University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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New Mediation, New Spatialisation, and Contemporary Literary Form

by

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Abstract

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New Mediation, New Spatialisation, and Contemporary Literary Form explores how literature with a particular interest in space, place, and spatial processes has adapted to the Post-Internet meditational environment. Online activity plays a significant role in workaday life, and this impacts on how we construct and inhabit spaces; social life is increasingly dislocated, attention is drawn from immediate surroundings and toward the mobile phone. These processes of construction and inhabitation are essential to non-fictional genres like nature and travel writing, but also to fictional ones like the isolation novel and the urban novel. In this thesis, I attend to these four genres, drawing out relations between shifts in their formal tropes and contemporary Internet-enabled changes to how spaces are produced, navigated, and involved in the processes of everyday life.

In Chapter 1 I show that nature writing is better able to evoke the spatial conditions of Anthropocene ecology with Internet-enabled storytelling through readings of Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, Common Ground's *Second Nature*, Robert Macfarlane's *Underland* and Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*. In Chapter 2 I read Joanna Walsh's *Break.up* and *Hotel* to suggest that online contact with home disrupts travel writing's typical parallelling of an interior, psychological journey with an exterior, spatial journey. Chapter 3 shows that spatial isolation must now be navigated alongside online isolation in isolation novels like Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy*, Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?*, and Patricia Lockwood's *no one is talking about this*. And Chapter 4 demonstrates the double-bind into which writers of urban novels are placed when looking to engage the legacy of the modernist urban novel. Reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* I first demonstrate that the *flâneur* is a trope that allowed modernist writers to explore the attentional demands of the city. Then, comparing Sally Rooney's *Intermezzo* and Andrew O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road* with Jenny Offill's *Weather* and Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists*, I show that the writing of *flânerie* is incompatible with the formal mimesis of contemporary, Internet-effected attentional processes.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Mediational Change, Spatial Change, Literary Change

1.1 Introduction

In *Underland* (2016), the nature writer Robert Macfarlane recalls a 'powerful dissonance' being introduced to his sense positioning in the world.[1] Standing atop a mountain in Greenland, he notes that:

> everything feels both distant and proximate at the same time. It feels as if I could lean from that summit and press a finger into the crevasses, tip a drop of water from the serac pool, nudge a berg along the skyline with my fingertip. I realize how configured my sense of distance has become from living so much on the Internet, where everything is in reach and nothing is within touch.[2]

Macfarlane is not using any online technologies when this dissonance 'overtakes' him; Internet use is nowhere in the narrative present of the scene. Nevertheless, his sense of the space around him, his own position within it, and the possibilities of action afforded by said position are 'configured' by time spent online. Even the experience of this remote Greenlandic mountain has been shaped by the patterns and tropes of everyday Internet use. The Internet has become essential to workaday living – we work, play, chat, entertain ourselves through the Internet, as well as using it as a navigational aide. And most of us carry it with us, always in our pocket. This thesis is about how Internet use changes the processes by which we construct and inhabit spaces, and how these changes are reflected in literary works like Macfarlane's.

Underland is exemplary here for two reasons. Firstly, it reflects on the impact media like the Internet can have on how we relate to the world around us, even after we've set them aside. Media afford us patterns, structures, and ways of being in the world that remain even when we close the book or screen. Macfarlane's experience is dissonant in precisely this respect; the mode of interaction learned from Internet use is dissonant with his offline environment. He shows how writing can capture the novel spatial experiences being shaped by frequent use of the Internet. Secondly, *Underland* partakes in the genre of

[1] Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), p. 362.
[2] Macfarlane, p. 362.

nature writing, which is itself deeply concerned with particular modes of engaging with space. Nature writing both informs and is informed by contemporary constructions of the natural, the rural, the wild, the urban, and so on. Moreover, it privileges the writer's close attention to and immersion within their surroundings. For this reason, nature writing books from Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788-9) onward have typically studied a single relatively small region. But *Underland* is different. Each chapter attends to a different location, and Macfarlane carefully draws out the networks operating between them. Here, the tropes by which nature writing typically constructs space likewise seem to be adapting to the influence of the Internet. Both the content of the above extract and the formal qualities of *Underland*, then, demonstrate the Internet's influence on contemporary space.

As such, genre plays a significant role in this thesis. One of the primary arguments made will be that Internet use has changed how we construct, navigate and inhabit spaces, and that these changes have had repercussions in the formal tropes of genres preoccupied with space. To make this point, I focus each chapter on a different genre of literature wherein certain spaces or modes of interacting with space are essential: travel writing, nature writing, isolation narratives, and the urban novel. For cohesion's sake, I focus on book-length prose literature. Poetry, theatre, the short-story and the essay have not been free of the Internet's influence, but each has its own conventions and history, and its own ways of interacting with Internet use. Readers will better be able to draw their own comparisons, note similarities and differences in how each genre is reshaped by the Internet, if works belong to equivalent forms. That said, two of the genres selected typically contain works of fiction, and two works of non-fiction. I cross fiction and non-fiction genres to show how the Internet is reshaping both how we recount our experiences of space, and how we imagine what experiences are possible. These are different, but equally interesting modes of reflecting on contemporary space.

In this thesis, I use the term post-Internet much more often than the term Internet. Once, we would talk about 'going on the Internet', by which we were likely to mean sitting in front of a desktop monitor, opening a web-browser, and browsing the Internet. But what does it mean to 'go on the Internet' today? When we stream films on a smart television, ask a voice assistant to play an album through our speaker, order a taxi, pizza, or grocery shop on a smartphone, are we 'going on the Internet'? What about when we use a navigation app to move through an unknown city, take a picture of a landmark and send it to a friend, then post it on a social-media site? I use the term post-Internet to refer to life in conditions in place from around 2008 onward: ubiquitous smartphone use, mass uptake of social-media and Web 2.0, and the integration of GPS technology. Internet use is essential to everyday life, but diffused throughout a range of disparate activities. In this thesis' introduction I explain the term post-Internet and its relationship with space further, by providing a history of how space has been thought of in media theory. In particular, I show that the post-Internet is congruent with a shift from the study of media objects to processes of mediation. Then, I establish how genre and space are understood in my methodology, before finally providing a critical history of how the Internet has been represented in fiction.

After this introduction, I move through four chapters that each focus on a genre preoccupied with space, beginning by continuing my discussion of nature writing. Because of the genre's historical interest in repeated, first-hand experiences of nature, nature writing works have typically focussed on walkable regions, within which the writer often resides. In this chapter, I first show how this influences what Mikhael Bakhtin calls the 'chronotope' of the genre – that is, its structures 'for reflecting and artistically processing' time and space.[3] Reading Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977), I show that the nature writing chronotope grafts a closed ecological system onto a walkable region, and allows only occasional references to a foggy world beyond. Then, reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and James Lovelock's *Gaia* (1979), I show how developments in ecological thinking problematised this chronotope. After Carson's pollution and Lovelock's global ecology, the closed ecological location of *The Living Mountain* is untenable. By reading *Underland*, I show that print nature writing tries to adapt by adopting a structure wherein the writer visits a series of locations, networking them as they go. At a chapter level, such texts retain the nature writing chronotope. The presence of ghostly figures at the boundaries of some regions, I suggest, registers the ecological entanglements with elsewhere that are suppressed by said chronotope. Finally, reading Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark By Then* (2017), I show that Internet-enabled literature can prevent such suppression. Utilising a print book alongside smartphone text and audio that responds to the reader's GPS location, Speakman's work locates the reader in several places at once. Readers can then remain within an ecological region, even as they follow its connections to other places.

I then turn to travel writing; a form grounded in the navigational act of travel and the writer's experience of new places. Beginning in 1130 B.C.E., I provide a history of travel writing that reveals it as a genre that has always been closely related with developments in media. In the nineteenth century, guidebooks like those in the Baedeker series surpassed travel writing as a means of learning about far-off places. In response, travel writing foregrounded the traveller's experience of such places, and of journeying between them. Such works pair an outer, spatial journey with an inner, psychological journey. Leaving home means leaving the socio-cultural environment that defines us, and growing malleable; the psychological changes of the inner journey rely on this malleability. But since the Internet allows frequent returns to this socio-cultural environment, the inner journey of post-Internet travel writing is frequently frustrated. Reading two works of travel writing from Joanna Walsh, I show first how this problematises the form of travel writing popular after the guidebook, and then what post-Internet travel writing might look like instead. With *Break.up* (2018), Walsh shows how Internet use frustrates the chronologically linear structure through which the outer and inner journey are parallelled. And with *Hotel* (2015), she seems to suggest that travel writing can meet the experience of post-Internet travel with non-linear chronological structures that draw out affective resonances across journeys.

Chapter 3 turns to fiction. I first make the case for a genre I call the isolation narrative. In works as diverse as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ivan

[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 84.

Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859) and Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1951), isolation has a consistent narratological structure. Beginning with *Robinson Crusoe*, I show that the 'narratological island' is refitted for the diverse concerns of writers, but invariably involves an interior space, a contradistinctive exterior space, a semi-permeable boundary between the two, and a key that unlocks said boundary. The key may be an actual key, but can be knowledge, or a form of transportation. But with so much sociality occurring online, the spatially isolated can have a rich social life. Conversely, many experience a portable form of isolation when siloed in online communities. Social life is a mesh of on- and offline activities, and post-Internet isolation therefore is also. In post-Internet isolation narratives, the narratological island in space converses with the isolating, islanding function of many online lives. First, I show how on- and offline isolations develop in response to one another in Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* (2017). Like *Break.up*, *Sympathy* stages the Internet's disruption of extant literary structures; Sudjic's protagonist leaves her spatial island but remains isolated by her online habits at the novel's close. Thereafter, reading Patricia Lockwood's *no one is talking about this* (2021) and Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* (2012), I show that post-Internet isolation narratives can end with the protagonist's release from isolation. But the route out must be secured through a mesh of on- and offline behaviours.

In Chapter 4, I conclude with the urban novel. Whilst the history of the urban novel encompasses texts like Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and the majority of Dickens' *oeuvre*, I pay especial attention here to Modernist urban novels. Narrating *flânerie* in the interior monologue style of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), I suggest, is a means of registering the psychological demands of urban life. It is a method for exploring contemporary attentional processes, and how they structure and are structured by city space. But post-Internet mediation is fragmenting attention, and many navigate cities with headphones on, looking at a smartphone screen rather than their surroundings. Works looking to engage modernism's legacy thus face a double-bind. Writers can adhere to the trope of narrating the *flâneur's* inner life, or they can adhere to the concern with contemporary attentional processes that underwrite this trope. Reading Andrew O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road* (2024) and Sally Rooney's *Intermezzo* (2024), I show that the post-Internet *flâneur* is distracted from their surroundings, sometimes paying them no attention whatsoever. And with Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists* (2024) and Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020), I demonstrate how the brief, fragmented prose style associated with post-Internet attentional processes tends to exclude *flânerie* altogether. When the *flâneur* is not attending to their surroundings, *flânerie* cannot be included in novels structured around brief, radiant moments of attention. Including *flânerie* in a post-Internet urban novel means disregarding Joyce and Woolf's structural interest in contemporary attention. But structuring an urban novel after post-Internet attention may mean excluding the *flâneur*.

1.2 Space in media theory

The question of how we construct, inhabit, and move through space has always been central to media theory. In fact, questions of space are of significance to several thinkers whose work preceded but is nevertheless significant within the discipline. Media theory as a field really began to cohere with Marshall McLuhan's work in the 1960s. Over the thirty years or so that followed, media theorists examined how print, radio, television, the phone, telegraph and so on influenced our relationship with space. In the 1990s, attention turned largely to 'new-media', a somewhat ambiguous term that tended to encompass the Internet as well as various virtual reality and 3-D modelling technologies. The lumping together of such technologies was not always helpful. Often, it is difficult to tell whether a development is being related specifically to the Internet, as analysis moves between regular online activities and those requiring virtual reality hardware. Much early writing in new-media theory focusses on 'cyberspace', a term adopted from a science-fiction novel. Nevertheless, works from this period offer much insight into the relationship between media technologies and spatial processes, even if one must disentangle it from speculation. Before long, the Internet was integrated into a range of devices and workaday activities, and media theorists attended to these entanglements. Such entanglement marks the shift into the post-Internet period, and from the study of media objects to processes of mediation in media theory. At this section's conclusion, I explain these shifts and introduce the critical approach to space with which I integrate them in this thesis. First, though, I detail how relations between media and space have been theorised throughout the history of media theory.

To begin, I will discuss two of those important forerunners mentioned above: Walter Benjamin, and Harold Innis. Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935) is typically considered cultural criticism or art history. But its argument provides an important touchpoint for scholars of new-media. Benjamin acknowledges that 'a work of art has always been reproducible', but insists on a distinction between human and mechanical processes of reproduction.[4] In particular, he is interested in film, photography and phonography, and their instantaneous severing of the work from its 'presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'.[5] Detaching the work from its spatial context separates it from its history, and the broader tradition that encompasses that history. In so doing, the mechanically reproduced image insists that there is nothing particular or special about the art object itself, that an image serves just as well. In the context of this thesis, we might say that a culture of mechanical reproduction is one wherein the spatial presence of the object is devalued by its circulation as a media image. Benjamin's essay thus comments on the status of the artwork, but also the way that contemporary society constructs the spatiality of objects. Online, images circulate in larger numbers, with greater promiscuity than in Benjamin's early twentieth century, and as such, his argument appears often in analyses of new-media.

[4] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 217-51 (p. 218).
[5] Benjamin, p. 220.

But whilst Benjamin's importance is borne out in studies of new-media, Innis' contributions are significant to the earliest works of media theory. Much of Innis' career was spent studying how Canada's national development relied on the export of goods like fur, potash, and lumbar. In *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930), he began to explore how trade and technologies like the railway determined the territory over which Canada extended. But his foundational influence on media theory was established when he turned this historical-materialist approach onto the study of communication. In *Empire and Communications* (1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951), Innis continued to study what determines a state's ability to control territory. Now, though, his focus turned to how states use media to overcome challenges to spatial and temporal coherence. For a state to expand, the spatial challenges must be resolved, and to sustain, the temporal ones must be also. Whatever media are available to the state shape its development by solving such problems. Whenever 'the medium is heavy and durable and [therefore] not suited to transportation', the state will extend in time but be limited in space.[6] If 'light and easily transported', and so likely fragile, the inverse is true.[7] The society of stone is smaller than the society of paper, but upholds its traditions for longer. With this insight, Innis recasts the history of Western civilisation as a complex of interactions between media objects and practices of governing and inhabiting space.

Marshall McLuhan was a junior colleague of Innis' at The University of Toronto. Whilst most would consider McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) the first media theory text, McLuhan positions it as a 'footnote of explanation' to Innis' work.[8] We might instead suggest that Innis' attention to the macro scales of history foreclosed on his being called a media theorist proper, and McLuhan initiated media theory discourse when he shifted Innis' observations into a phenomenological domain. McLuhan retains Innis' interest in media's political and social role, but is more interested in the experience of the media user. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan attends to how media have transformed individual experiences of space, and in so doing, effected the construction of spaces at the scale that interested Innis. This transformation takes place in two primary ways. First, by extending our 'faculties' – that is, the senses – media provide us ways of perceiving spaces beyond our immediate surroundings.[9] Second, the structures by which information is arranged in media become the 'favourite model of perception and knowledge' which we are 'inclined to prescribe for everyone and everything'.[10] The 'patterns of visual uniformity and continuity'[11] that structure print and the phonetic alphabet have '[f]or the West[…] long been pipes and taps and streets and assembly lines and inventories'.[12] But it was not only the ways in which we structured the built environment that we adopted from print. Rather, the patterns associated with alphabetic writing allow for 'the invention of Euclidean space'.[13] For McLuhan,

[6] Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 33.
[7] Innis, p. 33.
[8] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 52.
[9] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 126.
[10] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 5.
[11] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 84.
[12] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 87.
[13] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 110.

even the most fundamental processes by which we position ourselves within the world were determined by media; the subject will come to shape space as the dominant medium shapes its content.

Many felt that McLuhan's conclusions went too far in their assessment of how media use determines the production of space. One of the most notable responses to McLuhan's technological determinism comes from Raymond Williams. In a review of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Williams praises McLuhan's interest in how print shaped modern life, but criticises his 'isolation of print as a causal factor'.[14] For Williams, 'the great importance of print and its institutions commands us not to isolate them, but to return them to the whole field'.[15] The significant role print played in modern life, for Williams, implored care in understanding its interaction with other factors. In *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974), Williams goes further in calling McLuhan's work 'unhistorical and asocial'.[16] Determination, for Williams, is 'a real social process', but involves myriad factors, and establishes parameters for human activity, rather than directly causing said activity.[17] McLuhan fails to leave room for social, historical and economic factors, but also for the agency of media users. Williams' analysis of television offers insight into how media theory that takes account of such factors might look. He identifies the homogenising flow of disparate programmes as the 'central television experience'.[18] This flow, wherein news, entertainment, sport and so on come indiscriminately and are in many cases interrupted by advertisements, causes the viewer to develop a 'sense of the world' as a vortex of 'surprising and miscellaneous events coming in, tumbling over each other, from all sides'.[19] This seems a McLuhanite reading of the patterns associated with television. But Williams situates television within a 'whole social experience'[20] involving suburbanisation and increasing personal investment into the 'privatised home'.[21] Williams demonstrates television's influence on viewers' production of space, but he also shows how the emergence and success of television was entangled with other social and economic factors.[22]

From this tempered discourse emerged Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), and a series of works exploring the role of the media in large-scale spatialisations. Whilst this may seem a return to Innisean analysis, McLuhan and Williams' focus on subject-centred production of space was retained. Anderson was interested in the process by which the nation became imaginable to its inhabitants, rather than how it structured and preserved itself. His work set out to understand how people come to think of

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[14] Raymond Williams, 'A Structure of Insights', in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 33.3 (1964), pp. 338-40 (p. 339).
[15] Williams, pp. 339-40.
[16] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 131.
[17] Williams, *Television*, p. 133.
[18] Williams, *Television*, p. 96.
[19] Williams, *Television*, p. 119.
[20] Williams, *Television*, p. 88.
[21] Williams, *Television*, p. 23.
[22] For a contemporary work that situates emerging telematic media in an even broader set of social circumstances, see: James Martin, *Telematic Society: A Challenge for Tomorrow* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981).

themselves as belonging to a national community even though 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them'.[23] The formalisation of national languages via the homogenising process of print provided people the requisite tools to overcome such anonymity. Once, speakers of regional dialects could often not fully understand one another. But the invention of the printing press necessitated the formalisation of national 'print-languages' that allowed broader circulation of easily replicable texts.[24] The nation was, in the first instance, an imagined community of fellow readers grafted onto a terrain.

Works following Anderson showed the importance of media not only in imagining large-scale spaces, but also in constructing their internal dynamics. In *Communications as Culture* (1988), for example, James Carey shows how the development of telegraphic infrastructure structured the internal dynamics of North American space. Individual colonies had no direct link with each other, and in what Carey calls a 'classically imperial' communications structure, had to communicate via London.[25] As such, the content of newspapers was 'almost exclusively European in origin',[26] and American towns and cities were connected more to Europe than to one another.[27] We must note, here, how media shape the construction of space, but are, as Williams suggested, structured themselves by politics and ideology.

But whilst the likes of Anderson and Carey unpacked historical relations between media and space, others attended to a rapidly changing present. The 1980s was, after all, bookended by Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) and Frederick Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). There was a growing interest in the accelerated production and circulation of symbols, and the concurrent distancing of the real. Media, integral to symbolic exchange, naturally had a part to play. In *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), Vilém Flusser unpicked the notion that an image arranged access to the object it pertained to represent. The many images encountered daily are compositions; structure is given to the 'grains' of the photograph and the 'points' of the televisual image with human-made techniques and apparatuses.[28] This, for Flusser, culminates a process of 'distancing from concrete experience' that advanced through the development of tools, then figurative drawing, then text.[29] The sense that media foreclosed on encounters with the real was central also to Jean Baudrillard's work. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he suggested that the 'sovereign difference' between real and constructed had evaporated.[30] Media saturation had overseen 'the dissolution of TV in life, dissolution of life in TV',

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[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.
[24] Anderson, p. 43.
[25] James W. Carey, *Communications as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 116.
[26] Carey, p. 116.
[27] For further discussion on how newspapers and telegraphy transformed American spatialisations, and discussion on how radio and television continued these transformations see: Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (London: Penguin, 2006).
[28] Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, ed. by Mark Poster, trans. by Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 33.
[29] Flusser, pp. 6-10.
[30] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 2.

and since television delivered technical images, this amounts to the collapsing of reality and artifice.[31] The spatial implications of this postmodern media system are clearest in Baudrillard's work of travel-writing-as-theory, *America* (1986). Baudrillard's America is 'cinematic',[32] best 'seen televisually';[33] deserts 'the set of a Western',[34] statues of Christ 'straight out of *Close Encounters*'.[35] Spaces were not simply a matter of reckoning with the material world and one's place within it. Rather, the production of spaces was increasingly informed by media images.

Whilst Flusser and Baudrillard were focussed on the overall condition of postmodernity – the saturation of constructed images – others attended to how media shaped everyday spatial behaviours. Joshua Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* (1985) suggests that media reshape our understanding of space indirectly, by allowing behaviours that lead us to inhabit spaces differently. In particular, Meyrowitz showed that electronic media's tendency to 'bring information and experience to everyplace from everyplace' diminishes the relevance of place in everyday life.[36] But this diminishment was not subconscious adoption of the patterns inherent in such media, as McLuhan might suspect. Rather, Meyrowitz brings McLuhan together with Irving Goffman's understanding of how people perform social life according to the situation in which they find themselves.[37] Behaviour is dependent on our understanding of who might be observing us, and place thus plays an essential role. Social situations are typically bound to place because distance and obstructions like walls limit such observation. When electronic media convey information across these limits, they therefore sever the connection between space and situation, greatly diminishing the relevance of place to much behaviour. When two people speak on the phone, they enter a situation that excludes others in the respective places they occupy; when a politician speaks live on television, a new type of situation emerges that crosses myriad places. Meyrowitz's suggestion that we are left in a placeless world is perhaps reductive; he would later rescind the claim.[38] But his structure for relating space and media remains useful. Meyrowitz shows that our understanding of space is grounded in the ways it limits and facilitates everyday behaviours. When media reconfigure these limitations and facilitations, they therefore reconfigure our understanding of space.

Meyrowitz is one of many who became interested in how the accelerated movement of information would influence the movement of people. In *Polar Inertia* (1990), Paul Virilio anticipates that the accelerated media environment would bring about the 'definitive inertia or sedentariness of whole societies'.[39] Why

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[31] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 30.
[32] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2010), p. 58.
[33] Baudrillard, *America*, p. 9.
[34] Baudrillard, *America*, p. 58.
[35] Baudrillard, *America*, p. 2.
[36] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 118.
[37] Meyrowitz, pp. 2-3.
[38] See: Joshua Meyrowitz, 'The Rise of Glocality: New Senses of Place and Identity in the Global Village', in *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, ed. by Kristóf Nyíri (Vienna: Passagen, 2005), pp. 21-30.
[39] Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: SAGE, 2000), p. 20.

would anyone move from their couch in a world wherein 'things at one end of the earth are made visible, accessible, at the other end'?[40] Following Meyrowitz, we might ask why one might travel from this place to another when electronic media have so extensively diminished the relevance of place. But to do so would be to repeat the mistakes that Williams diagnosis in McLuhan. Just as McLuhan had derestricted the determining powers of print, so Virilio had derestricted those of televisual media. After-all, as John Urry showed in *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), media images of other places have long encouraged touristic travel. Urry shows that the earliest tourists in eighteenth century England deployed a Claude glass to remake their destination as the 'reduplication' of a landscape painting.[41] And as the 'circulating [of] images of this and other places' intensified in the late twentieth century, would-be tourists were supplied with ever-more destinations to visit and see for themselves.[42] Virilio's analysis reduces space to an audiovisual experience, failing to account for differences between seeing and visiting a place. Equating the movement of people with the movement of information, it ignores non-informational motivations for travel; to satisfy a long-held ambition, be with a loved one, or take a break from regular life.

In discussions on globalisation that developed throughout the 1990s, movements of information and people were often interrelated. In *Modernity at Large* (1996), Arjun Appadurai takes *Imagined Communities* as a point of departure, but insists that electronic media 'can have similar, even more powerful effects [than print], for they do not work only at the level of the nation state'.[43] Where print allowed people to feel themselves part of national communities, electronic global information flows allowed people to construct communities that 'operate beyond the boundaries of the nation'.[44] But whilst these communities transcend the nation's spatial boundaries, one should not suggest that the nation bears no significance. On the contrary, globalised media allow access to once regionalised content wherever one may be. They allow workers in the globalised economy to retain a diasporic connection with their home culture. In this sense, globalised media resolve a tension identified by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). For Castells, late twentieth century globalisation synthesised two spatial structures; the space of flows, and the space of places. Whilst 'functionality, wealth, and power' flow frictionlessly across spatial and political boundaries, 'cultural and social meaning is defined' by place.[45] Economic factors can coerce workers into travel away from home, to places wherein they feel alien. But the ever-telepresence of cultural content from home soothes homesickness. Whilst globalised media have dislocated culture, we must continue to situate media within Williams' broader nexus of determination. Far from encouraging sedentariness, global movements of information work with economic factors to enable global movements of people.

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[40] Virilio, p. 12.
[41] John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze* 3.0 (London: SAGE, 2011), p. 100.
[42] Urry and Larsen, p. 2.
[43] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 8.
[44] Appadurai, p. 8.
[45] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. xxxix.

Discourses on globalisation straddle the shift from media to new-media theory; five years after Appadurai, David Holmes focusses *Virtual Globalization* (2001) on the Internet's dislocation of culture. But much conversation in this time-period focussed on the idea of 'cyberspace'. Borrowed from William Gibson's foundational cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984), 'cyberspace' describes a 'consensual hallucination' of 3-D space,[46] which users 'jack-in' to and experience through their bodily faculties.[47] But throughout the 1990s it increasingly became associated with the emerging consumer technology of the Internet. In a sense, cyberspace fuses Virilio's apprehensions with the Internet's part in dislocating culture. It is available anywhere, but when we 'jack-in', we abandon our corporeal bodies to motionlessness. To understand why the Internet was understood in such a way, it is useful to consider the cultural climate of the 1990s. In *Cyberia* (1994), Douglas Rushkoff draws technological change together with 'an acid trip, a new cyberpunk novel, a quick-cut MTV video, or a night in a "house music" club', alongside advances in physics and maths that see 'numbers and particles[…] jump around in a discontinuous fashion, disappearing, reappearing, suddenly gaining and losing energy'.[48] In each case, '[t]he rules of linear reality no longer apply'.[49] Like television, the Internet can be relativised, here, as part of a 'whole social experience'. Cyberspace did not straightforwardly capture the reality of time online, but it did capture hopes and fears in a time wherein certainties of how we might interact with and within space were shaken.

Moreover, cyberspace is more like the spatial experience of the Internet than it may seem. In *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004), Mark B. N. Hansen engages the experiential qualities of new-media artworks. Here, 'Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay casts a long shadow'.[50] Since reproduction splits the image of the artwork from its spatial particularity, the particularity of the viewer's embodied experience of the work is foregrounded. Flusser has shown that modern media images are compositions of particles. But Hansen shows digitisation foreclosing on such images ever being fixed by enabling continuous revisions of said particles. As such, one's bodily positioning, affective states, and memory are deployed to 'enframe' digital information and create the image.[51] The image is transformed from the framing of an object to an 'embodied, subjective experience that can only be felt'.[52] Navigating cyberspace is therefore not entirely unlike Internet use. Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (2001) helps clarify this similarity. For Manovich, the Internet is 'an aggregate space', rather than a 'systematic space'.[53] By this, he means that it is not 'a coherent totality' but rather 'a collection of numerous files, hyperlinked but without any overall perspective to unite them'.[54] It is only the embodied experience of the Internet user that can generate connection and cohesion among these pieces. McLuhan identified print's linear homogeneity, and Williams television's integrational flow. Hansen and Manovich discern features of the relationship

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[46] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Voyager, 1995), p. 12.
[47] Gibson, p. 51.
[48] Douglas Rushkoff, *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Cyberspace* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2002), p. xix.
[49] Rushkoff, p. xix.
[50] Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 1.
[51] Hansen, p. 11.
[52] Hansen, p. 13.
[53] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p. 257.
[54] Manovich, p. 257.

between space and new-media that will be central to the arguments of this thesis. Online space does not provide a context or container for user interaction, but rather is constructed through the embodied process of such interaction.

As online activity proliferated, it became harder to disentangle a medium called the Internet from a complex of other media. The idea of 'convergence' was introduced in Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* (2006), and became central in the study of everyday media use. Jenkins, a long-time scholar of fan culture, had noticed that an 'assumption that new media was going to push aside old media, that the Internet was going to displace broadcasting' was not holding up.[55] The communities he studied pursued fandom across media; they discuss novelisations of films on the Internet. And whilst Jenkins' study is grounded in fan communities, he sees convergence as an overall cultural logic: 'Being a lover or a mommy or a teacher occurs on multiple platforms. Sometimes we tuck our kids into bed at night and other times we Instant Message them from the other side of the globe'.[56] This cultural logic informs media use, but also the convergence of media into multi-purpose devices like the smartphone.[57] In convergence culture, the Internet is available on a range of such devices, and an increasing diversity of activities are undertaken online. Moreover, these activities are often hard to disentangle from behaviours undertaken offline and with other media.

Jenkins' example of parenting via Instant Message hints at how convergence refigures our relationship with space, but a truer indication comes from the study of smartphones. After the iPhone's 2007 launch, it was increasingly common to access music, maps, video, games, as well as traditional webpages through an Internet-enabled smartphone. And with e-commerce sites allowing the purchase of anything from an anniversary gift to a weekly shop, offline activities likewise converged on the smartphone. When 3G data was added in 2008, users could perform these tasks from almost anywhere, and the addition of GPS in the same year allowed access to information pertinent to wherever they happened to be. This marks a shift into a post-Internet 'media ecology', a term introduced by Matthew Fuller in *Media Ecologies* (2005).[58] Fuller insists that the functions of individual media make little sense without studying such ecologies. He encourages attention not only to media objects and networks thereof, but also the various laws and cultural standards with which such networks interface. He insists that 'medial dynamics in combination generate behaviours, qualities, and openings that are more than the sum of their constituent, codified paths'.[59] Media in combination with each other and with legal and social practices

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[55] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 5.
[56] Jenkins, p. 17.
[57] I have opted to reference Jenkins, despite his particular interest in fan culture, because of his introduction of the term convergence culture. A more developed study of media convergence as a broad cultural logic can be found in: Graham Meikle and Sherman Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[58] Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), p. 1.
[59] Fuller, p. 24.

encourage certain behaviours. But they also furnish us with the capability to behave otherwise, thereby altering the media ecology. If we consider convergence culture to amount to a new, large-scale media ecology, we must ask: '[w]hat shapes-in motion, what dynamics do these combinations of media institute as they come into compositions?'.[60]

For many, the answer was the collapsing the distinction between on- and offline space. As Beth Coleman explains in *Hello Avatar* (2011), we live in an '*X-reality* – a continuum of exchanges between virtual and real spaces'.[61] Far from jacking-in and leaving our bodies immobile in meatspace, Coleman suggests, we exist between on- and offline space, on the move and wherever we happen to be. Partial immersion is not always positive. As Sherry Turkle observed in *Alone Together* (2011), it often means partial engagement with those we share said environment with.[62] Home is less a closed, family space with parents checking work emails and children scrolling social-media. And there is less chance of conversation with a stranger when many are occupied by smartphones. Beyond interpersonal connection, life in *X-reality* reconfigured place by making location-specific information easily available. There was now, as Jordan Frith puts it in *Smartphones as Locative Media* (2015), 'an informational layer intertwined with the physical space [mobile Internet users] experience'.[63] Place is experienced differently, takes on new meaning, when information about nearby restaurants, the location of points of interest, and the history of a peculiar building is always available. For these scholars, and in this thesis, place is increasingly co-created with information online, which mingles straightforward information with personal reviews. The way we think about where we are, and the way we behave within that environment, is closely connected with our online activity.

Responding to such conditions in *Media, Place and Mobility* (2012), Shaun Moores suggests a 'non-media centric' media study with a 'focus on the agent-in-its-environment'.[64] In this new-media ecology, and the hybridised lifestyles it produced, it was becoming harder to isolate the Internet as an object of study. Instead of 'going online' at a desktop computer, we stream a film on television, ask a smart-speaker to play a DAB radio station, open one of myriad smartphone apps to navigate a foreign place, send photographs of home to far-away friends, or post them to online masses. The Internet seems more like electricity or another utility, providing a resource requisite to disparate tasks. Like electricity, the Internet is everywhere occulted in modern life, a necessary flow that commands attention only when interrupted as in a power-cut.

Life in *X-Reality* would collapse without the Internet, but precisely this permeation characterises what I term the post-Internet period. The term post-Internet is borrowed from the study of visual art,

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[60] Fuller, p. 23.
[61] Beth Coleman, *Hello Avatar: Rise of the Networked Generation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), p. 3.
[62] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
[63] Jordan Frith, *Smartphones as Locative Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 3.
[64] Shaun Moores, *Media, Place & Mobility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 103-5.

where it was introduced by the artist and curator Merisa Olsen to describe her own work. Writing in *Artspace*, Ian Wallace explains that post-Internet artists 'have moved beyond making work dependent on the novelty of the Web to using its tools to tackle other subjects'.[65] I use the term in a metonymic sense, switching art for life in Wallace's formulation. The post-Internet is a period after the novelty of the Internet has faded, and it is integrated with other media and practices in daily life. Whilst the Internet is structurally integral to such processes, it evades focus; people are not preoccupied by the novelty of new-media. Rather, the Internet becomes part of the life's general conditions – a background. It becomes 'banal', to borrow a term from Zara Dinnen's *The Digital Banal* (2018), to which I return when discussing literary critical approaches to the Internet.

But when the medium is hard to bring into focus, critical methodologies for studying media objects come into question. In *Life After New Media* (2012), Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska propose an according shift from the study of 'a set of discrete objects (the computer, the cell phone, the iPod, the e-book reader) to understanding media predominantly in terms of processes of mediation'.[66] Mediation introduces time to the study of media, but it does more than reconfigure media objects and their use as discrete events, encounters, or processes. Departing from Baudrillard's sense that media obscure the real, Kember and Zylinska insist that mediation in fact produces the real. It is an ongoing coaction between humans, technologies and social structures which is fundamentally a process of 'becoming-with'.[67] Humans and technologies are entangled in mediation, but their becoming-with is a process of becoming-different. Mediational becoming-with, in Kember and Zylinska's terms, allows 'the temporal stabilization of mediation into discrete objects and formations'.[68] Put otherwise, the agencies of humans and machines interact to produce the temporary world of objects that includes humans and machines themselves. The relevance of *Life After New Media* to this thesis is clearest, here. Mediation is, at least in part, a spatial process. It is a process through which objects, in all their materiality and spatial presence, are produced through the interaction of humans and media.

Two major components of this thesis' critical approach are thus established: it will focus on mediational processes rather than media objects, and it will focus on what I call the post-Internet mediational ecology. A processual theorisation of space and spatiality is therefore required. Since Kember and Zylinska's understanding of mediation shows us that at least some spatial entities are subject to constant co-production, a static conception of space will not do. I turn, then, to Martina Löw's *The Sociology of Space* (2016), which undertakes a transition from studying of space to studying spatialisation comparable to the

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[65] Ian Wallace, 'What is post-Internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement', *Artspace*, 18 March 2014 <https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/trend_report/post_internet_art-52138> [accessed 2 June 2025].
[66] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2012), p. xiii.
[67] Kember and Zylinska, p. 40.
[68] Kember and Zylinska, p. xvi.

transition from media to mediation. Löw eschews 'absolutist conceptions of space'; understandings of space as 'a fixed, rigid plane on or in front of which moving action takes place'.[69] Such constructions cannot account for the complexity with which space is experienced and negotiated. They afford little insight, for example, into how two individuals or groups can have differing conceptions of a place, and how such conflicts can become essential to said place. Space must be understood a 'volatile, networked, and immaterial' production structured by the forces of routine, bodily capability, gendered, racialised and class-based habitus, the material and the symbolic.[70] To understand space's openness to shifts in these and other influences, one must understand it as a constant process of constitution, or, as spatialisation.

As such, Löw suggests that 'the constitution of space' should be 'integrated into the process of action'.[71] In other words, space is produced for and through our behaviour. And this behaviour can involve 'spacing', that is, the arrangement of material goods within a location, as well as the psychological process of 'synthesis'.[72] As she explains: '[s]pace is constituted as a synthesis of social goods, other people, and places in imagination, through perception and memories, but also in spacing by means of the physical placement (building, surveying, deploying) of these goods and people at places in relation to other goods and people'.[73] By 'social goods', here, Löw means to capture the symbolic dimension of material objects – their ability to mean, rather than simply to occupy a location. Whilst the synthesis of space is ultimately a subject-centred process, our individual spatialisations respond to the spatial syntheses of others.

We can understand this best if we imagine walking through a public square currently being used for a government-endorsed performance. Our understanding of this square, what type of space it is and how we might behave within it, is negotiated with its constitution as an events-space. This example helpfully illustrates the importance of institutional power in spatialisation. If the event did not seem to have the endorsement of the government, we would not so readily synthesise an events space; there is an analogous difference between a home and a squat. Of course, power determines placement as well – a teacher might move chairs around a classroom, whereas a student could be disciplined for doing so. If the teacher places chairs in a circle, the classroom takes on an egalitarian character. In this way, the teacher undertakes an act of spacing that guides the students' syntheses. As such, we can better consider spatialisation a relational process, negotiated with others.

The structural similarities between Löw's spatialisation and Kember and Zylinska's mediation make bringing the two together immensely useful for understanding spatialisation in the post-Internet mediational ecology. Both respond with processual analysis to a need to move away from the isolation of stable objects of study. Media objects and space(s) are exchanged for networks of agents and practices. Both mediation and spatialisation are ways in which a vastly interconnected world is incessantly given

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[69] Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*, trans. by Donald Goodwin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 105.
[70] Löw, p. 89.
[71] Löw, p. 107.
[72] Löw, p. 225.
[73] Löw, p. 225.

form. This thesis makes use of this epistemic congruence without foreclosing on issues such as whether mediation and spatialisation are disciplinarily limited approaches to the same process, or whether one is a sub-process of the other. To pursue such issues would mean reckoning with, for example, Löw's suggestion that spatialisation should be 'understood as an aspect of the social'.[74] If we were to suggest that mediation and spatialisation are one and the same process, we would in this case be suggesting that mediation is an aspect of the social. Whether we agree or not, this is tangentially relevant to the representation of space in post-Internet literature. The heuristically useful point is that mediation and spatialisation – whether or not they are one and the same process – both take place in and structure the world around us.

All interactions between space and media expounded above can be reiterated through this synthesis of Löw's spatialisation with Kember and Zylinska's mediation. Löw suggests, for example, that the 'notion of being surrounded by a uniform, homogenous space' is accompanied now by 'space as an arrangement of individual spaces in networks'.[75] Linking this with 'the development of computer technologies, especially the Internet', she echoes Manovich's writing on the spatial character of the Internet, and confirms McLuhan's predictions on what might follow the Euclidean space of print.[76] Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* can be rethought as addressing the sense of place that develops when electronic mediation necessitates the synthesis of far-off goods and people with those at hand. Anderson's *Imagined Communities* likewise. As *X-Reality* shows us, the post-Internet period is one wherein spatialisations taken for granted seem suddenly malleable. In this thesis, I show that this malleability is imparted onto evocations of space in literature. Shortly, I situate this work among approaches taken to the representation of Internet use in literary criticism. First, though, I establish the methodology that informs my engagements with post-Internet literature. To do so, I establish a relationship between genre, the writing of space, and the representation of contemporary life in literature.

1.3 Genre, space, and the contemporary

In the previous section, I established the relation between space and media that informs this thesis. Doing so, I highlighted some ways in which media theorists have identified media influencing processes of constructing, occupying, navigating and experiencing space. Now, I must explain how this relates to genres of literature in my methodology. To do so, I first establish how genre is understood in this thesis; as codifying a set of practices for producing literature, which can include those relating to the construction of space. Genre conventions often include specific narrative settings: rural settings for classical nature

[74] Löw, p. 190.
[75] Löw, p. 228.
[76] Löw, p. 228.

writing, for example. However, I show that literary space must be understood through attention to interactions between setting, plot, and character. But for generic practices to have anything to do with the processes of mediation and spatialisation outlined above, genre must have some relationship with contemporary life. Next, therefore, I establish the relationship between genre and contemporary conditions first in general, then with particular reference to generic constructions of space. Various critics have utilised this function of genre as a means of accessing historical understandings of the world. Moreover, many have used literature as a means of accessing historical understandings of space. Others still have shown that attending to genre's codes can yield insights into the contemporary moment, as well as to the past. Bringing these strands together, I situate myself among other writers who have used genre to understand contemporary spatialisation. Thereafter, I conclude this section by establishing the mechanisms by which genre reflects changes in spatial processes, before finishing this introduction with a discussion of how critics have approached representations of the Internet in literature.

Whilst genre forms an important part of this thesis' methodology, I am not staging an intervention in the discipline of genre theory. Instead, this thesis is interested in how post-Internet mediation influences the evocation of space in literature, and genre is part of how this influence is tracked. As such, I do not provide a critical history of genre of the same extent as the above history of space in media theory. But it is worth noting that this history exists, and will continue to unfold. Introducing *The Ideology of Genre* (1994), Thomas O. Beebee charts developing understandings of genre, from Horace's time of writing to his own. Beebee outlines four stages, within which genres have consecutively been understood as 'rules', 'species', 'patterns of textual features', and 'reader conventions'.[77] Shifts between such stages coincide with advances in 'the great debate about the location of textual meaning: in authorial intention, in the work's historical or literary context, in the text itself, or in the reader'.[78] Of course, between these broad milestones are more local discussions of what genre is and how it relates to meaning. To suggest that genres are deployed by the reader, for example, is only to begin to theorise how genre informs the reading process. In this thesis, rather than retheorising genre, I use it as a heuristic tool for analysis of how Internet use transforms the representation space in contemporary prose. As such, I adopt a broad definition of genre, which enables attention to processes of standardisation and change.

John Frow's *Genre* (2006) offers such a definition which, crucially for this thesis, allows understanding of how texts engage with genres without being overly determined by them. For Frow, genre

[77] Thomas Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 3.
[78] Beebee, p. 3.

> is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word "constraint" I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place.[79]

Frow sidesteps Beebee's debates about meaning's location by drawing attention to how genre constrains both its 'production and interpretation'. And his sculpting analogies encourage an understanding of genre working alongside other factors in meaning's production. Another crucial insight Frow affords is that a text 'is not a *member* of a genre-class because it may have membership in many genres, and because it is never fully defined by "its" genre'.[80] Texts must be thought of as participating in genres, rather than as belonging to them. Otherwise, little room is left for analysis of how texts subvert, ironise, challenge or blend genres, or indeed how genres change over time. As such, genres in this thesis are understood as a set of conventions whose relation to the text is essential to the text's production of meaning. Already, this gives some indication of how genre might track changes in typical spatial processes. But before developing these indications, we must ascertain the means by which genres formalise constructions of space.

In *Narratology* (1978), Mieke Bal suggests that 'few concepts deriving from the theory of narrative texts are as self-evident yet have remained so vague as the concept of space'.[81] Fortunately, in the intervening years, much work has been undertaken in putting this right. This thesis arrives in the wake of the so-called 'spatial turn' in the humanities, presaged by a turn in geography toward the social and human sciences. Over the course of the 1980s and 90s, geographers like Edward Soja and Doreen Massey, themselves inspired by Jameson's insistence on postmodernity's privileging of space and the spatial philosophy of thinkers like Henri Lefebvre and Gaston Bachelard, published work that privileged the role of social and economic dynamics in the construction of place. Meeting them in a field between geography and the humanities, literary scholars like Franco Moretti,[82] Bertrand Westphal,[83] and Timothy Morton have advanced theories for understanding how space and place(s) are constructed in or otherwise inform literature.[84] These efforts reveal space as a constitutive category of narrative – the equal of time, rather than its subordinate. But whilst space is at least implicit in almost all narratives, in some, Bal suggests, it is

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[79] John Frow, *Genre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.
[80] Frow, p. 23.
[81] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), p. 124.
[82] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1999).
[83] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[84] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

'thematised'.[85] Space in such works becomes 'an object of presentation itself[…] an acting place rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space'.[86] Space can be thematised 'steadily' – as itself – or 'dynamically' – in the types of human action it makes possible or necessary.[87] This distinction is not, as I will show below, clear-cut. It does, however, name the apparent difference between the importance of space in travel writing and the urban novel, for example, whilst insisting on their similarity at a higher level of analysis. This is to say that my thesis is interested in genres that thematise space, either 'steadily' or 'dynamically'.

The most apparent way in in which genre thematises space is by codifying setting. Introducing *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017), Robert T. Tally Jr. notes that '[s]etting is a key feature of almost all stories, as events take place in a given place, after all. Distinctive locales, regions, landscapes, or other pertinent geographical features are often crucial to the meaning and effectiveness of literary work'.[88] Since genres constrain production and interpretation of meaning, it stands to reason that genre will codify certain settings, 'crucial' as they are to the 'meaning and effectiveness' of texts. Just as there are genres of literature, there are genres of place; as Bal notes, '[o]ne big city has a number of characteristics in common with every other big city. This also applies to the countryside, a village, a street, a house, and every other general category'.[89] Places have 'general' qualities that writers intermix with 'specific qualities'.[90] Adding specific qualities differentiates the setting of New York from the more general category of North American city. But general qualities remain 'function[al]' in the text – it is '[o]nly by means of general characteristics [that it is] possible to create an image at all'.[91] Spatial genres can then be understood as foregrounding or thematising the general qualities of a type of space or place. It is in this way that a work can be about natural spaces as much as about Walden Pond. The urban novel is one wherein the general qualities common to city space play a significant agential role in narrative, rather than a novel that happens to be set in a city.

But what of the urban gothic, detective fiction and the mysteries novel? Not all novels set in cities are straightforwardly urban novels. One must consider how settings emerge from their supposed place in the background and shape narrative structure. In the simplest terms, settings enable plots – not by providing an arena in which they take place, but by encoding values that make action meaningful. As Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu point out in *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (2016), 'narrative space can be structured by oppositions between colonizing countries and colonized regions; between life in the capital and life in the province (Balzac's *Human Comedy*); between home and away from home (*The Odyssey*); between the knowable and the unknowable (the town vs. the castle in

[85] Bal, p. 127.
[86] Bal, p. 127.
[87] Bal, p. 127.
[88] Robert T. Tally Jr., 'Introduction: the reassertion of space in literary studies', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).
[89] Bal, p. 127.
[90] Bal, p. 127.
[91] Bal, p. 127.

Kafka's *The Castle*)'.[92] Oppositions provide motivations, perils and stakes that underlay the movements of plot. And it is not simply the crossing of boundaries that is noteworthy, here. Rather, spaces can be 'closed and confining', 'open and liberating', or even 'open and alienating' as in many tales of metropolitan life.[93] Spatial genres tend to thematise general qualities of spaces, but also codify ways in which characters interact with(in) those spaces. The same qualities are thematised to different narrative ends. The city crowd is somewhere from which something emerges in the urban gothic; into which a villain disappears in detective fiction; and into which the protagonist ventures in a mysteries novel. This is why Bal's distinction between 'dynamically' and 'steadily' thematised space is not firm. Constructions of spaces and of the activities they enable or encourage become inextricable in the production of narrative. To attend to spatial genre is then to attend to interrelations of plot and setting.

The term 'setting' becomes a blunt instrument when approaching these interrelations. It homogenises the many spaces of a text, and is perhaps responsible for the tendency to understand space as an inert backdrop, rather than narrative agent. Helpfully, Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu disaggregate narrative space into a range of analytical objects. 'Setting' for them indicates the 'relatively stable socio-historical category that embraces the entire text'; early twentieth century Dublin in *Ulysses*, for example.[94] 'Spatial frames' are the 'immediate surroundings of the characters', their location; Harold and Molly Bloom's kitchen.[95] 'Story space' then 'consists of all the spatial frames plus all the locations mentioned by the text'; Gibraltar enters *Ulysses*' story space through Molly's childhood recollections.[96] 'Storyworld' refers to the story space plus the unnamed locations a reader might infer; Joyce's Gibraltar is presumably attached to the Iberian Peninsula.[97] Finally, '[n]arrative universe' describes the storyworld 'plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, fantasies, and imaginative creations'.[98] Understanding how spatial genres codify interrelations between narrative space and plot entails attending to how plot interacts with these particular categories, rather than the undifferentiated lump of setting. The robinsonade features little variation in spatial frame as the Crusoe figure remains stranded on their island. Crusoe wants to return home, to another frame which is in the story space either because the novel begins there or because it is often thought about and wished for. To do so, they must cross a distance inferred to exist in the storyworld, under conditions determined by the setting (in a futuristic setting, the protagonist might simply await rescue via teleportation).

But some spatial structures are not easily assigned to plot or narrative space. As Bakhtin shows in his theory of the literary chronotope, plot and narrative space are embroiled in 'the intrinsic

[92] Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), p. 38.
[93] Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu, p. 38.
[94] Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, p. 24.
[95] Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, p. 24.
[96] Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, p. 24.
[97] Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, pp. 24-5.
[98] Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, p. 25.

connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.[99] Chronotopes are not descriptions of space and time, but the implicit spatial and temporal rules underwriting relationships between entities in the text. Greek romance novels begin with 'hero and heroine' meeting, and conclude with their marriage.[100] Much action takes place between these 'poles of plot movement', but it cannot alter the individual integrity of this pair, or the fidelity of their love.[101] To adventure without consequences, the protagonists must remain 'the subject of the action', their escapades determined by chance.[102] The underlaying temporal structure is thus 'adventure time' – time striated into episodes that remain, by virtue of their lack of consequences, interchangeable.[103] Spaces are emptied of social, political, and cultural factors that might intervene with the rule of chance, and thus take on an 'abstract' character.[104] Places in this abstract space are as interchangeable as the episodes of adventure time. The chronotope of the Greek romance is therefore 'characterised by a *technical, abstract connection between space and time*, by the *reversibility* of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their *interchangeability* in space'.[105] Events have little connection with place; escapes cross unspecified distances; no place or episode has any causal relationship with other places and episodes. Setting, plot, and every act of narrative description is structured by the chronotope. To attend to the relationship between space and genre, then, one must also attend the grammar with which textual entities relate to each other within narratives.

Finally, we must consider the function of narrative perspective. In particular, it is important to note whether narration is omniscient, focalised on a character, or mimetic of that character's consciousness. In *Moving Through Modernity* (2009), Andrew Thacker undertakes spatial readings of Modernist texts wherein such mimesis acquired prominence. Thacker notes how 'interior monologue' relies on a 'series of spatial terms: *inner*, *outer* and the *boundary* between these', but finds this boundary far from impermeable.[106] Rather, 'the interiority of psychic space is often profoundly informed by exterior social spaces', and critics must 'examine this interplay between interior and exterior space'.[107] The archetypal literary figure for this interplay is the *flâneur*, for whom urban bustle stimulates a cool perspective which is turned back upon the city. The *flâneur* is usefully instructive here as a figure appearing in fictional and non-fictional texts, and has been the focus of discourse on the determining role of identity in perspective. Feminist critics have long discussed the gendering of the term, and debated the critical validity of a *flâneuse*. In *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), Deborah Parsons undermines this discourse by problematising any uncomplicated association of *flânerie* and male scopic privilege.[108] In Parsons' study, it is apparent that neither male nor

[99] Bakhtin, p. 84.
[100] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[101] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[102] Bakhtin, p. 105.
[103] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[104] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[105] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[106] Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: space and geography in modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 5.
[107] Thacker, p. 5.
[108] Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

female urbanites can be extricated from a complex of gendered gazes, and pressures on the construction of identity. Wherever attending to spaces relayed through or focalised on a particular characters, we must note how personality, mood, identity and so on modulate the space's constitution.

Genres that thematise space codify relationships between plot, chronotope and perspective across all levels of narrative space. Since so many variables are at play, there is an enormous variety in how we might approach each genre. Analysis of travel writing is likely to attend to the interrelation of interior and exterior space in perspective, and the identity-based factors involved in this process. The robinsonade or isolation narrative demands more attention to the relationship between spatial frame and plot. But it is easy to imagine readings of how spatial frames motivate plot in travel writing, or how the island shapes the mind of the robinsonade protagonist. There are always further readings, and in my chapters I endeavour to focus on the features of textual space that each genre foregrounds. To discern these, I engage with critical writing on the genre, and read texts from its pre-Internet canon. Then, by engaging with post-Internet works from the same genre, I look for shifts in generic conventions and relate these to characteristic features of post-Internet spatialisation. As the work of Thacker and Parsons shows in relation to Modernism, literature has been used by critics as a means of tracing transformations in spatial processes across history. Below, I show that this function can be extended to the historical present, and that changes in the codes of spatial genres are therefore useful in tracking changes in contemporary spatialisations.

Having established how genres codify practices for constructing literary space, I now must show that the practices codified by genre relate to questions of contemporaneity and tracking historical change. For this, I turn first to Theodore Martin's *Contemporary Drift* (2017), and 'too-close reading'.[109] For Martin, too-close reading means attending to those texts 'that we are invariably too close to and whose historical context isn't yet fully clear to us'.[110] Where historicist readings situate texts within established historical context, too-close reading uses contemporary literature as a means of provisional access to the nascent historical context of the present. *Contemporary Drift* is, in Martin's words, a 'controlled experiment in historical emergence', and genre is its primary means of experimental control.[111] When understood, as they are in this thesis, as 'collectively recognizable and reusable templates, genres provide a powerful social tool for making sense of what is emergent and unfamiliar about our contemporary moment'.[112] Generic change registers the interfacing of established ways of making sense of the world and emergent conditions to be made sense of. When westerns eschew desert heat for snowstorms, and post-apocalyptic novels contain tales more of drudgery than adventure, 'genres draw our attention to what changes; then they compel us to ask why'.[113] Through too-close readings, Martin shows that wintry westerns reflect the 'vicissitudes of

[109] Theodore Martin, *Contemporary Drift* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 22.
[110] Martin, p. 22.
[111] Martin, p. 13.
[112] Martin, p. 7.
[113] Martin, p. 13.

the weather in an age of climate change', and post-apocalyptic mundanity depicts 'the laborious yet precarious rhythms of postindustrial work'.[114] *Contemporary Drift* ultimately looks to discern how the contemporary as a whole is conceptualised in literary genres. But the methodology of too-close reading – moving outward from shifts in generic form to understand the novelty of the contemporary – is essential to this thesis.

The relationship between text and context is often used in historicist criticism to understand the spatial processes common to earlier periods. In *The City in Literature* (1998), Richard Lehan follows developments in how cities are built, inhabited and understood by reading period-specific literature. As he puts it, '[c]omic and romantic realism give us insights into the commercial city; naturalism and modernism into the industrial city; and postmodernism into the postindustrial city'.[115] Moreover, genre often plays an important role in such readings. There is a wealth of material, for example, on the relationship between Victorian crime and detective fiction and urban space. In *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2002), F. S. Schwarzbach identifies the fictional detective as an arbiter of social class, seeing through trickery and identifying the lower-class criminal. From this, he discerns 'deeply rooted anxieties about identity in a modern urban society'.[116] Victorian detective fiction betrays not just a concern with urban criminality, but also a 'fear that in the new, socially heterogenous milieu of the modern city it becomes impossible to tell the true gentleman from the imposter'.[117] Schwarzbach attends to historical context; the 'modern urban social revolution' that would see London's population grow by over five million in the nineteenth century.[118] But material and cultural determining factors must be joined with his reading of detective fiction to yield insights into the experience of contemporary urban space. Literature is understood as providing special insight into how spaces are constructed, understood, inhabited and navigated by contemporary subjects.

Attention to literary constructions of space is not exclusive to historicist critics reading period texts. Indeed, spaces play a crucial role in David Alworth's *Site Reading* (2016). Alworth's work picks out four 'sites' for literary analysis: dumps, roads, ruins, and asylums. He sees these sites as modelling social networks in Bruno Latour's sense; assemblages of human and non-human actants. More than adopting the dump as setting, for example, William S. Burrough's *Naked Lunch* (1959) gives 'literary form to [its] physical processes of decomposition and unformation'.[119] Burroughs describes 'embodied subjects dissipating into whorls of flesh, as well as physical objects degrading from brand-name commodities'.[120] Sentences and paragraphs fragment, and narrative units retain interior coherence without yielding a unitary narrative – *Naked Lunch* is a sludge of adventure time. For Alworth, all aspects of narrative form bear

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[114] Martin, pp. 21-2.
[115] Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 289.
[116] F. S. Schwarzbach, 'Newgate Novel to Detective Fiction' in *A Companion to Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thessing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 227-43 (p. 239).
[117] Schwarzbach, p. 239.
[118] Schwarzbach, p. 239.
[119] David J. Alworth, *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 52.
[120] Alworth, p. 56.

traces of how sites are understood in the contemporary moment. We share this understanding of literary space, but Alworth is interested in an equivalence between space and the Latourian social. His sites 'mode[l] and theoriz[e] social experience',[121] and Burrough's dump ultimately constitutes a 'response to postwar American society' wherein booming production turned out 'a massive quantity of garbage'.[122] He reveals Burroughs as 'an actor-network-theorist in the extreme, a sociologist high on junk'.[123] Doubtless, there is merit to this reading, but this thesis does not strive for such conclusions. Whilst I agree that spaces are social, my readings will not discern the social by reading the spatial. Rather, my focus is precisely on changes in how space is constructed and experienced.

In this, I am closer to the approach of David James' *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (2008). James puts generic change into conversation with spatial changes wrought by the 'political revolution' of Thatcherism.[124] His chapter on regional realism identifies a newfound capacity to 'evoke the resilience of intimate familial and subjective relationships with local environments, without neglecting the impact of wider constitutional changes occurring on a national scale'.[125] Such an approach can be compared to Martin's analysis of the dialectic between generic 'templates' and emergent historical conditions. Regional novels conventionally evoke 'habitats characterised by native insularity or regression', but the emergent involvement of rural communities with national policy challenges this generic code.[126] This historical context in mind, James finds a 'subtle yet experimental advance' in the novels of Pat Barker and Adam Thorpe.[127] Rather than representing timeless rural enclaves, they 'imply that alternative spaces remain latent yet inferable amid the demands of the present, spaces which seem imperceptible to those that greet their local environment with cynical detachment rather than spirited engagement'.[128] In *Union Street* (1982), *Blow Your House Down* (1984), and *Liza's England* (1986), Barker brings unembellished spatial reportage together with moments of impressionist revelation within passages with a singular focal character. She thereby stages the rupture of disaffection by 'the substantive possibilities [that] persist amid everyday spaces'.[129] In *Ulverton* (1992), Thorpe achieves similar ends with a narrative focalised through a large array of the titular village's inhabitants, past and present. For both Barker and Thorpe, shifts in narrative tone resist a foreclosing, essentialising construction of place.

However, whilst James's analyses 'reconsider familiar links between certain genres and geographies', his interest in 'artistry' signals a 'particularising' approach to texts.[130] Setting out for 'a precise understanding of [the] relationship between setting and formal innovation for novelists today', he focuses

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[121] Alworth, p. 19.
[122] Alworth, p. 61.
[123] Alworth, p. 68.
[124] David James, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 34.
[125] James, p. 49.
[126] James, p. 42.
[127] James, p. 42.
[128] James, p. 68.
[129] James, p. 68.
[130] James, p. 15.

on the creative idiosyncrasy of selected writers.[131] In this thesis, however, I focus on authors' relationship to genre convention in order to trace how post-Internet mediation shapes contemporary space. For this reason, I generalise, rather than particularise – attending to generic continuity among texts, rather than the differentiation produced by the workings of an individual author's style.

I can now outline the methodology of this thesis. Since my interest is in literary evocations of post-Internet space, the texts analysed in depth will be from the post-Internet period. Technocultural change is typically gradual – there are early adopters and abstainers, and it can take time for us to understand what we're using. But since it plays a decisive role, I use the release of the iPhone as a benchmark, and understand post-Internet texts as those published after 2007. I begin each chapter by establishing the generic codes of a spatial genre through readings of criticism and pre-Internet literature. Then, I turn to media theory and related disciplines to outline post-Internet influences on relevant spatial processes. Finally, I undertake too-close readings of post-Internet literature that look for traces of pre-Internet generic codes encountering post-Internet spatial processes. Each genre is a distinct set of codes and practices, and relating literature with historical change means encountering the complexity of everyday life. In each chapter, however, I aim to disentangle the effect of post-Internet meditation from these broader contexts of determination. This entails heuristic agility; willingness to draw interpretive approaches from within and beyond literary studies. Before concluding this section, therefore, I briefly outline the critical approach that justifies such methodological promiscuity. In so doing, I provide a model for how generic change is theorised.

For Caroline Levine, form 'mean[s] all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference'.[132] Whilst literary texts provide her analytical objects, Levine's readings involve 'forms aesthetic and social, spatial and temporal, ancient and modern, major and minor, like and unlike, punitive and narrative, material and metrical'.[133] Each form looks to exercise its 'dominant order' upon the text, and in this sense, every form thwarts all others.[134] But this thwarting, for Levine, is a 'productive conflict'.[135] Rather than the subjugation of one form under another, Levine identifies the many ways in which forms subvert, amplify, modulate and merge. For example, in the first half of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), Tom passes a series of masculinity tests on the playing-fields of Rugby School. But the novel's latter half sees him asked to take care of a younger student; '[i]f the hero is victorious because he manfully withstands a series of assaults, the second half turns him into a pliable, recognizably feminine character: yielding, submissive, and open to alterity'.[136] The literary form of the *Bildungsroman* and the non-literary form of the gender binary 'begin to operate together' in determining the

[131] James, p. 20.
[132] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 3.
[133] Levine, p. 16.
[134] Levine, p. 81.
[135] Levine, p. 37.
[136] Levine, p. 15.

novel's narrative.[137] To produce a progressive narrative, rather than a reiterative sequence of episodes, Hughes must introduce a pliancy to Tom's character, but this pliancy 'falls on the feminine side of the gender binary'.[138] So long as masculinity equates to unyieldingness, the *Bildung* of characters like Tom will inevitably be a feminisation. The textual surface of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, then, articulates the formal collision between a generic structure and an extra-literary form.

Levine demonstrates how genre operates as one form among others, and how close-reading can uncover co-action of generic codes and historical context. To read *Tom Brown's Schooldays* as a *Bildungsroman* is necessarily to understand how its generic emphasis on maturation through trial interfaces with Victorian understandings of gender. This is my understanding of how texts participate in, rather than belong to genre. To participate in a genre is to deploy its forms, but forms are invariably deployed in collaboration with other forms. And since genres are sets of regularities, generic codes are themselves liable to shift when texts participating in said genres come to regularly do so in a particular way. As such, I understand generic change as a process by which the new structures that emerge when generic codes interface with other forms are repeated enough that they become generic codes themselves. In this thesis, then, I have selected four genres whose participant texts necessarily interface generic conventions with spatial forms. Works of travel writing cannot help but interface the codifications of the genre with the forms of contemporary travel; the equivalent is true for nature writing, the isolation novel, and the urban novel. But as these spatial forms have shifted with the emergence of the post-Internet mediational environment, the outcomes of such interfacing have shifted also. I demonstrate such shifts in the coming chapters, adopting various hermeneutic techniques to meet the multiplicity of forms and their interactions. But first, I close this introduction by situating my work alongside existing scholarship on the relationship between literary criticism and the Internet.

1.4 The Internet in literary criticism

There is a long history of critical approaches to literature and media broadly, not least in disciplines interested in the materiality and mediational qualities of the codex like book history and the sociology of literature. Wherever the idea of oral tradition is invoked, to discuss texts like *The Odyssey* (*c.* 700 B.C.E.) and *Beowulf* (*c.* 1000), the mediational properties of speech and writing are implicitly in comparison.[139] Nevertheless, the degree of literary critical debate stimulated by the Internet was unprecedented for a nascent technology. It has provided digital humanities scholars new tools with which to approach texts, and given writers new means to write and new experiences and lifestyles to write about. This thesis is

[137] Levine, p. 16.
[138] Levine, p. 16.
[139] See: Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2002).

predominantly interested in how these new experiences and lifestyles are conveyed in literature. As such, I begin below by addressing cyberpunk novels that precede the commercialisation of the Internet, and a surge in critical attention to such works in commercialisation's wake. I then discuss critical reception of Internet enabled literary forms and practices. Many felt hypertext heralded the death of print literature, but critics gradually turned to print's means of adaptation to a media ecology wherein its monopoly on text was weakened. The apparent resolution of cyberpunk's utopic and dystopic energies signals a broader shift to a post-Internet literature equivalent to the post-Internet art discussed above. To conclude this introduction, I finally establish the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this thesis' chapters in relation to this shift.

Whilst Marshall McLuhan is today positioned as a foundational media theorist, it is worth noting that he was a literary scholar by training. After attaining bachelor's and master's degrees in English at The University of Manitoba, McLuhan pursued doctoral study at Cambridge under I. A. Richards. McLuhan blended his disciplines in the Harley Parker co-authored *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting* (1968), and peppered his media theoretical scholarship with literary references. I am not merely gesturing to the historical interrelation of the disciplines central to this thesis, here. Rather, McLuhan's 'Notes on Burroughs' (1964), published in the same year as *Understanding Media*, provides a useful origin for literary critical reflections on cyberpunk. For McLuhan, novel technologies invariably 'yiel[d] new Utopias', as writers and artists construct worlds determined by their patterns and logics.[140] Plato's *Republic* (375 B.C.E.) was the utopia of phonetic writing; Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516) of print; Lewis Carol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) the 'non-Euclidean space-time Utopia' of electricity, and Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886) its 'grown-up' equivalent.[141] But once the 'full consequences' of the technology have 'manifested in new psychic and social forms' anti-Utopias challenge techno-utopianism.[142] Burroughs *Naked Lunch* was for McLuhan the anti-Utopia of electric mediation. The decomposition Alworth noted was the decomposition of boundaries in a world wherein 'electric media [had] stretch[ed] the nerves to form a global membrane of enclosure'.[143] *Naked Lunch* was sounding the alarm, 'trying to point to the shut-on button' of electric mediation. It demonstrated, to McLuhan, that we now 'live in science fiction'.[144]

For many critics, cyberpunks turn Burroughs' sense of imminent technocultural catastrophe and science-fictionalised life upon the Internet. In *Virtual Geographies* (2003), Sabine Heuser notes how frequently Burroughs appears in anthologies looking to contextualise cyberpunk, and is cited as an

[140] Marshall McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', *the Nation*, 199.21 (1964), pp. 517-19 (p. 517).
[141] McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', p. 518.
[142] McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', p. 518.
[143] McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', p. 519.
[144] McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', p. 519.

influence by cyberpunks like Gibson, Pat Cadigan, and Bruce Stirling.[145] In his foundational anthology *Mirrorshades* (1986), Sterling calls cyberpunks 'the first SF generation to grow up […] in a truly science-fictional world'.[146] But Burroughs' science-fictional world of television and radio was the world of their childhoods; their writing anticipated another technological moment. As Heuser notes, [c]yberpunk is the first literary movement or sub-genre to grow up alongside the internet and its community'.[147] Many cyberpunk writers accessed the young Internet through research institutions to which they belonged. Distributing and discussing fanzines through Listservs, these early-adopters witnessed the utopic potential of the Internet before its commercial launch.[148] But the present gave them cause to worry. Sterling's assertion that '[t]echnical culture has gotten out of hand', and that the 'traditional power structure, the traditional institutions, have lost control of the pace of change' is indicative.[149] Cyberpunk foreground technological addiction and exploitation, ungovernable mega-corporations and rogue artificial intelligences. Future technologies were synthesised with the technoculture of the present, and the results merged dystopic and utopic elements.

Many critics reflected on this tendency; in *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture* (2000), Dani Cavallero notes that 'utopias and dystopias are inextricable' in cyberpunk.[150] Cyberspace is a utopia into which one might escape from dilapidated urban sprawl; utopia compensating for dystopia.[151] But in *Technophobia!* (2006), Daniel Dinello finds the 'techno-paradisical escape' it provides typically revealed as a site of extraction and exploitation undertaken by those same shadowy corporations that had so diminished meatspace.[152] He observes this tendency in novels like *Neuromancer* and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1995), and films like *Tron* (1982) and *eXistenZ* (1999).[153] It is most palpable in the 'cyber-space addiction that typically 'dominates humans to the exclusion of human connection', whilst 'provid[ing them] thrills, freedom and empowerment'.[154] Indeed, Cavallero notes that many, including the protagonist of *Neuromancer*, pursue the 'boundless playing fields of cyberspace' with the 'desperate single-mindedness of drug addicts'.[155] Cyberpunk literature modulates the Internet's utopic potential with the drug problems and urban degradation of *Naked Lunch* and late twentieth century America. Techno-utopianism is tempered by Sterling's untethered technoculture and Internet's military origins. The habitual merging of utopia and

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[145] Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 12. See also: Dani Cavallero, *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), p. 19.
[146] Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. by Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1988), pp. ix-xvi (p. xi).
[147] Heuser, p. 15.
[148] Heuser, p. 17.
[149] Sterling, p. xii.
[150] Cavallero, pp. 35-6.
[151] This point is advanced convincingly by Heuser, who characterises the cyberspace/meatspace distinction as a unique cyberpunk chronotope.
[152] Dinello, p. 147.
[153] Dinello, p. 14.
[154] Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia!: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 160.
[155] Cavallero, p. 36.

dystopia for many critics represents ambivalence over the Internet's commercial future in the literature of its earliest adopters.

The critical works mentioned above were published ten to fifteen years after the novels they discuss; the commercial Internet's proliferation in the 1990s stimulated surging critical interest in works that had imagined its trajectory. Cyberspace became a way, writes Vincent Mosco in *The Digital Sublime* (2004), for people to comprehend 'the seemingly incomprehensible, to cope with problems that are overwhelmingly intractable'.[156] The Internet was complex and confusing, but its rapid adoption necessitated attempts to understand it. The cyberspace of cyberpunk afforded a model for thinking through the mediational changes of the millennium. Whilst they attended to the historical context of cyberpunk literature, though, critics often foregrounded its predictive acumen. Reflecting on the scene's development in 'Before the Lights Came On: Observations of a Synergy' (1991), for example, Steve Brown saw cyberpunks writing 'SF that more accurately reflected the future of the real world'.[157] Dinello indulges a similar tendency by suggesting the hyper-surveilled world of Stephenson's *Snow Crash* to be '[p]rojecting a time that may not be far in the future'.[158] Whether we agree with Dinello or not, it is unusual to see a critic appraising the predictive function of a science fiction text, rather than its estrangement and reflection of the present. Inadvertently echoing McLuhan's reading of Burroughs, Dinello finds that cyberpunk 'sounds an alarm that contrasts sharply with the divine prophesies of the cyber-utopians'.[159] Early in the Internet's commercial release, literature reflecting life online had not yet emerged, and critics could only study texts that predicted such a life.

Around the same time, others attended to how online reading and writing practices might impact on print equivalents, retaining the future-orientation of cyberpunk and its criticism. Cyberpunk's utopian and dystopian energies were mirrored in suggestions that Internet-enabled literature would bring what Robert Coover called 'The End of Books' (1992). Coover is not against such a development, but summarises a contemporary concern that hypertext challenges '[v]enerable novelistic values like unity, integrity, coherence, vision' and 'voice' such that 'the novel, too, as we know it, has come to its end'.[160] Indeed, in *Hypertext* (1991), George Landow highlights a tendency to see 'electronic writing as a direct response to the strengths and weaknesses of the printed book'.[161] The continuous and uniform patterns McLuhan associated with print suited it to 'conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and

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156 Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 13.
157 Steve Brown, 'Before the Lights Came On: Observations of a Synergy', in *Storming the Reality Studio: Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, ed. by Lawrence McCaffery (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 173-7 (p. 176).
158 Dinello, p. 166.
159 Dinello, p. 274.
160 Robert Coover, 'The End of Books', *The New York Times*, 21 June 1992 <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/09/27/specials/coover-end.html?> [accessed 2 July 2025].
161 George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 3.

linearity'.[162] By allowing users to click away from the text, move in any direction rather than remaining limited to its linear unfolding, hypertext allows altogether new ideas to be expressed. This central understanding is advanced in Ted Nelson's coinage of the term 'hypertext' in *Literary Machines* (1981), wherein it is framed as '[u]nrestricted by sequence', enabling 'new forms of writing which better reflect the structure of what we are writing *about*'.[163] For these critics and practitioners, hypertext revealed print writing as limiting expression by enforcing a linear structure on non-linear ideas. Electronic writing was sure to displace print, not least because it allowed new, nonlinear structures without foreclosing on traditional, linear modes of expression.

After this initial concern, though, critics began attending to relations between the Internet and print literature beyond the paradigm of media competition. In *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), Janet Murray insists that '[t]he computer is not the enemy of the book', but 'the child of print culture, a result of five centuries of collective enquiry and invention that the printing press made possible'.[164] For critics like Murray, differences between hypertext and print were not strengths and weaknesses broadly, but only in relation to the particular story being told. Some stories suit hypertext, others print. In texts like Jorge Luis Borges' 'The Garden of Forking Paths' (1941), Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and Milorad Pavic's *The Dictionary of the Khazars* (1988), Murray reveals a tendency toward nonlinear narratives in twentieth century literature and film.[165] Rather than a radical break, hypertext fiction was a direct continuation of these experiments in film and print.[166] Hypertext fiction and print fiction would co-exist precisely because of the formal differences noted by Landow and Nelson. Hypertext would continue the non-linear experimentation of twentieth century film and literature whilst print attended to those linear narratives to which it is suited.

But hypertext was not the only online practice reshaping print literary practices. As noted, Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* was grounded in studies of fan cultures. Jenkins demonstrates the co-action of old- and new-media in the fan-fiction culture of *Harry Potter* (1997-2007), and introduces the term 'transmedia storytelling' to describe an 'art of worldmaking' enlisting consumers as 'hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across different media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups'.[167] Fan-content and transmedia storytelling refigure the novel as an aperture, through which fans pass into a storyworld that is never exhausted.[168] Like hypertext, these practices are found to

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[162] Landow, p. 2.
[163] Theodor Holm Nelson, *Literary Machines* (South Bend: Distributors, 1987), p. 0/2.
[164] Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: The Free Press, 2016), p. 14.
[165] Murray, pp. 37-43.
[166] Murray's sometime student and hypertext author Nick Montfort ties hypertext literature into an even longer tradition by revealing its congruity with the pre-literate form of the riddle in: Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).
[167] Jenkins, p. 21.
[168] See: *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, ed. by Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

press print texts into a new, but not necessarily diminished role.[169] Whilst the utopic and dystopic energies of cyberpunk animated early discussions of how the Internet would surely supplant print literature, discourse quickly softened. Discussions over the future of print literature persisted – indeed, in 2014 *The Guardian* published an article by Will Self titled 'The novel is dead (this time it's for real)'.[170] By-and-large, though, attention turned to the novel's position in a mediational context defined by Internet use, rather than its exclusion.

For many, this new textual ecosystem signalled the end of the postmodern period in literature, and the onset of a new cultural hegemony. Indeed, as N. Katherine Hayles and Tod Gannon suggest in 'Mood Swings: The Aesthetics of Ambient Emergence' (2007), '[o]n or about August 1995, postmodernism died'.[171] This date marks the release of Netscape, 'the first commercial Web browser to be both robust and user friendly'.[172] The Internet was out of specialist hands and into public life, restructuring cultural logic. In *Digimodernism* (2009), Alan Kirby offers the first book-length study of this Internet-enabled cultural logic. For Kirby, 'the computerisation of text' restructures understandings of textuality.[173] In its 'pure [online] form', the digimodernist text 'permits the reader or viewer to intervene textually, physically to make the text, to add visible content or tangibly shape narrative development'.[174] Print texts will surely evoke this constitutive incompleteness by adapting 'narrative forms[…] which open the storytelling up internally and estrange it from its supposed destiny'.[175] Kirby admits reticence to imagine this practice in detail, but Ellen Rose does so in 'Hyper Attention and the Rise of the Antinarrative' (2012). For Rose, print must adapt to 'the hyper attentive mind whose reading practices are fragmentary, extremely distractible, and increasingly disinclined to follow a single narrative thread to its distant conclusion'.[176] Telos will make-way for associative bricolage in 'antinarratives' that mimic the Internet in having 'no beginning, middle, or end'.[177] The muted plots of Jennie Offill's *Department of Speculation* (2014), Ben Lerner's *The Topeka School* (2019) and Natasha Brown's *Assembly* (2021) seemingly bear this out. Even as it persists in print, the novel's traditional preoccupation with contemporary life necessitates responses to post-Internet conditions.

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[169] For analogous discussions on poetry see: *Reading #Instapoetry*, ed. by JuEunhae Knox and James Mackay (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024) and *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, ed. by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).
[170] Will Self, 'The novel is dead (this time it's for real)', *The Guardian*, 2 May 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction> [accessed 3 July 2025].
[171] N. Katherine Hayles and Tod Gannon, 'Mood Swings: The Aesthetics of Ambient Emergence', in *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*, ed. by Neil Brooks and Josh Toth (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 99-142 (p. 99).
[172] Hayles and Gannon, p. 99.
[173] Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How new technologies dismantle the postmodern and reconfigure our culture* (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 1.
[174] Kirby, p. 1.
[175] Kirby, p. 159.
[176] Ellen Rose, 'Hyper Attention and the Rise of the Antinarrative: Reconsidering the Future of Narrativity', *Narrative Works*, 2.2 (2012), pp. 92-102 (pp.100-1).
[177] Rose, p. 99.

Many contemporary critics noted an echo of Modernism's responses to industrialisation, urbanisation, and their impacts on social life. Meta-modernism emerged as a framework for understanding how early twentieth century formal experimentation was revivified by writers addressing another moment of technocultural upheaval. As Jessica Pressman summarises in *Digital Modernism* (2013): 'Making it new may be the oldest trick in the book, but it has newfound urgency in[…] an age increasingly defined by engagement with new media and obsessed with newness'.[178] Pressman shows how Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (2006) uses variations in font and colour create semantic resonances across its linear narratives,[179] and highlights the slow materiality of print by requiring rotation in time with the horizontal inversion of each page's text.[180] Together, these techniques incorporate hypertextual logic into the print text, whilst reflexively thematising the status of the codex in the post-Internet mediational ecosystem. In 'The Novel in the Digital Age' (2018), Pressman expands by showing how strategies like these, and the proliferation of literally massive novels of 800+ pages make 'the physical presence of information[…] an ontological and epistemological subject as well as an aesthetic one'.[181] But even as they problematise the Internet's de-materialising of information, such novels provoke hyperreading for making sense of enormous and complex plots.[182] Twenty years after Coover announced its death, critics discussed the novel's adaptations to the mediational changes that were supposed to kill it. But whilst criticism no longer insists on the novel's demise, a turn to modernist thought betrays continued preoccupation with the Internet's disruptive potential and the newness of new-media.

From cyberpunk and its criticism, through fears of the novel's death, into discussions of print's adaptation to online textuality, the Internet's impact on literature has frequently been figured in terms of upheaval, revolution, and radical transformation. Until recently, there had been comparatively less attention to the Internet as agent in workaday twenty-first century life: under the conditions of what Zara Dinnen calls the 'digital banal'. Today, the Internet is not experienced as an antagonistic, revolutionary force – at least not always. Rather, it has faded into the infrastructural background of contemporary processes, behaviours and attitudes. We are out of Mosco's 'mythic period', Rushkoff's disorientation, and into a post-Internet period wherein the Internet is experienced as banal. Dinnen suggests we attend to texts wherein the Internet plays a backgrounded role in order to understand lives lived on and with the Internet. Attending to 'fleeting expression[s] of technology within a narrative about something else', writes Dinnen, we might 'make visible, or reveal, some of those codes – mediation, computation – of the contemporary moment

[178] Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making it New in New Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 1.
[179] Pressman, *Digital Modernism*, pp. 167-8.
[180] Pressman, *Digital Modernism*, p. 161.
[181] Jessica Pressman, 'The Novel in the Digital Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 254-67 (p. 256).
[182] Pressman, 'The Novel in the Digital Age', p. 258.

that otherwise remain hidden'.[183] Only the ordinariness of the Internet in such narratives allows critics access to its ordinariness in everyday life.

Banality, in Dinnen's work, names the affective component of what I have termed the post-Internet. Like this thesis, *The Digital Banal* is underwritten by Kember and Zylinska's turn from media to mediation. Attending to mediation, Dinnen suggests, 'is necessary in order to apprehend the operations of media[…] that do not appear as discrete objects or procedures, but that form and reform as temporary instantiations of media, agents, relations, and networks'.[184] Relinquishing the need to attend to the literary construction of media objects enables us to attend to moments like the one narrated by Macfarlane in this thesis' opening, wherein the influence of the Internet outlives the moment of its use. Dinnen is interested in how the novelty of life in the post-Internet mediational ecology is effaced by the commercialised novelty of an unending stream of new gadgets. Banality, she argues, is the affective correlative of this effacement; the affect that disguises the political and social ramifications of a post-Internet world wherein 'there is no discrete experience of being online' because 'everything is online'.[185] The Internet infiltrates every aspect of our lives, animates myriad devices, but we have moved on – or been moved on – from its novelty.

Banality effaces many changes to how we experience, inhabit, and navigate space. The post-Internet mediational ecology is defined by the spatial proliferation of online activity; the smartphone enables Internet access from anywhere, GPS allows access to location-specific information, geolocated information inscribes place with informational layers. We begin a film on our television and continue on our smartphone or laptop whilst taking the train to work. Dinnen notes such developments, and the new social and subjective forms that they engender. Indeed, the second half of *The Digital Banal* 'interrogate[s] the[…] material environment and situation' of post-Internet life.[186] She turns 'outward, to places where software is made, to the lag of distributed digital networks, to server farms and underground cabling, to media infrastructure and environmental damage'.[187] But whilst this analysis of the relationship between space and digitality aims to account for the affective effacement of novelty, I am interested in recovering and documenting those particular novel spatial processes that are effaced.

In *The Digital Banal,* Dinnen shows the importance of analysing the Internet's role in texts not entirely preoccupied with Internet use. At the same time, Kember and Zylinska show that mediation determines behaviour and experience even when digital media objects are set aside. There are two important methodological implications to these arguments. First, all texts of the post-Internet period are determined in part by post-Internet mediation, and one might read texts that make no mention of the Internet

[183] Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 167.
[184] Dinnen, p. 4.
[185] Dinnen, p. 164.
[186] Dinnen, p. 4.
[187] Dinnen, p. 4.

whatsoever. Not all Modernist texts are topically *about* urbanisation, industrialisation, social fragmentation and collapsing progress narratives, but we nevertheless analyse them in such terms. The means of such analysis lead into the second methodological implication of the shift from media to mediation. Critics often discern the fragmentation of culture and historical narrative as being reflected in Modernist literature's formal and narrative fragmentation. The Internet pervasively structures everyday life, and is itself a means of structuring information. As such, the impact of today's post-Internet ecology can also be traced at the level of literary form: the genre conventions that this thesis focusses on.

Whilst literary criticism has not neglected the Internet's effects on form, a preoccupation with disruption and experimental practices has overlooked banal but pervasive shifts. Anna Kornbluh's *Immediacy, or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism* (2023) reveals broad, formal qualities of post-Internet literature whilst attending to popular texts and eschewing speculation. For Kornbluh, contemporary literature habitually effaces its own mediational function with gestures not unlike those observed by Dinnen. This entails 'repudiat[ing] representation itself, dismantling narration, character, plot, and the smoke of myth[…] Eating the real with a spoon'.[188] These habits animate Sally Rooney's unadorned prose and ennuied plots as much as the arch autofictional writing of Lauren Oyler, who described Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) as 'so even-toned that it's not disturbing'.[189] Expressed in Kornbluh's idiosyncratic listing format, these habits underwrite:

> autofiction
>
> a new prevalence of first-person in fiction
>
> a supervalence of memoir in the literary marketplace
>
> the personal-essay boom
>
> proliferating realisms
>
> a swelling of the abject
>
> the prose-poetry upsurge
>
> and its Rubin vase companion, the twittering archipelagization of prose.[190]

[188] Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy, or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2023), p. 5.
[189] Lauren Oyler, 'The Socialism Network: Sally Rooney's novels of millennial intimacy', *Bookforum*, 26.1 (2019), <https://www.bookforum.com/print/2601/sally-rooney-s-novels-of-millennial-intimacy-20818> [accessed 22 December 2024].
[190] Kornbluh, pp. 50-1.

All these disavow fictionality, 'creat[ing]' as Oyler suggests autofiction does, 'the illusion of a thinner boundary' – a less mediated relation – 'between the author and the reader'.[191] An immediate relation between author and reader secured by the assumed 'self-manifestation' of author in text is, non-coincidentally, the logic of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok.[192] Immediacy, for Kornbluh, is the cultural logic that succeeds postmodernism – her argument is grounded in Jamesonian cultural Marxism. But *Immediacy* highlights the need to look beyond depictions of Internet use in literature, regardless of how backgrounded they may be, and pay attention to post-Internet mediation's more subtle structuring of literary form.

Kornbluh's suggestion that '[s]patially, immediacy encloses while delivering everything close: the world at your fingertips' returns us to Macfarlane, in remotest Greenland.[193] The immediate logic of the post-Internet mediational ecology calls him to reach into the landscape. The incongruity of this mediationally conditioned spatial engagement within this particular locale reveals the banality with which it is received elsewhere, in the environs of everyday life. Macfarlane notices the novelty of his Internet-enabled conflation of proximity and distance when it disrupts his sense of what is appropriate to this space, circumstance, or narrative moment. It is precisely this process in which this thesis is interested: the revelation of post-Internet spatial conditions through their subversion of literary expectations.

Novel means of constructing, experiencing, inhabiting and navigating everyday space are effaced in a culture of what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun calls 'habitual new media', but we would take pause if the heroine of a gothic novel were to escape via Uber.[194] Generic codes afford patterns, repetitions throughout a canon of texts whose changes register adjustments in the facets of life with which their respective genre is concerned. In this thesis I do not attend to the Internet as an imagined catastrophe, or even as a driver of metamodernist experimentation. Doubtlessly, it has been and still can be viewed as both. Instead, I am interested in the Internet that has disappeared into the background of workaday life, and the suite of spatial behaviours and experiences it engenders. In four chapters, I will focus on travel writing, before nature writing, then the isolation novel, and finally the urban novel. Each is in a moment of transition. Generic codifications for the representation of space are interfacing with emergent, post-Internet spatial habits and processes. Mediational change, spatial change, literary change; all are incorporated into what Williams might call a whole social experience.

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[191] Lauren Oyler, *No Judgement: Essays* (New York: HarperCollins, 2024), p. 130.
[192] Kornbluh, p. 73.
[193] Kornbluh, p. 4.
[194] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Habitual New Media: Updating to Remain the Same* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

Chapter 2 Anthropocene Ecology, Internet Storytelling, and the Spatial-Ghosts of the Nature Writing Chronotope

2.1 Introduction

In *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing* (1995), Richard Mabey suggests that the 'vivid paintings of boars and bison discovered in southern Europe', which 'predate writing by thousands of years' prefigure nature writing's 'fascination with life forms dramatically different from ourselves, yet plainly filled with the same capacity for movement, fear, pain, and caring'.[1] If we accept these prehistoric roots, the genre has a very long history indeed. Mabey situates nature writing somewhere along a continuum that stretches between 'bald biological writing at one extreme and fictional accounts at the other'.[2] It is interested not only in the animal world of cave-painting, but also in botany, geology – the more-than-human. Nevertheless, it is a human genre inflected with human forms; 'part of the quest for the essential characteristics and boundaries of being human'.[3] Nature writing is particularly informed by 'the prevailing scientific view of nature' – it constructs 'nature' as understood in its contemporary moment.[4] In this chapter I examine the relationship between ecologically informed constructions of space in nature writing and our ever-evolving understanding of the more-than-human world. Ultimately, I suggest that printed nature writing has struggled to respond to late twentieth century developments in ecological thinking, but is now adopting post-Internet storytelling techniques to do so.

I begin by arguing that the close observation necessary to nature writing has historically limited texts to discussing a relatively small, walkable region. This has shaped the 'chronotope' of nature writing, Mikhail Bakhtin's term denoting sets of techniques through which texts or genres construct time and space. Reading Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977), I show that the classical nature writing chronotope encourages textual construction of small, bounded ecologies I term 'locales'. Then, I survey developments in ecological thought heralded by James Lovelock's *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth* (1979) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) that shift our understanding of ecology to one that the locale chronotope struggles to mediate. Ecologically bounded regions cannot exist within Lovelock's globally indivisible ecology. Reading *Second Nature* (1984), an anthology collated by the Common Ground

[1] Richard Mabey, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1.
[2] Mabey, p. 1.
[3] Mabey, p. 1.
[4] Mabey, p. 2.

conservationist movement, I chart literary responses to this tension. Alongside Friends of the Earth and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Common Ground characterised a dominant strand of ecological thought in the 1970's, and introducing *Second Nature*, Mabey proposes a networked form of localism to confront global ecological issues at an everyday scale.[5] Despite this proposal, I demonstrate that ecologically networked localism in *Second Nature* is an aspiration, rather than a shift in nature writing's generic tendencies.

In the early twenty-first century, however, the ecological situation seems dire and calamitous. Lovelock, Carson and Common Ground's portentousness has been replaced with a sense of urgency and immediacy. Reading Robert Macfarlane's *Underland* (2019), I show that contemporary nature writers respond to this urgency by forcing networked localism into print. The locale chronotope is used in such texts to discuss an ecology with which it is fundamentally incompatible. This incompatibility is overcome through the suppression of ecological relations between events and entities within the locale and those beyond it. These relations resurface as phantasmic figures lingering incongruously at the horizons of texts like *Underland*, or Kathleen Jamie's *Surfacing* (2019). These ghostly figures therefore embody nature writing's struggle to adapt to the spatiality of modern ecology. All of this said, I conclude by examining Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* (2017), a work of 'ambient literature' which conjoins print and post-Internet storytelling practices. Works like Speakman's construct parallel presents – layering locale upon locale and exploring ecological connections between regions without violating the ecological boundedness fundamental to the nature writing chronotope. Such works therefore square the locale chronotope with modern constructions of a global ecological system, thus exercising nature writing's spatial-ghosts

Before this, I will narrow my scope slightly. Firstly, to British nature writing. In documenting subjective encounters with the more-than-human world, nature writing registers this world as mediated by the writer's structures of thought. But texts like Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) and the Jason Moore edited collection *Anthropocene or Capitalocene* (2016) reveal our ideas of nature and the natural world as epistemic constructs. As such, differing cultural histories of 'nature' must be accounted for before undertaking this study. Macfarlane has highlighted, for example, the extent to which British and American understandings of wilderness differ. The former finds it in small places, 'in the strange and ragged interzones of a farmed English landscape – hedges, ditches, ponds, spinneys' – whereas for the latter it is a 'function of grandness of scale, a phenomenon to be experienced only amid the red-rock dihedral citadels in the desert states, or the vaporous magnificence of the Niagra Falls, or the vast mirror lakes of the Rockies'.[6] This is one deep rift between two cultural constructions the object of nature writing's study. We

[5] Jos Smith, *The New Nature Writing: Rethinking the Literature of Place* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 4.
[6] Robert Macfarlane, 'Where the wild things were', *The Guardian*, 30 July 2005 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jul/30/featuresreviews.guardianreview22> [accessed 3 August 2023].

might also look to Britain's longstanding relationship with processes of enclosure, inflected – as Bret Cristophers notes in *The New Enclosure* (2018) – by Thatcherist privatisation after the 1970s. Limiting discussion to works from a single tradition seems a suitable balancing of nature writing's generic cohesion and the many variations that emerge from its foundation in subjective categories.

Secondly, in tracing how developments in ecological thought since the 1960s disrupt nature wiring conventions, I focus in particular on so-called 'new nature writing'. For Joe Moran, new nature writing is a melting-pot, 'combining personal reflection with natural history, cultural history, psychogeography, travel and topographical writing, folklore and prose poetry',[7] to address 'anxieties about human disconnection from natural processes' from the late twentieth century onward.[8] Moreover, it 'represents a critical engagement with the rich history of British nature writing'.[9] Sometimes, this comes in direct engagement with older works, as when Helen Macdonald connects her goshawk in training *H is for Hawk* (2014) with T.H White's narration of similar experiences in *The Goshawk* (1951). More often, though, new nature writing employs traditional generic conventions either to question them, or to argue for their continued relevance. New nature writing is aware of its heritage, but in, for example, Robert Macfarlane's tireless defence of the parochial, we might sense over-attachment to generic conventions that no longer agree with Mabey's 'prevailing scientific view of nature'.[10] Often, as I suggest below, such conventions and understandings of ecology co-exist uneasily in new nature writing works.

Moran summarises the prevailing understanding of new nature writing as a sub-genre that 'entered public consciousness in Britain in the late 2000s in a series of widely discussed books and a special edition of *Granta* magazine under that title'.[11] But for Jos Smith, the movement begins with *Second Nature*, in 1984. For Smith, this work 'offers a window on to the alternative spatial structures that are emerging in contemporary British and Irish cultures of place', in large part through the above-mentioned re-invigoration of the parochial.[12] As I demonstrate in the readings below, however, this rethinking of place cannot quite articulate the degree of entanglement that defines understandings of nature in ecological thinking from the 1970s onward. But it is precisely this failure that reveals how newer approaches that incorporate Internet storytelling techniques alongside traditional, book-based practices come closer to evoking modern ecological thought.

In particular, book-bound nature writing struggles to incorporate a shift from thinking about located ecosystems to thinking about global interrelation. Nature writing is, per Macfarlane, 'deeply concerned with the relationship between knowledge and environment'.[13] It documents what Mabey calls 'the experience of witness[…] firsthand encounters with nature that are the aboriginal, objective raw

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[7] Joe Moran, 'A Cultural History of the New Nature Writing', *Literature and History*, 23.1 (2014), pp. 49-63 (p. 49).
[8] Moran, p. 50.
[9] Moran, p. 50.
[10] Macfarlane, 'Where the wild things were'.
[11] Moran, p. 49.
[12] Smith, p. 18.
[13] Macfarlane, 'Where the wild things were'.

material for science and art alike'.[14] It does not provide top-down, encyclopaedic knowledge of ecology, but rather, as the authors of *Modern British Nature Writing 1789-2020* (2022) put it, 'localised personal experience'.[15] This interest in keen, close observation of the natural world has limited the nature writer to watchful travel by foot, and thus limited each text to a particular locale. There is thus a tension between the limited scale at which nature writing constructs ecology and the global scale to which ecology extends, that is furthered in a time of ecological breakdown. A failed crop or melting glacier encountered within the locale can often be explained only with reference to ecological actants and behaviours that exceed it. A tendency to ignore such relationships prevents nature writing focussing on one locale from evoking modern ecology. In this chapter, I expand on the mechanisms of this failure, before showing how Internet mediational practices can help to overcome it.

2.2 Close attention, walking, and the nature writing chronotope

Early nature writing texts like Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788-9) are rigid in their naturalistic observations; Mabey describes them as 'rife with Linnean names, spare, vivid, precise'.[16] But these works are set apart from academic natural history by being 'energized by intense personal feelings about nature and [the writer's] home spot'.[17] 'Nature writing' refers in this chapter to a canon beginning in its modern form with White and his contemporaries, and extending through works of new nature writing like Macfarlane's. It is not interested in the natural world broadly, but specifically in the natural world encountered by the human subject. This excludes texts like Thomas Halliday's *Otherlands* (2022), wherein a non-situated narrator discusses ecology. But it admits contemporaries like Katherine May's *Enchantment* (2023), which go so far as to infuse nature writing with self-help tenets to combat an endemic 'sense of unreality' by encouraging reconnection with nature.[18] In his *Natural History*, White spends almost two pages austerely listing where to find rare and noteworthy Selborne flora; '*Hypericon androsæmum*, Tustan, St John's wort – in the stony, hollow lanes', and so on.[19] Whilst this is far too tedious for *Enchantment*, White's listing and May's self-help are both founded in impassioned encounters with the more-than-human; localised personal experience of ecology.

[14] Richard Mabey, 'News of birds and blossoming', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/mar/14/new-naturalist-books-richard-mabey> [accessed 4 October 2023].
[15] Will Abberley, Christina Alt, David Higgins, Graham Huggan, Pippa Marland, *Modern British Nature Writing, 1789-2020: Land Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 36.
[16] Mabey, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, p. ix.
[17] Mabey, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, p. ix.
[18] Katherine May, *Enchanted* (London: Faber and Faber, 2023), p. 5.
[19] Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 211.

To capture such experience, the nature writer adopts certain behaviours, which in turn effect their use of literary techniques. These are clear in the following passage from W.H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life* (1910):

> We are not in a hurry, but are always watchful, with eyes and ears and mind open to what might come; it is a mental habit and when nothing comes we are not disappointed – the act of watching has been a sufficient pleasure; and when something does come we take it joyfully as if it were a gift – a valuable object picked up by chance in our walks.[20]

The mode of being Hudson expounds enables White to state with confidence that '[w]hen brown owls hoot their throats swell as big as a hen's egg'.[21] Moreover, it is May's solution to the 'sliding of attention' that constitutes the above-mentioned 'sense of unreality'.[22] It is a slow, careful attention to the more-than-human world. The nature writer moves slowly, remaining in place to observe the passage of the seasons, and on a narrower time-scale, walking.

Such slowness is necessary to gather first-hand accounts of the natural world. Sprinting or galloping past a hooting owl, White would have struggled to observe the size of its throat. Even as the railway developed throughout the nineteenth century, railway journeys are remarkably absent from contemporary nature writing. Perhaps William Wordsworth's concern with the 'false utilitarian lure' of a railway line connecting Kendal and Windemere summarises a Romantic perception that railways spoil the unspoiled.[23] Indeed, when railways do feature in nineteenth century nature writing they are presented as detrimental. Richard Jeffries' *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879) bemoans the railway's tendency to centralise industry and thus deprive the village,[24] and presents 'the country where railways even now are few and far between' as a site wherein old-ways persist.[25] Puzzlingly, contemporary writers interested in ecology, nature, rural culture, but less invested in personal experience often discussed the impacts of the railway. John Ruskin, for example, wrote much social commentary 'opposing activities inimical to wild habitats such as the building of railways and artificial reservoirs'.[26] One must assume, then, that the relative absence of the railway, and the greater absence of time onboard a train, results from nature writing's interest in localised personal experience.

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[20] W. H. Hudson, *A Shepherd's Life* (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 169.
[21] White, p. 145.
[22] May, p. 4.
[23] William Wordsworth, *Kendal and Windermere Railway: two letters re-printed from the Morning Post* (Kendal: R. Branthwaite and son, 1845), p. 1.
[24] Richard Jeffries, *Wild Life in a Southern County* (Beaminster: Little Toller Books, 2010), p. 66.
[25] Jeffries, p. 79.
[26] Abberley and others, p. 113.

Nature writing practice, then, involves a lot of foot-travel, and there is therefore a sense in which the nature writer spatialises in an anachronistic, pre-industrial manner. Before the proliferation of the steam engine, when most travelled on foot or horseback, suggests Zygmunt Bauman, time and space were understood in reference to one another. Bauman explains that limited variety in the speed of travel meant that distance between two places could be articulated in temporal, rather than spatial units of measurement. Time and space are unified when the question 'How far is it from here to there' is answered with 'If you start now, you will be there around noon'.[27] But now, one must first ask 'Do you have a car? Or do you mean on foot?'; the lack of equivalence between these two answers means that spatial distance can no longer be effectively measured in temporal metrics.[28] The nature writer, though, remains bound to walking by the need to gather detailed notes on personal experiences with ecology. For them, little has changed, and the region over which the writer roams can, from White's time to the present, be roughly defined by the radius across which they can walk in a day and still return safely home or to their lodgings.

In fact, this locale is often staked out at the start of the nature writing text. White, for example, meticulously locates Selborne 'in the extreme eastern corner of the county of Hampshire, bordering on the county of Sussex, and not far from the county of Surrey', noting its location in relation to the cities and towns of London, Alton, Petersfield, as well as myriad parishes.[29] He notes its latitude, and adjacency to 'the vast range of mountains called the Sussex-downs'.[30] White's exhaustive presentation also includes the qualities of the soil in various locations, the layout of the village and the situation of various woods and rivers, but I am drawing attention here to his meticulous demarcation of Selborne's boundaries.

Whilst rarely so concentrated as in White's location of Selborne, such demarcation persists in new nature writing. The opening of Kapka Kassabova's *elixir: In the Valley at the End of Time* (2023), for example, is thick with kilometre measurements, describing a valley 'halfway between the Adriatic and Black seas',[31] in the 'south-easternmost highlands of Europe',[32] scattered with ruins and 'villages with mineral waters'.[33] Kassabova's locating is supported by the inclusion of a map, a practice not uncommon, found in works such as Patrick Laurie's *Native* (2020) and Nicola Chester's *On Gallows Down* (2021). So involved are nature writers in situating their observations that Little Toller Books – a publishing house specialising in nature writing – marks each text's locale with a red dot on a map on its back cover.

Kassabova, unlike White, had neither grown up, nor lived for an extended period in the region about which her work was written. Locality remains a privileged category in nature writing, and many texts like Nick Hayes' *The Book of Trespass* (2021) seek out its limits. But diversification and professionalism diminish its necessity. Simply put, a modern writer like Kassabova would likely struggle, after two or three books, to uncover interesting and provocative ecological encounters within walking distance of their

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[27] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 110.
[28] Bauman, p. 110.
[29] White, pp. 7-9.
[30] White, p. 7.
[31] Kapka Kassabova, *elixir: In the Valley at the End of Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2023), p. 12.
[32] Kassabova, p. 6.
[33] Kassabova, p. 13.

home. Often, as in Kassabova's work, the writer accesses local knowledge and the affective character of localism through inheritance – Kassabova is descended from inhabitants of the valley – or by embedding themselves with guides and notable figures in the local community. In some modern books like *Underland*, the writer ranges internationally, rather than remaining in a single location for the entire text. Crucially, however, they remain within a region roughly the size of the locales constructed by White or Kassabova at the level of the chapter, offering readers an array of localities. Whilst the writer may not be local, and may not remain for the length of the text in a single locality, modern nature writing remains committed to the locale as setting.

This locale, determined by a need for close examination, is fixed in the spatial conventions of nature writing. What Bakhtin would call its 'chronotope' is defined by narration of ecology at the locale scale. Bakhtin's chronotope is a set of 'general techniques[…] devised for reflecting and artistically processing' certain 'aspects of time and space'.[34] Put otherwise, the chronotope is the set of techniques through which a text puts individual entities into spatio-temporal relation with each other, or the textual rules of spatio-temporal relation. Bakhtin calls the chronotope a 'formally constitutive category of literature', because entities cannot relate without spatio-temporal conditions becoming apparent - even should these conditions be those of 'atemporality'.[35] He notes also that several chronotopes can structure a single text; these are termed chronotopic motifs, and make up the total chronotope of the work.[36] Mainly discussing the chronotope with reference to the novel, Bakhtin locates chronotopic motifs in different plot stages. These motifs, though, are also usually operating at different locations. I explain the chronotope in more detail below, through examples taken from Bakhtin's work: the idyll, and the abstract alien space. I thereafter clarify the relation of these particular chronotopes to the locale and the nature writing chronotope.

Although the locale encapsulates the nature writer's personal experience with ecology, the abstract alien space is just as important to their construction of ecological space. Abstract alien space lies beyond the locale, and the nature writing chronotope is best understood from the outside in. Bakhtin arrives to abstract alien space by discussing 'adventure-time' in the Greek romance.[37] Such romances begin with hero and heroine meeting, and conclude with 'their successful union in marriage'; all events must fall between these 'poles of plot movement'[38] But according to generic convention, the love of the protagonists must be 'absolutely unchanged' between meeting and marriage.[39] It must feel 'as if absolutely nothing had happened between these two moments'.[40] And yet, the temporal gap between the two is filled with various misadventures.[41] The narrative that these misadventures constitute thus 'lies outside

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[34] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 84.
[35] Bakhtin, p. 84.
[36] Bakhtin, p. 243.
[37] Bakhtin, p. 87.
[38] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[39] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[40] Bakhtin, p. 89.
[41] Bakhtin, p. 89.

biographical time; it changes nothing in the life of the heroes, and introduces nothing to their life'.[42] Adventure time is this 'empty time', within which events have no consequences beyond the present moment.[43]

For a novel to construct time in this way, it 'must have an *abstract* expanse of space'.[44] Events lack consequences by having 'no essential ties with any particular details of individual countries that might figure in the novel, with their social or political structure, with their culture or history'.[45] Such connections would situate events in relational networks, inviting consequences. Places must therefore be understood *only* as canvas for events – 'a naked, abstract expanse of space' – and the overall attitude expressed by the chronotope toward place one of 'interchangability'.[46] Constructions of space in such texts thus resist 'concretization' – understood in Bakhtin as a process of materialisation through detailing – because a 'concrete' place has a 'rule-generating force, its own order, its inevitable ties to human life' and its systems of relation.[47] In nature writing, as I demonstrate below, this means that ecological interactions beyond the locale are characterised, like all events structured by this chronotope, by 'isolation and disconnectedness'.[48] Ecological entities beyond the locale lack meaningful connections, especially to counterparts within the locale. Ecology is fundamentally a system of interrelation and co-dependence, or, in earlier thinking, competition. Thus, a chronotope of 'isolation and disconnectedness' is not well suited to its discussion. But nature writing only studies ecology within the roughly walkable region which I above termed the locale.

Encircled by abstract alien space, the locale is alike with Bakhtin's idyll; 'this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live'.[49] The idyll is possessed by those homely affects White and Kassabova harness with their locales. Being a home, it is richly detailed and concretised, an 'organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home'.[50] It contrasts the 'isolation and disconnectedness' of abstract alien space.[51] Owing to his interest in novels, Bakhtin sees the idyll as constructing a deeply connected 'life of men' within a well-defined location, that precedes and exceeds individuals.[52] In other words, Bakhtin's idyll concretises place by exploring a coterminous and impenetrable, regenerating system of relation. My suggestion, here, is that nature writers adopt this method of concretising place when constructing locales. Only instead of human familial and social networks, they foreground ecological ones.

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[42] Bakhtin, p. 90.
[43] Bakhtin, p. 91.
[44] Bakhtin, p. 99.
[45] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[46] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[47] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[48] Bakhtin, p. 102.
[49] Bakhtin, p. 225.
[50] Bakhtin, p. 225.
[51] Bakhtin, p. 100.
[52] Bakhtin, p. 208.

So, I suggest that nature writing chronotope can be broken into two motifs. Firstly, the idyll, wherein place is constructed through narration of a dense, closed network of relations. This hosts the localised personal experience of the writer. To avoid the affective freighting of 'idyll' and differentiate nature writing from Bakhtin's novel, I hereafter use the term 'locale'. Secondly, abstract alien space, where events and entities exist and occur without relating to one another. In Bakhtin's Greek romance, narration follows the protagonists into this space, constructing it as site for adventures without consequences. Nature writing, though, narrates long periods of close, walking observation within the locale. Abstract alien space to nature writing is therefore an unclear elsewhere; a site not well understood by comparison to the locale, where birds, trees, bugs and etc. surely interact, only beyond the narrator's 'localisable personal experience'. These chronotopic motifs cannot intermingle or overlap, because this would violate both the boundedness of the system of relation constituting the locale and the lack of relation that constitutes abstract alien space. The locale thus becomes a way of affixing an ecological network to a place, just as the idyll localises a social network, whilst the abstract alien space remains a murky elsewhere, where entities have little to do with one another, and less to do with entities in the locale.

These chronotopes have traditionally structured British nature writing. Close attention to ecology has encouraged slow movement and limited the scale of the writer's localised personal experience. In this way, the writer's construction of place is equal to their construction of an ecological network bounded within said place. Bakhtin has stressed, though, that we should not imagine the chronotope within a text to model the chronotope without; 'the process of assimilating an actual historical chronotope in literature has been complicated and erratic'.[53] And most importantly for the chapter at hand, many 'generic forms, at first productive, were then reinforced by tradition, in their subsequent development *they continued stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations*'.[54] Our understanding of ecology has developed into one that no longer aligns with nature writing's small, place-bound ecologies. The nature writing chronotope finds itself stubbornly continuing to exist, no longer adequate to this 'historical situation'. Below, I demonstrate the workings of this chronotope with my reading of *The Living Mountain*, before recounting changes to ecological thinking that have outmoded the text since Shepherd's time of writing.

The Living Mountain is well-positioned to exemplify the successful functioning of the nature writing chronotope prior to the shift towards global constructions of ecology. Penned in the 1940s but published in the 1970s, the work was championed to prominence in the 2010s by the likes of Macfarlane, Tilda Swinton and Jeanette Winterson.[55] Shepherd, as Samantha Walton points out in *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought* (2020), was extensively schooled in ecological debates of her time.

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[53] Bakhtin, p. 85.
[54] Bakhtin, p. 85. Emphasis my own.
[55] Winterson, like Macfarlane, has contributed glowing paratextual material to twenty-first century republications of *The Living Mountain*. These two worked alongside Tilda Swinton for a 2019 audiobook release of the text.

Studying under J. Arthur Thompson between 1912 and 1915 at the University of Aberdeen, she absorbed a blend of Darwinist and Christian principles.[56] Under Thompson's tutelage, Shepherd developed prescient ideas on the depth and variety of ecological interrelation; not just chains of predation, but webs of life. As such, *The Living Mountain* is interested in interdependence and cohabitation, rather than ruthless interspecies competition. Shepherd's work is thus closer to current ecological thinking than works from her contemporaries, and this might be borne-out in the delay of *The Living Mountain*'s acclaim. These ideas are, after-all, increasingly urgent in their relation to the imminent catastrophes characterising the current ecological situation. It is this nearness to current ecological thought, though, that positions Shepherd's work to draw out slight but significant discontinuities between such thought now and in her own time.

Though centuries passed between their writing, Shepherd's introduction to her locale – Scotland's Cairngorms – is markedly similar to White's of Selborne. Shepherd describes 'a mass of granite thrust up thorough the schists and gneiss that form the lower surrounding hills[…] nothing higher than itself (except for the tip of Ben Nevis) nearer than Norway'.[57] It is a location set apart by its geology and its height. She offers the highest elevation (4000 feet), and some local flora,[58] as well as the sources where 'the life of the rivers begins – Dee and Avon, the Derry, the Beinnie and the Allt Druie'.[59] In announcing, moreover, at the text's opening, that '[h]owever often I walk on them, these hills hold astonishment for me', she relates a never-ending catalogue of walks with the never-ending possibility of generating new knowledge of her locale.[60] Walking aligns with close observation once more, as Shepherd seeks 'the knowledge that is a process of living', whose gathering is 'a tale to slow for the impatience of our age'.[61] This special walking-attention defines the scale of Shepherd's locale, but also its character as a 'secret place of ease' in 'that disturbed and uncertain world' of the ongoing Second World War.[62] Through Shepherd's walking them, the Cairngorms become sharply differentiated on a geographical and an affective level from a surrounding 'disturbed and uncertain world' of abstract alien space.

This means little, however, if *The Living Mountain* fails to adhere to Bakhtin's descriptions of the idyll and abstract alien space. Introducing the text's 2011 edition, Macfarlane calls Shepherd's Cairngorms a place where 'everything is connected to everything else'.[63] As Shepherd puts it, 'the mountain is one and indivisible, and rock, soil, water and air are no more integral to it than what grows from the soil and breathes the air. All are aspects of one entity, the living mountain'.[64] Entities are often bound together on a subtler, grammatical level. The region's unity is reinforced through the collapsing of particularities under the singular pronoun 'it', as in: 'the high plateau where these streams begin, the streams themselves, their

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[56] Samantha Walton, *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and ecological thought* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 62.
[57] Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), pp. 1-2.
[58] Shepherd, p. 2.
[59] Shepherd, pp. 3-4.
[60] Shepherd, p. 1.
[61] Shepherd, p. 1.
[62] Shepherd, p. xliii.
[63] Robert Macfarlane, 'Introduction', in *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), pp. ix-xxxvi (p. xxiv).
[64] Shepherd, p. 48.

cataracts and rocky beds, the corries, the whole wild enchantment, like a work of art is perpetually new when one returns to it'.[65] Shepherd's famous rethinking of the range's individual tops as 'eddies on the surface of the plateau' she considers 'the true summit'[66] is one of many linking exercises that constitute what Walton terms the 'ecological whole' of the text.[67] In other words, Shepherd makes the Cairngorms coherent as a place by investigating their dense ecological interrelation. Shepherd achieves concretisation by locating an ecological network within the Cairngorms, in the same way that Bakhtin suggests the idyll is constructed by locating a network of social and familial relation.

This accounts for all that is connected – i.e. all within the Cairngorms – but what about everything beyond the bounds of Shepherd's locale? The world beyond the Cairngorms factors only occasionally into Shepherd's narration. People are born, work, and visit the Cairngorms from places like Aberdeen,[68] and Manchester,[69] and World War 2 occasionally draws the outside world into narration. Shepherd's encounters with the war, though, are reported, and mediated by radio broadcast. Narration of these broadcasts notably lacks detail; Shepherd relays only that she 'walked night after night over the moory path from Whitewell to Upper Tullochgrue to hear the news broadcast'.[70] The lack of detail as to the contents of these broadcasts contrasts Shepherd's richly detailed account of her surroundings: 'The heather through which the path runs was very black, the path perceptibly paler, clumps and ridges of heather between the ruts showing dark against the stone and beaten earth'.[71] When narration must discuss the world beyond, that is, events are stripped of detail in a way that prevents their entry into the system of ecological interrelation that constitutes Shepherd's Cairngorms.

This difference between Shepherd's narration of events in the Cairngorms and in the world beyond is clearest in her narrations of a storm that visits both. First, the Cairngorms:

> I watched, from the shoulder of the Morrone, the Cairngorm mass eddy and sink and rise (it seemed) like a tossed wreck on a yellow sea. Sky and the wrack of precipice and overhang were confounded together[…] tossed for a moment in the boiling sea of cloud. The sea closed on it, to open again with another glimpse of mounting spars – a shape drove its way for a moment through the smother, and was drawn under by the vicious swirl.[72]

[65] Shepherd, p. 3.
[66] Shepherd, p. 2.
[67] Walton, p. 26.
[68] Shepherd, p. 5.
[69] Shepherd, p. 63.
[70] Shepherd, p. 46.
[71] Shepherd, p. 46.
[72] Shepherd, p. 36.

As one might expect, the storm in the Cairngorms is characterised by locational specificity, interrelation, visual intensity, and immersion. It takes place in Shepherd's 'localised personal experience', and interactions between ecological entities lend the scene its sense of tumult, danger, and thus concreteness. Contrastingly, the storm beyond is – like the war – reported; the storm 'was called, when it broke upon the country, the worst for over fifty years'.[73] Shepherd acknowledges that the storm took place, inhered in matter, and was of great significance. But this is significance to someone else; material interaction between specific actants is not narrated because Shepherd was not present to witness it.

Nature writing constructs the locale through the writer's encounter with a dense system of ecological entanglement, and space beyond the writer's range of mobility stands in stark contrast. Beyond this network lies a leftover space, where entities are materially real but rarely relate with entities within the locale. Nature writing conventions thus conjoin a closed ecological system and the locale wherein the text is set. Shepherd walks the Cairngorms, observing the range's dense system of ecological interrelation. In doing so, she knits together the Cairngorms and this 'ecological whole'. For this conjoining to hold, however, Shepherd cannot acknowledge the ecological ties that link entities in the Cairngorms with entities beyond. Otherwise, the Cairngorms and the ecology encountered therein would no longer be coterminous. Macfarlane's suggestion that *The Living Mountain* is a text wherein 'everything is connected to everything else' should therefore be amended slightly. Everything on the Cairngorms is connected totally but exclusively to everything else on the Cairngorms; in the nature writing chronotope, everything in the locale is connected totally but exclusively to everything else in the locale. In the section below, I first summarise a shift in the 1960s towards ecological thinking that extends a total ecosystem globally. I then track the ways in which nature writing of the period adapted, laying the ground for new nature writing.

2.3 Pollution, global ecology, and the mixed successes of networked localism

Nature writing documents human encounters with the more-than-human world, mediated by concepts like nature and wilderness. As such, the generic conventions of nature writing should change with our understanding of such concepts. The mid twentieth century is characterised by significant shifts in cultural and scientific conceptualisations of nature and ecology. William Anders' 'Earthrise' (1969) photograph captured a previously unseen view of Earth, emerging from the horizon of a lunar landscape. It encouraged us to see beyond borders, national or otherwise. Cloud-formations cross continents and oceans; we are confronted with visual confirmation that London rainfall responds to pressure changes across the Atlantic. Buckminster Fuller's *Operating Manuel for Spaceship Earth* (1969) envisioned humanity as collective stewards of the planet. The first Earth Day would be held just a year later, in 1970. In 1982

[73] Shepherd, p. 36.

Disney named the central attraction of its newly opened Epcot park after Fuller's book; a few years later, 'We are the World' (1985), a charity-record combatting famine in Africa, became the eighth best-selling single of all time. Stewardship, however, necessitates awareness of danger. Organisations like Friends of the Earth – founded in 1969 – highlighted the dangers of overconsumption, oil, nuclear energy, and related issues. Global thinking and its responsibilities became a cultural and scientific mainstay.

Below, I attend to two major developments in ecological thought that informed these changes. With Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, I explore pollution as a new form of ecological relation. And with James Lovelock's *Gaia*, I look to the reimagining of the Earth and its inhabitants as a single, self-regulating system that maintains liveable conditions. Neither of these writers, as demonstrated in the paragraph above, were alone in their concerns. Both stirred conversation, but as can be seen in their frequent references to other texts, neither conjured this discourse from nothing. They should be understood as representative of contemporary ecological thought. Moreover, both sets of concerns challenged existing conventions of the nature writing chronotope – even more so when taken together. Although the term would be introduced later, I show below that ecological thought synthesising pollution and global ecology recognises what we would now call Anthropocene ecology. Ultimately, with reference to Common Ground's *Second Nature*, I demonstrate the difficulty of approaching Anthropocene ecology with the classical nature writing chronotope. The locale's construction as site for bounded ecological network comes into question when the world becomes, as Walton called Shepherd's Cairngorms, an ecological whole.

A retrospective review in *the Guardian* called *Silent Spring* a book that 'educated a planet'; 'one of the most effective books ever written'.[74] Carson's opening constructs an archetypical locale; 'a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings'.[75] She tells us of 'orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields', and how '[i]n autumn, oak and maple and birch set up a blaze of colour that flamed and flickered across a backdrop of pines'.[76] Ecological life seems seasonal and regenerative, but the past tense casts a long shadow. Soon, 'a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change'.[77] The town is plagued by 'sudden and unexplained deaths' and illnesses, among livestock, wildlife, adults, and 'children, who would be stricken suddenly while at play and die within a few hours'.[78] Carson admits that this town 'does not actually exist, but it might easily have a thousand counterparts in America or elsewhere in the world'.[79] The town is stricken with unforeseen consequences of pesticide use in agriculture. Whilst literature is not a topic of Carson's work, pesticides

[74] Tim Radford, 'Silent Spring by Rachel Carson – review', *The Guardian*, 30 September 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2011/sep/30/silent-spring-rachel-carson-review> [accessed 8 January 2023].
[75] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin Random House, 2000), p. 3.
[76] Carson, p. 3.
[77] Carson, p. 3.
[78] Carson, p. 3.
[79] Carson, p. 4.

and pollution seem a threat not only to Carson's archetypical locale and its thousand counterparts, but also to the figure of the locale itself.

Not being a nature writing text, *Silent Spring* adopts the top-down approach to ecology noted above. But the threat of pollution to the nature writing chronotope is most clearly articulated through anecdotes Carson sets at the scale of the locale. One relays the results of a report issued by the United States Fish and Wildlife service in 1960. The study sought to ascertain 'whether fish, like warm-blooded animals, store insecticides in their tissues'.[80] Samples taken 'from forest areas in the west where there had been mass spraying of DDT for the control of the spruce budworm' unsurprisingly contained the substance.[81] More significant, though, were similar findings in fish taken from a 'creek in a remote area about thirty miles from the nearest spraying[…] upstream from the first and separated from it by a high waterfall'.[82] Carson concludes that the 'only means of contamination seemed to be by means of ground-water'.[83] The use of the term 'contamination' is striking. The second creak, Carson seems to suggest, should be closed-off. It should be, like Shepherd's Cairngorms, an ecological whole. It is separate, elsewhere, and yet by invisible means its boundaries are breached.

How would a nature writing text taking this creak as its locale interpret a poisoned fish? The creek is littered with dead animals that cannot be explained with reference solely to the locale; the cause of death comes from beyond the roughly walkable region. Travelling invisibly from the spraying site to the second creak, the pesticide forges a material relation between the locale and abstract alien space. This is, furthermore, an ecological relation. The system of ecological relation constituting the locale can no longer be thought closed at the locale's borders. Whilst specifically concerned with pesticide pollution, Carson outlines pollution broadly as a troubling new structure for ecological interactions. The dangerous elements of human consumption, industrial and agricultural practice cascade between ecosystems once considered separate from one another. Foregrounding this danger, she presents a threat to nature writing's chronotope. In a polluting society, locales cannot be thought of as hermetically sealed; ecology cannot be understood only with reference to a roughly walkable region.

Although Lovelock is not writing in response to Carson, he does acknowledge that she 'had given us cause to worry'.[84] It is therefore unsurprising that whilst his ideas are relevant beyond discussions of pollution, they also powerfully modulate these discussions. Lovelock demonstrates the dramatic scale over which pollution can operate as a form of ecological relation. Despite its enormous impact on ecological thought, Lovelock's thesis is relatively simple:

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[80] Carson, p. 34.
[81] Carson, p. 34.
[82] Carson, p. 34.
[83] Carson, p. 34.
[84] James Lovelock, *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. vii.

> the entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts.[85]

He amends this slightly in the 2000 edition of *Gaia*, clarifying that 'it was not the biosphere alone that did the regulation but the whole thing, life, the air, the oceans, and the rocks'.[86] This seems to align with Shepherd's incorporation of 'rock, soil, water and air' into the 'indivisible' mountain. But post-Lovelock ecology is global and total; nothing within or beyond the borders of the locale is excluded. Moreover, by drawing attention to the self-regulating nature of Gaia, Lovelock clarifies that his ideas are of material relevance, rather than simply offering a new epistemic perspective. That is, in a self-regulating global system, local disbalances are dispersed and resolved on a global scale.

Synthesising Carson's understanding of pollution as a form of ecological interaction with Lovelock's of a global and total ecology provides an immense challenge to the nature writing chronotope. Pollution in a global ecology means that no locale is inviolably separate from abstract alien space. This, I argue, is the foundation of Anthropocene ecology.[87] Anthropocene ecology recognises Gaian global relation as well as humanity's role in generating pollution. We might consider, for example, how a polluted lake in Surrey devastates migratory bird populations, and how these migratory birds are vital in stabilising North African ecology. As more birds are killed by the toxic lake in the UK, so fewer birds are present to suppress insect populations in North Africa, or to feed larger animals that predate the migratory birds. The locale of the North African plain is inextricably linked with the locale of the Surrey lake; each to the other cannot be abstract alien space. The chronotope demonstrated in *The Living Mountain* has thus reached Bakhtin's point of no longer being adequate to the historical situation.

Revisiting commentary on Shepherd's work will help to clarify this newfound inadequacy. Macfarlane's suggestion that '[l]ong before Lovelock gave us Gaia, Shepherd was proposing a holistic vision of her small world as one and indivisible' inadvertently highlights the disagreement between Anthropocene ecology and the nature writing chronotope.[88] Post-Lovelock ecological thought is total and global. If Shepherd's Cairngorms truly were 'one and indivisible' – ecologically closed – Lovelock's Gaia could not be total. Shepherd's Cairngorms would be a division of Lovelock's indivisible Gaia. If not for Carson we might consider this disagreement abstract, academic, not founded in the localised personal experience that defines nature writing. An understanding of pollution, though, makes global ecology unavoidably material – a system through which serious harm can be levied on the locale from another continent. Put otherwise, pollution concretises global ecology, rendering the space beyond the locale no

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[85] Lovelock, p. 9.
[86] Lovelock, p. ix.
[87] Diane Ackerman, *The Human Age: The world shaped by us* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), pp. 44-50.
[88] Macfarlane, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

longer abstract in Bakhtin's sense of the word. Anthropocene ecology cannot allow for a chronotope that closes ecological systems at anything other than a global scale.

Nevertheless, over thirty years later the locale remains definitive of the nature writing genre; Morton still calls, in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) for 'dislocation, dislocation, dislocation'.[89] This is to be expected. Bakhtin insists that chronotopes persist long after becoming inadequate. We might wonder, though, how Smith's 'window on to the alternative spatial structures that are emerging in contemporary British and Irish cultures of place' could be structured by a chronotope used in nature writing since at least the eighteenth century. For Smith, this is achieved by retaining but rethinking an interest in locality. Writers 'ground' new nature writing in a 'more tangible localism that was the scale at which environmental concerns were being confronted'.[90] In doing so though, they mire their work in the bind that plagues many attempts to handle Anthropocene issues. Namely, that the scales at which issues unfold and are confronted differ vastly. Climate change far exceeds localised personal experience. To resolve this scalar tension, new nature writing attempts a 'networked localism' that retains the locale setting but emphasises its relation to other such locales.[91] The plain in North Africa networks with the lake in Surrey. Below, I explore this attitude, and the complications encountered by nature writers who attempt to employ it alongside the classic nature writing chronotope.

There is a conflict at the heart of networked localism. It is an attempt to square nature writing's scale of localised personal experience with the global scale of Anthropocene ecology. In reaffirming the local, says Smith, it seems to 'run counter to other theorizations of the Anthropocene that have shifted up in scale towards the planetary'.[92] In other words, it ostensibly refuses a Gaian understanding of ecology. On the contrary, though, Smith finds networked localism to shift at once to 'the intensely local and to the globally interconnected'.[93] The global becomes a network of locales. Rather than retreating from global ecological crises, networked localism promises to bring them down to 'a vital scale at which we can apprehend the changing world in which we live'.[94] Cleaving to the local(e), new nature writing nevertheless confronts issues that exceed it. An 'intertwined, topological vision begins to reveal itself' in these works; 'busy and fluctuating relations' between 'constellated, marginal parts'.[95] Climate change is confronted on the melting glacier; agricultural pollution in Surrey is confronted amidst the disfigured ecology of a North African plain. Attention is drawn to the intricate relationships between' 'a complex network of localities'.[96] But the successes of this approach have been mixed.

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[89] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 28.
[90] Smith, p. 11.
[91] Smith, p. 204.
[92] Smith, p. 17.
[93] Smith, p. 17.
[94] Smith, p. 43.
[95] Smith, p. 159.
[96] Smith, p. 159.

To examine these successes, I turn to the text in which Smith suggests new nature writing is founded. *Second Nature* is an anthology of nature writing essays curated by the Common Ground conservationist movement. Common Ground, in its own words,

> was founded in 1983 by Sue Clifford, Angela King and the writer to Roger Deakin seek imaginative ways to engage people with their local environment. [*sic*] The idea of Local Distinctiveness is at the heart of everything we do, and for the last thirty years we have captured the imagination of people all over the country.[97]

Throughout this period, they have commissioned and overseen myriad creative engagements with 'local distinctiveness'.[98] These have included celebration of 'Apple Day', which seeks to highlight 'the variety we are in danger of losing, not simply in apples, but in the richness and diversity of landscape, ecology and culture too'.[99] Eschewing a centralised event, Common Ground encourage 'people to celebrate Apple Day for themselves in their own city, village, parish, allotment or garden orchard'.[100] Similarly, the organisation encourages collaboration over 'parish maps[…] which would chart the things [locals] valued in the natural and cultural landscape',[101] and in so doing, help them 'find, express and demonstrate their sense of identity and intimacy with their places'.[102] The efforts in *Second Nature* follow the same spirit. They are largely retellings of deep, personal, often lifelong encounters with the ecology of a locale. Like Apple Day and nature writing works from White to Kassabova, they foreground the co-construction of place and ecology.

Prefacing the anthology, Clifford and King reaffirm Common Ground's commitment to 'common plants and animals, familiar and local places, local distinctiveness and our links with the past'.[103] In the second paragraph of his introduction, Mabey offers some context:

> We have all become well-informed about the world's ecological crises, about the destruction of the tropical rain forests, the pollution of the oceans, the profligacy of agribusiness, and even about the economic connections between all these. Yet this knowledge has remained curiously remote, not connected in any obvious way with our ordinary, everyday experience.[104]

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[97] Common Ground, 'Common Ground', *Common Ground*, n.d. <https://www.commonground.org.uk/> [accessed 5 August 2023].
[98] Common Ground, 'Common Ground'.
[99] Common Ground, 'Apple Day', *Common Ground*, n.d. <https://www.commonground.org.uk/apple-day/> [accessed 5 August 2023].
[100] Common Ground, 'Apple Day'.
[101] Moran, p. 52.
[102] Sue Clifford and Angela King, *England in Particular* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), pp. 317-8.
[103] Susan Clifford and Angela King, 'Preface', in *Second Nature*, ed. by Richard Mabey, Susan Clifford, and Angela King (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. vi-vii (p.vii).
[104] Mabey, 'Introduction', in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. ix-xix (p. ix).

The essays in *Second Nature*, he suggests, 'bring the argument in a very literal sense back home, to the local landscapes that are most people's first-hand experience of nature'.[105] It is worth noting the similarity between this and Smith's description of networked localism. In any case, the introductory materials of *Second Nature* describe the ambitions and sensibilities of networked localism. It is an approach that understands issues exceeding the scale of the locale as constituting connective tissue through which locales interact.

In the essays of *Second Nature*, however, ecological connective tissue seems largely absent. For Peter Levi, landscapes are networked by 'social and economic history';[106] for Michael Berkley, it's agribusiness;[107] and for Fay Weldon it's national politics, infrastructure and economics.[108] In Norman Nicholson's 'Ten-yard Panorama', the writer's home of Millom, Cumbria, is networked by the Cumbrian mining industry with various nearby towns. Millom exports pig-iron, but its buildings 'are roofed with slates from the quarries of Kirkby-in-Furness, on the other side of the Duddon. The town church is sandstone from St Bees[…] The railway station of Eskdale granite'.[109] In one paragraph, Nicholson recalls convalescing from tuberculosis in the New Forest;[110] the networking work of the landscape cure receives greater attention in Ronald Blythe's contribution to *Second Nature*.[111] Later, Nicholson recalls travels to 'Wester Ross, Sutherland, Shetland, Norway', and 'the Viking ancestry of the Nicholsons and Cornthwaites that I sprang from'.[112] We see that the movement of people – pushed or pulled by commerce, war, or illness – also networks locales. Despite a post-Carson awareness of humans as ecological agent, though, no attention is paid to the impact of such migrations on local ecology. Mabey describes networked localism in the introduction to *Second Nature*, and promises examples of ecologically networked locales in the essays to come. But, as is demonstrated in the selected works above, we only see locales networked by cultural, economic, and social factors.

This is with the exception of the collection's final essay. By referencing his influential *The Country and the City* (1977), Raymond Williams' 'Between Country and City' promises to further problematise a firm cultural distinction between urban and rural. Moreover, the essay is founded in Williams' suggestion that 'two apparently opposite and separate projections – country and city – [are] in fact indissolubly linked, within the general crisis-ridden development of a capitalist economy'.[113] One would assume, then, that locales in Williams' essay will be networked by the mechanisms of said ecology. Williams does discuss

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[105] Mabey, 'Introduction', p. x.
[106] Peter Levi, 'Knowing a Place' in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 36-43 (p. 40).
[107] Michael Berkley, 'From Flint to Shale' in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 56-62.
[108] Fay Weldon, 'Letter to Laura' in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 67-73.
[109] Norman Nicholson, 'Ten Yard Panorama' in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 3-11 (p. 7).
[110] Nicholson, p. 9.
[111] Ronald Blythe, 'Remedial Scenes', in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 28-34.
[112] Nicholson, p. 10.
[113] Raymond Williams, 'Between Country and City', in *Second Nature*, ed. by Mabey, Clifford, and King, pp. 209-19 (p. 209).

second homes, agribusiness, and government policy. Gradually, though, he integrates these concerns with 'both world economics and *world ecology*'; nowhere prior, in *Second Nature*, is a term like world ecology used.[114] For Williams, 'agrarian capitalism' is incompatible with contemporary ecological thought, and 'resists in terms of the unbalanced and often reckless use of non-renewable resources'.[115] He argues for 'a new kind of political ecology',[116] 'within which ecology and economics can become, as they should be, a single science and source of values'.[117] Locales are politically networked, yes, but by highlighting that agriculture invariably draws from a single, global pool of finite resources, Williams concludes *Second Nature* with an essay addressing their ecological networking.

But Mabey's introduction describes works that do more than just attend to ecological networking. It promises works which 'bring the argument in a very literal sense back home, to the local landscapes that are most people's firsthand experience of nature'. Political, cultural, and economic networking are brought home in the essays of Nicholson, Levi, Berkley, Weldon, and Mooney explored above. Williams, though, says nothing to the lived experience of ecologically networked localism. Instead, he calls for further work 'clarifying and extending [political ecology] and in defining it, *practically and specifically*, in the *many diverse places*, requiring diverse solutions and resolutions, where it must take root and grow'.[118] Williams is calling for work that brings ecologically networked localism home, into lived experience of local landscapes, or, locales. Whilst he does develop understanding of *how* ecology might network locales, Williams closes *Second Nature* calling for the type of work that Mabey promises in its introduction. He clarifies how shared, finite resources ecologically network locales, but does so from the top-down perspective mentioned above. Like *Second Nature* broadly, Williams provides no model for how ecological networking can be articulated within the nature writing chronotope.

Closing with Williams' essay, and opening with Mabey's attention to ecological crises, *Second Nature* is clearly interested in ecologically networked localism. Nicholson et al. integrate non-ecologically networked localism with the nature writing chronotope. Williams espouses ecologically networked localism from a top-down perspective. Despite the promise of Mabey's introduction, no essay in *Second Nature*, including his own, evokes ecologically networked localism through the nature writing chronotope. So, Common Ground call for writing that approaches ecologically networked localism with the nature writing chronotope, and provide essays that approach otherwise networked localism with said chronotope. They seemingly cannot bring these two strands together. It seems reasonable to conclude that something is blocking discussion of ecologically networked localism through the nature writing chronotope, preventing nature writing from speaking to the conditions of Anthropocene ecology. As Shepherd's work demonstrates, locales are only locales in that they are ecologically separate. The nature writing chronotope cannot speak to Anthropocene ecology because the notion of ecologically networked locales is inherently contradictory.

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[114] Williams, p. 212.
[115] Williams, p. 215.
[116] Williams, p. 215.
[117] Williams, p. 219.
[118] Williams, p. 219. Emphasis my own.

Thus, it stands to reason that Anthropocene ecology cannot be approached with the nature writing chronotope. Since *Second Nature* was published, though, ecological pressure has mounted. In the twenty-first century, cultural and political discourse falls under the sign of crisis. Anthropogenic climate change seems the ultimate form of pollution in a global ecological system. From disappearing island-nations to increasingly hostile desert settlements, to mega-polluting factories and metropolises; from Selborne to the Cairngorms, to Kasabova's valley at the end of time; no locale can be disentangled from the global issue of climate change. Moreover, whether they campaign for action, insist that action is hopelessly late, or even outright deny its existence or potency, few are unaware of the issue. Crises are often times of force, and we might therefore suggest that texts examined below force Anthropocene ecology into the nature writing chronotope. But forcing non-literary structures into ill-fitting, literary structures generates seams, disfunctions, and oddities. Odd, phantasmic figures linger surprisingly often at horizons in twenty-first century new nature writing. As well as haunting the geographical boundaries of the locale, these figures, I suggest, problematise its ecological boundaries. With reference to Macfarlane's *Underland*, I below clarify why such disfunctions tend to manifest in these figures.

2.4 *Underland*, and ghostly figures in ecologically networked localism

Unlike texts explored above, *Underland* visits various locations: from Parisian catacombs, to Somerset caves, to Greenlandic glaciers and dark matter labs beneath the North Sea. Each chapter, however, takes a single, roughly walkable region as its setting. All are at least partly underground, aside from Epping Forest, which Macfarlane explores with reference to its underground mycological network. These locales host episodes of Macfarlane's personal experience, but are subtly woven together through book-length attention to 'the sunken networks of extraction, exploitation and disposal that support the surface world'.[119] The subterranean networks explored within each chapter are criss-crossed by a 'a subsurface network of echoes, patterns and connections' underwriting *Underland*, '[a]cross its chapters, in keeping with its subject'.[120] The blue hue of Cherenkov radiation, crucial to work in the dark matter lab, returns in description of Italy's Isonzo river.[121] This structure is one of networked localism. Locales are networked by this self-referential underland in a manner that parallels and draws-out the real-life networking of the regions they represent.

When this networking is concerned with ecological crises, incongruous, phantasmic figures haunt the edges of the locale. Such figures are common in new nature writing; in *Haunted Spaces in Twenty-First Century British Nature Writing* (2020), Anneke Lubkowitz finds them with 'striking frequency' as far back the

[119] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 13.
[120] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 17.
[121] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 217.

abovementioned *Granta* issue.[122] Critics usually argue that they represent what the editors of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017) call 'the spookiness of the past in the present'.[123] This 'past' is formed of suppressed ecological entanglements which then 'return as virulent pathogens and spreading toxins'.[124] As *Silent Spring* demonstrates, however, Anthropocene ecology sees the here and now of nature writing breached spatially, as well as temporally. Through my reading of *Underland*, I suggest these phantasmic figures to sometimes represent the spookiness of networked localism; the spookiness of the elsewhere in the here.

Events, descriptions, and terms in *Underland* often sit in several networks. This networking of networks disrupts linear narration; one might begin anywhere, following systems of relation backwards and forwards throughout the text. In Chapter 2, 'Burial', Macfarlane watches a friend's children 'building a portal to the Nether' on *Minecraft* (2009).[125] Later, caving in the Mendips with their father, he acknowledges the synergy between their hobbies, admitting 'this feels like the Nether to me, Sean'.[126] For Sean, the Mendips are inscribed by mining practices, including the extraction of goods on a spiral ramp that takes lorries 'up and down, like an industrial version of Dante's descent in the *Inferno*'.[127] Here, the link between mining and descent to a netherworld is as clear as in *Minecraft*. We might pursue this association from 'Burial' to the interchapter '*Third Chamber*' through references to a burn-off 'known as the "Door to Hell" and "Hell's Gate"', started by a 'Soviet drilling rig'.[128] From there, to Chapter 1, 'Descending', where Macfarlane relays Enki's trip to the 'netherworld' in a 'variant' of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (*c.* 2100 B.C.E.),[129] or Chapter 6, 'Starless Rivers', and a reference to 'an entrance to Hades' in Roman mythology 'at the point where the River Timavo dives underground'.[130] Hades returns in Chapter 12, 'The Hiding Place', as the HADES nuclear waste disposal site in Belgium.[131] Such disposal-sites form a global network, each with their own cultural associations; each situated in myriad networks of understanding. A subterraneous reading that mirrors Macfarlane's journeying is invited, and by bypassing chapter boundaries it denies the firm separation of locales.

Thus, the structure of *Underland* is one of networked localism; but what does this have to do with ghostly figures? In *Underland*, these figures appear at the opening and closing of the chapter 'Red Dancers', which narrates Macfarlane's pursuit of a prehistoric art cave in an inhospitable, blizardous valley in

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[122] Anne Lubkowitz, *Haunted Spaces in twenty-first century British Nature Writing* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), p. 2.
[123] Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubant, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. G3.
[124] Tsing, and others, p. M4.
[125] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 34.
[126] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 36.
[127] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 30.
[128] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 247.
[129] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 16.
[130] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 184.
[131] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 401.

Lofoten, Norway. The chapters of *Underland* are divided into three sets, each with a prologue. The set containing 'Red Dancers' is titled 'Haunting', and its prologue threads through oil divination; the 'Door to Hell' burn-off; an anthropogenic toxic-mud volcano in Java; the mass-poisoning of thousands of migrating geese with industrial chemicals; and radioactivity 'swarming through' an urban-explorer in Chernobyl's 'Reactor Cavern'.[132] In various ways, these concerns present twenty-first century ecological crises as involving the break-down of spatial boundaries. The migratory birds will never reach their destination, thus disbalancing its ecosystem. Radiation permeates the boundaries of the body. The mud volcano is blamed on 'occult forces of the underland', already established as a metaphor for networks of 'extraction, exploitation and disposal' but here termed 'ghosts and spirits that dwell in the landscape'.[133] Introducing 'Haunting', then, Macfarlane forges an association between the haunting of landscapes and the transgression of spatial boundaries characteristic of Anthropocene ecology.

Fittingly, the ghostly figures of 'Red Dancers' are encountered at and associated with such boundaries. The chapter begins with Macfarlane 'looking across the bay to the northern shore – and there by the glimmering birches is a figure standing dark on rising ground, where no figure should be'.[134] In this short passage, the figure is associated with shoreline and the edge of a birch-forest; both of these often constituting the edges of locales. Macfarlane is told that he will see more figures once he crosses 'the Wall' – an enormous ridge serving as another such boundary.[135] He associates the cave-art he pursues with 'thin places'; 'those sites in a landscape where the borders between worlds or epochs feel at their most fragile'.[136] The same is seemingly true of the ghostly figures. Whilst 'epochs' suggests a temporal reading these figures, 'world' is implicitly a spatial category when appearing alongside 'epoch'. Thus, the figures are once more associated with the complication of boundaries between here and elsewhere. Locales, like chronotopes broadly, are both narratological and spatial arrangements. The return of these figures at the chapter's close therefore positions them at all borders of the locale. They haunt places where landscapes give way to landscapes and chapters give way to chapters; both are borders of the locale.

Rather than conjurations of Macfarlane's subconscious, perhaps resultant of his suppression of the landscape's ecological history, these figures are materially present within the locale. Both times the ghostly figures appear, Macfarlane is distracted by oystercatchers scattering with 'cries of alarm'; he is unable to locate the figures afterwards.[137] At the texts close, he assigns agency to them: 'The figure watches me from the birches'.[138] Seeing these as agential beings, one wonders whether Macfarlane's distraction was intentional. Purposeful or not, though, the repeated association of these figures with the startling of birds implies a causal relationship between the two, and thus a material relation between bird and figure. As seen in Shepherd's narration of the storm in the Cairngorms and beyond, and her moonlit walks to hear

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[132] Macfarlane, *Underland*, pp. 245-8.
[133] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 247.
[134] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 253.
[135] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 254.
[136] Macfarlane, *Underland*, pp. 270-1.
[137] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 253 and p. 284.
[138] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 284.

war broadcasts, narration within a locale suppresses material relations between the locale and what lies outside its borders. These liminal, boundary-haunting figures are then part of the system of material relation that constitutes the locale.

Unlike spectres in a conventional ghost-story, Macfarlane's ghostly figures do not whisper last words, nor re-tread paths once walked. All of this aside, they appear in their essential ghostliness. Ghostliness is a form of relation; with no other characteristics to speak of, Macfarlane's ghostly figures simply embody this relation. To be a ghost is to be a being that exists in the present only in a partial, hollow state, emptied of vital characteristics that remain in the past. The ghost relates to the past by being incomplete without reference to it. Macfarlane's ghosts, as noted above, are deeply associated with textual and spatial locations where locales meet. They are associated not only with the boundary between past and present, but also with the boundary between here, in the locale, and elsewhere. Thus, Macfarlane seemingly suggests that the relation these ghosts embody crosses spatial boundaries as ghosts conventionally relate across temporal boundaries. By including these spatial-ghosts into the system of relation that constitutes the locale, Macfarlane includes an abstracted embodiment of the material relations to abstract alien space that are suppressed for the locale to cohere as a closed ecological system.

This is clarified with a specific example of such suppression. In 'Red Dancers', Macfarlane finds 'puzzlingly, hundreds of perfect spheres, dark orange in colour', washed up on a beach.[139] When amongst these spheres, he identifies them as 'hollow iron net-floats from fishing trawlers – vast numbers of them, beached and rusted, like alien eggs'.[140] These are surrounded, also, in a 'a thick wrack of plastic jetsam, repulsive in its presence on this wild coast'.[141] In the next chapter, 'The Edge', Macfarlane explores the fishing industry in nearby Andøya. A reader attentive to the type of networked reading Macfarlane invites may note the significant chance that Loforen's flotsam arrived on boats sailing from Andøya. Nevertheless, seeing net-floats described as 'alien', one gets the sense that it came from another planet. A specific, material relation between Andøya and Lofoten, two of Macfarlane's locales, is elided from the text. These eggs are present in the system of material relation that constitutes Lofoten, but they make little sense without reference to Andøya; they are the spatial-ghosts of Andøya. Ghostly figures occur more often when nature writing becomes most interested in global ecological crises like plastic pollution because the nature writer is more likely to encounter 'alien' materials and effects, and so to suppress more relations.

Thus, the ghostly figures of new nature writing are embodiments of the suite of relations that must be suppressed in the construction of ecologically networked localism. For Ursula Heise, literature in the time of climate crisis is challenged on the level of 'narrative style and strategy as well as content' by risks that 'transcend national borders and are not readily accessible to our physical senses, linguistic conventions, or

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[139] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 268.
[140] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 268.
[141] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 268.

social institutions'.[142] Macfarlane's recurring concern with the failure of 'human habits of meaning making' in capturing his experiences echoes Heise's sentiment. [143] From Seamus Heaney's translation of *Agamemnon* (*c.* 458 B.C.E.) he borrows imagery of the tongue of a watchman 'deaden[ed][…] like the dropped gangplank of a cattle truck' when he must sound the alarm.[144] This, he suggests, is the situation we find ourselves in; our deadened tongues, derelict forms of meaning-making, cannot 'speak the Anthropocene'.[145] *Underland* shares Heise's awaweness, then, of the challenges Anthropocene crises pose to literature. The ghostly figures in 'Red Dancers' represent this challenge, and the partial failure of networked localism to rise to it. At times, though, Macfarlane seems to present behaviours and structures associated with the Internet as a new, productive lens through which we might approach the natural world.

One such example is the scene which opened this thesis. Atop a 'marvellous summit' in Greenland, Macfarlane finds 'language seems impossible, impertinent, sliding stupidly off the landscape. Its size makes metaphor and simile seem preposterous. It is *like* nowhere I have ever been. It shucks story, leaves the usual forms of meaning-making derelict'.[146] As the tongue is deadened, though 'a powerful dissonance overtakes [Macfarlane's] mind'.[147] In this state, 'everything seems distant and proximate at the same time. It feels as if I could lean from that summit and press a finger into the crevasses, tip a drop of water from the serac pool, nudge a berg along the skyline with my fingertip'.[148] Another form of meaning-making has kicked in; 'I realize how configured my sense of distance has become from living so much on the Internet, where everything is in reach and nothing is within touch'.[149] Time online has afforded Macfarlane a way of approaching natural landscapes that transcends enormous distances, crossing spatial boundaries elsewhere associated with ghostly figures. After Internet usage, Macfarlane feels he can touch – forge material connections with – objects in another locale. But despite noting this, Macfarlane does not allow it to shape his work. In the coming section, I examine works that do so. First, I relay commentary on the surprisingly complex relationship between Internet mediation and the natural world. Then, I conclude by showing that ecologically networked localism can be achieved without suppressing inter-locale relations in works like Speakman's *Dark by Then*, that combine print and post-Internet storytelling practices.

2.5 Internet mediation and the 'experiential approach'

[142] Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The environmental imagination of the global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 181.
[143] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 379.
[144] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 263.
[145] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 263.
[146] Macfarlane, *Underland*, pp. 361-2.
[147] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 262.
[148] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 262.
[149] Macfarlane, *Underland*, p. 262.

Ursula Heise is not alone in calling for literary forms better suited to the challenges posed by current ecological crises. In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Morton highlights literature's vital role in 'establishing ways of feeling and perceiving', and thus 'dealing with how humans experience their place in the world'.[150] For some, this means interrogating existing forms, as when Macfarlane suggests that when dealing with 'the idea of the Anthropocene[…] [o]ld forms of representation are experiencing drastic new pressures and being tasked with daunting new responsibilities'.[151] For others, like ecocritic Heather Sullivan, this work is future-oriented. Sullivan suggests that environmental scholars 'attend to the human cultural imagination in order to understand what we have been thinking or not thinking, why, and what we might think (and attempt) in the future'.[152] Concluding this work, I follow Sullivan's lead. Below, I show that introducing post-Internet storytelling practices alongside a print book equips nature writing with techniques and structures better suited to these new pressures and responsibilities.

The assumption that time spent online and time spent in nature are oppositional, and that time on the Internet detracts from our enjoyment of the more-than-human world, is tempting. The cultural image of the excessive Internet user is, after-all, of a person who spends a lot of time inside. Moreover, we hear often of 'digital detoxes' undertaken in natural settings. With an eye to mindful, slow attention, 'reconnection' with nature, and a boundary-enforcing attention to remoteness, accounts of digital detoxes seem remarkably similar to classical nature writing texts.[153] However, many efforts have been made to integrate online and natural experiences. Even those remotest of locales often offer Internet access. For $50 (USD), climbers can access Wi-Fi over significant swathes of Mount Everest.[154] The California State Parks service brought 60 of its 85 parks online as early as 2005; CIO Alan Friedman cites a concern 'that some people, because of the demands of their lives to be connected, were having trouble getting away to our parks because they lacked connectivity'.[155] We should not assume, therefore, that Internet mediation has an uncomplicatedly oppositional relationship to the 'natural' world and our relations to it.

In a straightforward, material sense, Internet usage has an ecological dimension. According to the BBC, '[t]he carbon footprint of our gadgets, the internet and the systems supporting them account for

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[150] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 2.
[151] Robert Macfarlane, 'Generation Anthropocene: How humans have altered the planet forever', *The Guardian*, 1 April 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever> [accessed 27 November 2023].
[152] Heather Sullivan, 'The Dark Pastoral: A trope for the Anthropocene', in *German ecocriticism in the Anthropocene*, ed. by Caroline Schaumann and Heather Sullivan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 24-44 (p. 25).
[153] See, for example: Ellie Seymour, 'A digital detox on the world's first "phone-free" tourist island', *The Independent*, 11 October 2023 <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/finland/finland-digital-detox-mobile-phone-ulko-tammio-b2424581.html> [accessed 4 December 2023].
[154] Freddie Wilkison, 'Meet the Sherpa Bringing Wi-Fi to Everest', *National Geographic*, 19 October 2023 <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/meet-sherpa-bringing-wi-fi-everest/> [accessed 1 December 2023].
[155] Sue Thomas, *Technobiophilia: Nature and cyberspace* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 100.

about 3.7% of global greenhouse emissions'.[156] Minute shifts in Internet practices are magnified in ecology: 'If every adult in the UK sent one less "thank you" email, it could save 16,433 tonnes of carbon a year – the equivalent to taking 3,334 diesel cars off the road'.[157] The average user could save 28.5kg CO2e a year by unsubscribing from emailing lists they are no longer interested in.[158] These figures grow in proportion with our increasingly large smartphone screens.[159] Video calling is more carbon intensive than emailing, but can cut travel-related emissions significantly by replacing face-to-face meetings.[160] In the twentieth century, writers like Carson showed us that human industrial, cultural, and agricultural practices should not be excluded from discussions of ecology. Morton furthered this point by revealing 'nature' as a human construct that forestalls attention to an ecological system that is always incorporative of human behaviours.[161] In the early twenty-first century, it we cannot repeat the mistake that Carson and Morton addressed. Internet usage, like so many other human behaviours, is inscribed upon our landscapes and our ecology.

Media theory has from its outset been concerned with the relationship between human mediational practices and the more-than-human world. For Marshall McLuhan, the alphabet elevated technologized humans above the milieu of the natural world when transferring them from acoustic to visual space.[162] Writing after McLuhan, though, Walter Ong suggests that the later arrival of print allows reproductions that facilitate closer scientific and poetic engagement with the natural world.[163] Simulation, figured as intentional scientific mediation by Sherry Turkle, [164] and a general condition of media-saturation by Jean Baudrillard, is often seen as interfering with direct access to reality.[165] These processes encompass the natural, as does John Urry's exploration of how circulating representations of places prefigure first-impressions by crafting a 'tourist gaze'.[166] These thinkers imagine a technologized human beyond the natural world. In response, posthumanist thinkers mingle the mediational and 'natural' in what N. Katherine Hayles has called 'the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject'.[167] In Donna Harraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), for example, a cyborg future means resisting distinctions between human,

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156 Sarah Griffiths, 'Why your internet habits are not as clean as you think', *BBC Smart Guide to Climate Change*, 6 March 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200305-why-your-internet-habits-are-not-as-clean-as-you-think> [accessed 1 December 2023].
157 Griffiths.
158 Griffiths.
159 Griffiths.
160 Griffiths.
161 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*.
162 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1971), p. 22.
163 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 124-5.
164 Sherry Turkle, *Simulation and its Discontents* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009).
165 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
166 John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: SAGE, 2011), p. 2.
167 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 4.

animal, and machine.[168] Alongside studies from critics like Sean Cubitt[169] and Matthew Fuller,[170] which recognise ecologies of mediation and media as ecological agents, these concerns are coalescing as 'Ecomedia' studies. The relative novelty of ecomedia journals, though – *Media + Environment* (2019-) and *Journal of Environmental Literature* (2020-) – and diffuse definition offered in *The Routledge Handbook of Ecomedia Studies* (2024) are hallmarks of a promising but burgeoning academic field.[171]

Many ecomedia thinkers have noticed that our landscapes and ecology are inscribed on our language for discussing Internet practices. In *Technobiophilia: Nature and cyberspace* (2013), Sue Thomas notes an 'incongruous synergy':

> the language of computers and cyberspace is still saturated with images from nature; fields, webs, streams, rivers, trails, paths, torrents and islands; flora, including apples, blackberries, trees, roots and branches; and fauna, such as spiders, viruses, worms, pythons, lynxes, gophers, not to mention the ubiquitous bed and mouse.[172]

New-media poet J.R. Carpenter expands this list to include borrowings from systems for taxonomising the natural world.[173] For Carpenter, this indicates a structural resonance between ecology and the Internet. There is a sense of fizz, (inter)activity to online activity that renders them a better fit than print to evoking ecological reality.[174] Going further, Thomas' 'technobiophilia' sees linguistic and structural synergies as indicative of our 'innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes as they appear in technology'.[175] We consistently structure Internet mediation after life-processes; 'high-tech design is frequently over-ridden or modified by a much more deeply embedded atavistic notion of what makes us feel at ease'.[176] For reasons unclear even to Thomas herself, approaches to the more-than-human world and Internet mediation seemingly emerge in conversation with one another.

In *Insect Media* (2010), Jussi Parikka calls for further critical attention to this co-emergence. For him, 'the microcosmic worlds of entomology' are groupings of 'sensations, perceptions, movements, stratagems, and patterns of organization that work much beyond the confines of the human world'.[177]

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[168] Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 15.
[169] Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[170] Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).
[171] *The Routledge Handbook of Ecomedia Studies*, ed. by Antonio López and others (London: Routledge, 2024).
[172] Thomas, p. 3.
[173] J.R. Carpenter, 'Nested Folders: On Birds in Digital Poetry', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 29.3 (2022), pp. 609-25.
[174] Carpenter, p. 624.
[175] Thomas, p. 12.
[176] Thomas, p. 115.
[177] Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. ix.

Seeing them so, we might rethink an anthropocentric approach to media theory. We could then design 'artificial agents that expressed complex behaviour, not through pre-programming and centralization but through autonomy, emergence, and distributed functioning', by attending to these qualities in insect life.[178] McLuhan's famous refiguring of media objects as 'extensions of man' might be understood as having blinkered our understanding of media.[179] Rather than considering which human faculties are furthered by mediational behaviours, we should more boldly address those non-human faculties that mediation might bestow upon us. We could then understand Thomas' incongruous synergy as a productive one. Observing insect-life, Parikka shows that the non-human world can often offer us tools for imagining novel mediational behaviours. Below, I show that this relationship can work both ways. New mediational behaviours furnish us with new approaches to the more-than-human world. And one way of presenting these behaviours and approaches is through forms of nature writing that involve them.

In *Ambient Literature* (2021), Tom Abba, Jonathon Dovey and Kate Pullinger introduce a new mode of writing. Ambient Literature is founded on the premise that 'literary experiences delivered through text and audio running on smartphones and tablets can offer distinctive new forms of reading, listening and looking'.[180] Ambient Literature does not turn away from print; many works require the use of a book alongside the smartphone or tablet. We might consider these instead as expanding the book. Whilst the likes of Manuel Castells, Zygmunt Bauman and John Urry have associated electronic and Internet mediation with mobility, partners of the Ambient Literature project 'want to *connect* us to place, to manipulate time and presence in order to have us attend to the world around us with greater, rather than reduced, intensity'.[181] They see new mediational possibilities as 'a spur to new kinds of writing capable of capturing new kinds of insights about the world'.[182] Thus, Ambient Literature seeks to offer new ways of writing place using online storytelling practices. In this way, it addresses Heise's concerns, exercises nature writing's ghosts, and explores ecologically networked localism within the nature writing chronotope.

That said, Abba, Dovey and Pullinger do not comment on print nature writing. Their approach to ecological crises, however, suggests the usefulness of their techniques in dealing with nature writing's difficulty with representing such crises. Ambient Literature looks to 'understand climate change through an experiential approach that affords the opportunity to enact modes of attention necessary to embracing ecological complexity'.[183] This 'experiential' intervention is crucial. As noted above, the locale chronotope of nature writing stems from a generic preoccupation with particular modes of attention and experience.

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[178] Parikka, p. xi.
[179] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
[180] Jonathan Dovey, Tom Abba, and Kate Pullinger, 'Introduction', in *Ambient Literature: Towards a new Poetics of Situated Reading Practices*, ed. by Jonathan Dovey, Tom Abba, and Kate Pullinger (London: Palgrave, 2021), pp. 1-26 (p. 1).
[181] Dovey, Abba, and Pullinger, p. 5.
[182] Dovey, Abba, and Pullinger, p. 83.
[183] Jon Dovey and Duncan Speakman, 'Anthropocene Elegy and GeoSpatial Presence', *Media Theory*, 2.1 (2018), pp. 32-56 (p. 33).

Detailed observations of the more-than-human require careful, close attention. Such attention necessitates slow movement, thus limiting the range of the nature writing text. But focussing on a limited region becomes problematic when ecology is reconfigured as a single, global system. Thus, the forms of attention upon which nature writing is predicated seem incompatible with discussions of modern ecology. As such, Abba, Dovey and Pullinger's efforts to approach global ecology in literature by disrupting attentional modes can be understood as intervening in nature writing conventions. Ambient literature texts can follow ecological connections out of the locale without compromising the locale's construction. No relations need suppressing, and none resurface in the guise of ghosts.

Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, is, for Dovey and Speakman, 'a new kind of eco-critical artwork'.[184] Alongside print, Speakman 'offers users the opportunity to shift between worlds'[185] by relaying 'a library of pre-recorded spoken word, music composition, field recordings and interviews' from three locations already undergoing significant, anthropogenic ecological change via the *Dark by Then* app.[186] These recordings – from Latvia, Tunisia and New Orleans – often play once certain locational criteria are achieved. At times, recordings are triggered by the GPS location of the device. At others, though, the reader-user is asked to tap a button once criteria have been met. One must find a dwelling, for example, or a crossroads. After reporting that these conditions are met, the reader-user hears extracts wherein interviewees discuss the threat that climate change poses to their home, or the difficult decision of whether they should leave. Thus, 'the listener/reader is incited to tie those memories to the place they are in'; *Dark by Then* 'brings someone's backyard into your own', so that 'you get to live together, on top of one another'.[187] This new textual form made of book, app, sound-recording and environment overlaps experiences to reconcile the limited scale of the nature writing locale with the global nature of Anthropocene ecological crises.

The printed text of *Dark by Then* observes chronotopic conventions of nature writing, albeit like Macfarlane at a chapter, rather than a book-length level. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 10, Speakman is in Port Fourchon, a Louisiana town threatened by rising water. The chapter's opening locates and bounds the locale, whilst situating human behaviours within local ecology; '[w]e'd been driving along Bayou Lafourche for a while, next to us a continuous line of shrimper boats moored end to end in the water[…] We were heading to the end of the land'.[188] This locating, bounding work continues with the inclusion of Port Fourchon's coordinates,[189] and a relatively detailed map of the Bayou on every even-numbered page. Odd-numbered pages narrate the mounting pressure of rising water levels. On page 37, 'the houses become less frequent, and the ones that we do see are raised up on stilts 4 or 5 meters above the ground'.[190] Overleaf, a letter from the US Federal Emergency Management Agency arrives; Raymond, Speakman's focal point in

[184] Dovey and Speakman, p. 35.
[185] Dovey and Speakman, p. 33.
[186] Dovey and Speakman, p. 34.
[187] Dovey, Abba, and Pullinger, p. 92.
[188] Duncan Speakman, *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* (Bristol: Ambient Literature, 2017), p. 35.
[189] Speakman, p. 35.
[190] Speakman, p. 37.

Louisiana, is told by his mother '[y]ou need to deal with this'.[191] Dread is compounded graphologically, as each page sees a murky grey block containing the text of past pages rising ever-higher. As descriptions of Raymond's home and fishing float in this symbolic water, we are reminded of both climate change's threat to human life and property, and the role of human lifestyles in this threat.

In this way, Port Fourchon differs little from the Lofoten of Macfarlane's 'Red Dancers'. Both locales are constituted by the writer's narration of personal experiences with ecology, and both are threatened by global-scale ecological changes. Instantiations of these changes within both locales are attributed to abstract, global systems: global warming in Port Fourchon and oceanic pollution in Lofoten. Macfarlane's work shows that relations between locales and abstract global systems in book-bound nature writing often obscure specific ecological relations between individual locales. The direct pollution of Lofoten by the Andøya fishing industry, for example, is obscured behind Lofoten and Andøya's individual relations with global oceanic pollution. Rather than seeing Andøya's role in polluting Lofoten, we see Andøya's contribution to oceanic pollution, and the ostensibly unrelated pollution of Lofoten's beaches. Throughout my readings of nature writing above, I have demonstrated that modes of experience necessitated by nature writing practice lead writers to construct Walton's 'ecological wholes'. With my reading of *Underland*, I showed this process foreclosing on the exploration of ecological connection between locales such as Lofoten and Andøya, and the thus suppressed relations being embodied by ghosts. But Internet mediation moves *Dark by Then* out of this bind.

Before reading Chapter 5, the reader-user must locate a body of water, and register that they have done so via the *Dark by Then* app. This need not be sea or river, but might be a canal, sewer, outflow pipe, pond, or puddle. This water logged, the audio-narrator comments that '[e]ven when everything is static around you, there is always movement in the water', and asks '[w]hat brought this water here? What is carried in its flow?'.[192] Highlighting the constant movement of water in and out of human settlements, Speakman draws close attention to the water-cycle. The reader-user's encounter with a body of water within their locale becomes as an encounter with a fraction of the larger, total body of water that flows from locale to locale – including in and out of Port Fourchon. It becomes clear, in other words, that the water rising in Port Fourchon once flowed where the reader-user sits whilst reading about Speakman's experiences there. Speakman's focus on water ensures that this effect applies to all reader-users. Water is often foregrounded in ecological discourse; glaciers melt into it, crops drown in it, desertification sees ever-more settlements make do with less of it. All of us struggle with or contribute to these concerns. We are invited, then, to see our own locale and Port Fourchon as directly, materially, ecologically networked via the water-cycle.

But this networking still takes place via an abstract system. However more directly Speakman stages the relation between the reader's locale and Port Fourchon, it remains structurally identical to Macfarlane's relation of Andøya and Lofoten. The first two are connected via the water-cycle, and the second are

[191] Speakman, p. 39.
[192] Speakman.

connected via global oceanic pollution. Here, though, the 'experiential approach' becomes salient. After the audio-narration, the Chapter 5 is read with a soundtrack of Port Fourchon field recordings; lapping waves, bird calls and chattering locals, boats tapping on jetties. We hear the waters that flood the pages of the chapter. We hear relation – specific, material interaction between the water and the tools of the local fishing industry. Deploying 'the audience agency of locating', Speakman reconstitutes the recordings as originating within the reader's locale.[193] The reader-user's arrival at the chosen location becomes the origin of the noises. They remain sounds of elsewhere, but are also sounds of the here and now, 'contribut[ing] to the overall effect of a parallel present'.[194] Simultaneous, partial presence in two locales becomes a new form of experience available to the reader-user. And yet, at no point has narration violated the nature writing chronotope by leaving Port Fourchon, neither has the reader-user left their chosen locale. The reader is situated in two locales, on either side of an ecological connection, and crucially on either side of the abstract system that is the water cycle.

Speakman's reader-user experiences ecologically networked localism, rather than just encountering it as a theory or concept. Ecologically networked localism is brought into localisable personal experience. Printed narration remains dedicated to localised personal experience within Port Fourchon, ignoring the ecological routes out of the locale just like Macfarlane, Shepherd, Kassabova and White. But these routes are attended to in the broader text, through the app's incorporation of sound and the reader's location. No modes of relation are suppressed and no ghosts required. For Dovey and Speakman, 'static subject/object contemplation produced by encountering the scale of ecological disaster' is replaced with 'an agility to trace the inter connectedness of multi-scalar agents and entities'.[195] Recall Heise's phrasing of Anthropocene ecology's challenge to literature. It is a challenge to 'narrative style as well as content', since risks 'transcend national borders and are not readily accessible to our physical senses, linguistic conventions, or social institutions'. *Dark by Then* meets this challenge by expanding readers' experiential capabilities beyond those offered by a printed text. Post-Internet mediation communicates the spatiality of ecological breakdown by allowing the reader-user to access sensations from two distinct locales, thus transcending spatial borders like ecological crises themselves. Not only does such work exercise new nature writing's ghosts, it also brings abstract, epistemological constructs like global warming into everyday, lived spatialisation.

Ambient Literature thus communicates the spatial character of incorporation in a breaking ecology by expanding the capabilities of the printed book with Internet mediation. Closing this chapter, it is worth noting that such work need not replace print nature writing. The contributors to *Ambient Literature* often articulate an interest in what Internet-mediated literature is 'capable of'.[196] This paradigm is rarely deployed in literary studies, but Caroline Levine insists criticism would benefit from turning to

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[193] Dovey and Speakman, p. 38.
[194] Dovey and Speakman, p. 44.
[195] Dovey and Speakman, p. 53.
[196] Matt Hayler, Jonathan Dovey, and Tom Abba, 'The Politics of Ambient Literature', in *Ambient Literature: Towards a new Poetics of Situated Reading Practices*, ed. by Dovey, Abba, and Pullinger, pp. 163-86.

an 'affordance' based model for the study of form in literature.[197] The flipside of affordance in Levine, though, is limitation, or necessitation. In this chapter, I showed that modes of experience required by nature writing necessitate the writing of closed, localised ecologies which constitute the genre's locale chronotope. I then showed that this chronotope cannot afford nature writing the opportunity to explore ecology as understood after Lovelock and Carson, as global and polluted. Speakman's post-Internet techniques enable the locale chronotope once more to evoke contemporary understandings of ecology and our relations with it. Nevertheless, Macfarlane's ghosts retain an important message. Climate breakdown does exceed the affordances of print nature writing; a medium that has homed ecological discourse now for several centuries. Together, Macfarlane and Speakman's works communicate what neither could convey alone. Structures for managing our relation to the more-than-human world are no longer adequate. But attending the affordances of novel technologies, we may yet uncover new ones.

[197] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 13.

Chapter 3 'One plane and one moment': Chronological Changes in Post-Internet Travel Writing.

3.1 Introduction

Travel writing, as a literary genre, is often defined as the 'factual, first-person account of a journey undertaken by the author'.[1] This broad, porous definition admits many works of memoir, journalism, letter-writing and ethnography, not to mention more unlikely forms like political reportage. There is perhaps a know-it-when-I-see-it aspect to associating texts with this notably fuzzy genre. But texts typically classified as travel writing tend to have a few key features in common. Most obviously, travel writing documents journeys through space; or, through the lens of this thesis, the spatialisations engendered in the act of travel. But in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (2016), Debbie Lisle argues against considering travel writing merely as representing space. Instead, we should see a genre enmeshed in 'wider discursive structures, and the material effects that are produced within those structures'.[2] Rather than simply commentating, travel writing participates in global political and cultural practices. Spatialising acts like border enforcement should therefore be understood as informed by the history of travel writing to the same degree that travel writing engages with them.

For Lisle, travel writing is best understood within this wider field of discourse and practice. As shown in this thesis' introduction, media and mediational ecosystems are crucial to any such field. Consider, for example, Benedict Anderson's observations on print's importance in the development of national communities,[3] and Arjun Appadurai's further comments on how electronic media underlay globalised lifestyles.[4] Together, these works chart media-determined developments in the role played by national borders in social, political, and identity formations. And indeed, the transition from Anderson's nationally bound print world to Appadurai's electronic globalisation is explored from within by travel writers, for example in Pico Iyer's *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1988), *The Global Soul* (2001) and *Sun After Dark* (2004). But this thesis is interested in Internet use, and critics have documented many ways in which the Internet has impacted travel writing. Paul Longley Arthur and Tom Van Nuenen summarise: 'As travel writing moves into online ecologies – materially, semiotically, economically – it becomes influenced by

[1] Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).
[2] Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 16.
[3] See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).
[4] See: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

new representational paradigms and patterns of consumption'.[5] We might not consider them travel writing *per se*, but travel blogs, reviews, and multi-media social-media posts constitute a new discursive context within which travel writing must find its unique position. Moreover, this proliferation changes the act of travel itself by premediating potential destinations with images and interpretations from others online. In this chapter, I focus on how post-Internet mediation disrupts one central generic convention of travel writing: its typically linear chronology.

Central to my argument will be travel writing's tendency to connect travel through space with what Simon Cooke calls a 'reflective inner voyage through the emotional and imaginative experience of the traveller'.[6] This is, in fact, another of travel writing's typical identifying features. In particular, pairing an inner and outer journey distinguishes travel writing from the guidebook, which provides depersonalised travel advice, and is in this sense the source of its literary merit. Works of travel writing typically mirror journeys through space with processes of self-discovery or self-refashioning. Travellers leave home one person, and after a series of reformative experiences on the road, return another. Often, they leave home with a problem, left latent or made explicit in the text, and journey to a solution. As I shall show, however, travel writing is malleable. Its recognisable features remain open to change, and this apparently definitive feature actually describes a small fragment of a lengthy history. In *Travel Writing* (2011), Carl Thompson historicises the twinning of inner and outer journeys, suggesting that it belongs only to 'Modern Travel Writing'.[7] This chapter will not straightforwardly suggest that the era of travel writing characterised by the twinning of inner and outer journeys is over. Indeed, sustained engagement with self and psychology distinguishes travel writing amidst the online ubiquity of travel information. Instead, I argue that post-Internet travel writing eschews chronologically linear narration of these journeys in favour of structures that foreground affective resonances operating across them.

This chapter primarily focusses on the relationship between post-Internet mediation, spatialisation, and the form of contemporary travel writing. But engagement with travel writing's formal development must account for two significantly interrelated factors: colonialism and labour practices. Travel writing struggles to shake its colonialist tendency toward the manufacture of difference, racial essentialising, and the affixing of locals to the destination in a way that starkly contrasts writer's mobility. The narrator generates localised group identities; judges, but cannot be judged in return. Moreover, discussing travel writing in the twenty-first century seems impossible without attention to labour practices. Migratory labour, and the de-differentiation of work-time and touristic travel-time are salient features in the cultural image of post-Internet travel, whose key figure is perhaps the 'digital nomad'. As the exoticising appropriation of 'nomad' suggests, these practices often articulate colonial legacies. Economic hardship coerces those from countries once under colonial rule into travel away from home, whereas those from

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[5] Paul Longley Arthur and Tom Van Nuenen, 'Travel in the Digital Age' in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 504-18 (p. 503).
[6] Simon Cooke, 'Inner Journeys: Travel Writing as Life Writing', in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Carl Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 15-24 (p. 18).
[7] Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 17.

nations that exerted such rule travel at leisure, in far superior conditions. Colonial forms continue to shape modern travel, and do-so likewise with travel writing. This chapter then focusses on the relationship with home as an aspect common to this variety of travel experiences. Nevertheless, care must be expressed in not eliding socially, economically and politically particularised journeys through overgeneralisation. To counteract such variables, I analyse two travel writing works from the same writer, published within a few years of each other.

Before these readings, though, I begin this chapter by surveying travel writing's history, paying particular attention to its formal adaptation to the emergence of new media technologies and mediational practices. As well as situating post-Internet travel writing in a critical context, this section will further historicise 'Modern Travel Writing' and the twinning of inner and outer journeys. In doing so, it will reveal this twinning as contingent on a mediational ecology that has since changed, and highlight the possibility for radically new forms for post-Internet travel writing.

After establishing this history, I look at developments in mediation over the late twentieth century and post-Internet period, and how they have impacted on the experience of travel. I draw out Internet-effected changes in the relationship between travel and home that are common to all journeys across the socio-economic spectrum noted above. Namely, I position the ability to retain contact with friends, culture, news, etc. across great distances as retention in one's symbolic home. Once, the symbolic home was co-located with the spatial home, but ubiquitous Internet access dislocates it, engendering a range of new communicational practices both for those travelling, and those remaining at home. In this section I establish what links these practices, and what might be considered fundamental shifts in the traveller's relation to the home. Care is taken to note the complexity of relations between traveller, journey and symbolic home, though, by way of insisting that the readings of post-Internet travel writing should not look for anything so simple as a reduced connection to home.

After briefly discussing how dislocating the symbolic home affects travel writing's twinning of inner and outer journeys, I progress to readings of two travel writing works from Joanna Walsh. First, I read *Break.up* (2018), which retains the linear chronology that typically charts the relation between inner and outer journey. The outer journey in *Break.up* progresses in a chronologically linear fashion, but the inner journey is stunted and faltering. This, I argue, is because the ever-present symbolic home prevents the narrator from remaining in the state of psychological plasticity that time away from home typically stimulates. *Break.up* narrates a journey intended to help the narrator move past a breakup, which fails to do so when she communicates with and observes her former partner's online presence. *Hotel* (2015) contrastingly rejects the linearity of the outer journey as a chronological model for narration. But renegotiation of the narrator's attitude toward the domestic labour of her marriage conveys the type of inner journey that *Break.up* fails to. Undertaken within the same media ecology as the trip in *Break.up*, the trip narrated in *Hotel* is structured by affective and intellectual links between spaces encountered throughout. The journey's linear chronology is flattened, but the distinction between time at home and time spent travelling remains significant. As such, I suggest that *Hotel* portrays post-Internet travel as

chronologically binary; distinction between the temporal states of home-time and travel-time displaces narration of a journey from one place to another. *Break.up* problematises pre-Internet travel writing conventions, and *Hotel* provides a post-Internet alternative. Despite being published second, *Break.up* asks a question, to which *Hotel* responds with linear chronology.

3.2 Travel writing and mediation

Travel writing is significantly restructured by the post-Internet media ecology, but we should note that the genre has always reflected changes in media use. In this section, I show that travel writing's typical twinning of inner and outer journeys since the late nineteenth century simply marks a stage in this history. Travel writing, in some loose sense, has been around for millennia. Around 1130 B.C.E., an Egyptian priest named Wenamon was so beset by calamities when journeying between Thebes and Lebanon that he put the narrative of his misadventures to writing.[8] The 3000 years since have seen much change in mediational habits and in travel writing form. Moreover, Thompson shows that travel writing 'extends into prehistory' if one expands its canon to encompass orally shared travel tales in pre-literate cultures.[9] Considering the tendency of media theorists like Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong to read the transition from oral to literate communication as the first major mediational change, one might suggest the entirety of mediational history to be imprinted on the development of travel writing.[10] Accepting McLuhan's suggestion that writing shifts us from acoustic to visual space suggests a long, shared history for travel writing, mediation, and spatialisation. Before showing how travel writing reflects the shift to post-Internet mediation then, I first establish a precedent by detailing its earlier responses to similar shifts.

Pre-literate travellers themselves have been understood as an early mediational form. As Eric J. Leed notes, such a traveller serves a 'communicational function[…] he is a witness who will leave and carry the news of this place with him, establishing its reputation to other communities'.[11] This traveller interfaces the host culture and the cultures from which they bring news, and in so doing acts as interface between home and away, inside and outside, self and other. But Leed problematises the neatness of such binaries. Travellers' safety often depended on the quality of their conversation and novelty of information provided about the lands they visit from. As such, pre-literate travel tales often subordinated truthfulness under the entertainment of hosts.[12] More significant to this chapter, though, is Leed's suggestion that travelling changes the traveller, troubling the sense that they embody their home culture. Leaving home,

[8] See: James Henry Breasted, 'The Report of Wenamon', *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 21.2 (1905), pp. 100-9.
[9] Thompson, *Travel* Writing, p. 34.
[10] See: Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982).
[11] Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveller: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 98.
[12] Leed, pp. 106-8.

writes Leed, means leaving one's 'defining social and cultural matrix'; the cultural, social and familial networks that have made us who we are.[13] If home significantly determines the formation of one's identity, then time travelling away from home loosens the determining pressures acting on the traveller's identity. Leed argues that separation from the defining matrix of the home puts the traveller into a state of personal plasticity, and new experiences in new places then alter the traveller's identity. This makes possible the relationship between the inner and outer journey that characterises Cooke's 'Modern Travel Writing'.

But travel writing adapted to many new media before the inner and outer journeys emerged as a structural trope. When the tales of Leed's travellers were first put to writing, various new agents were introduced to the production of narrative. Most literary forms are influenced by editors, publishers and so on. But since communication with itinerant travel writers is difficult, travel writing is particularly open to dispersed authorship. Rather than straightforward accounts of the narrator's journey, suggests Adrian Craciun, these works are the product of 'manifold social agents and contingencies'.[14] Whilst *An Itinerary* (1617), for example, is attributed to Fynes Moryson, the effect of Moryson's inner life on its narration is negotiated with myriad external factors. Not only are texts edited – rather, charts, maps illustrations, tables and more were compiled with the prose narrative of the journey. Texts like *The Principal Navigations* of Richard Hakluyt (*c.* 1552-1616) were multi-authored compendiums of text, illustration, cartography, itinerary, and so on. A genre once confined to the medium of speech is not only textualized, but seems inseparable from accompanying maps and charts, if not a composite form in which they are of equal importance to the written narrative.

The printing press changed this by making the reproduction of text much easier than the reproduction of maps and charts. Abovementioned paratextual elements were often omitted from early print travel writing, depending on the edition's targeted consumer group.[15] As James R. Akerman notes, 'the cost of acquiring and printing maps [was] weighed against the price and market' for new editions by publishers. Nineteenth century advances in printing technology would eventually reverse this process. Akerman highlights the return of maps, charts and illustrations in works like John Duncan's *Travels in Western Africa, in 1845 & 1846* (1847), and the guidebooks popular at the time.[16] But the immediate effect of removing maps and charts was to centralise textual narrative in the previously multi-media genre of travel writing. Because maps and charts enabled readers to possibly reenact the trip, this had significant repercussions for the reception of travel writing works. Their removal shifts travel writing from being a genre providing instructions for future journeys, to being one focussed on accounts of earlier ones. Slight

[13] Leed, p. 26.
[14] Adriana Craciun, 'Oceanic Voyages, Maritime Books, and Eccentric Inscriptions', *Atlantic Studies*, 10.2 (2013), pp.170-96 (p. 172).
[15] James R. Akerman, 'Maps', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 333-53.
[16] Akerman, pp. 346-9.

though this shift may be, it is difficult to imagine narration of an inner journey becoming a central trope in a genre whose focus is instructive, rather than reflective.

Moreover, removing non-textual elements and foregrounding personal experience invites comparisons with the novel, another ascendant seventeenth century literary form. Critics often attend to the adoption of the episodic structure common to early picaresque novels in works of seventeenth century travel writing like Thomas Herbert's *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* (1634) and William Dampier's *A New Voyage Around the World* (1697).[17] Emerging as a predominantly textual form, travel writing was read alongside popular texts like Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), and later imitations like Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelhausen's *Simplicius Simpliccimus* (1668). Protagonists of such novels move from location to location, and in doing so move from plot-point to plot-point. De Cervantes' Don Quixote and accompanying Sancho travel between inns, meeting others and becoming involved in altercations on the road. This episodic, picaresque structure is apparent in even twenty-first century travel writing texts like *The Amur River* (2021), and the many works of Michael Palin, most of which accompany an episodic television series. Travel writing has adapted to the shift from orality to literacy, developments in print technology and the emergence of the novel. These important changes in media and mediational practices render it a reflective, episodic form. Already, it is becoming clear that the structure that sees an inner journey match an outer one in travel writing is the outcome of the form's long history of adaptation to mediational practices.

The eighteenth century saw various media of analysis and representation emerge and structure new gazes. New media of analysis and classification produced a scientific gaze. Theoretical schema for the classification of natural phenomena were established, and instruments of data collection like the sextant and mercury thermometer were developed. Many of these were incorporated into travel practices, as travel became, like much in the Enlightenment, a formalised and scientific endeavour. In much travel from this period, writes Angela Byre, 'specimens were collected, maps made and temperatures tabulated, all for publication and display to a European public eager for new and exciting details'.[18] Travel writing was a significant medium for this publication and display. Still largely textual, works like John Hawkeworth's *An Account of the Voyages* (1773) are rife with numerical measurements and scientific terminology. Animals and plants are called by Linnean names, and description is precise and analytical, rather than poetic and meditative. Systems of classification dismantle the environment, replacing it with a series of discreet plants, animals, geological features. Grand themes of struggle, penance, godliness and endeavour within expansive spaces are excluded by virtue of this differentiating approach. Space becomes neutral, emptied of affective meaning, awaiting observation, division, and classification.

[17] Janicke Stensvaag Kaasa, 'Travel and Fiction', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Das and Youngs, pp. 474-487 (p. 475).
[18] Angela Byrne, 'The Scientific Traveller', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Pettinger and Youngs, pp. 17-29 (p. 17).

Applied to foreign lands, this scientific gaze often amounts to a colonial gaze. Eighteenth century media of measurement and classification allow the travel writer to arrive in a new location as arbiter of qualities and generator of difference. And these differences were typically structured by the binaries that supported colonial ideologies. *An Account of the Voyages* after-all contained the first account of James Cook's trip to the South Pacific, and Cook's later journals found wide readership throughout the century.[19] Such works grouped white, Western and safe by producing their antithesis in lands outside Europe and its colonies. Entangled in the powerful ideological structures of colonialism until their partial breakdown in the twentieth century, travel writing retains this tendency toward binary structures. Indeed, Lisle suggests that these binaries persist even in many late twentieth century texts. Such works fail to engage the genre's colonial legacy with sufficient criticality, inadvertently 'ignoring, repressing or displacing' colonial structures.[20] Texts like Bill Bryson's *Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe* (1991), for example, poke fun at cultural differences in Western nations in a manner that repeats a colonially essentialist understanding of the relationship between a terrain and its inhabitants.[21] Media of classification activated a generic tendency toward essentialism and the othering of the destination's inhabitants. The rigours of scientific analysis perhaps inevitably produce a colonialist gaze when applied to spaces and their inhabitants.

But not all texts written at the height of colonial practices propagated a colonialist understanding of space so directly. Alongside new analytic and classificatory media came new media of artistic representation and its circulation that produced what John Urry terms the 'romantic gaze'.[22] The late eighteenth century saw tourism ascending as a common mode of travel that typically involved a raft of new mediational behaviours. The romantic gaze is an early, period-specific iteration of what Urry calls the 'tourist gaze'.[23] The 'circulating images and texts of this and other places' started pre-determining the spatialisations undertaken by visitors to a new destination.[24] Arriving to destinations like the Lake District with a Claude glass and 'picturesque' eye, tourists sought vistas familiar from landscape painting and romantic poetry.[25] Texts like Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes* (1778) and Samual Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) privileged views over uninterrupted 'nature'. Local populations were wilfully ignored, considered blights on the landscape, or made alike with local fauna through primitivisation and naturalisation. And whilst this thesis attends to prose, the significance of such structures in the works of Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelly bears noting.[26] The romantic gaze was conditioned by landscape painting's formal tropes, and supported by the framing medium of the Claude glass. And whether the landscape constructed is a sublime natural expanse,

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[19] Michael F. Robinson, 'Scientific Travel', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Das and Youngs, pp. 488-503 (p. 494).
[20] Lisle, p. 265.
[21] Lisle, p. 10.
[22] John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: SAGE, 2011), p. 19.
[23] Urry and Larsen, p. 19.
[24] Urry and Larsen, p. 2.
[25] Urry and Larsen, p. 100.
[26] See: Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

blighted by human inhabitation, or an arcadia of simple and natural lives, local inhabitants are denied agency and depth of character.

As such, one should not overstate the distinction between scientific and romantic travel writing. Paul Smethurst notes formal similarities in scientific and romantic travel writing underwritten by a mutual 'search for order in nature'.[27] Scientific observers might claim an objectivity absent from romantic writing, but Smethurst argues that classification and ordering implicate scientists in their texts as much as romantics are implicated in theirs. As Benjamin Colbert notes, scientific writers 'evince[d] discomfort with linguistic demands placed upon them, often equating the picturesque with a populism which expresses the ends of science (widening understanding) while compromising the means (representing nature accurately)'.[28] Colbert highlights Samuel Hibbert and John MacCulloch as scientific writers who hold an aversion to the picturesque tendencies of their romantic colleagues in tension with the benefit of including picturesque passages in pursuit of broader circulation.[29] Whilst the categories of scientific and romantic travel writing are useful, neatly separating writing from this period into two camps would be a mistake. Whilst the scientific approach might pertain to a transparent and objective presentation of space, it is simply another mode of subjective spatialisation. The Claude glass is not unlike those instruments of scientific measurement, and searching for beauty is not structurally unlike searching for knowledge. In both cases, media become a means of constructing the destination.

Across the nineteenth century, photography took over as the medium predominantly influencing the tourist gaze and productions of space broadly. Another salient suggestion of Urry's is that no mediational practice has contributed more to the construction of the tourist gaze than photography.[30] Photography's birth is somewhat complex; several methods for recording the presence of light emerged over the nineteenth century.[31] Whether the first photograph was taken by Nicéphore Niépce, Louis Daguerre or Fox Talbot though, the practice spread quickly, and gained a reputation for objectivity that largely persists at present, despite scholarly contestation.[32] Photographs are understood as immediate representations of a location, and circulated broadly in Victorian-era photograph books like the one Walsh notes was received for Christmas by Sigmund Freud's patient, Dora.[33] In such conditions of reception and circulation, says Urry, '[p]laces and humans are transformed into objects passed from person to person'.[34] The circulation of places made possible by photographs 'organize[s] gazes, constructing and mobilizing the places that

[27] Paul Smethurst, *Travel Writing and the Natural World 1768-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 17.
[28] Benjamin Colbert, 'Description', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Pettinger and Youngs, pp. 166-78, (p. 169).
[29] Colbert, p. 169.
[30] Urry and Larsen, p. 155.
[31] Urry and Larsen, p. 14.
[32] See: Joanna Zylinska, *Nonhuman Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).
[33] Joanna Walsh, *Hotel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 25.
[34] Urry and Larsen, p. 180.

tourists consume and remember'.[35] Photography is heir to landscape painting in this sense, but the key distinction between the two is how much easier photographs can be produced and circulated. Where landscape painting pre-mediated trips to the Alps and the Lake District, the photographic archive rapidly came to encircle the globe.

Travel writers were not immune to photography's organisation of the gaze, and the inclusion of photography in travel writing has important repercussions the genre's reception. The inclusion of photographs alongside written travel narratives stages the failure of either image or writing to capture the experience of a place. The text's accompaniment with a picture suggests that there are aspects of the place that text and picture fail to capture individually. Whether sparse, as in Robert Macfarlane's *Underland* (2019) or extensive as in W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1998), the inclusion of photographs alongside written description implies that the mediums provide differing insights. Photography's inclusion in travel writing undermines the validity of either medium as a means of direct and comprehensive access to the destination. Some writers, like Nicolas Bouvier in *Japanese Chronicle* (1975), deploy disjunction between text and image to create a tension between the touristic gaze and alternative understandings of the destination. Even in these cases though, it is apparent that the *reality* of the destination cannot be conveyed in photograph or text, and likely not in combinations of the two. Travel writing texts then must be considered partial reproductions, framing experiences that cannot be articulated totally. The genre becomes notably subjective, conditioned by its medium and associated representational conventions.

Alongside booming guidebook sales and the rise of psychoanalysis, this change facilitated what Cooke terms the 'inward turn' of travel writing.[36] In *Abroad* (1979), Paul Fussell suggests that autobiographical travel writing emerged in response to the phenomenal success of guidebooks like those from the Baedeker series.[37] Conversely, Jordana Dym suggests that guidebooks gained readership by 'removing the personal component of contemporary travel writing'.[38] These two forms seemingly pull away from one another in pursuit of readership. Guidebooks supply information in a concise, objective manner, and travel writing adapts by foregrounding introspective, subjective responses to new places. And whilst generic change can be sluggish, Nandini Das and Tim Youngs suggest that travel writing's inward turn was accelerated by the popularisation of Freudian psychoanalysis, itself a mediational practice insisting on the depth of subjective experience.[39] In Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* (1937), Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps* (1936) and later works from Bryson, Paul Theroux and Bruce Chatwin, Cooke finds narratives structured by 'first person self, and its transformations through travel'.[40] Such works are impressionist, feature analeptic digressions that follow the traveller's reflections. They are broadly chronologically linear, though, because linear chronology is necessary to track the interrelation of

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[35] Urry and Larsen, p. 156.
[36] Cooke, p. 15.
[37] Paul Fussell, *Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 202.
[38] Jordanna Dym, 'Travel Writing and Cartography', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Das and Youngs, pp. 423-41 (p. 434).
[39] Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Das and Youngs, pp. 1-16 (p. 8).
[40] Cooke, 'Inner Journeys', p. 16.

the inner and outer journey. Now conventional, the memoir-esque forms we expect to find in the travel writing section of a modern bookshop emerge only due to mediational changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The foregrounding of an inner journey that responds to the outer one and the linear chronology this necessitates depend on these media conditions. As such, I suggest that they are liable to change in a new, post-Internet mediational ecology.

Media change facilitated the inner and outer journey structure, but whilst this structure remains essential, neither mediational habits nor travel writing conventions have been entirely stable in the century since its emergence. The tourism industry has continued to develop in a way that many argue displaces more engaged, less consumerist travel practices. Fussell extends Evelyn Waugh's postwar admission that he 'did not expect to see many travel books in the near future' to a book-length 'elegy' in *Abroad*.[41] For Fussell, the deployments and displacements of the First World War introduced mobility to the common imagination. Moreover, the damp, cold misery of trench warfare stimulated longings for home and warmer climes. The interwar successes of Waugh, Greene, Byron and Christopher Isherwood and others are for Fussell inextricable from these shifts in the common imagination. Moreover, this interwar period saw a ubiquity of options for rail and sea travel, and economic circumstances that allowed an all-inclusive transatlantic round trip by sea to cost only £18.[42] But for the likes of Waugh and Fussell, the rapidity of post-war air travel and introduction of firmer, passport-controlled borders led to a decline in travel, inversely proportional to a tourism boom; post-war globalisation subsumed the otherness perceived necessary to travel writing.[43]

Globalisation is inseparable from worldwide televisual media. In the late twentieth century, Urry's circulation of images accelerated such that almost everything had been seen before. An entirely unmediated encounter with any destination became impossible, just as the likes of Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco suggested that there could be no unmediated encounter with any aspect of the real. This stimulates what Gillian Jein calls the 'interpretive position' in travel writing.[44] The differentiation of spaces into common 'locations, sites and situations' like Athens, the market and the haggle, for Jein amounts to a 'legislative' position.[45] This term would incorporate the romantic, scientific, colonialist and touristic modes outlined above. Writers in the interpretive mode drew academic theory into travel writing that 'recognise[s] the risk inherent in writing's pertaining to a transparent relationship with the real'.[46] In Baudrillard's *America* (1986), this manifests in a journey through simulacra, drawing attention to the media images clouding the real. And in Roland Barthes' *An Empire of Signs* (1970) it sees the theorist travel Japan

[41] Fussell, p. 227.
[42] Fussell, p. 72.
[43] Fussell, pp. 24-50.
[44] Gillian Jein, 'From Legislative to Interpretive Modes of Travel: Space, Ethics, and Literary Form in Jean Baudrillard's *America*', in *Travel and Ethics*, ed. by Charles Forsdick, Ludmilla Kostova, and Corinne Fowler (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 31-51.
[45] Jein, p. 35.
[46] Jein, p. 32.

'search[ing] out not other symbols but the very fissure of the symbolic'.[47] The shift critical theory effected from legislative to interpretive positions generates work that explores spatialising processes, rather than spaces themselves. The writer remains keenly aware of the social and mediational systems that pre-determine their encounter with the destination.

The interpretive position became an established pose for travel writers to adopt, but one must be careful not to suggest that interpretive works heralded a paradigmatic shift away from the legislative position. Indeed, in *Tourists with Typewriters* (1998) Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan suggest the inverse. For them, the homogenisation of global mediation underwrites a boom in legislative travel writing, as readers seek reassurance that the world-out-there is not simply more of the same.[48] Works like Bryson's *Notes From a Small Island* (1995) and Julio Cortazar and Carol Dunlop's *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* (1983) revivify the heterogenous world by generating difference within familiar territory. And these were soon joined, suggests Huggan in *Extreme Pursuits* (2009), by works seeking aberrations in the abovementioned homogeneity by 'operat[ing] under the sign of disaster'.[49] From this perspective, legislative travel writing's historical tendency toward categorisation and the production of difference counters the homogenisation of media globalisation. But texts like Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (1998) often find the 'sign of disaster' on the non-Western side of those colonial binaries noted above. Those like *Small Island*, on the other hand, reproduce similar binaries by replacing Western/non-Western with wealthy/working-class and urban/rural. Travel writing continues to respond to mediational and historical change, but cannot simply shake-off formal qualities determined in different circumstances. Analysis of even post-Internet travel writing must be cautiously aware of the genre's long history.

This survey has outlined the frequency with which new media have impacted the formal tendencies of travel writing. I conclude by highlighting several key points. Firstly, travel writing has a long history. The recounting of travel tales had a close relationship with mediation even before the written genre emerged, because travellers themselves can be understood as pre-literate mediation. The twinning of inner and outer journeys emerged relatively recently as a travel writing trope, in response to a set of mediational conditions in place only from the late nineteenth century. Whilst it may seem innate to the genre then, this structure is open to renegotiation in the emergent post-Internet mediational ecosystem. Secondly, new media devices cannot be understood simply as allowing the travel writer to engage in new experiences; one must attend to the complex milieu into which new mediational practices enter. They offer new patterns, encourage some spatialisations, discourage or augment others, but must be understood as doing so in conjunction with other factors. In this history provided above, I demonstrated the significant but partial

[47] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), p. 4.
[48] Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 2.
[49] Graham Huggan, *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 2.

deterministic role mediational change plays in the formal development of travel writing. One cannot ignore its interfacing with myriad social, political and economic factors, not least colonialism and its spectres, which remain entrenched in the structures with which travel writing constructs the destination. But we come now to the current technological moment, the post-Internet period. Below, I explore the relationship between travel and the separation of one's symbolic home from its spatial location that is overseen by post-Internet mediation. Thereafter, I discuss the relationship between the inner and outer journeys and the symbolic home that informs my readings of *Break.up* and *Hotel*.

3.3 Post-Internet travel

Above, I showed that the twinning of inner and outer journeys and the linear chronology it necessitates respond to a range of developments in media use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the twenty-first century has seen a raft of new technologies and practices emerge; mobile phones, digital cameras, the commercial launch of GPS and near-instant communication. Moreover, these individual developments are integrated on a smartphone that most travellers and travel writers carry always in their pocket. The prevalence of travel content on social-media has accelerated Urry's 'circulating images and texts of this and other places' even beyond the levels that foreclosed on Baudrillard's access to the real America. We have seen above how travel writing transformed in response to the emergence of guidebooks, and now it is increasingly defined by this context of seemingly superficial social-media posts about travel. But the differing interpretive and legislative responses to media globalisation encourage care not to assume a singular response to this perceived superficiality. A writer might excavate meaningful experience from superficiality,[50] or else resist in ever-deepening explorations of ever-smaller areas.[51] Moreover, novel forms abound: blogs, vlogs, forum posts, Instagram posts and stories, livestreams, modes of documenting virtual travel, and so on. These online forms, however, are distinct from the genre of book-length, prose-based, literary travel writing that this chapter addresses.

Below, I look in finer detail at the impact late twentieth and early twenty-first century changes to media technology and mediation have had on travel spatialisations. I focus on the relation to home as one that unites the majority of journeys; to journey is to be away from home. Of course, the relation to home is not alike in all journeys, and post-Internet mediation has not had a uniform effect on all relations to home. I suggest only that this relation has been transformed in various ways, but across all journeys. Nevertheless, these many circumstances have one thing in common. Allowing contact with friends and engagement with news and cultural content, the Internet grants access to a 'symbolic home' to those far from their physical home. As such, travellers might no longer feel the effects of time away from the

[50] See: Teju Cole, *Blind Spot* (London: Faber, 2017).
[51] See: Alexandra Horowitz, *On Looking: Six Walks with Expert Eyes* (New York: Scribner, 2016).

physical home so strongly. Indeed, in *Break.up* Walsh declares: 'Where I am connected I am at home'.[52] Reading *Break.up* and *Hotel*, I show how this prevents progress away from the physical home from neatly structuring an inner journey. First, though, I begin this section with general observations on the relationship between home, travel and mediation. Then, I demonstrate how post-Internet mediation separates the physical and symbolic homes, and how this impacts on an array of travel practices. Throughout, and especially in this last case, it will be important to consider this separation as partial, understanding that the physical home is typically invested with some symbolic qualities that cannot easily be transposed online.

Mediation allows certain tasks that once necessitated travel to be accomplished without. Media travel for us, and we may therefore be encouraged to stay at home. This is true of post-Internet mediation, but to greater and lesser extents is also true of forms of tele-mediation, courier and postal services, and even human-mediation like Leed's pre-literate traveller. According to his friend and collaborator Robert K. Logan, McLuhan 'used to enjoy quipping that executives drive downtown to use the telephone'.[53] One easily sees McLuhan's point. A dissonance sits at the heart of this journey; why travel to a particular location to do what one might easily have done at home? Moreover, why travel to one location to be telepresent in another? There are a few potential answers to these questions, but it is worth thinking with the spirit of McLuhan's observation before coming to think against it.

This spirit might otherwise be termed the disincentivisation of travel, and is the core research problem in Joshua Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* (1985). Meyrowitz's work can be framed as re-evaluating the social, economic and political relevance of shared place under the conditions of media globalisation. He shows that various functions of modern life rely on mediational behaviours extending our communicative radius around the globe. McLuhan's executive has instantaneous access to dislocated information, including words spoken this second by a business partner on another continent; '*where* one is has less and less to do with what one knows and experiences'.[54] Before these technologies, most non-domestic social arrangements required travel to a shared space. Telemedia remove this necessity, but do not simply facilitate the same social engagements without the need for travel. As Meyrowitz shows, such changes have secondary and tertiary repercussions that proliferate through the network of social life. Removing the necessity of travel engenders a range of entirely new social forms. *No Sense of Place* was published in 1985, but later mediational changes have only accelerated the trends Meyrowitz noticed. It is now relatively common for people living on different continents to establish and maintain a relationship online. We might wonder, therefore, not only why the executive might drive downtown to use the telephone, but why anyone might leave the travel away from the home to fulfil any communicational need whatsoever.

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[52] Walsh, *Break.up* (London: Tuskar Rock, 2018), p. 33.
[53] Robert K. Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 310.
[54] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. viii.

Indeed, the image of housebound media subjects haunts our cultural and critical imagination. In the blockbuster Pixar animation *WALL-E* (2008), humanity is chair-bound, obese, and constantly communicating via a personal holograph screen. Pixar finds an unlikely bedfellow, here, in Paul Virilio. In *Polar Inertia* (1990), Virilio predicted a future characterised by the inertia of the individual; new electronic media would disincentivise travel not only in business or social relations, but generally. One need not visit far-off destinations when 'things at one end of the earth are made visible, accessible, at the other end'.[55] A suite of surrounding technologies that enabled almost all social, shopping, work, entertainment and touristic needs to be accomplished without the need for travel would produce a heavily mediated subject Virilio called 'couched man'.[56] The humans of *WALL-E* and Virilio's couched man are, of course, extreme representations of mediated stagnation. Nevertheless, Alan Teo identifies the Japanese figure of the hikikomori as a 'modern day hermit' who remains housebound whilst engaging in near-constant online activity.[57] The practice is not so widespread as Virilio and Pixar suggest, but Teo does reference studies identifying the lifestyle in at least nine countries. Needless to say, many other pressures are influencing hikikomori behaviour. But this international spread and the cultural and academic preoccupation with the immobile, media-saturated subject points to a not-insignificant role for media's disincentivising of travel. In terms of the twinning of inner and outer journeys central to modern travel writing, we might suggest that the absolute freedom to roam on an inner journey is gained at the expense of the outer journey. The society of *WALL-E*, couched man and the hikikomori is one opposed to the formal processes that typically underpin travel writing.

But that society has not quite come into being. Our relationship with home has changed in more subtle ways, but ones no less significant to the experience of travel. The phrase social network has become synonymous with social-media platforms; David Fincher's film charting Facebook's early development was titled *The Social Network* (2010). But if we resist this cultural association and look at the phrase outside of the context of the current historical moment, it simply denotes a network of friends and acquaintances. For many born around the millennium, social-media activities have always sustained this social network. Generations born just prior remember life before social-media, but have mostly now integrated it into their network. These are not generations of hikikomori, but may often find themselves *Alone Together* (2011), to borrow a phrase from Sherry Turkle. When together at home, writes Turkle, users of post-Internet media 'can always be elsewhere'.[58] This amounts to '[t]echnology reshap[ing] the landscape of our emotional lives'; whilst we might share the living room with family members, we are in a sense apart from them in an individualised online social space.[59] Of course, the family home is not entirely devoid of face-

[55] Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (London: SAGE, 2000), p. 12.
[56] Virilio, p. 70.
[57] Alan Teo, 'Modern Day Hermits: The Story of Hikkomori in Japan and Beyond', unpublished paper delivered as part of the 'Noon Lecture Series' (University of Michigan, 11 August 2012).
[58] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. 156.
[59] Turkle, p. 17.

to-face interaction, and many pre-Internet homes were not characterised by interpersonal warmth. But the fact remains that the Internet seemingly directs attention away from home life for many.

The nature of the home has changed in ways that impact on the character of post-Internet travel. The change that will be central to this chapter is the dislocation of a symbolic home from a physical one. Leed's discussion of pre-literate travel introduced the idea of a defining social and cultural matrix that the traveller is extricated from when they leave home. In this arrangement, there is little reason to differentiate the symbolic and physical home. Home is the physical place where the symbolic content that amounts to one's defining matrix is located. When in this place, one is submerged in one's home culture; perhaps certain languages must be spoken and communicated via signage, certain traditions, governmental functions, manners of speaking and social standards must be upheld. But as Meyrowitz makes clear in *No Sense of Place*, electronic media is indifferent to the boarders that constitute such an understanding of home. Turkle's alone-together family are turning away from the family life of the physical home in favour of online social and cultural practices. The reshaping of emotional life's landscape that she mentions is the significant shifting of Leed's defining matrix onto online platforms. When one can speak with friends and engage with news and cultural content online, one's personal online habits come to constitute a symbolic home. We have seen that this restructures the social dynamics of home life, but one of the most significant qualities of this symbolic home is the fact that it can be accessed from anywhere through the Internet. The physical home retains some relevance in social life, but the symbolic and physical home are for the first time discernibly separate entities. Below, I will address how this changes the experience of post-Internet travel, before moving on to how these changes are evoked in contemporary travel writing.

The likes of Virilio put forward a reductive understanding of how travel and the home interact, most obviously failing to account for the fact that *some* people will still want to do *some* things in person. The establishing of friendships and business relationships at long distance can in fact encourage some journeys even as it discourages others. In the titular society of Manuel Castells' *The Rise of the Networked Society* (1996), 'cultural and social meaning is defined in place terms, while functionality, wealth and power are defined in terms of flows'.[60] Even the dealings of McLuhan's businessman will involve both places and flows, since life is a mesh of culture, society, wealth and power. Trade relationships can be maintained with phone-calls, faxes, emails and video-conferences but cultural norms often demand that significant stakes should be discussed in-person. The same is true outside of business. A couple might meet on a dating app, travel to meet one another at a restaurant where they exchange phone numbers and use a messaging service to arrange further dates, then solidify their relationship by posting pictures of time spent together on respective social-media platforms. To revisit an example from above, people might forge intercontinental relationships from home before later deciding to make the long-distance journey to be together in offline space. Moreover, affective experiences of collegiality and community are not so easily achieved in video conferencing. McLuhan's executive may travel downtown to use the telephone

[60] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. xxxiv.

because he wants to foster such a sense of community at the office. Global flows of information then discourage various workaday journeys whilst encouraging other, potentially more exceptional ones.

In fact, many have suggested the twenty-first century to be a time characterised by mobility. In *Mobile Lives* (2010), Anthony Eliot and John Urry suggest that 'people's lives are being reorganized as works of mobility, as *mobile lives*'.[61] Travel is not only becoming more common, but rather restructuring modern life and subjectivity. The centrality of travel in mobile lives, suggest Eliot and Urry, troubles the Heideggerian notion of dwelling as the fundamental human behaviour. Since so many move around so often, and do so whilst engaging with their symbolic home through the Internet, Heideggerian dwelling is best thought of as dispersed throughout various mobile communicational systems.[62] One dwells wherever there is Wi-Fi or mobile data connection; one returns to one's dwelling whenever using the Internet to connect to the symbolic home. The dweller is unmoored from its fixed location and reconstructed as errant, and encountered always in part. For Eliot and Urry this 'is the ideology and utopia of the twenty-first century[…] the overarching narrative' to the extent that '[t]he UN and the EU both enshrine rights to movement in their constitutions'.[63] The modern subject, it could be said, is the travelling subject, and for such travellers the symbolic home takes on the status of dwelling.

The temptation here is to suggest that the symbolic home as expanded beyond the locational bounds of the physical. But this is a reductive understanding of the geography of post-Internet mediation. The symbolic home is no longer a discreet region to be mapped. Rather, any place wherein one might access the Internet allows integration into the symbolic home; it is accessible from a café on the other side of the world from the physical home, but likely not from the physical home's basement. It is best thought of then not as larger, but rather as infrastructurally contingent. This is clearest in the lives of 'digital nomads' for whom the distinction between work and leisure travel has broken down. 'Outsite', a company providing accommodation to such nomads looks to provide them 'the freedom to live and work anywhere'.[64] Post-Internet mediation allows the collaborative accessing and alteration of documents, the submission of reports, sending of emails, delivery of presentations and even face-to-face meetings to occur anywhere with an Internet connection. Many have taken advantage of these conditions by moving to sunnier climes – travelling as they work in countries like Portugal, which have made special visas available for such purposes.[65] And these digital nomads remain involved in the online social dynamics described above – maintaining friendships with those at home and around the world. Above, it was suggested that there would be no need for business to be conducted in an office when it could be

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[61] Anthony Eliot and John Urry, *Mobile Lives* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 21.
[62] Eliot and Urry, p. 5.
[63] Eliot and Urry, p. 8.
[64] 'About Us', Outsite, n.d. <https://www.outsite.co/about?_gl=1*wrfvpd*_up*MQ..*_ga*MTEwNTg2ODA3My4xNzU0NDc3MzE4*_ga_TVRQX1W6WS*czE3NTQ0NzczMTgkbzEkZzAkdDE3NTQ0NzczMTgkajYwJGwwJGgw> [accessed 3 August 2025].
[65] 'Countries Offering Visas for Digital Nomads – Requirements and eligibility Criteria', visaguide.world, n.d. <https://visaguide.world/digital-nomad-visa/> [accessed 6 August 2025].

conducted at home. But for many in the twenty-first century, neither business nor social life needs to be conducted in any fixed location whatsoever. The symbolic home has superseded the physical one.

But life is not always so simple as this. Typically, the separation of the symbolic from the physical home is partial, and complicated by a range of social and economic factors. In *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), Zygmunt Bauman suggests that affluent information workers have 'less and less reason to stay anywhere in particular' in the conditions of media globalisation.[66] Indeed, the popularity of the digital nomad lifestyle would support this assertion. In books like *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Liquid Life* (2005), Bauman suggests such lifestyles to be characterised by liquidity, an ability to flow easily from place to place and adapt one's personality *en route*. Now that the symbolic home is readily accessible online, these affluent workers are free to travel the tides of opportunity in a globalised market and infuse their everyday working life with touristic travel and activities. But Bauman notes that mobility is not always experienced as freedom. Travel is a part of life for many 'low-down' in society, just as it is for many 'high-up'.[67] In both cases, 'one needs just a split second to conquer' the distance between where one is and anywhere else in the world through mediational practices.[68] The difference lies in the comparative 'freedom to choose where to be'.[69] Where those low-down are 'thrown out from the site they would rather stay in', those high-up 'pick and choose their destinations according to the joys they offer'.[70] Whilst the digital nomad and the itinerant unskilled worker both rely on a dislocated symbolic home, we must be careful not to overlook the particularities of their respective situations when attending to this similarity.

The dislocated symbolic home is then best thought of not as an isolated factor in people's lives, but instead as part of the mediational becoming-with described by Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska.[71] It is part of life in the post-Internet mediational ecology, in the same way as the smartphone and data protection laws. The lives people live are an essential part of ecologies, but from another perspective, ecologies function as the background and context for lives lived. The dislocated symbolic home is simply a part of the context of a post-Internet life, and interfaces with many other factors in such a life. Most of us are neither hikikomori, digital nomad, nor itinerant worker. For many, the dislocation of the symbolic home is partial; much is available from anywhere, but not all. Even Castells' construction of a world-system sustained by globally networked media and trade must account for the fact that 'people's life and experience is rooted in places, in their culture, in their history'.[72] Locations are more than just sites for social and business activities, and this is especially true of the home. The physical home remains invested with memories, heritage, pride, and all of these can be difficult to access remotely. One cannot dismiss

[66] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 77.
[67] Bauman, p. 86.
[68] Bauman, p. 77.
[69] Bauman, p. 86.
[70] Bauman, p. 86.
[71] See: Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).
[72] Castells, p. 446.

intangible qualities like homeliness. A dislocated symbolic home is vital in sustaining post-Internet travel practices, but the physical home typically retains some relevance in even the most mobile of lives. Often, it retains more than a little.

This is nowhere clearer than in the post-Internet diasporic community. Diaspora is far from new, but takes on apparently new characteristics in the post-Internet mediational ecology. As Appadurai puts it, '[t]he story of mass migration (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history'.[73] But these migrations are experienced differently when 'the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations' construct 'diasporic public spheres'.[74] When 'Koreans in Philadelphia watch the 1998 Olympics in Seol through satellite feeds from Korea', they connect to such a sphere.[75] We cannot suggest that these people have no relation to their physical home. Much of the content that constitutes our symbolic home is related to our physical one; we may follow a local sports team wherever we are, or read the website of our local newspaper. We may also retain contact with members of our diaspora who are living in other countries outside both our country of origin and the one we currently live in. Two friends from Pakistan, for example, can retain contact with each other even if one lives in London and the other New York. Diasporic life, writes Myria Georgeou, is conducted 'beyond the binary opposition global/local' in an online 'diasporic (symbolic) space'.[76] Content that was once localised is available globally, but retains its local characteristics. I am discussing global diasporic communities here to draw attention to the complexity of relations between the symbolic and physical homes in post-Internet travel. In such communities, the symbolic home is globally accessible, but the physical home nevertheless occupies a privileged position within it. The traveller then feels the effects of being away from the physical home, but in a manner that is mediated by their retention in the symbolic home of the diaspora.

Whilst we might assume that the relationship between travel and the Internet is adversarial, then, the situation is much more complex. Online activity does not straightforwardly discourage travel in the way that McLuhan's quip about the executive seems to imply. Rather, the Internet plays an important role as a substrate for much travel, allowing people to move away from their physical home for longer periods without feeling entirely detached from their home culture and social network. But this is not to say that travellers feel no connection to their home; instead, post-Internet mediation allows people to preserve connection with the physical home at distance. My brief engagement with mediated diaspora showed that the physical home as site and nexus of memory and affect retains a privileged position in engagement with the symbolic home. In diasporic communities, engaging with the symbolic home can be thought of as angling the user toward the physical home, foregrounding one's distance from it even as it assuages said distance. In dislocating the symbolic home, post-Internet mediation has not simply rendered the physical home irrelevant. Rather, the symbolic home becomes distinct but inseparable from the physical home and its residual affective and symbolic investments. The two are distinct entities that nevertheless are always

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[73] Appadurai, p. 4.
[74] Appadurai, p. 4.
[75] Appadurai, p. 4.
[76] Myria Georgiou, 'Identity, Space and the Media: Thinking through Diaspora', *Les medias des minorités ethniques*, 26.1 (2010), pp. 17-35 (p. 21).

found in relation with one another. Just as it underlays both homebound and travelling lives, though, the separation of the symbolic and physical homes puts the two into various relations, depending on other factors. This variety lends itself well to literature. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore it with two examples from the work of Joanna Walsh. Before that, though, I will first explain how the dislocation of the symbolic home interfaces with the inner/outer journey structure that has been central to travel writing's modern instantiation.

3.4 Post-Internet journeys in the travel writing of Joanna Walsh

Having established the importance of the inner and outer journeys in travel writing, and the dislocation of the symbolic home in post-Internet travel, it is now necessary to explain how these structures interact when travel writing's generic conventions interface with the experience of post-Internet travel. The inner and outer journey pairing relies on a simple premise. Leaving home is the same as leaving one's defining social and cultural matrix and becoming more malleable as regards personality; progress in miles and minutes away from home is therefore matched by progress along an inner path. But the defining power of the home is largely based in relationships, culture, news and so on, much of which can be understood as an aspect of the symbolic, rather than the physical home. Since we can tap into the symbolic home wherever we have an Internet connection then, we can return to the defining matrix of the home wherever we might be. And returning to these powers is returning to the identity that they form, which is an apparent issue for the cumulation of an inner journey that matches our outer movement. However, whilst some are able to detach themselves from their physical home altogether, it retains a degree of relevance in the lives of most travellers. Phoning one's spouse from another country is not the same as being with them, but it is not the same as visiting that country without the means to call home either. Being away from the physical home still encourages some sense of personal plasticity, however frequent returns to the symbolic home recall the traveller's identity to what we might call its 'home state' and break the picaresque chain of associations between new places and identity changes.

Barring a few exceptions, critical texts on travel writing have not taken seriously the temporal dimension of the form.[77] Indeed, the genre has been included in this thesis because of its self-evident interest in the processes of spatialisation, and critical analysis has largely fallen on the evocation of space in the genre. In the case of travel writing, though, even a focal switch from static space to the processes of spatialisation does not amount to a satisfactory engagement with temporality. Journeys are spatial and temporal structures; they are time spent passing through space. Analysis of travel writing cannot then understand the journey as a means by which encounters with a static, stable destination are manufactured.

[77] Chief among such exceptions: James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Such readings would elide the many complex temporalities of travel writing – the long tail prefiguration of travel related media, the act of travel itself and all its sub-processes, the process of writing and publishing as a career author, male and female bodily time. Understanding narration of the journey as a means of framing descriptions of a destination does not take the journey's foregrounding of the relationship between spatial and temporal phenomenology seriously enough. My readings below will therefore examine the temporal structures of Walsh's two travel writing texts. It is these temporal structures, I suggest, that best reflect the spatial change that is the dislocation of the symbolic home.

This is not to say that analysis will start and end by pointing out the differences in the overall chronological structures of *Break.up* and *Hotel*. The two texts are structured by entirely distinct arrangements of the journey, the symbolic and physical homes, and these structures permeate their every scale and aspect. But even at the micro-scale of grammar, the difference between the works bears traces of their overall chronological difference. I first position *Break.up* as a text that retains the chronologically linear structure typical to travel writing, only to stage its breakdown in post-Internet mediational conditions. Walsh's narrator moves from city to train to coach to city, and readers are privy to her inner life as she does so. But frequent online encounters with her former partner prevent an inner journey from cohering in parallel with the outer one. Revisiting her symbolic home online, Walsh returns to the defining powers of this relationship, and very little inner personal development is therefore shown throughout.

By contrast, *Hotel* eschews the linear chronology of the outer journey in favour of various non-linear alternatives. One section narrates responses to a series of hotel postcards, another narrates the affects and thoughts general to various common types of hotel space like the lobby and the restaurant. This generalisation deprioritises the individuality of particular hotel bars, for example, and therefore also their separation in time. Narration of the journey therefore takes on a kind of temporal homogeneity. This structure allows Walsh to construct a chronologically linear inner journey, but only at the expense of narrating a chronologically linear outer one. But the journey involves reflections on time in the family home, decidedly before the journey. The chronology of *Hotel* is thus binary; the homogeneity of travel time becomes an interregnum in the flow of home time. This binary-chronology, I suggest, is one way in which travel writing might adapt to the nature of post-Internet travel.

First, then, to *Break.up*, a text whose interests in Internet media and the breaking-up of established relationships are intwined even in its title. The break-up indicated by the title is between Walsh and an unnamed male, whom I will henceforth refer to as *Him* or *He*, for ease of reference. But there are other process of breakdown at play in the work, which we might say have an allegorical relationship with this break-up. Walsh's relationship with *Him* can often be read therefore as an allegorical means of representing these less tangible processes. In one of several narrated dreams, Walsh is unable to discern whether a stack of books written by *Him* are works of travel writing or self-help.[78] Since Walsh is an avid

[78] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 26.

quoter of psychoanalysis and commentator on Freud, it seems particularly useful to attend to the narration of dreams in her work. In this case, it seems that *He* is linked even at the subconscious level with the interrelation of movement through space and movement through one's inner life. Throughout this reading I pay particular attention to the break-up of Walsh's relationship with *Him* as the salient defining factor from which she looks to remove herself through travel. I interpret it as a confluence of the various processes of breaking-up that permeate the text. Even as Walsh travels around Europe, the post-Internet breaking-up of the symbolic and physical homes allows this relationship to continue to define her. As such, I will suggest that Walsh's according failure to emotionally move past her break-up signals a breaking-up of the pre-Internet relationship between inner and outer journeys in travel writing. Internet usage, *Break.up* seems to suggest, is incompatible with the phenomenology of pre-Internet travel, and therefore also with the formal conventions of its writing.

Indeed, Walsh acknowledges that associations between thought and movement that seem analogous to the interrelation of inner and outer journey no longer function in her work. She introduces the Ancient Greek understanding of 'topos' as 'a meeting of space and idea[…] a mnemonical journey in which a location prompted a memory, an emotion, a stage in an argument'.[79] The Pre-Socratic philosophers, she suggests, 'discovered [knowledge] between places, along the arcs between nodes'.[80] This is not limited to the Greeks, though. Even in the post-Internet period, she suggests, 'our environments always allude to something else'.[81] Accordingly, she explains that the journey narrated in *Break.up* has been undertaken in order to 'leav[e] the places I know to find some more places'.[82] If environments allude to something else, these new places must amount to new sets of allusions. But Walsh admits that '[i]t's not entirely true that I won't know these new places: Does anyone know nothing of anywhere, now that nowhere is more than a click away?'.[83] The novelty that is necessary to the new sets of allusions a place might generate is troubled by the ubiquity of information online. Throughout *Break.up*, Walsh travels to a series of new places in a way that, according to these structures, should provoke a series of new ideas and allusions. Her outer journey, in other words, should provoke an inner one.

But the post-Internet conditions she outlines make this difficult. As such, she describes the work as a failure.[84] One of the many signs of this failure, she suggests, are the grammatical issues that permeate her writing. Describing her writing in *Break.up*, Walsh insists 'I run words together[…] the object must replace the subject. Sometimes participles dangle[…] I'm all non-sequiturs, tautologies'.[85] These grammatical failures are alike in the fact that they are breakdowns in linear structuring. One word fails to succeed another, should be inverted with an earlier word, the sentence structure is cyclical. These grammatical issues betray an aversion to linear structures to which Walsh often returns in *Break.up*. Even at the level of

[79] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 181.
[80] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 181.
[81] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 78.
[82] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 5.
[83] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 5.
[84] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 11.
[85] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 11.

narrative content, she bemoans such structures. Watching young Parisians as she waits at one of Paris' junctions, she thinks of how they 'can choose only to move forwards. They cannot choose to skip in time[…] They cannot choose not to move, or to go back'.[86] This general aversion to linearity seemingly informs Walsh's grammatical failures. But Walsh suggests failures like these to be examples of her 'fail[ing] the theory'.[87] They follow, she continues, from her 'hav[ing] failed the practice'.[88] Her practical failure in applying topos is her failure to find new knowledge between the nodes of her journey. The non-linear structures of her grammar reflect the broader failure for her interior life to form into a linear journey that is reflective of her spatial journey.

To better understand the conditions of this practical failure, one must first understand the significant online dimension of Walsh's relationship with *Him*. Prior to the book's opening, in the good times of their relationship, Walsh notes that 'we were so close, if only occasionally in the flesh'.[89] Even when physical co-presence was impossible, their relationship was supported by online engagement. Journeys, in other words, were de-prioritised. But the Internet's support in counteracting spatial distance in the good times persists when things turn bad. After the break-up, Walsh writes, 'there was never a space from which you could be erased, tidied over'.[90] Their relationship is dislocated – *He* cannot be missed because there is no particular space from which he could be said to be missing. *He* is present in Walsh's symbolic home, and this is available everywhere she goes. As such, we often see Walsh favouring mediational behaviours that can prolong contact with *Him* in the symbolic home over spatial ones that necessitate her confronting of his absence. Receiving an online message from *Him* shortly after arriving in Paris, for example, Walsh opts to 'spend the morning not walking through the city, but stalking [*Him*] through the Internet'.[91] The Internet's diminishment of the importance of distance in their relationship is not simply deactivated when they break up. Instead, it continues to structure the relationship that comes after.

Since Walsh's relationship with *Him* involved so much online interaction, we can infer that online activity plays a significant role in her social life. Indeed, Walsh considers the Internet to be her 'resting place';[92] '[w]here I am connected', she admits, 'I am at home'.[93] She is somebody for whom the symbolic home plays a much more significant role than the physical one. As such, she often chooses time online over time spent exploring the destinations visited in *Break.up*. On one such occasion, Walsh compares the Internet with the streets of Paris. Online, 'freedom is crossing from node to node', and unlike the Parisian junctions she had spent the day passing through, 'the *rond-points* of the net' have 'not four, not six, but

[86] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 29.
[87] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 11.
[88] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 11.
[89] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 115.
[90] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 4.
[91] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 192.
[92] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 32.
[93] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 33.

billions of connections, and no borders'.[94] As Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu point out in *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (2016), though, 'plot-functionally, narrative space can be described in terms of the partitions, both natural and cultural, that organize it into thematically relevant subspaces'.[95] Crossing these partitions in many cases allow narrative to progress, and the lack of borders that characterises Walsh's online experience thus presents an issue to *Break.up*'s functioning as a work of travel writing. The borderless movement of Internet use allows her to remain within this symbolic home even as she travels far from her physical one.

But since so much of Walsh's relationship with *Him* took place online, returns to her symbolic home are returns to the determining pressures that she set out to escape. Whilst other friends are briefly discussed, *He* is clearly the focal point of Walsh's attention to how post-Internet mediation has changed travel. *He* is, after-all, the presumed index for every use of the second person pronoun. Despite their spatial separation, Walsh is not really extricated from the determining pressures of her relationship with *Him*. Internet activity provides her with a facsimile of this relationship that she can not only view, but also navigate. Hearing that *He* is in Prague, and remembering '[t]here's a girl in Prague you have talked about', Walsh turns to this facsimile:

> I scroll down the list of connections from your profile, which links to hers. I hyperlink, displace myself. If I keep going I might come across everyone you've ever known, their friends, their relations, their relations' friends. Then I try to trace the degrees of separation from my profile to yours, and after a while, the names come up to friends of friends, of acquaintances, of people you might have met, and the suggestions go on and on until the names become unrecognisable.[96]

The anatomy of this fragment of Walsh's defining matrix is laid bare online. Moreover, she can move through it, engage with it. She can depart from it, remaining online, and then return, allowing this mediated contact to overwrite the experience of spatial separation. Access is provided from anywhere; the defining social and cultural matrix cannot be left behind through the accumulation of spatial distance.

Walsh's location simply ceases to matter as *Break.up* continues. On the Internet, Walsh and *Him* 'are here together'; as such, she feels 'I am not at this table, in this street, not in this café. I am not in Athens'.[97] Stating without qualification that the Internet 'is where I am', and that she is together there with someone

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[94] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 32.
[95] Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), p. 38.
[96] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 191.
[97] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 114.

with whom she is not co-located, Walsh diminishes the significance of space is a text that is structured by movement through it.[98] Arriving at Munich station, she describes her 'hope [that] there might be WiFi' as a 'hope for connection'.[99] A new destination on her outer journey does not evoke a new step on an inner one because it is received as an opportunity to return to her symbolic home online. In these conditions, she can never leave behind those determining powers that shape her identity for long enough to develop a new sense of identity. Arrival at a new city means accessing Wi-Fi once more and engaging with the relationship that she is travelling away from. As such, she finds that '[e]veryday I have to renew the decision not to search, not to write, not to look. Each day is a not-end'.[100] This not-end is the non-ending of Walsh's relationship with *Him*, but since *Break.up* narrates a journey taken to move past this relationship, it is also the non-ending of its narrative. Walsh covers a lot of ground across *Break.up*, but this movement through space no longer leads her on an inner journey. The link upon which travel writing's traditional relationship with linear chronology so relies is severed.

This breaking-up has the final word in the book. After arriving in London, at the conclusion of her journey, Walsh declares:

> I refuse to finish this book.
>
> There is no end to love.
>
> Now, where were we?[101]

Herein lies the not-end of the text that comes with the non-ending of Walsh's relationship with *Him*. The failure to adhere to travel writing's conventions by arranging inner life into a cohesively linear journey that mirrors progression through space receives some explanation a few pages prior. Walsh suggests that the Internet 'does not forget', just as Walsh cannot forget *Him*; it exists in a 'perpetual present', much like their relationship.[102] Internet use is pervasive in modern life, and it can be difficult at times to bracket one of its influences from another. Although the evergreen nature of online content is likely structuring Walsh's relationship with time, I suggest that the context of *Break.up* as a work of travel writing cannot be ignored. The spatial ever-presence of the web is frequently shown to prolong Walsh's attachment to *Him* and thus frustrate the inner journey typical to travel writing. It may be the dual-action of the Internet's temporal and spatial effects that overwhelms such a deeply entrenched generic convention as the twinning of inner and outer journeys. In either case, though, the separation of the symbolic home from the physical

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[98] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 114.
[99] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 178.
[100] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 192.
[101] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 260.
[102] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 256.

one clearly plays a significant role in problematising the parallelling of inner and outer journeys in post-Internet travel writing.

Break.up shows how travel writing's established conventions cease to function when confronted with post-Internet mediational habits. But periodically, an alternative structure breaks through the taut, cracked surface of the text's linear chronology. Throughout, a gloss runs somewhat ambiguously alongside the main body of *Break.up*. It consists of passages of quotation which seemingly reflect on or inform the construction of the text's narrative. Included in this gloss is the following passage from McLuhan: 'Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication ensures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay'.[103] The alternative to serial progression presented here is a broad, horizontal field of interactivity. Linear structure is abolished in the instantaneity of the electrically-configured world. The arrangement proposed to take its place is one in which nothing comes before or after anything else; a flat time. Things are not situated in a hierarchy like the one determined by the accumulation of spatial and temporal distance from home, but on a single plane, in constant conversation with one another.

Only a few pages later, we see what it might look like for travel to be structured by McLuhan's homogenous, singular moment of time:

> I am waiting for your reply to my email and I have settled into a waiting state, which is an airport state of mind. Waiting is familiar and its anxiety, once recognised, is comfortable. Loving is waiting for something to happen even when I'm not: I'm always in the headlong state of being about to hear from you. The internet, which is also so much waiting, doubles it. I could spend hours flicking from Twitter to Facebook to Email, hypnotised, waiting for someone to make contact, to tell me I'm still here. I wait and I don't do, until I find I have used up all my time, agreeably, waiting, until I almost feel I have done something. I could live in this suspended state (almost) indefinitely.[104]

This 'waiting state' that Walsh associates with the Internet is structured by the suspension of any progress toward a meaningful end. It is determined, in other words, by those same qualities that prevent *Break,up* from implementing a linear travel writing structure. As much as with the Internet, this state is associated with the airport, the node, the passing place. The steward of travelling itself that facilitates engagement with myriad destinations but is never counted as a destination in its own right. Walsh could just as easily

[103] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 102.
[104] Walsh, *Break.up*, p. 108.

have termed it a hotel state of mind. This suspended state of mind and its attendant chronology is further explored in *Hotel*, which seems to answer the key formal question posed by *Break.up*, despite having been published first.

If *Break.up* thoroughly demonstrates the tension between travel writing's chronological structure and the experience of post-Internet travel, the question it leaves us with is: how might travel writing texts be arranged so as to better reflect the post-Internet journey? The flat chronology of 'airport' time breaks occasionally through the linear chronology that problematically structures narrative in *Break.up*. In *Hotel*, 'airport' time is given free reign over the chronology of narrative. A reader can discern that Walsh has visited a series of hotels, but these hotels are never arranged in a chronological order. We do not hear of a visit to Paris, then Lisbon, then Rome, and the journeys in-between. This chronologically linear retelling is replaced by sections of narrative arranged around various non-chronological groupings. One section features Walsh's responses to a series of quotations, another to a set of hotel postcards, and another recounts the patterns of thought and affect general to common spatial features of the hotel like the bar, lift, and corridor. As with my reading of *Break.up*, I will begin my engagement with *Hotel* by demonstrating how it thematises flat chronology at the level of content, before moving on to how it structures the narrative. Since the chronological flatness is applied only to the trip itself, and the time of everyday life remains distinct, I describe the chronological structure of *Hotel* as binary. In the latter section of my reading, I will show that this binary chronology allows Walsh to narrate an inner change in a way that did not seem possible in *Break.up*. It is the 'active interplay' between hotel spaces arranged on this flat chronology that allows such development.

If *Break.up* is characterised by the failure or breaking-up of linear structure, *Hotel* is instead characterised by the altogether absence of such a structure. Whilst this might seem a slight difference, it has significant implications. As with *Break.up*, this structural preoccupation is made clear at the superficial level of narrative discussion. Rather than ire toward the persistence of linear structures, though, *Hotel* is preoccupied with their absence. A sense of telos, and movement toward a conclusion is often noted absent from Walsh's experience of travel. A hotel, she suggests, 'blocks any hope of an ending'.[105] And whilst the ending Walsh describes may be an emotional one, she also addresses the literary implications of such blockage. In blocking endings, she writes, the hotel renders tragedy 'impossible'.[106] And since tragedy is a form typically bound to advance in a linear manner toward its conclusion, this blockage would also presumably trouble the travel writing genre of which *Hotel* partakes. In another example of the hotel's blockage of an ending, Walsh admits to having 'been ill several times in hotels, as though I chose to go there not to recover, but to be sick'.[107] She visits hotels 'to have my illness out of the way of other people,

[105] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 130.
[106] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 130.
[107] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 96.

and their interference'.[108] The slight differences in how *Break.up* and *Hotel* construct the lack of chronological linearity are clearest here. Where *Break.up* focussed on the failure of linear structure, Walsh is here defining the positive qualities of flat chronology. Walsh visits the hotel 'to *be* sick'; *Hotel* is interested in what flat chronology *is*, rather than what linear chronology is not, or what it cannot accomplish. The difference between *Break.up* and *Hotel* is situated in one's preoccupation with the absence of linearity and the other's with the presence of non-linearity.

This switch from absence to presence persists even at a grammatical level. We have seen how grammatical structures reflect the breaking-up of linear chronology in *Break.up*, but grammar in *Hotel* is more amenable to post-Internet travel. Walsh discusses the grammar peculiar to hotel signage and brochures. She suggests that the passive voice phrasing common to phrases like 'dinner is served' is a means by which the hotel 'evades clock time and diffuses responsibility'.[109] Where the rearranging of subject and object disrupted linearity in *Break.up*, these phrasings do away with the subject altogether. There is therefore no preposition, no relation, no movement from or toward. Of course, dinner will in actuality be served at a certain time, but at the level of the sentence, suspension reigns. What would ordinarily be a change of state – from dinner's not being served to its being served – is refigured in the passive voice as an ongoing process. It is movement without change. Reflecting on her home life, Walsh finds the 'I do' of marriage to situate its speaker in another such 'continuous present'.[110] This continuality renders marriage a 'from' rather than a 'to'; Walsh 'can't see the point'.[111] Marriage, like dinner, exists ambiently in time, instead of moving toward a particular end-point. In *Break.up* Walsh enacts the futility of forcing various processes into the linear chronology that structures her journey through space. But in *Hotel* she allows events temporality and duration without forcing them to be a movement from one point on a timeline to another.

In my reading of *Break.up* I suggested that Walsh's 'failures' in grammar reflected the failure of the outer journey to impart its linear chronology on her inner life. At the superficial level of its narrative preoccupations and at the deep mechanical level of its grammar, *Hotel* instead reflects a flat chronology. Supposing that this similarly reflects the relationship between the text's inner and outer journeys, I now turn to the broader narrative structures of *Hotel.* As noted above, chapters in *Hotel* are structured in ways that do not foreground linear chronology. Instead of a chapter in Rome, then in Brussels, and so on, *Hotel* features a chapter collecting responses to hotel postcards, a chapter responding to various quotations, and so on. The chapter 'Hotel Diary' works through various features standard to hotels like the lobby, corridor, and lift. These are treated as amalgamations of the various individual lobbies, corridors, and lifts that Walsh visits throughout her journey. Narrating a lobby scene, Walsh laments: 'nowhere is more lonely[…] I'm only one of many. It never feels right, that's the lobby problem. The doors let in the outside for just a moment. I cross a threshold from the hot street air that spills in'.[112] It is notable that Walsh uses

[108] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 96.
[109] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 9.
[110] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 41.
[111] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 41.
[112] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 74.

the non-specific determiner 'a', instead of opting for 'the threshold' or even 'the thresholds'. If 'the' would index a particular lobby, 'a' gestures to an individual but nonetheless non-specific entity. It constitutes a slippage between the general and specific, such that Walsh's memory is located within 'a' lobby that seems to encompass all lobbies. The thoughts, acts and feelings commonly generated by hotel lobbies therefore take precedence over the order in which each lobby is visited.

I have shown that *Hotel* does not adopt the linear chronology common to pre-Internet travel writing. Now, I show that this non-chronological structure allows Walsh to construct the type of inner journey made impossible in *Break.up*. The role played by Walsh's relationship with *Him* in *Break.up* is played in *Hotel* by the gendered domestic labour of her marriage. By this I mean that it is the facet of life that she ponders throughout her journey, and that a reader might expect her to develop her attitude toward as she journeys. One hotel postcard stimulates a memory of her 'looking after our children and their friends for a long while' whist her husband went for a drink after work.[113] Another calls to mind the many times that her husband 'liked to look on and approve' whilst she undertook the domestic labour of tidying, cleaning, looking after their children and pets.[114] The sense of having one's femininity constructed through the observation of a male is negotiated across 'Hotel Diary'. At the start of the chapter, Walsh allies herself with Mae West, and Sigmund Freud's patient Dora. Both of these two, she suggests, 'looked just like their bodies'; their female identity was constructed through the deployment of a male gaze upon said bodies.[115] In Dora's case, this determination comes from Freud, her father, and from Herr K., a friend of her father's who forces himself upon her in what seems an inciting incident for the muteness that brings her to Freud. And in Young's it comes from Salvador Dalí, who crafted a sofa in the shape of her lips, and the various men who catalogue and trade in its reproductions. Pondering this whilst sat on one such reproduction, Walsh finds herself 'ginger' and 'uncertain'.[116] This uncertainty, I suggest, is resultant of her being beyond the determining gaze of her husband.

But whilst she is free from said gaze, she is not altogether extricated from her defining matrix. In the section of 'Hotel Diary' concerned with the hotel switchboard, Walsh describes the switchboard as 'the link between the hotel and not-hotel'.[117] She wonders, though: 'Do hotels even have switchboards anymore?'.[118] After-all, '[n]ow that everyone has a mobile, there must be easier ways of being connected'.[119] Indeed, hotel Wi-Fi seems to have taken the place of the switchboard, and Walsh uses it to remain in contact with her husband. Here, it seems that one form of media has been replaced with another that functions in more or less the same manner. Where Walsh's husband would once have called her through the hotel's switchboard, he now can contact her directly through the Internet. But the

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[113] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 51.
[114] Walsh, pp. 44-6.
[115] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 77.
[116] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 77.
[117] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 79.
[118] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 79.
[119] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 79.

important distinction between these two is that the switchboard is 'also the barrier' between the hotel and not-hotel.[120] In the sense Meyrowitz puts forward in *No Sense of Place*, the hotel is not so clearly a bounded place and social situation. There is no barrier between Walsh and her relation with her husband. This crucial aspect of her social and cultural matrix that sees her defined by attention to her domestic labour is not totally separated from her travel experience. Whilst her husband is distant in her physical home, he is nearby in her symbolic one. In both *Break.up* and *Hotel*, contact is maintained with the aspect of the defining matrix that the narrative foregrounds. The same mediational behaviours that disrupted the linear chronology of the former retain a prominent position in the latter.

But a linearly progressive inner journey still forms in apparent response to the experience of Walsh's travel. Across 'Hotel Diary', Walsh's attitude toward her marriage and domestic labour clearly develop. Amalgamations though they may be, the lobby, bar, room and etc. of 'Hotel Diary' are no less reflective of sites visited on Walsh's journey. *Hotel* shares more in common with pre-Internet travel writing than it might seem to; ideas are still tied to spaces visited, just as in the pre-Socratic mode discussed in *Break.up*. The hotel key-card section sees her realising: 'I have lived in relation to desires, often other people's[…] There is a hole in my side into which someone else's desires fit. It's only a matter of finding the right key'.[121] The logic of Walsh's actual use of keys across her journey structures her reflections on her personal, emotional life. She redefines her gendered position in the home; moving forward, she 'must not want the key always to be a man'.[122] The plasticity of the traveller seems more active here than anywhere in *Break.up*. Experiences with types of space on the outer journey are integral to structuring an inner journey, only the outer journey from which they are derived cannot be relayed in a linear chronology.

Throughout 'Hotel Diary', Walsh takes advantage of the malleability afforded to travellers, despite frequently returning to the defining powers of her symbolic home through Internet use. At the chapter's close, Walsh rejects the category of woman that had been imposed on herself, Dora, and West. In her section on the hotel restaurant, she notes 'I find myself never a woman[…] From where I sit I see no women, just this person, and that person'.[123] After the reflections of the key-card section, Walsh no longer 'needs' to be constituted as a 'woman' by male desire or approval. Where woman has been an identity quality assigned by men like Freud, Herr K., Dalí and so on, it is now a quality that Walsh herself is free to assign or not, to herself and others. Unlike in *Break.up*, Walsh does achieve some development on the set of concerns with which she began her journey in *Hotel*. 'Hotel Diary' begins with a particular stance being expressed, but crucial steps like her reflection on the key-card lead her to renegotiate this position. And all of this is accomplished despite her admitted Internet use, and its removal of the 'barrier' between the hotel and not-hotel. As a work of travel writing, then, *Hotel* manages to connect an inner journey with an outer one, despite the disruptive influence of post-Internet mediation. The key difference between

[120] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 79.
[121] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 83.
[122] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 83.
[123] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 94.

Break.up and *Hotel* that allows the latter to accomplish this, I suggest, is that *Hotel* does not martial the inner journey to the chronology of the outer.

The structure that *Hotel* adopts instead is clarified by the quotation from Michel Foucault that Walsh uses as an epigraph for 'Hotel Diary'. In this passage from *the Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Foucault describes the 'homogenous space' of the clinic, wherein 'series are broken and time abolished[…] There is only one plane and one moment'.[124] This is the flatness of hotel time, a temporality that brings each lobby, bar, restaurant and key-card together. But whilst the trip is chronologically flat, it remains a break from the linearity that constitutes time at home. This is why *Hotel* makes anaphoric references to time spent at home, like those that describe Walsh's domestic labour, but not to earlier points in her journey. Being away from home still affords some plasticity to Walsh in *Hotel*, and the temporal distinction between home-time and travel-time retains significance. It is only the distinction between events and places in travel time that is deprioritised. This is why I suggest that *Hotel* demonstrates a binary chronology, rather than an entirely homogenous one. I do not suggest that the trip no longer takes place in a chronologically linear structure. Walsh necessarily moved from place to place in a sequence that might have been used to chronologically structure *Hotel*. But she has de-emphasised this chronology, and it is this chronological change that has allowed her to discuss the impacts of travel on the post-Internet subject.

'Hotel Diary' then demonstrates the type of inner transformation one might expect from a travel writing text, and time spent in places away from home is indelibly linked to this transformation. In this way, the text still demonstrates the link between inner and outer journey that sustains Cooke's 'Modern Travel Writing'. Only in this case, the inner journey does not follow the chronology of the outer one. It is the linear chronology of the outer journey, then, that seems no longer essential to the form of post-Internet travel writing. It frustrated the formation of an inner journey in *Break.up*, but an inner journey was able to form when it was cleared away in *Hotel*. With *Hotel*, Walsh shows that travel remains a period of time distinct from our regular life. Time away from home still affords the post-Internet traveller a sense of plasticity, and the opportunity for personal development outside of the determining pressure of home life. The important difference between pre- and post-Internet travel is that the latter allows frequent returns to the symbolic home, and thus prevents a succession of new places from uncomplicatedly provoking a succession of steps on an inner journey. But writers like Walsh sustain travel writing by reflecting on the thoughts and affects that were stimulated across their journey once the trip has been completed. New structures for travel writing like the one deployed in *Hotel* will sustain the connection between travel and introspection for those with the inclination, and perhaps a problem like the breakdown of a marriage that needs solving.

The question of the writer's profession is more an issue here than in any other chapter in this thesis. To undertake the type of post-journey reflection that is implied by the generalising structure of

[124] Walsh, *Hotel*, p. 73.

'Hotel Diary', Walsh likely collected notes. The collection of these notes and Walsh's reflection upon them are incentivised by her vocation; she is writing a series of hotel reviews, as well as *Hotel* itself. There are therefore monetary motivations to her attention to how travel spaces have impacted her inner life. We might think of *Hotel* as a purposeful attempt to sustain the conventions of travel writing in post-Internet conditions, rather than a straightforward reflection of post-Internet travel. We might in this context also consider the 'manifold social agents and contingencies' operating within the publishing process – the role of commissioning and editorial practices. Doubtlessly, the symbolic home is largely dislocated, and this troubles the interrelation of the inner and outer journey. And the binary chronology of *Hotel* is one way of resolving this tension in writing. But I situate the chapters of this thesis in a moment of transition, and there is every chance that an entirely different structure for post-Internet travel writing than the one discussed here might emerge and become a generic standard. Indeed, a wealth of such approaches are likely to emerge in the coming years. These, in turn, will gesture to an even greater wealth of travel experiences. But all will require the careful attention of the travel writer. The extent to which these strategies will capture the reality of post-Internet travel for those who are not engaged in literary production remains uncertain.

Chapter 4 Attentional Islanding, Narratological Islands: Post-Internet Mediation and the Writing of Isolation

4.1 Introduction

In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt credits Daniel Defoe with rejecting 'the use of traditional plots' in favour of allowing 'his narrative order to flow spontaneously from his own sense of what his protagonists might do next'.[1] This 'total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir', Watt explains, was a significant departure from contemporary literary practice.[2] The novelty of this step perhaps goes some way toward explaining the somewhat laborious defence of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) that Defoe undertakes in *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720). In his assertion that there is 'not a circumstance in the imaginary story, but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part and step for step' a modern reader might perceive an early novelist instructing an unaccustomed public in how to engage with his text.[3] Whether or not Defoe's great isolation narrative was the first modern novel, this is to say, it was certainly early enough to play a significant role in the development of the form and its reception. In doing so, it instantiated the plotting of a protagonist's isolation, trials, and liberation as one of the oldest and most storied plots in the canon of novel writing. And though gothic, Victorian and modernist writers left the desert island behind, I suggest, the spatio-narratological trope of islanding persists throughout their isolation narratives.

In other words, isolations afflicting protagonists throughout the history of the novel have typically been effected by maintaining the protagonist's location within a space that is able to function in the same way as Crusoe's island. The impossibility of social connection has been yoked onto the impossibility of leaving this space, and as such, leaving this space has made such connection possible once again. But, as Mizuko, the social-media frequenting writer from Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* (2017) puts it, 'we have the Internet everywhere we go now and we can find out anything we want to know straightaway, which tends to kill a plot'.[4] Modern communications technologies allow instant communication across immense spatial distances, through walls and across seas. If the Internet is killing plots, the isolation narrative should surely be one of the first to go. But perhaps now more than ever, we need the isolation narrative to make sense

[1] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 14.
[2] Watt, p. 14.
[3] Daniel Defoe, *Serious reflections during the life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe: with his Vision of the angelick world* (London: W. Taylor, 1720), p. n16.
[4] Olivia Sudjic, *Sympathy* (London: ONE, 2017), p. 79.

of the times in which we live. Despite our connective technologies, we are, as the cultural historian Fay Bound Alberti puts it, 'in the midst of a moral panic' over 'an epidemic of loneliness'.[5] So, how does the narratological trope of islanding take place in a novel set during the post-Internet period? How does the novel capture post-Internet isolation?

To answer these questions, I will first review the long history of the isolation narrative, from *Robinson Crusoe* to the middle of the twentieth century. Throughout this review, I will draw attention to the ways in which various settings act as what I term narratological islands – that is, settings that fulfil an islanding function within the narrative. I outline a series of core structural features that recur in every narratological island, whether it be a typical robinsonade island or a gothic castle. And I demonstrate the extent to which the narratological island and its constituent features appear in a guise best able to communicate the concerns of the text in which are deployed. Next, I examine discourse on how the Internet is reshaping social experiences of isolation. Beginning with utopian predictions on the transcending of spatial barriers in social life, I demonstrate that the role of post-Internet technology has been much more complex. With reference to media theorists and those involved in practically combatting post-Internet isolation, I demonstrate that social life must now be understood as a mesh of on- and offline dynamics. I show also that in so thoroughly drawing our attention away from the social life of the office or the home, and sealing us in echo chambers, online connectivity facilitates a type of islanding that does not rely on spatial structures whatsoever.

With these insights in mind, I turn finally to read three post-Internet novels whose narratives are arranged around the isolation of their protagonists. After Alice, of Sudjic's *Sympathy*, finishes university, she becomes a shut-in. She decides to visit her sickly grandmother Silvia in Manhattan, where she develops an obsession with the abovementioned Mizuko that quickly spills from on- to offline behaviours. In *Sympathy*, Alice's and later Mizuko's isolation is a mesh of on- and offline behaviour that at turns includes spatial and non-spatial islanding. But whilst this mesh facilitates Alice's isolation narrative, it proves difficult for her to disentangle from. The titular protagonist of Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* (2012) likewise meshes on- and offline behaviour in her isolation. After a house for which she was awarded a MacArthur genius grant is surreptitiously purchased and demolished, Bernadette quits architecture and purchases Strait Gate, a dilapidated former girls' school. Whilst her daughter Bee attends school, and husband Elgie works at Microsoft, Bernadette cloisters, using post-Internet services to avoid leaving the house. But the entanglement through which Bernadette secures her isolation, I show, ultimately undoes it. Likewise, the unnamed narrator of Patricia Lockwood's *no one is talking about this* (2021) travels globally, attending speaking engagements where she discusses Internet culture. Immersed in the Internet, which she calls 'the portal', the narrator is attentionally islanded, but the inevitable enmeshment of post-Internet life sees family tragedy draw her out of this isolation.

[5] Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 2.

As these brief summaries imply, the post-Internet isolation narrative does not depend solely upon the narratological island to isolate its protagonists. But this does not mean that the narratological island of *Robinson Crusoe* has finally reached the limits of its relevance to the isolation narrative. Islanding is still a relevant process, and as such, the narratological island still a relevant site. But the island enters now into conversation with the islanding forces of online behaviour. Social life is a mesh of on- and offline dynamics, and the post-Internet isolation narrative must reflect this. The post-Internet isolation narrative, that is, must tell the tale of an enmeshed islanding. In *Sympathy*, this enmeshment undercuts the possibility of satisfactorily concluding the post-Internet isolation narrative. Typically, the isolation narrative is ended by the protagonist's breaking free from their narratological island, but the islanding function of the Internet is accessible no matter where they go. As my readings of Semple and Lockwood indicate, though, this need not be a hinderance. Narratives of enmeshment simply require enmeshed resolutions.

4.2 The narratological island in isolation literature

In the introduction to his comprehensive *Theorising Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* (2017), Ian Kinane outlines a longstanding literary preoccupation with the figure of the island:

> Imaginary islands are to be found in some of the anglophone world's earliest recorded literature, from the many islands of Homer's *Odyssey* (circa the eighth-century BCE) to the Atlantis of Plato's *Timaeus* (circa 360 BCE) and from Dante's purgatorio in *The Divine Comedy* (1321) to Thomas More's eponymous *Utopia* (1516).[6]

What is it about the island that preoccupies writers so? For Rod Edmund and Vanessa Smith, '[t]he defining idea of an island is its boundedness[…] Boundedness makes islands graspable, able to be held in the mind's eye and imagined as places of possibility and promise'.[7] The possibility of grasping the island in this way – of considering it a homogenous unit, fundamentally cut-off from a surrounding world – renders islands useful to writers as 'closed and comprehensive sites for experimentation'.[8] For this reason, suggest Edmund and Smith, the island has 'offered many discursive possibilities to European cultures'.[9]

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[6] Ian Kinane, *Theorising Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), p. 9.
[7] Rod Edmund, Vanessa Smith, 'Editors' Introduction', in *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. by Rod Edmund and Vanessa Smith (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-18, (p. 2).
[8] Edmund and Smith, p. 3.
[9] Edmund and Smith, p. 2.

But the discursive possibilities enabled by islands as a narrative setting can function even when a literal, geographical island is not depicted in a text. Other kinds of settings can serve what we might call an islanding function in the texts to which they belong. These narratological islands, as I shall call them, might not even look like islands at all.

This may seem an unusual stance, but as Gilian Beer points out in her contribution to Edmund and Smith's *Islands in History and Representation* (2003), it is one already taken in scientific discourse. Islands, 'as the language of bio-geography reminds us, need not be only parcels of land; they can in that discourse be ponds or lakes, clearings in the wood, or clusters of trees on the plain'.[10] The attribution of the term island stems not from any *particular* material characteristics of the location, but this is not to say that it has no relation whatsoever to the material characteristics of the space. Rather, 'in this bio-geographical usage islands are enclosures within which intimate ecological relations prevail and from which their population cannot escape and survive (not fish in the wood, or tree-insects on the plain)'.[11] The term island denotes an insurmountable separateness – a threshold that cannot be crossed – but does not necessitate that this separateness be secured by the island's envelopment within the sea. The island is a figure, through which certain structural characteristics are highlighted for the epistemic benefit of bio-geographers. Here, I take a similar approach to the study of literary islands. The island will be understood as a spatial element invested with certain characteristics that render it functionally if not materially identical with what we might call an actual island.

It is worth briefly outlining these characteristics before moving forward. First of all, the island must be a room, castle, geographical island or other interior that the protagonist can be within, and at some point break free from. It must then be surrounded by a semi-permeable boundary. This boundary must not be immediately and easily traversed, but its traversal must be imaginable to the reader. A locked door, for example, keeps a character within a room, but encodes the promise of eventual opening and release. It can keep the captive within the interior until they locate the key, or the barrier is breached from the other side. The key is the final important structural feature of the narratological island. But just as the island may not look like an island, the narratological key need not always appear in the guise of an actual key. The key resolves the issue that seals the boundary around the island; in some cases, it may be a key. But in others it might be a raft, a passing ship, an underground tunnel or knowledge thereof. In some cases, the barrier is psycho-spatial – the isolate projects an internal conflict onto their spatial surroundings and refuses to pass some threshold. In such cases, the key may be a psychological matter of resolving said conflict. As the narratological island has been adapted to various ends, so have all of these features appeared in various guises.

But this is not to say that the narratological island has no relationship with literary representations of actual islands whatsoever. On the contrary, the narratological island trope is best understood as

[10] Gillian Beer, 'Island bounds', in *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. by Edmund and Smith, pp. 32-42 (p. 33).
[11] Beer, p. 33.

emerging from a literary tradition wherein its structural properties were invoked through the straightforward deployment of the geographical island setting. Some of this history is recounted in the above quotation from Kinane, and I will soon attend to *Robinson Crusoe* and the robinsonade genre that it engenders. In order to illuminate particular characteristics of the robinsonade, though, it is first of all useful to dwell on the spate of island narratives that precede Defoe's. As Rebecca Bullard notes:

> In the century before the publication of Defoe's novel, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), *A Description of the Famous Kingdome of Macaria* (1641) by Gabriel Plattes, James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* (1668), the anonymous tracts *Antiquity Reviv'd; or The Governent of a Certain Island Antiently call'd Astreada* (1693), and *The Free State of Noland* (1696), developed the literary tradition instigated by Thomas More's Utopia (1516), using the island motif to investigate apparently ideal societies and to explore ideas about power, control, and political sovereignty.[12]

Already in these texts, islands are figured as 'closed and comprehensive sites for experimentation'.[13] In contrast to *Robinson Crusoe*, though, these texts all represent isolated societies, rather than isolated individuals. Why, we might ask, did Defoe divert from this popular contemporary use of the island?

By the time Defoe was writing *Robinson Crusoe* in the early eighteenth century, a tremendous shift in the conceptualisation of human social, political, and even psychological life was underway. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt explains that 'the effective entity on which social arrangements were now based was no longer the family, nor the church, nor the guild, nor the township, nor any other collective unit, but the individual'.[14] Individual freedoms and capabilities are exchanged for fealty and obligation everywhere from John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) to the signing of the U.S declaration of independence and the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century. For Watt, the diminished significance of group-membership devalues 'conformity to traditional practice'.[15] In so doing, it allowed Defoe's prioritising of 'truth to individual experience' as outlined in the opening of this chapter.[16] On a more fundamental level, Georg Lukács sees individualism's figuring of 'every soul as autonomous and incomparable'[17] as a shift to a 'historico-philisophical situation'

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[12] Rebecca Bullard, 'Politics, History, and the *Robinson Crusoe* Story', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 84-96 (p. 86).
[13] Edmund and Smith, p. 3.
[14] Watt, p. 61.
[15] Watt, p. 8.
[16] Watt, p. 12.
[17] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 66.

that 'demand[s] the novel'.[18] In the epic form it replaces, he explains, even great lives have 'weight' only in so far as they are 'significant to a great organic life complex – a nation or a family'.[19] The novel is the form, then, of both creatively individual writer and the socially individual human.

Defoe's turn away from More and his successors is simply an articulation of this broader shift. Owing to what Edmund and Smith call 'a suggestive congruence between islands and individuals', though, the island may be better suited to Defoe's task than More's.[20] Islands, they suggest, 'have a marked individuality, an obstinate separateness that we like to think corresponds to our own'.[21] Kinane sees this manifesting in literature as an 'important figurative symbiosis between the individuation or conceptualisation of the self and the island as a visual, psychological and symbolic manifestation of this process'.[22] In island-centric literature, he suggests, humankind is stripped of its social signification and absented from mainland, continental culture';[23] it is no wonder, then, that Samuel Taylor Coleridge considered Crusoe 'the universal representative, the person, for whom every reader could substitute himself'.[24] But the castaway does not remain universal, desocialised, uninscribed. Rather, says Kinane, they are usually returned to society with 'a greater sense of egoic completion'.[25] This de-socialisation, journey of self-formation through trial and challenge, and ultimate return forms the basic narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* and further robinsonades. Perhaps due to the inviting synchronicity between this narrative and the ascent of individualism, though, Kinane is able to highlight how 'the trope of the island, the conceptual constant to the physically variable Crusoe figure, has received relatively less critical treatment'.[26] He invites us to ask: 'why an island? Why not some other landscape or topography?'.[27]

By answering with reference to *Robinson Crusoe*, I hope to suggest that Kinane's two questions are not so equivalent as they seem; that the answer to the question of 'why an island?' is a set of narratological characteristics that can be assigned to 'some other landscape or topography'. Defoe's Crusoe wrecks on an island where he remains for twenty-eight years before returning to civilisation and proving his character both as a leader and as a fair, equitable tradesperson. During his time on the island, he develops a closer understanding of himself and his relationship with God, and comes to cultivate the land, build a home and keep animals. He is accompanied for much of this duration by Friday, a native to the region in which he wrecks – since this companionship results from Crusoe's efforts to 'get a savage into [his] possession',

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[18] Lukács, p. 70.
[19] Lukács, p. 67.
[20] Edmund and Smith, p. 4.
[21] Edmund and Smith, p. 4.
[22] Kinane, p. 106.
[23] Kinane, p. 106.
[24] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. by George Whalley, 6 vols, (Princeton University Press, 1980-2001), ii, ed. by George Whalley, (1984), p. 165.
[25] Kinane, p. 106.
[26] Kinane, p. 32.
[27] Kinane, p. 32.

though, the island remains the site of Crusoe's isolation.[28] The first clue as to why the island is crucial to Crusoe's narrative comes in his tendency to describe it as a space that things are to be found 'in', rather than the perhaps expected 'on'. He fears 'wild beasts, if any were in the island';[29] he wonders if there is 'tobacco in the island';[30] and opens Chapter XIII noting that he had reached 'the twenty-third year of [his] residence in the island'.[31] This prepositional quirk draws attention to the island's envelopment of Crusoe; it is something that contains, even whilst sustaining and supporting him.

'On' does not imply 'under' in the way that 'in' implies 'out'. Crusoe's insistence that he is 'in' the island establishes the island as a heterotopic zone, that takes its meaning in relation to what lays beyond its borders. The island is defined as an asocial interior, and other lands beyond the sea a socialised exterior. The sea itself acts as the semi-permeable boundary between these zones. As in most robinsonades, the boundary is semi-permeable because some crucial piece of technology is rendered inoperable by the calamity that brings the Crusoe figure to the island. In this case, Crusoe's ship drifts away in an overnight storm after he salvages some onboard provisions.[32] This particular ship is not the key, though. Seafaring technology itself is the key through which Crusoe opens the natural boundary of the sea. Thus, the destruction of Crusoe's ship strands him on the island, but does not foreclose on eventual escape; the same is true of Crusoe figures from Johan David Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) to Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2011). The absence of the key makes the robinsonade narrative of isolated self-sufficiency possible. But the possibility of its return – in the building of a raft or a visit from a passing ship – allows the hope of eventually crossing the boundary to motivate these efforts, and facilitates the narrative's typical conclusion in a return to society.

The answer to Kinane's 'why an island?', then, is that the island is useful as a location that can be arrived at, sealed for the duration of the narrative, and somehow unsealed at its conclusion. Moreover, it is a parcel of space that contrasts the world beyond – a 'vantage point', as Kinane puts it, 'from which the individual may look back upon his/her own social model from afar, and which affords the opportunity of affirming or denying his/her own relation to that societal hierarchy'.[33] In later robinsonades, the remote island is exchanged for settings able to function similarly whilst addressing the text's particular themes. J.G. Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1971), for example, strands its Crusoe on a central reservation to comment on urban decay and capitalism's expulsion of the less-productive. The suggestion of critics like James Joyce, that Crusoe is the 'prototype of the British colonist' and Friday 'the symbol of the subject race' supports, rather than disproves this point.[34] The island was the geographical location most appropriate to colonial discourse out of a catalogue of locations that might have fulfilled a similar structural role. That being said,

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[28] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Philadelphia: Washington Square Classics, 1987), p. 267.
[29] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 86.
[30] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 196.
[31] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 242.
[32] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 85.
[33] Kinane, p. 128.
[34] James Joyce, 'Realism and Idealism in English Literature (Daniel Defoe—William Blake)', in *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. by Kevin Barry and Conor Deane (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), pp. 163-82 (p. 174).

robinsonade intertextuality is a theme in itself, and texts like R.M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island* (1857) and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) deploy the island to engage with a conversation on individuality and sociality that stems from Defoe's novel.

If Kinane's critical effort is to demonstrate 'both *how* and *why* the island has become a mediated trope or image in those *Robinson Crusoe*-styled narratives produced in the global north', mine is to suggest that he might go further.[35] We might look beyond the robinsonade, and find that the island trope is often mediated in such a way that it no longer manifests in an aesthetically recognisable island at all. Isolation narratives demand islands, and refit them to their particular needs. Nowhere is this clearer than in the gothic literature that emerges alongside the robinsonade in the eighteenth century. Carl Fisher's summary of the robinsonade as a text wherein the 'hero (or heroine, or heroes) must manage difficult transitions to a world they did not create, often hostile to their existence, and survive through intelligence, industry and improvisation to overcome isolation' could just as easily describe the gothic.[36] The challenges vary, but the structure is the same – likewise, the specific features of the island are changed, but its structure and narratological role are not. The island of gothic literature is not the asocial space of Crusoe's island, but instead is inscribed by social structures and standards antithetical to the world beyond. The island is the castle, the ruin, the manor house, and the boundary remains semi-permeable, but secured by socio-political, rather than natural forces.

For Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, the gothic is a markedly formulaic genre. In the gothic narrative, the protagonist is 'massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally have access[…] there is something going on inside the isolation[…] and something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach'.[37] As a result, the gothic is made up of 'three main elements', these being 'what's inside, what's outside, and what separates them', and whilst these 'take on the most varied guises, the terms of the relationship are immutable'.[38] The gothic narrative is formed by the protagonist's motivation and efforts to break through this barrier between in and out; 'the lengths there are to go to reintegrate the sundered elements[…] are the most characteristic energies of the gothic novel'.[39] Like Fisher, Sedgewick could easily be discussing the gothic or robinsonade narrative, here. Both are constituted by a movement from inside to outside, which is complicated by a boundary between the two zones. These narratives engender settings that look markedly different, but function, almost identically, as narratological islands.

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[35] Kinane, p. 3.
[36] Carl Fisher 'Innovation and Imitation in the Eighteenth Century Robinsonade', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 99-111 (p. 13).
[37] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 12.
[38] Sedgwick, p. 12.
[39] Sedgwick, p. 13.

The differences between remote island and gothic castle, I suggest, indicate two major differences between the concerns that robinsonade and gothic novels seek to address. The first is a difference in the spatial discourses with which the genres engage. As noted above, the desert island enables both the robinsonade narrative and its commentary on colonial spatialisation. But the gothic is interested in spaces much closer to home. In his contribution to Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend's *The Gothic World* (2014), Benjamin A. Brabon suggests that the gothic aimed to 'interrogate the force' of 'geographic transformations' that saw Britain 'divided up and partitioned, creating fixed and often impermeable boundaries within the national landscape'.[40] At the heart of these rapid shifts, suggests Brabon, was a 'conflict between "old" and "new" money that was literally moulding the landscape according to fashion and taste'.[41] The desert island fulfils Sedgewick's gothic structural criteria – an inside, an outside, a separation – but is not an appropriate site for an interrogation of the interrelation of wealth, power, and the parcelling of British land. The gothic island could not, like its robinsonade equivalent, be asocial. It must be a site wherein the forces reshaping the contemporary British landscape might be felt, even if only in analogy.

The second concern informing the gothic's redressing of the narratological island is its interest in gendered social dynamics. When Fred Botting suggests that characters '[c]onfronted with indifference, forced marriage and death must suffer and be sacrificed to the persecutions of patriarchal power with only the occasional knight fighting for their honour', it is perhaps only the final clause that makes clear that he is discussing gothic heroines, rather than eighteenth century British women.[42] In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1989), Nancy Armstrong notes that contemporary women 'would never imagine undertaking Crusoe's economic adventures'.[43] Rather, 'gothic tales of sensibility, and stories of courtship and marriage' better evoked a female experience wherein,[44] per Tim Stretton and Krista Kesselring's *Married Women and the Law* (2013) 'a husband's authority and legal identity covered his wife's'.[45] Gothic texts refashion the boundary between interior and exterior to address these dynamics. Natural forces isolate the Crusoe figure on his island, but the entrapment of the gothic heroine must, like that of eighteenth century women, stem from a gendered power imbalance. The gothic island must have an interior inscribed by the conflation of wealth and power, and a membrane the permeability of which is dependent on the intent of a male antagonist.

Horace Walpole's instigative *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), suggests Botting, 'sets out the features and themes for use in all later gothic texts'. [46] Typical of 'the castles, abbeys and ruins at the centre of many

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[40] Benjamin A. Brabon 'Gothic Geography', in *The Gothic World*, ed. by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 98-109 (p. 100).
[41] Brabon, p. 99.
[42] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 48.
[43] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 24.
[44] Armstrong, p. 47.
[45] Tim Stretton and Krista Kesselring, 'Introduction: Coverture and Continuity', in *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World*, ed. by Tim Stretton and Krista Kesselring (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, 2013), pp. 3-23 (p. 3).
[46] Botting, p. 47.

early gothic fictions', Otranto is heavily inscribed with a 'conjunction of family line, social status and physical property'.[47] Otranto's patriarchal Manfred exerts 'power, property and paternal lineage' in an effort to entrap and marry the younger Isabella;[48] he orders 'that every avenue to the castle should be strictly guarded, and charged his domestics on pain of their lives to suffer nobody to pass out'.[49] The natural forces constituting Crusoe's boundary are exchanged for the exertion of Manfred's patriarchal power. The 'series of frights and flights' typical of the gothic escape narrative thus spatialises Isabella's resistance to Manfred's sexual and marital advances.[50] Replacing inhospitable sea with guards and locked doors enables the text's comment on the social vulnerability of eighteenth century women. Likewise, it allows Walpole to stage and critique the creation of those landscape boundaries that were parcelling eighteenth century Britain. Structurally, Isabella's task is alike with Crusoe's – survive the interior, breach the boundary, return to the exterior. But discourses on British land ownership and the plight of eighteenth century women demand adjustments. Need for a socialised interior and boundary constituted through power-imbalance refigures the narratological island as a castle.

This iteration of the narratological island can be found in myriad gothic texts; Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), John William Poldori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Francis Lathom's *The Midnight Bell* (1798). It is spoofed in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), and it plays a diminished but still prevalent role in texts like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), wherein the patriarchal castle and escape therefrom play a significant but not total role in constituting the plot. Moreover, texts like Jordan Peele's 2017 film *Get Out* retain the spatial-narratological structure but address other societal power imbalances. In Peele's film the whiteness, rather than maleness of the antagonists conflates with wealth in their enforcement of boundaries. Just as the *Concrete Island* adapts the robinsonade island to its post-industrial concerns, *Get Out* adapts the gothic island to its interest in racial politics. These are slight variations; gender is exchanged for race in a text that nevertheless uses the narratological island to spatialise resistance to politically-secured power. More interesting for the discussion of spatial narratology at hand, here, is a nineteenth century shift that would see narration of remote castles and manor houses 'give way to terrors and horrors that are much closer to home'. [51]

The situation into which Manfred tries to force Isabella was one regularly playing out in eighteenth and nineteenth century households. As Botting notes, '[h]omes and families do seem constraining when one is obliged to accept someone one has not yet met as husband just because he is wealthy or well-connected, or see a future breeding sons and heirs'.[52] But the nineteenth century foregrounding of realist literature meant that gothic concerns and commentaries tended 'to be refracted through the domestic world central

[47] Botting, p. 4.
[48] Botting, p. 4.
[49] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Cassell & Company, 1886), p. 53.
[50] Botting, p. 5.
[51] Botting, p. 104.
[52] Botting, p. 11.

to realism'.[53] For Carol Margaret Davison, the Brontë sisters played a crucial role in this 'generic fusion'; Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) all combine the gothic with aspects of 'social realism'.[54] In such texts, '[t]he dark, sometimes criminal, underbelly of the middle-class domestic sphere, which includes repressed family secrets and histories, is probed and exposed'.[55] If abbeys, monasteries, and castles like Otranto are deemed too extravagant for such a literary context, the everyday domicile – a site overtly inscribed with such relations – is an appropriate replacement. Power of course plays a continuing role in domestic isolation. But the grandiosity of Manfred's patriarchal, aristocratic power, tied as it is to the investment of hereditary wealth and power in Otranto, must make way for powers grounded in domestic settings and a realist tone.

Botting identifies Charlotte Perkins Gillman's short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) as a typical example of domestic isolation in Victorian gothic literature.[56] The text's unnamed female protagonist is confined by her physician husband in a house 'quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village', marked by 'hedges and walls and gates that lock'.[57] This interior space is defined by loneliness and captivity, and in contrast, she admits, 'I always fancy I see people walking' when looking through its windows.[58] The exterior, then, is defined not only by the presence of others, but also by their relative mobility and freedom. As the gothic castle is exchanged for the rented country apartment, the trappings of aristocratic wealth are exchanged for the professional authority of the physician. In *Agency, Loneliness and the Female Protagonist in the Victorian Novel* (2019), Maria Hendry highlights the regularity with which 'doctors' control and isolation of female characters' is made possible by the 'God-like reverence' with which their profession is endowed.[59] The protagonist's husband may intend to improve his wife's health, but, says Botting, she is 'little more than a domestic prisoner' – her condition not unlike Isabella's.[60] The nefarious doctor did not singularly replace the avaricious patriarch as enforcer of isolation in nineteenth century gothic texts. The grandiose, unusual power of Manfred, though, was frequently exchanged for familiar, workaday power.

Perhaps as a result, gothic tropes like the narratological island became palatable to realist writers. The Brontës' realist gothic might be placed on a continuum that culminates with gothic infused realism. This was a time, for Botting, when 'distinct forms of gothic writing [became] less discernible, having been dispersed among a number of other genres'. [61] The home of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* (1857), for

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[53] Botting, p. 122.
[54] Carol Margaret Davison, 'The Victorian Gothic and Gender', in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 124-41 (p. 127).
[55] Davison, p. 127.
[56] Botting, p. 120.
[57] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', in *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories*, ed. by Robert Shulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3-19 (p. 4).
[58] Gilman, p. 7.
[59] Maria Hendry, *Agency, Loneliness, and the Female Protagonist in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), p. 59.
[60] Botting, p. 120.
[61] Botting, p. 116.

example, takes the 'melancholic and gloomy appearance of the castle', and is 'haunted by the secrets of disreputable class origins and the ghostly presence of the father signified by his foreboding portrait'.[62] Allan Pritchard sees feminised 'imprisonment by duty' as lending a gothic tone to *Bleak House* (1852), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1842) and *The Mystery of Edmund Drood* (1870).[63] In *A Christmas Carol* (1843), one of Dickens' most gothic, the miserly Scrooge is visited overnight by three spirits who teach him to value the social as well as economic. Scrooge re-emerges reformed, into a street-scene characterised by Christmas camaraderie.[64] To do so, he passes through the door he had double-locked the previous night.[65] Acting as Manfred to his own Isabella, the wealthy tyrant Scrooge enforces his own interior/exterior boundary, before breaking through into a space oppositional to his lonely quarters. In gothic realism, the boundary between inner and outer is often psycho-spatial. It inheres in the text's rendering of space, but the protagonist either chooses or is coerced into not breaching it.

This exchange of overt, material obstruction for self-, economically-, or socially-enforced boundaries is in-keeping with contemporary constructions of domesticity. The notion of a domestic sphere fundamentally detached from public life gained, for Melissa Valiska Gregory, 'centrality as a fundamental organizing principle in Victorian literature and culture'.[66] Domesticity's development 'from a set of basic housekeeping practices to a powerful and elaborate ideology that importantly intersected with major cultural debates regarding nationality, empire, social class, human rights, and gender' insisted on the importance of an epistemic division between domestic and otherwise across all of these domains.[67] This can still be felt in the division of domestic and foreign policy in many governmental structures. The domestic implying the domicile, though, leads this epistemic division to imply a spatial division. Recent scholarship has contested the reduction of these twin divisions into an overarching division between female and male affairs.[68] Yet this doesn't change the importance of isolation as a structuring division: what matters is that Victorian life drove a firm epistemic and spatial divide between the interior and exterior of the home. For Gregory, this divide was reiterated in literature, as '[q]uestions related to home and family organized the nineteenth-century novel'.[69] We have seen above how domesticity organized narratives of gothic isolation in this period, as well as isolation in gothic infused realist narratives. Before advancing, though, it is important to note that the domicile became an important site for isolation in novels with little if any relation to gothic traditions.

In myriad novels from this period, the home is as much an ideological construct as it is a location. In *Sesame and Lillies* (1865), John Ruskin terms the home a 'shelter'; 'so far as the anxieties of the outer life

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[62] Botting, p. 119.
[63] Allan Pritchard, 'The Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45.4 (1991), pp. 432-52 (p. 449).
[64] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 157.
[65] Dickens, p. 22.
[66] Melissa Valiska Gregory, 'Domesticity', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 439-48 (p. 439).
[67] Gregory, p. 439.
[68] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 32:2 (1993), pp. 383-414.
[69] Gregory, p. 439.

penetrate into it, and the[…] hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home'.[70] Ruskin figures the ideal home as an unthreatening interior surrounded by a threatening exterior – the boundary between the two is maintained by familial loyalty. This curious inversion of the typical narratological island, though, has itself been a site of literary isolation. For Armstrong, nineteenth century fiction was deeply involved in an ideological project that refigured 'modern domesticity as the only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world'.[71] Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859) is overly drawn by this haven. However often prompted to see his estate, attend parties, visit friends, Oblomov returns to a 'flabby, listless existence'[72] in his 'forgotten corner of the world', where relief from public pressures means 'no struggle, no movement, and no life'.[73] By feeling too keenly Ruskin's distinction between shelter and hostile society, Oblomov follows Scrooge in securing his own isolation. For characters like these, isolation is maintained by the inscription of a troubled mental state onto an extant but permeable spatial boundary. The terrain of isolation, they demonstrate, had started to shift to individualism's ultimate, psychological interior.

This shift would be more fully consummated by modernist writers in the early twentieth century. Below, I will examine how this was achieved, but first, I briefly outline a few reasons why. Starting in the latter nineteenth century, notes Andrew Popp, 'cities grew almost compulsively'.[74] By pushing us into ever-closer and more frequent contact with others, suggests Georg Simmel, the 'bodily proximity and narrowness of space' characteristic of urban life 'makes the mental distance' between us perceivable for the first time.[75] We are hyper-aware of an unbridgeable separation between each of our inner lives. This unbridgeable separation is further foregrounded by the shell-shock afflicting troops returning from the first world war; characters like Septimus Warren Smith of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Chris Baldry of Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* (1918) evoke this interior isolation. Meanwhile, Henry James' psychological novels – *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904) – involved the psychological works of his brother William in literary discourse. In his well-read *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James insisted that consciousness cannot be understood 'chopped up in bits' like a 'chain' or 'train'.[76] Whilst Henry James was, for Woolf, a 'portentous figure looming large and undefined'

[70] John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. by Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 78.
[71] Armstrong, p. 16.
[72] Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 237.
[73] Goncharov, p. 465.
[74] Andrew Popp, '"I feel as if Part of [My] Self Was Torn From Me": Entrepreneurship, Absence and Loneliness in Nineteenth-Century England', in *The Routledge History of Loneliness*, ed. by Katie Barclay, Elaine Chalus, and Deborah Simonton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), pp. 75-87 (p. 75).
[75] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and David Frisby (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 174-86 (p. 181).
[76] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 233.

in the minds of her contemporaries,[77] William's interest in 'the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life' would perhaps have an even greater impact on their understanding of form.[78]

Woolf's cohort, writes Deborah Parsons, were 'dissatisfied' with the very 'model of the novel as they inherited it'.[79] Following William James, they originated what 'has been variously described as the "psychological" or "stream-of-consciousness" or "modernist" novel'.[80] In a passage reminiscent of William in content, if not in style, Woolf finds that 'the mind receives a myriad impressions'; '[f]rom all sides they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday'.[81] The novelist must 'record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall[…] trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness'.[82] The stream Woolf prescribes, in other words, registers interiorised reactions to exterior stimuli, which are necessarily exchanged for coherent narration of objective reality. Narration itself must move into an interior space separated from an exterior by a 'semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'.[83] The protagonist's inner world will become an island upon which the narrative voice is stranded. But such fiction, she suggests elsewhere, 'will tell us very little about the houses, incomes, occupations of its characters; it will have little kinship with the sociological novel or the novel of environment'.[84] It will differ significantly, that is, from the isolation narratives discussed above.

Narrating the inner lives of their protagonists, modernist writers followed the early individualists in eschewing the literary conventions of their forebears. James Joyce remarked on his writing of *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) that 'one great part of every human existence is passed in a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of widewake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead prose'.[85] Indeed, the 'Penelope' chapter of his *Ulysses* (1920) – perhaps the most well-known segment of interior monologue in western literature – runs for sixty-two pages with no punctuation, separated only into eight paragraphs. One paragraph opens with 'frseeeeeeeefronnnng' registering Molly Bloom's hearing a train pass – the sexual diatribe of the previous paragraph accordingly gives way to consideration of 'the poor men that have to be out all the night from their wives and families'.[86] In order to gain access to Molly's interior

[77] Virginia Woolf, 'The Method of Henry James' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume 2: 1912-1918*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-2011) ii, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, (1987), pp. 346-52 (p. 346).
[78] James, p. 239.
[79] Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.
[80] Parsons, p. 3.
[81] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Common Reader*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925), pp. 207-18 (p. 212).
[82] Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', p. 213.
[83] Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', p. 212.
[84] Virginia Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', *Granite and Rainbow* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1958), pp. 11-23 (p. 18).
[85] James Joyce, 'Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver', in *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, 3 vols (Faber and Faber, 1957-1966), iii, ed. by Richard Ellmann, (1966), p. 146 (p. 146).
[86] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 894.

world of 'frseeeeeeeefronnnng', the reader must go without the objective narration and consistent topic-focus one might expect even from earlier first-person narratives like *Robinson Crusoe*. Returning, though, to Lukács' outlining of individualism as a philisophico-historical situation figuring 'every soul as autonomous and incomparable', one might suggest *Ulysses* to culminate a journey that Defoe began. The true autonomy of the soul, perhaps, is autonomy from shared, objective reality, and thus from a shared language and objective narration.

This being said, assuming that internal monologue represents absolute flight into the psychological interior is careless. For Joyce, the narrative voice of *Ulysses* was angled towards 'the subterranean forces, those hidden tides which govern everything and run humanity'.[87] As Parsons clarifies, *Ulysses* signals a 'move away from the stream of consciousness of the individual mind' that had animated Joyce's earlier *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and toward 'the conception of deeper, underlying currents of collective human existence'.[88] A similar point might be made on Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves* (1931). Interior monologue became an overtly useful tool for writers looking to deepen their construction of isolation, but had other functions. Moreover, the possibility of evoking isolation with grammatical rather than narratological tropes allows writers to explore states of isolation that have little to do with spatial confinement. Jean Rhys' use of ellipses in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), for example, reiterates the isolation engendered by the protagonist's trauma and alcoholism by breaking-down the correlation between her interior life and immediate surroundings. Uses of interior monologue to enable narratives of collectivism and mobile isolation are interesting in their own right, but this chapter is limited in its concern with narratives engaging islanding processes.

In Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1951), internal monologue deepens the sense of spatial islanding by reiterating it an epistemic separation between the interior and exterior. Molloy narrates from captivity in his late mother's bedroom, and within the narrative is confined at one point to the house of a woman whose dog he kills. Narration of the material conditions of these isolations is uncomplicated; 'I went to the door. Locked. The window. Barred'.[89] But in *Molloy*, 'thought and feeling dance their sabbath' in 'that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns'.[90] As such, the entrapment of Molloy's body is equated with the entrapment of his mind; Molloy is uncertain of things beyond the boundary of his narratological island. A 'queer' man who Molloy discerns as one of a group visits weekly. The man collects Molloy's 'pages' and returns them 'marked with signs', Molloy admits, 'I don't understand'.[91] An epistemic rupture at the boundary of Molloy's mother's room is thus demonstrated. The referents to which these signs gesture are beyond the room within which his body, and thus mind are confined. By narrating Molloy's internal monologue, Beckett is able to transfer the epistemic restrictions enforced through Molloy's spatial isolation onto the narrative itself. Beckett evokes the condition of Molloy's spatial isolation more clearly, that is, by placing the narrative itself into such conditions. In a typically Beckettian

[87] Arthur Power, *Conversations with James Joyce* (London: Millington, 1974), p. 54.
[88] Parsons, p. 65.
[89] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 36.
[90] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 6.
[91] Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 3.

move, *Molloy* exaggerates a simple formal premise; interior monologue is useful in textually reiterating spatial isolation

Beckett plays with limitations resultant of interior monologue's necessary implication of a physically located body. His lack of paragraphing, moreover, offers the reader no exit from a narrative voice that itself has no exit from Molloy's body. Counterintuitively, though, Molloy is one of a series of Beckett's characters whose names begin with the central letter of the alphabet – Molloy, Mother, Mag, in *Molloy*, others in *Malone Dies* (1951) and *Murphy* (1938) – and who are implicitly immersed in the very centre of language. That the location of language and the subject should have such an uneasy relationship in *Molloy* is typical, for Andrew Kincaid, of Beckett's multimedia oeuvre. Beckett often 'approaches the connection', says Kincaid, 'between subjectivity and confinement through an analysis of the spatial elements of the particular medium within which he is working'.[92] We might see Beckett 'first and foremost a media critic' interested in how 'the limits of the technology and medium' in use construct a 'relationship between the physical and experiential'.[93] In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), initially titled *Magee Monologue* – another pair of 'M's – the titular monologuist responds to tape-recordings of his younger self. Introducing the tape-recorder allows Beckett to close the circuit of the monologue; the viewer is in the curiously voyeuristic position of watching a man converse with himself. Wherever he wanders through his apartment, Krapp is recalled by this need for self-address to the desk where his tape-recorder resides. Here, Krapp resembles Oblomov, but his self-imposed spatial isolation is inextricable from his mediational behaviours.

Beckett is not the first to express an interest in interactions between mediation and isolation. Friday's presence in *Robinson Crusoe*, after all, is announced in the mediated form of a footprint in the sand. There was perhaps something about twentieth century living, though, that made it possible for a concern with isolation and mediation to unite works across a career as diverse as Beckett's. It was something Woolf felt, also, when she observed

> The long avenue of brick is cut up into boxes, each of which is inhabited by a different human being who has put locks on his doors and bolts on his windows to ensure some privacy, yet is linked to his fellows by wires which pass overhead, by waves of sound which pour through the roof and speak aloud to him of battles and murders and strikes and revolutions all over the world.[94]

[92] Andrew Kincaid, 'Samuel Beckett's Radio Geographies', *Modernist Cultures*, 17:1 (2022), pp. 54-73 (p. 56).
[93] Kincaid, p. 56.
[94] Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', p. 15.

The pace of mediation was beginning to pick up; twenty-three years after Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape*, Jean Baudrillard would suggest in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) that a glut of mediation had ushered '[t]he impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real'.[95] Woolf's locked and bolted man mires connection in isolation. We might find his life familiar, but for the outdated insistence on wired communication.

The constitutive features of the narratological island are all present in Woolf's portrait. Pointedly, her subject's home is 'cut' from others – it is a homogenous, separate unit, whose impermeability is secured by locks and bolts. It has, then, an interior and a semi-permeable boundary. As well as serving as a boundary, the locks and bolts render the home a place of safety and security. Since the world beyond is a place of battles, murders, strikes and revolutions, then, the interior and exterior of this suburban island take on contradistinctive meanings, as we have come to expect from the narratological island. But his – to Woolf – hyper-mediated lifestyle calls the extent to which we might describe him as isolated from this exterior world into question. Over one hundred years from Woolf's description of this man, we now carry news of battles and etc. around with us in our pockets. For writers looking to explore isolation, this poses an issue: can narratological islands function amidst constant connection? In *Asylum Road* (2022), Sudjic – potentially feeling that she had exhausted heavily-mediated isolation in *Sympathy* – has her protagonist lose her phone at the beginning of a troubling, claustrophobic visit to family in Sarajevo.[96] Shortly, I will discuss texts that, like Sudjic's, comment on the character of post-Internet spatial isolation. Before that, though, I will summarise current thinking on the relationship between post-Internet mediation and contemporary social life. In so doing, I address the character of post-Internet isolation.

4.3 Post-Internet sociality, post-Internet isolation

Once, we would have associated isolation with the hermit, the castaway, or perhaps a cloistered monk. Later, we might have considered the wife of a cruel husband, the poor and downtrodden. Now, we might insert the hikikomori, the conspiracy theorist, the home-worker. To exchange one cast of typical isolates for another, though, would be to undersell the profound changes that the post-Internet infosystem has wrought upon the character of isolation. Experiencing, as many suggest we are, an 'epidemic of loneliness', we might no longer consider isolation a phenomenon typical to certain types of people in certain situations.[97] It is better to attend to how isolation has mutated into various forms that traverse on- and offline sociality. It is better, perhaps, to consider post-Internet isolations, rather than post-Internet isolation. As such, the below summary of post-Internet isolation does not draw out particular figures and

[95] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 16.
[96] Olivia Sudjic, *Asylum Road* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), p. 75.
[97] Alberti, p. vii.

situations that might serve as fodder for new tropes and stock characters in the literature of isolation. Of course, the Internet does offer new ways for us to be islanded in our everyday lives, and I will attend to these processes of attentional islanding below. But first, I dispel any oversimplifications; the Internet does not straightforwardly surmount spatial separation's causing of social isolation. I then show that online behaviours are enmeshed at every stage with offline ones in the construction of the post-Internet social. As such, these behaviours are enmeshed in post-Internet isolation and its abating.

Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together* (2011) attends to the Internet as 'a portal that enable[s] people to lead parallel lives in virtual worlds'.[98] Individualised mediational worlds run parallel to embodied social situations; directing our attention toward these mediational worlds is what allows us to be alone, separate from each other, even whilst together. I return to these ideas later, but first look to *Alone Together* for its evocation of the hopeful culture of early Internet adopters. The first half of *Alone Together* discusses social robotics, and the second half, on networked communication technologies, opens with an anecdote from 'the halls of MIT' in 1996.[99] That summer, Turkle

> met with seven young researchers at the MIT Media Lab who carried computers and radio transmitters in their backpacks and keyboards in their pockets. Digital displays were clipped onto eyeglass frames. Thus provisioned, they called themselves "cyborgs" and were always wirelessly connected to the Internet, always online, free from desks and cables.[100]

The utopian fervour of these cyborgs, who proposed to 'live simultaneously in the physical and virtual', is somewhat characteristic of discourse around the early Internet.[101] The Internet, it seemed, would realise the consensual, collaborative hallucination of Christopher Priest's 1977 science fiction novel *A Dream of Wessex*; never-ending connectivity, an end to isolation.

One year on from Turkle's meeting with the MIT cyborgs, Frances Cairncross suggested in *The Death of Distance* (1997) that '[t]he next quarter century will see the fastest technological change the world has ever known'.[102] Cairncross foretells 'The Communications Revolution', and whilst her commentary focusses separately on the telephone, television, and Internet, adaptations to the former two are mostly understood as resultant of the proliferation of the latter.[103] Despite acknowledging that the effects of her revolution 'will depend on why people communicate and what knowledge they choose to acquire and how

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[98] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. xi.
[99] Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 151.
[100] Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 151.
[101] Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 151.
[102] Frances Cairncross, *The Death of Distance* (London: Orion Business, 1998), p. 233.
[103] Cairncross, pp. 1-2.

they use it', she insists that it 'will surely be good for societies everywhere'.[104] Like Marshall McLuhan, Joshua Meyrowitz, and many more media theorists preceding her, Cairncross sees mediation as surmounter and eraser of spatial boundaries; bringer of the titular death of distance. As well as 'increas[ing] the variety of ways people can and do communicate' then, new mediational forms will 'create new ways to socialize and to build communities of interest, independent of geography'.[105] And beyond the formation of new groups, diasporas will be bolstered,[106] whilst '[e]lectronic communications [will] allow friendships and families to survive separation'.[107] Isolation, in *The Death of Distance*, is understood as a spatial phenomenon, and Cairncross' revolution is a toppling of the spatial regime.

But in *The Digital Sublime* (2004), Vincent Mosco resists what he sees as 'mythic triumphalism' operating throughout Cairncross' work.[108] In a text he 'began to think seriously about writing in 1996', Mosco looks to undermine the likes of Cairncross by drawing out striking similarities between theirs and earlier expressions of technological utopianism.[109] Among these, 'nineteenth century predictions that the railroad would bring peace to Europe, that steam power would eliminate the need for manual labor, and that electricity would bounce messages off the clouds'.[110] Even more pertinent, here, is Mosco's highlighting of radio enthusiasts in the 1920s who 'pioneered the new wireless technology, communicating over vast distances without political and economic controls'.[111] Many such pioneers, '[e]mboldened by their new invention[…] also felt the allure of virtual community'.[112] These sentiments are common to what Mosco terms the 'mythic period' of novel technologies, 'when they are hailed for their ability to bring world peace, renew communities, or end scarcity, history, geography or politics'.[113] But it is only after this period, at the other side of utopian and dystopian discourses, 'when technologies such as the telephone and the computer cease to be sublime icons of mythology and enter the prosaic world of banality[…] that they become important forces for social and economic change'.[114] And as Zara Dinnen points out in *The Digital Banal*, that time, for the Internet, has long since come.

To truly outline the characteristics of post-Internet isolation then, we must refute the pull of technological determinism. This will entail keeping in mind that the design and use of connective technologies are human acts, negotiated with myriad competing social forces. As Nancy K. Baym puts it in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2010), we must recognise 'that the machines have affordances that can push us in some directions rather than others', but also that 'people have long- and short-term cultural,

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[104] Cairncross, p. 233.
[105] Cairncross, p. 240.
[106] Cairncross, pp. 243-4.
[107] Cairncross, p. 241.
[108] Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power and Cyberspace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 86.
[109] Mosco, p. 1.
[110] Mosco, p. 22.
[111] Mosco, p. 27.
[112] Mosco, p. 27.
[113] Mosco, p. 19.
[114] Mosco, p. 6.

situational, and personal trajectories that shape the development, uses and consequences of technologies'.[115] But we should also be careful not to allow such a recognition to cloud the enormity of the Internet's influence. Our approach should be akin to the approach taken by José Van Dijk in *The Culture of Connectivity* (2013). In Van Dijk's work, the effort to understand 'how [social-media] platforms have become central forces in the construction of sociality'[116] necessitates attention to how '[p]atterns of behaviour that traditionally existed in offline (physical) sociality are increasingly mixed with social and sociotechnical norms created in an online environment'.[117] For him, 'networked sociality' is the outcome of such patterns 'taking on a new dimensionality' as a result of this mixing.[118] And as Baym also reminds us, we must remember that there are still times when we log off; offline sociality is parallel to, and correspondent with online sociality, rather than prior to it.[119]

It is useful to collect and consider these nebulous commitments as a rejection of what the sociologist Nathan Jurgenson has called 'digital dualism'.[120] Taking aim at an array of colleagues studying Internet communicational habits, Jurgenson highlights a 'systematic bias to see the digital and physical as separate'.[121] In everyday life, as works as diverse as Manuel Castells' *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) to Rob Cover's *Digital Identities* (2015) have demonstrated, the two domains intermingle. Working under the constraints of digital dualism, then, can never give us a complete picture of the social and its phenomena, including isolation. Digital dualism will always lead us, says Jurgenson, to assume 'a zero-sum tradeoff where time and energy spent' either on or offline 'subtracts from the other'.[122] We fall into epistemological traps. On the one hand, we might understand time spent in online spaces as detrimental to 'real' social encounters.[123] But on the other, with Turkle's cyborgs, we might imagine the materiality of offline encounters to amount to a kind of friction that disbars a total, global, communicational freedom. The only way to avoid these traps is to attend carefully to the complex interrelation, the enmeshment of online and offline social behaviours. We must see post-Internet social life, and so post-Internet isolation and its resolutions, as phenomena transversal of on- and offline spaces.

For a model of how to do so, we might turn to those who have sought to tackle post-Internet isolation in practice. In 2018, Theresa May's UK government appointed the world's first 'loneliness minister', and published a report titled 'A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness' through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. This report is upfront in its recognition that, contrary

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[115] Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 155.
[116] José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 23.
[117] Van Dijck, p. 19.
[118] Van Dijck, p. 19.
[119] Baym, p. 153.
[120] Nathan Jurgenson, 'Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality', *The Society Pages*, 24 February 2011 <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/> [accessed 15 August 2024].
[121] Jurgenson, 'Digital Dualism'.
[122] Jurgenson, 'Digital Dualism'.
[123] Jurgenson, 'Digital Dualism'.

to the hopes of Turkle's cyborgs, loneliness 'is a reality for too many people in our society today'.[124] Loneliness, it should be said, is not straightforwardly equivalent to isolation – like solitude, it is an emotional or psychological reaction often prompted by the situational condition of isolation. Nevertheless, it is a useful measure, and the May report often elides loneliness and isolation, looking to combat the former by alleviating the latter. Without celebrating or commiserating, May's foreword notes that 'as our society continues to evolve, so otherwise welcome advances can also increase the risk of loneliness. From working more flexibly but also often more remotely, to doing our shopping online, the warmth of human contact risks receding from our lives'.[125] Our offices and shops are emptying, and the convenience of staying home is exchanged for the everyday interactions that weave us into the social fabric of our communities. The May report presents a complexity of new modes, forms and substrates for post-Internet isolation.

At once, though, the report draws attention to 'great opportunities – including new ways of connecting and communicating with others'.[126] Whilst post-Internet mediation is a crucial part of the problem as laid out in the May report, it is also a part of the solution. Just as working and shopping patterns become enmeshed with post-Internet mediation in their facilitation of isolation, the solution to said isolation is a similar mesh of online and offline behaviours. Early on, the report presents several case studies, one of which is particularly illustrative of such enmeshment. Courtney, a 28-year-old mother, had been visiting a supermarket every day to be around people.[127] Loneliness is a common issue for the chief caretakers of young children – usually mothers – and far predates the current post-Internet infosystem. Frequent trips to the supermarket are likewise a pre-Internet solution to the issue, but seeing that this 'was not a long-term option to find adult conversation', Courtney turns to a post-Internet solution.[128] Courtney joined Mush, a mobile app '[f]ocused squarely on facilitating real-life local friendships and meet-ups between mothers with babies of the same age'.[129] Post-Internet sociality is deployed as a precursor to offline social interaction. A form of isolation that far predates post-Internet technology is alleviated with a mesh of on- and offline interactions. The May report shows us that the character of isolation has been changed, and many problems are as novel as the solutions that rise to meet them. But we should be careful not to flatten the complex role of post-Internet technologies in either category.

When we consider the role of motherhood and thus gender in Courtney's isolation, we are also prompted to consider the persistence of offline social dynamics in online spaces. In *Digital Sociology* (2015), Deborah

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[124] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 'A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness', Gov, 15 October 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness> [accessed 10 August 2024], p. 2.
[125] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, p. 2.
[126] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, p. 3.
[127] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, p. 4.
[128] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, p. 4.
[129] Mumsnet HQ, 'Mumsnet acquires mum meet-up app Mush', *Mumsnet: News*, 17 April 2024 <https://www.mumsnet.com/news/mumsnet-acquires-mum-meet-up-app-mush> [accessed 7 August 2024].

Lupton advises us to consider 'how socioeconomic, cultural and political factors shape, promote or delimit the use of [digital] technologies'.[130] Many, like Courtney, find relief from isolating patterns of offline discrimination by turning to post-Internet technologies. Lupton points to the many people with disabilities that 'report finding [digital] technologies offer a way of communicating and expressing themselves, of achieving greater participation in social relationships'.[131] One user with Tourette's syndrome reported to Lupton that 'she felt "comforted", "safe", "more relaxed" and "at peace with myself" and "normal" when communicating with others online', since they could not see or hear her tics.[132] But many others find offline isolation replicated online. Explicitly rejecting utopian ideas about transcending spatial barriers, Lupton highlights how '[j]ust as with the other physical environments with which people with disabilities interact, the design of digital technologies may serve to configure disability in their neglect of accessibility for a wide range of users and bodily capacities'.[133] As such, many spaces of online community become 'just another arena of social life' from which 'many people with disabilities are excluded'.[134] Just as offline spaces are constructed and navigated by individuals with a range of accessibility needs, so too are online ones. Careful stewardship is required to avoid the replication of exclusionary forces that isolate those same people that so often find themselves isolated by offline social practices.

And such stewardship cannot be confined to questions of accessibility and ability; in *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), Safiya Umoja Noble draws out the continuity between identity-based discrimination online and offline. The algorithms that deliver online content to users, Umoja Noble reminds us over and again, are designed, and thus 'situated in intersectional sociohistorical contexts and embedded within social relations'.[135] In practice, such contexts amount to 'a continuum of values that largely reflect U.S.-based social norms' and therefore 'a number of racist and stereotypical ideas'.[136] It is not difficult to see that a Google autosuggest result that suggests completing the phrase 'why are Black women so' with 'angry', 'loud', 'mean', 'attractive', 'lazy', 'annoying', 'confident', 'sassy', 'insecure', or 'bitter' might both reflect and reinforce offline behaviours.[137] Neither is it difficult to imagine how isolating this degree of othering and objectification might be for black and female Internet users. More insidiously, though, as algorithmic content delivery is increasingly the norm for social-media, news sites, video-hosting platforms and search engines, algorithms have ever-greater influence on the informational diets of Internet users. In this way, they normalise problematic and bigoted attitudes, behaviours and social-dynamics that persist in offline spaces. More than rendering the Internet another terrain for the isolation of certain groups, then, 'algorithmic oppression' retrenches and encourages exclusionary behaviours in offline settings.[138] Umoja

[130] Deborah Lupton, *Digital Sociology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 117.
[131] Lupton, p. 126.
[132] Lupton, p. 126.
[133] Lupton, p. 127.
[134] Lupton, p. 127.
[135] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), p. 13.
[136] Umoja Noble, p. 57.
[137] Umoja Noble, p. 21.
[138] Umoja Noble, p. 1.

Noble and Lupton highlight a complex back-and-forth, a feedback loop that reiterates and exaggerates discrimination across on- and offline domains.

This process of retrenchment is often as isolating to those engaging with discriminatory content as those who are the subject of it. As viewpoints become more extreme, such Internet users enter echo chambers, or, as Cass Sunstein terms them in *#Republic* (2018), 'information cocoons' that distance them from peers in both on- and offline communities.[139] 'Echo chambers' is the more common term, but 'information cocoons' will be adopted here, since it is more germane to discussion of isolation. Like many others, Sunstein draws a connection between our siloing in such cocoons and a process of 'polarisation' that is an inevitable result of content-delivery algorithms.[140] Since such algorithms supply users with ever-more content similar to content they've already expressed interest in, social-media sites increasingly host 'speech communities whose members talk and listen mostly to one another'.[141] To put it another way, 'modern technologies and social media are dramatically increasing people's ability to hear echoes of their own voices and wall themselves off from others'.[142] One consequence of such informational cocooning is 'considerable difficulty in mutual understanding' between those within and those without the online community.[143] Unchallenged perspectives are deeper entrenched, and extreme content, and therefore extreme opinions become more palatable. This furthers the distance between those within and those beyond the group; 'people like you' and 'people not like you'.[144] Over time, that is, the informational cocoon takes on the contradistinctive interior-exterior structure of the narratological island.

And whilst the cocoon might be constituted through online practices, the isolating effects are far from limited to online relationships. This is clearest in the most extreme cases, like those found on 'r/QAnonCasualties', a 'subreddit' on the content aggregation and discussion site Reddit. The site provides a space for people with loved ones invested in the QAnon conspiracy ecosystem – a network of intersecting theories suggesting that Donald Trump leads covert resistance against a paedophilic cabal secretly controlling America. Users share their experiences, with titles like 'I survived the Stoneman Douglas school shooting and my dad is suddenly convinced I'm a liar and part of a false-flag operation'.[145] Resources are recommended for breaching the informational cocoon of individuals like this poster's father, including Mick West's *Escaping the Rabbit Hole* (2018). Conspiratorial informational cocoons, suggests West, are 'a bizarre wonderland of time-wasting and harmful falsehoods that are taking people

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[139] Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 9.
[140] Sunstein, p. 9.
[141] Sunstein, p. 57.
[142] Sunstein, p. 57.
[143] Sunstein, p. 57.
[144] Sunstein, p. 76.
[145] throwaway096283, 'I survived the Stoneman Douglas school shooting and my dad is suddenly convinced I'm a liar and part of a false-flag operation', Reddit, 19 July 2021 <https://www.reddit.com/r/QAnonCasualties/comments/onq9ig/i_survived_the_stoneman_douglas_school_shooting/> [accessed 6 August 2024].

further away from the real world',[146] culminating in their 'marginalization and social isolation'.[147] The cocoon becomes 'an obsession. And if one partner does not share that same obsession then significant relationship problems can develop, including divorce. These problems extend to family and friends, and even into the workplace'.[148] In these extreme but increasingly common cases, social isolation is once more inextricable from but not restricted to post-Internet mediation. Content-supplying algorithms construct a worldview that becomes isolating, but this isolation stretches over on- and offline sociality.

Falling into such information cocoons is just one way in which we can become attentionally islanded by our online habits. Enthralled by the algorithm, we increasingly turn our attention away from our friends and family. In *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015), Turkle heralds 'a new "silent spring"'; just as Rachel Carson recognised agricultural technology's poisoning of our ecological networks, we must now recognise connective technology's poisoning of our social networks.[149] The near-constant availability of mobile Internet access leads us to 'turn away from our children, romantic partners, and work colleagues' whenever talk grows sparse or boring.[150] But such moments, 'lulls' as Turkle terms them, are precisely when talk becomes conversation – when we reach for those deeper, non-phatic topics that forge and sustain meaningful connection.[151] And as we become less accustomed to such lulls, we become less comfortable with them, much sooner. The bar for what we consider a lull is lowered, and we turn to our phones faster. To be attentionally islanded is to have one's attention pulled away from the social situation of one's surroundings. And whether through polarisation or reducing the tolerance for lulls, it is a process that draws us ever further in.

Where Cairncross predicted a future in which we would be able to transcend our spatial setting, Turkle explores a present in which attentional islanding leads us to do so compulsively. Myriad social situations are diminished when 'we want to be with each other but also elsewhere, connected to wherever else we want to be'.[152] As we become attentionally islanded, our being together in space, around the same table, no longer guarantees that we participate in an identical social situation. Take, for example, the family dinner. We might imagine a meal shared with family to be a place to attend to shared concerns and to each other – a place to pay the care of conversation to loved ones. But now, the circle of attention is broken by 'laptops, tablets, phones, a desktop, and of course, in the background, a television, perhaps two'.[153] This degree of mediation seems exaggerated, but Turkle points to research that has found that 'the typical

[146] Mick West, *Escaping the Rabbit Hole: How to Debunk Conspiracy Theories Using Facts, Logic, and Respect* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2018), p. xvi.
[147] West, p. xix.
[148] West, p. xix.
[149] Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), p. 11.
[150] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 23.
[151] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 43.
[152] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 24.
[153] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 46.

American family is managing six or seven simultaneous streams of information' at dinner.[154] It may seem, then, that we are 'never apart', living 'a family life squared', sharing so much more with our families – 'video, photographs, games, the whole wide world'.[155] But for all this connectivity, we fail to offer each other sustained, unbroken attention at dinner.

And whilst popular wisdom and representation might frame children and young people as the culprits, Turkle makes clear that parents are at least as likely to divide their attention at the dinner table. Checking emails and scanning documents, parents are engaging with a host of post-Internet working behaviours. But similar behaviours are also attentionally islanding them in the office. At work, many are mediationally walled off from colleagues in a 'cockpit' made up of 'a laptop, two iPhones, an iPad', and earphones, '[b]ig ones'.[156] When forced into in-person meetings, they reply to emails, edit documents, tune in only for their turn to speak; '[m]eetings are performances of what meetings used to be'.[157] Offices, in any case, are emptying, and this too can be isolating. Even 'the most dedicated email exchange', writes Turkle, 'is not the same as a face-to-face conversation'.[158] Without 'breathing the same air', we fail to develop a sense of community.[159] Email exchanges and online meetings leave no slackspace – no watercooler time – and thus little time for personal chat. It seems, then, that people are spending less time out of the house, participating in the social life of the office. And at the office, they are attentionally islanded. But this diminished face-time is not recuperated at home. Instead, many seem to be attentionally islanded from their family even as they are spatially isolated from the office community.

The issue is pervasive; we do not give total attention to the people we spend time with, and relationships suffer for it. In *The Shallows* (2010), Nicholas Carr reckons with the effects of heavy Internet use – i.e. usage to a degree that is now commonplace – on cognitive habits. And Carr is sure to point out that '[i]t isn't just our reasoning that takes a hit'.[160] Rather, '[o]ur social skills and relationships appear to suffer as well. Because our smartphones serve as constant reminders of all the friends we could be exchanging messages with electronically, they pull at our minds when we're talking with someone in person'.[161] Moreover, as we grow accustomed to 'the Net's uniquely rapid-fire mode of collecting and dispensing information', we develop 'a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts'.[162] We invest small amounts of attention into a range of tasks, and therefore struggle with complex ideas and long projects. And what is a meaningful relationship if not a long project full of complex ideas? Our relationships are just another facet of our mental lives becoming ever-shallower as our finite attention is spread thin.

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[154] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 46.
[155] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 101.
[156] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 33.
[157] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, pp. 240-1.
[158] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 248.
[159] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, p. 248.
[160] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Bains* (London: Atlantic Books, 2020), p. 231.
[161] Carr, p. 231.
[162] Carr, p. 10.

In *Alone Together*, Turkle terms these 'relationships with less'; the 'unsettling isolations of the tethered self'.[163] The isolations of a self tethered, that is, to the post-Internet communications network. Inverting the dreams of the MIT cyborgs, the tethered self is always able, and as we have seen, predisposed to 'absent itself from its physical surround – including the people in it'.[164] This absenting is our stepping, if only partly, into the 'parallel worlds' that the Internet offers us a 'portal' to. The inseparable mesh of on- and offline behaviour that constitutes post-Internet social life often manifests as the division of attention between the spatial here and the mediational elsewhere. When we are attentionally islanded in such a way, the relationship between spatial islanding and isolation is called into question. Isolation becomes something we can carry with us, not so grounded in semi-permeable boundaries and interior/exterior distinctions. But such connectivity is not all bad; it allows us to maintain contact with friends and loved ones, forge long distance relationships. In this sense, post-Internet technologies can alleviate the isolation that comes from being stranded on what might look like a narratological island. Even this, though, is tempered by an awareness of how the Internet has emptied our offices, shops, provided ever-fewer reasons to leave the house.

With this in mind, the purpose of the coming readings will not be to comprehensively define the features of a new genre of post-Internet isolation narrative. Crossing spatial and mediational terrains, post-Internet isolation appears in numerous guises, and numerous approaches are taken in literature seeking to approach this variety. That said, we are now aware both of the spatial conventions of isolation literature and the forces and dynamics of post-Internet isolation. Moving forward, then, we have a sense of the elements conversing with each other in the post-Internet isolation narrative. Therefore, one key narrative feature that does become significant in these narratives is enmeshment. Just as post-Internet sociality and thus isolation are marked by the enmeshment of on- and offline behaviour, so the post-Internet isolation narrative will be a narrative of enmeshment. Reading *Sympathy*, I highlight the role of enmeshment in forging complex isolation narratives wherein the narratological island converses with the types of attentional islanding outlined above. For Sudjic, enmeshment troubles the possibility of a conclusive escape from the narratological island, but my readings of *Bernadette* and *no one* will afterward show that enmeshment can, on the contrary, be central to concluding the post-Internet isolation narrative. In *Bernadette*, it forces the breaching from the exterior of a typically spatial narratological island, whereas in *no one* it coaxes the protagonist out of an information cocoon. Whilst unable to discern a single form for the post-Internet isolation narrative, then, I will show that it is inevitably a narrative of enmeshment.

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[163] Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 154.
[164] Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 155.

4.4 Enmeshed isolation and its endings

Sympathy arranges and rearranges various narratological islands, all of which, in their own way, entail the enmeshment of on- and offline activity. The novel charts the development of Alice's isolation before, during, and after her time in Manhattan. This narrative is given shape by her preoccupation with Mizuko's online presence, and her efforts to ensnare Mizuko within an isolation of her making. Throughout this process, the islanding that facilitates Alice and Mizuko's isolation is frequently shifting in character. At times, it involves typically spatial narratological islands, and at others, it leans primarily on the types of attentional islanding explored above. At others yet, attentional islanding is shown to play an important role in encouraging spatial islanding. Whatever the case, isolation always takes place in the enmeshed, post-Internet social lives of two characters who spend a lot of time online. In this way, Sudjic crafts a post-Internet isolation narrative, examining the relationship between online connectivity, spatial islanding, and isolation. But Alice's post-trip isolation undermines the boundary-breaking conclusion typical to the island narrative. After teasing out the intricate relations between attentional and spatial islanding in *Sympathy*, including in its denial of an ending, I finally turn to *Bernadette* and *no one*. These two texts, I suggest, leverage enmeshment to formulate post-Internet endings for post-Internet isolation narratives.

Alice's pre-trip isolation comes in a form we might expect from a post-Internet novel; she is a shut-in, or hikikomori. But Sudjic avoids the digital-dualist trap of opposing on- and offline sociality. After university, Alice returns to her mother's house, where she develops a range of anxiety-induced symptoms that make her 'feel like a foreigner'.[165] During this time, she 'barely left the house, and then, the longer this went on, [she] found it less and less necessary to leave [her] room'.[166] In her letters, Silvia blames Internet use, noting that '[s]he had read *many* articles about kids who had exactly the same thing, though mainly in South Korea and Taiwan'.[167] For Silvia, Alice's bedroom is straightforwardly a site of isolation, and Alice can abate this isolation by getting 'out and about, meeting people and being active'.[168] But whilst Alice lacks 'any friends who were friends [she] could see in real life', and has friends instead 'behind screens, dispersed in other parts of the globe', her isolation is not caused by online activity.[169] Rather, it is grounded in the offline circumstance of 'having been signed up to a school for kids whose parents were always moving'.[170] The digital dualism latent in Silvia's opposing asocial, housebound online activity with social, mobile offline activity fails to recognise the mesh of online and spatial dynamics constituting Alice's isolation.

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[165] Olivia Sudjic, p. 37.
[166] Sudjic, p. 37.
[167] Sudjic, p. 38. Emphasis in original.
[168] Sudjic, p. 38.
[169] Sudjic, p. 38.
[170] Sudjic, p. 38.

Silvia misreads Alice's narratological island because she is unfamiliar with post-Internet technology, and so post-Internet isolation. The pair exchange letters because 'Silvia hadn't got to grips with any modes of communication that did not require a person to be fixed'.[171] But if letters fix a person to a place, post-Internet technologies unfix them. Silvia's understanding of mediation does not account for mobile Internet access. In combination with her digital-dualist tendency to oppose on- and offline activities, this prevents her from being able to prescribe a suitable solution for Alice's isolation. For Silvia, Alice has been fixed in place by mediation; this is an online problem, and must therefore have an offline solution. But rather than online sociality causing Alice's cloistering in her bedroom, the two issues constitute one enmeshed isolation. And as becomes clear throughout *Sympathy*, enmeshed problems require enmeshed solutions. Silvia expects Alice's leaving her lonely bedroom for hyper-social Manhattan to be equivalent to Crusoe's leaving his asocial island to return to the social world beyond. But this acts only on the spatial element of Alice's isolation. And since Alice's isolation is sustained by both a spatial island and online attentional islanding, it is with her wherever she might access the Internet. Alice thus undertakes the first of two transatlantic journeys that fail to extricate her from isolation.

In Manhattan, Alice is free from her spatial island, but her unabated attentional islanding develops as she slips into an information cocoon. On vacation with Dwight, her sometime boyfriend, and Silvia's friends the Rooiakkers, she discovers Mizuko's Instagram account. Whilst the others engage in family activities, Alice steps, in Turkle-esque phrasing, into 'Mizuko's world'.[172] Looking at a photograph taken at the time, she observes:

> I am starting to fade[…] the solid world around me, the reality of it, is starting to slide away, like wet sand sinking beneath the water[…] I am walking into that ocean and it gets slowly deeper and then suddenly there's a drop and the temperature of the water changes before I'm ready; my footing slips, and before I have a chance to take a breath I'm under.[173]

The extended spatial metaphor, here, breaks down the sense that Alice's online behaviours are ontologically separate from her offline ones. The mediational 'space' directly supplants the space in which she is co-located with Dwight and the Rooiakkers; attending to Mizuko's Instagram separates Alice from her immediate spatial surroundings. And whilst not shipwrecked like Crusoe or captive like Isabella, the suddenness and breathlessness of Alice's immersion suggest that she cannot simply opt to return to the world beyond. Here, 'Mizuko's world' takes on an islanding function.

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[171] Sudjic, p. 36.
[172] Sudjic, p. 232.
[173] Sudjic, p. 202.

At this stage, Alice's islanding is entirely attentional – it is not reliant on her restraint within a narratological island. In fact, she is 'addicted to walking around the city, often until 'it got dark and [her] feet were bleeding'.[174] But despite being sustained by online behaviours, Alice's isolation is not limited to online social life. Whilst her 'attachment to [Mizuko] was cultivated through her pictures and photographs and quotes and all the things she put online', Alice admits 'I began to try to look at plain, ordinary-seeming things the way I thought she might look at them and so try to remake them like she did'.[175] In this way, Mizuko's 'telepresence, had given shape to [Alice's] new life in New York'.[176] But this reshaping extends over the social geography of the city, and often entails insertion of a barrier of apathy. Visiting Silvia in hospice care, for example, she 'felt almost no pity, only disgust' for patients other than Silvia, finding them 'especially incompatible with the beauty and dark humour of Mizuko's worldview'.[177] The informational cocoon that Alice falls into on the Rooiakker trip continues to island her in offline space. Whilst Alice can move freely through Manhattan, it seems that her online habits have nevertheless placed a barrier between her and its social fabric. Unlike islanding achieved with a narratological island, Alice's islanding, like the technology that sustains it, is mobile.

Alice's isolation of Mizuko relies on an even more complex mesh of on- and offline sociality. Seeing Mizuko post a photograph of herself and Rupert at a nearby café, Alice rushes to the location, and deploys her extant relationship with Mizuko's boyfriend Rupert to engineer a meeting. Charming Mizuko with 'interests I had siphoned from' her online presence,[178] she arranges for the pair to attend a lecture together.[179] Continuing to 'regurgitate her opinions from old statuses', Alice adopts Mizuko's favourite books;[180] passing Mizuko's favourite bookshop, Alice pre-emptively announces it as her own.[181] Alice's online behaviours continue or are repeated in offline space. Her online stalking translates into offline stalking; parroting Mizuko's online statuses back to her, Alice remakes herself as a kind of offline echo chamber. When, after an argument Alice overhears, Rupert breaks-up with Mizuko, Alice leverages her ill-won influence. Convincing Mizuko to hand-over her phone, she hides Rupert's many attempts to reinitiate contact.[182] She then insists Mizuko try 'a method I found online for her called the thirty-day no-contact rule', through which ex partners are 'locked out completely'.[183] Alice's isolation of Mizuko, then, is an irresolvable mesh of on- and offline behaviours. It takes the form of restricting Mizuko's online activity, but is achieved solely through offline interactions that are in turn made possible by Alice's online

[174] Sudjic, pp. 50-1.
[175] Sudjic, p. 85.
[176] Sudjic, p. 1.
[177] Sudjic, p. 243.
[178] Sudjic, p. 250.
[179] Sudjic, p. 250.
[180] Sudjic, p. 363.
[181] Sudjic, p. 68.
[182] Sudjic, p. 262.
[183] Sudjic, p. 263.

activity. What began with Alice's falling into an informational cocoon has developed into a complex enmeshed isolation that extends across Alice and Mizuko's on- and offline social lives.

But when Mizuko is hospitalised, Alice, who is already apathetic to many social encounters that take place in offline space, is able to add a spatial dimension to this isolation. After Mizuko is discharged, she convalesces in her apartment, and Alice suggests that the pair aid Mizuko's recovery by focussing on her writing. To do so, they hand all their digital devices to the apartment's doorman. The online dimension of the narratological island has been exchanged for a spatial one; the door to Mizuko's apartment becomes a psycho-spatial barrier behind which the pair 'became a cult'.[184] Like the physician of Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', Alice exerts a social influence in order to isolate Mizuko within the apartment in the supposed aid of convalescence. Alice began, in London, suffering an isolation that enmeshed online activity and offline cloistering. Moving to Manhattan tackled her cloistering, but her unabated online activity saw her fall into an information cocoon. Since post-Internet lives are a mesh of on- and offline behaviours this online activity came to island her in offline life, and furthermore allowed her to island Mizuko. And now, only after this complex sequence of exchanges, the pair occupy an entirely offline spatial isolation. The post-Internet isolation narrative is a narrative of enmeshment. Even non-mediated, spatial isolation, it seems, must be situated within the context of a life of online activity.

In *Sympathy*, the narrative of isolation is constituted by a mesh of on- and offline islanding forces, but the novel's conclusion problematises the role of enmeshment in providing an ending typical to such a narrative. Fleeing Mizuko's apartment after Rupert's unannounced arrival, Alice returns to London. Seemingly aware that this equates to the ending typical to her narrative, she acknowledges that '[y]ou've reached an end if you come back to where you started'.[185] Her narration of this journey is marked by passage through various spatial boundaries; first passport control, then the gates for her flight, then borders on her flight path display, then an electronic passport gate in the UK.[186] Purchasing a flat, moreover, affords 'my own threshold that I carry myself over, and I am the only one with a key'.[187] Like Crusoe, she breaks free of her narratological island and returns home. And for a time, this ending sticks; these spatial barriers, she writes, 'gave me the impression that I'd managed to build a wall between then and now'.[188] But after a month in her new home, Alice 'cracked', rewatching online the lecture she'd attended with Mizuko.[189] As Alice is drawn once more into Mizuko's world, despite all the distance between them, her ending begins to undo itself.

Over the novel's final few pages, Alice uses a variety of post-Internet services to subvert the spatial distance between herself and Mizuko. Blocked from Mizuko's social-media accounts, Alice bombards her

[184] Sudjic, p. 365.
[185] Sudjic, p. 389.
[186] Sudjic, pp. 380-81.
[187] Sudjic, p. 390.
[188] Sudjic, p. 399.
[189] Sudjic, p. 400.

with emails that go unanswered. She sets up online alerts for content mentioning Mizuko's name, despite finding her obsessive searching already meant 'anything to do with [Mizuko] would seek me out without my soliciting it'.[190] Pushed deeper into Mizuko's world by content-delivery algorithms, Alice foresees a life '[r]esending and resending, reopening the page to see if [Mizuko] has responded'.[191] Just as on the Rooiakker trip, she will be drawn from her immediate surroundings; 'everything else will go dark' as she fixates on 'the spinning wheel' of the refreshing page.[192] Dislocated in such a way, she returns, through mediation, to Manhattan. Using Google Street View, she admits, 'I walk my eyes along West 113th Street to Riverside Drive[…] I urge the arrow on[…] I push through the bank of trees that separates Riverside Drive from Henry Hudson Parkway'.[193] The verbs of motility that permeate this narration reappear when she casts online behaviours as 'a line stretch[ing] out, wire-tight, under the ocean, a pipeline I can walk back along'.[194] No amount of movement, *Sympathy* suggests, can conclude Alice's narrative of heavily mediated isolation. Hers is not a spatial condition, and as she points out earlier in the text, 'there's no end to things [online], no way out[…] nothing stays private and nothing goes away'.[195]

But not every post-Internet isolation novel is so doomful. In Semple's *Bernadette?* and Lockwood's *no one* the inevitable enmeshment of social life offers a route out of isolation. Bernadette's isolation is staged on a narratological island, but is nevertheless made possible by a suite of post-Internet behaviours that mediate this island's boundaries. However, we are reminded that the Internet is a tool for human connection. For better or worse, online interactions involve others whose lives continue into offline space; this continuity ultimately unpicks Bernadette's mediationally sustained spatial isolation. By contrast, the islanding of Lockwood's narrator is entirely attentional, and maintained by online behaviour. Living a life characterised by 'flights through blue rare space, the handing over of tickets and stamping of passports, the gorgeous violent ruptures of somewhere-elseness', she is unbound by her spatial location.[196] This global lifestyle, though, isolates her from those who are – in both the social and spatial senses – close to her. But personal tragedy stages a confrontation between this shallow global culture and the deep micro-culture of her family. Our lives, Lockwood seems to suggest, are inevitably meshes of on- and offline social dynamics. And, at least in the case of her narrator, local, offline, family ties can still be mobilised to extract us from information cocoons. Below, I etch out the enmeshed dynamics whereby these novels both construct and conclude isolation, before making brief final notes on the post-Internet isolation narrative.

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[190] Sudjic, p. 404.
[191] Sudjic, p. 406.
[192] Sudjic, p. 406.
[193] Sudjic, pp. 402-3.
[194] Sudjic, p. 265.
[195] Sudjic, p. 233.
[196] Patricia Lockwood, *no one is talking about this* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) p. 151.

Like Crusoe, Isabella, Oblomov, and many others, Bernadette is isolated on a spatial narratological island. In the words of her rival and neighbour, Audrey, Bernadette is '[u]p there in your gigantic house looking down on all of us, writing checks, but never deigning to come off your throne and honor us with your presence'.[197] Having Bernadette purchase the 'entire hillside, *which you can't build on*, but [which] does ensure privacy', Semple indicates that hers is a psycho-spatial boundary; spatial isolation is Bernadette's means of retreating from her architectural career.[198] But her self-imposed isolation is enmeshed with much online activity. To avoid her talkative cleaners, Bernadette spends much of her time on a computer in an Airstream trailer in the yard.[199] In the nested isolation of this trailer, she exchanges emails with 'Manjula' of 'Delhi Virtual Assistants International', outsourcing tasks entailing social interaction.[200] She also spends a lot of time 'ordering shit off the Internet'.[201] Online services, that is, play a similar role to the role played by the servant Zakhar in *Oblomov*. Whilst Oblomov employs Zakhar to take care of those tasks that would necessitate crossing his psycho-spatial boundary, Bernadette uses the Internet. Online activity makes Bernadette's self-imposed isolation possible by mediating the boundary of her narratological island.

Relying on mediation's indifference to spatial barriers to secure one's isolation is inevitably a dangerous game. Even non-mediated barriers in *Bernadette* rarely hold. Audrey's son's school-locker is beaten into no longer locking;[202] Strait Gate is riven with 'leaks, strange drafts, and the occasional weed pushing up through the floorboards';[203] Audrey breaks-into Bernadette's yard through a hole in their shared fence.[204] But as Microsoft's culture of secrecy attests, enmeshment makes information barriers even harder to enforce. Microsoft, Bernadette notes, 'is a company built on information', which 'can just walk out the door'.[205] We see this when Bee recalls Elgie 'blab[bing]' a company secret to the family.[206] Bee then 'blab[s] it to [a friend], who blabs it to her Dad, and even though he works at Amazon, he used to work at Microsoft and knows people, who he tells, and Dad hears about it'.[207] Bernadette's choice of verb, then, was pointed; for all of Microsoft's high-tech information systems, it is human mediation that unpicks their barriers. Microsoft's secrets are supposedly islanded, in much the same way that Bernadette is, but enmeshment troubles their isolation. Microsoft allow people to come and go, and find that information comes and goes with them. Online shopping and emailing Manjula, Bernadette allows information to come and go, and soon finds that people come and go with it.

Bernadette's narratological island, that is, collapses due to the enmeshment of the online transactions that sustain it with the offline lives of those with whom she transacts. Manjula, after all, is not an online entity. In fact, midway through the text, 'Manjula' is revealed as a cabal of cyber-criminals

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[197] Semple, *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* (London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 2019), p. 82.
[198] Semple, p. 25.
[199] Semple, p. 9.
[200] Semple, p. 7-9.
[201] Semple, p. 119.
[202] Semple, pp. 56-7.
[203] Semple, p. 88.
[204] Semple, p. 50.
[205] Semple, p. 121.
[206] Semple, p. 68.
[207] Semple, p. 68.

looking to defraud Bernadette. From her airstream, Bernadette gives over control of Elgie's airline miles, which the gang then use in an intercepted attempt to fly to Seattle. The entailed break-in and breaching of Bernadette's narratological island is thwarted by the FBI. Nevertheless, the fallout leads to Bernadette's boundaries being breached at once by an FBI agent investigating the 'Manjula' case, a local detective, a K9 team, a psychiatrist looking to stage an intervention, and Elgie's administrative assistant.[208] Just as people walk information straight out of Microsoft's door, information walks people straight in through Bernadette's. Bernadette's isolation relies on the capability of online mediation to transcend spatial barriers, but the enmeshment of on- and offline life means this leaves her barriers vulnerable to being breached materially. Bernadette's mistake is failing to see the offline life on the other side of her online interactions. In doing so, she fails to recognise that enmeshment cannot be controlled and guaranteed to work only in service of spatial isolation.

But what of texts wherein the islanding is entirely constituted by online activity? In the opening of *no one*, Lockwood's narrator is so immersed in online discourse that 'she had no idea where she ended and the rest of the crowd began'.[209] Beyond straightforward online interaction, this de-individuation is founded in a shared attention, moving 'like the shine on a school of fish'.[210] As one, Lockwood's community sifts through 'blizzard of everything':

> Close-ups of nail art, a pebble from outer space, a tarantula's compound eyes, a storm like canned peaches on the surface of Jupiter, Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*, a chihuahua perched on a man's erection, a garage door spray-painted with the words STOP! DON'T EMAIL MY WIFE![211]

It is notable here, and throughout the novel, that discussions taking place online tend to avoid personal topics in favour of culturally shared experiences. To be within the portal is to relinquish the boundaries of the self, and attend only to shared, superficial topics. Individuality is exchanged for community and communal experience. For Lockwood's narrator, this space of communal experience functions in the same way as a narratological island.

Of course, Lockwood's narrator is not restrained in the same way as a robinsonade or gothic protagonist. But like Alice, she finds her attention hijacked by online activity. Trapped under 'an avalanche of details[…] the world pressing closer and closer', she feels the 'spiderweb of human connection grown

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[208] Semple, pp. 198-209.
[209] Lockwood, p. 11.
[210] Lockwood, p. 9.
[211] Lockwood, p. 3.

so thick it was almost a shimmering and solid silk'.[212] Elsewhere, she describes 'a wall of swimming red' flame, the walls of a womb,[213] or a set of doors that 'shut fast behind you'.[214] When 'locked in' by 'the metastasis of the word *next*, the word *more*', she relies on her husband to break her out.[215] But there are times in which speaking 'softly, tentatively', he must repeat himself 'until she shifted her blank gaze up to him'.[216] In more extreme cases, 'she would twist away and [figuratively] kick him in the nuts, screaming, "My whole *life* is in there!"'.[217] With her attention so drawn to the culturally shared but emotionally shallow experiences that constitute the interior of her narratological island, Lockwood's narrator cannot attend to her immediate spatial surroundings. But this boundary does not divide only on- and offline experience. In obstructing the narrator's ability to attend to her immediate spatial setting, this mediational boundary also comes between her and those who people it. The shallow, communal experience that makes up the interior of her narratological island opposes deep, personal connection with family on its exterior.

Accordingly, the turning point in both the novel and the narrator's informational cocooning arrives as an experience as emotionally intense as it is uncommon. The narrator's niece is diagnosed with Proteus syndrome; a condition effecting fewer than one in one-million which, she notes, had never before been diagnosed *in utero*.[218] Impossible to assimilate into the network of collective experience that constitutes her narratological island, this personal tragedy demands that her attention return to the world beyond the screen. Falling 'heavily out of the broad warm us', she returns to Ohio, reinvesting attention into her spatial surroundings in the place where the portal first allowed her to transcend them.[219] But the boundary works both ways. Placing a palm on 'the membrane of a white hospital wall' in the maternity ward – the spatial heart of her family's experience – she 'feel[s] the thump of the life that went on without her'.[220] Despite sensing 'the hugeness of the arguments', she feels that 'she was no longer in that body'.[221] Just as her husband was on the outside of the portal, the portal is now on the outside of a private, emotional experience shared with family. Post-Internet lives are an irresolvable mesh of on- and offline events and relationships that cannot be kept from responding to one another. And there are yet offline experiences that can draw us from online islanding.

The narratological island has not outlived its usefulness. Having persisted in the robinsonade, the gothic, the realist gothic, the realist, the modernist, and so on, it persists in the post-Internet novel. But just as in the modernist novel it was often put into conversation with the islanding function of internal monologue,

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[212] Lockwood, p. 8.
[213] Lockwood, p. 75.
[214] Lockwood, p. 28.
[215] Lockwood, p. 21.
[216] Lockwood, p. 13.
[217] Lockwood, p. 59.
[218] Lockwood, p. 137.
[219] Lockwood, p. 120.
[220] Lockwood, p. 151.
[221] Lockwood, p. 151.

it is now put into conversation with the attentional islanding of online behaviours. Our post-Internet social lives are meshes of on- and offline behaviours. Post-Internet isolation accordingly is likewise, and so is its writing. The offline trope of the narratological island is thus meshed with the online trope of attentional islanding in many post-Internet narratives. This is the case with *Sympathy*. But even in texts that do not feature both of these tropes, the enmeshment of on- and offline behaviours plays a central role. In *Bernadette*, the narratological island is unpicked through such enmeshment, and in *no one*, the same can be said of attentional islanding. Whilst the narratological island continues to be relevant to the narration of post-Internet isolation, then, it seemingly can no longer serve its islanding function without complication. Since *Robinson Crusoe* and the novel's formative period, the narratological island has been the core structural trope around which isolation narratives have been constructed. It is now a form among others; still salient, but, like the offline social of which it was born, negotiated with its online equivalent.

Chapter 5 The *Flâneur*, the Absentminded *Flâneur*, the Absent *Flâneur*: Journeys in the Modernist and the Post-Internet Urban Novel

5.1 Introduction

In *Modernism 1890-1930* (1986), Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane find that '[t]here has always been a close association between literature and cities'.[1] After all, the city is home to our cultural institutions and the locus of modern economy – a place to meet, converse and collaborate with other artists, get published, and make money.[2] As well, or perhaps because of these practicalities, '[t]he push and pull of the city, its attraction and repulsion, have provided themes and attitudes that run deep in literature, where[…] the city has come to seem the very analogue of form – for Pope and Johnson, Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky, Dickens and Joyce, Eliot and Pound'.[3] Several of these have written what we might call urban novels. A slippery and capacious term this may be, but the definition offered by Lieven Ameel in his contribution to *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017) affords much epistemic utility. For Ameel, a novel 'cease[s] to be a text merely set in a city', becomes a 'fully-fledged city novel' when:[4]

> the urban environment does not act as a mere setting – [but as] a presence that exerts its influence on all elements of the narrative. It enables the plot to develop, the protagonist to reach his/her destiny, the language of the novel to take shape. Plot, character, and language in their turn reveal and fulfil the potential of the city.[5]

The urban novel as I approach it in this chapter, then, is a fictional genre wherein urban space plays an agential role. It reflects, reiterates and engages urbanity, and contemporary discourses thereon.

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[1] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 96-104 (p. 96).
[2] Bradbury, p. 96.
[3] Bradbury, p. 97.
[4] Lieven Ameel, 'The city novel: measuring referential, spatial, linguistic and temporal distances', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 233-41 (p. 234).
[5] Ameel, p. 239.

Ameel's definition of the urban novel allows us to bring together texts as far-flung as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011); Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963); John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and Paul Aster's *New York Trilogy* (1987). In doing so, we can chart the development of tropes, structures and typical characters through the history of urban literature. But this affords only half the picture. The other half comes in seeing the operation of difference across such continuity. Whilst the city is ever-present in literature, write Bradbury and McFarlane, its character shifts through ages of novelistic history. First, 'in much realist art the city is the emancipating frontier, the point of transition into hopeful possibilities'.[6] Then, 'in much naturalism it is a vast system both throbbing with and passing beyond human will, a jungle, abyss or war'.[7] Finally, in the modernist texts to which their work attends, 'it is the environment of personal consciousness, flickering impressions, Baudelaire's city of crowds, Dostoyevsky's encounters from the underground, Corbière's (and Eliot's) *mélange adultere du tout* (adulterous mixture of everything)'.[8] In this chapter, I am interested in the legacy of the modernist city. In particular, I am interested in its status as the seat of modern consciousness. The modernist urban novel, I suggest, is particularly interested in how city-life was reshaping contemporary attentional processes. And its post-Internet equivalent shows these processes being reformed once again – this time by Internet use. Concern with how technologised lifestyle changes renovate contemporary attentional processes unites contemporary urban novels with their modernist predecessors.

To speak of modernism is often to speak of urbanity in literature and *vice versa*. As Bradbury and McFarlane insist, '[i]n many respects the literature of experimental modernism which emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century and developed into the [twentieth] was an art of cities'.[9] This is at least partly, they add, 'because the modern artist, like his fellow men, has been caught up in the spirit of the modern city, which is itself the spirit of a modern technological society'.[10] This was a spirit of change and growth – both at rapid pace. Cities were 'foci of migration from the countryside, places of population growth, new psychic stresses, new technologies and styles'.[11] As Carolin Duttlinger notes in *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature, Thought and Culture* (2022), the 'unprecedented social change' taking place in cities was 'confusing and overwhelming' for many.[12] This was 'an ever more complex world, where concentration is vital and yet increasingly elusive'.[13] Compared to the estate or village, the city was a complex and aggressive stimulatory environment wherein the mind 'was perpetually stimulated and

[6] Bradbury, pp. 99-100.
[7] Bradbury, p. 100.
[8] Bradbury, p. 100.
[9] Bradbury, p. 96.
[10] Bradbury, p. 97.
[11] Bradbury, p. 98.
[12] Carolin Duttlinger, *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature, Thought and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) p. 4.
[13] Duttlinger, p. 14.

dispersed – and in turn craved more stimulation'.[14] It was a site demanding new ways of attending to the world. And this perhaps accounts for the modernist urban novel's foregrounding questions of subjectivity, consciousness, and experience.

Modernist writers were engaging with what Jonathan Crary in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (2001) calls 'a generalised crisis in perception' beginning in the late nineteenth century.[15] Crary highlights attention's status as a 'major issue' in the work of 'Gustav Fechner, William Wundt, Titchener, Theodor Lipps, Carl Stumpf, Oswald Kulpe, Ernst Mach, William James', likewise 'J-M Charcot, Alfred Binet, and Theodule Ribot', and throughout and beyond the 1890s, Sigmund Freud.[16] Through these works, 'attention became a decisively new kind of problem'; a historicised faculty which 'became inseparable from philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic investigations of perception'.[17] But attention, writes Alice Bennett in *Contemporary Fictions of Attention: Reading and Distraction in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), is slippery. It is 'a kind of blind spot; it is impossible to perceive directly, but is also the means for perceiving at all'.[18] Writing in a post-Internet context, Bennett identifies '[n]arrative fiction, with its longstanding conventions for depicting interior states, [as] almost uniquely placed among artforms in its ability to convey the complexities of characters' attention'.[19] The conventions Bennett mentions here, associated with the mimesis of consciousness, are modernist conventions. They emerge from the milieux outlined by Crary above. Narrative fiction is particularly able to address changes in attentional processes, then, because modernist writers developed practices for approaching the changes urban living wrought on early twentieth century attentional processes.

What has been called the inner turn of modernist literature can then be cast as an effort to capture new processes of attention just as they were emerging. Narration of the psychological interior is alive to the processes of attention by which external stimuli are parsed, and the patterns of thought that they stimulate. Since these new modes of attention belong to city life, they provide a causal link between urbanisation and modernism's inner turn. And to best explore modernised attention, modernist writers narrated a mode of engagement likewise belonging to modern city life: *flânerie*. Popularised in Baudelaire's essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), the *flâneur* can be tricky to pin down. Writing in praise of Parisian painter Constantin Guys, Baudelaire celebrates the 'passionate spectator' for whom it is 'an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude' that is urban space.[20] Later, drawing the *flâneur* out from Baudelaire's poetry in his starts on the *Arcades Project* (1982), Walter Benjamin describes one who

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[14] Duttlinger, p. 2.
[15] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), p. 2.
[16] Crary, p. 23.
[17] Crary, p. 5.
[18] Alice Bennett, *Contemporary Fictions of Attention: Reading and Distraction in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018), p. 17.
[19] Bennett, p. 11.
[20] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1970), pp.1-40 (p. 9).

'goes botanizing on the asphalt',[21] for whom '[t]he street becomes a dwelling',[22] and an 'unfailing remedy for[…] boredom'.[23] To narrate, as modernists often do, the inner life of the *flâneur* is then to capture the processes by which urban space is encountered by, incorporated into, and responded to by its inhabitants. The *flâneur*, if he has no other features, must travel round and pay attention to urban space.

The *flâneur* is then a vital trope that emerges out of modernism's commitment to rearticulating contemporary attentional processes. But as Michael North points out in a *New Literary History* article called 'The Afterlife of Modernism' (2019), modernity is a mobile thing. As North puts it, '[t]hey were modern then, and, though they are long gone, we are just as modern now'.[24] Modernism persists into the early twenty-first century, and is challenged to remain interested in ceaseless modernisation without being 'reduced to the default designation for whatever seems to be happening right now'.[25] Critics must address modernism's persistence without losing sight of 'the contemporary moment [as] culturally and politically distinct from anything in the past'.[26] One such critical effort comes from David James and Urmila Seshagiri's article 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution' (2014). James and Seshagiri point to 'a significant body of late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature [that] consciously responds to modernist impulses, methods, and commitments'.[27] These writers 'readopt modernism as a flexible posture rather than a fixed period[…] an epithet for evaluating expressive reactions to modernity', whilst 'retaining the first half of the twentieth century as the most aesthetically meaningful timeframe for the modernist arts'.[28] In this way, modernism coheres as 'both a moment and a movement, as an era with which they imaginatively reconnect and as an ethos that they formally refine'.[29] In *Modernist Futures* (2012), James identifies 'a sincere rather than a self-parodic dedication to rendering perceptual experience' as a primary criterion for defining a metamodernist work.[30] But post-Internet attentional processes place metamodernist writers into a double-bind as regards such rendering. These processes often translate into novels whose form is characterised by brevity, sparsity; a reduction that excludes the prosaic, structural and connective. The meanderings of *flânerie* are incompatible with such formal adroitness. To cleave to modernism's aesthetically meaningful tropes, here, is to betray their underlying posture and ethos, and *vice versa*.

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[21] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 36.
[22] Benjamin, p. 37.
[23] Benjamin, p. 37.
[24] Michael North, 'The Afterlife of Modernism', *New Literary History*, 50.1 (2019), pp. 91-112 (p. 94).
[25] North, p. 92.
[26] North, p. 93.
[27] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution', *PMLA*, 129.1 (2014), pp. 88-100 (p. 88).
[28] James and Seshagiri, pp. 90-1.
[29] James and Seshagiri, p. 93.
[30] James, *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 13.

Urban life is no longer in the foreground of debates on attention and distraction. As Crary noted at the turn of the twenty-first century, '[f]or the last 100 years perceptual modalities have been and continue to be in a state of perpetual transformation, or, some might claim, a state of crisis'.[31] This transformation continues – part of the unending process of modernisation. Only now it is the post-Internet infosystem that is most often associated with a crisis of attention. In *Life After New Media* (2012), Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska find that 'our relationality and entanglement with nonhuman entities continues to intensify with the ever more corporeal, ever more intimate dispersal of media and technologies into our biological and social lives'.[32] In a more immediate sense, writes Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows* (2010), the online brain finds itself, like the urban brain before it, 'overloaded by stimuli'.[33] For Carr's post-Internet subject, 'attention splinters, thinking becomes superficial, and memory suffers'.[34] The city now must compete with another powerful renovator of attentional processes. And as Manual Castells suggests in his preface to the 2010 edition of *The Rise of the Networked Society* (1996), 'the intellectual categories that we use to understand what happens around us have been coined in different circumstances, and can hardly grasp what is new by referring to the past'.[35] The *flâneur* as he appears in modernist writing is one such outmoded tool. As such, I argue in this chapter that changes in the textual function of the *flâneur* are the primary shifts that post-Internet mediation has wrought on the urban novel, in which *flânerie* is a key convention. What becomes of a figure that emerged to engage the attentional restructuring of urban modernisation, amidst the attentional restructuring of post-Internet modernisation?

To answer this question, I first explore the interrelation of *flânerie*, the inner turn, and the urbanisation of attention. A wealth of critical material covers these topics, and any chapter-scale overview cannot be comprehensive. Many will find Debord's work missing, or Durkheim's, or Marx's and Engels', both separately and together. Many will miss a more sustained engagement with Benjamin. All this furthers my suggestion that the early twentieth century was preoccupied with the influence of urban space on modes of perception. But this section of the chapter is indicative, rather than comprehensive. It lays the ground for readings of two modernist texts that narrate much *flânerie*. Both James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) are novels whose narrative style mimics consciousness, and which centre largely on the urban journeying of relatively ordinary people. Both are limited to the span of one day, neither of which are particularly momentous for the protagonist. Their general lack of plot and short timespan allows them to attend to the granular details of urban life, and both do so through narration of *flânerie*. In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom navigate Dublin, and in *Mrs Dalloway* the titular Clarissa, her daughter Elizabeth and former-flame Peter Walsh are among a troupe exploring London. Reading these novels, I outline the *flâneur*'s usefulness in exploring the urbanisation of attention in the modernist urban novel.

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[31] Crary, p. 13.
[32] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), p. xv.
[33] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (London: Atlantic Books, 2020), p. x.
[34] Carr, p. x.
[35] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Networked Society* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. xvii.

But what happens when the attentional forces of urbanisation meet their post-Internet counterparts? The answer, as noted, depends on whether we borrow modernism's tropes or the interest in the formal mimesis of contemporary attention that underwrites them. In the next section of this chapter, I read two texts that persist in engaging with the trope of *flânerie*. Neither Sally Rooney's *Intermezzo* (2024), nor Andrew O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road* (2024) adopt the limited timescale of their predecessors. Nevertheless, they feature much movement through city space. In the first, brothers Ivan and Peter Koubek circulate Dublin, and in the second, Campbell Flynn is at the centre of a cast of would-be London *flâneurs*. In both cases, the smartphone distracts from *flânerie*, and from narration of urban surroundings. Cleaving to modernism's tropes in the post-Internet urban novel, I suggest, yields a distracted *flâneur*. But adhering instead to the underlying ethos of marrying form and contemporary attentional processes often excludes the *flâneur* altogether. The fragmentation of attention observed by Carr and others finds its literary counterpart in novels formed of short, disparate paragraphs. Reading Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020) and Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists* (2024), I show that this mimesis of post-Internet attention tends to register the city as a series of discrete locations. Each fragment has its place, and journeys between places seemingly happen between fragments, beyond narration. These novels narrate a series of moments wherein attention is captured, and as I will demonstrate in my readings of distracted *flânerie*, attention is rarely now captured by one's urban surroundings. In such novels, then, the distracted ultimately becomes the absent *flâneur*.

5.2 Modern cities; modern experiences; modern tropes; modernist literature

In *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams describes an experience of the modern city. One stands among 'the great buildings of civilisation; the meeting places; the libraries and theatres, the towers and domes; and often more moving than these, the houses, the streets, the press and excitement of so many people, with so many purposes'.[36] One feels a certain 'pulse', an 'identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light'.[37] But one feels also 'the chaos of the metro and the traffic jam; the monotony of the ranks of houses; the aching press of strange crowds'.[38] Williams' modern city is a place of order and disorder, high-culture and workaday life, variety and monotony, an irrepressible human energy that seems now to draw us in, now to repel us. And Williams is quick to highlight, moreover, the rapidity with which this multifarious, contradictory environment became culturally central. In the middle of the nineteenth century, England's urban population first exceeds its rural – the urban makes-up three-quarters of the whole by the century's end, and this at a time when 'the population as a whole was

[36] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 5.
[37] Williams, p. 5.
[38] Williams, p. 5.

dramatically increasing'.[39] A population of nine million 'had doubled by 1851, and doubled again by 1911'.[40] In the early twentieth century, urban life was as shocking as it was novel; the rural world of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot persisted in living memory.

Writers of literature required new tropes, forms, and figures with which they could capture this rapid restructuring of society, culture and life. Of these, two are particularly relevant to the discussion of the urban novel. The first, and the most apparently relevant, is the *flâneur* – the archetypical wanderer of urban space. The *flâneur* is the urban observer, roaming the streets and, as Baudelaire has it in his essay on Guys, 'rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life'.[41] The second, whose relevance to the urban novel will perhaps need more attention, is the so-called 'inner turn' of modernist literature. Eschewing the external, top-down narration of earlier writers, many in the early twentieth century moved the source of narration to the psychological interior. Many of the more notable novels of this type are set primarily in cities, and are rife with instances of *flânerie*. In fact, both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, likely the two most often cited examples of the inner turn novel, are structured largely around urban perambulation. This, I suggest, is no mere coincidence. The city had rapidly ascended to a deterministic position at the macro scales of the human; culture, history, economy, politics. But in the early twentieth century, its impact on the micro scales of experience, subject-formation and attention was being uncovered. Below, I show that novels like *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* adopt the perspective of the *flâneur* to engage in pressing discourses on how urban space influences, in particular, attentional processes.

To do so, I will first need to introduce the *flâneur* in clearer detail, then modernism's inward turn. In 'The Painter of Modern Life', Baudelaire offers Guys as the quintessential *flâneur*. The *flâneur*, says Baudelaire:

> marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city – landscapes of stone, caresses by the mist or buffeted by the sun. He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed – in a word, he delights in universal life.[42]

Surrounded by 'the ebb and flow' of urban life, 'in the midst of the fugitive and infinite', the *flâneur* enjoys 'to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet remain hidden from the world'.[43] This play of

[39] Williams, p. 217.
[40] Williams, p. 217.
[41] Baudelaire, p. 7.
[42] Baudelaire, p. 11.
[43] Baudelaire, p. 9.

presence and anonymity, centring and periphery is only possible amongst the crowds of the city. In this sense, the *flâneur*'s relation to the urban scene is riven with contradiction. The *flâneur* moves into the crowd in order to observe it – he enters the crowd as a means of detaching himself from it.

Half a century on from Baudelaire's introduction to the *flâneur*, Walter Benjamin revisits the figure. In Benjamin's text, which inaugurates *flânerie* as a definitive process of modernity and critical literature thereon, Baudelaire displaces Guys as muse. Benjamin's work historicises the *flâneur* in a manner not attempted by Baudelaire. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* emerges at a time wherein '[p]eople had to adapt themselves to a new and rather strange situation, one that is peculiar to big cities'.[44] The enjoyment of urbanity that Baudelaire found in Guys is recast in Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire as 'the opiate that was available to give relief to men so condemned [to live in Paris], and only to them'.[45] But this opiate was not to last. In Baudelaire's poetry, writes Benjamin, 'the gaze of the *flâneur*[…] still bestowed a conciliatory gleam over the growing destitution of men in the great city'.[46] But the *flâneur's* conciliation remains possible in this period only because the city 'had [not] yet overwhelmed him'.[47] As Williams notes above, cities had exploded in population by Banjamin's time of writing. Moreover, writes Benjamin, 'technology ha[d] subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training'.[48] Whilst one might once have 'cast glances in all directions' as one fancied, Benjamin's contemporary 'pedestrians are obliged to do so in order to keep abreast of traffic signals'.[49] Benjamin's city is a new city, demanding new patterns of attention, and its *flâneur* accordingly is a new *flâneur*.

To understand why changes to urban space demanded a new *flâneur*, one must first understand the relationship between *flânerie* in literature and urban experience. The status of the *flâneur* as a historically specific cultural figure is curious. The possibility of the *flâneur*'s strolling observation of the city is as old as the city itself; it far precedes the prominence of *flânerie* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact, as Williams notes, 'perception of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets'.[50] Williams cites works from Blake, then Wordsworth, then Dickens, here, but notes that none of these three capture the experiential qualities of urban space in the same way as writers of *flânerie*. The *flâneur* reaches cultural prominence when '[t]he forces of [urban] action have become internal'.[51] The 'profound change' thus brought to the trope of urban walking is that 'there is no longer a city, there is only a man walking through it'.[52] This is Baudelaire's 'kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness', or 'mirror vast as the crowd itself'.[53] The *flâneur* is not simply a means of describing urban space. The *flâneur* collapses city and subject into Williams'

[44] Benjamin, p. 37.
[45] Benjamin, p. 55.
[46] Benjamin, p. 170.
[47] Benjamin, p. 170.
[48] Benjamin, p. 132.
[49] Benjamin, p. 132.
[50] Williams, p. 243.
[51] Williams, p. 243.
[52] Williams, p. 243.
[53] Baudelaire, p. 9.

composite figure of the man walking through the city. The *flâneur* is *about* urban space in as much as the *flâneur* and his modes of perception are *of* urban space. The narration of *flânerie* is the narration of urban experience, inclusive of attention.

This accounts for the ascent of the *flâneur* in the late nineteenth century. The *flâneur* emerges as a figure at the same time that questions of attention were coming to the fore in discourse over the city. For Duttlinger, Baudelaire's *flânerie* 'not only coincides with a cultural crisis of attention but embodies the situation, written as it is by one who shares his reader's experience of mental fragmentation'.[54] Likewise, in *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2003), Deborah Parsons finds that the *flâneur* 'enabled writers to engage with contemporary concerns with the means available to the mind to adapt to the conditions of the modern environment'.[55] For both Duttlinger and Parsons, and also for Benjamin and Crary, Georg Simmel is the thinker to whom we must turn to understand the new perceptual modes necessitated by urban environments. In *City and Modernity in Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin* (2022), Vincenzo Mele shows that whilst earlier urban sociologists foregrounded the grand structures, patterns and institutions of the city, Simmel examined the urban 'truly and fundamentally [as] a lived experience'.[56] In Simmel's sociology, that is, much like in Baudelaire's poetry, there is no city, only the individual walking through it. Urban space, for Simmel, was fundamental in a restructuring of attentional and subjective processes. In being so, it instituted a distinctly modern 'metropolitan type of individuality'.[57] The *flâneur* is precisely such a metropolitan individual.

For Simmel, the key to understanding the metropolitan individual comes in attending to the city as a novel stimulatory environment. Metropolitan individuality, he suggests, has its 'psychological basis' in 'the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli[…] the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions'.[58] Under such conditions, the metropolitan individual adopts a standoffish, *blasé* attitude which, for Simmel, has been 'unconditionally reserved to the metropolis' more than any other 'psychic phenomenon'.[59] The continual assault of fresh stimuli common to urban space diverts one's nerves 'so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent; and if one remains in the same milieu they have no time to gather new strength'.[60] The *blasé* disposition is a 'refusal to react to [attentional] stimulation' in which urbanites find 'the last possibility of

[54] Duttlinger, p. 303.
[55] Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 31.
[56] Vincenzo Mele, *City and Modernity in Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 135.
[57] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and David Frisby (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 174-86 (p. 175).
[58] Simmel, p. 175.
[59] Simmel, p. 178.
[60] Simmel, p. 178.

accommodating to the contents and forms of metropolitan life'.[61] All things 'appear to the *blasé* person in an evenly flat and gray tone; no object deserves preference over any other'.[62] It is a radical psychical retreat; total attentional disengagement from one's surroundings. It is also, much like the figure of the *flâneur*, a dialectical entanglement of subject and city.

The narration of *flânerie* can be rethought as capturing the process of becoming-with through which the metropolitan individual emerges. For Parsons, the *flâneur* and the Simmelian urbanite are united by 'stimulated yet burdened senses, [a] need for the city experience yet desire to be surrounded by the closeness of the crowd whilst remaining mentally aloof from it'.[63] *Flânerie*, she suggests, is a response to the challenges of Simmel's urban overwhelm. Drawing from Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, Parsons suggests that the *flâneur's* physiognomic process of caricature and categorization is an effort to 'familiariz[e] the urban crowd into a coherent, readable, and thus harmless phenomenon'.[64] Like the *blasé* disposition, it resists overwhelming difference. As Robert T. Tally Jr. points out in *Spatiality* (2013), then, wherever we find the narrative figure of the *flâneur*, '"knowing" gives way to different types of experience'.[65] The city of the *flâneur* 'is not really a world to be known, but a plenum to be experienced in various, often unsettling ways'; 'the images produced are likely to be both strange and beautiful, but perhaps they do not offer a clear basis for knowledge of the city'.[66] Arriving at an exchange of external, objective knowledge, for internal, subjective experience, we find that the *flâneur* has walked us to a much broader turn in literary history. Below, I will discuss the inner turn of modernist literature, then conclude this section by ascertaining what the narration of *flânerie* tells us about urban experience in *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*. Thereafter, we follow the *flâneur* into the post-Internet urban novel.

Depending on one's perspective, the *flâneur* either prefigures or forms part of a generalised turn in literature toward the narration of experience. Recall the speed with which urban life became the primary mode of human experience. In a short space of time, writes Williams, 'generations of men and women learned to see in new ways'[67] that were better suited to the modern city in 'its miscellaneity, its crowded variety, its randomness of movement'.[68] In *Theorists of the Modern Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf* (2007), Deborah Parsons explains that 'the sense of living in a new age was acute, and what had become the conventional forms of fiction seemed inappropriate, even hostile, to the depiction of their contemporary moment'.[69] The novel, in particular, had reached a 'moment of crisis'.[70] In *The Psychological*

[61] Simmel, p. 179.
[62] Simmel, p. 178.
[63] Parsons *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 30.
[64] Parsons *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 23.
[65] Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 99.
[66] Tally Jr., p. 98.
[67] Williams, pp. 242-3.
[68] Williams, p. 154.
[69] Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.
[70] Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel*, p. 15.

Novel, 1900-1955 (1961), Leon Edel diagnosis the twentieth as a century of 'deeper and more searching *inwardness*'; William James' psychology, Henri Bergson's zoetic philosophy of duration, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis.[71] The novel would only resolve the formal crisis into which it had fallen by attending to this cultural preoccupation with inner life. It is for this reason, suggests Edel, that 'inward turning to convey the flow of mental experience' becomes 'the most characteristic aspect of twentieth century fiction'.[72] Interior monologue, the psychological novel, the stream-of-consciousness; all of these, I suggest, emerge at least in some part to respond to the rapid restructuring of attention observed by Williams.

It is for this reason that novelists deploying such techniques are so often found to be preoccupied with urban space. In both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, a typical plot is evicted from the structure of the text to make room for granular attention to the details of a day in the city. As Richard Lehan observes in *The City in Literature: An intellectual and cultural history* (1998), 'both the modernist self and impressionism were urban phenomena'.[73] In fact, impressionism for Lehan is an urban phenomenon because the modernist self is also. Impressionistic psychological novels 'depicted the world through the subjective eyes of the city dweller, reacting to the external impressions with the overstrained nerves of the technical man or woman'.[74] Here, Lehan seems to suggest that these novels are invariably novels of *flânerie* and metropolitan individualism. And whilst this might often be the case, one cannot forget the rurality of William Faulker's novels, or, in fact, the spatial vagueness of Samual Beckett's. Nevertheless, 'a new kind of literature was rapidly developing', says Williams, 'in some real proportion to the growth of large cities', and the former took the latter as its muse more often than not.[75]

In any case, these modernist writers differed from their literary predecessors in that they sought to apprehend life from the inside. As we have seen, though, this same preoccupation with the psychological interior has the opposite effect when situating them among their contemporaries in non-literary fields. And the term inner turn, it should be noted, is perhaps a slight misnomer. Whilst the likes of Woolf and Joyce attended to the interior, their focus on narrating impressions is distinctly turned outward. If the narrative voice of the modernist text amounts to the writing of an emergent subjectivity, the subject in question emerges by attending to its surroundings. The *flâneur* in the literary climate of the inner turn thus fulfils a clear and identifiable function in capturing the emergence of the subject that attends to the city. Writing *flânerie* is writing the processes through which the metropolitan individual develops in their urban surroundings. But as Duttlinger notes, '[c]omplaints about the growing mental strain of modernisation were widespread, almost universal' in the early twentieth century, but 'by no means uniform'.[76] Rather, early twentieth century scholars and commentariats brought preconceptions on class, race and gender to a 'debate [that] highlighted and heightened existing social divisions'.[77] Modernist writers did not shy away

[71] Leon Edel, *The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950* (London: Rupert Hard-Davis, 1961), p. 28.
[72] Edel, p. ix.
[73] Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 78.
[74] Lehan, p. 78.
[75] Williams, p. 217.
[76] Duttlinger, p. 51.
[77] Duttlinger, p. 51.

from this debate. In the conclusion to this section, I will show how narrating *flânerie* allowed not only for engaging with the general attentional conditions of the city, but also with the ways in which said conditions were inflected by social and identity-related factors.

As mentioned above, discussions of the inner turn in literature are almost inevitably drawn to *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*. And these are texts, too, which one cannot discuss without discussing their relation to the urban spaces in which they are set. In *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (1996), Gillian Beer finds that '[i]n *Mrs Dalloway*, [Woolf] sets out the topography of London as precisely as does Defoe whom she so much admired'.[78] But Woolf's mapping of London has little in common with Defoe's in *Moll Flanders* (1722), or the later Crusoe works; much the same is true of Joyce's mapping of Dublin. We might say of both, as Williams does of *Ulysses*, that new, urban ways of being had been adopted 'into the deep substance of literary method itself'.[79] The text becomes 'intense and fragmentary, subjective primarily, yet in the very form of its subjectivity including others who are now with the buildings, the noises, the sights and smells of the city, parts of [a] single and racing consciousness'.[80] In both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, *flânerie* is a conduit for this chiasmic relation between city and subject. But one must be careful, when attending to this chiasmus, not to suggest that all urban experiences are alike. Through their writing of *flânerie*, Woolf and Joyce show that the emergence of metropolitan individuality is inevitably inflected by questions of identity, as well as personality and past experience.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, one can discern much about Clarissa's character from the narration of her early *flânerie*. In *Moving Through Modernity: Space and geography in modernism* (2009), Andrew Thacker finds her to be 'haunted by "a kind of unease" at being overwhelmed by the immensity of city life'.[81] He singles out the following passage, early in Clarissa's flower-shopping journey:

> She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone[…] to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.[82]

In Thacker's reading of this passage, Clarissa's description of the city as 'absolutely absorbing' indexes a palpable embroiling of subject in city.[83] That 'she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that' amounts

[78] Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 52.
[79] Williams, pp. 242-3.
[80] Williams, pp. 242-3.
[81] Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: space and geography in modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 159.
[82] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 9.
[83] Thacker, p. 159.

to her 'doubt[ing] her own identity' amidst the stimulative overwhelm of urban space.[84] But whilst *Flânerie*, for Clarissa, can present 'unease and danger', it is ultimately a 'strangely comforting' deferral of identity.[85] It therefore prefigures her mingling of marital joy with the 'sense of being herself invisible[…] being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore, [but] Mrs. Richard Dalloway'.[86] It provides the reader the first sense of what she calls 'an emptiness at the heart of life; an attic room' around which one might argue the novel's flowers, gloves, talking, lunches and party revolve – not to mention its tangles of memory and feeling.[87] Clarissa's welcoming the chiasmus of *flânerie* heralds her uneasiness with this emptiness.

The *flâneur*, then, is not a neutral conduit for observations of urban space, but a living individual or emulation thereof, freighted with social identity and character. When Stephen Dedalus walks around Dublin, says Lehan, 'every place becomes an aesthetic object or text; his impressions are controlled by his sense of art and beauty'.[88] This is not always for the better. Watching a lapidary at work, Stephen ponders precious stones; 'cold specks of fire, evil lights shining in the darkness. Where fallen archangels flung the stars of their bows'.[89] Then, '[t]he whirr of flapping leathern bands and hum of dynamos from the powerhouse urged Stephen to be on'.[90] In what seems more poetry than private thought, he adopts the conceit of addressing these '[b]eingless beings': 'Stop! Throb always without you and the throb always within'.[91] For Lehan, such aestheticizing ties Dedalus into contemporary discourse on 'the decadent/aesthetic and symbolist experiences' and the impact of French on English literature.[92] If so, it complicates the optimism with which Stephen leaves Dublin for Paris' literary, aesthetic education at the conclusion of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Dedalus returns from the birthplace of *flânerie* with the aestheticizing proclivities of Baudelaire, but Dublin is perhaps too loud, too fast, too industrialised. Clarissa is buoyed by her appreciative openness, but aesthetic interpretation at times depresses Stephen. Both take part in the chiasmic becoming-with of *flânerie*, but their disposition differs along with their biography.

To Clarissa's self-erasure and Dedalus' aestheticizing we might add a third response that will bring us closer to questions over social identity. Early in his day, Bloom 'stood by the nextdoor girl at the counter' of the butchers.[93] It is apparent, as '[h]is eyes rested on her vigorous hips', that he is sexually interested by her.[94] From her hips, he moves to her '[s]trong pair of arms', which he recalls '[w]hacking a carpet on the clothesline'.[95] As he envisions '[t]he way her crooked skirt swings at each whack', Bloom's

[84] Thacker, p. 159.
[85] Thacker, p. 159.
[86] Woolf, p. 11.
[87] Woolf, p. 33.
[88] Lehan, p. 76.
[89] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 311.
[90] Joyce, p. 311.
[91] Joyce, p. 311.
[92] Lehan, p. 76.
[93] Joyce, p. 70.
[94] Joyce, p. 70.
[95] Joyce, p. 70.

sexualisation takes on masochistic overtones.[96] This masochism perhaps sheds some light on his ambiguous relationship with Molly's cuckoldry. Hurrying his business, Bloom hopes '[t]o catch up and walk behind [the nextdoor girl] if she went slowly, behind her moving hams'.[97] But when he leaves, '[n]o sign. Gone'.[98] This encounter, says Thacker, echoes across the day's *flânerie*. Throughout, Bloom engages in 'compensatory libidinal gazes that try to demonstrate his visual power over women'.[99] That these compensatory glances are attempts to recover power seems to speak to a certain uneasiness over his own masochistic preferences. Thacker's broader interpretation, though, finds Bloom resisting 'the vortex of the modern metropolis and the fear of symbolic castration by the female in the city'.[100] In either case, Bloom's *flânerie* is in contact with currents of gendered sexuality that seemingly flow beneath the surface of urban experience. If Bloom emerges in dialect with Dublin, his is a dialectics of resistance, responsive to the emerging female presence in early twentieth century cities.

The *flânerie* of these three characters invariably narrates the emergence of a subject in response to urban surroundings. But in each case, this emergence is inflected by their character and biography, such that each emergence seems governed by a different process. For Clarissa, this is self-erasure; for Dedalus, aesthetic interpretation; for Bloom, sexualised and gendered resistance. The 'Wandering Rocks' section of *Ulysses* is a catalogue of such processes of *flânerie*. Father Conmee's Dublin hosts a public he salutes, blesses and guides;[101] the onelegged sailor's is a challenge to traverse but a propitious site for begging;[102] Tom Kernan's Dublin is a place for militaristic, but also sartorial and reputational competition.[103] In chiasmic *flânerie*, the individual and the city shape one another; no two *flâneurs* are alike. But the reading of Bloom's *flânerie* above shows us that shared, group identities still have a role to play. For Parsons, the expansive and grammatically male figure of the *flâneur* obscures the female experience of the *flâneuse*. Concurrent with the *flâneur's* literary ascent, 'women's access to the metropolis was expanding, both in terms of leisure and employment'.[104] As such, Parsons reminds us, we cannot approach female *flânerie* without accounting for 'women's highly self-conscious awareness of themselves as walkers and observers of the modernist city'.[105] We must attend to 'gendered models of modern urban vision'.[106] And whilst they lie beyond the purview of Parson's study, she would likely agree to add racialised, class- and ability-based.

Before concluding, then, I briefly explore the role of gender in two instances of *flânerie* in *Mrs Dalloway*. First, Elizabeth, whose jaunt up the Strand is coloured always by Parsons' self-awareness. Aware that does so 'in front of everybody', Elizabeth casts a self-critical eye on her boarding of an omnibus.[107]

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[96] Joyce, p. 70.
[97] Joyce, p. 71.
[98] Joyce, p. 72.
[99] Thacker, p. 142.
[100] Thacker, p. 142.
[101] Joyce, pp. 280-8.
[102] Joyce, pp. 288-9.
[103] Joyce, pp. 307-10.
[104] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 43.
[105] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 6.
[106] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 6.
[107] Woolf, p. 148.

She boards 'most competently', but knowing that her unaccompanied presence is notable.[108] She feels watched by voyeurs like Bloom who 'were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies'.[109] Now 'delighted to be free', now imagining herself beautiful and constricted 'sculpture', Elizabeth holds her freedoms in tension with male judgements on her appearance and mobility.[110] Nevertheless, she persists, 'penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business'.[111] She feels herself, then, entering into a male space, within which she travels freely and confidently, but not necessarily welcomely. But the busyness and seriousness of the Strand lead her undeterred appetite toward other new freedoms; 'she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand'.[112] In *flânerie*, Elizabeth works through a tension specific to the gender politics of interwar London. She is becoming-with a city rife with male perception and judgement, but also with new freedoms and promises for women.

Peter Walsh's perambulations provide an important counterpart to Elizabeth's. As Peter leaves Clarissa's house in the morning, says Thacker, he passes through a 'social space devoted to memorials of war, death and Empire, with grand buildings dedicated to public, official life, such as the Treasury and the Foreign Office'.[113] Peter is led to consider 'the great renunciation', which he feels himself to have taken along with the celebrated military figures whose statues line the street.[114] For Thacker, it is masculinity that Peter has relinquished. Peter's decision to then pursue a woman he spots walking past one such statue is accordingly recharacterized. It seems, for Thacker, that Peter's pursuit is an attempt to recapture the masculinity exchanged for a statue that he never received. But in his attempt to 'shrug off' his 'imperial masculinity', or rather de-masculinity, Peter 'only draws upon a different aspect of that same version of masculinity'.[115] Like Bloom, and like those observing Elizabeth, he looks to exert power over a space through the implementation of his gaze. In the context of Thacker's reading, one might say that he attempts a scopic colonisation of the street. Like Elizabeth's, Peter's *flânerie* is incoherent without the context of historically specific gender relations – in his case, these intersect with the declining of Empire. Their *flânerie* evokes a moment of transition; whilst Elizabeth looks for something she will find in the future, Peter searches for something he has lost in the past.

In all the above readings of *flânerie*, characters have come into focus in their engagements with urban surroundings. New modes of being and thinking in urban space are modelled in the narration of such engagement. To narrate *flânerie* is to narrate the processes of ingesting and digesting the urban stimulatory environment. Whilst it is not the only involved process, the process of attention is crucially

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[108] Woolf, p. 148.
[109] Woolf, p. 147.
[110] Woolf, pp. 148-9.
[111] Woolf, pp. 150-1.
[112] Woolf, p. 150.
[113] Thacker, p. 160.
[114] Woolf, p. 56.
[115] Thacker, p. 163.

important; to appear at all in a text mimicking consciousness, stimuli must be noticed and attended to. And there is much to be learned from which stimuli capture a character's attention. Do they attend to their business, or steal sexualising glances at their neighbour? Are their eyes fixed to the floor, or are they looking around at the Strand, bustling with employment? Processes of reflection and consideration have only what has been attended for their materials, but the processes of attention are themselves determined by the urban environment. Attentional processes, then, are curiously both the substrate and the output of urban experience. The impact of the urban stimulatory environment on attentional processes is thus central to *flânerie*, especially when concerned with the mimesis of consciousness. Now, though, the *flâneur* is likely in possession of devices that draw attention away from urban space. The smartphone is a hole into which much attention is pulled; for the *flâneur*, this attention is pulled away from their urban surroundings. In the coming section, I will explore the narration of this new, ever-distracted *flâneur* in post-Internet literature.

5.3 Post-Internet technology and the distracted *flâneur*

Julia Bell opens *Radical Attention* (2020) with a disturbing but telling anecdote:

> San Francisco: a man pulls out a pistol on a crowded train. On the CCTV footage of that afternoon he clearly waves the gun around. Points it across the aisle several times. His fellow passengers are only feet away, but no one notices him. They are all staring, scrolling, texting[…] Jeopardy, chaos, terror are right there, but no one is paying attention.[116]

This situation is, of course, extreme. But it is a crisis in, or of ordinary conditions. The shooting makes the situation abnormal, but it is not unusual for all the attention in a train carriage to be invested in personal devices, rather than the shared space. These passengers, to use the German parlance, are smombies: smartphone-zombies. Drawn always to attend to their smartphone, the smombie finds that '[t]he information rewards [of screen time] supplant sensory attention to the actual physical body in the world'.[117] The word 'screen', Bell reminds us, has an array of definitions.[118] As well as the typical post-Internet interface, it is 'a shield, protection[…] a barrier, a boundary'.[119] As they look down, attending to their screens, the passengers on this San Francisco train are placing another screen between themselves

[116] Julia Bell, *Radical Attention* (London: Peninsula Press, 2020) p. 11.
[117] Bell, p. 74.
[118] Bell, p. 35.
[119] Bell, p. 35.

and their surroundings. In this, they are not uncommon, and this poses a problem for the narration of *flânerie*.

The *flâneur* in literature has responded to the stimulatory overwhelm of urban experience, but urban stimuli are now competing for attention. The city contends, now, with what Bell calls 'a system whose purpose it is to capture our attention'.[120] In *The Attention Economy* (2017), Claudio Celis Bueno explains that in Post-Industrial economies 'in which information and knowledge become central to the valorization process of capital, human attention becomes a scarce and hence increasingly valuable commodity'.[121] Attention is sold to advertisers, but also monitored with 'cybernetic machines and advanced information technologies' to provide 'a constant source of information about [a user's] consumption habits, preferences, trends, lifestyles and so on, which is then utilized to facilitate the constant adjustment of the production of commodities'.[122] In the attention economy, attention slides easily between labour, resource and commodity. As such, it is the target of a high-powered, well-funded, auto-adjusting framework that is incessantly tweaked by many of the smartest people in the world. The haphazard city, whose impact on attentional processes is incidental to its noise and busyness, is not well-equipped to compete. The would-be *flâneur* is now constantly pulled away from attending to their urban surroundings. If the modernist *flâneur* narrated becoming-with the city, its successor captures what it is to become-with the tension between urban surroundings and post-Internet interfaces. By reading Rooney's *Intermezzo* and O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road*, I turn now to the *flâneur* that persists into the post-Internet urban novel. We might consider this figure the distracted *flâneur*.

Before proceeding to discuss the distracted *flâneur*, it is first important to note that not all attention paid to phones in urban space has been, as it were, hijacked. Attention is central to the online economy, and is often captured through the smartphone interface. But often, we read the news, browse social-media, shop for products and watch online videos simply because we would like to. Moreover, Internet usage is part of the pragmatic fibre of our days. We use GPS apps to navigate spaces, urban and otherwise; Post-Fordist working patterns have us checking work emails whilst we commute; the ever-present possibility of contact with our loved ones is often welcome. Bueno's attention economy is useful in understanding the scale of the forces at work, but it should not obscure these other behaviours. Nevertheless, welcome or pragmatic though they may be, these habits still require that we turn away from our urban surroundings. The coming readings cannot hope to cover every way in which post-Internet technology distracts us from our surroundings, but to do so would not be particularly useful to the matter at hand. It is the combined scale of these distractions that counts. So, when a character texts or calls a friend, browses the Internet or uses a navigational app, it is the underlying process shifting attention from urban space to the smartphone in

[120] Bell, p. 44.
[121] Claudio Celis Bueno, *The Attention Economy: Labour Time and Power in Cognitive Capitalism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), p. 13.
[122] Bueno, p. 96.

which I am interested. Each of these individual distractions is then to be taken as synecdochally related to the attentional forces acting on the post-Internet *flâneur*.

With that said, I turn first to Rooney's *Intermezzo*, a novel wherein *flânerie*, or at least its attempt, remains central to the narration of urban space. Rooney's Dublin remains a site of stimulatory overwhelm. Peter finds it to be '[n]oisy and confusing', an 'exotic alphabet of lights and faces'.[123] Early in the novel, Peter engages in an act of *flânerie* that establishes his character and the novel's themes, much like Clarissa's deferral of identity in *Mrs Dalloway*. Walking past an art college, he watches 'students milling around in denim jackets, plastic boots, torn stockings. Formless teenage faces floating pale under the streetlight'.[124] Peter sexualises youth, but sees the young as formless and unrefined. This judgement is pertinent, perhaps, to the two women with whom he is romantically involved throughout the novel. Sylvia is a university lecturer of his own age who is unable to engage in sexual activity due to chronic pain; Naomi is a much younger student and adult content creator, whom readers meet when Peter visits her house to have sex before dinner with Sylvia. Moreover, Peter's attention to the 'torn stockings' on these young students aligns sexualisation with the sartorial expression of his perceived lack of refinement. Fittingly, Peter often buys Naomi smart-casual clothes he imagines Sylvia would wear.[125] He seemingly wants to dress sexual youth in the clothes of refined adulthood, to resolve an opposition palpable in this early *flânerie*. The chiasmus of urban subjectivity, familiar from *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, is seemingly alive in Peter's perambulations.

But unlike anyone in either of these modernist novels, Peter has a smartphone in his pocket. He feels it vibrate against his hip, sends, reads and anxiously checks for messages, uses search engines and navigational apps. Coming home from the pub, Peter awaits a reply from Naomi:

> Fog over the river. Lights in the distance suspended in nothingness. No reply, she's out probably, or ignoring him. That would be the only downside. Cloak of grey quiet lending to the streets a melancholy dignity. Empty the city feels, desolate, dimly beautiful.[126]

Assuming Peter checks his phone to see that Naomi has not replied, narration of smartphone use is buttressed here by descriptions of his urban surroundings as murky and unclear. Immediately before is fogginess, nothingness and unfixity, immediately after comes greyness, quiet and emptiness. On another occasion he texts Sylvia from a bus whilst 'condensation bead[s] grey on the windows'.[127] The text exchange distresses Peter, and he returns attention briefly to his surroundings. Far from grey condensation

[123] Sally Rooney, *Intermezzo* (London: Faber & Faber, 2024), p. 402.
[124] Rooney, p. 11.
[125] Rooney, p. 12.
[126] Rooney, p. 222.
[127] Rooney, p. 201.

he sees 'dried brown leaves eddied through white air. Avenue of trees. Old stately red-bricks with painted doors'.[128] When Peter attends to his smartphone, he divests attention from his surroundings; they move out of focus and grow quiet, empty, misty. When he returns his attention, the world is clearer, objects differentiated and placed once more. Urban space falls away from the distracted *flâneur* as they attend to their smartphone. And as such, it falls away from the narrative surface of the novel.

This murkiness permeates Peter's *flânerie*. He texts while '[c]ool darkness gathers around the lighted screen', and '[t]rees wav[e] silent branches overhead'.[129] Sending another text he is 'wreathe[d]' in 'misted air' whilst streetlights hang 'weightless and silent over the heads of passers-by'.[130] When Peter uses his smartphone, his surroundings receive only a modicum of attention, but this, it seems, is a high-point. Toward the novel's close, Peter journeys through Dublin to attend Ivan's chess tournament. Waiting for a crossing signal to change, Peter opens a link to the tournament website: 'for more details click here. Live games starting 2 p.m, ten rooms listed with the names of participants'.[131] For a moment, he glances up, to note only that the 'pedestrian light [is] still red', before returning to his phone.[132] Far from a 'rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life', this *flâneur* limits attention to his surroundings to the bare minimum required for his navigation of the city. Back on his phone, Peter finds Ivan's game and watches it progress until the traffic signal changes.[133] Only then does he seemingly pocket his phone and attend to 'the constellation of hanging lights' above him.[134] Description of what took place around Peter, of the crowd of 'other pedestrians' with whom he waited, is entirely absent.[135] Peter's focussed engagement with his smartphone displaces narration of his surroundings entirely. We learn much about Peter when he engages with his surroundings, the issue is simply that he rarely does.

Much the same could be said of Campbell, of O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road*. And this, in turn, potentially sheds some light on the relative lack of urban travel in the novel's more than 600 pages. One would expect, after all, that a novel whose name is lifted from the map of London would explore the city's streets. But Campbell, like Peter, is often attending to his phone. Early in the text, he sits in Soho Square to smoke a cigarette 'across from the mad statue of Charles II by Caius Cibber'.[136] For Campbell the art historian, London is a museum. But it is at once alive; '[b]utterflies chased each other round the top of the statues, a pair of holly blues'.[137] Not unlike the middle-age with which Campbell grapples in the novel, London is a site where life to come flutters around monuments of life lived. We are beginning to get a

[128] Rooney, p. 202.
[129] Rooney, p. 9.
[130] Rooney, p. 307.
[131] Rooney, p. 423.
[132] Rooney, p. 423.
[133] Rooney, p. 423.
[134] Rooney, p. 423.
[135] Rooney, p. 423.
[136] O'Hagan, *Caledonian Road* (London: Faber & Faber, 2024), p. 15.
[137] O'Hagan, p. 15.

sense for Campbell's character when 'he took out his phone: thirty-three emails'.[138] Uninterested, he 'put in his earbuds and clicked one of his mindfulness apps'. After guided relaxation collapses into rumination, he receives a text from his sister Moira containing 'a link to a news website'.[139] Campbell calls Moira to discuss the article.[140] As their call concludes, rain arrives, and Campbell departs from Soho Square.[141] Neither statue nor butterflies return. Whatever insight Campbell's attending to them might have offered us is steamrolled by a procession of smartphone activities.

Campbell, like Peter, is prone to attending to his smartphone rather than his surroundings. And since O'Hagan narrates the world as experienced by Campbell, urban space often drops out of description altogether. Midway through the novel, Campbell attends lunch at the Delaunay in Aldwych with the wife of his disgraced and arrested best friend.[142] He decides to walk from his home in Islington, but the distribution of pluperfect and simple past tense clarifies that the narrative present takes place toward the end of this journey, near Lincoln's Inn Fields. Feeling ill and overwhelmed, Campbell stops in the Fields and looks for somewhere to sit. Alighting on another bench, he again pulls out his phone and looks for somebody to call for consolation. Once Campbell decides to call his colleague Gwen, the narrative switches almost entirely to dialogue.[143] Beyond reported speech are verb-phrases relating to conversation like 'Campbell said'[144] and '[h]e meant it',[145] narration of laughter's outbreak and a silence that follows,[146] and Campbell's brief thoughts on Gwen.[147] After around a page and a half narrating this conversation, the call apparently ends, and a paragraph begins by noting: 'Somehow he got to the Delaunay early'.[148] It seems Campbell has walked half a mile through some of London's busiest streets during his call with Gwen, but there is no description of the shopfronts, monuments, architecture or passers-by. The novel's text is made-up of what Campbell attends to, and as such, all the above are displaced by his conversation with Gwen.

We learn much about Campbell from his phone-calls with Gwen and Moira, his having four mindfulness apps and an overflow of unread emails. We likewise learn much from his turning to Candy Crush and Ancestry.com whilst awaiting a choral performance at a local church.[149] But this chapter is not meaning to suggest that the post-Internet urban novel does not construct character and narrative. It is, rather, assessing the relative role of *flânerie* in these processes when compared to modernist counterparts. And though these smartphone activities teach us much about Campbell, they are not *flânerie*. Both *Intermezzo* and *Caledonian Road* invite readers to spend a lot of time with people who pass unattentively

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[138] O'Hagan, p. 15.
[139] O'Hagan, p. 16.
[140] O'Hagan, p. 17.
[141] O'Hagan, p. 119.
[142] O'Hagan, pp. 373-5.
[143] O'Hagan, p. 373.
[144] O'Hagan, p. 373.
[145] O'Hagan, p. 374.
[146] O'Hagan, p. 374.
[147] O'Hagan, p. 374.
[148] O'Hagan, p. 375.
[149] O'Hagan, p. 388.

through the same streets as Bloom, Dedalus, Walsh and the Dalloways. In Peter's case, engaging with a smartphone seems to drain detail from urban surroundings, and in Campbell's it seems to exclude them from attention, and so narrative, altogether. Both novels engage modernism's legacy by recontextualising the trope of the *flâneur*; their distracted *flâneurs* suggest *flânerie* to be incompatible with the ever-present temptation of smartphone use. As Carr and others have noted, giving-in to this temptation has gradually splintered contemporary attentional processes. In line with this splintering, a new form of novel has emerged that adopts a sympathetically fragmented style, with short paragraphs capturing fleeting moments. These novels then engage modernism's legacy instead by aligning form with post-Internet attentional processes. But if urban surroundings command relatively little attention, what room is there for *flânerie* in novels such as these?

5.4 Fictions of attention and the absent *flâneur*

When, in *Modernist Futures*, James sets out to examine texts drawing upon 'modernism's legacy in the very process of fulfilling new formal, ethical and political objectives',[150] a primary criterion he establishes for such texts is 'a sincere rather than a self-parodic dedication to rendering perceptual experience'.[151] Modernism's legacy, in this case, consists of the foregrounding of form as content – insistence on the legibility of form as regards contemporary experiences of perception. At a formal level, neither *Intermezzo* nor *Caledonian Road* seem to differ enormously from early twentieth century predecessors. But many post-Internet novels do differ, in ways that map neatly onto contemporary discourses on the relationship between online behaviour and attentional processes. In Jenny Offill's *Weather* and Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists*, a fragmented, associative form is certainly legible as reflective of post-Internet perceptual experience. More specifically, it seems to register the splintering of attention. Both Offill's and Savaş' are urban novels in Ameel's sense. In *The Anthropologists* Asya is making a film about a public park whilst she and her partner Manu look for a home to buy in the city, and in *Weather*, Lizzie is a librarian who rides the city bus to work from her home in an apartment building. But whilst both protagonists are discernibly and regularly circulating through the city, these journeys remain implicit. Little narration of urban travel appears on the narrative surface. When such journeys do surface, it is clear that Lizzie and Asya are, like Peter and Campbell, distracted *flâneurs*. Below, through readings of *Weather* and *The Anthropologists*, I demonstrate how novels aligning their form with post-Internet perceptual experience are likely to exclude narrations of distracted *flânerie*. Prioritising the commitments to contemporary attention that underwrite the *flâneur*'s emergence in modernist fiction, that is, counterintuitively leads to the absence of *flânerie* from the narrative surface.

[150] James, *Modernist Futures*, p. 1.
[151] James, *Modernist Futures*, p. 13.

Before this, though, the relationship between fragmentary form and contemporary attention requires some focus. And the unlikely route into this discussion comes from the David James edited collection *Modernism and Close Reading* (2020). In his introduction to the volume, James suggests that 'we would be hard-pressed to think of two more convivial bedfellows' than '[m]odernism and close reading'.[152] For James, the 'iconoclastic strategies of modernist works' – among them surely the mimesis of consciousness – 'legitimat[e] the reading practices they at once solicit and endlessly repay'.[153] And as Max Saunders has it in his contribution to the collection, anticipation of these practices 'advocated what we might call "close writing": a minute attention to the words being used, the word choices being justified by the effects they produced'.[154] The attentional overload of urban space then stimulated a shift in contemporary reading and writing practices; a dense and sporadic prose style that requires slow and reflective reading. But as our understanding of modernism expands in spatial and temporal scope, writes James, 'the rapport between close reading and the proliferating objects, elastic timeframes, and global contexts of modernist studies no longer feels guaranteed'.[155] Saunders homes in on a particular admission of modernism's expanded timeframe; close reading's 'original form of minute verbal analysis' he writes, 'struggles for traction in the multi-media flood and landslip of Web 2.0'.[156] With new forces acting on contemporary attention comes a new style of reading and a new form of writing.

Saunders' comments on reading and the post-Internet infosystem partake in what Bennett in *Contemporary Fictions of Attention* calls 'this new era of distraction crisis discourse'.[157] There is little need, here, to rehearse the finer points of the discussion of post-Internet attention spans constituted by works like Carr's *The Shallows*. Readers will be aware of the splintering and shortening of attention brought on by Internet use – if not from discourse, then from lived experience. But as 'this "distraction crisis" has begun to affect even the most dedicated readers – writers, book critics, professors of literature' – it has become central to contemporary literature and its formal innovations.[158] As Bennett has it, 'the distractions of the digital age have become the spur for new writing that is freshly alert to attention's vagaries and fragility'.[159] One of the example texts to which Bennett recourses to discuss this new writing is Tao Lin's *Taipei* (2013), a novel in which the protagonist, Paul, is often found 'absently look[ing] at the Internet'.[160] In this archetypical Internet novel, writes Bennett, the narrative's 'empty, eventless rhythms are soothing and compulsive in almost the same way as scrolling through webpages. Reading this book feels just like

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[152] David James, 'Introduction', in *Modernism and Close Reading*, ed. by David James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 2-16 (p. 1).
[153] James, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[154] Max Saunders, 'Modernist Close Reading', in *Modernism and Close Reading*, ed. by James, pp. 19-44 (p. 20).
[155] James, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[156] Saunders, p. 20.
[157] Bennett, p. 3.
[158] Bennet, p. 3.
[159] Bennett, p. 4.
[160] Tao Lin, *Taipei* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013), p. 54.

looking at the internet'.[161] Books like *Taipei*, I suggest, engage modernism's legacy by refitting their form to contemporary attentional processes. But the reading style with which this form aligns is also the force acting on said processes. Reading the Internet has displaced inhabiting the city in shaping modern attentional processes, so contemporary novels are both reflective and soliciting of a reading style associated with Internet use.

In 'How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine' (2010), N. Katherine Hayles outlines this reading style, beginning by identifying much the same circumstances as Saunders. Namely, that 'people in general, and young people in particular, are doing more screen reading of digital materials than ever before. Meanwhile, the reading of print books and of literary genres (novels, plays, and poems) has been declining over the last twenty years'.[162] These two sets of material are not alike; online reading is riddled with 'hyperlinks that draw attention away from the linear flow of an article, very short forms such as tweets that encourage distracted forms of reading, small habitual actions such as clicking and navigating that increase the cognitive load'.[163] In a stark echo of Simmel's comments on the *blasé* form of urban attention, Hayles highlights 'the enormous amount of material to be read, leading to the desire to skim everything because there is way too much material to pay close attention to anything for very long'.[164] In such environments, the sporadic, associative process of 'hyperreading has become a necessity'.[165] With its short bursts of attention and willingness for link-following digression, hyperreading 'enables a reader quickly to construct landscapes of associated research fields and subfields; it shows ranges of possibilities; it identifies texts and passages most relevant to a given query; and it easily juxtaposes many different texts and passages'.[166] But hyperreading, writes Hayles, 'may not sit easily alongside close-reading'.[167] What, then, does a novel written by and for hyperreaders look like?

To answer this question, I turn to one of the foremost practitioners of the style. In an article called 'Page refresh: how the internet is transforming the novel' (2021), Olivia Sudjic positions herself among those distracted but dedicated readers identified by Bennett. She confesses that her attempts at close-reading Caleb Azumah Nelson's *Open Water* (2021) were thwarted when she 'could barely turn two pages before [her] hand moved reflexively toward the cracked screen of [her] phone'.[168] The Internet, writes Sudjic in her own micro-memoir *Exposure* (2018), 'has irrevocably changed how a person can be'.[169] After years of

[161] Bennett, p. 10.
[162] N. Katherine Hayles, 'How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine', *ADE Bulletin*, 150 (2010), pp. 62-79 (p. 62).
[163] Hayles, p. 67.
[164] Hayles, p. 67.
[165] Hayles, p. 66.
[166] Hayles, p. 66.
[167] Hayles, p. 67.
[168] Olivia Sudjic, 'Page refresh: how the internet is transforming the novel', *The Guardian*, 23 January 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jan/23/page-refresh-how-the-internet-is-transforming-the-novel> [accessed 20 January 2025].
[169] Sudjic, *Exposure* (London: Peninsula, 2018), p. 66.

scrolling and hyperreading, we find 'ourselves broken into pieces, flattened out, sprayed through an atomiser'.[170] Just as 'writers like Virginia Woolf[…] used a stream of consciousness to convey the experience of twentieth century living', writers of Sudjic's cohort must find a writing style that is 'like living now',[171] among 'the endless tabs and incongruous juxtapositions of digital life'.[172] It is worth noting, again, that since the character of 'living now' is so grounded in online reading practices, this task is possibly more straightforward than the one confronted by the likes of Joyce and Woolf. If online hyperreading is central to the restructuring of post-Internet attention, writers approaching contemporary perceptual experience need only mimic the formal patterns of the Internet. Just as early twentieth century writers adopted a close-writing style in anticipation of a close-reading reception, Sudjic's cohort meet hyperreading with hyperwriting.

Where the early twentieth century modernists adopted the mimesis of consciousness as a way of evoking their contemporary attentional pressures, twenty-first century successors adopt a fragmented, digressional style. As Sudjic explains,

> [t]he dominant trend is to tell a story through fragments. Sometimes these make a point of concision – only a paragraph, or even one line, which of course makes social media comparison easy, while others may be the length of a blog. Each fragment possesses no obvious bearing on the next, juxtaposing random facts with news articles, wry observation of a stranger on a commute followed by an unrelated emotional confession, in the manner of one individual's Twitter timeline.[173]

In reflecting the formal qualities of the Internet, and therefore anticipating a hyperreading public, this style 'makes allowances for internet-eroded concentration spans, our inability to stick to linear paths of thought'.[174] It is a style that leaps from one moment of radiant attention to the next; put otherwise, it is a style permeated with narrative gaps. Gaps between topics and events, and – because of the diminished attention to the post-Internet journey established in the above exploration of distracted *flânerie* – gaps between places. And if gaps emerge between places visited by a novel's protagonist, they must be understood as replacing the narration of the protagonist's journeying between said locations. Through readings of Offill and Savaş below, then, I show that the distracted *flâneur* falls through the pervasive gaps of this fragmented writing style. *Flânerie* sinks below the narrative surface.

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[170] Sudjic, 'Page refresh'.
[171] Sudjic, 'Page refresh'.
[172] Sudjic, 'Page refresh'.
[173] Sudjic, 'Page refresh'.
[174] Sudjic, 'Page refresh'.

My suggestion that *flânerie* falls beneath the narrative surface is carefully phrased. It is clear that journeys are taking place, they simply are not being narrated. They form part of a connective tissue beneath the fragmented surface of the post-Internet urban novel. One is tempted to suggest that *Weather* and *The Anthropologists* are urban novels wherein city space has been reduced into a purely structural role. In each novel, a protagonist lives in a city, and visits many locations around said city. Lizzie, of Offill's *Weather* is a librarian whose brother has recently had a child; she travels between work and home, to her brother's house and to miscellaneous urban locations like a cinema. After accepting a role as assistant to Sylvia, her former professor whose podcast on ecological breakdown has attracted lots of attention, Lizzie also finds herself visiting conferences. In Savaş' *The Anthropologists*, Asya and her partner Manu are looking to move from a rented into a purchased home in the city. They tour various properties, hanging out meanwhile in bars, cafés and restaurants with their friend Ravi, and showing visiting relatives around town. Both characters, and so the narratives for which they act as foci, are notably mobile, as much as the focal characters and narratives of *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*. But unlike those in *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway*, Lizzie and Asya are post-Internet subjects, travelling always with a distraction machine. Journeys receive little attention from either protagonist, and so from their respective narrative.

Both Asya and Lizzie are prone to the type of attention sinking behaviours observed in Bell's *Radical Attention*. One fragment of *Weather* begins: 'There are fewer and fewer birds these days. This is the hole I tumbled down an hour ago. I finally stop clicking when my mother calls'.[175] Expectations are inverted, here; what seems at first the result of Lizzie's attention to her surroundings is revealed as quite the opposite. The Internet becomes a screen, in Bell's multifarious sense. At once, it provides information about the world, whilst interfering with the user's engagement with said world. Perhaps due to these screening practices, Lizzie and her husband 'never notice the same things'.[176] The narrator recalls coming 'home and [her husband] was all excited because they finally took it down. Took what down? [she] asked. And he had to explain that the scaffolding that had covered the front of our building for three years was finally gone'.[177] For his part, the narrator's husband fails to notice that their neighbour is dealing drugs.[178] There are significant gaps in their respective pictures of the world, likely because, like Manu, they are 'transported[…] to a different place' through mobile mediation.[179] Watching Manu vacuum whilst listening to a podcast, Asya finds that he only returns to 'the present world' when he takes his headphones off.[180] Since she seems invariably to listen to her employer's podcast whilst moving from place to place, we can assume that this otherworldliness is what prevents Lizzie from attending to the newly renovated façade of her building.

Weather is full of moments wherein surroundings go unnoticed; the phone screening individuals from urban space. At times, Lizzie takes advantage of this general tendency. Choosing to avoid Nicola, a

[175] Jenny Offill, *Weather* (London: Granta, 2020) p. 95.
[176] Offill, p. 12.
[177] Offill, p. 12.
[178] Offill, p. 12.
[179] Ayşegül Savaş, *The Anthropologists* (London: Scribner, 2025), p. 142.
[180] Savaş, p. 142.

mother from her daughter's school, Lizzie notices '[s]he's on her phone', and surmises that 'as soon as she looks up, she'll see me'.[181] Lizzie 'dart[s] through the doorway just in time', before Nicola 'put her phone away and [began] striding purposefully down the street'.[182] Elsewhere, Lizzie is distracted as she returns from a park near her home:

> On the way back, I don't notice anything underfoot, anything overhead. Possibly there was a light coming greenly through the leaves. Impossible to be sure.
>
> *What is the Nano Hummingbird? What is the Robofish?*.[183]

Here, Lizzie is much alike with Rooney's Peter. The italicised text is, according to typographic conventions established elsewhere in the novel, likely to represent queries typed by Lizzie into a search engine. Just like Peter's, then, Lizzie's attention to her surroundings drops when she attends to her phone, and narration of said surroundings is thus impoverished. Unlike Peter, though, Lizzie is somewhat aware of the exchange she is making, and seemingly contrite. When Sylvia picks her up from a train station and asks whether she took time to look at the river, Lizzie lies that she did, knowing that 'it pains [Sylvia] the way everyone goes around with their heads down these days'.[184] Distracted *flânerie*, it seems, is the default mode for proceeding through urban space in *Weather*.

Much the same is true in *The Anthropologists*, and this bears out in the descriptive style of the novel. On the way from visiting a potential home, Asya and Manu 'walked through another street, with a similar row of old houses [to the one just toured]. There were young couples, dogs of peculiar breeds, little shops that sold handmade things'.[185] This is as thick as description gets when journeys through the city are narrated by Asya. And yet there is very little detail. What breed are the dogs, and what are their peculiar characteristics? Of what sort are the handmade things, and what makes them so visibly handcrafted? Wherever description is thicker, close attention reveals the scene as an amalgamation of several moments of observation. The Dame is a notable figure within the area in which Asya and Manu live. She is described 'sat in the very front row [of a café], her face turned up at the sun, piles of books and newspapers next to her coffee, a plate of bread, butter, and jam'.[186] Other times she's 'at the park, her face once again oriented toward the sun, her trousers rolled up, her limbs splayed across several chairs she'd pulled together to make a throne'.[187] It seems that Asya is paying more attention than usual, here, but the

[181] Offill, p. 56.
[182] Offill, p. 56.
[183] Offill, p. 47.
[184] Offill, p. 107.
[185] Savaş, pp. 66-7.
[186] Savaş, pp. 45-6.
[187] Savaş, p. 46.

first description is of the Dame on 'some mornings', the second on '[o]ther days'.[188] In both cases, several impressions of the Dame are seemingly stacked in order to yield the level of detail appropriate to characterisation. Asya, like Lizzie, is a distracted *flâneur*.

So far, we have established that Lizzie and Asya are given to distracted *flânerie*. I have shown, also, that their distraction is reflected in a general dilution of the description assigned to their surroundings. So far, so much the same as *Intermezzo* and *Caledonian Road*. But as noted, *Weather* and *The Anthropologists* are distinct from these other texts in their formal characteristics. In the former two novels, long periods of time are narrated, and these often include journeying from place to place. The level of detail provided is roughly equivalent to the detail provided in *Mrs Dalloway*, and in much of *Ulysses* – although, there are exceptionally detailed passages in the latter. In these cases, detail of the protagonist's surroundings seems exchanged for detail on their smartphone use, and on their musings, fears, reflections, etc. But Offill and Savaş' novels are broken into sections that cover far smaller segments of their respective protagonist's time. The typical segment might cover a period of five minutes, perhaps half an hour, and one can often discern that a greater length of time passes in the narrative gap between one segment and another. If a segment seems to cover a longer period, it typically contains a sentence beginning with a temporal marker like '[l]ater',[189] or '[w]hen I get home', indicating that a similar narrative gap inheres between it and the sentence behind.[190] This style narrates that which enthrals the protagonist's attention, and cuts all that does not.

The issue regarding *flânerie*, then, is that journeys seem to fall primarily into the latter category. Often, journeys are compressed into grammatically sparse statements that offer essential information on who is travelling where. Asya and Manu spend a day showing Asya's father round the city. Asya recalls: 'After dinner we *saw him off to his hotel* and *came home* to watch an episode of a detective show'.[191] Two significant journeys are compressed into this short sentence, and a reader is told nothing of their character. Likewise, after touring a flat the pair 'walked all the way back home, over an hour, crossing into the old city and out again to shake off the visit'.[192] The pair had felt inadequate to the 'practicality and ease' of the life implied by the apartment.[193] They seemingly worked through this on the journey, in what seems like a significant act of chiasmic *flânerie*. Despite its significance, though, and its hour-long duration, this journey is compressed into a single sentence. Likewise in *Weather*, sentences like 'I take the car service home'[194] stand in for entire journeys, whilst others like 'I'm late for the lecture now' are only sensible if we surmise some journeying to have been completed.[195] On a larger scale, Lizzie admits to having 'wrecked my knee

[188] Savaş, p. 46.
[189] Offill, p. 36.
[190] Offill, p. 44.
[191] Savaş, p. 33.
[192] Savaş, p. 123.
[193] Savaş, p. 123.
[194] Offill, p. 62.
[195] Offill, p. 20.

with all this gallivanting around', but little of this gallivanting appears on the surface of narration.[196] Over and again, these novels draw attention to the *flâneur*-esque perambulation of their protagonists, which highlights the absence of narrated *flânerie*.

This compression more often results in the exclusion of journey from narrative altogether. Visiting a hospital with her 'wrecked' knee, Lizzie receives a diagnosis of osteoarthritis, which she looks up on the train home:

> *Osteoarthritis develops slowly and the pain it causes worsens over time.*
>
> Right, okay, steady on. Later, when I tell Ben the gout story, my voice is less jaunty than I intend.[197]

Somewhere between deciding to search her condition online and telling her husband a story from the hospital, Lizzie has travelled from the hospital to her home. But since she attends to her phone, she pays little attention to her surroundings, and the journey therefore falls through the gaps in her narrative. Similarly, Asya makes a new friend at a picnic for expats and immigrants: 'When the picnic ended, she held out her phone and I tapped in my number. By the time I got home, I had a text from her'.[198] Again, a journey falls through the gap between sentences. The first sentence is located firmly at the picnic, and the second at Asya's home – nothing intervenes between the two, and nothing mediates the transition from place to place. The first sentence belongs to one location, the second to another, and the journey between these places remains implicit.

But whilst the fragmented attention style of these novels inheres on a sentence level, it is most often associated – by Sudjic and others – with transitions between larger segments. As Sudjic notes, these vary from tweet- to blog-length; they are seemingly greater than paragraphs but lesser than chapters. Lizzie and her brother chat for a moment outside a cinema after a film. When he leaves for a dinner with some of his girlfriend's friends, Lizzie 'watch[es] him walk off, hands in his pockets, slumped over'.[199] There is no further description of her surroundings, and she immediately begins listening to a podcast. She finds that 'the geologist being interviewed speaks quickly, sweeping through millions of years in a moment'.[200] The segment concludes with Lizzie's summary of his sweeping history, and the next begins with her attending a conference with Sylvia. Offill's narrative style is not dissimilar from the one exercised by the geologist. The granular details of everyday life are excluded – Lizzie does not walk home from the cinema, neither does she travel to the conference. She is simply present outside the cinema, then, as the

[196] Offill, p. 40.
[197] Offill, p. 42.
[198] Savaş, p. 15.
[199] Offill, p. 30.
[200] Offill, p. 30.

next section opens, she is present at the conference. *The Anthropologists* is no different. One section concludes at a house-viewing, the next opens at a park;[201] another concludes at a bar, the next opens at Asya and Manu's home;[202] a third concludes at a train station, the next opens by their bedside.[203] Over and again, journeys fall through the gaps between these fragments.

We have already seen the extent to which *flânerie* has historically been useful to the characterisation of the urban novel's protagonist. The chiasmic process of *flânerie* furnished us with an opportunity to understand what draws the attention of Joyce and Woolf's *flâneurs*, and how they respond to their surroundings. Briefly in *Weather*, though, we see what else might end up missing from narratives whose protagonists are distracted from their surroundings. Lizzie boards a busy bus, unsure that she'll find a seat, but 'miraculously, it is all able-bodied teenagers with earbuds'.[204] She laments: 'I forgot my phone, or I too would have blotted out these humans'.[205] One such human 'keeps glancing' at Lizzie, and she mentions that he might know her '[f]rom the library'.[206] They then get off at the same stop and strike up what Lizzie would later describe to her friend Tracy as a 'wartime romance. Minus the war. Minus the sex'.[207] Alongside the birth of her brother's child and his struggles with fatherhood, this wartime romance makes-up much of what we might loosely term the plot of *Weather*. Meeting a stranger in public and striking up a relationship seems appropriate to the plotting of an urban novel. Cities are, after all, dense with other people, and all the social opportunities they entail. But for post-Internet urbanites, the chances of such an encounter are so diminished by the ever-distracting presence of the smartphone that they can only be narrated once its absence is accounted for.

Urban surroundings often receive diminished attention from the distracted *flâneur*, and when novels are structured around short, resonant moments of attention, *flânerie* can be excluded altogether. After discussing her wartime romance with Tracy, Lizzie addresses the reader: 'And then it is another day and another and another, but I will not go on about this because no doubt you too have experienced time'.[208] Just as much, perhaps, as Joyce and Woolf's readers have experienced a day's passing. The crux of the issue regarding *flânerie* and the writing style that Offill and Savaş have represented here is that the workaday passage of time is understood as not interesting enough – unlikely to hold anyone's attention. And perhaps, when we consider Internet-addled attention spans, hyperreading practices, and the success of fragmented fiction, we might be inclined to agree. But this puts writers in a double-bind as regards the legacy of modernism. If modernism's legacy lives in its tropes and figures, the *flâneur* has a place in any text looking to engage said legacy. Of course, writers of such texts can hardly pretend the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are entirely alike. As such, these writers refit the *flâneur* as the distracted *flâneur*, a figure who passes through urban space somewhat oblivious to their surroundings. But if

[201] Savaş, pp. 155-6.
[202] Savaş, pp. 72-3.
[203] Savaş, p. 55.
[204] Offill, p. 139.
[205] Offill, p. 139.
[206] Offill, p. 139.
[207] Offill, p. 186.
[208] Offill, p. 186.

modernism's legacy lives in its attitudes toward form – its insistence that form can and should mimic contemporary perceptual experience – the place of the *flâneur* is uncertain. In post-Internet urban novels structured around brief intensities of attention, there is surely no place for the dispersed perception of distracted *flânerie*.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: The Selection of Generalities

In this thesis I have argued that everyday Internet use has had enormous impacts on how we construct, inhabit, navigate and experience space, and in so doing has restructured common literary practices for the evocation of space. I understand this restructuring as active in literature broadly, but have used genre as a tool for establishing a set of conventions that can be checked for changes in the post-Internet period. Genres codify practices for the production and interpretation of meaning in literature, and genres with a self-evident interest in space or experiences thereof codify practices for the evocation of space. The shifts observed in the four chapters above then point to significant and prolific changes wrought by post-Internet mediation on contemporary spatial practices.

My first chapter showed that new, Internet-enabled forms of storytelling move nature writing out of an impasse in which it has been caught since the late 1970s. Nature writing typically foregrounds close, first-hand experiences with the more-than-human. To do so, it adopts a chronotope that restricts narrative to a roughly walkable region I have termed the locale, and offers vague and infrequent descriptions of elsewhere. Nature writing texts thus tend to produce hermetic ecologies coterminous with the locale, but adjustments to ecological thought in the latter half of the twentieth century problematise such constructions. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and James Lovelock's *Gaia* (1979) highlight the globality of ecology, and the ease with which pollution transcends assumed spatio-ecological boundaries. In *Underland* (2019), Robert Macfarlane looks to reconcile this understanding of ecology with the nature writing chronotope, but like many nature writers after Carson and Lovelock he produces a text the spatial and narrative borders of which are haunted by ghostly figures. These figures, I suggested, register the ecological connections with elsewhere that must be supressed for narration to remain within the locale. Reading Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* (2017), I showed that literature can exercise these ghosts by incorporating online, GPS-enabled content alongside the codex. Such transmedia work can evoke multiple locales at once, thus sidestepping the incongruity between the nature writing chronotope and contemporary understandings of the ecology it looks to represent. In this case, post-Internet mediation has not caused the change in spatial processes, but enabled literature to better evoke spatialisations it had otherwise struggled to capture.

My second chapter, on travel writing, showed the diversity of literary codifications that can bear traces of post-Internet spatial change. Once, time away from home left us malleable – open to personal change in a way that we are not when we remain in what Eric J. Leed calls our 'defining social and cultural matrix'. Travel writing has typically been structured by a series of new places that provoke a parallel sequence of personal developments in the writer. But now, we can keep in contact with friends and local news and cultural content wherever we happen to be. Travel remains exceptional, and we continue to step – if for shorter durations – out of our defining matrix. And as such, travel writing retains an interest in the psychological effects of time spent away from home. The linear narrative structure derived from the

twinning of a spatial and an interior, psychological journey, though, is disrupted by frequent online returns to the defining matrix. In *Break.up* (2018), Joanna Walsh stages this disruption by frustrating the inner journey and concluding the text without resolving the personal problems foregrounded throughout. In *Hotel* (2015), she eschews travel writing's typically linear chronology for a non-linear structure that foregrounds affective responses to types of place and experience common to travel. In travel writing, then, chronological structure is perhaps unexpectedly the textual aspect wherein the impact of post-Internet mediation on contemporary spatialisation is most apparent.

Chapter 3 turned to fiction, and explored the writing of isolation in a time when social life is partly dislocated online. I first argued that isolation in literature has a distinct spatio-narratological structure that is reoutfitted to communicate with the themes and focuses of individual texts and genres. I call this the narratological island, and it consists of an interior, an exterior, a semi-permeable boundary between the two, and a key that might open said boundary. Wherever this structure is adopted, social and spatial isolation are conflated – the former assumed an inevitability of the latter. The narratological island assumes the correspondence of space and social situation unpicked by Joshua Meyrowitz in *No Sense of Place* (1985). In the post-Internet period we can speak to people online when remaining at home; but at the same time, online shopping and remote working have emptied public spaces. Moreover, we can be isolated online in echo-chambers and filter-bubbles. Spatially secured isolation may be eased, but the Internet has its own islanding forces. Post-Internet social life is a mesh of on- and offline activities, and post-Internet isolation therefore is also. Reading Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* (2017), I showed that the post-Internet isolation narrative charts the co-responsive development of spatial and online islanding. The novel begins with Alice fleeing spatial isolation in the UK but failing to address her online isolation. She then falls into an isolating obsession with Mizuko's social-media presence, which leads to her and Mizuko's spatial and mediational islanding. When she flees back to the UK, escaping spatial islanding again, she remains trapped in 'Mizuko's world'. Post-Internet mediation frustrates the conclusion of Alice's isolation narrative, but satisfactory conclusions are reached in Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* (2012) and Patricia Lockwood's *no one is talking about this* (2021) when protagonists are extricated from both spatial and mediational isolation. The narratological island remains important to narratives of isolation, but must now be negotiated with the patterns of online social life.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I argued that post-Internet attentional patterns put metamodernist writers of urban novels into a double-bind. The urban novel in the modernist period, I argued, brought interior monologue together with the figure of the *flâneur* to explore the impact of urbanisation on contemporary attentional processes. Post-Internet urbanites, though, are often looking to their smartphones and listening to audial content through earphones; they are distracted from their urban surroundings. Reading Andrew O'Hagan's *Caledonian Road* (2024) and Sally Rooney's *Intermezzo* (2024) I showed that when post-Internet texts narrate the *flâneur's* inner life, urban surroundings often grow fuzzy and vague as attention turns to the screen. In fact, there are points in both novels at which narrated engagement with media content takes the place of description of the urban environs through which the *flâneur* passes on a journey. These *flâneurs* are distracted, only giving partial attention to their surroundings. I then argued that novels like Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020) and Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists* (2024), whose fragmentary prose

structure is informed by post-Internet attentional processes, tend to exclude *flânerie* altogether. In such novels, the fragmentation of post-Internet attentional processes highlighted by critics like Nicholas Carr and N. Katherine Hayles is evoked in the fragmenting of narrative into momentary vignettes which tend not to last for more than a couple of pages. Such vignettes capture radiant moments of attention, and since urban surroundings now receive relatively little attention, *flânerie* is notably excluded. Journeys seemingly occur in-between sentences and prose fragments. Those novelists who adopt the *flâneur* from modernist urban novels cannot then adopt this prose style, and those that adopt this prose style cannot adopt the *flâneur*. To follow the modernist urban novel in having narrative form reflect contemporary attentional pressures is to refuse the tropes with which it does so, and *vice versa*.

In this last case it is clearest that any suggestion that post-Internet mediation simply breaks established codes for the evocation of space in literature is reductive. Rather, post-Internet spatialisations are a new form with which the other forms of post-Internet literature must interface. And as Caroline Levine convincingly argues in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm Hierarchy, Network* (2015), this interfacing rarely involves the outright denial of one form's effectiveness by another. Literature is a discursive field; literary texts contain the history of their form and genre. Long-established tropes for the representation of space have not outright vanished from post-Internet texts, but their role in structuring said texts must be negotiated with emergent spatial processes. Ghosts emerge from the interfacing of the nature writing chronotope with late twentieth century understandings of ecology's spatial dimensions, but are exercised in the development of post-Internet literary practices. In travel writing, attention to how travel impacts one's inner life is maintained, but post-Internet mediational habits deprioritise chronologically linear narration of this impact. The narratological island remains essential to post-Internet isolation narratives, but typically enters into complex conversations with processes of online islanding. And in the urban novel, mobile post-Internet mediational habits make *flânerie* incompatible with the formal commitment to narrating attentional change with which its use in modernist literature is underwritten, but do not foreclose on either of the two appearing individually. There is much variety even within genres, and in time new codifications will likely stabilise. Future work might use the methodology of this thesis to discuss whatever these codifications might be. But this thesis has sought to capture this moment of uncertainty, which may in time be understood as a moment of transition.

By focusing on genre, the methodology of this thesis entails a working at the level of a series of generalising abstractions. Whilst in the introduction I suggested that texts can partake of more than one genre, the readings throughout have been advanced as though each text partakes of only one. But *Underland* is as much travel writing as it is nature writing, *Sympathy* is an urban novel, and *flânerie* is a prevalent practice in *Break.up*. The abstraction effected by these analyses has as its cost a lack of attention to these aspects of these texts, but its benefit is the critical purchase genre grants on understandings of how literature interfaces with emergent historical conditions. Literature is complex, and I have abstracted generic codifications from this complexity for the purposes of my reading. Moreover, life is complex, and the very notion of travel writing, nature writing, isolation narratives or the urban novel entails the

abstraction of a particular aspect of experience from its place within this complexity. Whilst they have proved useful, then, these abstractions have in some cases entailed a turn away from complexity. More future work might then find insight in attending to this complexity with a methodology that eschews generic readings in favour of attention to the particularities of a certain book or writer. Alternatively, the complexity of literature might be restored by attending to one text through the lens of multiple genres in which it might be said to partake.

In either case, a critic would turn away from the abstractions of genre, to attend to the particular characteristics of an individual work. But any piece of critical writing must balance the relationship between a text's particular idiosyncrasies and those generalities that connect it with other texts. Participation in genre supplies one such set of generalities; indeed, the words 'genre'[1] and 'general' share an etymological root in the Latin word 'genus'.[2] But historical period supplies other generalities, as does the identity of the writer, engagement in certain discourses, intertextual reference, the nation or region of publication and its social, political and economic conditions. It is uncommon to see literary critical works that do not engage to some degree in such generalities, typically in combination. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is interested in texts published in Europe and topically focussed on Asia and the Middle East; Dorit Cohn's *Transparent Minds* (1978) is interested in texts that narratively mimic consciousness; Tessa Hadley's *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure* (2009) is interested in James' later novels, and specifically their discussion of female sexuality. Corpora of study are formed around generalities, and each work of literary criticism that involves more than one text must account for the relevance of these texts to each other by foregrounding some generality or another. A binary exchange of the abstractions of genre for the particularities individual texts is not, therefore possible. Even were this thesis to have selected works that take a notably unique approach to post-Internet spatialisation, the generalities associated with genre would be exchanged for generalities associated with textual experimentation and its modernist heritage.

The focus on genre in this essay is therefore not a decision to foreground the general over the particular, but a decision about which generalities should be foregrounded. To answer the question of why genre supplied the generalities of this thesis, it is necessary to repeat that genre is not the focus of analysis, only a methodological tool. Each genre supplies its respective chapter with a set of conventions for the evocation of space that interface with emergent processes of spatialisation in the post-Internet texts analysed. The generalities of genre are used as a means for representing unacknowledged consensus on experiences of nature, travel, isolation and urban life. They therefore have two important strengths as regards the research interests of this thesis. Firstly, they are useful for approaching historical change, because genres tend to produce generalities that persist over long periods of time. These are otherwise known as conventions. By locating the generalities of this thesis in generic convention, I have therefore constructed a methodology that allows me to understand the particularities of the texts read as indicative

[1] Entry 'Gender', *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www.oed.com> [accessed 12 August 2025].
[2] Entry 'General', *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www.oed.com> [accessed 12 August 2025].

of historical change. Where the particularities of texts in Cohn's *Transparent Minds* allow her to discuss the varying degrees to which texts engage in the mimesis of consciousness, the particularities of texts in my chapters have allowed me to discuss how literature is adapting to a shift in the media ecology.

Secondly, a focus on spatial genres foregrounds understandings of space that have become standardised in literature, and that one can therefore assume resonate with how readers understand and engage with space. The ascent of post-Internet media has not just provided us new tools to continue living in the same way but doing so faster, easier, and for less money. Rather, as Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska make clear in *Life After New Media* (2012), it has restructured life from the level of everyday social, work and leisure habits to the level of what it is to be in the world. In other words, life has changed for everyone, in almost all its aspects. Since change has been so thorough and widespread, many individuals will have their own, distinct reactions to how particular facets of life have changed. But in attending to these individual reactions and their idiosyncratic articulation in literature, we are less likely to communicate those changes that are common to life in the post-Internet media ecology. When we read texts in relation to how they partake in genre, we foreground their ability to evoke precisely these common changes. Genre, in other words, lets us say something about the conditions of life as they are mutually understood by an array of writers and their readers. Together with genre's suitability to analysis of historical change, this makes generic analysis particularly useful for understanding the mediational changes that this thesis addresses. The generalities of this thesis then correlate to life as it has been, and the particularities represent attempts to grapple with life as it is coming to be.

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