (1991) reflections on the contemporary individual, Auster's characters are

thrown entirely into a late modern world of risk and ontological insecurity without the conventional supports of personal and institutional relations. Quinn, Blue, Fogg, Pozzi in *Music of Chance* and Benjamin Sachs in *Leviathan* are brought to within a slither of non-existence; held, as it were, at a physical and psychic threshold before they do indeed vanish or find (or their companions and near doubles find) an embodied connection through language and the intense bond of personal or 'pure relationships' Giddens speaks of (1991: 88–98). In Auster's world these are at this point the transforming influences of marriage, family and love. The last above all emerges as the healing bond between self and other, or more precisely between male and female other. This is what the narrator finds in 'The Locked Room', and what Auster discovered in his second marriage, to Suri Hustvedt, and draws upon in several statements elsewhere. Love, as it is defined in *Moon Palace*, 'is the one thing that can stop a man from falling' (Auster, 1989: 50).

'In a way', says Auster, referring to the stories of the *New York Trilogy*, 'New York is the main character of the books – they're about what happens to people in a big city like this' (Berg Collection, cited Dunn, 2000: 223). Quinn is an example of what happens in the city, and for Auster was plainly an image of what he might himself have become if not for marriage to Suri Hustvedt (1995a: 142), and this book and the next *In the Country of Last Things* are openly conceived as homages to her (1995a 142, 148). Quinn / Auster are one of the pairings (or if we admit 'Auster', the triumvirate) who track back and forth, inside and across the pages of fiction and the narrative of Auster's personal history. In the New York of the *Trilogy*, Quinn, who has lost his wife and child and loses himself, can disappear so that his double, the unnamed narrator who represents Auster's new family life can appear.

This transformation inaugurates both a broader acceptance and participation in family and community and a commitment to the apparent simplicities of fable. Auster speaks of his early poetry as a 'clenched fist'; of prose as an opening up, 'a letting go', and of letting go further in being a parent, when, as he writes, 'you can find yourself wanting to tell stories' (1995a: 130, 132, 134). He tells classic fairy tales, especially the story 'Pinocchio' to his son, and comes to describe himself as a storyteller and realist. Oral tales recommend themselves, he adds, in their anonymity, economy and open-endedness (1985: 140–1). Individuals are opaque to each other, 'utterly walled off' in their own thoughts, but a story breaks down the walls of solitude

because 'it posits the existence of others and allows the listener to come into contact with them' (1985: 143; 1982: 152).[3]

As ever, this belief is accompanied by certain risks, though of different kinds, in Auster's adopted story telling mode and in its accompanying values. Auster continues to explore and test the terms of personal and domestic stability in stories which throw characters between the solipsism of bare rooms and the riddle of public spaces in the city or the openness of the American continent. Many of his novels accordingly employ a quest narrative in which their bereft protagonists seek a coordinated personal history or moral and political purpose in the linguistic and social rhymes folded within random circumstance. Arguably, the American hinterland doubles in this way for the city, or transports its issues to a simpler open terrain in the same gesture that the structure and plot of fable lay out the complexities of postmodern urban living. In his most recent novel, *Timbuktu* (1999), a man and his dog, Willy G. Christmas and Mr Bones, take to the road like two tramps, one the master, one the devoted disciple. Their adventures serve to test the warmth and tolerance of the American family to outsiders like themselves and in the end show it wanting. The true haven they realize is elsewhere and nowhere, the land of Timbuktu, a place of devoted love which is not on any map.

The risk of sentimentality (and masculism) in such a story is obvious. Perhaps we should exercise some caution however. Thomas Docherty argues that it is under the rationalist imperatives of modernity that love has been seen as an embarrassment and displaced to the realms of sensibility, sentimentality or desire. Modernity, moreover, has characteristically sought a fusion of self and other, accommodating 'alterity by *fusing* (or confusing it) with Identity' (Docherty, 1996: 203). Docherty advances instead a conception of 'postmodern love' which avoids this fusion of the other with the same. This love, he says, is the experience of an 'indeterminate' realm, akin to the 'intermediate state' between knowing and not-knowing (203): it does not fuse or regulate the sexes but 'establishes the truth of their un-linking, their *de-liaison*' (205). In Rimbaud's 'je est an autre', the self is projected onto an interiorized other. In Alain Badiou's philosophy, cited by Docherty, 'Il y a "un" et "un", qui ne font pas deux' (205). Each 'one' is 'indiscernible' and 'disjoint' from the other. Auster breaks across these understandings, viewing the other as unknowable and beyond the self but as intimately constitutive of it ('My true place in the world … was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable'). His discovery of love thereby

rearticulates the self in an unexpected combination of postmodern indeterminacy and romantic convention.

I want to take up some of these features in relation to another sphere where Auster finds a form of social connection beyond the couple or the family. Film presents the opportunity and risks of collaborative work, involving the individual, in Auster's striking account of the making of his second film, *Lulu on the Bridge* (1998), in a world of adventurous artistic production with 'friends', 'comrades, partners' (1998: 156,159,162). Here, at the close of the 1990s, is a further change of emphasis: from solitude to 'a sense of solidarity' (159), represented especially in the working relations of filmmaking. The story of *Lulu* itself turns on a blurring of the magical and the real and a belief in the transcendent power of love to connect characters across dream or fantasy and even in death. The result has been judged sentimental and derivative in its plotting and themes. The same might be said, as I've suggested, of the almost contemporary novel, *Timbuktu* (1999), and of Auster's collaboration with the performance artist Sophie Calle (a model for the character Maria in Auster's *Leviathan*), titled, *Double Game* (1999). The latter presents Sophie Calle's re-enactment of passages in Auster's novel and, in a section titled *Gotham Handbook,* reports on the results of Auster's instructions to her to make New York City a better place ('smiling, talking to strangers, beggars and homeless people, cultivating a spot': 237–243). Arguably, these simple but disarming exercises belong to a calculated aesthetic of estrangement: impersonal but contrived explorations of constructions of gender and social interaction in the city. All the same, it is difficult to avoid the view that the simplicities of fable have come in Auster's later work to help ratify a naive belief in person to person love and communication. This is not yet true, I believe, of the films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* made by Auster and Wayne Wang in 1995. These works move Auster beyond a conception of the other who is kin, or twin to, or lies deep within the self, beyond the model of the family and beyond the idea too of the self and other as absolutely disjunct, to an appreciation of collaborative, improvisatory and creative communal relationships. Auster has spoken admiringly of Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia in the novel (1995a: 133–4), and here, prompted by the working relations of film-making and the vehicle of storytelling, the clenched fist of the all-inclusive universalizing self opens into a dialogic model of personal, social and ethnic urban identities. These films therefore warrant some extended discussion.

Dialogic community: Paul Auster and Wayne Wang

The story on which *Smoke* is based, 'Auggie Wren's Christmas Story', was first published, in an irony Auster clearly appreciates, in *The New York Times*, the paper of record, on Christmas Day 1990. It was read there by Wayne Wang, director of *Dim Sum* and *The Joy Luck Club*, who determined to make it into a film. *Smoke* was completed over the next four years to Auster's rewritten script in an evidently happy collaboration between Californian-Chinese American filmmaker and New York Jewish novelist. Wang describes Auster as 'my friend, my brother and my partner', and Auster comments on 'the atmosphere ... of respect and equality' between director, writer and the editor, Maysie Hoy: 'there were no hierarchies', he says, ' no intellectual terrorism' (1995b: viii, 11).

The second film grew like a crazy, dancing footnote from this working ensemble. It was made in six days from left-over time and film stock and Auster became co-director. There was no script: celebrities like Jim Jarmusch, Lou Reed, Madonna and Rosanne Barr took cameo parts for standard or no fees alongside local people. The crew were joined by Harvey Wang, who shot documentary video footage, incorporated in brief montaged snatches into the film, of Brooklyn streets and citizens. Jewish, Asian and black inhabitants delivered statistics directly to camera at the door of the cigar store on Brooklyn's rivers, its mixed population, even its potholes. The whole film was improvised and only given shape, says Auster, in an 'ongoing triangular conversation' between himself, the photographer and video filmmaker, Wayne Wang, and the editor Christopher Tellefsen (1995b: 160). All this, says Auster, was 'wonderfully in keeping with the spirit of the project ... strange unpredictable doings set against a backdrop of diversity, tolerance and affection' (200). The film is a comic statement of 'great human warmth' in which, with appropriate contradiction, characters argue, yell and insult each other, are obnoxious, opinionated and angry, and in which 'Nearly every scene ... is about conflict' (161).

Auster says *Blue* has no plot, but it has. Vinnie, the owner of the store, wants to sell the store to replace it with a health food shop. Auggie's defence of the cigar store as a public forum where the old and young come for their papers, their candy, their cough drops and simply to hang out, against the demands of 'dollars and cents', is a story of how the living memory of the Brooklyn neighbourhood can withstand commercial progress, and is also entirely in keeping with

the film's aesthetic of spontaneous, collectively inspired amateurism, a blip of dissent and diversity in a homogenizing, hugely commercial film industry. Auggie's case is aided, moreover, by the speech of the ghost of the Dodgers baseball star, Jackie Robinson, the first black to play pro-baseball. The best of old Brooklyn, its stand against prejudice and profit speaks in the present, not as nostalgic whimsy but as a living and active influence.

Smoke, to return to this text, has at least two main stories as well as some internal storytelling – about how to weigh smoke and how Mikhail Bakhtin smoked his only copy of a manuscript while in exile. The first main story is about a writer, Paul Benjamin, (Auster's pseudonym for his earlier detective novel *Squeeze Play*), and Auggie Wren. Benjamin is recovering from the death of his wife and from a writer's block, and needs a Christmas story and Auggie provides him with it. The second story is about a young black boy from the projects, Rashid/Thomas Cole, whose mother is dead, who is estranged from his father and is on the run from local black hoods after finding some stolen money. He assumes different names and identities in his double flight from his pursuers and his search for his father. His life crosses with Paul Benjamin's and Auggie's, and theirs with his. The stolen money circulates between them until it is passed on as a gift. Paul Benjamin and Rashid pose as father and son and (impossibly) as son and father before Rashid confronts, fights with and is reluctantly accepted into his natural father's present family. They sit at the close of Rashid's story at an awkward picnic lunch with Paul and Auggie as silent guests and in which the only exchange is not words but a cigar.

Rashid is an aspiring artist and he presents his father with a drawing of his garage as a secret gift. Auggie too is an artist whose project is a multi-volumed series of photographs of the corner opposite his store, shot every day at the same time. Until instructed by Auggie, Paul cannot see any difference beneath the apparent sameness of these photographs, but it is there. Auggie is the witness to the community's varied daily life, the chronicler of its routines and vitality whose project gives it definition and life, even in the picture his albums include of Benjamin's dead wife.

There is much to comment on in these films. A major concern, I think, is the role of storytelling in establishing a dialogic exchange at the centre of this neighbourhood, in particular between men. Paul Benjamin needs a Christmas story and Auggie gives him one in a scene occupying the last ten minutes of *Srnoke* in which the story he tells –

which is no less than Paul Auster's own published story of 'Auggie Wren's Christmas Story' – is intercut with the story on film, in black and white. Auggie chases a black youth who has thieved from his store and finds the youth's pocket book with photos inside, including one of his grandmother, Granny Ethel. When Christmas comes Auggie goes to return the wallet. Granny Ethel lives alone in the projects and is blind. She mistakes Auggie for her grandson and he goes along with this. They eat Christmas dinner and he prepares to leave, but before he goes, takes a camera from a pack of stolen cameras in the bathroom. This is the story and the camera is the camera he uses every day. Is it a true story? Does it show Auggie in a good light or as a thief?

The film ends on Auggie and Paul Benjamin's smoke-wreathed smiles, as they share the ambiguity of the story – that's what friends are for they agree, to share your secrets with. Clearly, the scene confirms their friendship, but the filming suggests something more of the terms of this friendship. Early scenes of the film are shot in wide shots and masters, giving way to more close shots and singles as the characters become more involved with each other. During the telling of the story the camera is almost exclusively on Auggie's face and closes in on Auggie's mouth, 'apparently', says Auster, 'as close as it ever will' (1995b: 13). But then it moves in further in an unexpected intimacy. 'It's as if the camera is bulldozing through a brick wall', says Auster, 'breaking down the last barrier against genuine human intimacy' (13). Thus visual and emotional conventions are broken down in a moment that confirms the bonding between the two men. The mouth speaking and smiling is an erotic opening between them, as language, the body and friendship are shown as intimately connected. The mouth which occupies the screen is also, of course, the mouth of the storyteller, who gifts this story and is also, we might say, the mythologist (echoing the Greek 'muthologist'), the figure of the historian as storyteller who passes on the tale of the tribe by word of mouth. Anthony Giddens reminds us in *The Transformation of Intimacy* how rarely men form and sustain close friendships. He reports how in a group of 200 American men and women two-thirds of the men could not name a close friend and that those who did, named a woman friend. Three-quarters of the women meanwhile could easily name one or more close friends and these were invariably other women (Giddens, 1992: 126). In foregrounding a friendship between two white, heterosexual males, *Smoke* presents a gendered and, we might think, limited perspective on positive relations within the community. Nevertheless, in the developing intimacy, respect and

mutual dependence between Auggie and Paul Benjamin – in their dialogic relations in short – the film challenges the stereotype of competitive, uncommunicative, non-caring relations between men. In the context of Auster's own work it moves beyond the concept of the introspective, universalized individual, releasing the male self from the mirroring relation of father and son, and suggesting another emotional connection than the fragile triangle of father, mother and child (31). The scenes between the two men establish a non-sexual but emotionally charged intimacy: a bond of friendship founded on the act of giving, primarily the giving of a story which is a giving of the self: a letting go.

In *Blue,* a communal Brooklyn identity is reaffirmed with the saving of the store. The neighbourhood spontaneously rejoices in the carnivalesque dancing in the streets at the film's close as lovers, friends, strangers, men and women, short and very tall, white, Asian, African-American, Hispanic and Puerto Rican, are led in the 'Brooklyn shuffle' by the drag dancer, RuPaul. Thus a mixed and montaged narrative mode combines in collaborative creative work to celebrate intimacy between men, neighbourhood values and ethnic diversity. No doubt this sounds nostalgic, conservative and sentimentally utopian all at once, echoing the verdict on the ideal community of Iris Marion Young and others above. The films affirm face-to-face friendship – characteristically privileged, in Young's view, in the conservative ideal of community – and further install the valued neighbourhood space of old Brooklyn in the preservation of the cigar store. I have no wish to defend a conservative idea, nor do I think this is what is entailed. The problem is that the binary model of the old ideal and the new ideal is simply inadequate.

Auster and Wang's films, I suggest, represent the site of an urban community as it is lived, imagined and contested with a greater complexity than Young's model can sustain. The local community is valued, certainly, but shown as mixed and heterogeneous, without a unitary history or identity and as functioning on differentiated and contradictory levels. First, the films alert us to a range of relationships in the community which Young's description fails to consider. For here, non-assimilative relationships embrace face-to-face friendship as well as a 'being with strangers' in a network of near and far connections across time and space where these can and do also change. Second, both films, and *Blue in the Face* in particular, show how the place of the neighbourhood as one important coordinate of cultural identity might 'continue to resonate' (Carter et al. (eds.), 1994, vii), as

an active and positive force in the very process of re-articulating the networks of social relations in the city. [4]

If this conception of people and place is nostalgic and utopian, then both terms stand in need of some redefinition. Nostalgia, as bell hooks writes, is 'that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act', and as such is to be distinguished from 'that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present' (hooks, 1990: 147). This 'politicization of memory' applies in Auster to the evocation of an earlier Brooklyn, most evidently in the embodied memory of Jackie Robinson, who pleads the case of 'sense' against 'cents' and of a combative, anti-racist culture against commercial gain. The best of the past is thus felt as a living memory and active influence in the present. This is neither wishful thinking nor the pastiched recycling of the postmodern 'nostalgia mode'. Elizabeth Wilson describes in similar terms how this kind of 'retrieval' rather than passive 'remembrance' of the past can prompt an 'active responsibility both for the past and for the future' (Wilson, 1997: 139). As such, this kind of interpretive historical imagining is closely connected with utopian thoughts of a better world. Like nostalgia, utopianism is, of course, commonly associated with escapism, with a distracted, unrealistic gaze towards a perfect future. Thus, the 'ideal community', says Young, is 'wildly utopian and undesirable' (1990: 302). Here too, however, the important question concerns the relation of this better world to the perceived imperfections of the present and the possible strategies which would convert one to the other. Thus, although Young rejects the utopianism of the community, she does so in favour of an alternative 'ideal' or 'vision of the good society', achievable, she believes, through a 'politics of difference'.

The question therefore is what *kind* of utopianism these films present? *Blue in the Face*, said Auster, is a 'hymn to the great People's Republic of Brooklyn' (1995b: 16). Park Slope, where he has been a resident for fifteen years and where the film is set, he describes as 'one of the most democratic and tolerant places on the planet. Everyone lives there', he says, 'every race and religion and economic class, and everyone pretty much gets along' (14).[5] This is in spite of the 'terrible … wrenching … unbearable things' that go on in Brooklyn, not to speak of the 'hellhole' of New York as a whole (14, 15). In the texts of the films this utopianism is expressed not so much in the characterization of a whole life or 'vision' of the good society as in valued moments or epiphanies: the scenes, notably, once more, between Auggie and Paul Benjamin and the dancing in the streets which

celebrates the victory of saving the store. As Angela Carter once said, the heroic optimism stories produce for us is of a kind that says, 'one day we might be happy, even if it won't last' (Carter, 1991: xviii). The comic community spirit of *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* is not built to last, but its utopianism is no more naive or unqualified than is its nostalgia. The final scene shows a harmonious multi-ethnic community congratulating itself on its now reaffirmed identity. However, its positive value does not lie in any suggestion of a permanent victory over the bad times of the present but in the way a small, better moment (involving some 600 people) is embedded in and arises from that world. Like the memory of a better self which returns to shape the present, the joy of this moment triumphs for now in a world of spite, jealousy and dissatisfaction between men and women, and of suspicion between blacks and whites.

This last aspect is worth some further comment. Auggie and Paul are evidently the central figures of the films' jointed narratives. Yet, as I suggested, their respective and shared stories connect them with others, including their past wives and new women partners and non-white characters, especially African-Americans. Taken together, these connections contextualize and relativize the stable bond they achieve as friends. Women characters (for example, Ruby and Madonna) enter the community or the store (for example, the waitress, Auggie's woman friend, Violet) from a place outside, or (like Paul's student girlfriend, April) they do not enter the physical sphere of this male-centred world at all. Or, again, like Rosanne Barr's character, they wish to leave. Women therefore come second to baseball or business, or simply 'the boys'. If things work out, as they do for Rosanne who gets to go with Vinnie to Las Vegas, or for Ruby, the road is still rocky and marked by suspicion, insults, deception and stand-up rows. Nonetheless, these relationships include moments of assertivenesss and independent action by women, and of a non-invasive mutual recognition between women and men. Ruby, for example, is the one storyteller to match Auggie and Paul. Her story that her pregnant daughter, Felicity, is Auggie's child is a ploy – perhaps – to get the money to help Felicity off drugs. Auggie at first rejects this account outright, and is rejected by Felicity, yet he and Ruby arrive finally at a non-manipulative and affectionate understanding. The stolen money which circulates through *Smoke* passes to Auggie and he gives it to her, as freely as he gifts Paul Benjamin a story. With a wink he accepts the 50–50 chance that Felicity is his daughter. This scene effectively returns the ambiguity of fiction as both truth and lie to Ruby's story,

much like his own, and in the same gesture acknowledges her enigma as other to himself.

Relationships between blacks and whites and the question of ethnic identity are similarly shown as complex. Blacks live not in Park Slope but in the adjacent projects in Boerum Hill. The men are unemployed or struggling economically, involved in the informal economy or in theft. Auggie and Paul's stories connect them with black lives through Grandma Ethel (whose grandson Auggie pretends to be) and Rashid/Thomas (who poses with Paul as father and son). *Smoke* tells us how difficult, if not in 'real' terms impossible, these relations are. Thus, Auggie can only pass as Grandma Ethel's grandson because she is blind and Rashid/Thomas simply cannot be Paul's son. Rashid/Thomas' aunt implies that Paul has to be 'some kind of pervert' to have taken an interest in him, and Rashid makes it plain that Paul's taking him in for a few days is not a miracle cure for racial inequality: 'Let's not get too idealistic' they agree (1995b: 58, 83). Rashid/Thomas's newfound family, including his father's second wife and child, sit in silence, with Auggie and Paul on the margins: the whole a tableau of compounded personal, familial, gendered and racial uncertainties. The more positive signs of coexistence and fluid identity, therefore – the street celebration and the coming together of white, Puerto Rican and African-American males in the store, Auggie's successful relationship with the Spanish-American Violet, the video footage of racially mixed shopping areas, the interviews with and statements by Brooklyn citizens of mixed race (all of which occur in the more relaxed *Blue in the Face)* – have to be seen in this more fully differentiated context. The utopian moments of joyful union work, that is to say, because they qualify and are in turn qualified by the regular tensions alive in the neighbourhood.

The nostalgia and utopianism of these films are therefore in the end neither sentimental nor weakly idealistic; nor are they 'undesirable' in terms of the ideal of a 'non-oppressive society' or a dialogic relation with 'unassimilated others'. Their moments of self-aware and negotiated coexistence offer less a vision of another, better world than a glimpse of the possible in this imperfect present. The community is defined by both, in an anthology of intersecting and contesting narratives of the good and less good life. Its positive moments of non-intrusive affection, tolerant social interaction and combative reaffirmation draw on the strengths of association with a place, notably the store and its immediate Brooklyn environs. These places, we might say, provide sites of momentary, memorable definition in lives of heterogeneous flux.

Kevin Robins suggests that the experience of combined 'settlement and flux' has comprised the most vital tension of the modern city, and that this is now undermined by the new globalizing flow of information networks which traverse the borders and boundaries of community, region and nation without impediment (1994: 316–21). The postmodern city is therefore viewed as a thoroughly permeable space without settlement or stability. But if the distinction between 'settlement and flux' is undermined, so too are others – between community and migrancy, belonging and homelessness, continuity and dispersal, the local and the global, and between the modern and the postmodern. And if this is the case what does it say, finally, of the representation of the community and city in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face,* where a tension between settlement and process is retained? Are these texts after all 'modern' or, at least, not yet postmodern? As above, I believe things are more uneven and two-sided than this series of distinctions suggests. In one respect, the Brooklyn of these films is a technological backwater, entirely bereft of information technologies and media flows, Walkman, faxes, and e-mails; a place where authors use typewriters rather than word processors and where the only television is a dud black-and-white set. But it is also the Brooklyn where, as Auster summarizes. '"We don't go by numbers"' (1995b: 161): a Brooklyn of spontaneity and cosmopolitan diversity rather than calculation and sameness; a 'supplement' to the city which counters the mathematical grid and rational categories of the still modernizing Manhattan with its own anarchic postmodern and improvised, eccentric mayhem.

The best illustration of this bifurcated allegiance to the modern and postmodern is Auggie's photographic project. The exact timing, dating and apparently totalizing ambition of this project, for which Auggie uses a still camera on a tripod rather than the postmodern apparatus of roving video camera, suggest a modernist sensibility keen to order the randomness of the everyday. Here too is the controlling male gaze of modernity's predominantly visual regime. At the same time, however, Auggie's albums of 14 years' photographs, numbering above 'four thousand pictures of the same place' (1995b: 42) comprise an anonymous, public chronicle rather than an authored artwork. The project proposes no hierarchizing evaluations and no telos. There is no centre to its narrative of serial snapshots and its gaze is equalizing and democratic rather than predatory or invasive. Also, although the photographs are 'stills', collectively they present movement and change over time in a continuing negotiation between 'settlement

and flux', or the impulses of the modern and postmodern. Above all, as Auggie has to point out to Paul Benjamin the photographs require a way of reading: 'You'll never get it if you don't slow down, my friend', he says '... They're all the same, but each one is different from every other one' (1995b: 44). As Paul looks more closely and comes upon a photograph of his dead wife, so the photographs become a moving personal as well as public memoir. They record the individual in the collective, the exceptional and contingent in the routine and commonplace, the different in the same. The result is neither modernist nor postmodernist as usually understood, but what we might think of as a deconstructed, reflexive modern in the post-modern.

Auggie's project, like these films as a whole, tells us that absolute distinctions between the modern and postmodern, the local and global, continuity and contingency are too simple. The known place and community and the strange and distant run but do not merge together. Moments of stability are not necessarily enclosing or oppressive, nor are intense emotions and focused identities sentimental, nostalgic and conservative. It is fitting that Auggie's cultural project in the film represents these complexities since, as I contend elsewhere here, cultural texts have precisely this value in relation to theoretical commentary. They do not supersede or superannuate theory, but remind us of the need for a correspondingly adequate complexity of description and definition. In a sense, the lesson they offer, like Auggie's, is in how to read. To appreciate the different in the same (whether in notions of community, identity, modernity or post-modernity) we need to slow down, putting the 'victories', however fleeting, on rewind and on freeze frame, pressing the pause button to introduce an uneven, contradictory counter-time in 'the fast changing circumstances of cities today' (Watson and Gibson, 1995: 262). A post-modern politics needs, in other words, to pay attention to moments of provisional stability as well as to the process which takes such moments with all their constellated meanings speeding by. Reading images and stories can help us do this.

6
'Witness to my times': Sarah Schulman and the Lower East Side

Neighbourhoods

New York has fifty-nine 'district communities' and hundreds of 'neighbourhoods' whose physical areas are geographically, socially and ethnically but not legally defined, and which historically may or may not have been experienced as 'communities'. For all the ambiguity of this term we may say that it signifies a sense of shared subculture and social-psychological belongingness for local people or those using a given urban area (see Krieger, 1982). Even so, such subcultural communities may overlap, coexist in harmony, mutual indifference, or tension, and be internally perceived in different ways

Paul Auster, as we have seen, views Brooklyn's Park Slope as a kind of utopia. This neighbourhood happens also to contain the highest concentration of lesbian residents in the US and serves, says Tamar Rothenberg, as 'the centre of lesbian population in New York' (Rothenberg, 1995: 175).[1] But if this has given Park Slope a numerical identity as 'lesbian', lesbian residents do not view it as a 'lesbian community', but more 'as an area where lesbians live' (172). Those who participated in a survey by Rothenberg in the mid-1980s were conscious of Park Slope's earlier history as a racially diverse, 'artsy lefty' neighbourhood offering affordable housing and social and cultural amenities. By the late 1970s it was felt to support a 'woman's community, however loose' (175). The residents' sense of a specifically lesbian 'community', however, Rothenberg reports, extends beyond Park Slope itself to Greenwich Village which is marked, as is Chelsea more recently, by the urban semiology which gives these areas a public reputation as lesbian. Notably this entails the existence of 'third places' – neither home nor work – such as cafés, bookstores, clubs and bars (Oldenburg, 1989).

The one important communal place of this kind in Park Slope is Seventh Avenue where lesbians are able to feel comfortable walking and being seen at the weekends (Rothenberg, 173). This distinguishes this area both from Greenwich Village and from the nearby Winsor Terrace where some have also now moved, but which offers no such safe space.

Would Park Slope itself comprise a lesbian community if it were more conspicuously marked or publicly recognized? Would it join the community Auster describes, or redefine this? Are any of these changes desired by and to the advantage of lesbian residents? On Seventh Avenue lesbians are visible but not conspicuous. In Prospect Heights they are visible because more exceptional and are more exposed to prejudice. Does being accepted therefore mean being seen and remarked upon or being seen but not noticed? Does a lesbian community mean having 'in common a quality of neighbourhood life' which declares itself as distinctive, or which is somehow paradoxically both distinctive and anonymous? (Wolf, 1979: 98). These are the kinds of questions consistently posed, directly and indirectly, by New York novelist, journalist and lesbian activist, Sarah Schulman. Schulman combines these questions, moreover, about urban, sexual and cultural identity with the issue of the place and role of the lesbian writer. Is being marginal or mainstream the preferred option? Schulman would appear to desire both: to claim an American identity but to occupy a critical position within American culture and American literature. But this raises its own questions. Schulman comments at one point how useful it would be for the status of lesbian fiction if Paul Auster were to announce he was a reader and that it constituted a valid part of American literature (http://www.bookwire.com). This echoes the questions above on the identity of Park Slope. Would recognition of this kind mean the status and value of lesbian writing were respected and confirmed, or does joining 'American literature' entail assimilation and compromise? Could either category remain unaltered by this transaction? Is a sense of a hierarchical distinction between the marginal and the mainstream in fact the best place to start?

Lesbians living in Park Slope or Prospect Heights belong to a generation whose political and sexual identities emerged, says Rothenberg, in the context of lesbian feminism rather than in the later context of AIDS and an association with specifically gay issues and queer activism. 'I think they (young women)', says one Park Slope resident, 'live on the Lower East Side' (176). Sarah Schulman would seem to

belong politically to both generations but it is in the second location, specifically the East Village, that her life and writing in six novels from 1984–96 have been based, and from here that she poses the questions above.

The Lower East Side is known for the tenement buildings erected to house immigrant workers in the early twentieth century, for its historic identity as a poor, densely populated, predominantly Jewish area and for an associated tradition of political dissent. In the 1970s and 1980s, as Janet Abu-Lughod writes, its decaying residences stood in emphatic contrast to the evident affluence, power and symbolic skyscrapers of the financial and governmental centres nearby (1994: 17). In other ways, however, it has come to comprise a multi-ethnic, diversified district, typical of inner city metropolitan neighbourhoods. Such zones, Abu-Lughod argues, 'have lost their common culture and have become instead the contested turf of diverse groups and subgroups who pursue different life styles and conflicting goals in the physical proximity of the same area' (1994: 5). Her study of the East Village details the emergence from this uneasy diversity of a temporary alliance of residents, squatters and the homeless in a 'battle' with the City authorities over the occupation of Tompkins Square, a long time site of radical activity and the symbolic focus for a confrontation in the early nineties between the local community, so constituted, and the City over the 'ownership' and destiny of the area (see Brooker, 1996).

Sarah Schulman views the East Village primarily as a lesbian urban space, at times as a lesbian community. Abu-Lughod does not comment on the gay or lesbian presence in the neighbourhood, nor their involvement in issues surrounding Tompkins Square (see Schulman, 1995: 220–222). In a sense this is only to confirm one aspect of her account. The 'same' place is not the same but coded and read differently, by residents and writers alike, as a metatext upon the available semiological text of buildings, streets, parks, and public places. The same physical area is a cultural stage, so to speak, busy with meaning: less inert backdrop than a script of signs, scenes, and characters active in different dramas, whether of the homeless or of gay and lesbian and artistic life. If Abu-Lughod sees such 'subcultures' as being at odds, however, in Schulman they both clash and coalesce.

Meanwhile, these internally differentiated stories and perspectives have been overlaid, in the Lower East Side as elsewhere, by other influential and 'grander' narratives: those framed as economic policy and planning projects. For the one thing Brooklyn and the East Village

share in the eyes of residents, squatters, authors and researchers alike is gentrification. Rothenberg observes that the historical coincidence of the women's movement and gentrification was essential to the establishment of a majority lesbian population in Park Slope (179), since the pattern of short-term residence and moving on from one neighbourhood to the next, characterizing this movement, has inevitably encouraged rising house prices. 'We're the ones who lead gentrification without even knowing it', says one of her interviewees (178). In East Village, gentrification followed the common cycle of the purchase of decrepit, abandoned or burned-out buildings, their rapid sale and restoration by developers for substantial profits. This process was encouraged by Mayor Koch, and the resulting alliance of commercial interests and City authorities was met by the resistance which lead to the Battle of Tompkins Square. In this case, gentrification was to some degree forestalled; firstly because of an existing stock of public housing and secondly because yuppies found this and other aspects of the area unacceptable. The outcome has therefore been mixed – combining the neglect, displacement or elimination of residents with some degree of negotiated settlement and even the signs of a newly configured social-sexual community.[2] Overall, however, this recent history would seem to confirm the neighbourhood's internal diversity and the description of a 'community', when called into being, as depending on a sense of 'the other' outside itself. Abu Lughod views this episode with some pessimism, concluding that the East Village community lacked the organized democratic 'content' which would have withstood the forces of power and privilege. It declined as a result into inertia and internal squabbling, 'vulnerable to division and co-optation' (1998: 234).

Schulman's campaign against indifference, hostility and normative codes in the realm of sexuality and culture (on behalf of people with AIDS and for the recognition of lesbian lives and writing), overlaps with and is arguably shaped by these immediate social and economic circumstances, just as she struggles to speak beyond them to the larger entity of 'America'. Also, she herself tells different kinds of stories of East Village: polemical accounts in journalistic essays and political pamphlets of issues in gay and lesbian life which are the published expression of her political activism and the stories of her plays and novels. I want to ask below how these different discourses contribute to Schulman's general political project and in particular to ask, here as elsewhere, how the distinctive imaginative modes and structures of fiction operate as a form of what might be termed 'indirect political

action'. One novel, *Shimmer* (1998a), is especially interesting in this respect. Here, partly in response to the changes in the East Village indicated above, partly in response to the frustrations inherent in Schulman's faith in America, she shifts her fiction in place and time from present day East Village to Manhattan in the 1940s. This comes, I believe, to signal an important, strategic change.

Fictions of lesbian community

In *After Delores* (1988), the unnamed narrator works in a dive coffee shop ('not the kind of place that anyone gets thrown out of' for non-payment, 96). In Schulman's next and third novel, *Girls, Visions and Everything* (1986), the protagonist, Lila Futuransky, works, without much enthusiasm, for a xeroxing shop. Her lover Emily, works from dawn till dusk in a garment factory, and her friend, Isabel, works as a waitress at a fast-food joint. They belong recognizably to the East Village of this period when, as Abu-Lughod reports, the economic restructuring which saw a decline in manufacturing and a growth in the financial, insurance, and information sectors of the City, brought an expansion to the unskilled service sector and a return of 'sweatshop production' to the Lower East Side (Abu-Lughod, 1994: 2).

Schulman's characters, as this suggests, are typically caught up in processes of material economic and social change. So rapid is this change that by the time of the reissue of *Girls* in 1999, the world it depicts has gone, says Schulman. In her 1999 'Preface' to the novel she identifies the forces for change as 'AIDS, gentrification, and marketing' (1999: x). Gentrification is an emerging influence in the East Village of 1986, at the edge of Lila Futuransky's consciousness. In the later novels, *People in Trouble* (1990), *Empathy* (1993) and *Rat Bohemia* (1995), it has taken effect. The first of these novels, especially, is also centrally concerned with AIDS, which then figures as a joint theme with marketing in *Rat Bohemia* and *Stagestruck* (1998b), a critique of the representation of gay life in New York's theatreland, prompted by the plagiarism of Schulman's *People in Trouble* in the hit musical *Rent*. In this latter case, fiction and non-fictional prose are intimately connected, but arguably they share a common purpose throughout. For while in the one, Schulman campaigns against indifference and injustice, in the other, she treats the same issues in the manner of a committed social realist, embedding the personal in a verifiable urban world and society shaped by contemporary sexual and national politics. The local and national issues and events pacing the novels

(gay pride, ACT UP, gentrification, the swing to the right under Reagan), Schulman treats directly again in the many occasional essays, written between 1981–94, and collected as *My American History* (1995).

The epigraph to *People in Trouble* – Marx's famous statement that 'social being determines consciousness' – would seem to make this connection and Schulman's priorities (politics first, culture second) very clear and to commit her writing to a realist aesthetic of the kind favoured by orthodox Marxism. This would seem entirely consistent too with the politics of 'concrete solutions' proposed by the direct action group 'The Lesbian Avengers' which Schulman helped establish in the early 1990s (1995: 279–319). Also, even if the political agenda has changed – as between the first and later publication of *Girls,* for example – this earlier world 'did exist', as Schulman insists (1999: x). Her novels serve therefore to intervene in issues of the day but can join in telling the story of 'my American history' as this present time recedes. The fact that the moment recorded in *Girls* 'did exist' can be buttressed, moreover, by the actuality of where it happened; its realism guaranteed by the small map of East Village included on the back cover of the novel's re-issue.

It's a mistake, however, as we all know, to judge a book by its cover. Despite its verisimilitude and topicality, Schulman's fiction exists in a more complex relation to her essays and activism and to the cultural history of the Lower East Side, or specifically to lesbian life in the East Village, than a vocabulary of authenticity, social record or conventional realism can suggest. Rita in *Rat Bohemia* wants 'to be a witness to my own time' (1996: 6). The witness is the figure who stands to one side, but it is naive to suppose this makes her a recording instrument of a passing reality. A depiction of the 'times' depends too, as always, on the eye (the perspective, angle, and focus) of the 'witness'. The 'Preface' to *Girls*, in fact, turns around the assumptions of a simple reflective reportage. The novel, says Schulman, provided a context, a place and group identity for its lesbian readers. The work of fiction, that is to say, helped make a reality where this was nebulous or absent. This is more in line with comments Schulman makes elsewhere on the need to engage 'in re-evaluating and re-imagining every aspect of social life' (1995: 1). Art therefore does more than report on or even construct the world. It aims, rather, purposefully to reconstruct it, by altering perceptions and attitudes in and of this world.

We might suppose, of course, that Schulman's prose works seek to do this too. But in this case we can't think of them as statements of fact devoid of rhetorical form and purpose any more than we can

think of fiction as the secondary representation of an *a priori* reality. It begins to sound as if only a postmodern relativism can properly describe a situation where 'reality' or 'realities' are understood as the product of the different narratives which compose them, whether these are the 'stories' of fiction or journalism. This is neither Schulman's position, however, nor one I want to adopt. My argument is rather that what makes Schulman's writing problematic is that her purpose in estranging perceptions is to displace misconceptions and ignorance with 'the truth'. This owes less to postmodern pluralism than to a radical left modernist project of the kind associated with Bertolt Brecht or socialist feminism. We can in these terms recognize both Schulman's fiction and non-fictional prose as in different ways polemical and rhetorical means to a given end. Principally, this is to estrange and subvert heterosexual norms so as to foreground the 'reality' of lesbian life and culture. So far, left modernism seems not only viable but newly articulated. The problem is that in fiction this is an imagined reality. As such, the very mode of fiction, far from supplementing a 'truth' and 'authenticity' established elsewhere, undermines these same notions and the associated binary distinction of truth and falsehood on which Schulman's thinking so much depends. Whatever effects the novels have upon the 'consciousness' of their different readers, their most interesting effect consequently may be an internal one – in the way that as fiction they expose an appeal to 'the truth' as untenable and so come to estrange and redirect this very project.

It might in fact be more accurate to say that Schulman's fiction itself stages this tension between the real and the imagined. In some instances, notably *People in Trouble*, she is drawn towards 'social realism' (her own description,1995: xxi; 1998b: 23). Characteristically, however, the novels accentuate their own fictionality through a knowing use of the conventions of popular genres, a self-conscious comic-seriousness or cross-generic play. Thus, *The Sophie Horowitz Story* (1984) and *After Delores* (1988) draw on the conventions of the detective and crime novel in satirizing the rigidities of the revolutionary left feminism of the 1960s, and in uncovering the friction between alienated subcultures in the 'heterotopic … "combat zones"' of the Lower East Side (Munt 1992: 43).[3] *Empathy* presents the tensions of a family funeral in the form of a short screen play, and *Rat Bohemia* exposes the sham of closeted lesbian writing in an 'Appendix' of three chapters by 'Muriel Kay Starr', which blatantly rewrite earlier sections of the novel in a style which will appease heterosexual norms. As this suggests, Schulman's novels combine postmodern effects with serious, one

might say, didactic intent. They mean variously to entertain, support and instruct their different readers: on AIDS, on the cruelty of the family towards its gay and lesbian members and on the burden of compulsory heterosexuality. But their earnestness and irony can pull in different directions. As Sally Munt sees it, Schulman extracts 'the best from postmodernism in its playful unfixing' but her work also reveals 'a developing discomfort' with postmodernism's 'depoliticizing tendencies' (1982: 34). This uneasiness is repeated elsewhere in Schulman's writing – in the course, for example, of a later argument contesting the absorptive and neutralizing effects of advertizing (1998: 102–8). The power of the market is such that the formerly symbolic political image of two women kissing can now be smoothly commodified as lesbian chic. The jolt of such an apparent public acceptance is temporarily liberating but in the end deflating, Schulman realizes, since the image is so plainly emptied of its initial meaning. The different real needs and experiences of Americans – what Schulman calls 'the authentic range of lived experience' (117) – are obscured or acknowledged only as different 'products'. Such a distinction will not hold, however. For one thing, the 'authenticity' of lesbian and gay life is itself highly coded, and in Schulman's own terms lesbian consumers are seduced by a public sign of recognition even while this is known to be false and manipulative (117–18). There is no escape from public imagery and constructed subcultural identities into a world of unmediated reality and authenticity.[4] The novels serve only to confirm this mobility of forms and to deconstruct any sense of an *absolute* distinction between commercial and artistic discourses. This is postmodernism's lesson to an earlier 'ideology critique' committed to disclosing a repressed reality beneath the warped surface of the modern world. Whether we see this as 'depoliticizing', as Sally Munt suggests, or 're-politicizing', depends, amongst other things, on how we argue a distinction – which is not an absolute one – between fiction and advertizing. The issue, we begin to see, calls for a discussion of the situated ethics of particular forms of representation rather than another exhausting stand-off between truth and *mis*representation.

All this has a particular bearing upon conceptions of subjective and social sexual identity, and thus upon how being lesbian or the existence of a lesbian community are represented and perceived. Schulman dreams that American culture will come to accept lesbians as 'full human beings whose lives can now be truthfully represented

among the selection of lives that make up the American experience' (1998: 50). The world inside her fiction, however – not simply in its writerly devices but in the lives of its characters – shows lesbian identity and community as a self-fashioned and fluent act or set of actions rather than as fully achieved and stable entities. As Sally Munt writes of *The Sophie Horowitz Story*, 'Identity is foregrounded … The reader's pleasure derives from the recognition not of selfhood, but of roles' (1992: 36). This is not to say that lesbian identity is shown as merely playful and unproblematic. In *Empathy*, the protagonist Anna 0. (named after Freud's first patient – as if to confirm the novel as more psycho-parable than realist tale), suffers from schizophrenia after the departure of her lover, 'the woman in white'. She is both Anna O and the male 'Doc' – an anti-authoritarian, post-Freudian amateur with a gift for listening or 'empathy' – who treats her. She emerges from this episode (represented in many ways as a cinematic or dream sequence) with the help of a new lover, Dora (the subject of a second Freudian case study of female hysteria) with a new sense of flexible but situated identity. 'She learned', Schulman writes, 'that a person positions herself on quicksand … that every single individual has to rethink morality for themselves and at the same time come to a newly negotiated social agreement' (1993: 165). Thus Anna learns 'to be many people at once', in a contradictory world which is both inexplicable and open to explanation (165). Lesbian identity is understood accordingly as provisional and differentiated and as inviting more a vocabulary of masquerade and performativity than of stability and transparency. But just as importantly, this new sense of self is seen as being at risk, as in the image of a person on quicksand, which sets Anna O. upon the precarious terrain beyond the range of normative definitions.[5]

All of the novels confirm a view of identity as constructed out of this kind of tension. A particularly interesting example is *Girls*, since here a rare and positive sense of self and community coincide. Schulman names *Girls* as her favourite novel (1995: xx) and certainly it occupies a key place in her changing portrait of the East Village. The lesbian characters are without exception involved in the arts, as dancers, designers, performers or writers. Their world is in effect their creation. This self-fashioning is particularly evident in Lila Futuransky who models her persona of urban outlaw on the Jack Kerouac of *On the Road*. Kerouac provides a cultural style, a look and an attitude to the life of the street, 'ready for anything as long as it was new' (1999: 15). Kerouac also provides the book's title and some of its prose effects, thereby implicating

author and text as well as character in this same homage. The novel therefore inhabits a world of echoing words and images stressing its own and the community's embedded socio-textual construction. Significantly, however, and in contrast to Schulman's reaction to the pervasive influence of advertizing, above, Lila actively re-reads the trope of 'Jack Kerouac'; choosing to be him rather than one of his girls (17). Schulman in this way therefore shows how a dominant male-oriented counter-cultural image, along with its accompanying prose style, can be re-appropriated rather than rejected in the name of an image-free reality.

Lila's street style helps define the lesbian neighbourhood as an oppositional subculture: she is 'Miss Subways' who harbours a new emergent 'future' in her very name. Her friends know her as this persona, and, like her, draw on the romance of an earlier counterculture in making the East Village a lesbian place. Symptomatically, Lila has to step through a waste land of garbage and rubble on Avenue B to get to the garden maintained by 'yippie' Sally Liberty. In some ways this 'alternative' local communal site and ethos (the women campaign against the City's intention to permit only square gardens) recalls Jane Jacobs' celebration in her classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) of the everyday life of dense personal relationships and serendipitous encounters in New York's Greenwich Village and her 'almost anarchist embrace of the unplanned community' (Kasinitz 1995: 94). As Philip Kasinitz comments, Jacobs' study was a riposte to the arch modernist Le Corbusier's fixed preference for the skyscrapers of downtown and midtown Manhattan, and provided a vocabulary and rationale for those 'many people who love the "miserable" low red streets of the dense urban neighbourhoods *as they are*' (93). Lila, Sally Liberty and Schulman, we might argue, want similarly to resist a later generation of modernizers.

Marshall Berman suggests how Jane Jacobs' protest against modernist uniformity is weakened by her 'pastoral' version of inner city neighbourhoods without blacks or Hispanics, 'free from crime, random violence, pervasive rage and fear' (Berman, 1983: 325). Schulman's 'Preface' confirms how much more complex the city has become by 1999, and admits to some naivety of her own in the novel's proposal for marketing lesbianism the way the Beats marketed themselves (1999: vii).

Marketing, she comes to list with gentrification and AIDS, as having brought this world to an end. *Girls* catches the moment before these crises impinge upon the oasis of the lesbian 'garden' which friends and

lovers have made in the East Village, and whose ethos they publicly stage in the art, dance and ironic avant garde performances at the lesbian venues (the Kitsch Inn, the Pyramid Club), which give this culture its physical place on the map.

This world has a summertime brightness and optimism which is exceptional even in the early novels. Tensions appear here all the same, however, in the lesbian community's relation to the 'other' world outside itself, and – since this outside of straight life, sexism, yuppies, city bureaucracy and commercial interests not only threatens but encroaches upon the neighbourhood – appear inside it too. Yuppies, police and developers invade Lila's life and her own view changes. She comes to see the life of the 'cool' street drug dealers she befriends as dirty and unglamorous and in particular begins to feel threatened on the street by the sexist bravado and violence of men (59,173). The result is that she is caught between her would-be self-image as an adventuring female Kerouac and the safe life of the domestic loving couple represented by her new girlfriend Helen. She hands over her copy of *On the Road* and the text of this life to Isabel, but the confident street style she has projected, along with the terms of her flexible but committed relationships with friends, lovers and the feminized city, is jeopardized. Helen's body becomes the 'liberating' zone to replace the 'freedom' of the road. (164, 176). It is difficult, however, not to see this physical intensity as occupying a more limited domain than the body of the City. Certainly Lila's choice of 'the sad truth' over 'the fun deception' (164) is marked by the sense that it 'will never be right' (178). It *is* nevertheless a choice. The novel confirms that identity remains optional and that community has to be orchestrated into being in the physical and social spaces which give it life. The 'social realism' it brings to this 'postmodernism', however, both internally and in the retrospect of Schulman's later 'Preface', show how this freedom to choose was being channeled and constrained against its will by atavistic male power and newer tendencies with their own designs upon the neighbourhood.

The twilight optimism of *Girls* gives this story a key place in Schulman's novels of the eighties and nineties. Despite their comic formal play, the other early novels come finally to present a melancholy loneliness and sense of rejection rather than of community. Sophie Horowitz lives a life of principled improvisation and exits on a note of breezy expectation ('I just want to enjoy life, have friends and keep my life interesting. If I stick to my instincts the world will follow' 1997: 195), but the novel's tale of misadventures hardly warrants such

confidence. She has been exploited throughout by the alliance of one-time feminist revolutionaries and drug dealers for the purposes of their own plot, and her story is rejected by the collective running *Feminist News* because it glorifies 'women who are male identified' (194). The 'story' of Sophie Horowitz is that there is in the end no story, and her final words are spoken into this emptiness. In *After Delores,* the unnamed narrator is driven by a corrosive hatred and frustration after her lover Delores has deserted her for Mary 'Sunshine', a staff photographer on *Vogue*. The narrator kills the man who murdered a sometime lover 'Punkette' (thus finding a displaced object for her revenge) but is fundamentally unconnected. She wanders into a series of short-term, superficial, even vicious relationships, antagonizes one-time friends and at her lowest sinks to the level of a jobless, drifting alcoholic. 'You are just a lonely person', says the actress Beatriz to her (1988: 152). The callous surface of postmodernism (the world of designer fashion which has tempted Delores, and the cruel, self-regarding role-play of the actresses Beatriz and Charlotte), triumphs over friendship and romance. The narrator is stunned that Delores who was her 'best friend' won't 'just be nice' (77), but cannot shake the 'illusion' of who she once was, or seemed to be.

Neither protagonist in these novels finds love or romance or a sustained supportive relationship in the community. They contrast markedly with *Girls*, therefore, though it is these two novels, produced either side of *Girls*, which set the emotional tone for Schulman's later fiction. The lives of the protagonists of *People*, *Empathy*, and *Rat Bohemia* are similarly shaped by rejection: Molly by the experimenting bisexual artist Kate, Anna O. by 'the woman in white', and Rita, Dave and 'all gay people' (1996: 163) by their families. In other words, as a character recognizes in *Rat Bohemia,* they are dogged by a 'nostalgic desire for normalcy, normalcy, normalcy' (1996:111). While all the novels enact a relation between the figure of the lesbian and the normative mainstream 'other' – represented by the middle class 'arty type' or yuppy, the constraints of 'compulsory heterosexuality' or the patriarchal family – this hegemonic alliance can neither be held at bay, nor successfully negotiated, nor brought to think and act differently. Matching this story there is, in the background, the rise of homelessness, the decline of the neighbourhood and the defeat of local interests as recounted by Janet Abu-Lughod. The closing episode of *Rat Bohemia* enacts the ambivalences of this moment. Four women friends are stuck in a hire car in Chinatown without petrol which means they cannot travel as intended to visit Rita's first girlhood lover in the suburbs. In

other words, they can neither connect with the past nor make any serious movement forward in the present whose changed ways they witness passing by on the other side of the car windows. They nevertheless feel that they have made a difference, that the world has changed 'Thanks to people like us' (1996: 216). Thus, though evidently confined, they affirm a hard won sense of their own unity in difference. Despite everything and contrary to appearances they have come some distance – and do get the car back to the lot on empty.

The power of straight thinking

The relations in Schulman's novels of out lesbian characters with sometime lesbian or bisexual lovers and the patriarchal family enact, on another level, her own relations as a lesbian writer with the literary establishment and with an idea of America, as this has conceded control to the Right and succumbed to a cynical cultural fatalism in the 1980s and early 1990s. Schulman addresses this situation directly in *My American History* (1995) and *Stagestruck* (1998b) and in associated contemporary essays and interviews. She has always wanted, she writes, 'to be part of American intellectual life and still be completely out of the closet in every way' (1998b: 22). We have seen how the novels operate upon ideas of coherent, unmediated identity held outside their pages. These ideas simultaneously fuel and self-destruct in the prose works, especially in the unfolding of her arguments on theatre, marketing and gay America in *Stagestruck*. The novel *People in Trouble* was about the struggle to get the truth about AIDS heard. *Stagestruck* wants to tell the true story of how *Rent* plagiarized and distorted the novel and to bring the more general misrepresentation of gay life on the New York stage to public notice.

Schulman's evidence is entirely convincing and *Stagestruck* stands as a bold indictment of the ignorance and complacency of the New York based cultural establishment. There is an underlying problem, however, over and above the attitudes of this professional-media class, with the terms of Schulman's own critique and her expectations, particularly, that this group can be persuaded to think and act differently by a demonstration of the truth. The question a friend puts to her in *Stagestruck* reveals the gulf between her idealism and the real world of the literary-media-legal establishment. '"*Why should anyone care?*"', he asks, about the facts of AIDS and gay men as written by an East Village lesbian (16). The response to the plagiarism of her book, by her own editor, publisher and agent amongst others, reveals that no

one in power was seriously interested; worse, that they didn't need to be interested to continue to run the cultural establishment. Schulman wants lesbian writing to be admitted into 'the mosaic of American literature' (1995: 274). But why, one asks, should she demand equality of treatment with the members of a club, which has shredded its own rules? This kind of confusion is compounded by an over-simplified view of middle class heterosexual readers and playgoers. Thus she wonders if straight men, brought by some unlikely chance to read a lesbian novel, would identify with Peter in *People* (1998b: 14), as if gender and sexual identification was likely to overrule the portrait of this character as a superficial egoist, or as if the novel couldn't be read in quite other ways. On the one hand she assumes a principled and open national culture – only to discover indifference and opportunism – and on the other, assumes a sexual and gender alliance which is closed to other identifications and attitudes. Neither the nation nor its dominant groups, in short, are viewed in sufficiently complex, or, one might say, cunning ways to effect the kind of change she desires.

Schulman's conclusion in *Stagestruck* is that America must be persuaded to recognize that the supposed neutrality and '"objective" stance of the dominant culture is artificial' (1998b: 3 and see 145). Straight society in particular needs to be brought 'to see itself' from a position outside the norms which grant it invisibility. The real life episode of her campaign against *Rent* clearly did not bring this about, but nor can *Stagestruck*, itself. Firstly because the truth this book tells is the story – behind her 'moral' victory – of a failure to exact the real justice of a legal victory. 'I simply was not powerful enough' she comments' (1998b: 1). One can only reflect that if the media establishment was untouched by her original case it needed even less to listen to the book of this story. A second reason is that Schulman's prose arguments, somewhat like the lives of her fictional characters, are dogged by 'normalcy'. She cannot, that is to say, shake a faith in America and American letters, nor in the authority of the literary mainstream. Thus she writes of lesbian authors with their 'noses pressed against the glass wall that separates "us" from "them"' (1995: 260), of her belief that lesbian life can be seen as an 'organic part of American literature' (1999: viii), and, in another revealing concession, of 'elevating' gay and lesbian culture 'to the level of mainstream visibility' (1998b: 146). She surrenders too much at such moments, surely, to the loaded hierarchies, which set the dominant centre against the excluded margin and serve precisely to sustain this ruling culture in its hegemonic role.

Schulman's project is therefore confounded by the double face of contemporary America: at one and the same time symbolic host of the 'modern project' whose first principles are justice and equality, and prime example of the machinations of an invasive corporate culture in the postmodern era. She appeals to the first only to expose the influence of the second. Her consequent frustrations with 'real' America are evident. The result is trenchant critique mixed with some bafflement and overstatement, but also, almost inevitably, a sense of defeat. She feels, she writes like 'a relic of a disappeared civilization' (1998b: 41).

Stagestruck does not solve the problems in which it is ensnared. However, Schulman's conclusions do significantly shift attention away from the under-represented margins to the centre itself: for now, as she sees it, challenging the dominant culture's '*feelings* of neutrality is essential for any truthful expression to emerge' (1998b: 3). Some of her writing – even by default – does also imply an alternative strategy by which to destabilize and outwit the categories, which hold those feelings in place. There are two aspects to this strategy which I want to draw out. In the essay 'A Modest Proposal' (1995: 272–274), Schulman turns her attention to the publishing and reviewing network. She argues here for an end to 'the gay list', since, contrary to appearances, this has conspired to restrict lesbian art to the cultural ghetto. She therefore calls on corporate publishers, magazine editors, and bookstores to join in what she calls a 'concrete solution' to reverse this situation. This they will do by 'integrating lists, integrating advertizing, integrating reading' (273), by ending the quota system on the reviewing of lesbian texts, and by telling the public 'that gay and lesbian books are for everyone' (274). Significantly, however, Schulman does not consider extending this action inwards to the content of her own writing. As an author she sees only the pressure to remove, minimize or obscure lesbian content and the need therefore to insist on its uncompromised centrality. An 'integrated' treatment of lesbian and other content which will 're-position' books as well as bookstores, seems not to be part of her agenda. At least not explicitly, for politically her arguments logically point this way.[6] Thus she writes, in a slightly earlier essay, how 'imagining an alternative for human relations' means 'that categories like *black* and Jewish' need to be opened to 'other factors such as gender, sexuality, class loyalty etc.' (1995: 262). If black and Jewish, then why not lesbian?

The second aspect concerns less the internal treatment of identity in Schulman's fiction than the modes of identification she attributes to

her readers. In *Stagestruck,* she sets out the 'rules' by which a 'fake public homosexuality' is reinforced and made acceptable. This includes two prohibitions, firstly that 'nothing … that would show straight people's complicity or responsibility in relation to homophobia is permitted', and, secondly, that 'Straight audiences must not be expected to universalize to a gay or lesbian protagonist unless they have already built up a relationship with that character, thinking they were straight' (1998b: 147). Her own purpose, obviously, is to estrange these normative assumptions and the '*feelings*' of neutrality which underlie them. She wants readers and playgoers to see themselves as constructed and therefore open to change. What other form can this awareness take, however, than a conception of identity which, as above, combines sexuality, class, gender and ethnicity? Isn't it in these terms too that a playgoer or reader will be moved from an identification with one category to an identification with or understanding of another?

The curious effect of *My American History* and *Stagestruck* is therefore to show how Schulman needs to develop a different political strategy than that espoused by these books themselves: another way of effectively critiquing and transforming the 'establishment' than expecting it to listen to the simple truth. Seeing and feeling things differently and thereby creating 'a better future' (1998b: 146), as Schulman intends, has to mean undermining the categories which hold this culture's normative assumptions together. Schulman insists on being accepted in her own terms; on being included 'in' as an 'out' lesbian, but knocking on the door of 'America' with the truth in her hand and an idea of 'them and us' in her head, will not, on present evidence, achieve this end. Her frustration does suggest an alternative however: to become less the 'American lesbian writer' who will be treated like other American writers in the American mainstream than an American writer in a tradition of American dissent and non-conformity. The economic and physical changes to East Village, bringing gentrification and poverty side by side, has further redefined these options. By the time of *Rat Bohemia* (1996), the earlier model of the Beats, for example, is thoroughly outmoded. 'Those guys were so all-American' comments Killer (30). Nowadays dropping out only means joining the homeless. To be a bohemian, 'You gotta function', she says, 'You have to meet the system head-on at least once in a while' (30). 'I love the Viet Cong', says Rita, 'because that's the kind of American I am. I'm an UnAmerican' (53).

Above all, therefore, Schulman needs to dismantle the hierarchy of

'American/un-American', to show how the second is implicated in, and has historically confronted and defined the other from the inside: how being un-American is a way in short of being a kind of American. This does not mean abandoning the 'unabandonable project' of 'winning respect and recognition' for herself and others, but does mean showing the other side of the official self-portrait of 'America' and opening 'primary lesbian content' to the categories of race, ethnicity, gender and class loyalty involved in 'imagining an alternative for human relations'. It means also getting inside the 'feelings' of American readers in a new way, through more of a ruse than the frustrations of straight talking to straight minds. These things, I suggest, Schulman attempts to do in the novel *Shimmer*.

UnAmerican activity

In an essay in the mid 1980s, Schulman tours the neighbourhood buildings associated with the contributions of Jewish radical women of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century (1995: 125–148). She literally maps a resonance between her own activism and theirs, and brings a new historical dimension to the treatment of personal and family Jewish identity which underlies much of her earlier work. In *Shimmer*, the influence of ethnicity is foregrounded at the outset in the figure of the working class Jewish girl from Brooklyn, Sylvia Golubowsky. She works as a stenographer on the New York *Star* and hopes to rise from the typists' pool to a job as reporter and so to become a writer. At one point she reflects how 'Jews still gather to remember the wrongs of five thousand years past'. That, she says, 'is why we continued to exist as a people, despite being so few' – bonded in 'a critical mass of consciousness' (1998a: 181). Sylvia is witness to the later wrongs of the anti-Communist witchhunts of the late 1940s and early 1950s, and serves in her own 'shimmering rage' to show how the political fear and oppression of the period were of apiece with anti-Semitism, discrimination against women and the repression of gays and lesbians. Sylvia's brother, Lou, takes the job that should have been hers, and later, when set on the hunt for communist sympathizers, trails her to a lesbian bar. This occurs late in the novel. We hear of a 'secret, secret life' (7) in the novel's opening pages, but it is only in Chapter 27 (40 pages from the novel's end), that Sylvia tells of discovering the bar and of being able freely to express her sexuality. This delay is true perhaps to the enforced reticence of the period, but is nevertheless essentially a device, the ruse by which Schulman subverts

the rules of a 'fake public homosexuality' and conducts the reader towards an identification with a lesbian character believing her first to be straight. Sylvia's ambitions, her brother's conduct and the support given to him by her family, have already determined the direction of the reader's sympathies. Unlike the earlier novels, therefore, we are brought here through the at once distancing and allegorical force of an historical example and through feminist and left liberal arguments on women, class, and ethnicity to confront questions of contemporary sexuality.

The novel joins these multiple identifications with issues of race. A black playwright, Cal Byfield, and his Southern white wife and jazz pianist, Caroline, move next door to Sylvia's Greenwich Village apartment. Cal and Sylvia share the experience of oppression and a common frustrated dream, that 'In 1949 little Jewish girl typists from Brooklyn grow up to be great American novelists at about the same rate that Negro kitchen help get their plays produced on Broadway' (107). The jazz scene gives Sylvia a first, personal sense of self and belonging (89), and this is confirmed when she and Caroline, who plays at the bar on Sixteenth Street, become lovers. In this 'unofficial' world, she feels 'an overwhelming happiness in its perfect context ... that there is no separation between my desire, my capacity and my self' (235, 236)

Against the interlaced narratives of Sylvia and Cal – the latter rendered through his granddaughter, N. Tammi Byfield – the novel sets the tale of Austin Van Cleeve, an odious member of the moneyed elite, conniving gossip columnist and unrelenting opponent of Roosevelt. Van Cleeve is determined to destroy the liberal editor of the *Star* newspaper, Jim O'Dwyer, and his cynical machinations to this end pervade the novel. He alone triumphs at its close, surviving to gloat at the final defeat of the principles of the New Deal marked by Clinton's dissolution of welfare programs in 1996.

The lives of the other main characters end in apparent compromise and defeat. The confused O'Dwyer ('I am pro-liberal and anti-communist, and you are free to be whatever you are because this is America', 145), is driven into a suicidal decline and is finally murdered. Cal Byfield has refused to compromise his case for putting Negro theatre on the American stage. His arguments clearly echo Schulman's own for lesbian art, but the novel demonstrates the many obstacles to their realization. He prostitutes himself to a patron, Amy O'Dwyer, and is on the point of selling his soul for a job as a scriptwriter on the black TV show 'Amos and Andy'. He ends instead as a partner to a

black owned advertizing agency where he is credited with introducing niche products for black consumers. His granddaughter is led by his example to reject thoughts of interracial relations (127) as endangering her 'shimmering presence' (169) and vows to protect his tarnished dream for the black race (272–3). Sylvia's life too collapses. She is 'emotionally evacuated' from her family (186), dumped by Caroline – suffering the rejection of earlier Schulman heroines – and is consumed by hatred at the joint betrayal of her brother and lover. Clinton's 'dissolution of welfare' only confirms that '. . . in the end, the masters do win' (270). Her experience has given her, as she puts it in the novel's first sentence, 'a proclivity for bitterness'.

This beginning is not quite the end, however, and there is another way of viewing the course of events in the novel. Sylvia has, after all, become a writer. She has written a series of novels on the adventures of a gang of career girls in New York and won the admiration of 'the gay crew' for her memoir, *Freud Was My Co-Pilot* (270). With Agnes (is this the 'little squirt' from New Jersey she meets in the bar on Sixteenth Street?), she moves to Vermont in the 1980s, and teaches there on a Master's program in writing. In the present time opening of the novel, she says, *a propos* a flirtatious student who 'doesn't know a thing', that the one thing she finds 'irresistibly attractive' is 'a historical view' (6). The emblem, she adds, of the historical period of her own generation was the Rosenbergs, the falsely accused 'atom bomb' spies, executed in 1953. Their case exposed the combined shallowness and virulence of anti-left hysteria, but also affirmed their faith as Jewish immigrants and Marxists in another America. They 'were working-class people . . . patriots . . . who wanted an America that was fair' writes Schulman (4). In a further exchange recorded later in the novel between Sylvia and a journalist on the *Star* (who is the first to recognize her as a writer), he names social security and welfare as one of the Communist Movement's contributions to United States society. In the Marxist classics he finds 'the beauty of the source' of a 'desire to end all forms of human exploitation' (259). Beliefs such as these speak of the inspiration of a tradition of American dissent in the heart of this period of prejudice and conformism which survive the novel's more obvious outcomes.

Cal's integrity, also, is not simply compromised. He enters the very world whose distracting images Schulman chastises in *Stagestruck*. But he is not without principle. His company is one of the first black advertizing agencies, he champions the representation of African–Americans in mainstream advertizing, and he resigns over a campaign

to promote 'Uptown Cigarettes' to black consumers. We remember the words too, of the Black executive who interviewed Cal for the 'Amos and Andy' show. He has come to believe, he says, 'that the only way to secure power for Negro men is one fellow at a time'. This is the lesson of moderation and strategic change within the system, not of its revolutionary overthrow. His reasoning is also echoed by the thoughts on teaching of the mature Sylvia Golubowsky. Students, she says 'let you change the world, one person at a time. You can make a big impact by showing somebody one great book' (5). She seduces her students by her shelves of books – at once an invitation to the truth and a display of her authority, however supernumerary, 'obscure and poor' she may appear. As in the world of television and advertizing so in the world of books. Schulman seems to recognize at such moments that the system cannot be converted in a revolutionary stroke but only subverted and re-inflected, one person at a time. The possibility of change depends not on a purity of conviction and strength of will but on reworking the symbolic discourses of word and image which might add up to a 'critical mass of consciousness'. *Shimmer* itself operates in just this way, by offering the instruction and parable of its 'historical view' and in situating the truths of lesbian life in a society where the personal struggles of an all-but-powerless working class Jewish woman and black man are nevertheless connected. These characters, and Van Cleeve too, are set in a continuing history which can no longer be viewed as an one-dimensional unity but as internally riven, defined by a struggle over the definition and destiny of America and being American. For this past and present time are predicated too on an alternative future. Thinking what advice she would give her students, Sylvia Golubowsky concludes:

> You can't beat history, but if you're young enough, try to wait out the historic moment. Everything does pass, but unfortunately so will you. That's why each one of us has to try to hurry along the process of change in any way we can, while not becoming its victim. It's an irony of history, but the people who make change are not the ones who benefit from it. This is a bitter pill to swallow (4)

Good books must make you uncomfortable, must make you 'demand a different life', she argues (6). Schulman's *Girls* had described a supportive communal identity for its lesbian readers. Everything in her subsequent writing, however, says that this embedded culture in New York's East Village is now gone. The refrain of *Rat Bohemia* is that

'New York is closed'. *Stagestruck*, in addition, laments the lack of a community of writers, since those Schulman joins at an arts colony in 1997 are committed only to the paraphernalia of gossip, flattery, contacts and contracts (1998b: 43–4). *Shimmer* necessarily takes up a new objective in response to these conditions: to intervene in and help reconstruct not this 'marginal' culture but the culture of the centre whose feelings of normative 'objective neutrality' haunt those on the margin. Its devices of recognition and estrangement therefore provide a context of another sort than *Girls*. It says to its readers that this earlier moment in American history when 'patriots' were vilified as UnAmericans also 'did exist' (1986: x) and that this was an America too of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and the patriarchal family. The uncomfortable lesson of American history, of course, is that this reality continues to exist. *Shimmer* makes its 'bitter pill' palatable through the distancing effects of parable and by situating Sylvia's lesbianism in a nexus of class, gender, race and ethnicity. Schulman therefore finds a way, not through straight talking but 'obliquely', as befits the order of truth, of enlisting her readers in this historical view and fuller sense of identity, situating them too as citizens, open to the kind of persuasion books might bring.

7
In the Matrix: East West Encounters

Turning the globe

The logo for BBC news broadcasts used to show a globe which turned slowly through its axis before returning to the world's European and Western face. This has been replaced by an enigmatic sequence in which an angled disc of the British Isles gives way to a series of swirling ellipses of parts of the globe. Superimposed on these images are the scrabbled, then clearing names of world cities. That this sequence has been supplemented by the channel identification of a coloured hot air balloon of the globe which floats against a variety of backgrounds, confirms that something has come adrift. Our picture of the world has been quite radically disturbed. One reason is the ubiquity and all-at-onceness of telecommunications. This development, allied to the vast influence of corporate powers operating over and above national borders and the deliberations of national governments, seems to have kicked the globe into a speeding multi-coloured blur. It's clear too, whose foot the boot is on. Globalization equals Americanization, says Thomas Friedman (1999): a thesis Time Warner and AOL showed themselves only too ready to prove in a merger which greeted the twenty first century with a power-house of world wide 'infotainment'.

At the same time, this drive towards homogeneity is contradicted by the evidence of blatant social inequalities, by cultural and ethnic difference amounting to intra-national tension and conflict and by environmental risk and ruin which invariably homes in on developing rather than developed societies. The turning globe stops to show hunger, poverty, war and the ravages of economic or 'natural' disaster. Floods wash away thousands of village homes in Bangladesh, a television set rides the mud flows destroying shanty towns in Venezuela, the East

Timorese are brutally attacked by Indonesian troops, Chechen 'rebels' withstand the threat of a once major world power. Western Europe knows these stories through images and news stories. If they seem, perhaps, to belong to another history or another world, to the deprivations of the 'Third World' or to the tortuous limbo of the Second, we are brought to know of the stark contrasts between West and North and South and East through the very media which otherwise wrap the globe in a uniform garb. Globalization reinforces privilege, but at the same time reveals its opposite and the ways in which the two are inevitably entwined. Civilization and barbarism, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, step side by side along the same historical path. And what was true of the 'modern' period is true of the late or reflexive modern. Under globalization, the processes of homogenization and disparity are bound together in a continuing paradoxical coexistence. The difference now is that this proceeds on the unprecedented scale the term 'globalization' suggests, and in the context of a wide popular knowledge which – whether complacent or protesting – is itself new.

Academic discourse has alerted us to this paradox, and in postcolonial studies provided a vocabulary to describe the transitions from colonial dependency to new hybrid ethnicities and diasporic identities which migration and cross-cultural exchange have produced. Significantly, this work has in the process helped to undercut any simple binary distinction between skin colours or the cultures and geographies of the West and non-West. Post-war immigration brought the colonial past to the door of the Empire, and by the 1990s the 'Third World' had, in a common recognition, relocated in the 'First'. An awareness of internal disparities and cultural hybridization, is accompanied, that is to say, by a new sense of ourselves in national and world space: both in the immediacy of city streets and through the technologies which connect the local with the global. In this chapter I want to shift the physical co-ordinates away from London and New York to the West Coast of the United States and to some of the cities of the Pacific Rim. In this region especially, says Fredric Jameson, narrative 'conflates ontology with geography' (1992a: 4). Once again, however, this sense of 'who we are' being as much as anything 'where we are' on the globe, has impinged upon the West as upon the East. Both hemispheres consequently overlap in a new economic and cultural world space. This is perhaps what Jameson intends by what he calls a 'geopolitical unconscious' which now joins the older 'political unconscious' in seeking to map not only our place in networks of class power, but 'our new being-in-the-world' (1992a: 3).

The perplexing question of course is who 'we' are when we view what we view and how we view it. Some of the basic points or places of reference, therefore, need first of all to be clarified. London, for example, has been an ethnically heterogeneous city for centuries. Only since the 1950s, however, as the colonial past nudged its way into the present-day life and consciousness of the former empire, has the metropolis come to a painful and still incomplete awareness of race and ethnicity as a constituent and not simply external part of its own identity. Both London – like other cities once at the core of European-based imperialism – and New York, a world city at a later stage and of a different type, must now themselves be viewed as 'post-imperial' or 'post-colonial' cities. This is not at all to say that their increasing ethnic and cultural diversity makes these cities in political and economic terms 'the same' as the cities of formerly colonized nations. As Bill Schwarz writes, 'the post-colonial city is hybrid' but nevertheless 'organized by powerful logistics' (1999: 269). These are the logistics of global capitalism and as ever favour the already advantaged. The post-colonial difference is that the conditions associated with the geography of metropolitan 'centre' and colonial 'periphery' – once set at sufficient distance to make these relations a matter of background – are now visible in these city's own populations and internal cultures. Also, since this is a 'post'-imperial or 'post'-colonial age, which carries at least in part the sense of 'coming after' colonialism, the earlier experience is not simply re-staged as a now public drama in the former host cities, but produces a different urban character with the potential at least for reflexive reappraisal, exchange and innovation.

From this point of view alone, 'West and East' cannot stand as a simple binary of opposites across a world of haves and have-nots, though Europe and the USA remain in most things hegemonic. Nor is this simply a matter of internal changes and a changed self-image in the West. Of major Eastern nations, China and Japan have had long histories as imperial powers. Tokyo had a population of over one million by the end of the eighteenth century. It 'modernized' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth expanded rapidly before and after World War Two to become the first administrative city in the world with a population of over ten million. Tokyo's recent reputation depends on the production and export of vehicles, sophisticated photographic, media and computer equipment and – despite a poor record on housing, transport, public services and wage levels (Hall, 1966, Wantanabe, 1984) – it has ranked for a generation as a global financial centre along with New York and London

(Sassen, 1991). William Gibson's novels, which I examine below, have confirmed this status, extrapolating a future cityscape, socio-economic organization, and human, or 'post-human' type from Tokyo's physical density, international business conglomerates and leadership in micro- and biotechnology.

Gibson's narratives, as we shall see, come especially to rewrite the geography of the Pacific Rim connecting the American West Coast and Japan. A further network of developing world cities with Tokyo at its core has emerged in Southern and East Asia itself, however, and this too has had a marked global impact (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998: 67–9). The first generation of 'Tiger' economies – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan – was in the 1980s, joined by Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and China. They were characterized by a phenomenal rate of economic growth (Malaysia at 8 per cent, Taiwan at 10 per cent and Shenzhen in Southern China at 20 per cent compared with the 2 per cent growth of Great Britain in this period), and the rapid construction and expansion of urban complexes, where before there was nothing or the structures of a traditional rural economy. The West watched the rise of a novel and contradictory social and economic system. The overnight appearance of expressways and skyscrapers housing the world's major corporations, and the production and use of advanced technologies has run alongside one party control, draconian civil laws, nepotism, an ambitious young middle class, lack of welfare provision and a forgotten aged and poor population on the social and shabby physical margins of the new cities. Conspicuous signs of this boom under the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad have been the completion of the (then) world's tallest building, the Petronas Towers in February 1996, the vast national stadium intended for the Commonwealth Games of 1998, and the new 'intelligent city' of 'Cyberjava', undergoing completion in 2000, 30 miles south of Kuala Lumpur.

In 1996, Martin Jacques, former editor of *Marxism Today*, greeted the 'Tiger' economies of Taiwan, Malaysia and China as a sign of the coming 'Asian century'. He asked two questions: whether they could sustain their present development and 'catch up' with the West and whether 'modernization' meant they would 'remain distinct or get more and more like us' (1996, Part One). This sounds complacently Western, even if we realize that 'Western' encodes a mentality and symbolism active beyond its geographical home (in the way that Mahathir's Petronas Towers sought to magnify Malaysian pride in the

only way they could, by outdoing the American skyscraper). In 'the grand modernist narratives', as Doreen Massey puts it, 'everyone was envisaged as part of the same history, and difference was reorganized into a historical queue, spatial difference obliterated into temporal sequence' (1999: 232). Jacques's questions tend to reinforce these assumptions, setting Asian societies on an escalator moving upwards to the West (which is where some would put themselves). In the end, however, he discovers a more incoherent picture, one which mixes economic objectives familiar to Western capitalism with political and cultural traditions which do not translate across hemispheres. He is brought therefore to recommend a process of 'learning and borrowing' between complex and porous societies and to predict a future where neither the West nor Asia will be dominant.

'Modernization means Westernization' Jacques posits at one moment, only then in 1996 to find an 'Asian style' modernization. This was not, however, the end of the story. Like many others Jacques failed to detect the signs of collapse in the 'Tiger' economies which fell, domino style, over the next two years. The reasons for the crash were commonly put down to their 'different', non-Western features: a pattern of excessive borrowing, cronyism, government support for lame-duck banks and businesses, obstacles to liquidation procedures and the deep-seated assumption of a job for life. The terms of the slow recovery – tighter and more transparent financial regulations by order of the IMF, the adoption of American style management practices and the acceptance of American ownership – have therefore seemed to turn things on their head once more. 'Modernization' turns out to mean 'Globalization' and the new century promises to look like more of the previous 'American' century. But perhaps the point is that no generalization – all Asian or all American – is accurate enough. If twenty-first century Japan has gratefully accepted American methods, Malaysia, under the indomitable Mahathir, has defied Western speculators while struggling, along with Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, against massive debts and insolvencies, compounded, notably in Indonesia, by charges of corruption, internal friction and violent disorder. While these last four economies have suffered badly, the city states of Hong Kong and Singapore, though different in themselves, and Taiwan, the longest established 'Tiger', have quite quickly established a new stability and pattern of growth. China, meanwhile, has been relatively untouched by this crash and fears of recession. The expectation is that all the 'Tigers', old and young, will pick up in the new century if at a slower rate of growth than previously. There is consequently, as

The Economist concluded, 'no single Asian model', nor is there an unqualified Western hegemony.[1]

If the markers of economic 'modernization' appear to slide and waver, so too do those defining European modernism and political or ethical modernity. London, in 1999, staged the exhibition and talks titled 'Cities on the Move' on East Asian art, architecture and film. Its subtitle 'Urban Chaos and Global Change' is haunted by an idea of order and stability, and this was compounded by an allusion to T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* in an essay titled 'Unreal City' on the exhibition by Andrew O'Hagan, one of its co-organizers. For Eliot the 'unreality' of London was of a piece with the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy' of modern life which his 'mythic method' was meant to shape and order (Kolocotroni et al., (eds.) 1998: 373). Did O'Hagan mean to endorse Eliot's idea of order along with Eliot's image of the city? It seems not, since his 'unreal city' of the East veers off towards Italo Calvino's imagined cities and the idea of 'virtuality'.[2] As in earlier chapters we can see how self-conscious (or reflexive) the translation of modernist dicta and touchstones must be if they are effectively to carry over the geo-cultural time zones of past and present.

In the same essay, O'Hagan describes the spell cast by American consumer culture and how 'hypercapitalism' is producing a world without difference and distinction. This 'chaos' he sees as tempered by the ability 'to make something human' and by the 'political or ... humanitarian' use of urban space by Asian artists (1999: np). The homogenizing forces of late capitalism therefore provoke an appeal not for a reconstituted difference but to another kind of sameness invested in the idea of a common humanity or humanitarianism. Jeremy Seabrook's (1996) study of cities in the 'developing world' of the South is motivated by a strong political commitment along these same lines. He discerns a historical rhyme between the shock of nineteenth century industrialization in Britain and the trauma experienced by rural workers encountering the foreignness of life and labour in the cities of South Asia at the end of the twentieth century. The once vital if now thinning bonds of kinship and neighbourhood in Britain are replicated, he argues, in the supportive networks of the modernizing Third World (1996: 1–3). Moreover, as globalization produces scenes of the Third World on the streets of European cities there is hope, says Seabrook, of 'a genuine and popular internationalism' of the poor, homeless and working people (1996: 301).

Both O'Hagan's and Seabrook's thinking derives from the tradition

of Western humanism; in other words from the 'modern' Enlightenment belief in the universal categories of justice and equality. Both, however, evince the difficulties of translating this project across the centuries. Firstly, because where there is possible kinship and solidarity, there is also radical difference – of the kind conferred upon new migrants by a prior knowledge of cities gained from Westernized media and consumer culture, as Seabrook concedes. Secondly, because in setting a common humanity against capitalist uniformity, they run the risk of precisely confirming rather than undermining the homogenizing logic of this same Western project. Modern globalized economies and 'deterritorialized' technologies, that is to say, threaten as much (or more), to erode a common history of oppression as to inspire the creation of a new international proletariat. Can the modern project provide the resources to think through the many questions entailed here – amongst them of identity and difference and notions of the human and political agency – which are raised anew by contemporary societies and world-cities? Fredric Jameson and Rem Koolhaas, whom I consider below, find different answers to these questions. I try in what follows to relate their ideas to the way literary and film texts respond to these issues or, indeed, pose new ones.

'The street finds its own use for things': Edward Yang and William Gibson

As is well known, Fredric Jameson writes from within a Western Marxist tradition, and his sense of contemporary postmodern society, political culture and a transformed future derives from this framework. In recent years he has given a significant lead to the study of 'Third World' literary and film texts in the context of postmodernism and globalization (1986, 1992a). Though the system of late capitalism in his view regularly defeats comprehension and is beyond representation, we try all the same to name and to know this totality. Since, what is more, our knowledge can only be by definition limited and incomplete, we must do this, Jameson suggests, in the only way possible – through an allegorical method which sees the whole in the part. Jameson transposes this method from Hegelian Marxism, and attempts to construe the postmodern from the modernist political project this tradition helped inspire. His own method, that is to say, and the method he detects in 'Third World' films, is an instance of the very transitional nature of this moment; one in which concepts and procedures from Western traditions (along with the images and idioms

of consumer or media society) are transcoded, spliced and reset in new non-Western texts and contexts. In general terms, this is a type of the inevitable 'reflexivity' I have discussed earlier, but we need to appreciate too the kinds of difficulty I have outlined above. For if late modern Western societies are brought to adopt a reflexive dialogue with their own pasts, the history of colonialism and post-colonialism tells us that this past has never been hermetically and only Western. The resulting dialogue, as the East or South speak back to the West or North, works over the experience of imperialism and the economic and cultural influence of global capitalism upon the 'local' or regional histories of non-Western or 'Third World' territories. The outcomes of this dialogue cannot be described in the language of linear development or of straightforward, one-way assimilation but more in the, appropriately cack-handed, 'uneven developmental-language' Jameson enlists to describe the 'belated emergence of a kind of modernism in the modernizing Third World, at a moment when the so-called advanced countries are themselves sinking into full postmodernity' (1992a: 1). Jameson is highlighting here 'the residues of the modern' he finds in the Taiwanese Edward Yang's film, *Terrorizer* (1986), and I want to discuss this film before coming on to other film and literary texts. For all their differences, the visual or prose style and narratives in these examples suggest the high degree of textual and cultural reflexivity now almost inevitably involved in the depiction of urban based identities where local and global meet. A world so saturated with narratives and images, as with other goods, runs all too evidently to repetition and excess, and thus to redundancy and waste. For Jameson, in his most pessimistic mood, art sinks under this weight, condemned to repeat the past where everything new has already been invented. I think we would do better to put this as a question. Can the old be reconditioned and made to operate once more for a new purpose? Can waste be effectively recycled? Can a story be re-accented in a new language or narrative form? Can identities be reinvented?

Terrorizer answers these questions in the affirmative. The film's central narrative (one of three overlapping stories) concerns a doctor and a former editor who has abandoned a career in publishing to write fiction. This situation helps engender the film's governing reflections on fiction and reality, deception and authenticity. The characters conduct this debate in the kind of explicit exchange characteristic of the French 'New Wave', thereby connecting the film to the 'global' history of cinema, but at the price of a belated and somewhat vulnerable 'modernist' air. However, Yang's film, rather than the characters,

comes to give all this a 'local' and sophisticated inflection. Jameson says the novelist is blocked. The truth is she is blocked by the limited circumstances of her married life and one kind of novel writing about it. The trigger for her rewriting is a malicious 'phone call from a Eurasian hustler loosely involved in drugs and prostitution, called 'white doll', and now confined with a broken leg in her mother's apartment. All the characters are confined or imprisoned in some way and all tell stories, some of which are wanton or self-deluding lies. 'White doll's' telephone lies are the connecting point for the other stories. The novelist responds to the call to her by going to the apartment 'white doll' names. She realizes the story of her husband's adultery is false, but uses this plot to rewrite her novel in a new mode.

Her model is neither modernist nor Western, but 'Japanese suspense fiction'. The genre elements of betrayal, murder and suicide transform her novel into a prize-winning success and they shape, or appear to shape, her husband's fate in the film's ensuing narrative. She maintains throughout that fiction and life are different and the ending of the film upholds this distinction – one the dull husband who 'only knows routine' and never reads novels, cannot accept. He has lost his wife and failed to gain promotion. The final scenes show him shooting his boss, tracking down his wife and lover and the 'white doll'. As the police arrive, the camera shows a wall splattered with blood in what turns out to be the scene of his suicide in the bathroom of his friend, the cop leading the investigation. The sound of a gunshot wakes the cop and the novelist. The story we have seen is their joint dream or her dream in which her husband and the cop are characters. Jameson suggests the cop's non-Western style flat and bathroom – the scene of friendship and suicide – give the film its bearings in a distinctive local Taiwanese culture. But the 'local' here is differentiated, and on another level (of class and gender), represented by the woman and her novel, Taiwan finds a resource in Japan. The inspiration of 'Japanese suspense fiction' means that the bureaucratized life of American-style late capitalism, which has produced the loveless ordinariness of the middle-class marriage and thus blocks her writing ('the couple have a problem' she writes and stops), can be crossed through and begun again. She, at least, has a new life and the idea perhaps for another new style novel.

Like *Terrorizer*, the following examples are, to confirm Jameson, 'about art itself in a new kind of way'. That their essential message is, in his words, 'the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past' (1992b: 169), is far less

certain, however. I want, in fact, to point precisely to an aesthetic of revisioning or rewriting which contradicts such a message. *Terrorizer* serves to announce this aesthetic. Also, if these examples are about art they are 'about' more than art. Notably, in a way which generalizes this very feature, they are about the accessibility of the past, its redundant or waste products, survival or recreation. For, not surprisingly, even in a post-realist age, the changes outlined above in global economies, national and urban identities do more than condition and frame new art and writing: they provide its immediate subject, both in descriptive and narrative detail and, as Jameson suggests, as allegorical trope. Nowhere is this more true than in contemporary SF, a genre otherwise, or so we assume, about neither the past nor present but the future.

Science fiction is the invention of the twentieth century, a popular literature specializing in parables of modernity which, thanks to Henry James's and Virginia Woolf's low opinion of the broad social realism of its English founder, H.G. Wells, found itself *persona non grata* in the literary house of 'modernism'. Peter Keating argues this amounted to a misjudgement of Wells, who was as alive as Virginia Woolf to the change in human character 'in or about 1910' she saw in contemporary London (Woolf, 1992: 70; Keating, 1984: 135–139). In effect, the modernist reaction to Wells betrayed a failure or unwillingness (as much a matter of social class as of aesthetic taste), to recognize another modernism, one more directly engaged with modernization, and thus to see the latter in a more positive light. The divisions were, however, set between modernist and realist, high and low, minority and mass literature. Only in the reflexivity signalling the postmodern from the 1980s, has non-genre 'serious' literature and SF combined to produce in cyberpunk fiction something like a new mode combining science, technology, the language of the street and 'literary' technique. Once announced, cyberpunk discovered its own mongrelized provenance in the theoretical texts of postmodernism and the cult texts and figures of the Anglo-American counterculture, ranging from Ballard, Burroughs and Pynchon to Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, the Sex Pistols and predecessors on the fringe of mainstream SF, such as Alfred Bester and a major player such as Philip K. Dick (see McCaffery, 1991: 7–29).

Cyberpunk therefore magnetized a broad community of literary, media and popular cultural texts beyond the obvious front-runners, and spoke across different generations and subcultures from the sixties counterculture to seventies punk and eighties hackers. A hall of fame

in which Johnny Rotten partnered Jean-François Lyotard suggested something new was afoot: nothing less, said Bruce Sterling, than 'an unholy alliance' of science, technology and 'street level anarchy', its product, the monstrous hybrid of computer hacker and punk rocker (1988: x). Sterling might have added the leitmotifs of postmodern theory: a loss of history, fragmented subjectivity, the power of the image and simulacrum. These themes run through the work of an author such as Philip K. Dick whose *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*? (1968) inspired the cyberpunk movie *Blade Runner* (1982, 1991). Seeing the opening of this film Gibson felt compelled to leave the cinema, fearing it had got there before him. He was in fact confirming the intertextuality of a common cultural mood.

Another of Gibson's acknowledged predecessors, J.G. Ballard, had earlier pointed to a 'death of affect' as 'the most sinister casualty of the century' (1996: 91).[3] Ballard's double source is Salvador Dali and Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* and as this suggests, the original civilization in question had been that of modern rather than late modern society. As we have seen, early commentators felt the metropolis threatened the patterns of open exchange and human affection on which traditional communities were founded. The later fear is that the capacity to feel freely and deeply is no longer held in reserve, as Georg Simmel observed, but is indeed forgotten and lost. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, humans have to deliberately engender feelings by stepping onto an 'empathy box'. What is deemed essentially human can only be experienced as a supplement which confirms its actual lack. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* builds its problematic sense of the human around the capacity to feel, or more precisely, as in Dick's ur-text, to empathize. The replicants reveal themselves as non-human by their inability to show feeling for other forms of human and animal life.

Blade Runner must count as a major allegory of the compound anxieties of a coming post-human age. It introduced a generation of viewers to the figure of the cyborg who, unlike the robot which confirms a difference between the human and the machine, amalgamates the organic with the technological to the point of blurring distinctions between them. In other ways too, *Blade Runner* popularized the idea of a loss of depth and historical sense announced by postmodern theory, both in its own intertextual echoes across a surface of film and genre fiction (notably forties' *noir* and detective fiction) and thematically in the plight of the replicants who strive to conform to the human and collect photographs as 'evidence' of an

authentic past. The film extends the ambiguities of the replicant to the protagonist Deckard, and its main meaning is often taken to derive from his problematic identity. The 'Director's cut' of 1991, especially, drops sufficient clues, cryptic and incoherent though they are, to suggest Deckard might himself be a replicant. That is to say, we might all be victims of the 'death of affect', the unconscious products of a sequence of images and simulated emotions 'programmed' into us as a personal history. In fact, however, one might argue the contrary: that Deckard, the 'cold fish' of the film's opening, comes to 'feel more' in recognizing some affinity with the replicants and in 'feeling love' for Rachael. We need the inverted commas here because the love match of replicant and human seems based on a repertoire of mechanical and learned actions. Still, there is enough to suggest a bond of feeling where there was none. Elsewhere, too, when he scans a photograph in such a way as to produce a clue from within the depths of its flat surface, Deckard contradicts the received wisdom on the one-dimensional superficiality of the postmodern. In the figure of Deckard, the posthuman retains traditional humanist attributes of respect for the enemy, heterosexual passion and a near instinctual pursuit of truth behind or beneath the superficial image. This heuristic, vertical ordering of the world is reinforced, moreover, by the film's depiction of 'them' (the cops and Tyrell) and 'us', where 'they' are associated with a physical high point of power and surveillance above the city and 'we' (along with Deckard and the replicants) are entangled at street level with the dangers and confinement of a dystopian future city. In a further conventional trope, this struggle opens the prospect of freedom in another, better place, which the first version of the film depicts as a ruralized idyll awaiting the elected couple.

The place Deckard and Rachael escape from is, of course, Los Angeles, the chosen city of the near future in Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1996) and the archetype of the postmodern metropolis in the writings of Jameson, Edward Soja and Mike Davis. In *Blade Runner*, this is a world of pollution and corrupt power, advanced technology and decrepitude, consumerism and forced labour in which the 'little people' of East and West crowd the streets under conditions of stark inequality. For Jameson, Los Angeles is the site of the Bonaventure Hotel, a 'symbol and analgon' of the cognitive disorientation of the postmodern subject in postmodern space (1991: 44). For Mike Davis (1990), LA is a fortress wired to protect the privileged while for Edward Soja (2000), it is already a 'postmetropolis'. From LA, so it seems, having arrived at the end of the Western world, we can see the future. Effectively we are there already. It

is odd then that LA makes little to no appearance in the work of the acknowledged leading chronicler of a cyberpunk future, William Gibson. In *Idoru* (1996), LA is home to the sadistic TV tabloid 'news' corporation, Slitscan. In *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999), a formal partition has divided California and Los Angeles and San Francisco 'seemed more like different planets than different cities' (84). Gibson's future has come in this novel to pivot in the latter, the hippy playground of the sixties, but has swung this way only in his second trilogy (comprising *Virtual Light*, *Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties*) after the earlier stories and novels had moved back and forth between the 'Sprawl' of the American East coast and Tokyo.

But if the cultural and ideological home of Gibson's future settles after all in the United States, the world of his fiction has been stretched into its distinctive geography by the pull of South Asian territories, especially North America's mirror image and leading competitor, Japan. Bruce Sterling welcomed Gibson's fiction for presenting us with 'credible futures' after decades of space fantasy and tales of sword and sorcery (1987: x). In a sense, one might think it is the present rather than the future which Gibson has made credible, not least in confirming the changed geography and idioms which have accompanied the growing power of the multinationals, the influence of information and media networks, and the more shadowy neuro- and biotechnologies of our own time. But the question of credibility seems hardly relevant. After all, for all the texture he brings to the large facts of social and economic modernity, Gibson imagined Chiba City in *Neuromancer* without having visited Japan – just as for many years he avoided using the Net, though he had coined its dominant metaphors. The source of the fiction is not the future (how could it be?), no more all of the present, but shards and sections of the past and present together. Like the girl Sandii in an early story '*New Rose Hotel*', who remakes her past and thus her present self as if out of a 'scattered deck' of cards (1987a: 109), Gibson shuffles the modern with the post-modern, the jargon of the street with the science lab, and the East with the West to create an idea or effect of the future. His method is one of both casual and deliberate collage and his stories, obviously enough but quite crucially, are imagined fictions, drawing on a 'musée imaginaire' – 'stitching together all the junk that's floating around in my head' as he puts it (McCaffery, 1991: 277). Gibson, as Sterling notes, is a 'retrofitter' (1987: xii), a 'bricoleur' working over the past as Jameson says contemporary artists are bound to do. In a notoriously cryptic note, Jameson enlists Gibson's cyberpunk as 'the supreme *literary*

expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself' (1991: 419, n.1). Does this mean he imitates 'dead styles' or renovates them, that he reproduces the cultural logic of capitalism or resists it?

Critical opinion has in fact argued both ways. Cyberpunk and Gibson are seen in turn as uniquely exploring the gamut of contemporary 'political, philosophical, moral and cultural issues', as a mere 'marketing strategy' (Wolmark, 1993: 109), or as finally 'complicitous with the owners and managers of the culture industry' and multinationals (McCaffery, 1991: 364). In part, readings such as these result from different reactions to late capitalism, the role of technology and notions of the human on the part of Gibson's critics, but they point also to a central ambiguity in the texts themselves, most evidently in the works of the 'Sprawl' series, which the novels of the second trilogy then go some way to resolve. This is related to different conceptions and treatments of space. Gibson's concept of 'cyberspace' has been frequently cited as his original contribution to SF and to the world of information technology beyond it. The term is a way of naming the place behind the computer screen where data is stored and protected. It helps accentuate not only the importance of information and of multinationals in today's global economies, but the distance at which this system operates from individuals who play a bemused and expendable part in its operation. The prevailing mood is one of paranoia and though this is borne with some panache by those who are caught up in the system's enigmatic grand narratives, it does not alter the basic configuration of lone individual in thrall to unknowable powers. The limited transaction across these extremes is reinforced by descriptions of cyberspace as simultaneously 'out there' in the matrix, and 'in here' in the cerebral cortex.

The central protagonists in the Sprawl dramas are white, male and North American. For all their deconstruction and remaking of identity and image, there is no serious consideration of a change of biological sex and none at all of race or ethnicity. Women are accomplices, betrayers and occasional lovers, but it would be a mistake to confuse Gibson's frail male heroes with the beefcake cyborgs of contemporary film. Sex is like jacking into the matrix (or the reverse), an ecstatic out-of-body experience. But sex as such is rare. Women are the objects of desire and thus unobtainable. For Bobby Quine in '*Burning Chrome*', they are an essential but idealized inspiration. He steers his life by them, turning them into platonic 'emblems, sigils on the map of his hustler's life, navigation beacons . . .' (1987a: 176). Accordingly in this psycho-sexual scheme, women are 'unreal' or 'posthuman' figures,

their bodies enhanced to the point of distortion by surgical augmentation or converted into pure image, producing at the end of this particular chain of evolution, the Idoru or 'idol-singer', Rei Toei, 'a personality-construct, a congeries of software agents, the creation of information-designers' (1997: 92). Male bit-part characters (Deane, Armitage, Finn in *Neuromancer*) are similarly comprised of layered self-images but are given to connivance and calculation rather than action; they are creatures of the mind not body, and in the case of Mitchell in *Count Zero* and Dixie Flatline in *Neuromancer,* no more than a brain in a tub or box.

These experiments in the posthuman are conducted either side of the central protagonists who, as in *Blade Runner*, eventually confirm the normative codes of liberal humanism. Even so, the masculine, while privileged, serves in Gibson as the vehicle of a deeper anxiety beneath the pose of hip self-sufficiency. In the early '*New Rose Hotel*', the narrator, betrayed by the beautiful Sandii, is confined in a coffin and awaits his inevitable discovery by the Hosaka, 'the biggest zaibatzu of all' (1987a: 104). In *All Tomorrow's Parties,* Laney is holed up in a cardboard dwelling on the Tokyo subway. Throughout, Gibson is led to sketch similar allegories of postmodern paranoia and centrelessness: a condition which explains the characters' repeated predicament as reluctant, uncomprehending agents for corporations and their quest for oneness in a matrix of all consuming data. 'Religion rumbles all over the place in Gibson', says Samuel Delany (1988: 33). Mysticism and metaphysics certainly echo through cyberspace: from the cosmic unity of the AIs at the end of *Neuromancer* and the invocation of Voodoo overseers in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), to the prospective 'marriage' in the cathedral of data between Lo Rez and the Idoru, and Laney's disappearance into the nowhere of pure consciousness in *All Tomorrow's Parties*.

Brian McHale sees cyberspace as an 'inset world' or paraspace, a plane of mental and virtual reality 'parallel to the primary reality plane' (1992: 155, 156). The latter are the urban sites and enclaves of the Sprawl on the American East Coast and their equivalent in Tokyo and Chiba. In these places, Gibson paints a heterogeneous microworld, 'an image of the carnivalised city', says McHale, akin to Foucault's 'heterotopia' (154). The life of these urban scenes corresponds to the shifts and turns in Gibson's prose style as it runs familiar and invented brand names, technologies and places together across a jittery backdrop, or holds an item up for inspection with a connoisseur's eye. Collage and 'superspecificity' learned from Dashiell Hammet's 'cranked up' naturalism

(McCaffery, 1991: 269) combine in what Gibson sees as a kind of surrealism to create buildings and cities of layered times and styles in a jigsawed urban geography. It is a mistake, however, to see these scenes as the whole to which cyberspace is a part. The latter is an out-of-body experience which answers, in the early stories and conspicuously in *Neuromancer*, to the individual male protagonist's distaste for the 'meat' of the body and desire for harmonious transcendence. Cyberspace draws individuals beyond the material world to a 'no-place' outside human society. In short, it functions as a metaphor for crossing over from this life to death, which McHale otherwise points to as a driving impulse in the fiction (1992: 166–173).

Jenny Wolmark emphasizes the contrast between the two realms of cyber and urban space, and finds in the latter a borderless domain whose affinities with the feminine, as she sees it, implicitly critique the stories' dominant male orientation (1993: 117–19). But these areas are not borderless, nor without physically and socially marked distinctions. The city streets are alive with 'biz', they are hybridized, fluent, dangerous and competitive, threaded by assassins, spies and stalkers but composed too of collectivities: of gangs, subcultures and communities such as the Lo Teks of 'Johnny Mnemonic', the 'Panther Moderns' and the Rastafarian 'Zion colony' of *Neuromancer*, or the Gothicks and Kasuals of *Count Zero*, who have their own look, argot, and territories. What is more these marginal groups locate themselves to the side of or above the city. Thus, the Lo Teks live in a nest of catwalks, rope ladders, webs and hammocks above the fabric of Chiba City, (1987a: 14, 16), while the 'Zion Cluster' plots the end of Babylon from a makeshift space station, a hull reminiscent of 'the patchwork tenements of Istanbul' (1986: 127).

The disembodied unity and oneness of cyberspace contrasts markedly therefore with the hybrid, worldly, politicized and jealously guarded territories of Gibson's urban spaces. While, in the early fiction, cyberspace bonds the individual with cosmic forces, the urban sites set him or her in the frazzled mainstream world of commerce and the suspicious but supportive networks of oppositional communities. These distinctions continue in the second trilogy, but Gibson moves here too beyond the stark contrast of individual white male in cyberspace and the hybrid collectivities nestled within or above urban space. The most developed and relevant examples are the 'Walled City' (of *Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties*), a rebuilding in virtual space of the destroyed Kowloon City of Hong Kong and the 'Bridge people' of *Virtual Light* and *All Tomorrow's Parties*, who have occupied the San

Francisco Bay Bridge and made it their own. Both are the site of oppositional or alternative communities which as Gibson indicates (see his 'Preface' to *Idoru*), and as the story of *All Tomorrow's Parties* suggests, have, for him, a physical and ideological affinity with each other. In the latter novel, the Bridge and all it represents is threatened by a public relations conglomerate representing global clients who want it made safe for tourism. To this end Harwood, the richest spin-doctor on the globe, has helped install the Singaporean based convenience store 'Lucky Dragon' at a strategic point of the opening of the Bridge. The novel falters because the project to employ nanotechnology to transfer an object from one Lucky Dragon outlet to another across a global network, while potentially dire, hardly seems to signal 'the end of the world as we know it' as Laney intuits. It does foreground Gibson's real world sympathies, however. The Bridge people have claimed the bridge as an 'autonomous zone' and construct a web of dwellings upon its steel frame from the recycled waste products of mainstream society. The Bridge is set on fire but the Bridge people are warned in time, by the bugging techniques of members of the Walled City net site who in defeating Harwood see a way of furthering their own eco-campaign for 'a radical urban reconfiguration' in Mexico City (1999: 177).

All Tomorrow's Parties reflects directly upon the dual theme of history and oppositional collectives. History is now 'a shape', says Laney who subsequently drops from sight into metaphysical coexistence with the Idoru there to make contact with his own troubled past. In their different ways the Walled City and Bridge offer a contrary sense of history, social collectivity and political purpose. The Walled City (or 'Hak Nam') reconstructs the anarchic, alternative community of Kowloon, built up layer by layer from its mid-nineteenth century beginnings and destroyed in 1993. Neither a MUD (multi-user domain) for dropouts ('Otaku') or exclusive 'boy thing' (88), the Walled City is 'unlike anything' (125). Like the Bridge, it develops the many earlier references in Gibson to the use of 'gomi', kipple and waste and to the way 'the street finds its own use' for the discarded goods and technology of mainstream society.[4] The key issue in *Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties* is less the control of information as such than the control of nanotechnology, which builds 'out of whatever's handy' (1997: 196). It is being used in Tokyo to rebuild the city after a quake and is the lynch pin of Harwood's plans. The Walled City 'has no address' (125), but Chia dreams finally in *Idoru* that it will take physical form as an island in Tokyo Bay, growing out of the 'wrack and wreckage of the world before things changed … a thing of random

human accretion, monstrous and superb, it is being reconstituted here, retranslated from its later incarnation as a realm of consensual fantasy' (289). Cyberspace is appropriated and as it were materialized.

In *All Tomorrow's Parties* this ethic of creative recycling is embodied in Fontaine who runs 'a 'junk shop' where he displays the bric-a-brac and especially the watches and clocks of yesteryear. Like the makers of the Walled City, he repairs the objects and machinery of past time for local community use – notably, in making a '"funicular" ... junkyard elevator trolley' for a disabled friend (1999: 81). In this novel, after the defeat of Harwood, the community finds its own use for nanotechnology, employing it in a 'restoration bed' in the shop now run by Silencio who has found himself and his voice.

Both Hak Nam and the Bridge preserve the old and convert the new in defiance of the commercial ends of global conglomerates. There were once Bohemian enclaves, says Harwood, 'alternative subcultures ... where industrial culture went to dream ... [of] ... alternate societal strategies' (174). These are now extinct, gone 'the way of geography in general', but are replaced by 'autonomous zones', like the Bridge community, which are insulated from the monoculture and are more resistant to commodification (174). 'Autonomous zones' have evolved out of their modernist precursors, making them, we might say, 'reflexively modern': an oppositional social form marked by an ethic of co-operation and conservation and an aesthetic of recycling. Gibson and Sterling's co-authored *The Difference Engine* (1990) had pilloried the collaborative ethic of a 'Marxist Commune' in Manhattan, but Gibson's argument for the restoration of use-value over exchange-value effectively re-circuits a key Marxist insight through the libertarian anarchism and hippy communitarianism of the 1960s. It is in the idea of collective restoration, reinvention and resistance, pitting spontaneous random growth against corporate planning, in places such as the Walled City and the Bridge, that his stylistic collage finds an echoing thematic substance and critical edge.

Starting over: Wong Kar-Wai and Lawrence Chua

Gibson transplants the 'Walled City' from Kowloon in China to a virtual place in Tokyo, layering the idea of an 'autonomous zone' into the strata of his favoured far Eastern metropolis. His choice of city is underlined by his reaction to Singapore. It felt, he said, like 'Disneyland with the death penalty', a 'micromanaged ... Swiss-watch' environment where 'conformity ... is the prime directive ... and

people have … "the policeman inside"' (1994: 15, 16, 20). Singapore's cleanliness and discipline unsettle him, threatening a future when free expression and 'the fuzzier brands of creativity' (15), will be shut down. Nervously, he hurries from the spotless Changi Airtopolis to Hong Kong, eager for a sight of the 'mismatched, uncalculated windows' of the Walled City while it was still standing (20).

Gibson's account not only confirms the anarcho-populism at the centre of his work, but, so Rem Koolhaas, architect and theorist of the metropolis, would suggest, the Western basis of this perspective on the East. Tokyo, says Koolhaas, appeals to Western sensibilities because of its 'chaotic, unplanned, random nature' (1997: 98). Singapore presents a more difficult challenge and calls for a more modest recognition of a different political and social order: in some respects unfree, in others free (105–6). Rather than denouncing an alien and 'ugly' system Koolhaas forced himself, he says, to seek out the 'possibilities for doing variant work', where there was blandness and uniformity, working 'with it, in it.' (107). Singapore is a prime instance of what Koolhaas comes to describe as the 'Generic City': a metropolis without identity or character: homogenous, serene and vacant, and though international now, the prominent type of Asian city (1995: 1011–1089; 1248–1264). The 'Generic City' is 'the city without history' (1995: 1250), built upon a *tabula rasa*, upwards out of the flattened terrain of former villages or where colonialism had imposed its physical presence. Post-colonial governments are driven to start anew, Koolhaas argues, and, in this respect like earlier authoritarian regimes, are ruthless in wiping out the past (1995: 1019; 1997: 99–100,105). Unlike the distended palimpsest of the historic Western metropolis which can only become more of the same (1995: 1248),[5] these 'post-cities' (1995: 1252) have flattened the imbalance of centre and periphery and face the future in a regular arrangement of well-spaced and interchangeable skyscrapers. To Gibson's postmodern urban landscape of marginal zones and niches, of frenzied 'biz' and the magic of nanotechnology which builds out of what is to hand, there stands the futurist project of the 'Generic City' whose most highly differentiated space is the anonymous airport (1995: 1251), a place of waiting, emptiness and jet propelled lift-off, which might serve only to link you, in Gibson's worst scenario, to a second airport and 'Generic City' cloned from the first.

At the same time, Koolhaas's generalizations trail a number of qualifications and contradictions. For while it is homogenous, the 'Generic City' is also multicultural and multi-ethnic (1995: 1252). While it is

decentred and monotonous it is 'equally exciting – or unexciting – everywhere' and 'can produce a new identity every Monday morning' (1995: 1250). While it appears calm, it is caught up in a whirlwind of perpetual change. Above all, the rhythm of rapid turnover, of demolition and building from scratch which projects it forward, ironically realizes the ambitions of architectural modernism at a time when these were discredited and anachronistic in the West. The inspiration for the Singapore of the sixties was the modernism of Le Corbusier ('I scrap everything at once' he cried).[6] But if the newness of the 'Generic City' is the belated expression of the 'international style', Singapore, says Koolhaas, gave modernism only a 'lobotomized' half-life, releasing the 'mechanistic, rationalistic' forces of modernization while it shed 'modernism's artistic, irrational, uncontrollable subversive ambitions' (1995: 1041). At the same time, the city has gone on through later decades to produce a hybrid 'Confucian postmodernism' (1995: 1077), bringing traditional Asian ornamentation to the unadorned skyscraper housing of the earlier period. Histories are repeated, selectively and in new combinations.

At some point, therefore, the loose ends unravel, as Koolhaas realizes. The sameness of the Asian generic city which distinguishes it from the different sameness of Western global cities, is met by the internal differences of cities across the Pacific Rim: as, for example, between Tokyo and Singapore, or the latter's 'Confucian postmodern' and the 'Islamic postmodernism' of Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers. We are reminded of how the common economic crisis of the late 1990s played itself out differently across the region – bringing a literal halt to major building projects in a further jolt to the look of its cities. 'Asian cities are all different', says Koolhaas, 'there is no Asian condition' (1997: 106, 117). Unless, that is, we view this condition as an unstable compound of sameness and difference, the effect of a resurgent modernism, newly sited this time in Asia and in the context of globalization. In such a complex and volatile force field, the regimented order of the 'Generic' can exist in an arbitrary tension with the unruly density of 'postmodernism', in the streets of individual cities, as across the region. The condition then, as Foucault characterizes the contemporary epoch, is one 'of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered' (1999: 350).

As if to underline this state of affairs, Koolhaas's 'Generic City', though contrasted with the more familiar kind of postmodern metropolis, would seem to be the very expression in urban design of postmodernism's most common themes: namely 'the death of affect'

and 'the loss of history'. In turn, postmodern literary and film texts seem to embody the features of the 'Generic City'. The films of the Hong Kong director, Wong Kar-Wai, are remarkable proof of this correspondence. Thus, in *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Fallen Angels* (1995), especially, the spaced intervals and emptiness Koolhaas describes are replicated in the emotional distance and vacancy of the characters, while the rapid turnover and future orientation of city building projects find an echo in the provisionality and yearning of their lives and in the very manner of filmic narration.[7]

Hong Kong is multicultural, multi-ethnic and postmodern: a global economic capital in which government and organized crime exercise tight control (Cuthbert, 1995). The lives of the young professionals and criminals in Wong's films replicate its patterns of flexible accumulation and unrelenting commodification but are also 'generic' in the terms Koolhaas outlines. Their stories intersect and mirror each other against the fauvist backdrop of the speeding, crowded metropolis but are without sustained connection. Simple daily routines and shy romance share the streets with drug running, gambling rackets and contract killings but pass each other by. Relationships are short-term and interchangeable: like jobs they come and go, like building blocks they amount to more of the same. The stories of the two young policeman known by their numbers in *Chungking Express*, seem to seep into each other – the second policeman becomes the owner of the snack bar they both visit and the snack bar girl becomes an air hostess like his first girlfriend. She dreams of California to the repeated sounds of 'California dreaming' on the soundtrack and abruptly leaves Hong Kong, only on her return to declare California was 'so-so'. Meanwhile, the lonely young policemen talk themselves out of their heartbreak, the first measuring out his grief by the arbitrary calculation of the calendar date of his birthday, the coincidence of his girlfriend's name Mai, and – in a figure which sums up much else in the films – the sell-by date on pineapple tins.

If these lives recall the reserve, apartness and reification of the modernist city they are, we realize, quite without its gravity. Any trace or echo of the past is unnoticed. The slate is wiped clean so that like the Generic City they can start over. One type (of domestic utensil, article of clothing, job, girlfriend or boyfriend), can be replaced or replicated like a generic unit from district to district. But just as loose ends escape the uniformities of the 'Generic City', so the films come to suggest non-conformity and indeterminacy rather than the blank

regularities of the generic. The lives of these twenty-somethings are not simply without emotional commitment and any significant history or purpose, they are defined against these things – as a recognized norm. In *Fallen Angels,* notably, this is a middle class norm of marriage, career and money-making (reminiscent of the life of the doctor in *Terrorizer*), from which the young professional killer, Wong Chi-Ming, has consciously 'fallen' into the criminal underworld. Alternatively, these are the things, or a version of the things the characters do want in life, but cannot achieve. This is especially evident in *Happy Together* (1997). The film tells of two gay lovers who have left Hong Kong for Buenos Aires. They part, meet again and bicker, care for and love each other, but though one speaks regularly of 'starting over' they never do. 'Happiness together' is a fleeting though precious memory for one character only, Lai, when alone. The film questions the easiness of the norm of the 'happy couple' in the irony of its title – for this is a story about unhappiness – and in subverting the norms of stay-at-home heterosexuality. Most importantly, however, the past here cannot be thrown off. Lai's sadness is alleviated by the lesson of another exile, Chang, from Taiwan, who demonstrates a cheerful independence and offers a different kind of non-sexual male friendship. Lai misses Chang when he travels later to Taiwan, but returns finally to Hong Kong not as a 'type' to the same, 'generic' place, but in an altered mood which builds the experience of the past into the person he can now be in this city. It looks as if there can a tolerable, happy single life, located in time and place if not this time and place. Lai is making a new start, but not from a *tabula rasa*.

I want to conclude with the mention of a writer whose work relates to many of the above themes, but who explores them in the context of less established regions than the global centres of Tokyo, Singapore or Hong Kong. Lawrence Chua is Asian-American, born in Thailand and living and writing in New York. He has written on Seoul in South Korea, three interconnected prose essays on Beirut, New York City and Cyberjava, south of Kuala Lumpur, and as editor of *Muae*, has overseen a range of contributions on the art and culture of South East and East Asia.

Chua's first novel *Gold by the Inch* (1999) returns a character from a failed gay relationship in New York to Bangkok, Thailand. The unnamed narrator (who uses the forms 'I' and 'you' of himself) returns 'home' in search of affection and to recover a hidden truth in his personal and family history. When the passion of a new relationship

with Thong, a young male prostitute in Bangkok, cools, he journeys to his birthplace, George Town, Penang, which he left with his parents for New York when he was ten. His father has died in Orlando, Florida, surrounded by mementoes and the dead objects of US consumer culture. Together the father and capitalism have obscured the past. The life of the narrator's Chinese grandmother has in particular remained a mystery. But what seems like a 'tabula rasa . . . a clean slate' (48), to start the story his father wouldn't tell is far from that. As he seeks to uncover this past he charts the political history of colonialism and the newer power of the multinationals, in passages which carry an evident authorial polemic. In the present, modernization runs apace without regulation. His architect brother is drawn into the national programme of rebuilding, but in an evident trope for its shoddiness and cynicism, the office block he builds in Siam Square collapses (20, 198).[8]

Capitalist profiteering has invaded everything, past and present, and globalization has stamped 'MADE IN USA' upon the face of the world (78). The body has long borne the mark of imperialism and Thong, too, belongs to the world of commodified sex in thrall to the power of the US dollar. The narrator exposes but cannot counter or convert this false world to an authentic history or to love not money. His 'search for origins' (70) slips across an unyielding surface. Determined to find a photograph of his grandmother, he seizes on one from a street trader though it 'could be any grandmother' (107). The story he must make (up) himself (43) collapses, for in the end, 'There are no stories here', only residual images full of incoherent messages: 'A matrix. Pregnant with inconsistencies and catastrophes, delusions and discoveries.' (113). Place is synthetic; home unfixed: 'the same' but 'Nothing . . . the way you remember it' (46). In Bangkok an elephant in a traffic jam slides the 'premodern . . . the postmodern', and the 'antimodern' into uneasy juxtaposition (17). George Town becomes 'a montage of attractions' where buildings pull, clash, liquefy – bent 'on a perpetual flight forward' (65, 79).

On all counts, whether encoded by sexuality, class, education, language, colour or culture, identity here is fraught and disjointed. US dollars give the narrator status and mobility but not love. He is neither a tourist nor a Western exploiter, but neither is he a native. He has an awkward and limited command of Thai and needs a dictionary to speak to Thong. He is lighter and darker in different people's perceptions (133, 201), and much of his thinking is rendered in a discourse on the body and skin as the surface on which tensions within the self

and with the world are enacted at the self's outermost edge. There is no stable body or place to inhabit and 'no prepackage of identity or ethnic heritage left to possess' (135). The 'local' cannot present an alternative to the 'global' which manipulates and compromises its authenticity and itself has 'no fixed address' (24). A corrupted Asia cannot supplant the West, while the Western presence itself, personified by a Danish masochist or angry, frustrated servicemen provoke fantastic revenge. The narrator prepares to leave but has no sure destination other than the airport and a flight which could take him 'anywhere' (205). He takes a 'memory killer' and in a final sequence in LA, the city of angels, offers his body as a surface for ski trails of coke; an urban skein beneath which runs a network of roads; and as the text of this story. The reader is tricked into participating but if s/he expects 'some kind of closure' (208) they are disappointed. The scene in LA, it turns out, was a dream of another place from *this* place before his departure. The narrator ends at a point of transit and expectation with the lies of 'pure fiction' (205) to build on.

In the essay 'All Fall Down', Chua writes of capitalism's repression of dream and imagination (1997: 16–17). In his novel the capacity to dream is rescued from beneath the rubble. His response to modernity's narrative of 'progress' is the novel's indeterminacies of voice, identity and destiny. To the fictions of rootedness, the myths of colonial prejudice and the deceptions of commodified culture, his story replies with the 'matrix' of mixed blood, history and sexuality and 'dreams of colliding worlds' (1998: 113). But still, dreams, like the fantasy at the novel's end, which remembers the time in a city when 'I last shared my body with you' (207), build possibilities out of the past. Chua speaks here for an aesthetic of 'rewriting', 're-invention' or 'rebuilding' shared by those discussed above. Plainly, his commitment is less 'grounded' than theirs: there is no saving alternative of love or friendship and even less of a supportive community or subculture – or if there is, it lies outside this book in the diaspora of critical voices such as are assembled in the journal *Muae*.[9] From a world of repressive social narratives, Chua retrieves a montage of images: thus, a relationship is like 'a rocket or a bridge' (32), the city ('a perpetual flight forward'), a projectile which shoots him forward out of place into time. The story the novel tells is that in a world of lies, the truth resides not in one place, or one body or one language, but elsewhere, anywhere: in flight, in time, across space – liberated from their compression under globalization – and fuelled by the imagination which writes another life upon the world's body.

Coda: Postmetropolis and the Art of Fabrication

The city is at an end, announced Rem Koolhaas as we approached the millennium (1999b); a proposition posed in less categorical terms by Kevin Robins (1994), Rob Shields (1996) and in Edward W. Soja's reflections on the postmetropolis (1995, 1997, 2000). We seem to be pitched into a future 'no-place' beyond ourselves. In fact, however, few of these thinkers want in the end to suggest the city or metropolis has arrived at a final terminus, but that a kind of city or its representation is now in crisis, requiring us to comprehend a double condition of simultaneous decline and emergence: in short of reflexive transformation.

The type of city at issue is the 'modern' American or American inspired twentieth century city. This consisted of three concentric rings, comprising a central business area, an area of industrial manufacture and out-of-town residential areas with transport systems, and pre-eminently the motor car moving people to and from the outer districts. A series of socio-economic and technological changes in the last quarter of the century transformed this mode: both boosting and dispersing downtown business areas, demoting industrial manufacture and encouraging thoroughly urbanized 'edge cities'. The result has been the decentralized 'sprawl' of highways, office parks and malls especially familiar across the United States (Fishman: 1995), and a marked deterioration in the conditions of the inner city (Harvey: 2000). Edward Soja identifies six general 'discourses' in an attempt to comprehend these changes: 'flexcity', 'cosmopolis', 'exopolis', 'metropolarities', 'carcereal archipelagoes' and 'simcites' (1997: 23–29). These refer in turn to new modes of flexible post-Fordist production, a globalized economy and culture, the 'urbanization of suburbia', glaring social and economic inequalities on lines of class,

gender, race and ethnicity, the ubiquitous use of surveillance alongside segregated or 'gated' cities and the invasive effects of consumer and media industries in creating a hyperreal or simulated urban environment (1997: 23–29). Soja claims these features are general to contemporary urban life, though it is fairly apparent that LA is most often his primary, even paradigmatic example. The result is that though he intends his 'macro' analysis to correct an over-emphasis upon the local and subjective and upon global finance capital, Soja's schema tends to ignore the specificities of 'global' cities, and the complex play of the micro in the macro across different urban cultures and histories.

The story of this critical transition is in fact less a movement towards one type of city or post-city than of uneven local and global development, of sharp disparities and loss of definition in both amoebic postmodern urban complexes and the layered 'modern' global cities which have themselves entered upon a dynamic transnational life. Rather than witnessing the end of urban life, we are subject to an accelerated morphing of urban sites and consciousness without apparent co-ordination or goal. So much so that this experience can invite the fatalism and cynicism which have been a main legacy of the ruling neo-liberalist agenda in this period (Beck 2000: 98; Harvey: 2000: 154–5, 258). At the same time, it is this very mentality – intoned in the Thatcherite mantra 'there is no alternative' – which has inspired the contemporary quest for a counter project. Thus David Harvey (2000), looks for a 'space of hope' in a renewed tradition of utopian thinking and critical reflection. Ulrich Beck stresses the importance of 'doubt and debate' to the founding of a 'self-critical' and 'responsible modernity' (2000: 99). Soja looks to 'the restructuring of the *urban imaginary,* our situated and city-centric consciousness' in the making of a 'postmodern urban politics' (324). Marshall Berman (2000) seeks a 'critical culture' modeled on the 'experimental neighbourhood' of New York's Greenwich Village in the 1950s: 'places where people and ideas can bump into each other … and find or imagine new ways to put the ideas together'.

My argument in this book has been that literature and film can contribute to a contemporary critical culture and reconfigured urban imaginary, by modeling possible alternative narratives of identity and sociality. As at the outset, I borrow here from Foucault's description of the attitude of modernity as an eagerness to imagine the present, 'to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it' … through a 'critical interrogation on the present and on ourselves' (1986: 41, 49–50). The

radicalized reflexive modernity of the present age requires us to be 'more modern' in this sense. This means seeking to redeploy or resignify the cultural resources which in European based or cosmopolitan modernism already contradicted national modernity. I have been interested above in how this reflexive aesthetic has also been sustained by actual artistic networks or local communities and subcultures, and how, in their changed composition, these too rearticulate the ready-mades of urban identity or community. Radical social and cultural geographers have often disparaged the notion of community. Thus, Iris Marion Young (1990), Richard Sennett (1996) and Harvey (1996, 2000) reject what Sennett calls the 'myth of the purified community' as nostalgic, homogenizing, exclusive and reactionary. The problem with this argument is that it too readily accepts an evidently conservative 'myth' of community when this is open to critique and rearticulation (see Kasinitiz, 1995: 163–270). An alternative understanding, discovered in some of the texts above, views community as a provisional network, spatially grounded, diasporic, open and diverse. It accords with Soja's sense of the role of 'intercultural and hybridized coalitions that cross the boundaries of race, class, gender, and geography' in creating a new transgressive imagery and 'politics of social and spatial justice' (2000: 348). It accords too, I believe, with Harvey's reflections on how the 'open and benevolent' possibilities advanced by utopian thinking must recognize the need for closure in the material world, 'at least for a time' around a 'particular set of institutional arrangements or modes of social relating' (2000: 185, 188)].

These thoughts relate chiefly to strategies of invention and refashioning in the urban spaces of the developed world. Most cities of these countries, as Richard Rogers points out, have suffered intense deindustrialization over the last twenty years. This has left 'a legacy of vast abandoned sites' (1997: 56), and the kinds of blatant inequality detailed by Harvey in Baltimore. Other cities, Berlin, Beirut, Grozny, have been the subject of political division, or ravaged by conflict. The developing world (the site in part of Koolhaas's 'Generic' cities), meanwhile presents a further contrast. Here, cities are expanding too rapidly, says Rogers. The result has been the 'emergence of massive shanty towns' which present the first experience of the city for 50 per cent of the world's population. In Bombay it is calculated that 5 million people – equivalent to the population of inner London – live in shanties (Rogers 1997: 57–8). Between 30 – 60 per cent of the residents of most large cities in developing countries – Sao Paulo (32 per cent), Mexico City (40 per cent), Manila (47 per cent), Bogota

(59 per cent) live in shanty towns. These mostly illegal settlements suffer from a lack of rudimentary services including effective drainage, electricity and clean water, as well as from inadequate food, transport and schooling. Driven to these sites from rural areas by famine, political instability, internal wars and other pressures, squatters discover a precarious existence exposed to landslides, disease, drought and flooding. Here the world witnesses the most extreme effects of Beck's 'risk society'.

Simcity and the shanty town

I want in this Coda to reprise some of the discussion above on formations and deformations of community, and an aesthetic of reinvention in relation to the two extremes produced in the era of the postmetropolis: first, 'simcity', as described by Edward Soja and associated with advanced Western societies, and second, the shanty town or urban slum, for many the 'distinguishing feature', as Jeremy Seabrook confirms, of the developing or 'Third World' (1996: 174). Both environments figure in our contemporary urban imaginary as dream and nightmare versions of our possible futures and current failings, the twinned consequence of the radicalizing processes of globalization with all its advances, confusions and mishaps. Contemporary Hollywood movies have frequently turned to the worst scenarios of this 'risk society' for their plots of environmental 'disaster', corporate fraud, computer malfunction, surveillance and paranoia. According to Beck, as we have seen, the experience of these effects also provokes doubt and discussion on possible alternative strategies and safeguards. Hollywood films can be said to contribute to this same process, though typically less through a depiction of the democratic debate and collective action Beck and others have in mind, than through spectacular stories of individual heroics.

Such are *Dark City* (1998) and *Matrix* (1999), in both of which, as in a number of other recent films, especially those treating cyborgs and information technologies, distinctions between the real and imaginary, or material and virtual worlds are blurred. Such films extrapolate in other words on Soja's 'simcity'. In each, the simulated 'unreal' world is the creation of anonymous, alien powers whose agents materialize as uniformly sober suited, white male corporate servants. In *Matrix*, this enemy is opposed by a team of men and women, headed by a black supremo, who work for human freedom from a secret base with ramshackle technology. Their ultimate victory is, they believe,

destined. Thus, aided by an occult faith, computer genius and ju-jitsu skills, an internally differentiated and altruistic 'local' group opposes monopoly power in the interests of a city population duped into accepting simcity as real. In both films, however, 'popular' interests await the exceptional individual (a man), who will save the world (aka the United States). In *Matrix*, this hero is explicitly a quasi-religious saviour, the one whose coming has been prophesied. Most importantly however, the hero's miraculous abilities mirror those of the enemy. In *Dark City*, the city (a generic American type of the 1940s and 1950s), is altered each night by alien 'strangers' who have invaded the planet and need to learn how to be human in order to survive. They stop time and in the interval recreate or 'tune' the city from an eclectic collage of Western building styles at the same time as they abort and restart people's lives on another course. Memory is curtailed and identity manipulated. The one man who resists their virus can defeat the aliens only by exercising a more powerful form of the same gift of tuning. The city turns out to be an asteroid to which he brings sun and sea from a storehouse of preferred images. The new future is made out of nostalgia for a past on 'Ocean Beach', a place that possibly never was. Buildings are thrown back up by the force of the hero's magical will.

Dark City in particular, is a paean to the human capacity to reinvent a better life (invested here in heterosexual romance and the 'green' icons of sun and sea) out of the rubble and fragments – whether real, remembered, or implanted – of the old. Control of the world is wrested from alien forces and a dystopian, simulated world is reset in a utopian direction. The caveat is that this is simulated still. There can, these films imply, only be a homeopathic cure for the ills of globalization. The human imagination must vie with corporate manipulation, and this comes to a one-on-one contest between saviour hero and evil villain over, in a sense, whose simcity will win the day. If the best of this argument is that the methods and technologies of global conglomerates can be re-appropriated for common ends, this is undermined by the ideology of individual male heroism it depends upon and the all too familiar world on offer. Victory is handed to a liberal individualism behind whose benign face lurks an aggressive corporate visage ready to exploit that same ideology.

Popular film narratives of simcity show little conception of collective action. William Gibson's near future world, as we have seen, cannot do without individual heroes, but does invest a collective ethic and agency in the 'Bridge people' and those networked into the virtual

site of 'the Walled City'. In Marge Piercy's 'cyberpunk' novel, *Body of Glass* (1992), the simulated human 'Yod', constructed to defeat the greed of corporate powers, self-destructs. Hope is invested finally in a woman warrior, Nelhi, who is human first and cyborg second, and in a mixed community in the urban 'Glop' who recycle the discarded products of advanced technological and consumer society for new populist ends. In both authors, these alternative communities are situated physically in in-between worlds or at the margins of dominant metropolitan locales. They explore the idea of countercultural communities in ways Hollywood does not, but are interesting too in showing how the globalized simcity and shanty or ghetto coexist in an antagonistic but close physical relation, one within the other. In this way they help critique the assumption that the advanced or future simcity and depressed local or shanty towns of developing nations are 'worlds apart'.[1]

Near future films and novels of the kind mentioned, which occupy a speculative position adjacent to present trends, sustain a belief in how repressed individual or popular forces can impinge upon and disrupt the global from deep within itself or from its edges. They play a part, therefore, in constructing narratives of a new or revived urban imaginary. Shanty towns, though at the other post-metropolitan extreme, can be read in a similar way. Richard Rogers, for example, points to the environmentally aware and democratically inspired innovations in the shanty town areas of Curitiba, Brazil (1997: 59–63). The urban wasteland, say such stories, can be reclaimed. Nevertheless, an emphasis such as Rogers', upon self-help and local initiative, can itself have a counter effect, as Jeremy Seabrook warns. Unlike the 'slums' of nineteenth and earlier twentieth century Western cities, the squatter and shanty settlements of the developing world are constructed by the people themselves, 'sometimes with the scavenged materials of industrial waste, sometimes using traditional materials, often using a mixture of the two' (1996: 174). Whereas earlier Western observers saw squalor, disease and social instability, recent reactions have seen slum dwellers as 'the bearers of community values, solidarity and mutuality' (174). Third World shanty communities have introduced drainage systems, literacy programs, employment initiatives and successful campaigns against alcoholism in a show of tenacity and mutual help which stand, says Seabrook, as a tribute to the 'altruism and self-sacrifice of the poor' (197). At the same time, such developments 'may create the impression that everything is really best left to the people themselves … absolving the powerful of responsibility'

(197). Local ingenuity should not be allowed, he says, to obscure the 'macro problems' deriving from the relentless growth of cities, the damage to farming traditions caused by the pull and push of refugees to urban centres and the afflictions they meet there. What is more, the accelerating pace of development in Asian cities, in particular, has meant that evictions have multiplied as settlements which have brought improvements to neglected plots, have raised land prices and become profitable sites for further development. The belongings and continuity which make for a relatively stable sense of community have, therefore, been disrupted. As Seabrook comments in relation to the Klong Toey area in Bangkok: 'By constructing their homes, by reclaiming land and making it habitable, the people increase its value. As the city grows and expands they find that others, with greater purchasing power, want the amenity they have created, and they are threatened with eviction.' (1996: 183)

I want to conclude with some reflections on three linked stories of the squatter or shanty town in the post-metropolis which draw out some of these issues. These stories are neither investigative reports nor conventional novels, but fables or parables, as will be seen. They point up the combined concerns of this book with urban identity, the fragile conditions of community, the interpenetration of the local and the global and the forms of representation and re-imagining. They also serve to bring other motifs to notice which have moved less consistently through earlier chapters: the theme of waste and the urban waste land and the role, less conspicuously still, of dogs as human companion, stand-in, urban dweller and storyteller.

'A poor man is like a dog' – Latife Tekin and John Berger

Latife Tekin's *Berji Kristin. Tales from the Garbage Hills* (1996 [1984]), is based on life on the outskirts of Istanbul in the 1960s. It is, claims John Berger, a truly original work, unique and disorienting in its way of telling, 'on the verge of fairy story' (8), and in its treatment of its subject: 'Before her, no shanty-town had entered literature – had entered written narrative – as an entity in itself' (1996: 6). It therefore 'centres' the peripheral in a narrative, 'carried over' in translation, which weaves animal, physical and human in a metaphorical text of tall-tale and episodic yarn, whose 'foreignness' disturbs both geographical and discursive bearings. From the first, in Tekin's book, the shacks constructed one winter upon Garbage Hill are faced with repeated destruction from a hostile wind and demolition men. Again

and again the huts are rebuilt from scrap metal, plastic, cardboard, china shards and breeze blocks until three communities are established below a ring of factories making car batteries, chemicals, refrigerators, textiles and later, 'fake detergents'. The stories follow the 'eras' of 'Flower Hill's' history through the rhythms of work and unemployment, illness from pollutants, internal strife and battles with the factory bosses. The people's dramatically changing fortunes thus make their lives a virtual parable of postmodern contingency. They respond with guesswork, gossip, legend, jingles, elections and strike action, combining the old and the new ways in an attempt to comprehend and direct their hazardous fortunes. They look especially to the counsel of their leaders – shamans, autodidacts, organizers and above all, story tellers: amongst them are Liverman, who appears from nowhere to tell the epic of the quarrels and reunions over seven generations of the Livermen family; Chief Mamut, head of the gypsies, whose long tale in couplets was 'rooted in the speech of the squatters' (12); and Lado, whose adventures are revered 'as the finest examples of the squatters' oral tradition' (129).

The result is a bizarre version of the doubt, critical reflection, new knowledge and alternative strategies Ulrich Beck argues is provoked by the unexpected side-effects of contemporary society. The squatters' talk builds 'a kind of home', says Berger (7); its governing idiom is 'rumour' – the one thing they share, he adds, with the stock exchange, a community confronted like them but at the other end of society with the volatile, inexplicable and risky. So they discover a kind of commonality of experience and mythology, though this solidarity is riven by petty jealousies over status and material goods (a door with an embossed lion, liqueur glasses and red net curtains), violence against women, a suspicion of newcomers (the Romanies, the Kizilblas) and strange words ('anarchist'). In the end (but it is not *the* end) the folk of Flower Hill move on to 'Unity Flower Hill', a name belied by the husbands' adultery and wife beating. The original settlement becomes a gambling den and red light district which the men still visit. The name 'Kristin' (meaning 'prostitute') is given to a girl, Crazy Gönül, who has become their favourite. The book's title combines her name with the word for innocence, summing up the combination of wide-eyed fear and wonder, half truths, old customs, new knowledge and knowingness, with which the hut people make their way at the edge of this 'modern' urban industrial world. Such is Latife Tekin's tale of community: self-renewing , self-divided, now at one, now at odds with itself and the world.

Just as this shanty community is estranged in its post-metropolitan niche, so Tekin's text is estranging to outside readers. Berger's comments on the novel register this disturbance and challenge to Western readers, as well as the exchange the book offers across cultures and languages. He describes how he felt lost 'in the labyrinth of her understanding' and of how, when meeting, they laughed – 'at the inexplicable … at everything that could not be said anywhere', and because they had no common language (1996: 6). His own novel *Lilac and Flag* (1990) and later story *King* (1999) are both influenced by Tekin's example (Berger, 1992b) and show how these enigmas of spatial and cultural position might be differently negotiated, or narrated. In both texts, the metropolitan centre and shanty settlement are situated in an imaginary nexus across regions, continents and histories.

Lilac and Flag is the third volume in Berger's trilogy *Into Their Labours* (1992a) which chronicles the journey from peasant village to metropolis. Berger names the latter 'Troy', neither a real place nor the placelessness said to mark the post-metropolis, but a re-imagined place whose source is the ancient world and classical epic and the place therefore of narrative and story. The whole is infused with invention. The city's areas combine the sites of European and American cities: Champs-de-Mars, Park Avenue, Alexanderplatz, Cachan, Swansea, Chicago. No-go areas such as the shanties of Rat Hill and Tortoise Hill vie with downtown zones where middle class women recoil from the poor as if from an invading virus. IBM dominates a site across the river. On the other side live the poor who service big business, drop out of paid employment into crime, or survive on a memory of village life. Essentially, however, it is a tale of 'Lilac' and 'Flag', the names two young lovers, Zsuzsa from Rat Hill and Sucus, the son of poor workers, invent for themselves. '"There are no jobs"', says Sucus '"except the ones we invent"' (1992a: 381). Sacked from a building site, Sucus joins with Zsuzsa in a ploy to steal a handful of passports. They dream of another life – an invention, such as the poor need, made with words, 'which change everything, and nothing' (489) – but then Flag fails to establish himself as a street medic and discovers that Zsuzsa has taken work in a sex club. Enraged, he thrashes out and believing he has killed her shoots himself in custody. On a ship of the dead he searches for Zsuzsa but failing to find her, can delight in her continued life and the life of their love which has been their prime invention.

Relationships in Troy are disjointed, communities exist as no more than ragged groupings or in a memory of village life to which none

can return. Happiness is the dream of another unrealizable life in some other place. Yet Zsuzsa's fleeting presence (she plays at disappearing into and behind Sucus), and their love has given a magic to their lives, – 'a kind of power' hated by 'those with power', a nameless something which 'goes through us and joins us with the beginning of everything' (459). As such they represent the kind of radical human protest described by Raymond Williams: the 'commitment to another, the absolute love of the being of another', which clashes with a prevailing system as sharply as 'any assault on material poverty' (1974: 51). The affirmation of 'desire *in* another', which Williams finds in the novel *Wuthering Heights*, is, he emphasizes, 'where social and personal, one's self and others, grow from a single root' (1974: 55).[2] This bond Berger re-imagines for the outcasts of the post-metropolis over a century and a half later.

In *King*, the sense of loss is greater. Here, civilization, given a European location somewhere in France or Germany by this story's characters and place names, has produced a new 'barbarism' of poverty and indifference. King is a dog and the storyteller of a day in the life and demolition of the shanty town he guards. He ends a King without even a wasteland as kingdom.

Dogs, it will have been noticed, feature in a number of texts discussed above, in association with modernist and postmodern versions of the wasteland. In Eliot's *Waste Land*, the speaker warns against the dog who is 'friend to man' who threatens to dig up – what? – the corpse of the past best left dead and buried, a repressed sexuality, the waste the poem seeks to expel in the interest of cultural order? Dogs, as Alison Light points out, have been valued in the Victorian and modern period precisely as friends to man. 'Dogs were a tie. That was their point' (1999: 3). But more than this, 'They encouraged and anchored affections, they set a limit to self-centredness, prompting reflection on the need, in an increasingly materialist culture, for social and personal bonds which put others first' (3). Dogs were 'natural altruists and ideal dependants' (3): a projection, it might be thought, of our better but still masterful human selves. 'One of the impulses of the Post Modern', Light comments further, 'is the desire to retrieve those modes of sociability and relatedness which Modernism meant to dismantle and diffuse' (6). A first step is to literally give voice to the intelligence and feeling attributed to the dog's speaking look. This is what occurs in Paul Auster's *Timbuktu*. Mr. Bones is both 'the same', a companion and shadow to his master William Gurvitch, aka Willy G. Christmas, an expression in his goodness of Willy's own

adopted aim, 'to make the world a better place', and 'the other': 'a hodge podge of genetic strains' and of course the animal who is brute nature to Willy's human. Saint and mongrel are hybridized allies in a peripatetic tale which tests out the affections of suburban America for its poor and hungry. Children and mothers pass the test, while men and fathers are found wanting. Together, Willy and Bones are a better example of the son to father relationship explored in much of Auster's fiction. They can be united, however, only beyond this imperfect world in death, the nowhere land of Timbuktu. Alison Light finds all this too schmaltzy and a poorly disguised apology for heterosexual masculinity. A tougher and more disturbing parable of that same sexuality informs Iain Sinclair's writings, where the dog is an image of the scratchings, false starts and angled movements of the modern day *flâneur*, the questing stalker in search of the city's hidden meanings. Eliot's dog, held in by the reins of his modernism, is here on the loose.

Berger's eponymous dog in *King* is a speaking dog and storyteller: as much a man brought low (after wasted years in bars, driven by madness or destitution to adopt this persona), as a devoted canine servant and listener to his master and mistress, Vico and Vica. Like the dog of culture and fable he is, in Light's terms, 'natural altruist and ideal dependant', a description echoed in Seabrook's description of the strengths of slum dwellers in Asian cities whose ingenuity is a tribute to the 'altruism and self-sacrifice of the poor' (1996: 197). King is in a sense the embodiment of this spirit of mutual help, survival and yearning for a better life, a somewhere else of sand and sea which he dreams on behalf of Vico and Vica and the others.

There is, these stories tell us, no other place, no clean break or *tabular rasa*, but only, as I have wanted to emphasize throughout, *this* place reconfigured. *Berji Kristin* presents this social aesthetic, as we might term it, at its most positive: it brings a promise, says Berger, 'that again and again, from the garbage, the scattered feathers, the ashes and the broken bodies, something new and beautiful may be born' (Tekin, 1996: 8). In *Lilac and Flag*, what survives is the image of Lilac's sheer, vulnerable presence and in the love between the two young people, the basis for redeemed relations between the self and other. In *King,* hope hits rock bottom. As in the fate of slums and shanty towns Seabrook points to, a new corporation wants the land and the community is forcibly evicted. As King seeks to marshal and lead the settlers to 'somewhere better', they become barking dogs like him, their barks the cry which announces 'I'm here' (1999: 224, 227). His rescue charge to the beach is a dream, however, a 'merely'

imagined better place. He discovers he is alone and we realize we are reading the tale of a bereft and shivering survivor.

We realize too of course that we have read a tale of survival more than a survivor's tale; that *King*, that is to say, is John Berger's story, not that of a dog or squatter. What then are the politics of Berger's fable? Stuart Hall has suggested that the problems of globalization must be met by an active recognition of 'equality and difference'. His phrase offers to reconcile a universal principle in the modern or Enlightenment tradition with an emphasis learned from feminism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. For this conjunction to be realized, he and others argue, the West must practise self-limitation, critique and responsibility. Seabrook's argument above on the ways successful initiatives by shanty dwellers can be used to absolve major powers of responsibility, points to the difficulties in meeting these demands. There are two ways, broadly, in which Berger might be said to address them. His impersonation, firstly of the dog King, is consistent with the presentation of the book as at first sight unauthored. In its Granta publication of 1999, the book's front cover presents us simply with the title, *'King: A Street Story'*. Only on its end paper in imperfect print is it announced that this story was written by John Berger whose name then gives way to the 38 first names of those he wishes to thank. The device of an anonymous fable therefore permits an act – or further device (for what else can it be) of self-effacement which advertizes the need for such self-limitation.

At the same time, while Berger in this sense 'retreats', his story advances an attack upon the assumptions of power and privilege, especially through the character Vico. Vico has been a factory owner, a learned, graceful, and much travelled man who now looks like, and is therefore, taken for a derelict. Once named Gianni he has become Vico after his adopted philosopher Giambattista Vico. 'Vico' means 'little street' (102) and this is 'a street story', told in its masculine, and in Vica, its feminine forms in the 'Age of Dogs' anticipated by Vico's philosopher hero (180). The couple recall the romance of their past in Naples and Zurich and (until it is smashed), hoard cherished scraps of their past in a stoppered jar. Their hut, too, says Vico has been their best, most memorable thing. At the end he insists, 'We are their mistake, King. Never forget that' (211). Vico serves therefore to expose the responsibility of the powerful and to undermine a too easily assumed contrast between the cosmopolitan and the vagrant, riches and poverty, the metropolis and shanty town, or, indeed, between West and East, since, this is after all the tale of a Western European city

not the 'Third World' as might be expected. Berger therefore employs non-naturalistic fable both to tell an anonymous story 'from below' of the poor man as dog, to target those 'above', and to undermine the assumptions of an above and below, an 'us' and 'them'. Estrangement and identification commingle as a result in the story's effects upon its readers.

I do not mean in these comments, however, to present *King* as a final model of the reflexive modernism I have had in mind in earlier chapters. I have wanted to draw attention throughout to how fiction and film can explore and re-imagine the forms and effects of metropolitan and post-metropolitan life. Berger's writing finds ways to highlight some of these – the interpenetration of the local and global, the fragility but not impossibility of human bonds and community – but emphasizes too the role of the storyteller and the forms of storytelling in treating these themes. His stories declare themselves as works of fiction or, more accurately, perhaps, of critical imagination. I have wanted, above all, to make a case for the way fiction and films, but also architects and social commentators can sustain a critical culture by refabricating the metropolis in imagination. The texts I have turned to here – the films of 'simcity', Latife Tekin's and Berger's stories of the post-metropolitan waste land – are more self-conscious and conspicuous examples of this reworking than some of those treated earlier. David Harvey finds a 'space of hope' in utopian thought. I do not believe there is any 'better place' which does not start from this place and from the 'bad new times' in Bertolt Brecht's phrase. My hope is that the estrangement practised by these fables from the edge and from a possible future city might jolt us into a productive re-imagining of *this* time and place.

Notes

Introduction

1 In her magisterial *New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. America's Global Cities* (1999), Janet Abu-Lughod enumerates the characteristics of the global city as the internationalization of the market, revolutions in transport and communications, the transnational movement of capital and labour, the combined decentralization of production and centralization of economic control, the growth of business services, and, accompanying these changes, 'a presumed new bifurcation of the class structure . . . and increased segregation of the poor from the rich' (2). She wishes to argue, somewhat like Ward and Zunz, that '*all of these characteristics*, at least in embryo form', had appeared in mid to late nineteenth century New York (2). I am not persuaded by the evolutionary metaphors of 'embryo' or 'germ' Abu-Lughod employs; indeed she herself insists that 'the built environment is *not* organic' and that 'it is has been created and is continually being recreated' (4). This is closer to the view on modernity's 'reflexiveness' I adopt here. In her study of the three American global cities, she means to draw attention to the 'significant variations' resulting from 'their changing embeddedness in an evolving world system' (1). I cannot see how or why this should be thought to apply to a synchronic comparison of cities but not to their histories.

2 If we think Simmel's comments on turn of the century Berlin have been over-generalized, we might consider C.F.W. Masterman's on the urban type in contemporary London. Masterman saw the advent of a new physical and mental 'City type' who was 'stunted, narrow-chested, easily wearied, yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina or endurance'. This type was without spiritual values and given to a 'certain temper of fickle excitability' and avidly sought stimulus in drink, gambling and the new sensational press. (1973 [1901]): 7, 8).

3 In a skilful and engaging discussion James Donald finds a way of re-modelling the notion of community in Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of 'being *in* common' (1999: 154–5). This denotes the sharing of a lack of identity; a loss, says Nancy which 'is constitutive of community itself' (157). Donald offers this as a description of the 'neighbourliness' which he sees as opposed to the 'common being' of community and as the basis of the political disposition of citizens (166–7). 'Being *in* common' is a convincing description of the day by day coexistence of strangers. Political action, however, depends on 'having in common' – the moment of decision to join forces and lobby a council – about too much noise and not enough space, in the kinds of example Donald considers (168).

Chapter 1

1 Not surprisingly these were sometimes disputed. H.D. and Richard Aldington, for example, argue that the birth of Imagism and herself as 'H.D. imagiste' took place at the British Museum café, not in Kensington. Such is the way that significant moments are mis-remembered or elided, their personal and cultural value making them the object of competing narratives.
2 Barry writes that Pound spoke an 'American mingled with a dozen "English society" and Cockney accents inserted in mockery, French, Spanish and Greek exclamations, strange cries and catcalls, the whole oddly inflected with dramatic pauses and *diminuendos*' (1931: 159). His synthetic speech matched the 'strangest assortment of people' gathered around him at the weekly restaurant.
3 Iris Barry sat for a number of Lewis's drawings and paintings, notably his 'Praxitella' 1920–1, included as a colour plate in Jane Farrington (1980) *Wyndham Lewis*. London: Lund Humphries.
4 If she did not refer to Lewis in this essay, she did not refer either to her children. Meyers reports that she saw them as a 'burden' who 'would interfere with her career' (Myers, 1980: 91). The daughter was advertized for adoption, the son was put with Iris Barry's mother and in an orphange. It was only years later that they learned she was their mother, of each other's existence, and that Lewis was their father.
5 The concept of a 'vernacular modernism' is developed by Miriam Hansen (1999) in a persuasive discussion of early cinema.
6 London modernism divided between the Imagists and Vorticists on one side and Bloomsbury on the other, and Eliot was unique in shifting between these groupings (he was published in *Poetry* (Chicago), the *Egoist* and in *Blast* as well as by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press); an indication perhaps of how far he was prepared to go in making his way in English literary and class society.

Chapter 2

1 See Arnold Rampersad (1986), 123–4. I draw on this and the subsequent volume for much of the biographical information which follows in this chapter.
2 See Hutchinson (1995), for an extensive discussion of the contents of *The New Negro* and a consideration of the differences between this volume and the special issue of the *Survey Graphic*.
3 Du Bois viewed *Nigger Heaven* as 'a caricature … a mass of half truths … a blow in the face' and complained that *Home to Harlem* 'nauseates me'. See Singh: 30, 44–5, and Ogren: 126–9.
4 Paul Gilroy (1994) cites Hughes on these grounds as a symptomatic figure in the 'Black Atlantic', 13.
5 Nanry (1982) confirms the association of jazz, capitalist expansion, the technologies of mass production and the modern city. The 'modernism' of his title, however, refers to these processes of modernity and 'modernization' rather than to aesthetic modernism. Rogers' view is echoed also in Harvey

(1991), who identifies the 'modernism' of 1920s jazz with its revolt against tradition.

6 He later cites Hughes's poem 'I too', included in *The New Negro* as an example of this 'kinship' (414). This misses the position of disadvantage from which this claim is made in the poem. Where he approaches the question of definition, Hutchinson speaks of Harlem Renaissance modernism as drawing upon traditions of realist and naturalist discourse (117–20). This is interesting and relevant to Hughes. But why we should call this, or the intellectual traditions he discusses 'modernist' rather than 'modern', is unclear.

7 A view which of course only confirms the power which whiteness possesses as a received and unseen ethnic and cultural norm. See Richard Dyer, *White*, London: Routledge, 1997, 2–3.

8 Bérubé is 'half-right' says Aldon L. Nielsen (1992: 246). Tolson, he argues, sought to demonstrate how *African*-American modernism existed culturally and historically prior to Anglo-American models. To believe otherwise is to 'ignore the nature of his poetry and the breadth of Tolson's own remarks' (245). These remarks include the statement 'Culture of 14th Century Africa equal to Europe's' and a note that the craftsmanship of Benin workers was considered 'equal to the best ever produced by Cellini' (249, 250). It's unfortunate that Nielsen construes this evidence so as to urge the replacement of one racialized cultural hierarchy with another, performing half the job of a politicized deconstruction. The '*nature* of his poetry', secondly, as Nielson's argument confirms, has been ideologically and *culturally* determined.

Chapter 4

1 For some discussion of the changing meanings of this concept see my, 'The Wandering *Flâneur*, Or, Something Lost in Translation' in *Miscelánea,* Vol. 2 (1999), Universidad de Zaragoza, 115–30.

2 Keiller referred to Dave's article in a talk at the British Film Institute, London, 26 June 1998.

3 Jennings helped organize the first Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 and combined with Charles Madge and Tom Harrison to found the Mass Observation research project in 1937. This set itself the task of recording the idiosyncracies of ordinary people's lives and habits in England, and for Jennings and Madge, at least, always carried an implictly surrealist edge. Jennings was a painter as well as film-maker and worked chiefly in this last capacity for the Empire Marketing Board – later the GPO film unit during the 1930s. His 'surrealism' depended more on evident visual puns and juxtapositions than Keiller's, though both shared the theme of the 'condition of England. See Remy (1999) .

4 See *Rising East. The Journal of East London Studies*. University of East London/ Lawrence and Wishart which has dealt consistently with these and other regional issues since its launch in 1997.

5 We remember Rachel Lichtenstein's reaction on visiting Spitalfields after the birth of her son, when she is stunned by the kinds and degree of change, and feels that neither she nor Rodinsky belonged. Her theme, like Sinclair's, is

disappearance and loss. What they fail to see, directly and positively, is the new and emergent.

6 See his wild, atavistic attack on the Millennium Dome: 'tear down the fences ... return the poisoned land to use. No circus, no tent shows, but the kind of workaday fields that once existed outside the walls of the city. Somewhere to practice archery, to operate market gardens, to listen – as entertainment – to the threnodies of hucksters, hedgepriests and visionary madmen' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 10, no.19, 2 Oct. 1997, 10.

7 Rogers titles his chapter on London in his *Cities for a Small Planet* (1997), 'London: the Humanist City', 103–43.

Chapter 5

1 Young's arguments are developed in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. For their influence and sympathetic discussion, see Paul Patton, 'Imaginary cities: images of post-modernity' in Watson and Gibson (eds) (1995), 112–21, David Harvey (1996), 310–12, 348–50, and James Donald (1999).

2 Martin Buber, said Auster, 'was a very important writer to me for a long time'. First transcript of interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, 1989, 15. (Cited, Dunn, 2000: 308). Also of interest on the theme of 'self and other' are Auster's essay on and interview with Edmond Jabès (Auster 1990: 183–9, 190–210).

3 Auster's remarks on storytelling recall Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Storyteller' (1970). Here Benjamin distinguishes between 'the novel', the written product of bourgeois individualism and mechanical production processes, and the older, oral and communal form of 'the story'. The latter is marked crucially, in his account, by a dialogic exchange between the co-present narrator and listener, between the self and other and by repetition, in which the listener may become in turn the storyteller. Auster's distinction between his own poetry and prose writing and his emerging perception of the role of story is cast in similar terms.

Peter Brooks (1994) suggests that we view Benjamin's invocation of `the sociable situation of storytelling' as a strategic protest against the implications of 'solitary consumption' in the age of the novel (86). One might argue similarly on behalf of Auster and other contemporary writers that to mobilize this 'superannuated' form is a way of contesting a dominant cultural narrative from a residual but oppositional position. Thus, the more democratic, communal form of storytelling provides the source of a 'counter postmodernism' which looks not to the hypermodern, but to an earlier, premodern and oral made. Brooks adds that Benjamin 'proposes ... the notion of narrative as gift: an act of generosity' (87). This, also, is very apt in the light of the exhange of story and experience between Auggie and Paul Benjamin in *Smoke*.

4 Sharon Zukin (1996) reports how identity is negotiated in neighbourhood shopping streets in contrast to commercial downtown areas. 'Despite their problems', she writes, 'these streets produce the quality of life that New Yorkers prize, the public space that makes neighbourhoods liveable, and

attaches people to place' (58). Also of interest, Joseph Sciorra writes that the building of *casita* by Puerto Rican inhabitants in New York City are not solely the actual remembered dwellings from the Caribbean, but 'also an ideal and imagined site; memory given form to serve future possibilities', 'Return to the future. Puerto Rican vernacular architecture in New York City' (King (ed.), 1996: 78).

5 For a more sceptical view see Jan Rosenberg (1989). Rosenberg reports on the 'community politics' of 'the neighbourhood's concentration of leftists and liberals' and their self-organization 'against the tide of privatization' and also on how Prospect Park 'serves as more of a barrier than a meeting ground between white upper middle class and black and Hispanic Brooklyn' (159–61).

Chapter 6

1 Since this information is not given as census or other comparable data, Rothenberg accepts the evidence of data collected for the purposes of electoral politics, the decision to site an anti-gay violence match and rally in Brooklyn in 1990, the membership of the Prospect Park Women's Softball League (about 95 per cent lesbian), the existence of SAL (Social Activities for Lesbians), and The Lesbian Herstory Archives in Park Slope, as well as 'common knowledge' that it is a 'lesbian neighbourhood' (1995: 169, 173).

2 East Village was advertized as a hot spot for gays and lesbians on the web in late 2000: 'Big news for the pink triangle set is re-emergence of East Village as Gotham's grooviest gay ghetto', announced one website: www.gaynyc.com.

3 Munt (1992) offers a detailed account of the 'unrelentingly metafictional' effects of these and later novels (37).

4 Munt (1992) comments that 'Lesbians as a group tend to be highly self-conscious, being impressed by the perpetual need to make visible differences from each other and dominant heterosexuality. Even on the most intimate "private" level, sexual desire requires the inventive reconstruction of roles'. This makes lesbian culture, she says, 'in some ways ... the ideal forum for playing out postmodern fantasies' (34). Schulman too goes on to argue, against any determinist argument, that: 'There are so many different ways to be gay' (1998b: 119).

5 In an excellent discussion of the novel as articulating an 'ethical postmodernism' to counter postmodern political disengagement, Sonya Andermahr (2000) shows how it rejects essentialist arguments on lesbian identity and desire in a way which corroborates Judith Butler's theory of performative identity, but how Schulman nevertheless insists on the validity of a language of oppression.

6 The case for a broader integrated political strategy is put in an earlier interview conducted in 1985 where Schulman quotes lesbian feminist activist Marguerita Lopez on the need to combat gentrification by becoming 'a part of every movement that is going on' (1995: 100). Lesbian and feminist movements have made the mistake of isolating themselves, says Lopez. They 'have to get out of the basement and join the movement' (100). Schulman does not endorse this view at this time, but is led, I believe, to find a broader political context.

Chapter 7

1 *The Economist,* 17 March, 1998: 14. The above account draws on a number of articles and surveys from *The Economist* in this period: See issues for Nov. 29, 1997: 17–27, 85–6, 93–4, 109–10; 'A Survey of Business in Japan: Restoration in Progress', Nov. 27, 1999: 1–18; 'Asia Picks Up the Pieces', Jan. 3, 1998: 69–70, 72–3; 'Survey of East Asian Economies', March 17, 1998: 3–19; Dec. 4, 1999: 79–80. Also, BBC 2 'Bubble Trouble' broadcast on 9, 16, 23 Jan, 2000.

2 Equally problematic is O' Hagan's citation of Ezra Pound's 1915 translation of a fifth century Chinese poem as appropriate to the contemporary urban culture represented by the exhibition. The poem is Pound's 'To-em-mei's "The Unmoving Cloud"'.

3 On the influence of Ballard, see Stirling (1986: xii), McCaffery, (ed.) (1991: 274, 281). Gibson refers to 'the unfocused angst and loss of affect' of the hacker generation given expression in *Neuromancer* in McCaffery, (ed.) (1991: 271).

4 An early example is the figure Rubin in *Burning Chrome*, who is a 'master of garbage, kipple, refuse, the seas of cast-off goods our century floats on': 118. The idea of 'gomi' or 'kipple' was introduced, once more, by Philip K. Dick.

5 Koolhaas makes an exception of London whose identity is 'a lack of clear identity', (1995: 1248), a view reiterated four years later in the talk, 'Metropolitan Apotheosis', (BBC Radio 3, 9.10.1999).

6 Quoted by Koolhaas (1995: 1112). See his comment on his own plan, incorporating a Manhattan-style grid structure, for 'La Defense' in Paris, 1991, as an 'immodest echo of how architecture could have been interpreted at the beginning of this century' (1995: 1129).

7 Wong Kar-Wai's films have been received, somewhat like Asian economies, as representing the future of cinema, though revealingly for one admiring critic, Larry Gross, they confounded the normal reference points and vocabulary of evaluation (*Sight and Sound*, Sept 1996: 10). Above all, critics and audiences find the films remarkable to look at. Their social meaning is less easy to decipher, however. We might expect films made in Hong Kong in the 1990s to somehow register the meanings of Hong Kong's historic changeover from British to Chinese rule. They say nothing directly of this. This is not to say they are without social meaning, as I try to indicate. Wong Kar-Wai's most recent film, *In the Mood for Love* (2000) is set in the carefully rendered Hong Kong of the early to mid 1960s. It depicts, as do earlier films, a proximate and rehearsed set of relationships in an affair which never happens and this allegorizes, one might think, the coming instabilty of the region and loss of that earlier time.

8 See Seabrook, who finds a community of male friendship in a small gay cinema in Bangkok, tucked down a side street and overshadowed by a high rise condominium (1996: 263–5).

9 Chua's essay on South Korea is titled 'All Fall Down' and the issue of *Muae* in which it appears, 'Collapsing New Buildings': an echo conscious or otherwise of Gibson's chapter title 'Collapse of new buildings' in *Idoru*.

Coda

1 The real life interpenetration of these two spheres was dramatically confirmed in April and May 2000, by the 'Love Bug' virus originated by a computer student in a back room in a poor district of Manila in the Philippines. The virus struck 45 million computers world-wide, generating estimated losses of hundreds of millions of pounds sterling. Like other incidents of 'computer crime', the episode simultaneously confirmed the transnational reach of global communications and their vulnerability, showing how a simple, scatter-gun device at the point of the 'local' and marginal could corrupt global financial and corporate networks, reversing and subverting their normal operation.
2 I owe this reference to Roger Mehta, 'Telling Stories and Making history. John Berger and the Politics of Postmodernism', unpublished PhD thesis, University College Northampton, 2000. I have in mind also Thomas Docherty's thoughts on 'postmodern love' and the example of Paul Auster discussed in Chapter 5.

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