



**This electronic thesis or dissertation has been  
downloaded from Explore Bristol Research,  
<http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>**

*Author:*

**Nagy, Krisztina**

*Title:*

**Cultural and literary geographies of the city in the fiction of Martin Amis**

**General rights**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author, unless otherwise identified in the body of the thesis, and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement. It is permitted to use and duplicate this work only for personal and non-commercial research, study or criticism/review. You must obtain prior written consent from the author for any other use. It is not permitted to supply the whole or part of this thesis to any other person or to post the same on any website or other online location without the prior written consent of the author.

**Take down policy**

Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to it having been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you believe is unlawful e.g. breaches copyright, (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact: [open-access@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:open-access@bristol.ac.uk) and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline of the nature of the complaint

On receipt of your message the Open Access team will immediately investigate your claim, make an initial judgement of the validity of the claim, and withdraw the item in question from public view.

# **Cultural and Literary Geographies of the City in the Fiction of Martin Amis**

Krisztina Nagy

**A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts**

**Department of English**

**December 2006**

**Word count: 82,327 words**

## Abstract

The primary aim of the dissertation is to place Martin Amis's fictional work up until the mid-1990s within the framework of ongoing debates in the fields of cultural geography and urban literary studies. Secondly, it proposes to expand the recent and vibrant scholarly research into literary representations of the city, the notion of 'spatialization' of narratives and its concurrent call for the production of a spatial context - a 'space of literature' - that would originate and accommodate spatially engaged critical readings of literary works. Images and narratives of the city will be thus shown to form a hitherto unexplored and almost entirely neglected urban geography of Amis's fiction.

The thesis will mainly attend to rhetorical and discursive narratives of the city as opposed to embedding it into a socio-historical frame, all the more so since the novels under discussion frequently dissolve the geographically or physically available urban topography through acts of textual self-referentiality, repeatedly asserting thereby the linguistic condition of the 'city in literature.' Some of the theoretical and rhetorical readings to follow concertedly aim to engage with recent urban theory; at times they derive from narratology, but can also proceed from post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theories of language and literature. The topics addressed by the individual chapters - the body, memory, walking, information, the uncanny, doubles, forms of repetition, murder mystery, travelling, modes of expenditure - will be read as literary models of the city that Amis's urban writing appears to particularly respond to. While each chapter patently maps and asserts the relevance of the theme and figure of the urban in Amis's fiction, it has also been an important objective of the thesis to further the critical discourse applicable to the city in current literary studies.

**Author’s Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED: *Nary Knight*.....

DATE: *8<sup>th</sup> February 2007*.....



## Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Professor David Punter, who has been a supportive guide through all stages of my work; his comments have been always acute and his encouragement and interest have been indispensable.

I owe a large and pervasive debt to Dr. Tamás Bényei and Dr. Nóra Séllei at University of Debrecen, Hungary for their formative and always stimulating seminars. My thanks go to Tamás Bényei in particular for encouraging me from so early on, but also for reading parts of the dissertation and for allowing me to read the manuscript of his forthcoming chapter on *Money*, which provided invaluable insights in the very final stages of my PhD. I am also much grateful to Dr. Jenny Bavidge at University of Greenwich for her interest in my work and for kindly offering to read chapters of my PhD; her supportive comments were very much appreciated.

Thanks must also go to my parents and a number of great friends both in Hungary and in Bristol: Dia Papp, Zsuzsa Jávör, Barna Marthy, Emese Bedő, Cathy Hume, Cathy Ladds, Marie Weinel, Rose White, John Halliwell, Tom Neilson, James Thomas, and James Miner. My greatest gratitude is to Tilo Burghardt, who bore the brunt of it and much more.

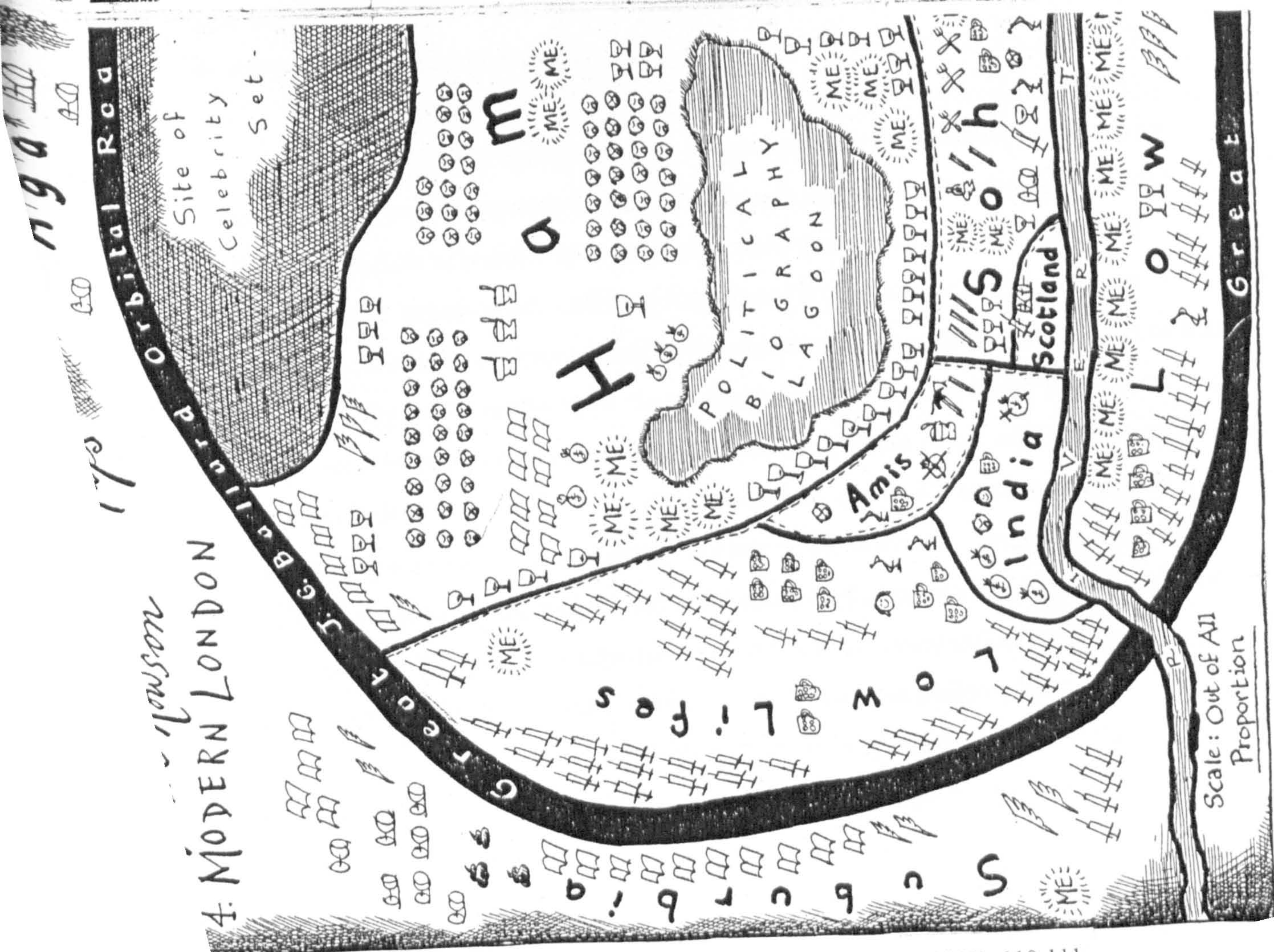
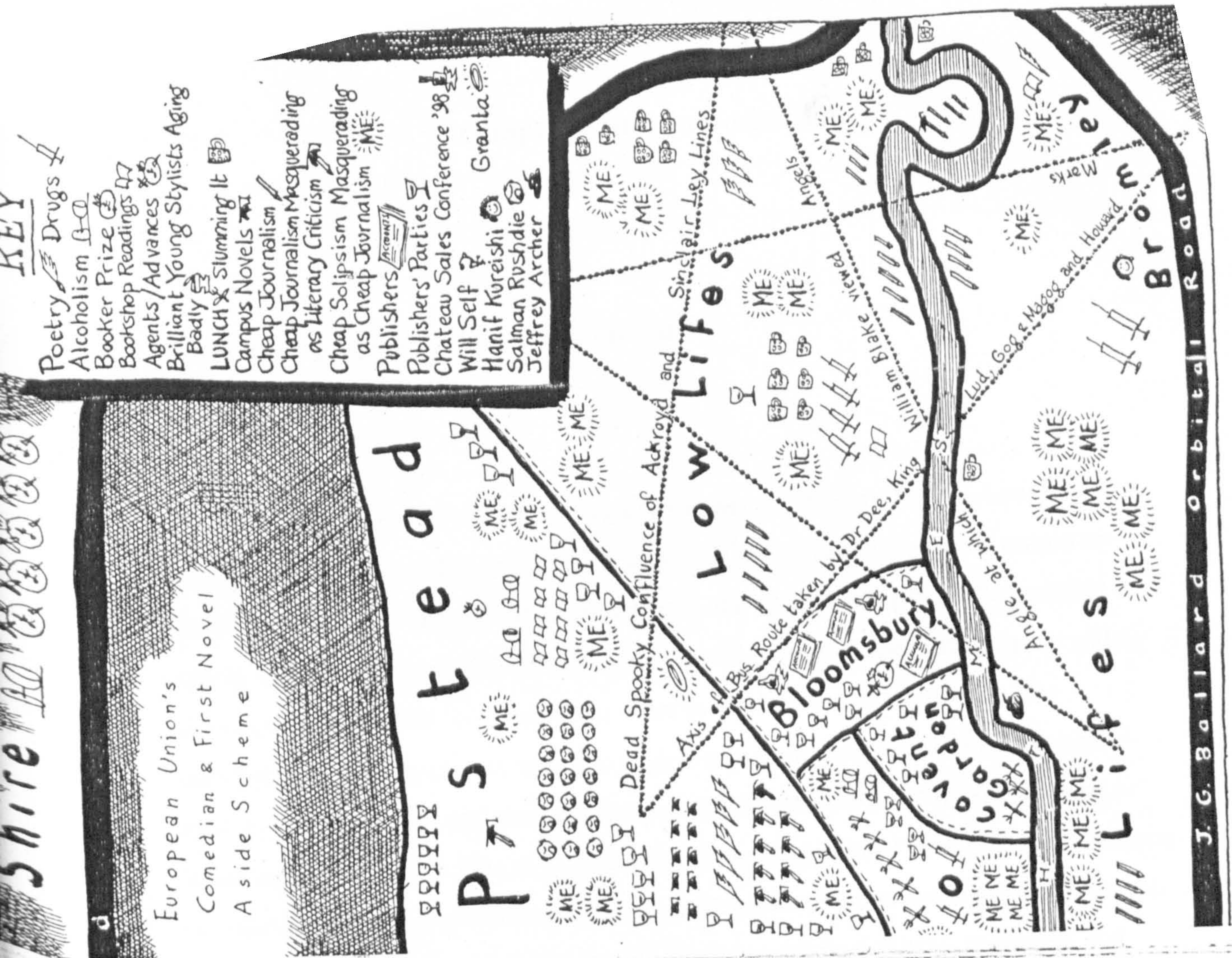
The dissertation was made financially viable in the form of the Overseas Research Student Scholarship (ORSS) and the University of Bristol Postgraduate Research Scholarship.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	8
i, Critical Geographies of Space and the City	8
ii, Literary Geographies of Urban Space	22
iii, Urban Geographies of Martin Amis's Fiction	33
 <b>Chapter Two: Body Visions: <i>The Rachel Papers</i>, or Portrait of an Urban Artist as a Young Man</b>	 40
i, Body Work and Urban Poetics	41
ii, Body, Style and Performativity	52
iii, Linguistic Geometries of Desire	59
 <b>Chapter Three: Broken Visions: Language, <i>A(na)mnnesia</i> and the City in <i>Other People</i></b>	 67
i, Mapping Words: Defamiliarising the City	68
ii, City of Alterity	81
iii, <i>Kinaesthesia</i> : Circularity or Violent Paradigms of Space	89
 <b>Chapter Four: Double Visions: Information, Authorship and Doubles in Literary London</b>	 100
i, Information, The Uncanny and Literature	102
ii, Urban Fields of Production: Exercises in Authorship	113
iii, City Fellows (Twins and Doubles) or Doubling the Urban Text	125
 <b>Chapter Five: London Visions: The City, Metafiction and Topography</b>	 136
i, Mapping Worlds: Fields of London, Fields of Fiction	138
ii, Heterotopic London: Writing the City as a Pub	150
iii, Transpositions: Death and Narrativity	160

<b>Chapter Six: Changing Fields of Vision: Urban <i>Textscapes</i> of Anglo-America</b>	<b>170</b>
i, English Journeys: Literary Travels in Transatlantic Space	171
ii, Character and Form: Audio-Specular <i>Topographics</i>	180
iii, Fiscal Geographies of the City	195
 <b>Bibliography</b>	 <b>205</b>







## Chapter One: Introduction

### Critical Geographies of Space and the City

The dissertation will be principally focused on making Martin Amis's fiction available for urban analysis through an examination of how his creative output up until the mid-1990s engages in recent cultural and literary debates on the concept of space. In contemporary cultural theory, space and modes of spatialization are widely analysed and carefully investigated in order to tap into the relationship of the individual to state apparatus, and into such much-contented issues as discourses of identity, class, gender, and race and the power relations involved in constructing or representing them. The city, in addition, has been long viewed by social scientists as a complex and interactive network of socio-economic activities based on geographical, architectural and public relations, creating a *milieu* where political, economic and aesthetic connections intermingle.

An important and comprehensive summary of the development of space in intellectual and cultural history is Henri Lefebvre's study, *The Production of Space*. In this book Lefebvre's aim was to present a since then much-referenced general theory of space. In particular, Lefebvre formulated a critical requisite to reassess space and its socio-cultural role since, as he maintained, up until the publication of his work (originally published in 1974, somewhat belatedly translated into English in 1991), space had been a cultural vacuum and had only had a rather arid and scientific (geometrical) definition. Lefebvre accused scientists, above all, mathematicians of "deflecting" space into a "mental thing" (Lefebvre 3). With the Cartesian school of thought, he explains, space had started to be conceived of as belonging to the realm of the absolute, entailing space's superimposition upon and domination of all bodily senses and subjective viewpoints. Indeed, for scientists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz or Newton, space had the attribute of the divine. Correspondingly, the Kantian conception of space was



essentially separated from empirical space: “it belonged to the *a priori* realm of consciousness (i.e. of the ‘subject’s’), and partook of that realm’s internal, ideal – and hence transcendental and essentially ungraspable – structure” (Lefebvre 2). It appears then that the concept of space was formerly attributed the qualities of the metaphysical or the divine, crucially held to be beyond understanding or unavailable for critical enquiry.

As foundation work of human geography, Lefebvre’s book is essential since it placed great emphasis on trying to expand the frame of reference of quantifying and scientific geography and invest the discipline with a vision of the social scientist centred on human and personal experiences of environment. As part of his bid to advance an extensive review of the critical history of space, one of Lefebvre’s first proposals is a tripartite division. The first mode of spatiality<sup>1</sup> he offers is the so-called “spatial practice,” a medium human beings were closely bound up with and which ensured continuity by embracing production and reproduction. It also involved a process of initiation with the full implication that the individual had to pass tests in order to enter it so that, as Lefebvre perceptively remarks, “the ultimate foundation of social space is prohibition” (Lefebvre 35). Seemingly an ideal spatial arrangement, “spatial practice” is nevertheless conditioned by a curious interplay of affirmation and negation.<sup>2</sup> The doubleness of the act of spatial initiation (in leaning upon the primary act of prohibition) thus underscores more recent approaches wherein space is perceived as similarly dualistic: space can provide a sense of immediacy and objectivity; or, on the contrary, it can be a mere interface of mediation where beyond

---

<sup>1</sup> As Silvia Mergenthal places emphasis on the notion of spatiality in a recent article, “Contested Spaces in Contemporary London Fiction,” spatiality primarily denotes an intertwinement of social and spatial; an important aspect of which is an analysis of how this is realized by feeling and thinking (Onega-Stotesbury, eds. 132).

<sup>2</sup> As Lefebvre also remarks, Georges Bataille’s spatially-inflected considerations in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings: 1927-1939* and to some extent in *Eroticism* tie in with his ideas about the dialectical (affirmation-negation) origination of space. For Bataille, the entirety of space (physical, social, mental) is tragically apprehended since space-formation is conditioned on the exertion of violence. The mythical spatial arrangement of centre-periphery, for example, covers over a wound; so, at the heart of spatial origins and their uses lies a violent sacrifice. Thus, Bataille argues, violence is intricately bound up with the act of human creation, a correlation that a number of Amis’s novels will be shown to be equally suggestive of.

each surface there is something else. Lefebvre's second-degree organization of space, designated as "representations of space," is mediated to a considerable degree. Being overwhelmingly technical and conceptualised, it is a scientifically planned space tied to essential relations of production, including those of knowledge, signs and codes (Lefebvre 33). Opposed to this is the third-degree organization of space, the so-called "representational space." Constituted by a web of "complex symbolism," it is a spatial type connected to the imaginary as well as the "clandestine," the unconscious and to "the underground side of social life" (Lefebvre 33). It is essentially the realm of art described, explored and invented by artists, philosophers and writers. Enmeshed with non-verbal signs and symbols, it is suggested that "representational space" is imbued with a symbolic use of objects that overlays the physical world (Lefebvre 39).

A less complex repartition of space formations was delineated when Lefebvre distinguished between "absolute space" and "abstract space." "Absolute space" is composed of fragments of nature located at sites that were mainly chosen for their intrinsic qualities, like a cave or a river (Lefebvre 48). Although these sites co-existed peacefully with people, we are reminded that they were to recede through history as a result of human invasions and constant attempts at appropriations.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, nostalgic and idyllic as the arrangement of "absolute space" may sound, it marked a highly repressive visualisation of space because it failed to accommodate the individual and the idiosyncratic. Such observations also signal how the incipient considerations of human geography have been instrumental in opening scientific and geographical discourse to emotive sources. "Absolute space" betokened a public and highly institutionalised space that strictly overruled the private in simply avoiding making any distinction between public and private: the private realm was subsumed altogether by religion or politics.

With the arrival of capitalism, a new type of space began to emerge: the "abstract space" of commodities founded on the colossal network of banks, motorways and airports (Lefebvre 53). Within this space the city – once the forcing

---

<sup>3</sup> This is not to be confused with what some classical philosophers, like Spinoza, understand by absolute space. For them absolute space belongs to the realm of the transcendental: it is that of God, infinite for whom no shape is necessary to occupy. It is located nowhere and has no place because it embodies *all* places. It metaphorically identifies any space as holy where forms are generated, and such forms (square, circle, triangle, cross) are seen as microcosms of the universe (Lefebvre 236-237).

house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space – disintegrated (Lefebvre 53). Thus, Lefebvre was a forerunner of postmodern geographers in several senses: in arguing that a critical investigation of space destabilises the relations of production and unproduction, materiality and representation, the global and the local, and the processes (mental maps, symbols, icons) by which people interact with space, he presciently revealed that locations of knowledge are ineluctably positional and multiple. All in all, Lefebvre's work is seminal in understanding new approaches to analysing the spatial distribution of human activity and the social relations of production.

Since Lefebvre's landmark study the role and aims of geography have been reconsidered and irretrievably altered to yield a new subset called 'human geography,' and more recently, 'cultural geography' that attend to new methods in cultural theory, and a general problematisation of the notion of centre, mimetic representation or power structurations.<sup>4</sup> Geographical readings posited on a unified, inviolable and collective sense of place have been repudiated and places as locations *sui generis* experienced by ordinary people have become significant. Fredric Jameson in his important work, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, acknowledges space as the contemporary existential or cultural dominant as a result of postmodernism's engagement with a logic of spatial supplement, a supplement that is being produced by an irreversible process of impoverishment of the sense of history (and time) in culture and society. It is in this sense that the urban can be taken to constitute a fundamental context, an integral part of the general and particular formations of spatiality and of social life.

In particular, the phenomenological investigation into everyday urban modern existence proposed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is of great relevance for contemporary cultural theorists and literary critics embarking on an exploration of the urban-spatial imaginary. Most significantly, de Certeau is strongly opposed to the uncritical embracing within the social sciences of the Foucauldian discourse on power. Here, de Certeau sets out to counter the supposed omnipresence

---

<sup>4</sup> In this respect see Linda McDowell's article, "The Transformation of Cultural Geography" (Gregory, Martin and Smith eds. 146-173).



and dominance of these ‘power-practices’ with a different idea of a ‘tactics’ of using (productively consuming) urban space. He argues: “If it is true that the grid of ‘discipline’ is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it” (xiv). He advocates that critical attention be paid not only to the ubiquitous power practices but also to those practices by means of which users re-appropriate space (xiv). Indeed, cities are widely described as organised by control centres (Amis’s most memorable and at the same time playfully subversive metaphor in this respect is the pub) through what the prominent postmodernist geographer, Edward W. Soja, described as a “subtle geography of enclosure, confinement, surveillance, partitioning, social discipline and spatial differentiation” (Soja 153). Read from this critical angle, one of the interpretive dilemmas that Amis’s fiction repeatedly seems to pose is that the characters are posited in an intermediary space where they are struggling to negotiate their double-coded status: conditioned by late capitalist cultural practices, yet simultaneously undermining those.

In *Postmodern Geographies* Soja contends that a major reason for the neglect or invisibility of space (as opposed to time) in theoretical discourses can be accounted for by the general view that originary space, in other words, the absolute and infinite space, Nature, cannot be produced and, therefore, is “the antithesis of human production” (21). It is a general view among human geographers that the critical concept of space and spatialization emerged and began to be attended to when the most fundamental relations of civilisation were implemented. Space subsequently increased in significance with the arrival of capitalism; it structured the social divisions of labour while being further reinforced by the various institutional embodiments of the state: “spatialization is associated with the development and survival of capitalism, with social division of labour, institutional materiality of the state, and the expression of economic, political and ideological power” (Soja 119). Furthermore, Soja in this work heralds Michel Foucault as one of the most important theorists to have significantly contributed to the (re)assertion of space in critical thought. Foucault’s spatial observations are most explicitly spelt out in two interviews: “Questions on Geography” and “Space, Knowledge and Power.” However, they are perhaps most succinctly summarised in a short yet famous article entitled “Of Other Spaces.” Here, Foucault advances the much-quoted term

*heterotopias* to refer to space-formations within the contemporary superseding the hierarchic “ensemble of places” of the Middle Ages, of the “emplacement” effected by the sacred and profane. *Heterotopias* stand for contested spaces in human culture; they are “counter-sites” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). The essential characteristic of *heterotopias* as multiform and irreducible spaces turns them into apt spatial formations often used for expressing attributes of urban spaces always producing multiple stories and thereby suggesting that cities are *heterotopias* in and of themselves. Moreover, *heterotopia* is a useful term to imply that postmodernist narratives of spatiality are inexorably expressive of the discourse of plurality.

Conversely, for feminist geographers including Gillian Rose, Nancy Duncan, Linda McDowell and Elizabeth Grosz, human geography for all its professed emphasis on plurality is still in need of a critical corrective. They urge a feminist reappraisal of the discourse of geographical knowledge, a ‘gendered’ geography that instead of erasing feminine difference would be a vanguard of the critical case of decentring ‘woman.’ Feminist theory has been also crucial in integrating the role of body, the notion of embodied experience of spatiality in cultural geography. In her influential study, *Space, Time and Perversion*, Grosz’s major preoccupation is to emphasize the importance of cities in the social production of bodies and body-senses. The city constitutes a context or medium, Grosz contends, where otherwise unrelated bodies meet and interact; the city is thus most crucial in our awareness of corporeality. According to Grosz, the urban condition allows the body to be produced as a socio-sexual discourse: “The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically ‘incomplete’; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering and long-term ‘administration’” (Grosz 104). In her view, however, the interconnectedness of city and body has been erroneously presented, with either preceding the other in a rigid way; instead, the body and the city are to be defined as creating an urban-corporeal interface.

Moreover, Grosz cogently claims that the city is the site for the body’s cultural saturation and that this process of culturally encoding the body is governed by images circulated by the mass media. In post-industrial cultures, I would argue, the interface of the city reflecting or reflected by the self and body is best located in the realm of the artificial, thus inverting the *ur*-narrative of the mutual conditioning of visual and



desire, of space and subjectivity. One of the most prevalent reflecting surfaces in the contemporary is the vast glass fields of tower buildings. The sprawling glass surfaces of modern architecture constitute a space of ambiguity since inviting as they may be to the viewer to have a look inside, they ultimately refuse or disorient the inspecting eye. In this transposed scene of (self-) reflection, it is a depthless veneer of transforming images that looks back at the self. Glass buildings then are to be taken as architectural impressions of the model of readability that the postmodern city offers; it is as if the city staged a *mise-en-scène* of the relationship of urban space and its reader, a spatial topography of architecture (space) and viewer (self) where seeing (understanding) is fuzzy or blurred (always 'beyond'), born out of the imperfection and disfigurement of what is shown (represented). In *lieu* of the interior of the building, the viewer is presented with a deformed and warped moving image of his or her surroundings. The glass surface works against the illusion of permanence suggesting that buildings can be just as transitory as the aims of the urban planners that conceived and built them. Indeed, postmodern architecture with its frequent use of glass surfaces is often viewed by conservationists as buildings conceived by advances of technology and modernity to work against the so-called spirit of the old town and city-centres, as disrupting the continuous line of historical cityscapes. Architecture is, as a result, a prime manifestation of the dialectics of space: it can reify and at the same time fragment urban experience. Hence, the human geographers' tenet that the city is ultimately a social discourse, a competitive place of social production, the spatiality of which challenges orthodox analysis for the city indeed seems limitless and constantly in motion, always encompassing or turning into 'other spaces.'

Any attempt at appropriating space, however, is highly problematic since a principal mode of mapping space lies within the regime of looking. Looking, a widely debated term in psychoanalysis, feminism and visual arts, is theorised as the originary process in the birth of subjectivity, and revealed as a deceptive mechanism since it institutes a primary scene of misrecognising the self. Grosz's treatment of the relationship between psychoanalysis and corporeality offers some useful ideas on the intersection of spatiality and looking as well. Grosz refers to the work of the idiosyncratic French intellectual, Roger Caillois, whose work often combined anthropology and sociology with literary criticism and philosophy. Moreover, Caillois was instrumental in the formulation of many of Lacan's key theorems about the

dialectic of space and ego-formation. In analysing the behavioural patterns of the insects, particularly with respect to their imitating strategies or mimicry, Caillois made some pertinent comments for the purposes of a psychoanalytic consideration of self (organism) and space (environment). His most notable conclusion was that contrary to generally accepted ideas, mimesis had no survival value since it exposed the insect to more danger. Caillois's observations in the field of insect entomology is of great help to Grosz in being able to forcefully contend that for positioning oneself as a subject, it is crucial that one is able to locate oneself in space occupied by one's body: "This anchoring of subjectivity in *its* body is the condition of a coherent identity, and, moreover, the condition under which the subject *has a perspective* on the world, becomes the point from which vision emanates" (Grosz 89). The phenomenon of *mimesis* among insects is eventually likened to psychosis among human beings since the psychotic's space is often blurred (conflated) with other spaces around him while living in the compressed time-frame of a continuous present. These observations can be instrumental in tackling the uncertainties of recognizing and establishing boundaries of self and space, a condition of postmodern urban writing where the relations of space and subjectivity are best conceived of as a process or a flux dismantling a fixed sense of identity or place.

Grosz is not alone in urging a more social, or rather, 'soft' reading of space. Human geographers, such as Steve Pile, Nigel Thrift, Henri Lefebvre, Yi-fu Tuan, Doreen Massey, Edward Relph and David Harvey, have all convincingly argued for a cross-disciplinary discourse on space and subjectivity to comprehend the practices that allow the place the self takes up to be both constitutive and expressive of identity. From this follows their major contention that space is essentially a social construction. As discussed above, positivist notions of space, the concept of passive geometry have been challenged in social sciences since the 1970s, and instead the idea of interaction has been stressed. In this new social landscape, the city emerges as the most dynamic of all spatial structurations, an urban site that not only invites but in fact requires individual mapping. It is to be also noted that space and spatial categories have been recently recovered as important concepts in mapping the complexity of the inner self. As Steve Pile has put in his psychoanalytically-informed study on space and subjectivity, *The Body and the City*, what psychoanalysis and geography share are "*terrae incognitae* of people's hearts and minds" (9). In his cognitive conception of

the city, Pile is evidently influenced by Freud's passing yet all the more suggestive remarks in the introductory pages of *Civilization and its Discontents*, where Freud draws a parallel between mental activity and urban forms (more specifically, the 'Eternal City,' Rome), revealing that while trying to find an apt analogy of the mind, he first chose the city. When visiting Rome, Freud asserts, tourists can witness the ruins of previous times; and, in a similar fashion, in "mental life, nothing that has once taken shape can be lost, that everything is somehow preserved and can be retrieved under the right circumstances – for instance, through a sufficiently long regression" (*Civilization* 7).

Admittedly, Freud had renounced the idea since, as he maintained, even the most peaceful city would inevitably have to undergo demolition to a certain extent to make way for new urban planning. From the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis, these are gratuitous acts of erasing topographical memory-traces. Freud, consequently, abandoned the comparison drawing the conclusion that "no city can properly be compared with a psychical organism" (*Civilization* 9). Nonetheless, these early remarks are revealing for present urban studies since they presciently offered a model of how recombinatory imagination *forgets* the city. The Freudian analogy drawn between mental processes and Rome is exemplary of the very layered, palimpsestic, recoiling ambivalence of the city and the cognitive-visual perception that it requires. Thus Freud, it can be argued, foregrounds the city as the archetype of human imagination.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, Pile claims, the mental map of the city is mainly produced by a so-called "imageability,"<sup>6</sup> an attribute that resolves the mental map into an embodied process of knowing, reflecting and following the psychodynamics of a place.

---

<sup>5</sup> An equally rich analogy of cognitive faculties and the urban is that of Wittgenstein, who grounded the maze-like complexity of the city in the metaphor of language's historically sedimented density (Middleton and Woods 279).

<sup>6</sup> Pile presumably borrows the term from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, which, published in 1960, was one of the first works on urban planning and architecture to promote a psychological, or at least, emotive consideration of the relationship between urban environment and its inhabitants. Lynch defines the term as follows: "that quality in a physical which gives it a high probability of evoking a stronger image in any given observer" (Lynch 9). A highly imageable city, Pile continues, "would be the one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly interconnected" (Lynch 10).



The modelling of mental energies evoking a spatial archaeology leads us to the work of the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, who provides a poetic reading of the physical world, human space and the objects people surround themselves with in his imaginative *The Poetics of Space*. In this work Bachelard essentially applies methods deriving from phenomenology to the architecture of the paradigmatic *topos* of human space: the house. His work is significant in terms of showing that human beings always create an imaginary dimension to their built environments, and the house or the city of imagination is opposed to formulaic and quantifiable geography. In Bachelard's vision the materiality of the house is turned into an indeterminate space since it is imbued with the counter-materiality of dreams, intimacy, interiority and involution. It is furthermore suggested that space should be apprehended as an affective realm; hence, Bachelard's argument goes, space is a category of difference rather than indifference. Furthermore, for the intuitive epistemology of space called for in his work, Bachelard advances the term *topophilia*: the excavation of the objects' aura, and the investigation or recovery of the hidden meanings of places like the cellar, the attic or the drawer.

Amis's fiction, on the other hand, reflects an urban psychodynamics where it is becoming increasingly difficult to relate emotionally to the physical surrounding, where the emotive *topoanalysis* of space promoted by Bachelard becomes impossible since physical and psychological do not connect. Similarly, the urban sociologist, Richard Sennett, remarks in *Flesh and Stone* that as urban space "becomes a mere function of motion, it thus becomes less stimulating in itself [. . .]. Thus, the new geography reinforces the mass media. The traveller, like the television viewer, experiences the world in narcotic terms; the body moves passively desensitized in space, to destinations set in a fragmented and discontinuous urban geography" (18). In this study, Sennett is mainly concerned with analysing urban space in order to find ways that would make the inhabitants more physically responsive and aware of each other. Most characters in Martin Amis's fiction, however, respond to one another, conceive of themselves as subjectivities and experience urban space through desire or a libidinal economy. Thus, it is necessary that a brief overview of the dialectic of desiring, identification and space in critical thought is offered.

The consideration of the critical notion of desire in relation to space is apposite so much the more since psychoanalysis has been seen by many as a helpful critical discourse in the exploration of what animates the physical and imaginary spaces of the city. In this respect psychoanalysis is ultimately seen as a spatial discipline, and as applying itself to the various ways the mind de-materializes the world and transforms it into a multi-layered memory of imaginary representations. Pile offers a useful summary of the trajectory of the Lacanian mirror-stage, largely regarded as grounding the primary mechanisms of cognition and identification for later life. In the mirror-stage, Pile expounds, the child transforms itself into the image as it appears to the child (*imago*) while also assuming the identity of the *imago* (*The Body and the City* 123).<sup>7</sup> This *imago* is prototypical of the way the self will later come to function (123). Hence, specular image, as Pile rightly argues, will constitute an ego-ideal involving objectification and a dialectic, or rather, a play of appearance and disappearance, of presence and absence. One effect instituted by such a spatial composition of self-identification is that the self is always ‘doubled,’ being essentially structured by a dialectic of whole and parts, shown and hidden, visible and invisible. This spatial dynamic inevitably brings about a ‘derealising’ effect since what the self is ultimately left to identify with is a reflection, a virtual image, a fictional self; “and the effect of this,” contends Pile, “is to both create an obsession with space and to institute an air of unreality about spatial relationships” (*The Body and the City* 124).

It adds to the ambiguity and the constitutive misapprehension of self-formation that the place where the self can identify with itself, the mirror, is in fact a virtual space, a *placeless place*. The mirrored image of the self is essentially non-material and shows only in its absence: it stages in a way the somethingness (or agency) of the other as well as the dissolution of the self into nothingness (*The Body and the City* 127). As Pile convincingly illustrates, Lacan’s mirror-stage did not only subsequently rewrite or at least challenge humanist ideas about the formation of a stable self, but it also began to undo the “notion that space is somehow a passive backdrop against which bodies and subjectivity can be mapped – space looks back” (*The Body and the City* 129). The mirror-stage is also of relevance to the present

---

<sup>7</sup> Laplanche-Pontalis define the *imago* as follows: “Unconscious prototypical figure which orientates the subject’s way of apprehending others; it is built up on the basis of the first real and phantasized relationships within the family environment” (*The Language of Psychoanalysis* 211).



research since, as an originary experience, it significantly takes place before the appearance of language, and, in this sense, it leans upon the materiality of the body. This anchoring is decisive for subsequent mental processes as it grounds metaphorical thinking, thus significantly conditioning cultural assumptions. In Amis's fiction, the body or living through the body in the city is a prominent narrative theme, and will be the main object of enquiry in the next chapter. So, in summary, psychoanalysis is crucial for our purposes since it establishes that the self is arrived at from an interplay of approximation and distancing; and the city, by analogy, articulates and disarticulates, figures and disfigures the conscious subject or self.

Drawing upon Pile's assertion that city-life should be understood in as much social as psychoanalytic terms, this thesis offers a reading of spatial-corporeal relations as generating a rich metaphoric literature of the urban expressive of the eroticism of 'Amis-city.' One of the recurrent and constitutive characters of the erotically charged 'London fields' devised by Amis's novels is the prostitute, or a variation on the prostitute, an urban figure often taken to be a female double of the *flâneur* of the turn of the century urban settings: "a central spectacle in a set of urban encounters and fantasies" (*The Body and the City* 232). As Pile continues, both the *flâneur* and the prostitute are "markers of the difficulties of locating people in their proper place: each moves between locations, turning up where they 'should not be'" (*The Body and the City* 235). Pile evokes the figure of the *flâneur* in an attempt to draw a different mode of engaging with the city that he locates in the intersection of "erotics of knowledge, vision and street-walking" (*The Body and the City* 225).<sup>8</sup> This assumes greater importance if the de Certeau idea is considered that walking is a form of enunciating the relation of self and space. As a result, for de Certeau, as for other thinkers of the city, like Walter Benjamin, the city is mainly a site of freedom and agency. Furthermore, walking - a spatial tactic to be considered in Chapter Three - is akin to the act of speaking for both select, fragment, omit and transgress given patterns. To walk also means to depart from the familiar, to go to unexplored territories, to write the space of the city to an individual logic. Chiefly drawing on

---

<sup>8</sup> If one is to take on board Pile's suggestion that the actual etymology of the word is not the French intransitive verb *flâner*, (meaning to saunter, to laze), but *flâneuse*, which signifies a kind of reclining chair (*The Body and the City* 225), then, quite significantly, the eventual use and meaning of *flâneur* (gathering knowledge and essentially linked to the pleasure derived from observing and freely strolling through arcades and the streets of the city) can be taken to fold back on a more originary correlation between leisure, comfort, bourgeois liberty and the all-important act of cultivating the mind.

Benjamin's influential treatment of the *flâneur* in *Charles Baudelaire*, Pile defines this urban type as the epitome of the capitalist 'man about town' relentlessly indulging himself in (consuming) visual pleasures and the spectacle of the urban modern. Chapter Six, by contrast, will proffer for the turn-of-the century urban character of the *flâneur* the figure of the transatlantic traveller just as intensely fascinated by the movement and frenzy of the city and capital in postmodernist geographies.

The role of walking and wandering was equally a primary concern of a leftist group of mainly French social theorists in the 1950s and 1960s, called *Lettrist International*, but more as a critique of the unitary and "poor" vision of modernist urban planners. Since then loosely referred to as the Situationists, they are acknowledged as originators of the term 'psychogeography' much prevalent in current urban studies. Psychogeography was intended to be a new form of urbanism as it comprised a praxis of inventive and subversive strategies for investigating the geographical environment or the city, and for going off the predictable pathways to better understand the psychic and spiritual effect of urban geographies on the self. As Simon Sadler argues in *The Situationist City*, through their spatial practices, the Situationists wanted to reassess the urban. These *situations*, aimed at plunging the "participants into an examination of individual and collective consciousness" (Sadler 106), included placing works of art in pubs and bars instead of museums, turning the roofs of Paris into an alternative pedestrian zone, or wandering through a given area using the map of another location (as one member wandered through one region of Germany while blindly following a map of London). Relying on random and aimless movements through space (the Debordian *dérive* or drift and *détournement* or diversion), the psychogeographers wanted to counter what they described as the contemporary domestication, over-regulation and, hence, potential eradication of the inherent diversity of human spatial structures.

The literature of urban psychogeography, however, is one that has been produced in response to an imaginative exploration of related events recurring on the same site within the city, and the psychological aftermath of this on the material history of London, as can be found in Peter Ackroyd's London novels or Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat: A Book of Dead Hamlets*. Psychogeographic narrative regards urban space as a multi-layered text where behind the everyday and ordinary lie

mysterious and occult forces, where each layer hides something. As Jennifer Bavidge draws the conclusion in her unpublished dissertation, “Representations of Urban Space in the Postmodern Novel: Ellis, Ackroyd, Auster, Sinclair”: “The city enacts the situationist drift itself in the postmodern novel” (Bavidge 41). Bavidge also argues that psychogeographic urban novels ultimately deconstruct the rationale of historical investigation through the trope of unresolved crimes, amply illustrated by Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor*, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, *The House of Doctor Dee* or Sinclair’s *White Chappel*, *Scarlet Tracings*. Thus, the structures of the official history of a place are undermined, and the topography of London can become a political-critical aesthetic, especially for Sinclair. Arguably, Amis’s urban fiction evades psychogeographic interests since his writing is not particularly responsive to a set of architectural and cultural memories; the pervasiveness of London seems to emerge in a transformed cityscape that refuses to unravel the past. Compared to contemporary literary psychogeographers, Amis’s urban experimentalism is markedly disengaged; only the present is refracted through his Londonsapes. Alternatively, an avoidance to take stock of the literary heritage of London pits Amis against some of the new antiquarianism to be found in psychogeographic literature. Amis’s urban novels, instead of digging into the past, are expressive of the forceful socio-economic and physical (re)structurings and repercussions involved in the present of the late-capitalist city. This also seems to corroborate the urban theorists’ argument that in capitalism one masters space by producing it, and in the process new (social) relations are also being produced. In the following, the introduction will embark on establishing links between postmodern geography, its critique of reductive concepts of spatiality and the recent output in the field of ‘literary geography’ or literary criticism on the city.



## Literary Geographies of Urban Space

The critical affirmation of space in cultural theory has drawn attention to the importance of spatial referents in modes of communication; the self has started to be viewed as always posited or located within a place or situation, in a literal or a figurative sense of the word. Interestingly enough, almost concurrent with the consideration of human existence as profoundly linked to spatial praxis is a gradual overturning or over-writing of spatial referents in the late-capitalist daily practices of communications that have re-invested, confused and disjointed these spatial debates. The following chapters will demonstrate that Amis's urban texts figure the unease and violence effected by such postmodern practices of "de-spatialization." A major unresolved anxiety in cultural geographical discourse is that the fundamental transformation of spatial relations disturbs former, more regulated cultural politics, forms of knowledge and their dissemination, the circulation of signs, and in a particular sense, the customary relations between people, bodies and information. As a result of a widely-recognised shift in postmodern cultural production, it is commonplace that the new determinants of mass media are grafted onto the urban fabric of the post-industrial city. Hence, the prevailing argument in current urban studies that the difference between the city of imagination and the 'real' city is increasingly shifting towards a point of erasure has gained much relevance in any consideration of urban modes of existence. An early example of conflating the geographical city with the imaginary one would be James Joyce's modernist Dublin. As Hana Wirth-Nesher has summarised in *City Codes*, in *Ulysses* Joyce turns the provincial, backward and all too familiar city of Dublin into the most elaborate and capturing modernist city in literature that also comprises the vastness of the mythic and cultural geographies of the Western world, thus mapping a metropolis of imagination of such power that in turn the material city has been changed and effected by it (Wirth-Nesher 180). Postmodern geographers have been instrumental in recovering literature for critical discourses on space and the urban. Conversely, the recognition that the construction, representation and interpretation of the city have been long present in literary texts returned some critical attention in human geography

to the metaphorical or figurative roots of geographical naming and writing; thus the relationship of social sciences to discourse or text has been shifted.

Jonathan Raban in his much-celebrated *Soft City* published in the mid-70s argued for a number of views that more recent studies on the urban novel have expressed. The city is “soft,” claims Raban, because it is plastic by nature as opposed to the settled world of villages or small towns. Raban also extends the meaning of soft in urban critical thinking to denote play, illusion, aspiration, or nightmare, but also, and most significantly, “the real.” In this book he called for a more fluid comprehension of urban space where the cities are seen and lived as pliable locations:

We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in cities is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relationship between man and material that exists in the continual play of urban living. The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture. (4)

The mutual consideration of geography and literature importantly marks a movement away from outmoded models to new theorisations of spatiality; in cultural geography, however, there are inadequate accounts of the imagined constituent of urban space. As seen above, a universal and ordered sense of place has been displaced and replaced with a more diffuse idea of spatiality while the city is seen as “a site of different and competing discourses or narratives, of which literary representation of the city is one element” (Bavidge 42). The authors of *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing*, Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, raise the importance of attending to the fiction of the urban, seeing it as a rich and multi-layered discourse abundant in metaphors that have not yet been registered by



sociological discourses, or in tropes that on many occasions provide the sociologists with an apt visual analogy to support their analyses. Furthermore, they convincingly assert that the novel and the city form a special bond wherein the novel can offer a: “‘structure of feeling’ adequate to our experiences of abstract space. This discourse of ‘feeling,’ [. . .] in relation to city experience, is part of the transformative power of fictional representations, because it structures our spatial awareness through a concretisation of our everyday spatial consciousness” (278). In his exhaustive and formative survey, *The City in Literature*, Richard Lehan similarly conceives of the city and its various representations in literature as two texts mutually shaping each other: “as literature gave imaginative reality to the city, urban changes in turn helped transform the literary text” (xv). Perhaps the term ‘city in literature’ is the perfect way of thinking the softness of the imaginary and the fixedness of the represented city together. The space of ‘city in literature’ in Amis’s case will be shown to be most graspable as an event, open to plays of associations, overlappings, a plural condition set in an intertextual matrix.

Taking their theoretical bearings from de Certeau, Middleton and Woods understand the city as the last stronghold of the collective social imaginary against the extensive discourse of power and ‘regimentation:’ “The city is both the site of authority and social control, and the place where the evasion of authority can become most self-aware, which is why so much of the best recent fiction gravitates towards representatives of urban space and cities” (281). This view, therefore, is suggestive of an intense urban imaginary tied up with a compelling argument for urban fictions to be read in a way that could be most productive, revelatory and subversive when originary structurings of the city are being queried. These are best conceived of as discursive sites where the city doubles itself as an elementary form of social authority or restrictive groundwork; and in this doubling act, it exhibits its constitutive ambiguity. The city develops and is developed in a way to cover over blind-spots within its social regulations; however, there are difficulties in sustaining such acts of urban planning since one of the most fundamental organizing principles of the city is its very ‘uncontainability,’ always spilling over its own boundaries and methods of structuration.

Lehan reminds us that literary criticism itself first comprehended the city in terms of an urban-pastoral dichotomy where the metropolis has been usually derided (Lehan 289). As is also evident from Raymond Williams's classic literary analysis on the subject, *The Country and the City*, the Romantics, for example, largely displayed an aesthetics of anti-urbanism in their literary works. Indeed, the creative output of the Romantic poets can be considered as a reaction to industrialization; for this reason, the city, in their view, was mesmerising yet lacked poetic attributes. Lacking in any interdisciplinary approach, Williams's book is still useful as an evaluation of changing attitudes in literature and culture towards the opposites of country and city, or more recently, culture and landscape. The city and the country have been often regarded as two mythic modes of human existence. Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* is strongly critical of urban technological environment, and prefers to return to earlier considerations of spatial forms and their roles in society when space was largely organised around the ancient debate on nature and civilisation: the country or *arcadia* and the city or *polis*. The country was held to be a knowable space of abundance and congeniality while the city was that of unknowability and hostility.<sup>9</sup> The former was attributed such qualities as peaceful, serene, bucolic, or even, spiritual, hence, transcendental. On the other hand, the city was seen as the opposite, an infernal place of noise and gloom, essentially a post-lapsarian space, secular and mechanical. Moreover, the rural was considered a naturally disorganised and infinitely sprawling space, while the city, at the moment of its inception, was already designed with a forcefully imposed focal point, a hub or a centre.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the problem of the loss of absolute spatial referents is a somewhat essentialist view

---

<sup>9</sup> Obviously, opposite value-attachments exist as well. For instance, in ancient times the values attached to the urban and the rural were the reverse of these. In ancient Greek urban meant *asteios* while rural meant *agroikos*, and they can be translated as witty and boorish, respectively (Sennett 36).

<sup>10</sup> However, such a division of town and countryside would be far too simplistic. See Richard Lehan on p. 286. He conceives of a certain economical dialectic between the city and the countryside effectively creating a symbiotic relationship between the two: the city was energised by the countryside as the latter provided raw materials for its markets. The relationship of doubling and reflection between the town and the countryside has been remarked upon by Lefebvre as well: the urban space is reflected in the rural space it contains while the town contemplates itself in the countryside perceiving itself in the country's double, in its repercussions or echo (*Production* 235). Since London is to a large extent the paradigm for urban analysis in this thesis, it could be also added in this respect that the town development in London up until the twentieth-century was very much dependent on, or restrained by aristocratic hereditary landowners who owned expansive stretches of land in the city but did not actually live there. Instead, they lived in their sumptuous mansions in the countryside. Although in Amis's fiction, the country is never a real alternative to the city, the problems of thinking the city and the countryside together is a significant narrative element in *Success*, and to a certain extent in *The Rachel Papers*.



among some critics, especially the ones belonging to an earlier cultural paradigm, that the city is a diseased social formation from its beginnings since it is aimed at creating a centre outside nature by a violent (ab)use of land. According to Burton Pike, author of *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, such enforced manmade designs saturate the idea of the city in Western culture with an ambivalent sense of guilt. The very act of the city's foundation is considered as interfering with the divine order. "The guilt," Pike explains, "might be connected with the curious myth that so many ancient cities were founded by murderers" (Pike 5); in Genesis the first city founder was Cain, for instance (Pike 6).

Pike is representative of critics who read the city as the ultimate symbol of civilisation, or an archetypal place of the vast cultural *topoi* of heaven and hell. Equally, in the introduction to Max Weber's notable *The City*, the editor and translator Don Martindale enlists a number of perceptions of the city registered by early sociologists. In the beginning of the twentieth century the urban was seen as a voracious form of civilisation. What was most striking - apart from indigenous city-dwellers residing in the poorest parts of the city and producing an unduly large number of degenerates, criminals and suicides - was that the city-class was incapable of long-term self-perpetuation (Weber 17). Indeed, Peter Ackroyd in his extensive *London: The Biography*, a book that intriguingly blends the city's historical and literary heritage, suggests that London "has commonly been portrayed in monstrous form, a swollen and dropsical giant which kills more than it breeds" (*London* 1). There are several examples in English literature, such as the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Ben Jonson, William Blake, Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe and Charles Dickens, all of whom imaginatively evoke London's voracious and destructive forces. The fraternal spirit created by the guilds, the driving force behind the foundation of many cities, was fragmented into a sense of displacement and impersonality as a result of the fierce drive for gain that bonded the craftsmen together at first, an urban dynamic most famously treated by the turn-of-the-century sociologist Georg Simmel in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900). It is at this point that Pike sees the city in literature to have become "fragmented and transparent rather than tangible and coherent, a place consisting of bits, pieces, and shifting moods; it came to stand under the sign of discontinuity and disassociation rather than community" (Pike 72). However, much more recently, to the ideology of the city as some lost but longed for

community, the contemporary novel responded with a picture of the city as a labyrinth, honeycombed with networks of hectic social interaction, as is masterfully created in Michael Moorcock's celebrated *Mother London*.

Lehan contends that the city has evolved through three stages, the commercial, the industrial, and the world-stage city, and relates them to various literary movements, especially to the ones pertaining to the novel: realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Christine Boyer, while considering architecture as the (aesthetic) manifestation of the city's development, also conceives of the city's spatial paradigms as responding to various stages of capitalism. The city as a work of art, framed as a "unified spatial order," developed into a panorama, a bird's eye view demanding deciphering as well as reordering; finally, this has turned into the centreless and contingent fragmentation of the postmodern city of spectacle (Boyer 32-35). Indeed, the literary movement of modernism has significantly contributed to internalising space and subsequently invited or facilitated contemplations about the presence and value of interior or psychological space. Leonard Lutwack in *The Role of Place in Literature* also maintains that modernist literature had a tendency to create an "inner spaciousness" in a reaction to a placeless world.

Modernism was, in addition, a markedly cosmopolitan and urban aesthetic that helped define to a great extent contemporary representations of the city. The postmodern, in turn, is conceived as a configuration of spaces and counter-spaces that question the validity of the interior and the private while at the same time challenging the violence of abstract spatial logic driving for power and surveillance. The literature of the city has recorded how the development of the city (since it was artificial) became dysfunctional with time, and subsequently turned into a labyrinthine construct ruled by a spatio-sopic logic whose recurring form was absence and uncertainty, endemic moments of blind spots or *lacunae*. In the grandiosity of the metropolis, the human scale is considered to be lost while the self is simultaneously aroused and submerged. In the postmodern urban the connection between the physical, empirically available city to all and the subjectively perceived image became suspended.

---

<sup>11</sup> The novel as closely related to the city forming a "close relationship" has been also contended by Malcolm Bradbury in his short essay "The Cities of Modernism." See also Hana Wirth-Nesher's *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*.



As an emerging novel type, the contemporary British urban novel is partly rooted, Malcolm Bradbury explains in *The Modern British Novel* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), in trying to find a literary site of resistance, a reaction to Thatcherite urban politics, and was further intensified by opening itself up to post-nuclear urban apocalyptic narratives prevalent in American fiction. The city of London, then, has become an object of intense enquiry and critique of nationalist ideology since the disintegration of the British Empire. John Brannigan in his discerning survey of post-war British fiction, *Orwell to the Present*, also suggests that the possibility that the urban emerges as a major theme in a number of contemporary British novels. He argues that the city is:

a malleable space, which exists principally in the mind, as an imagined, planned or mapped space. It is a text, comprising the imposition of geometry upon the vagaries of landscape, and the conglomeration of names and signs with navigable network of routes and passages. It is made possible as an experience, a conception, only by the influence of the cartographical and imaginative aids which are capable of bringing its existence as text into coherence. Literary texts help to give imaginative coherence to the city, to bring the city into consciousness as a navigable, readable space. The city played its part too, of course, in giving new, dynamic shape to literature, to make possible new literary forms of the novel. (186-187)

Brannigan also suggests that the city “is conceived as the monumental boast of modernity” (Brannigan 186). Indeed, the city is considered by many as mankind’s monument of the human self. Nonetheless, post-structuralist urban studies and ‘urban semiotics’ have drawn attention to the double-coded status of monuments: they do not have any practical use and are only meant to mark and represent the essence of the nation within the city.<sup>12</sup> The monument is meant to be seen from a great distance, and

---

<sup>12</sup> A useful collection of linguistically-informed social reading of urban space is *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* edited by M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (1986).

is erected to function as a panopticon from where one can see in all directions. It is very often designated to be the landmark of a city, or even, to be the city, to stand in a metonymical relationship to the city. Roland Barthes's essay on the "The Eiffel Tower" (1964), as one of the most recognisable urban landmarks in Western civilisation, points to the ambiguous role of monuments in the social imaginary. The Tower, evidently the highest building in Paris (and the highest building in the world when it was built in 1889) with a large number of imitations and reproductions all around the world, is the epitome of the "absolute monument" for Barthes, a pure sign that has escaped reason (Sontag ed. 237). It is, however, virtually empty; it is "*nothing*, it achieves a kind of zero degree of the monument," explains Barthes; there is nothing to see inside the monument (Sontag ed. 240).

Likewise, postmodern architecture signifies the effacement of monumental representation. So, the city of London is not identical with itself; it is after all a collective designation of several hundred little places and villages. This is also detectable in the architectural fabric of the city, a mark that the city refuses to be a continuous narrative - adding one building could often modify the whole, and thus affect the architectural-political-social fabric of the place. The fictional environment built by the postmodern novel repudiates the grand narratives of the nation; so does Amis as well create a small London within the vast metropolis where the meta-narrative of community and the city is greatly problematised. The cultural function of local geographies are significant in the sense that they suggest that urban planning cannot be an absolute structure of meaning. London is indeed constituted by more than one act of building, naming and writing while in the following chapters the aim is to demonstrate how Amis's writing is expressive of the 'politics of place,' of certain little Londons. On the whole, Amis's small London is part of writing the ineffable, vanishing and emerging realities of the city.

As argued above, terms utilised for reading space have been rethought by urban theory alongside with a shift within social sciences in their relationship to text; hence some human geographers' idea that the urban is a narrative in itself. The role of maps and the methodologies of mapping, consequently, have been also reconsidered. London's celebrated literary chronicler, Ackroyd, rightly maintains that "[t]he history of London is represented by the history of its maps. They can be seen as symbolic



tokens of the city, and as attempts to picture its disorder in terms of fluent and harmonious design” (*London* 112). We also learn from Ackroyd’s monumental work that the first map of London is a copperplate map from mid-sixteenth century, supposedly commissioned by Queen Mary I, yet only surviving in three fragments (*London* 112). It is an unusually detailed map, Ackroyd reveals, for it shows such urban trivia as dog-kennels, trees, buckets by a well or bed linen stretched out to dry.

Interestingly enough, Martin Rowson’s “Four London Maps,” published as recently as 1999 in the *London: The Lives of the City* edition of *Granta* (104-110), seem to draw on such earlier, more animated traditions of map-making. As seen, the ‘Modern London’ map is spatially dominated by Hampstead, while ‘Amis-land’ borders on the real and imaginary neighbourhoods of India, Scotland, Soho and Low Lifes (*sic*). Rowson’s comic graphics experiment with mapping – geographical writing- and can be, by way of extension, an inspiring reflection of the imaginary realm of the ‘city in literature.’ It is also suggestive that literary geographies of the city are not mere transcriptions of themes of sociology or urban phenomena; they overwrite the epistemologically available city and question the assumed identity of a place. In ‘Modern London’ the style of the cartoonist is applied in a way to activate a different vision of London, and also to destabilise categories normative geographical readings of the space of London are posited on. The insistent exposure of the fictionality of Rowson’s map resembles Amis’s self-reflective prose and signals a new kind of realism. Rowson’s ‘Modern London’ is also illustrative that the contemporary city is a contested space, phantasy text that can accommodate differing frames of reference. It is furthermore reminiscent that traditional cartography relied on invention and tied up with representational ideologies that Barthes in his article “Semiology and the Urban” debunked as follows: “Scientific geography and in particular modern cartography can be considered as a kind of obliteration, of censorship that objectivity has imposed on signification (objectivity which is a form like any other of the ‘imaginary’)” (Lagopoulos and Gottdiener eds. 89). Similarly, composed of small cartoon-like icons of novelistic cartography, of writing over (palimpsest) on the ‘real’ city, Amis’s London will be shown to foreground the fact that traditional representation relied just as much on invention and on the transposition of various representational ideologies.

The cultural theorist, Geoff King, in *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Geographies* also stresses that, in terms of mapping the world, cartographic conventions are superimpositions on rather than originators of an indisputable natural law, a view substantiated by the history of cartography itself. When the first printed maps began to circulate in Europe (1470s), the rational and the mystical were of the same cultural complex:

At the time of its development linear perspective was in fact viewed as a means of restoring the flagging moral authority of the church in an increasingly secular world. A world of straight lines and mathematical homogeneity was seen as reflecting the perfection of God's creation. Linear perspective is just another cultural convention. It might have its uses, but it is not the only way to view the world (King 46).

It is also interesting to note that in these late Medieval maps unexplored lands were filled with pictures of animals (real or fantastic), while invented rivers and uncharted seas were inhabited by mermaids, sea monsters or imaginary islands (King 63). However, as David Harvey contends, maps nowadays are devoid of the religious or the fantastic plane, or at least of people's personal marks in the individual production of them. They merely stand for a factual, functional and a thoroughly abstract ordering of space (Harvey 249). To take Barthes's earlier argument further, literary cartography is in a way an obliteration of scientific objectivity (similitude) imposed on cartographic signification (difference). This "writing/reading process is also an imaginative act of alternative mapping," writes Julian Wolfreys, foremost critic of literary London, "a mapping which undoes the very coordinates on which the presumption of knowable, finite topography relies. It relies on resistance to finite instances of comprehension or absolute accessibility" (*Writing London Vol. II* 167).

At the same time, drawing upon de Certeau's comment that a map "eliminates little by little the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce it" (de Certeau 121), the present research cannot escape making such impositions on Amis's urban fiction. Still, a map does indeed colonize space, and my attempt to map Amis as a



writer of the city colonizes his fiction in turn. Conceived of as a geometrical place, the map is “a formal ensemble of abstract places,” de Certeau argues, “it is a ‘theater’ (as one used to call atlases) in which the same system of projection nevertheless juxtaposes two very different elements” (de Certeau 121). The map produces and represents knowledge and stands between the past and future of a place. Furthermore, mapping can be taken to be a form and practice of rhetoric insofar as rhetoric aims to invoke authority and converge alterity into the ideology of oneness. Indeed, maps inevitably produce ideological spaces; they are sites with no real place, yet have a direct, analogical relation with one. To map the city also means that a form is provided that translates the city into a portable spatial miniature that can be taken to other places, or anywhere for that matter. Maps are thus transmitters between two worlds and need to be decoded, their most persistent decoder being the reader of the literature of the city. Writing the city contributes towards the possibility of regarding and reading the map less as a homogenous and empty space and more as a fluid, active one imbued with imaginary attributes. The cartography of writing London produces a literary map that precedes the sheer physicality of London in a way Jean Baudrillard suggests that a map that precedes the territory that it maps (*Simulacra and Simulation* 123). In the literature of the city, London resists turning into an intelligible and discernible reality of a place; instead, it is being reproduced from the imagination of characters (explorers) and the phantasmic effects conjured up by the text (map). The urban novel redraws the map of London to a different logic, to a more literary one where the city is non-linear, defying a quantifying scientific logic. Hence, the literary map of the city is only readable in its fragments, and in Amis’s case, it is all the more inscribed with enquiries into the iterative nature of writing, language or signification.

## Urban Geographies of Martin Amis's Fiction

The thesis aims to trace out the ways Amis's fiction addresses itself to urban literary and cultural geographies and holds that his novels are more intricately related to narratives of the city than has been previously thought. Prefatory remarks ought to be made at this point that the several dozen articles and essays of varying critical acuteness (most of them solely rehearsing tedious debates on postmodernist narrative poetics), and the three major studies of Amis's work, with the exception of some scattered and cursory remarks, fail to pay attention to or substantially address the role and significance of the urban in his novels. *Martians, Monsters and Madonna: Fiction and Form in the World of Martin Amis* (2000) by John A. Dern, for example, is a monograph that merely and rather unoriginally accommodates Amis's novels within "the postmodern condition." Drawing on some overused critical points, Dern argues that the importance of Amis's fiction is how "formlessness" supersedes "forms" of the novel (time, place, character, reliable author motivation) since "the great forms of the past have been exhausted and need to be redeployed" (Dern 7). While Dern contends that "[t]here is no guiding concept behind his work, unless it is the idea of making each novel or story different from the others by emphasizing a distressing worldview or a literary technique" (Dern 13), my main contention is that beyond a concern with various contemporary narrative techniques one theme running through Amis's novels is the urban. Gavin Keulks's *Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel since 1950* (2003), albeit a much-needed compendium in the field of literary genealogies of post-war British fiction, is again a study that only interprets their work "in terms of their historical and interpersonal interaction" (Keulks 19). It demonstrates how their differing views on and aesthetic allegiances to realism, modernism, experimentalism, comedy, style, morality and literature effectively inscribed "a whole generational shift of assumptions and values" (Keulks 29). A returning point of reference throughout the dissertation will be *Understanding Martin Amis* by James Diedrick, which, first published in 1995, then subsequently revised and updated in 2004, offers a comprehensive, close and insightful analysis of the most important themes and



distinctive features of Martin Amis's work; still, even Diedrick's study more or less leaves the urban realm of Amis's novels out of sight.

The dissertation then aims to extend and recontextualize the current literary criticism on Amis and the ostensible objective is to align his fictional texts to one particular type of novel that is still being discovered, a novelistic practice of which Wolfreys writes: "a genre, if not a tradition, which defines itself even as it escapes definition through the exemplarity of its most singular texts: that of the London novel" (Gibson and Wolfreys 172). The urban novel, it seems, is best assumed to be a hybrid form of multiple origins that has evolved for the past centuries and accommodated other genres, such as social-comedy, social documentary, Gothic, ghost story, crime novel, historical romance, autobiography, *Künstlerroman*, travel narrative, utopia, dystopia, satire, apocalyptic narratives and sci-fi. In the same vein, the presumption to comprehensively thematise and theorise the city in Amis's novels would be erroneous. Amis's city-text is configured from multiple texts, voices, intertexts that ultimately reveal a lack of any original. The next chapters consider the *topos* of the city in literature as an arch-trope running through all the readings, not least in the sense that J. Hillis Miller proposed in his inspiring book *Topographies*: "Tropes, it can be seen, are a matter of transference or changing places. The figurative word takes the place of the literal word, the improper the place of the proper. Tropes are usurping placeholders" (*Topographies* 71). Topography in Miller's analysis - as the ensuing chapters also aim to proceed from - is at the same time a space of philosophy, literature, ethics, borders and even the performative translation constructed by the elusiveness, iterability, and from writing's endless movement. Thus, Amis's urban topographies are *tropological* events that situate and resituate literary London and carry over the name of geographical London and its finite boundaries into the novel, into the space of literature so that the novelistic topography of the city is bound to create a site productive of difference.

As Peter Childs rightly notes in his survey of key British novelists of the late twentieth century, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970*, the city is a common ground for Amis's novels considered by many as constituting a dark satiric vision of contemporary life: "It has been observed that Amis's three long novels, though they do not have the continuity of characters or plot to constitute a trilogy, do

form a triptych: a set of three pictures of West London and contemporary Britain with its American influences” (Childs 43). The discourse between Amis’s fiction and the tradition of the urban novel may be semi-conscious, even cryptic in places; questions about the cultural and literary aspects of location and topography (‘writing place’) will be raised notwithstanding. The recurrent juxtaposition of the same West-London locations - mostly Notting Hill, Hampstead, Kensington, Paddington and Pimlico – that inform Amis’s urban text is best apprehended as assuming what Wolfreys calls “the experience of the aporetic. This force appears in the most supposedly familiar locations, in those places where we might believe we no longer have to read” (*Writing London Vol. II* 173). Iteration of the same location then seems to undo the static condition or identity of a geographical place; the deployment of an urban discourse in these novels will be consequently shown to be allusive in ways not previously demonstrated. The constant recurrence of the same sites exerts a haunting influence over the narrative; it starts to become a spectral presence, thus disturbing, dislodging and transforming the identity of a place while concurrently suggesting that perceiving the city and the specificity of a place can only be born out of assembling, putting together these topographical ruins. In this regard, Amis is a literary ‘rag-picker’ of London debris (a term applied to the urban author with increasing frequency), a scavenger of the literary urban text. Crucially, ‘rag-picking’ involves a random collection of things as it fastens on the accidental. The city-form, one might surmise, can only emerge in its amorphousness that needs to be collected, picked upon and imagined in all shapes it can take.

For Amis, writing a place familiar to the reader, like Notting Hill, is, first of all, a disfiguring process. Thus, the common experience of estrangement can be taken to frame the reader’s perspective on the city. Amis’s London is different from the one written by the celebrated contemporary London novelists - Ackroyd or Sinclair - in that his prose performs unawares rather than neatly surveys, carefully arranges or assertively presents the elements of the urban. Since the city repudiates articulation in its entirety and uniformity, the many inconsistencies and narrative disruptions in Amis’s fiction could be interpreted to enact Wolfreys’s discerning notes on the urban novel:



the true city text, the true act of writing the city, allows for the production of the text that, in its formation is analogous with the city, and is thus a performative text inasmuch as it never merely represents or speaks of the city, but enacts the city's assemblage through the assemblage of traces, ruins and remainders that write the city in ruins, though never as such (*Writing London Vol. II* 217).

In Amis's urban discourse, the linguistic condition of the city is time and time again asserted; we are made aware that the urban is first and foremost a verbal spectacle. More directly, the urban space is composed of place names, sounds, proper names of characters, in other words, of a performative mapping. The characters draw a personal geography of London and the novels are subtended by their mental impressions of it. Yet, Amis's novels also show that mental mapping is inescapably incomplete, distorted, just as his novels can be polysemic. It also emerges that knowing the name of a place does not correspond to knowing the place (as will be seen in the case of London Fields); its 'reality' is one of many effects of observing the city. Amis's urban writing is expressive of the equivocal nature of even calling a city London since the proper name, albeit promises "structure and a linking textuality which maps performatively the city space, whereby that space is always being reconstructed anew, then, as the proper name of the city, London both names and performs a similar endless and labyrinthine event; whereby, every time the city is named, it rewrites itself" (Gibson and Wolfreys 203). Thus, the proper name is a textual storehouse, the ultimate archive that gives material shape to the formless, ungraspable city.

Admittedly, if compared to Ackroyd or Sinclair, Amis's London is blatantly unaware or forgetful of other (historically and literally prior) Londons; his writing on the city disturbs the lineage and identity of literary London. Rather than extracting the esoteric aspects of London places, Amis's literary survey of the city, offers, like a palette, an array of dispersed little blots or nodes, disseminated *topoi*. A common concern with Amis is that the reader is generally provided with little topographical details about the places. I would suggest, however, that his fiction is better conceived

of as a literary map of strong, marked sensations reminiscent of Ford Madox Ford's impressionist depiction of life in London at the beginning of the twentieth century in his neglected, yet recently rediscovered *The Soul of London* (1905).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in attempting to capture the essence of the city, Amis refuses to render a vast social panorama of the city, partly as a result of his professed attacks in various interviews on the English literary tradition of the novel as a social act. His artistic rendering of London is consequently in search of more localised and individual (personal) images of a place. Part of this is an ability to reinvent, exaggerate, and also to be excessive and extravagant. As Amis himself put it in an interview with Will Self: "And this is what I try to do with London: I don't want to know too much about it. Of course, I soak it up willy-nilly, but I have to push it through my psyche and transform it. So it isn't, in the end, London any more. It's London in the patterning of my cerebellum" (Self, "Interview"). These comments come closest to Amis's self-proffered attestation of his own standing as an unusual, wilfully defacing literary cartographer of London.

Curiously enough, when interviewed by Christopher Bigsby, and asked if he considered himself lucky to have London the way Saul Bellow was lucky to have Chicago, Amis replied: "I think it suits me fine. I don't think I'm distorting when I write about London. [. . .] I am not saying that my truth is the only truth, but it is very definitely part of the truth and if you are interested in ugliness and sleaze, and the comedy of that, then London is absolutely the place to be" (Bigsby 44). Indeed, Amis looks to the street for the hidden side of the city and his writing is shaped in a way to respond to the darker aspects of the city; his is a certain London-*noir*, a site of constant crisis and degradation. The city configured in such a prose portrays the rough and tumble of urban life where the characters are far from being presented in a refined way; they are more depicted as forcing houses of the physical and the sensual. Amis's idiosyncratic way of appropriating the metropolis is an artistic reliance on convoluted plotlines and robust yet empty characters who lack agency and are best read as textual means through which Amis and, thus, the reader look at and see the city in certain

---

<sup>13</sup> Amis's writing, I would add, has a lot to share with modernist aesthetics. One of the major attributes of his prose is a predilection for formal experimentalism. The remarks of the editor of Ford's *The Soul of London*, Alan G. Hill, provide a good introduction to the influences on Ford's artistic *credo*: "the impressionist recognised that the relationship between writer and object was never a static one, but part of the flux of impressions that were passing through his mind at the moment of writing. The essence of reality was to be recaptured, not by factual completeness or authorial omniscience, but by a careful selection of telling details and visual effects projected spontaneously through the individual point of view of the writer" (Ford xxii).



ways; on many occasions character shapes the city. His crooked characters thus stand for an oblique perspective where one sees London from beneath (the underground), in its chimera and sinister shadow rather than in its substance, or airy and formal symmetry.

London as a consistent and governing theme, as an idea of the novel, is problematic, nonetheless, since Amis has a self-confessed aversion towards the “ideas novel.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of the “ideas novel,” he proposes to feed the energy of his novels from the notion of style. A term frequently used to assess his novels, style is regarded as a radical reworking of impressions that in turn changes perception as well. “The point is,” Amis claims, “that you have to make it as vivid and intense as you can, and let the reader choose. Style is not neutral; it gives moral directions” (Haffenden 23). One result of Amis’s stylistic agenda is that whilst his novels are poised to re-present the city, the artistic device (representational verismilitude) to do so is simultaneously undermined. In this respect, Amis’s writing on the city simultaneously brings to the fore problems about the condition of the contemporary novel; literary conventions, or the lack thereof, will be shown to always assume a socio-critical role in his writing. Clearly preoccupied with finding an appropriate form for writing the contemporary, Amis finds the closest approximation in architecture. In an interview with Jonathan Noakes in 2002, Amis compares the postmodern novel to “the architecture that has all its innards on the outside” (Reynolds and Noakes 16), and draws the conclusion that this has proven to be a dead end for art and novel writing (Reynolds and Noakes 17). His novels then can be taken to be in search of an urban semiology that sets out to reveal and address the ambivalence of art as art and its underlying anti-representationality: conferring meaning on the formless or meaningless.

Furthermore, postmodern architecture, its excessive visibility reinforces the frequently stressed non-difference of places in present-day urban settings, and, consequently, produces a certain “de-contextualization” thus prompting the trope of placelessness. There is an increasing concern with the condition and literature of placelessness as a result of the disruption of hegemonic narratives of place and identity, and a general critique of urban experience. “Placelessness,” Edward Relph

---

<sup>14</sup> See the interview with John Haffenden p. 15.

argues, “describes both an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places” (Relph 143). This state will be shown to change the perception of the self, and instead of being at home in the city, the self will be gradually infused with the “unhomely.” Amis’s response to the nostalgia or the metaphysical angst of the lost nature of dwelling permeating the works of philosophers like Gaston Bachelard or Martin Heidegger, is farce or parody, and a considerable amount of violence, invading personal lives and eroding the social fabric of the quotidian. Chapter Four, entitled “Double Visions: Information, Authorship and Doubles in Literary London,” starts from some basic assumptions expressed by Anthony Vidler in his landmark study *The Architectural Uncanny* and draws on the aesthetic category of the uncanny to interpret postmodern conditions of spatiality, urban, architectural, and novelistic. Amis’s urban concerns relate to the uncanny mode all the more since they are oftentimes hidden and residual.

Amis’s contemporary London is a literary escapade into the textual, away from the historical, just as the textuality of the postmodern seeks to reinterpret the urban as different from its previous model found in historical realist novels. The thesis will, for example, concern itself with examining and uncovering a space of urban literature where fictional stories are set to turn into involutions of author, victim and murderer - in this sense sharing some similarities with Peter Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* -, a specificity of postmodern urban writing to be explored in detail in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, it is equally tenable that in a reworked form Amis’s fiction is still a means of perpetuating the cultural history and role of the city; and the forthcoming chapters propose to recover these. This does give a sense of continuity to Amis’s work, although in a different, more elusive form, as if the city put itself under erasure in these writings. Above all, it ought to be emphasized, Amis’s antithetical mode of writing the city inflects the genre of the urban novel in certain ways that require or invite critical attention.



## Chapter Two: Body Visions: *The Rachel Papers*, or Portrait of an Urban Artist as a Young Man

The urban analysis of Amis's fictional narratives proposed by this thesis will open with a critical endeavour to chart the relevance of the extensive figuration of the body in Amis's first novel, *The Rachel Papers*, in order to examine the novelistic setting, thinking and inspection of the relations of the self and the urban environment. The first three novels of Amis's novelistic output, *The Rachel Papers* (1973), *Dead Babies* (1975), and *Success* (1978), have been widely claimed to constitute an informal trilogy whose governing theme, among others, is an intense preoccupation with the body. These three novels, largely demonstrating an artist in the making, exhibit, as James Diedrick notes, a "remarkable verbal inventiveness often accompanied by uncertain control of tone, so that stylistic virtuosity often results in pastiche" (*Understanding* 20).

In line with what one might expect of a first-time novelist who is trying to put himself on the English literary map in the shadow of a parental figure (Kingsley Amis) who was by then considered to be a definitive and formidable exponent of post-war British fiction, *The Rachel Papers* is indeed highly self-reflective, its subtext much taken up with personal concerns. Still, *The Rachel Papers* was a promising and inventive novelistic *debut* on Amis's part,<sup>15</sup> addressing teenage and artistic angst, a curious mix between James Joyce's *Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). I would, in addition, argue that the narrative orders and world of the novel are already imbued to a considerable extent with the geography of London, even if limited: there is a discernible, yet at this point peripheral or marginal representation of the city. It is to be contended nonetheless that the text as a coming-of-age narrative can be simultaneously read as a novel of journey and arrival not only in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, as gaining experience and

---

<sup>15</sup> Like Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* about twenty years earlier, *The Rachel Papers* received the prestigious Somerset Maugham Award granted to first-time novelist.

becoming an adult, but also as a peculiar *Künstlerroman*, relating the urban writer's inaugural arrival in the metropolitan glitter of London. Quite fittingly, for Charles Highway, the narrator-protagonist, going down to London from the sleepy, floating world of the rural countryside entails packing in "crucial juvenilia" (*R P* 14), apart from the more obvious paperbacks and clothes.

Composed of twelve chapters (each title consisting of two elements), the novel is chronologically arranged in the form of a series of playful narrative *analepses* and *prolepses*. The first components of the chapter-titles follow the short time-frame from seven o'clock till midnight, when Charles Highway turns twenty. The second parts, as Reynolds and Noakes also point out, suggest a journey, literal - Oxford, London, Costa Brava, the spinney - or metaphorical - the Low, the dog days, coming of age (Reynolds and Noakes 31). The plot itself commences with Charles's train journey from a village near Oxford and arrival in London to take up temporary residence at his sister's house in Campden Hill Square, Notting Hill, while he is attending a crammer in Bayswater Road in order to prepare for the Entrance Exam at Oxford University. Charles meets the attractive Rachel Noyes at a party, and from then on the pursuit of the woman ("with a mental chant, *timor mortis conturbat me*," Charles opted for "thick Chelsea" (*R P* 33)) becomes intertwined with his intellectual aims. It is this amorous and mental journey that is remembered, organized, rewritten and related in the final hours of Charles's teenage years.

### **Body Work and Urban Poetics**

Whether turning its material existence into a signifying practice (and thus being a major cultural construct), or remaining a master-trope that curiously circumvents the linguistic (and thus prevailing as beyond or outside culture or language), the body in various disciplines is simultaneously seen as representative of sheer physicality as well as a bearer of the heavily symbolic. Daniel Punday's remarks in *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* are much pertinent in this respect: the "transformation of the unruly body from raw material or vehicle of desire into the outside world to which the mind responds occurs whenever modern and



contemporary thinkers describe the relationship between individual and world” (Punday 13). Considered in the context of the thesis, such alternating theoretical positions allow for perceiving the city itself as a body concurrently imbued with the imprint of cultural discourses and historically different urban planning, yet also as pre-emptive of, or simply overflowing such regulating practices.

As the essential model for human and artistic forms of production in classical tradition, the body has been long considered as a foundation for the awareness, apprehension and mapping of the environment.<sup>16</sup> In cultural discourses the body and body images are often projected as the self’s physical environment as well as a place where issues of subjectivity and the subject’s relation to the world can be explored and constructed; in other words, the body is viewed as an embodiment of consciousness. However, the contention that the body can be a disavowal of the intellect or the rational (having great currency in feminist or postcolonial critical discourses) is equally arguable. So, perhaps it is best to apprehend the body as the *locus* subtending the binary opposites outlined above. Whereas the novel certainly repeats this duality, it also attempts to rewrite it – admittedly in a slightly facetious manner - in the sense of confronting and overtly manifesting the cultural (literary) embeddedness of the body on the one hand, and on the other hand, covertly staging through satirical acts the body as a means of resistance to such cultural inscriptions.

Charles’s corporeal engagements will be taken to underpin how the novel attempts to negotiate self, identity and (urban) space. *The Rachel Papers*, double-written by the adolescent author-narrator, Charles Highway and Amis himself, will be considered as a corporeal novelistic event that partakes of urban poetics, of conceiving the city-body as a literary text in the sense that an ostensible shift is enacted within the text from a world constructed through the self’s bodily perceptions

---

<sup>16</sup> See Anthony Vidler’s terse explanation: “The body, its balance, standards of proportion, symmetry and functioning, mingling elegance and strength, was the foundation myth of building” (Vidler 71). Nevertheless, he continues to stress: “beginning with the eighteenth century, there emerged a second and more extended form of bodily projection in architecture, initially defined by the aesthetics of the sublime. Here, the building no longer simply represented a part or whole of the body but was rather seen as objectifying the various *states* of the body, physical and mental” (Vidler 71-72). Moreover, Grosz’s chapter on “Space, Time, and Bodies” is a useful and summative account of the cultural and scientific dimensions of historically different spatio-temporal-corporeal relations.

to one constructed through literature and language, an effective linguistic *corpus* which nevertheless hinges on or folds back on the body. Peter Brooks's insightful remarks in *Body Work* confirm the underlying argument of the chapter: "Narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of the body's entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifier factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning" (*Body Work* 8); and alternatively, this chapter argues, how the city-body embodies meaning. The novel represents and dramatizes a primary moment of loss of the body, of the city-body and of the authorial self as well, to language, to pure signification of which Amis's urban semiotics is immensely productive. Charles figures as both writer and reader, effectively instating a literary practice germinal to Amis's fiction where the construction of literary realism gives way to plays of signification, and where close or adequate description would be an 'artistic fallacy.'

The body is a prime vehicle of the narrative that 'somatizes' the way Charles relates to himself, to Rachel and to the urban environment. Indeed, at first look it could be argued that it is the body that is the *topos* of all meanings in the novel rather than literature. At the same time, it is also to be asserted that Charles's corporeal visions are only readable through cultural constructs since pure physicality or materiality can be deemed pre-cultural or pre-linguistic, hence unreadable. Thus issues of body, language, and literature are being insistently thematized while the role of the corporeal remains ultimately undecidable, suspended between the disruptive or even meaningless material and the multi-layered cultural. It is revealed therefore that corporeal confusion is one response to the city where the self and body form an unbalanced relationship; this ruptured condition is also central to my consideration of how the form or phenomenon of the city is disjointed from the city-text.

In extensively drawing upon literature to relate to himself and to the world, Charles is considered by most reviewers and critics as an ambiguous character. He describes, for instance, his jaw as having a "cool Keatsian symmetry" (*RP* 47), thus attesting to how corporeal assumptions are intertwined with literary texts in the novel. More interestingly, Charles turns the idea of virtue into a mere linguistic entity empty of any notion of transcendence. Being virtuous for him is presumably more



conceivable as decorum, a narrative function most comprehensible in terms of linguistic configuration; in his own words: "My conceit is an unmanned canoe, leaping imaginary rapids" (*RP* 68).<sup>17</sup> Such a reversal recalls J. Hillis Miller's remarks on virtue being similar to reading a story; for both he suggestively uses Wittgenstein's figure of playing a game. Thus, virtue is to be conceived of as a language game: "You do not learn to read a story or learn how to be virtuous by being taught abstract rules for either, but by a kind of leap within the culture in which certain behavior is virtuous or within the complex assumptions that make it possible to read the story" (*Topographies* 69). Charles, on the other hand, is in search of or painstakingly labours at establishing these abstract rules, and in the process, reveals that his relationship to the world, and thus to the corporeal, is equally a product of reading, a condition and construction of reading.

In the opening sentences of the novel, Charles plays with readerly expectations of fact and fiction, of asserting and feigning identity. He deftly invokes tropes of naming (Keulks 124) and the fashionable associations his surname, Highway, might prompt: "My name is Charles Highway, though you wouldn't think it to look at me. It's such a rangy, well-travelled, big-cocked name," but, as he reveals, he is "none of these;" yet he adds, "But I *have* got one of those fashionable reedy voices, the ones with the habitual ironic twang, excellent for the promotion of oldster unease" (*RP* 7). The introductory sentences already reveal an anxiety about the body, about guise and identity, an anxiety that will run through the narrative and, in Diedrick's words, will make "high comedy out of its self-reflexiveness" (*Understanding* 21). Proclaiming the discrepancy between his name and his appearance (Keulks 124), Charles thus alludes to the potential disorientating or muddling undercurrent of linguistic signification and the act of naming. His surname, 'Highway,' and the spatial imagery it invokes unwittingly and curiously interrelate with the spatial dimensions of the surnames of Stephen Dedalus and Haulden Caulfield. Dedalus, Joyce's semi-autobiographical narrator, solicits a widely recognised association with the ill-fated craftsman, inventor, architect or 'landscape artist' of Greek mythology, Daedalus, whose legendary

---

<sup>17</sup> This subsequently turned into one of the longest-standing devices of Amis that would give ground for lots of criticism. In his next novel, *Success*, Gregory Riding's immorality and transgressions are similarly portrayed as "merely accoutrements of his unthinking self, the phraseology of his charm and luck" (*S* 86).

labyrinth was rightly taken to be an (ostensibly spatial) allegory of Stephen Dedalus's labyrinthine *Bildung* as a young man and Joyce's 'hidden script' on his need to escape from the strict authoritarian Catholicism and fervent nationalism of colonised Ireland. The surname, Caulfield, on the other hand, juxtaposes 'caul' and 'field' where 'caul' primarily means the inner membrane enclosing the foetus in a woman's womb, and thus protection. The protagonist's fraught exploits in the novel nevertheless revivify an archaic, and more equivocal connotation of 'caul' as a net, or a spider's web. Highway, in comparison, sounds distinctly modern, industrial and urban, an unalienable spatial feature of postmodern urban landscape implying not only well-travelled, but also speed, straight lines, the depletion of contemplative-affective spaces and an exposure to quickly changing sensory stimuli. The phenomena of highways implicitly rewrite the subjective aspect of travelling through space by a thoroughly objective order of navigating space, a spatial conformation where the self travelling through it is both the self and not the self. As Charles is also quick to reveal, he does yet does not correspond to the referential field of 'highway;' and by analogy, the city-texture in his 'papers' is similarly amorphous at this stage, merely a series of uncoordinated potentialities.

Still, I would argue that *The Rachel Papers* is an apt literary metaphor of the city. The novel reads as a literary scrap-book filled with colourful, over-stylised entries; indeed, many attributes of the city find resonance in it: the city, like Charles's 'papers,' is vast, sprawling, unpredictable, fluid and charged with sexuality. A widely-recognised re-animation of the trope of the city as body is Peter Ackroyd's on the first pages of his encyclopaedic *London: The Biography*, where an exposition of the founding metaphor of the city as body is proffered. The conceit, 'The city as body,' is a *prolegomena*; it is placed as a Preface to the entire book and significantly partitioned from the rest of the Biography, as if defining the entire book. In Ackroyd's view, the city is a potentially monstrous organism with patent analogies to the physiological functions of breathing, consumption and excretion.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ackroyd borrows the image from the seventeenth-century surgeon of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, William Harvey, whose famous treatise on the human anatomy, *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordus et Sanguinis in Animabilis* (1628) was the first medical disquisition in Western Europe on the circulation of blood in the human body, proposing as it did that the arteries take and the veins bring blood to the heart (formerly it was believed that various veins were linked to different organs; or the ancients believed that blood circulated because of body heat). Ackroyd tells us that for Harvey walking



city, as a physical organism and representational conceit, is predisposed to accumulation, excess and hyperbole; it is a grotesque body whose limits cannot be precisely defined, drawn or fixed. The novel's imagination of the city converges with Ackroyd's insofar as an attempted inscription of limits or coherence that they do not possess is ascribed both to the 'papers' and the city. The novel additionally formulates an analogical relationship between the body of the 'papers,' the woman and the city. Closely intertwined, Charles's papers and the figure of the woman consist of citations, conflicting narratives, traces, postulations and subversions. The trope of the body in the novel bears the distinctive marks of the postmodern city; they both can incorporate many acts of writing for they are both surfaces to be rewritten, awaiting, spread out to be recorded and be taken account of.

Charles's insistent drive at the creative use of language elicits a particular form of linguistic expression that comes closest to grasping the relationship between city and body, not least because the narrative locution often feeds on urban slang. The title, *The Rachel Papers*, also conforms to the figurativity (and certain arbitrariness) of this structural homology. In this sense the title already is expressive of figurativity, of the urban, of the urban (as) *idiom*. It figures the novel; it is itself, self-contained, yet it is in excess of itself since its ground (content) is different from or is beyond the primary referents of its separate elements. This textual or structural insufficiency and surplus constitutes in a way an analogical relation between the figurative referentiality of the title and writing the body in the city. *The Rachel Papers* is a novelistic transcription of a journal, which, in turn, is based on a former journal. Thus, the title also posits the problem of self-difference and self-presence since the file entitled 'Rachel Papers' is certainly contained within *The Rachel Papers*, yet it is not

---

through the city and observing the hoses of fire engines spouting water like blood from a cut artery, for example, gave him the idea to conceive of the human circulatory system in a similar way (*London* 1). In *Flesh and Stone*, especially in his chapter on "Moving Bodies: Harvey's Revolution," Sennett explains why Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* was particularly synchronic with its time and influential for subsequent urban planning. Sennett rightly holds that Harvey's new understanding of the body coincided with the great social transformations of the age, with the increased circulation of goods and money (Sennett 255), fostered foremost by London's uncontainable mercantilist spirit. Moreover, "Harvey's findings about the circulation of blood and respiration led to new ideas about public health, and in the eighteenth century Enlightened planners applied these ideas to the city" (Sennett 256). As a result, "Enlightened planners wanted the city in its very design to function like a healthy body, freely moving as well as possessed of clean skin" (Sennett 263). So, "[s]crupulously cleaning excrement off the body became a specifically urban and middle-class practice (Sennett 263). It is worth noting at this point the circulating reciprocity between the body and the city: the city offered the model for Harvey's revolutionary rethinking of the body, which in turn folds back on restructuring the city based on the bodily functions.

tantamount to the whole novel. The body-text, as a result, is stratified and intrinsically turns the 'papers' into a ventriloquist text. This will prove to be a productive narrative embedding for the creation of a stylistic persona (both narrating and narrated), a narrative device that concurrently discloses the artifice of the novelistic articulation. This is more graspable if it is considered that the displacement of the journal occurs on at least three levels: the act of writing a journal, doubled or repeated in the re-writing and re-reading of it as a novelistic journal, which is, in fact written by Amis. More specifically, the question of performance of identity and Charles's resistance to a single identity or voice is relevant to my argument that the journal performs the dissembling figure of Charles;<sup>19</sup> it is a literary form of the picaresque of a young man in London, a tale of urban *peripeteia*.

The process of Charles clustering the 'papers,' however, displays that the *corpus* of literature is always created in a piecemeal fashion from heterogeneous works. This view of literature as a collection of disparate pieces relates to the way the literary canon – the body of literature – is a space where, in the words of Brian McHale, an eminent critic of postmodern literature, "fragments of a number of possible orders have been gathered together" (McHale 18). So, (urban) literature is a cumulative activity as well, and the contemporary text, including *The Rachel Papers*, acts as an interminable site of discursive assemblage. Charles relentlessly parodies and indirectly cites former authors, yet not at the expense of burying these works in the past, as Fredric Jameson assumed parody and pastiche inescapably do in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. A compulsive reader, Charles is an "acquisitor" of catchy turns of phrases who takes much pride in classifying everything he reads. Of his own admittance his mind has "filing cabinets" (*R P* 132) to come up with the right answers to everything. However, his drive to define and specify paradoxically produces excess within the text. The piles of notes that his diaries mainly consist of suggest the absurdity of systems: "On my desk, a sea of pads, folders, envelops, napkins, notes, the complete Rachel Papers stand displayed. Four-eyed, I indent subject-headings, co-ordinate footnotes, mark cross-references in red and blue biros"

<sup>19</sup> Some critics, like John A. Dern, raise similar concerns: "Charles Highway alters *himself*. His character is not fixed, but rather a collection of caricatures he employs as necessary. His entire 'self' is a parody of reality, or, rather, a travesty of his perspective on reality" (Dern 57).



(*R P* 59). Indeed, *The Rachel Papers* is a mass (mess) of papers, notes and memoranda that are significantly weighing upon him as he is spending the last five hours of his nineteenth year shuffling, arranging and rearranging them. Hence, it can be claimed that the novel is a result of the productive disorder of Charles's memoirs. He is an obsessive chronicler, well-illustrated by the fact that on average he wrote seven diaries a year. His memories consist of folders, note-pads, carbons, letters and diaries; "the marginalia of my youth" (*R P* 8), as he calls them; they are, quite suggestively, lying on the patchwork quilt. Before he starts writing, he jostles "the papers into makeshift stacks" (*R P* 8), a metaphor of the writing process itself to follow.

One of the main problems Charles is facing in the final hours of his teenage years is how to organize this seemingly endless collection of memories and flashbacks. The days Rachel spent in Campden Hill House, Charles relates with regret and resignation, could not be adequately catalogued and filed away. Those days of proximity are blank or blurred, "a sorry jumble of cold facts and free associative prose. However," he continues "this prompts me to take a structural view of things – always the very best view of things to take, in my opinion" (*R P* 173). The dual process of organizing and remembering implies a thorough mechanization of the writing process since everything he puts down is excessively systematised. For instance, at the beginning of each chapter he states the exact time, an authorial quantification that instead of shaping and pulling his memories together fragments them because the stated time has little relevance to the chaotic corporeal memories subordinated to it; they can be a few days or weeks old to several years. Such a temporal disorganization of his memories breaks the continuity of corporeal experiences into parts where the body is fragmented through time and sensory experiences. The reshuffling and erratic juxtapositional writing process is finished off with tapping "The Rachel Papers into a trim pile. The hands of the alarm-clock form a narrowing off-centre V-sign. In seven minutes they will be one" (*R P* 205). This scene similarly illustrates that the oneness of *The Rachel Papers* - written by Charles and by Amis - is contrived, random and illusory.

Charles's 'Rachel Papers' is syncopated with reductive rationalism. It is one of the many ironies of the text that while attempting to elevate bodily matters by

constantly drawing upon literature, Charles does the exact opposite: he debases, or rather commodifies it. Sexual scenes described in terms of ‘memos,’ ‘directives,’ ‘prototypes,’ as Diedrick also noted, “derive from the larger discourse of commodity capitalism” (*Understanding* 22).<sup>20</sup> As his sense of selfhood is dependant on a series of consumables and pleasures, a corporeal vision is further subtended wherein the body is perceived to be dismembered, out of place, or generally not forming any kind of plenitude. This tenet ties in with a larger contemporary cultural dominant that tends to represent the body as fragmented and disfigured, breaking the body up not only in arts but also in architecture. Vidler claims that in architectural production there has been:

a recent return to the bodily analogy by architects as diverse as Coop Himmelblau, Bernard Tschumi, and Daniel Liebeskind, all concerned to propose a re-inscription of the body in their work, as referent and figurative inspiration. But this renewed appeal to corporeal metaphors is evidently based on a “body” radically different from that at the center of humanist tradition. As described in architectural form, it seems to be a body in pieces, fragmented, if not deliberately torn apart and mutilated beyond recognition (Vidler 69).

---

<sup>20</sup> Written from a sociologist’s perspective, Bryan S. Turner expresses a more complex view of corporeal-economic relations in *Body and Society*: “In particular the prominence and pervasiveness of images of the body in popular and consumer culture are cultural effects of the separation of the body (and in particular its reproductive capacities) from the economic and political structure of society” (Turner 2). In traditional societies there was a close connection, a structural relationship between ownership and reproduction, property and procreation where the woman’s body was central. By contrast, in modern societies, Turner argues, personal and domestic relations are no longer based so much on contracts but rather they comprise a network, a circulation of sexual and monetary exchanges. Turner reminds us that in ancient Greece the privacy of the domestic space was regarded as deprivation and dissipation of the self as opposed to the freedom and rationality of the urban public sphere of politics (Turner 133). See also Sennett’s *Flesh and Stone* in this respect. Indeed, the early forms of urbanity greatly contributed to a gradual emergence of the self-conscious individual. Self-awareness instituted a closer relationship between self and body, and the messiness and unruliness of the body gradually came to be considered as a threat to social order and personal stability. The inevitable mercantile spirit of towns and the autonomous life the city offered cut the ties of community life formed in the rural countryside. In the civic mind, the disintegration of social organization, a result of the destructive effects of industrialization, was further jeopardized by the rise of the novel that required privacy and seclusion from the public sphere.



Equally, Charles, in a way, dehumanizes himself, and almost turns his body into an automaton: his main folder is tellingly entitled *Conquests and Techniques: a Synthesis*. Apart from the immediate comic effects, Charles's definition of the relationship of self and body has a more philosophical (existentialist) resonance, a view that regards this correlation mainly in terms of awareness of resistance that objects in the world have to the self. In this respect, the body is not a firm anchor that connects Charles to his surroundings; it rather manifests the contingency of his original relation to his environment. Moreover, a phenomenologically informed perception of the body proposes that the world is conditioned by the experience of the body, implying that the body is a primordial experience or an originary constituent in perceiving and apprehending the world.<sup>21</sup> Charles seems to invert this by creating a phenomenology of literature, or the letter. The way he gives account of his life is indicative of the fact that body is not configured as revealing things to him; quite the other way around, literary works show his 'bodilyness' to him. He is only able to recognise his body, or more precisely, can perceive his body as long as he is able to relate or read it by drawing upon literature. The novel is intriguing then since the production of corporeal space is contingent on and in conflict with conceptual space: literature becomes an imaginary terrain explored through the body which is in turn conceived through literature.

In his parents' house in the countryside, well-prepared on nature speeches and anecdotes, he takes Rachel out into the fields to try and seduce her. Nonetheless, the initially bucolic scene soon changes into a messy spot of mock-romance: the spinney was "unspectacular" where the trees were either fat or ropery, and the bushes were strewn with beer cans, trodden newspaper, grey tissues (*R P* 130-131). So, in the novel, it can be argued, there is a perceived loss of the body inasmuch as the body and bodily pleasures fail to exhibit the fullness of being, and thus the body is riven by discord and incongruence, even loss and absence. More significantly, such figurations of the body read the novel as complementing the dislocation of the material at the

---

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, published in French in 1945, translated into English in 1962, is perhaps the most important philosophical work developing the notion of 'body-subject' and postulating an 'embodied' or 'incarnated consciousness' in the centre of the perceiving subject's encountering, constructing and reconstructing the world.

expense of the non-material and the virtual in postmodernist spatio-cultural discourses. In *The Rachel Papers* space is not experienced in depth in the sense that its coordinates are drawn and re-drawn in a flux of placelessness where various formations of bodily spaces are always transposed into or are undifferentiated from literary or imaginary ones.

This kind of corporeal-spatial order unavoidably leads to the formation of a different sense of identity. Amis's constructions of the body noticeably attend to more recent corporeal images as vessel, carrier, channel of intensities invested with considerable capitalist and consumerist interests.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most prominent theoretical foray into a new sense of body created by such relations is Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, where the notion of a 'body without organs' is elaborated: a body that repudiates the fallacy of stable identity. The 'body without organs' is ultimately understood as a body experienced entirely as time, fluency or currency, as the site of exchangeability or mutability rather than self-presence. Amis's idiosyncratic conceptualisations of the body as a site of consumption and depletion will, however, bear more heavily on the critical premises put to work in the final chapter that will closely look at perhaps Amis's most accomplished novel, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984), in order to examine how the cityscapes of London and New York as well as the frenetic transatlantic travelling feature as modes of textual, corporeal and spatial expenditure.

---

<sup>22</sup> These partly derive from Marxist and post-Marxist theories of commodity fetishism that define commodity in capitalism as an object without an origin since its production processes are 'alinated' or hidden. Freud's observations on the effects of fetishism, and, by way of extension, of commodity culture are equally relevant for my enquiry: for him, fetishism initiates the alienation of the individual from the experience of the body since the body increasingly becomes to be understood as an objectified identity. For an interesting interdisciplinary scholarly discussion, see John Stratton's *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*.



## Body, Style and Performativity

The desire and the huge repertoire of 'literary plots' of luring and courting Rachel inevitably situate Charles as entangled in acts resting on exchanges, superimpositions, cross-mappings on many levels of the text. Such transpositions can be found in the curious linguistic interchange of the names as well since Charles's name, as Diedrick has also indicated, is a near-anagram of Rachel. Through performing a nominal overlapping, the proper names are bearers of Charles concealing his preconceptions and emotional inadequacy in the guise of *being after* Rachel. In keeping with Charles's scholarly machinations (always tending towards the burlesque), Rachel is one letter wanting or insufficient of Charles's name, a markedly textualised manifestation that she is literally reductively imagined by Charles. In addition, Rachel's surname is Noyes, which is a homophone of noise on the one hand, while it can be broken down into 'no' and 'yes' on the other hand; Noyes is thus a carrier of ambiguity and non-reductive oppositions. Furthermore, drawing upon the huge repository of literature on love turns their tale of love (altered into 'Rachel papers') into a derivative, already written narrative. *The Rachel Papers* is not a love story but a travesty of a love story. In the *Conquests* folder, for example, he has a tree diagram drawn as part of the plan to seduce Rachel, an act of over-intellectualisation and parody that makes his feelings of love implausible.

With extensive references to previous works of literature, Charles admits unawares that his own writing ostensibly feeds upon former ones; yet he also acknowledges his indebtedness and the possibility of his writing gathering form from these literary antecedents, without which his 'Rachel Papers' would be a shapeless mass, matter without form. Similarly, Amis's novels bear the condition of writing the city taking shape for and against various acts of inscription. As will be also seen in the following chapters, Amis's novels and writing on the city come into existence by means of texts and voices ascertainable and unascertainable at the same time, while never developing into or remaining the 'urban novel' as such. So, a reciprocity is being established with other literary works, a narrative technique of writing the city

folding and unfolding without ever finding a definite shape of the urban. In terms of the parameters of a novelistic form, the papers and memos of seduction scrupulously written and collected constitute a deviance from the nature of a conventional novel; the notes in a sense transgress the boundaries of the novel. The constant sorting, shuffling and reshuffling of his 'Rachel Papers' gradually draw an image of the novel as a pack of cards, another variation on Andrew Gibson's observation in *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, where we are reminded that "for the [common postmodernist] geometric image of the text as pyramid or box, or the architectonic image of the text as storeyed house of fiction, Derrida substitutes the image of the text as fan, ceaselessly deployed then retracted, opened then closed" (118). Charles's writing methodology of claiming and disclaiming dissolve the coherent body of his writing or 'papers' into a metaphor for game, for a pack of cards, each layer representing a card waiting to be reshuffled.

Charles's body perceptions are closely linked to the city, which he regards, to borrow a term from Raban, as an "emporium of styles." His view of the urban, despite his efforts to pretend otherwise, is structured in terms of an encyclopaedic hierarchy of London's stylistic landscape. Yet, his character is not necessarily given over to cold calculating rationality, or, at least, he as much concedes to it as undermines it. A good example of this double-gesture of pretence and comedy is when he relates his meticulous preparations before meeting Rachel verging on the absurd as he recounts that the clothes he was about to wear were always linked to the personality he wanted to put on. Before leaving the house, he arranges the room so that it would make a "balanced impression," which after lots of deliberations consists of "*2001: A Space Odyssey*; the Thames and Hudson *Blake; The Poetry of Meditation* (a study of the Metaphysicals, although on the basis of the cover it looked more like a collection of beatnik verse); *Time Out*;" and just to throw in something "incongruous, arresting," he laid *Persuasion* face down on his bed (R P 46). Clearly, the London scene, in his regard, is a stage where he can perform a multiplicity of identities and roles. For Raban too the relationship between the city dweller and the city is a constant moulding and re-moulding where the urban self in the acts of exploration inevitably invents and produces the self: "In this sense, it seems to me that living in cities is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relationship between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living"



(Raban 4). In writing the relationship of body, self and identity, Charles equally draws upon a strong element of self-fashioning and masquerade.

Embroiled in a spectacle of disavowal and feigning, the almost excessive playfulness of the novel, I contend, is not merely accidental. Rather, it is a performative and strategic gesture where Charles's persona engages in what Wolfreys described in the context of Peter Ackroyd's fiction as "the play of character and the 'dressing up' in the form of others speak[ing] to the very sense of identity, of what it means 'to be'" (Gibson and Wolfreys 86). Amis's strong engagement with elements of fashion and style is to be then perceived as a textual condition of urban 'reality.' The role of fashion in the novel is curious since in striving to express identity, it institutes a process of alienation from the self towards a repetitive, duplicative, almost mechanical existence.<sup>23</sup> In the same vein, style and stylisation are better conceived as rhetorical tropes of irony since they ultimately distance the narrated and narrating self; thus, style in the novel is more a figure of speech of disguise and hiding than one of mere linguistic embellishment and display. Dramatic monologue, a narrative convention much favoured by Amis, is also indicative of constructing a self lost under the many layers of theatricality and posing. In Charles's world everything is 'spectacularized' whereby things are transformed into images, a semiology that is sensual yet, paradoxically enough, derives from over-intellectualisation. Obsession with the transitory markers of style is, however, another way of undermining solid values and tradition, a patent novelistic concern of both Joyce's and Salinger's novels.

For Charles, preparing for the oral exam does not involve going through his notes, as one would expect, but rather a final quick run through entries and files comprising extended (sixty pages) hints about how to re-adjust his persona depending on the interviewer: what accent to have, clothes to wear, how to enter, how to indirectly flatter if the don is female, and so on. One of the climactic scenes of the

---

<sup>23</sup> The libidinal investment in the perfunctory existence conditioned by the ephemera of urban trends and styles should be still distinguished from the unthinking, automated existence induced by the growing command of technocracy in the post-industrial society. In this respect, Jean Baudrillard's remarks are illuminating. On the subject of artificial intelligence and machines, he maintains: "What must always distinguish the way humans function from the way machines function, even the most intelligent of machines, is the intoxication, the sheer pleasure, that humans get from functioning" (*The Transparency of Evil* 53).

novel is when during the interview the Oxford don, Knowd (dressed in urban guerrilla outfit: green and khaki colours, boots and beret) tells him off: "Literature has a kind of life of its own, you know. You can't just use it . . . ruthlessly, for your own ends" (*R P* 211). Charles repeatedly reveals that his "realism" and the way he reflects on his adventures in London are informed by works of literary criticism. The body in this respect is a textual event that, in Charles's view, is in a curious way cast to reconfigure the relationship of literature to life, of word to world; his relationship to bodies, therefore, is intercepted in this flight of meaning.

In the view of a number of critics, Charles's satirical depiction and comments on the body share, to a certain extent, Swift's anal humour (to whom explicit references are made in the text); still, it ought to be maintained that Charles's agenda differs from Swift's. I concur with Diedrick's contention that Charles's chief concern with human flesh and human fallibility may make him a satirist of some sort, but this still fails to amount to the larger moral aesthetic Swift had: ridiculing the human body and its excesses was part of Swift's Christian humanism (*Understanding* 28). One of the most fleshy (certainly most graphic) scenes of the novel is when Charles finds out that Rachel (just as Celia in Swift's "Cassinus and Peter") defecates; the subtitle of this chapter is another reference to Swift: "the Dean of St Patrick's." In this moment of revulsion Charles gives evidence of his dissimilitude from Swift as a satirical artist, and also of his fundamental detachment from his apparent love for Rachel since being confronted and disgusted by Rachel's bodily marks shows the horror of Charles when thrown back into an immediate and unmistakable experience of the corporeal.<sup>24</sup>

Another file has the title *Odds and Sods*, and is generally taken up by discussing scatological matters. Charles's anal humour comes fully to the fore when he suffers from trichomonas, and the reader is given all the details about it. For Charles the body is the main source of irony in the text; his carnal aesthetic, however, is not so transgressive as he persists in claiming it is. Neither does he conceive of the body as a means of testing the limits, an engagement that Brooks sees as an enterprise of the erotic from where writing may evolve: "Writing indeed [. . .] may originate in

---

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that while this scene fills Charles with horror, in primitive thought power over a person is conferred by possession of their dirt, as Norman O. Brown suggests in *Life Against Death* (300).



the erotic. And the erotic espouses the mission of writing when it is the source and the object of an act of intelligence, when it is seized intellectually as a testing of limits” (*Body Work* 277). Nonetheless, his ceaseless intellectualisation and literary analogies suggest that Charles seems to seek after abstraction and the sterile world of the intellect as the last possibility and retreat in the confusion and messiness of the corporeal. Charles’s search for the geography of the body within the scope of the literary works signifies a dematerialization or dispersal of the corporeal.

As seen above, one guiding principle in Amis’s creative output is the combination of high and low concerns of literature. After first failing to seduce Rachel, he becomes depressed and the *anagnorisis* (*R P* 140) that came to him one day while travelling on the London Underground, Circle Line, was a result of finding a striking similarity with a hunch-backed tramp who got on at High Street Kensington. The tramp, called Mobile Armpit, was on nodding terms with him. His loud sniffing and snorting compelled Charles to hand him a handkerchief; and what he found disturbing about his “trite and rather appalled gesture of charity was an even triter and more appalled one of kinship” (*R P* 141), a textual juncture when the idea of collective bodily senses can function as an urban event. Peter Brooker’s notes on being crowded together in the city express a similar idea: “This might indeed describe one level of common experience in the postmodern city, and help mark the boundaries of the kind of knowledge derived from personal acquaintance with people and places” (*New York Fictions* 5). The figure of the beggar or the tramp might be an enduring figure of the city, and of Amis’s urban textscapes in particular, still Charles’s unforeseen feelings of comradeship towards the tramp were terrifying. In this passage it is also evident that Amis’s London is often written from a curious mix of abjectness and farce.

Charles’s embodied shapelessness also betokens a disorder reproducing the randomness and loss of coherence within the urban; shapeless bodies correspond to urban shapelessness. Moreover, the body’s state is often upheld as one of disequilibrium, transformation and change; and thus bodily space enacts urban spatial structurations. In the urban, there is a diffusion of forms and figures, a regression through which one loses one’s identity in the sense that one is denied the possibility of a fixed identity. Charles’s body perceptions dissolve and ridicule fixity; and, indeed,

as Brooks asserts in *Body Work*, it is the violated and naked body that has a story. Likewise, in Charles's view a good character, at least an interesting one, is marked by a disorganization or malfunctioning of the body, by a sort of abnormality also perceptible in what many critics have picked up on as Charles's reformulation of the Angry Young Man, Jim Dixon's maxim of "nice things are nicer than nasty ones" (Amis 140) into "[s]urely, nice things are dull, and nasty things are funny" (*R P* 88). As a result, Charles's heightened self-consciousness about his body and the bodies around him generates in each act of being involved with the world a sense of estrangement and interruption from being at one with his body.

The body, according to Brooks, is to be read as a figure of narrative that creates a delay in terms of narrative development; and I would add, the body can also be taken to supplement the postmodern novel's intrinsic resistance to closure. One of the contradictions of the novel is that it ultimately repudiates the material (bodily or spatial), just as the tensions and paradoxes that Charles's constant recourse to literature creates in the text turn the idea of language into self-parody, a renunciation of its role to represent. Charles is a prolific reader and writer, a compulsive analyst who is eloquent and loquacious yet does not say much about the city. There is a discord, I would suggest, between the sketchy materiality of specific London locations as a definable space and the immanence of the city whose presence or significance is still palpable in the narrative strands of the text, as if the city was hiding within itself and within Charles's notes. One of Charles's notebooks is, as a matter of fact, called *Highway's London*, described as "oppressive, sulky with the past" (*R P* 15). It is to be argued, therefore, that Charles and the city inscribed in his 'papers' form an elusive and uncertain relationship most readable in the ways the body and body sensations are being configured.

Admittedly, one of the difficulties in "mapping out" the novel is that *The Rachel Papers* is in a sense oblivious to the material import of urban space; there is a lack of self-conscious 'emplacement' of the narrative. First of all, the way Amis renders London is not so much through a *lacuna* of topographical history as through a vigorous display of quickly paced impressionistic close-shots. Even though various snippets of detailed descriptions might give the impression of an illustrative and substantial writing of the city, they are somehow groundless, or diminished by a



narrative focus on the array of characters who populate it. The crammer Rachel and Charles attend is given the topographical and descriptive particulars. Situated in Bayswater Road, it is “one of those dreary pastel Regency houses so popular in this part of London [. . .] with papier-mâché pillars guarding the double-doored entrance” (*R P* 49). Still, our attention is held by “the kind of punks,” “public school drop-outs,” swarming in and out and the image of the teacher as “the cruel-faced bearded man in a pinstripe suit” (*R P* 49-51). Amis’s imagination of London is consequently quite different (almost radical) from that of the popular contemporary London writers - Ackroyd, Sinclair and Moorcock - in the sense that Amis’s urban landscape is both empty and full. His urban concerns can at times assert the nothingness of the city - the fictional environment of the city as a void or flat setting of dangling topographical particulars - yet, in the same breath, make the London scene extremely compact, crowded, highly-charged and vibrant.

Amis’s urban discourse then is a continuation of what Robert Alter has recently defined in *Imagined Cities* as “the freedom of novelistic report, strikingly inaugurated by Flaubert, to renounce the continuity of integral description in order to represent the discontinuous impingement of sensory stimuli on consciousness” (Alter 95). This novelistic agenda of a sense of vagueness and ambiguity in the portrayal of the city and characters has larger correlations in one of the paradigms of postmodern models of (anti-) representation whereby it is postulated that the aesthetic of representation is always political. The language of representation reaching particular limits implies an absence of comprehension and understanding, which consequently intimates an absence of truth. The correlation for this in Amis’s *ars poetica* would be his often-quoted precept that “style is morality,” a contentious declaration repeatedly underlined by Amis. Just as language and style precede Charles’s emotions and thus bring about a particular apprehension of the world, it is very often claimed that in contemporary discourses - be that literary, cinematographic, photographic- the image of the city precedes the city itself. As Kevin Lynch has noted in *The Image of the City*, “The underlying topography, the pre-existing natural setting, is perhaps not quite as important a factor in imageability as it once used to be” (Lynch 110). This pre-emptive model of representation destabilises the reader or viewer’s certainty about what is “real”; it produces an *aporetic* city. By contrast, it is precisely due to such imaginary inscriptions that the city becomes imaginable, scriptable, legible, and

memorable. In the urban imagined by Amis things defy understanding; there is an element of the incommensurability of material and non-material. It is also tenable, however, that the disruptions, cognitive enclosures, or framings of the reader's knowledge about the city allow an alterity of London to emerge to be discussed in the next chapter. For the time being, our concerns lie with examining more closely how these stylistic preconceptions can disturb the corporeal and relocate it into the realm of the literary.

### **Linguistic Geometries of Desire**

Talking about his body, Charles carries out the double act of what Barthes designated in *S/Z* 'semiotization of body' and 'somatization of story,' that is to say, Charles's inscriptions of the body mark its passage or translation into literature, into the realm of the letter. The body features, in a sense, as a character that can be constructed, written, and, eventually read and interpreted; hence, Charles's recovery of the corporeal for the realm of the semiotic. It is significant in this respect that at the end of the novel Charles replaces Rachel's tissue (woman-body) with the letter to the father (word-literature). In Charles's world corporeal sensations give rise to complex linguistic systems; his relationship with Rachel is suggestively called the "Rachel opus" (*R P* 65). By his own admission, to win Rachel's favours he heavily relies on what he thinks he can learn about women by reading female writers. The body - a field of hedonistic practices and pleasurable acts - is also constructed as a project through which he can practice the art of writing.

One of the uneasy aspects of the text, shared by most reviewers, is that he speaks with a language that precedes him: "One of the troubles with being over-articulate, with having a vocabulary more refined than your emotions, is that every turn in the conversation, every switch of posture, opens up an estate of verbal avenues with a myriad side-turnings and cul-de-sacs –and there are no signposts but your own sincerity and good taste" (*R P* 154). When Rachel confesses to him that she lied about her father, Charles's biggest disappointment is that while he lied to her for ludic or literary reasons, Rachel did it to answer an emotional need instead of an intellectual



one. However, hard as Charles may try to convince the reader that he prefers the playful, his actions mainly comprise of trying to avoid anything unexpected or accidental. The irony of Amis's prose still alludes to the fact that the arbitrariness of linguistic signification is one of the ways in which the accidental time and time again interpolates in Charles's plans; it is also one of the inexorable sources of humour in the text. A good illustration would be when Charles is inviting Rachel to a Blake exhibition, and Rachel at first is reluctant partly because she has already seen it; so, she suggests that they go to the Gray illustrations, which Charles, being caught off-guard, misunderstands as the "grey" illustration. Next he mistakes Fulham (where Rachel's nanny lives) with Farnham, thus exposing himself as a resident in transit with limited views of the cartography of London.

One of Charles's preferred ways of self-reflection is looking at himself in the mirror: "I caught my eye in the mirror. My face looked, at once, dreary and vicious. My hair hung on my head as if it were a cut-price toupée. My mouth was crinkled like a frozen potato-chip. Moreover, my chin seemed curiously mis-shapen, or off-centre" (*R P* 80). The space of the mirror is essentially non-material (virtual); it is an empty space, a so-called 'non-space,' an anomaly of representation since the mirror stands for a space of distortion, or rather, deflection as the light entering the eye forms an inverted and reversed retinal image. Apart from changing three dimensions into two, the mirror reverses left and right while reducing the size of the reflected object, and doubling in the process the distance between the two. So, at these points in the narrative the concerns of the novel can be taken to be with fractures and gaps in knowing the self and the body. Similarly, the *anamorphosis* of the urban space gives rise to a formation of the self constantly compelled to desire, thus giving prominence to the urban as a permanent and mobile site of insufficiency. Thus, the novel responds to a significant shift in the role of the body, similar to what Vidler stressed in *The Architectural Uncanny* as a departure from the originary paradigm of urbanism and architecture that ordered the formation of a traditional city:

From Francesco di Giorgio's explicit analogies to Le Corbusier's direct "imitation" of vitruvian bodily perfection in the bodily layout of the Ville Radieuse, the body has provided the organic tissue, so to speak,

by which the city might be recognized, memorized, and thereby lived.

The bond between “body politic” and the city was, for the humanist tradition at least more than a simple comparison. The psychological consequences of the loss of such guiding metaphor can only be apprehended through the notion of homesickness, the desire to return to a once-safe interior (186).

Similarly, in the novel the body is seen as the anti-foundation of the homogeneity of the self; it refutes the possibility of the oneness of the self. In this light, the end of the novel also marks that there cannot be a metaphoric correlation between self and body just as language and the city in literature are not receptive to fully embody a sense of identity or selfsameness. In *lieu* of the body as a prime medium through which discipline took effect in ancient times, in contemporary discourses the body becomes a principal site of dissolution.

Furthermore, a deformed body that the mirror ultimately reflects is regarded as an unordered space since the body-in-the-mirror can only be mirrored in a state of transformation and change. One anxiety associated with the element of transfiguration is that the ‘body in the mirror’ can turn space into an unpredictable, almost unrepresentable otherness.<sup>25</sup> The ‘body in the mirror’ marks both an encounter with and a separation from the self, while this dual process enables Charles to make sense of his corporeal reality. However, the only way he can apprehend it is by misconstruing it. If the reader is inclined to see Charles as a narcissistic, self-obsessed adolescent, then his reply: “It isn’t so much that I like or love myself. Rather, I’m sentimental about myself” (*R P* 16), reveals that in “being sentimental about himself,” he is aware that his relationship to himself can only be personal, biased, distorted, hence misconstrued. This condition of misreading the self can also stand for the

---

<sup>25</sup> Pile maintains of Lacan’s ‘mirror phase:’ “While the space of vision takes a privileged place in the relationship with others [. . .] the subject is never the centre of this scene; subjectivity is always defined against another centre” (*The Body and the City* 129).



potential of alienation, estrangement and abstraction.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, it is a fundamental attribute of spatial structuration that it distances and detaches, alienating and transforming the objects in its field. When he is standing in front of the mirror looking for spots and blemishes, the city becomes a metonym for his face; he is relieved that there are “no big boys in town at the moment” (*R P* 47); so, ‘being-in-the body’ is a singular or unique map in *The Rachel Papers*, a decentred one that discloses the body as a city, a *tropological* site of analysis, metaphors, humour and alienation.

The proliferation of scenes of self-scrutiny and self-formation are partly an endorsement to read the novel as aligned to the genre of the ‘portrait of the young artist’ and are partly parodies emptying such a tradition out of the novel. As Amis himself explained in a recent interview, *The Rachel Papers* rewrites “the portrait of a young man” genre into the “portrait of the literary critic as a young man.” He adds that Charles is “an anti-creative figure, he’s a pedant, a nineteen-year-old pedant” (Reynolds and Noakes 14).<sup>27</sup> Charles is indeed a critic inasmuch as he imposes his own reading on the “Rachel opus,” mostly informed by his actual reading list for his English Exam, thus in effect inventing and disseminating new meanings for the literary works. It is one of the paradoxes of Charles as a character, and, perhaps, one of the major unresolved dilemmas of the text that much as Charles may pretend to be engaged in literature and the discussions revolving around its values, his bodily pleasures always emerge as primary or superior to theoretical assertions. Even the novel’s manifest association with the genre of comedy attests to the reassertion of corporeal concerns in the text.

---

<sup>26</sup> As Pile emphasises, while “Lacan sees the mirror-phase as a moment of misrecognition, it is for Lefebvre the archetypal moment of the violence of abstraction” (*The Body and the City* 160). Lefebvre argues that each phase in the history of space is marked by a particular logic of visualisation with specific co-ordinates: the mirror, the eye and the gaze, and the image respectively, where the last one obviously stands for the contemporary city’s logic of visualisation.

<sup>27</sup> Charles’s obsessive stylisation reveals a subtext not only of the “portrait of the artist as a young man,” as mentioned earlier in the chapter, but also of the “portrait of the artist *manqué*,” who, because he fails to make art out of life, turns his own life into art. This kind of affected relocation of art and the erotic is problematic according to Amis; as he himself proposes in an essay written on Nabokov’s *Lolita* in 1992, and subsequently republished in *Writing Against Clichés* in 2000: the main character, Humbert Humbert, fails as an artist or writer on similar grounds.

The corporeal has generally been devised as a reminder of physical existence, of finality, but the novel turns it into more than that. Literature is regarded by Charles as an elaborate trope that manages to eloquently articulate the body in all its materiality. Whenever the narrator talks about perceptions of the body, the role of shame is important in terms of negotiating the dual status of the body. Whereas all kinds of emission are traditionally deemed abject because they overflow the limits of the body, orifices can also be conceived of as connecting the body to the world.<sup>28</sup> The sexual scenes are described in terms of exchanging bodily fluids while at one point Charles compares having sex with Rachel to “bowel movement.” Not only is the body constructed by Charles as a place channeling experience, but also as a token of the his fallen state. Experience is one of Charles’s major preoccupations, reinforced by his choice in the written exam held in Kensington Town Hall: when asked to write a two-hour essay on a single word and faced with the themes of Spring, Memory, and Experience, he chose Experience in exploration of which, the reader is told, he drew on “The Bible, *The Pardoner’s Tale*, *Hamlet-Lear-Timon*, Milton again, Blake again, Housman, Hardy” (*R P* 182). He is aware that reading the world and his own body through the trope of literature makes his life more comprehensible and at the same time more incomprehensible.

Imbued with excessive self-reflexivity, Charles’s narrating the body is entrenched in a structural interminability. In a structural recoiling always at work between the narrative and textual levels in Amis’s fiction, rationalizations undermine what should be delightful bodily diversions. In Charles’s “papers” bodily senses, albeit not banished, are somehow evanescent in the sense that they are transposed into figures of speech, literary phrases, and spectacles of verbal discourse. He can only consider Rachel within the matrix of a linguistic experiment, a “scholarship” that, if it

---

<sup>28</sup> Fear and shame with respect to the body being a channel between two worlds and also between people was prevalent in the literature of the eighteenth and, especially, of the nineteenth century. In these works, London was taken as a central location, and a locus of a pervasive fear of being touched with the implication that diseases might be passed on. Stallybrass and White also emphasize in their highly-acclaimed *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*, “‘contagion’ and ‘contamination’ became the tropes through which city life was apprehended” (Stallybrass and White 135). Bodies, indeed, have a long history of being regarded as vessels or transmitters of the unwanted and the destructive. In William Hogarth’s famous painting of East-End’s “Gin Lane” (1751), by contrast, the viewer can observe that a major disturbing factor of this urban scene is precisely a lack of physical touch between the figures, most powerfully depicted in the inebriated mother dropping her baby. So, a lack of human interaction, in fact, enhances Hogarth’s image of urban dissipation and disorder.



goes wrong, will be “wasted” or “rendered defunct.” The conversations with Rachel are scripted in advance, and when Charles accidentally meets her in the Notting Hill Gate’s Smith (caught in an ‘act of interchange’ between a book on Cockney slang, and one on *Criticism and Linguistics*), he is impelled to “ad-lib” (65) in the absence of a notepad.<sup>29</sup> This greatly contributes to the novel’s playful relation to ideas; as a matter of fact, the entire novel can be regarded as an exploration of the ludic or comic underside of received cultural conventions. Charles’s habitual theatricality, in a way, unwittingly aims at attenuating and baffling the power of logos, the letter and all forms of authority. For him the project is to read the self where language in its structures and infinite possibilities of equivocation refuses to be a site of objectivity, detachment or depersonalisation. In opposing to being a place where the self or the personal recedes, language is a passion for Charles, a means of finding the voice for self-expression. It is in this interstitial state that Charles conceives of writing and the space of literature as a state of blissful indeterminacy, fully articulated when Charles talks about his nightly reading material: “For I had begun to explore the literary grotesque, in particular the writings of Charles Dickens and Franz Kafka, to find a world full of bizarre surfaces and sneaky tensions with which I was always trying to invest my own life” (*R P* 64).

Rather than experiencing the world through his body, Charles inverts the relationship and shows that it is living vicariously through literature (mainly the volumes of literary criticism he swots up for his Entrance Exam) that ultimately evinces that he has a body. “Thus I maintained a tripartite sexual application in contrapuntal patterns” (*R P* 100), says Charles reminiscing about his relationship with Rachel. His body seems to exist by virtue of linguistic constructions. In addition, Amis’s novel ultimately cannot decide how to relate to Charles’s excessive artistic reformulation of the world; it simultaneously celebrates and suspects it. Charles uses literature to satiate his desire (indeed, a common metaphor that has been used for reading since the novel started to develop in the eighteenth century is ‘appetite’), thus supplanting the erotics of the corporeal with the erotics of the literary. When the feelings of frustration need to be described, his only recourse is to the storehouse of

---

<sup>29</sup> It adds to the irony of the text that according to the *OED*, ‘ad lib’ is an abbreviation of the Latin original, *ad libitum*, meaning ‘according to pleasure.’

literary terms; a point of introspection in the text when the affective realm is taken account of in terms of a literary *glossalia*: “Intense consciousness of Being; pathetic fallacy plus omnipresent *déjà vu*, cosmic angst, metaphysical fear [. . .]. The Rev. Northrop Frye fetchingly terms it ‘queasy apocalyptic foreboding’” (*R P* 73). At the end of the novel, the question remains whether Charles has managed to break free from the prison-house of his language and, by way of extension, of his body so that he can make the transition from ‘the space of his body’ to conceiving ‘his body in space,’ a condition of self-awareness.

In the middle of the narrative Charles starts composing a Letter intended to be a long list of complaints levelled at his father, mainly for failing to be a good father. It started slowly; he had great difficulties writing it: “Dear Father, This has not been an easy letter to write” (*R P* 68), so begins the Letter. As the novel progresses, however, the “Letter to My Father” is changed into “Speech to My Father,” or more precisely, he crossed “Letter” out and put “Speech” above it. By then, the Letter, erased or transcribed into Speech, was two thousand words long; and as Charles reveals, he even had a Coda in preparation. The “Speech,” meticulously prepared and executed, commands the highest emotional investment among his ‘papers’: “The Letter to My Father – what a remarkable document it is. Lucid yet subtle, persistent without being querulous, sensible but not unigaminative, elegant? Yes, florid? no. (*sic*) [. . .] The only question is: what do I do with it?” (*R P* 214). As Keulks rightly remarks, the Letter to My Father is rather Kafkaesque since it is never delivered, yet it demonstrates lots of anticipation and foreshadowing involved with it (Keulks 129). Although clearly composed with a strict literary format in mind, the Letter soon loses its focus. Charles is confronted with the insufficiency of language as the Letter will be ultimately infused with his overflowing sentiments towards his father while the concomitant vehemence further diffuses the coherent and finely-tuned Letter into a thirty-foolscap-long emotional outpour.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> In contradistinction, he spent only three hours composing the break-up letter to Rachel, and when she tells him that his letter was horrible, his main worry concerns the style rather than its content.



Other forms of communication with the father are equally disorganized and chaotic in the novel: whenever he tries to talk to his father on the phone, he is either cut off or simply not put through, or there is nobody to answer his calls. It is to be noted, therefore, that in this novel Charles's much-fraught relationship with his father will set the paradigm for subsequent representations of father figures in Amis's fiction. *The Rachel Papers* can be read as a wishful search for heritage, for adhering to the literary tradition. Nonetheless, the text is repeatedly marked by discontinuity, disjunction, a disturbance of any form of authority, paternity, thus disaffiliating Charles from the order and coherence of tradition. The Letter and its vicissitudes testify that the place that most clearly marks Charles's concerted attempt to correlate language to some sort of meaning is 'decomposed.' Still, he cannot avoid the arrival of adulthood in his life; at the start of the novel he is literally five hours away from it. It attests to the genuine comic force of Charles's prose that at the start of the novel he calls adulthood by the name of the inhabitants of a popular fictional country in English literature, "the noisome Brobdingnagian" (*R P* 8), thus showing adults to be daunting and colossal in their appearance, yet possessing something of the formidable and empowering.

At the end of the novel Charles leaves London to go up to Oxford; the metropolis is left behind, and thus the sense of displacement and imminent relocation is an inevitable termination of the 'papers.' The novel concludes with Charles saying: "I refill my pen" (*R P* 219), a cue suggestive that he chooses what has, in fact, turned out to be an inextricable and evolving correspondence with his literary ancestors. Not abandoning the quill is also a sign that whatever adventures the city and the corporeal offer to him, the novel insists that the storyteller return to the literary. In summary, the end of the novel, instead of the anticipated social integration of the urban picaresque, presents a circularity and a feeling of isolation, expressive of the urbanised self's condition where, generally speaking, the experience of the city is the disintegration or dismemberment of experience.

### Chapter Three: Broken Visions: Language, *A(na)mnesia* and the City in *Other People*

When Martin Amis's *Other People: A Mystery Story* was published in 1981, it perplexed readers and reviewers alike since it differed from the preceding first three novels both in terms of style and in its theme. So, perhaps not surprisingly, the little critical attention it received has been equally varied. It is not generally deemed as one of Amis's seminal novels, and, as a consequence, most critical appraisals of Amis's *oeuvre* pay little or no attention to it; or if they do, they have difficulty interpreting it due to its enigmatic subject matter and even more puzzling ending. Despite the apparent critical neglect, I share Diedrick's appraisal of the novel as one of Amis's most important novels on the basis of its ambition and risk taking (*Understanding* 53). The novel is largely written from the perspective of an ostensibly amnesiac young woman suggestively called Mary Lamb, and it relates her (after)life as a social misfit, or outcast through the settings of contemporary London. Her story mainly consists of a series of encounters with "other people," most enigmatically of all, her former self, Amy Hide, all taking place in the haunting scenes of London's modern bedlam.

Mary Lamb wakes up in a hospital one day unable to name things, remember her name or have any notion of what the purpose of her existence is. She leaves hospital, and in the eerie and intimidating multifariousness of London's "stirring streets" (*OP* 27), parks, pubs and squats she meets several people who will alternatively befriend, threaten or violate her, some of whom seem to recognise her as Amy Hide and act as elusory ghostly figures and voices from her past. In this urban-*noir* type of novel there is an intriguing mystery to the protagonist's life. Furthermore, the obscurity of her story is deepened as a result of the construction of a provisional new identity running parallel with or being fastened upon an investigation of her presumably violent death. By the end of the novel, the narrator John Prince, who is also her benefactor in the role of a policeman and then her demon-lover, kills her, the novel thus subverting the position and values a philanthropist is conventionally



honoured with. It adds to the existential and surreal *milieu* of the novel that the story is framed by - it begins and ends with - the same scene of Mary awakening into life or death. And it is this *limen* that the novel ultimately renders impossible to grasp or locate through the shards and glimpsed fragments of the uncanny circularity of Mary's existence.

### Mapping Words: Defamiliarising the City

In the next part of the chapter the objective will be to argue for the multivalent relevance of the artistic technique of defamiliarisation in Amis's fiction, performed in more than one way and fundamentally related to forging a distinctive and vivid urban poetics in *Other People*. To this end, my enquiry will open with an evaluation of the pragmatics of *onomastics* in the novel. The names of Mary Lamb and Amy Hide, both belonging to the central character, undoubtedly read as suggestive literary palimpsests or textual transferrals of other names. Playing upon vital literary allusions, the narrative produces a compact formula of 'spatialised narrative' since these names, as will be shortly demonstrated, point to a layered import of her embeddedness in the novel. In other words, the narrative ordering of character and story lays bare a modality of textualised space that could be defined as *heterotopic* in the Foucauldian sense, a site where it is possible to meet one's former selves. *Heterotopia*, claims Foucault, "is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" ("Of Other Spaces" 25). So, Mary/Amy's position in the novel is a gathering point, a nexus of several other meanings, urban types and literary selves. This kind of conflating arrangement of spatial planes in Amis's urban fiction will assume great significance later in the dissertation, especially in terms of *London Fields* as a metafictional text about the genre of the urban novel to be examined in Chapter Five. In this instance, however, *heterotopic* mode of naming enables us to better understand the preternatural and spectral narrative space of the novel on the one hand, and the centrality of foregrounding the possibility of

permeability and transgression between the narrative planes and narrated selves on the other hand.<sup>31</sup>

The surname of her forgotten, yet slowly emerging former self, 'Hide,' is a patent reference to other literary counterparts of divided selves and secretive lives in the urban, most notably, that of R.L. Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, a famous precursor of split identities, whose corrupt self hides beneath, and thus gradually undermines the respectable quotidian self. The name Hide also suggests secrets, effacement, and, hence, uprooting. As a veritable palimpsest, the name adduces another layer when Mary herself suggests a new homonym of the word. At the opening of the novel, after having been released from hospital, she is aimlessly roaming the streets of London and is struggling to make sense of the teeming urban variety impinging on her senses. When it is starting to get dark, she anxiously looks in the crepuscular city, and noticing that 'other' people are quickening their steps, she asks herself: "Where were they going to *hide*?" (*OP* 18).<sup>32</sup> So, her yet undiscovered previous name can be read as a naming-trope upholding at least two meanings: 'hide' as a means of getting away from one's identity, as harbouring menace; yet in a different yet related sense, it can denote a cover from the chaotic urban arena. Thus, 'Hide' implies an imaginary location that provides safety and identity inasmuch as one of the connotations of the word is home, a domestic refuge from the anonymous and undecipherable cityscapes. Not least, as a linguistic marker of home, of protective shelter, hide can also signify the protective skin or fur of an animal. Nonetheless, due to the cultural associations that the name inescapably invites, 'Hide' is a metonymic extension of and coexistent with her destructive self, a concealment of a dark and secret past. The surname, it can be argued, shows or reveals the actuality of an underlying secret that ominously yields an anticipated second effacement or return in the narrative.

Crucially, the juxtaposed name, Amy, echoes 'amicable,' a cognate of 'hospitable' and 'hospitality,' an important term with respect to 'the other' in the

---

<sup>31</sup> I understand the signification of the word 'transgression' not only as its received meaning would suggest, i.e. contravention, violation, and infringement, but also in a more literal, hence, primary sense evoked by the etymology of the word in the *OED*: *trans+gradi*, meaning walking or stepping beyond.

<sup>32</sup> Emphasis mine.



theory and philosophy of ethics, most notably in the works of Emanuel Levinas, or in Julia Kristeva's original *Strangers to Ourselves*; and more recently and, perhaps more relevantly, in the ethics of the novel, persuasively discussed in J. Hillis Miller's noteworthy *Ethics of Reading or Others*, and in Andrew Gibson's engaging *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel*.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, 'Amy' can be a near homophonic transposition of Amis; thus, her name hosts the figure or mark of the author, a persistently returning literary guest in Amis's fiction. Furthermore, Amy's name relates to a former important precursor of the lost innocent girl in London's literature: Little Dorrit, whose full name is, quite suggestively, Amy Dorrit. Charles Dickens's novel is also a story comprising many variations, transpositions and twists in the characters' fortunes that London, as the novelistic setting, seems to particularly facilitate, or even govern. Moreover, in like manner to the centrality and spectrality of the return in *Other People*, the textual world of Dickens's novel is also permeated with, as Ned Lukacher has it, "the experience of the modern city giv[ing] way to the archaic sensation of the 'eternal return'" (Lukacher 325). Her names, drawing on their antecedents, therefore, seem to function as narrative schemes of releasing new lives, or conversely, of London's former narratives constituting a binding force on or predetermining her life.

Her 'other' name, Mary Lamb, which is, in fact, more in focus on the level of *histoire*, is a manifest literary allusion to Charles Lamb's deranged sister who in a delirious fit killed her mother, and was thereafter under the guardianship of her brother. So, when Karl Miller proposes in *Doubles* that Amis's fiction signals, "'Martian' and 'alien' and 'orphan' are collusive terms" (Miller 414), then the figure of the madwoman should be also added to this set of characters. Mary is, in addition, representative of the metropolitan archetype of the female vagrant, a characterological instantiation of a subjectivity that is contingent and always in transit. Last but not least, she acquires the name 'Mary Lamb' from urban vagrants (tramps) while they are singing nursery rhymes, which are, in point of fact, anonymous verses of obscure origins widely associated with street life in London resourcefully drawing upon and taking an odd and humorous angle on the city and its historical events.

---

<sup>33</sup> The entire chapter on *Other People* as a novel productive of urban alterity is much indebted to Gibson's inspiring book, who in this study has masterfully set forth paradigms of ethical readings in postmodern novels.

The novel demonstrates that proper names intrinsically effect a certain proliferation of selves whereby each self can be reconstituted in terms of other texts. In the process the literary map of the urban is also redrawn in terms of creating new ambivalences in London stock characters, like the imaginative substitutions of the figure of the orphan. The proper names, Hide and Lamb, as a result, mark a continuation of but also a difference from former narratives, and this double novelistic vision bears an important relation to Thomas Docherty's observations on the function of proper names in postmodern narratives. In his view, "the self disappears under a welter of proliferating narratives, 'forking paths,' which never cohere" (*Alterities* 64). Implicit in Docherty's argument is the idea that character cannot be represented as it remains by necessity "outside naming" and is thus "always 'dispositioned' towards otherness, alterity" (*Alterities* 66), and, it should be added, towards other people.<sup>34</sup> It is this difference in non-difference that haunts Mary/Amy's story; her difference or otherness is internalised resulting in the unfixedness of her identity, which, in turn, will point to the multiplicity of perspectives and readings contained in the novel.

Central to reading the novel in terms of its literary intertexts is a careful consideration of the title of the book, especially the apposition, *A Mystery Story*, an allusion that the novel can be also read as a rewriting in a contemporary and profane form of a much earlier literary genre: medieval morality plays, perhaps the most well-known of which is *Everyman* (dating from around 1500).<sup>35</sup> This way the main title, *Other People*, accrues an entirely new meaning. Not only can it be considered as the postmodernist novel's titular reversal of the representative medieval Christian play of *Everyman*, but it can be also read as ironically inverting the subject-matter of these highly allegorical plays: a dramatization of the forces of good and evil in the human soul. For our purposes, it can be also significant that the mystery plays regularly staged and re-presented a key parable in the Bible, especially stories concerned with man's Creation, Fall and Redemption. The mystery, however, has clearly lost its religious content in the postmodern novel as Mary's journey is done in a spiritual vacuum (divested of the possibility of final redemption) staged in London, an infernal

---

<sup>34</sup> The importance of using the term 'disposition' in the argument should be noted: the etymology of the word *ethos* reveals that its Greek original meant 'disposition.'

<sup>35</sup> Diedrick also makes this point, albeit to different ends. See his chapter on the novel "Entering the 'Martian School'" in *Understanding Martin Amis* pp. 53-69.



shadow-land and modern-day Pandemonium. In a scene of foreboding ruination, where even the raindrops “fell to their deaths” (*OP* 181) on the beaded glass of the window-pane, the author interpolates a new minuscular rewriting of the Seven Deadly Sins of the Middle Ages: venality, paranoia, insecurity, excess, carnality, contempt, boredom (*OP* 181), thus establishing a link with the numinous only to suggest its irrevocable recession from Londoners’ lives.

The first page of the novel reads as a scene of Mary’s creation (Creation) on at least two levels: of her coming into the world as such, but also into the world of the novel: “Her first feeling, as she smelled the air, was one of intense and helpless gratitude. I’m all right, she thought with a gasp. Time – it’s starting again. She tried to blink away all the water in her eyes” (*OP* 13). As suggested in the same passage, her first sensations vary between incomprehension, fear and feeling wounded. In order to be able to define her surroundings and to position herself within, one of her first defence-mechanisms is to incorporate it, to think of the world as “her idea” (*OP* 15). However, this kind of cognitive mapping will be soon deflected as the world turns out to be too threatening, she thinks, to be part of herself; afflicted Mary feels that the “immanence of harm” (*OP* 15) is too overbearing to claim the world her own. Her relationship to her environs and, in this way, to the city of London, is, therefore, grounded in this originary scene marked by feelings of loss, displacement and incommensurability. When she leaves hospital, she rightly expects that less people will help “out there” than “in there.” Her disorientation is enhanced by the vision of the streets replete with symbols she cannot decipher: “all she saw was ulterior, having a great and desperate purpose which excluded her” (*OP* 17). Thus, being constantly imbued with a sense of irrationality and inscrutability is an emblematic prefiguration of her ensuing predicament in this urban fable of existential angst.

By the same token, the figuration of Mary’s former life as a story of downward mobility constitutes a direct novelistic reference to the mystery plays’ elaborate allegorisation of the themes of worldly descent. The imagery of social decline diffuses through the novel, a sense of unrelenting decay that is also commented upon by Diedrick: “On one level Amy’s literal estrangement is a metaphor for that of Amis’s generation. A kind of emotional and moral ‘downward mobility’ affects even the most privileged members of the twenty-something

generation here. Like Mary/Amy, they seemed to have lost touch with the past; their responses are likewise stunted" (*Understanding* 195). However, the novel's social concerns can be at best considered as a grotesque and comic version of a novel of manners set in London.<sup>36</sup> Amis's construction of London clearly differs from the vast socio-economic portrayals of London-society to be found in Victorian novels. Instead of representing the various ramifications of the subject's arrival and attempted ascent in London society (a favourite novelistic concern of earlier times), in contemporary urban settings the self's movement can be most aptly described as going astray, getting lost, deviation, and perhaps, inevitable fall (Fall): the urban *parvenu* is replaced by a lost figure. Critical efforts to read a moral message into the novel (such as a cautionary tale about corrupted morals and mankind's depravity) are to be thwarted for *Other People* ultimately avoids the representation of the city as a site of social contestation. Rather, a phantasmagoric space of self-exploration is being produced, a journey of the self through the dark recesses of the contemporary city. The condition of amnesia alters Mary's urban vision and it consequently generates a literary topography of pathological urban spaces; instead of clearly mappable urban locations, the text merely conveys a sensation of these places.

Diedrick reads the novel as an "existential mystery (the first half of its title alludes to Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*, with its famous line 'hell is — other people!'), exploring the enigmas of time, memory, sexual identity, evil, death — and other people" (*Understanding* 54). In terms of rendering this hell of other people, Amis has recourse to the poetic style of the so-called 'Martian School of Poetry,' a prominent poetic movement in Britain in the late seventies and early eighties whose most noted proponents were Craig Raine and Christopher Reid. Certainly, Amis was aware of the Martian School's artistic agenda as he published and favourably reviewed their poetry in *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *New Statesman* (*Understanding* 54). The Martian Poets' aim was to undo the grip of the familiar on perceptive faculties by denaturalisation, inversion and revitalisation, in one word, by

---

<sup>36</sup> In this respect, see Amis's remark: "Among the many mysterious processes under way in this century is a breakdown of genre, so that comic novels can take on quite rugged stuff. It seems clear to me that [. . .] I am a comic writer, and that comedy is a much looser form than it once was" (Haffenden 10).



‘defamiliarisation.’ A salient point of their innovative poetic practice was to displace uncritical certitudes and assumptions about the duality of moral categories; specifically, binaries like normal or deviant. The resulting linguistic indeterminacy, also embraced by *Other People*, serves as a prime vehicle for producing a prolonged sense of estrangement that the Martians aspired to. As Diedrick points out, as early as 1979 Amis himself published a poem in the Martian style, “Point of View,” the publication of which predates that of the novel in 1981. Amis has, as a matter of fact, incorporated the poem in prose form into the novel:

Policemen look suspicious to normal murderers, To the mature  
paedophile, a child’s incurious glance is a leer of predatory salacity. In  
more or less the same way, live people are as good as dead to active  
necrophiles. [. . .] If you don’t feel a little mad sometimes, then I think  
you must be out of your mind. All clichés are true. No one knows what  
to do. Everything depends on your point of view (*OP* 173).<sup>37</sup>

Bringing the question of perspective to the forefront of how things can be formed or distorted in the field of vision and also in one’s consciousness of ‘the order of things,’ ties up Amis’s Martian poetic skills with Victor Shklovsky’s early article “Art as Technique” (1917). Based on Formalist principles, Shklovsky’s polemic would exert great influence on Martian poetry. He famously claimed that art “exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (“Art as Technique” 12). His aesthetics marks a significant break from the Symbolists’ tenet that art is “essentially thinking in images’ and that its purpose is to present the unknown (most often the abstract or transcendent) in terms of the known” (“Art” 3). It militates against the intrinsic value inscribed to poetry by putting forward the critical formula of “defamiliarisation” that

---

<sup>37</sup> In comparison, it is worth briefly referring to Craig Raine’s celebrated poem: “A Martian Sends a Postcard Home,” and its much-quoted description of the telephone: “In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps, / that snores when you pick it up. / If the ghost cries, they carry it / to their lips and soothe it to sleep / with sounds. And yet, they wake it up / deliberately, by tickling with a finger” (Raine 1-2). It should be also noted that on most occasions it is through the phone that John Prince communicates bad news that raise the ghost of Mary’s formerly depraved life.

would find great resonance in thinking about art and literature in the twentieth-century. This technique aims to lay bare the automaticity of perception, a formulaic minimalism and enervation of the senses that, if in compliance with, fosters learning to see as “largely a matter of learning to ignore” (“Art” 4). Art therefore needs to be re-conceptualised less in terms of an impediment to perception and more as a means of a renewed engagement with it.

Mary’s interaction does convey a reinforced awareness of the meanings of things; nonetheless, her unwitting modification of the semantics of relations between people, places and things, absorbing as it may appear, fails to furnish her with a strong agency. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth comments in *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*: “In postmodern narrative the effort at estrangement moves simultaneously in two directions: one magnifying the subjectivity of perception, and the other, [. . .] diminishing to extinction any sense of mimetic connection between that subjectivity and the world that remains intact beyond and apart from it” (Ermarth 108). In the beginning Mary tries to place everything into categories; even people are categorised into six types. She is striving to find validation for the practical uses of her modes of perception; yet, instead, she discloses the absurdity of categories as she is time and time again forced to dissolve and reinvent them. On a similar note, in his stimulating book-length study of the representations of London in nineteenth-century English literature, *Writing London. Volume I*, Julian Wolfreys argues that novelists and poets writing the city “engage in rhetorical events of poetic cartography. Such cartography does not reveal the city. Instead it suggests the limits to which mapping can extend, beyond which representation cannot reach” (*Writing London Vol. I* 13). So, images of London and of things refuse to be permanent referents for the complexities of the world; as a result, instead of knowing them, she can only have a vision of them.

The composition of Mary’s rather oblique vision also harks back to a much earlier poetic tradition in English literature, an authorial predilection that dates from Amis’s studies as an English undergraduate at Oxford: the metaphysical poets,



especially John Donne.<sup>38</sup> Mary's early perceptions of her environment and London are indeed reminiscent of the metaphorical images the metaphysicals operated with. First calling dusk "falling air" (*OP* 18), she later registers the movement of the clouds high up in the sky in the following way: "the fat creatures had crept back beneath their spangled roof – all heavy and red now, and their deity a sombre silver in the lake of darkness" (*OP* 19). In the same poetic vein, a deliberate concatenation of the sublime and the grotesque can be traced on the first pages of the novel. The minds and thoughts of ordinary people are similarly fascinating and mystical: "ordinary people are really terribly strange, deep with dreams and infamies, or so Mary thought" (*OP* 102-103). This way, Mary displaces the familiar images of the evening to their most strange, and thus momentarily redeems a relationship or fascination between perception and the outside world, a cultural dominant that was defined by the self's sensual relation to the environment before (poetic) sensibility has become dissociated, as famously proposed by T.S. Eliot. Partly due to her amnesia, Mary easily succumbs to a suspension of disbelief and, as a result, she reworks her first impressions and produces a radical change in modes of perception in the process. Pivotal to this shift are visual stimuli through which her perceptions of the city are at once overbearingly physical (materialistic) and also extensively imaginary and soft. Her mindscapes draw alternative 'Londons' at times realistic, other times phantasmagoric, essentially indeterminate cityscapes whose amorphousness, however, concurrently enables endless re-configurations and re-imaginings.

Her first reading of the urban scene reveals a cityscape conceived as a complex semiotic syntagma assembled of a flux of mundane and poetic images: above the "steep canyons [skyscrapers] there had hung an imperial backdrop of calm blue distance [sky] in which extravagantly lovely white creatures – fat, sleepy things – [clouds] hovered, cruised and basked [. . .] lanced by the slow-moving crucifixes

---

<sup>38</sup> The metaphysical poets are widely regarded as establishing and extensively drawing upon the rhetorical figure of 'conceit' in English literature. A sub-type of the arch-trope of metaphor, one of the most remarkable characteristics of the 'conceit,' apart from bringing together heterogeneous images, was a preoccupation with analogies between macrocosm and microcosm. Moreover, in the definition of the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, the metaphysicals skilfully used colloquial speech, complex sacred and profane themes, while they also had a liking for paradox and dialectical argument, direct manner, and caustic humour. Furthermore, they were keenly aware of mortality and developed a capacity for elliptical thought and tersely compact expression (543-544).

[airplanes] of the sky” (*OP* 17). Her seemingly uninformed perceptions of London disclose a stirring urban poetics where the personal formations of the city are caught up in a figurative process of turning and troping. This other London is presented in the fragmented anarchy of Mary’s perceptions that can quickly change from witty conceits to dire and gritty perspectives. Dazed and dazzled by this mirage-like field of vision, she is much perturbed to notice that the variety of environment and people in the streets starts to grow “weary and its pigments [give] up their spirits without struggle, some with stealth, others with hurtful suddenness” (*OP* 17). The city is powerfully envisioned in the transitory stage between day and night, a twilight zone that reveals its gloominess and chaotic conditions as the “shadows put on weight” (*OP* 19). As evinced in such passages, her vision is representative of a blurred aesthetic of the city where conventional forms of representation are ineffectual. Wolfreys observes in a similar context: “London then challenges the very language of visual perception, and the poetics of that perception, where description is not only barely adequate but also wholly inappropriate” (*Writing London Vol. I* 90). Likewise, Mary’s ensuing peripatetic life in London suggests the difficulty of experiencing London in depth, and the subsequent descriptive ‘inadequacy;’ hence, the predominant allusiveness of the text.

In the interview given to Haffenden, Amis draws attention to his intentional use of clichés and thus gives emphasis to another peculiar ‘defamiliarising’ narrative technique in the novel: a cliché, while slips the attention of most people, is attributed fantastic and ominous aspects in the text. Since Mary can only grasp its literal meaning, when she is told to go home, or else, she will catch her death, for instance, she imagines, thus personifies death in her belief, that she will be physically caught. Her imagination displays a peculiar poetics of inversion since it is understanding on a primary level that actually produces the figurative effect of *prosopopoeia* (giving face to something inanimate or to an abstract concept), of personification, and therefore (re)connects language, inanimate things and empty phrases with the animate and human. Clichés are generally held to be commonplaces, or dead metaphors since they have lost their poetic, menacing or mystical content.<sup>39</sup> Mary’s *aporetic* readings and

---

<sup>39</sup> This can be also read as an ironic inversion of the famous Nietzschean proposition that there is no originary ground for language and thus meaning since all words are metaphorical transferences. Mary’s



blindness to the figurativeness of language, however, paradoxically recover or resurrect the terrifying liveliness and poetics (figures) of language and stress its materiality. Taking the literal meaning of a cliché or metaphor is *literally* the poetics of raising the dead. This in itself is a metaphorical condition of Mary as a revenant (“poor ghost,” Prince tells her at one point) reminding the reader of other revenants in the literature of the city.

As shown above, Mary’s involvement with language is dangerously simple and complex at the same time, a multi-layered textual affair, caught up in drifting and transference of soul and identity. The novel’s major preoccupation is self-knowledge; this is cryptically dramatized through one self searching for or tracing out the other self in the hope of finding a coherent and unified identity within the larger settings of the city. In many respects, the novelistic enterprise of self-exploration extensively draws on the sustained metaphor of reading itself. As soon as she leaves hospital, Mary becomes a voracious reader, at times so avid and non-selective in terms of reading material that it verges on the comic. First she thinks that reading and language provide her with the ability of self-reflection that would, she hopes, forge the condition necessary for a coherent self:

Even now she knew that language would stand for or even contain some order, an order that could not possibly subsist in anything she had come across so far – that shadow driving across a colourless wall, cars queueing in their tracks, the haphazard murmur of the air which gave pain when you tried to follow it with your mind . . . *Reading* might well hold the key to any order the world disclosed, Mary felt; and she was keen to exercise this new skill of hers (*OP* 37).

The first scenes of reading in the novel are reminiscent of Ned Lukacher’s conception of ‘primal scenes’ which are most crucially not understood in the usual terms of relating to sexuality - the child observing the parents-; instead, ‘primal scenes’ come to “signify an ontologically undecidable and imaginative construction, between archival verification and imaginative freeplay” (Lukacher 24). Indeed, language, upon

---

idiosyncratic patterns of decoding imply that one has to feel the ‘thingness’ of language, in other words, one has to return to the very materiality of language to apprehend that words do not mean what they say.

Mary's discovery, restores her sense of reality and seems to return her to an originary state. She discovers that by reading literary works she can acquire language skills. Nonetheless, first optimistic, later disillusioned with the uses of literature, she concludes that literature is "imagined for money, time sold" (*OP* 69). In her innocent way, then, Mary registers a common concern that literature is a commodity, and writing and reading are, after all, merely vehicles for materialistic transaction, transferring intellectual capital into an economic one. In spite of her seemingly summary statement, her conclusion is a candid and direct expression of larger and more convoluted post-structuralist theoretical positions that have long stressed that any act of signification, or rather, representation is arbitrary and inherently fastens on a tacit contract between signifier and signified.

The amoral and corrupting potential of literary works is reified by the novel when Mary Lamb is thrown out of the hostel where she was sheltered because the books she was reading were deemed improper and dangerous. After her misfortunes in the hostel, a group of squatters take her in, an odd company whose members include a failed Irish actress, an ex-convict Australian, an unsuccessful businessman, two black men who spend all they have at Battersea Funfair on horses or dogs. Here, she is free to read anything she pleases, and soon develops a more nuanced reading sensibility that deems books as either empty or full: "A few books were dead – they were empty [. . .]. But some were alive: they spanned out at you seeming to contain all things, like oracles, like alephs" (*OP* 104). Thus, in Mary's perceptions books and literature, staging the (in a sense always primal) performativity of the imaginary, have the effect of corresponding to the thoroughly spatial figures of speech 'empty' or its implied counterpart 'full.' The books that she finds "alive" are animated most probably in the context of what has been presented above on the literature of defamiliarisation; thus, she "learns to see" and acquires a vision attuned to the occult and magical and, crucially, to apprehending the phantasmatic form of the *aleph*. This latter is a major literary trope in literary and sometimes even in socio-geographical discourses on space and will be an important intertextual reference in the next chapter as a multiform narrative point representing the encounter of Amis's fiction with quintessential postmodern space formations. The *aleph* will be further considered in terms of a metaphoric interpolation of the concept of information as well as a literary



spatiality that ultimately deranges perception and, most significantly, evokes the figure of the double and doubling in *The Information*.

Turning back to the role of vision and scenes of reading in this novel, it is to be noted that Mary's novelistic existence is suspended between solving and misreading her own mystery. The quest for her former, 'other' self is driven by the desire to get to Amy. So, it seems that the *Bildung* of Mary's character is essentially and simultaneously her demise and cessation. When Mary finally transforms into Amy, however, her renewed self becomes disfigured and her story ineffable or extinct for as soon as Amy substitutes Mary, her place is that of death. Despite living in the middle-class comfort of London's suburban arcadia, her existence becomes utterly empty and meaningless, and in the last part of the novel, her only wish is to die; so, the novel intimates that it is only through death that any meaning about her existence can be transferred. So, Amis appears to be writing a convoluted relationship and implication of the self and the city whereby the city becomes a repetitive stage that concurrently re-affirms, perpetuates, and then negates one's sense of individuality; the city seems to effect a dissolution of the self. Consequently, the principle of mutability of selves, urban metempsychosis is only viable in its circularity, just as the urban realm can be only conceived as an appropriate backdrop as long as its elements are enmeshed in a state of becoming.

In the process, however, a unified identity of the place is being dismantled: "London may change, but the city remains in some manner the same. It returns to itself, never quite as it was but always haunted by its previous forms, returning to disturb the present identity of the city, dislodging both it and our perception of London" (Gibson and Wolfreys 175). Thus, the novel accentuates the rupture of the human self and the identity of a place, of individual and society in the urban. Part Three of the novel is set in the suburbs of London, "a remote arcadia, a pleasant, fallen world" (*OP* 193). Amis's mode of writing the city subverts the supposed arcadian idyll of the place: it is "a dormitory town [. . .] where the earners of London came back exhaustedly to sleep in lines" (*OP* 193). It is also the place where Amy comes to die. The modalities of writing the city in the novel are, thus, meant to attend to the ambiguity of contemporary urban spaces where reductive modes of thinking space and place (notions that define the locations as specific and conforming to the

standards of urban planning) are rethought. The next part of the chapter will concern such dispositions (ethics) of the novel, an urban thinking of alterity where relations of self, memory and urban space constitute a topology of unarrestable dissolution of unified self and modes of representation.

### City of Alterity

It is not unusual of critics to assign language the function of a skilful narrative tool with the help of which an order can be imposed on the splitting and disintegrating strands of a fictional text. Brian Finney's comment on *Other People* is a case in point: "Amis [is] deliberately employing language as a metaphor with which to associate order (especially narrative order) with fabrication" ("Narrative and Narrated Homicides" 7). Yet, it should be added, language as much orders as disorders the novel. Moreover, Mary is led astray in the space of language just as much as she loses herself or is baffled in the psycho-spatial grid of the city. Finney's conclusion that literary narratives serve the purpose of transforming chaotic life into an ordered one, "homicide into harmless pleasure, and readerly into writerly narration" ("Narrative and Narrated Homicides" 15) is similarly debatable.<sup>40</sup> Surely, as will be soon demonstrated, the writerly attribute of the text comes to the fore in the first scenes, where Mary is straining to make some sense of the jocular and sarcastic notices in the pub, but the aim is to intimate the excess and dangers of signification and names, taking a savagely concrete shape in the imminent violence exerted on her body (Trev, a common and brutal criminal, rapes her). So, her disastrous approval to Trev's suggestion that they go back to his place and 'do it' "to kingdom come" (*OP* 40) affirms the act of interpretation as a divided process that, quite literally, rather splits than coheres her (self).

---

<sup>40</sup> Finney's statement can be contentious since in the theoretical text where the expression 'writerly' stems from, Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, the space of the writerly text is far from being a paradigm of reaffirming conventions and novelistic decorum. On the contrary, it is a textual place saturated with *jouissance*, an experience of violent and climactic bliss close to loss of self, death, fragmentation, and the disruptive rapture experienced when transgressing limits (the ultimate limit, *limen*, being the one Mary has crossed: the boundary of life and death). So, in this sense, writerly narration is far from being conducive to a neat order; it rather disrupts the logic of writing and narration.



Elsewhere, Kiernan Ryan reads the role of language in relation to the novel's development of the idea of contamination and loss of innocence: "The self's capacity for innocence," we are told, "is vindicated by the reminder that complicity is not innate but acquired, as the constraints of language and gender escort the infant into the prisonhouse of history" (Mengham ed. 215). Ryan's reading discloses the duplicity of language: apart from marking loss and perdition, language also allows for salvation in the sense that the self can acquire a history or a past, in other words, a narrative. To put it simply, language is the means to have a story but only at the expense of returning Mary to her much dreaded past. So, through language Mary simultaneously experiences a return to and a displacement from her origins, an acute sense of dispossession and homelessness.

The novel's playful engagement with linguistics also discloses the underlying ambiguity of the existential phenomenology of language: consciousness does not only arrive from decoding, reading, or getting one's bearings of the environs (experiencing) through the medium of language, but language also thinks and reifies these phenomena, or as Amis himself put it, "we cannot perceive or conceive of anything except for the way we think in language" (Haffenden 8). It is suggestive that one of the first stages of linguistic reification in the novel is set in the hazy, stuffy and chaotic environment of a pub: "'I just like a good *time*.' [. . .] 'No harm in that, is there? Jolly good luck to you'" (*OP* 36), says Sharon to Mary. "Harm, luck and time were precisely the sort of things she was keen to know more about. [. . .] Each word she recognized gave her the sense of being restored, minutely solidified, as if damaged tissue were being welded back on to her like honey-cells" (*OP* 37). The novel shows then how Mary's mind takes in the world, and constructs it; and how the faculty of cognition is concurrently confounded by it. Through a skilful deployment of rhetoric, it is in turn suggested that language thinks Mary: "'You don't *have* to be MAD to work here – *but* it HELPS!' and 'ALL RIGHT, *so you're difficult*. WITH a *little effort*, you could be IMPOSSIBLE!'" (*OP* 37). It can be inferred from this scene that the first words Mary manages to spell out are ironic rhetorical statements that further underscore the potential disarray language can bring about in her consciousness. In addition, the novel undoes or subverts received assumptions and the limits of knowability best dramatized in Mary and Prince's dialogues about the nature of crime: "Mary said, 'What do you get if you break the law?' / 'Time,' he said. /

‘What do you get if you murder someone?’ / ‘Life.’ / ‘What’s life like?’ / ‘Murder.’ / ‘Is it?’ / ‘Hell,’ he said and laughed. ‘Don’t ever try it” (*OP* 114). The quoted conversation manifests an irrevocable displacement of the possibility of reassuring comprehension; as a consequence, the alterity of language, as devised by the novel, affects ethics.

Conditioned by such disorienting spatial-linguistic coordinates, her inchoate mind-set, as can be assumed, facilitates the workings of memory merely on an emotive level rather than a descriptive or mimetic one: “Memories happened to her quite a lot these days, but always as analogies of mood rather than deliveries of hard information; and they all seemed to antedate the crucial things in her life” (*OP* 177). Another telling example is her attempt to recall the details of the night when she was raped by Trev, after being “fixed up” by Sharon (an expression that already sounds sinister when Sharon uses it); and her memories “came back to her in hot thudding pockets of image and heartbeat” (*OP* 42), as a montage of vague and flitting images. Furthermore, her difficulties to remember are tied up with her inability to name, to know and write herself while the figure of London as a *tropological* place gives rise to a dissolution or evanescence of identity. Mary’s evocative memories always arrive in random images and thus work towards composing a broken vision or topography not only of the psyche, but also of the urban environment. Breaks, ruptures and chasms are in fact repetitively experienced in the text, as Blake Morrison also remarked in an otherwise mixed review of the novel in *The Times Literary Supplement*: “Breakage is a dominant motif in the novel and wherever Mary goes she leaves a trail of destruction behind her: broken backs, broken jaws, broken noses, broken necks, broken spirits, broken hearts” (Tredell ed. 46). So, the text of the novel and the literary topography of London are to be read as creating in conjunction a labyrinthine space of *anamnesis* that errant Mary is impelled to navigate. However, as J. Hillis Miller opines, “[t]he atopol inhabits the individual psyche” (*Topographies* 7-8); that is, her efforts of mapping the exterior will be always interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable interior.

Since the novelistic descriptions are unreservedly poetic at places, it can be argued that the novel seeks to foreground the transformative and performative power of language. In some respects, this can be taken as a novelistic statement that the



postmodern environment is increasingly becoming textualized. Indeed, in Amis's novels the quotidian reality of Londoners' lives is profoundly textual; therefore, a constant deferral of London as text also takes place, a delay that becomes striking in *Other People*. New cultural and literary geographers similarly stress the limits of urban representation and concur in the problematic to fully apprehend specific localities of a city. London, as a figure organizing Amis's novels, can never be resolved into presences and unified significations. Especially with *Other People*, it is remarkable that all the locations in the novel, despite being in London, are curiously unlocatable for they are not named. Cartographically locatable places are conspicuously missing, or if any, they seem to be accidental, mere supplements to the hellish environment. In this sense, a certain thinning of reality is achieved, a creative practice by means of which the novel questions the implications of realistic description or representative geometry of the urban novel.

Evidently, the writing of the city in this case as well may be taken to be composed of sites that could strike the reader as singular at first: the description of the pub, for example, is characteristically reminiscent of Amis's style blending the monstrous and the sublime so to depict the elemental and tumultuous onslaught of sensations impinged on the self by spatial structurations: "There was a stale, malty, sawdust heat [. . .]. Everything clamoured for exchange – the multi-coloured glass banked up high over its trench, the boxy machines with their clicking trapdoors, their conditions and demands" (*OP* 36). While attending to the underground locations of the city, Amis also registers the essential unknowability of London. Indeed, in Mary's perception the city is pushed to the limits of knowability: "Everything in the named world was pressing for admittance to her heart; at the same time she knew that all these things, the trees, the distant rooftops, the skies, had nothing to do with her. Their being was separate from hers, and that was their beauty" (*OP* 202). Such problematisation of and uncertainties about mimetic adequacy result in Amis's infernal bars starting to look eerily repetitive and identical instead of distinctive. One effect that should be extrapolated from this apparently exhausting iteration of locations is that this way the city assumes a certain spectral quality.

The novel fashions Londonscape according to an overload of fleeting sensations and in terms of perceiving the city, none of the characters manage to

entirely behold or create a mastering image of it. The novel also expresses the dizzying sensation that London can prompt; its vertiginous composition making Mary's body hum: "As they walked up the wide entrance to the sky Mary looked downwards and saw that the turbid tract beneath them was in fact alive, boiling, throwing bits of itself restlessly in the air, as if to catch the screaming birds that swerved and hovered just above its surface, taunting, enraged" (*OP* 31). Mary's feelings of incomprehension are mainly due to the fact that she is cut off from the past, as the sinister narrative voice tells her: "When the past is forgotten, the present is unforgettable" (*OP* 53). Indeed, her presence is an intensified presence. As a result of the erasure of her former identity, and having no knowledge of herself, her senses have been sharpened while her naivety and blindness give her more insight. When she begins to understand signs, the narrative voice uses the spatial metaphor of "gaining ground" (*OP* 53); this process allows her perceptions to be "multiform, instantaneous and random, like the present itself" (*OP* 53). This also marks her difference from other people: "Mary sees a window and a face behind it, the grid of the paving-stones and the rake of the drainpipes, the way the distribution of shadows answers to the skyscape above" (*OP* 53). It is, indeed, with a sense of naturalness that she holds a bleak vision of the city assembled from a series of images wherein London is dissected and disembowelled.

The displacement of the position of the viewer who cannot behold the urban multifariousness started to be attended to by nineteenth-century poetry and novels, as also observed by Wolfreys: "The city imposes a new poetics, a new rhetoric, on discourse wherein the sight of the subject, the act of vision which the subject directs, envisions and simultaneously cites the sights of the city in terms dependent on vision and sensation, rather than narration and explanation" (*Writing London Vol. I* 90). In place of the grand narrative voice, the textual matrix of the city is being rearticulated by a continuous layering of various urban voices; in this case, one knowing and the other unknowing. Moreover, in postmodern writings of the city there is no original or final signified, as such, only a violent production or proliferation of the various meanings of the city.

Philip Tew in his recent study on the condition of contemporary British novel is right to regard the city as an imaginary repository for artistic rejuvenation:



“Contemporary fiction returns often to the city and urban social practice and spatial realities variously as location, subject matter, a cultural source, for energy and as symbol of change” (Tew 90). So, if contemporary novelistic texts are primarily concerned with re-working the patterns of urban myths, then one such alternate view of the city is seeing it as a wasteland. While earlier works had an uneasy relationship with the seediness and squalor of London, the writing sensibility that saturates contemporary fictional works is markedly celebratory of urban filth, as if Amis’s characters were born out of and sustained by urban decay, corrosion and grime. In *Other People* London is largely featured as a violent haunt of vagrants, drunkards and the homeless; an urban inferno of misfits and degenerates stuck in a pattern of self-abuse. Disturbing urban types in the novel are two women (possibly prostitutes) vociferously attacking a man with an “animal leap” (*OP* 111), or a “man standing in the middle of the dark street, peeled raw naked, weeping – and burning money” (*OP* 113). These Hogarthian characters, representative of archaic types of the city persisting through the ages, are referred to in the novel as “deep-divers” (*OP* 175), a spatial image and rhetoric of language that subverts accepted categories of rational and irrational, regular and anomalous. The pervasive imagery of self-debasement is a compelling projection of the internal emptiness of the urban self, a resonant metaphor of a wider urban chaos. Amis’s authorial response to contemporary urban conditions can be best captured in a startlingly monstrous image of the city driven by the fragmentation and destruction of the self. So, the unconscious of the city resembles the movement of Mary’s narrative, its escape from itself, suggesting that it is haunted by destruction, negation and regression.

When she finally gets a job and finds a squat where “people are serious about living together” (*OP* 99), Prince takes her on a rather macabre tour (a ghost walk) of the city at night to show the frightful exuberance and energy enmeshing the cityscape of London. During these nocturnal walks, a remarkable textual exhibit of Amis’s distinct urban poetics is created vividly portraying the decadence of the city: “the copper veins that keep things working,” an urban paraphernalia of the “city’s abysmal divides and atrocious energies, its furniture, hardware, power and glut” (*OP* 112). Prince also takes her to a run-down warehouse that is in some way reminiscent of London’s erstwhile opium dens. The novelistic scene is redolent of death-cult where “hollow couples” are dancing to mournful music while people are being ceremonially

kicked about on a stage, as if in a bizarre ritual of death. Mary registers that this place is beyond the conventional 'reality' of London, a fabular landscape, a slower world beyond reason "where cause and effect never need to come around" (*OP* 115). The journey downwards is merely evocative and not directly representative of London: "The river again, writhing and orderless in the lunar night, the plumed snout of a still rumbling factory, warehouses that marched past slowly on either side and seemed to glance back over their shoulders at the car, a stretch of black grass in which an elliptical pond glinted and winked" (*OP* 114). The barren, industroal reality of London thus creates a sense of unreality, a surplus, in a way, where the contemporary city is in a way in excess of itself, remaining haunted, indefinable and imperfect.

In the dark provinces of the city, Prince acts as a knowledgeable guide of the urban underworld while Mary equally feels an inexplicable affinity with London's shadowland. This augments the urban *noir* undertone of the narrative since the moments of epiphany in Mary's life invariably coincide with images of destruction and decay in the novel, as if her identity were being recuperated piece by piece by scenes of suffering and waste. Not incidentally, Freudian psychology also holds that the unity of self is achieved, if achieved at all, in moments of negation, repression, and self-destruction. It is in this sense that the novel is a sustained meditation on the relationship between subject and memory that raises the figure of the absent subject. The memory aids that the city constructs for Mary are to be read as 'mnemotechnics.' "A mnemotechnic," Wolfreys holds, "is to be taken less as a signifier indicating some brute inarticulable reality or collection of material objects, than as a performative mark, a momentary gathering point, and a nexus of mnemonic and spectral effects" (*Writing London Vol. II* 8). So, her past is a mutable topography, a changing network of places and the self, like her room in the squat that "had a soul, the vestiges of presence frailly lingering" (*OP* 103). The novel is an extended exposition of the contemporary critical position that the past cannot be finished in a conventional sense; it is rewritable since it has lost its formerly attributed epistemological primacy and essential closedness. Her past is both a difference from and a constructing *analogon* of her present; its dual position is established and maintained through the workings of invention, substitution and displacement. Memory, a cognitive faculty through which it is possible to go beyond the boundaries of a limited, often undesirable existence, in



the novel, however, drags her back to her constrained condition where her present is being gradually transformed into her past, or vice versa.

If it is claimed that a unified and locatable representation of London is absent from the text, then the urban configuration inevitably and simultaneously progresses towards displacing and disseminating a coherent sense of identity. One of the most telling scenes in this respect is when Mary is randomly identified by a stranger with a “wild face” (*O P* 151) as Amy Hide (or her *alter ego*), a textual event that marks an eruption of the ethics of the urban novel: the act of identification in effect triggers a violent discomposition of her identity. The scene takes place in a lavatory. Walking “down” there she felt strange, as if “dangling,” and the place was “shadowy and vast, possibly endless” (*O P* 151), without light at the end of the corridor; a space whose dimensions were difficult to gauge, where distances could be of any expanse. Particularly memorable in this scene is the unsettling image of Mary sitting on the toilet after having been recognised (another example that in Amis’s novels the unseemly continues to be one of the main sources of productive experience) and “a hand passed upwards across her face” (*O P* 152); a point of novelistic alterity, or of (no) return of (for) Amy Hide (Mary Lamb). Thus, Mary’s confrontation with her two selves is underscoring an emerging urban textual practice of constructing a metropolitan subjectivity that is divided, protean (always on the way to becoming) and indeterminate (always risking the self). The actual scene of the incursion of the self’s boundaries is marked by a diabolical laughter and the primary feelings of exultation, relief and terror (*O P* 185). This psychic configuration marks a condition of estrangement and (constitutive) severance in which social relations are unthinkable, not even between two halves of the self.

The novel, it is to be noted, resists unified or straightforward readings of spatial attributes for it is being configured in harsh and revolting images that essentially exceed simple models of representation or controlled mimesis. One prominent characteristic of this urban world is contingency that permeates story-telling at all levels. Mary’s name, for example, comes to her in an accidental way. The name is attached to her on hearing it in the nursery rhymes sung by idling tramps in a park. Just as the act of naming carries a certain degree of arbitrariness, her constant wandering and relocation can be regarded as a (re-)enactment of a metonymic drift,

which is ultimately the organizing principle of her peregrinations in London. In the next part, the chapter will turn to such permutations in Mary's life to argue that the novel shows the detrimental consequences of the effacement of a sense of identity, and that the only remedy it can proffer is a narrative 'kinaesthetic' of Mary's restless itinerary both anticipating and relentlessly striving towards losing the self yet again.

### ***Kinaesthesia: Circularity or Violent Paradigms of Space***

The final part of the chapter will attend to the textual production and conveyance of the urban praxis of *kinesis* and its inherent logic of supplementarity and will inspect how they can be seminal in terms of inquiring into the ways identity can be thought in such a textual space. As has hopefully become apparent from my arguments above, in Amis's novel the discourse of alterity always fastens on a curious and palpable exertion of violence. Indeed, the coordinates of the text, the city and Mary's passage are significantly predicated upon authorial exercises in violence. Much critical attention has been paid to the function and (rather exasperating) persistence of authorial control in Amis's novels, especially to the overbearing presence, cruelty and self-flaunting figure of the author.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Amis inscribes himself into the text of this novel in a double act of dissimulating as Prince of Darkness and also as the narrative voice. John Prince is variously presented either as a policeman, Mary Lamb's ambiguous protector or Amy's former demon lover, or the Prince of Darkness, and her murderer. In Diedrick's description: "Like a traditional gothic villain, Prince is part lover, part destroyer. He stalks Mary/Amy from the beginning of the narrative, and leads her into the dark labyrinth of the past that increasingly haunts her" (*Understanding* 60). As the author's double, Prince is, so to speak, the *dramatis persona* of the author in the narrative, his vicarious self; they are "exactly analogous," says Amis (Haffenden 18). His murderous presence as

---

<sup>41</sup> Amis has been often criticised for trying to be too much in control of his novels and for torturing his characters with some "horrible Dickensian glee," as he himself admits, and goes on to insist that "the author is not free of sadistic impulses" (Haffenden 12). Nonetheless, in the novel the narrating persona is more apologetic and less openly embracing displays of authorial *Schadenfreude*: "I want Mary out of all this. [. . .] She might smash. I see her as a crystal glass that someone has tapped too hard with his knife; she sings along her breaking line" (*OP* 100).



authorial substitute perhaps testifies to the implicit destruction that is inevitable if the author wishes to maintain control over the narrative. Prince's last words to Amy, "I am the policeman, I am the murderer" (*OP* 205), reveals his double-coded status. He is the man of law (in judicial terms, but also in terms of law meaning letter, language, and thus literature), and, at the same time, its transgressor. Ultimately, the ambiguous character of Prince can be taken to allow for displacing the anxiety about artistic control over the narrative,<sup>42</sup> and for transposing onto the level of metafiction the difficulty of writing about contemporary London.

The text is interspersed with authorial asides or intrusions whose function is to serve as epistemological breaks. These metafictional comments do not only make the hermeneutics of the urban novel more difficult and thus disseminate the meaning of the text, but also, in Finney's words, these textual ruptures can be interpreted as adding to the social comedy of the novel: "They are a basic ingredient of narration, one that has been employed in rather different ways by comic novelists since the time of Cervantes and Fielding" ("Narrative and Narrated Homicides" 6). However, it is also possible to regard them as signifiers of the intended disorientation and dislocation of the reader from the supposedly assured (spatial) dichotomy of being inside or outside the text. By dint of interpellation, the reader is invited inside, into the world of the novel, and is concurrently implicated in the murder of Mary Lamb. As a consequence, complicity, as already discussed in Ryan's article, emerges as a metaphorical condition of the relationship between author and reader. Furthermore, complicity is also suggestive of a spatial relation that disperses the inside and outside boundary lines of the narrative; it overwrites such a spatial alignment and thus implodes the position of the reader.

Yet, in spite of seemingly forceful authorial involutions, Amis's faceless presence functions as a disorganizing figure in Mary/Amy's story instead of a controlling one. He strains to duly engage with the multiplicitous formations of self and urban space, as the narrator confides: "The breaking line is where I walk, or where I sometimes think I do. [. . .] The lines are always somewhere else, they never

---

<sup>42</sup> For example, in an article written on the importance of authorial intrusions in Martin Amis and Alasdair Gray's novels, Richard Todd is uncertain whether novel's central concern is afterlife or a time warp ("The Intrusive Author" 132).

cross, no figures loom, all are alone on the breaking line" (*OP* 100). The lines that are always relocating are the lines drawing the interminability of the text and thus intimate that text and the city jointly sustain the possibility and condition of reinvention, and, not incidentally, the reinvention of new acts of writing and reading as well. Mary/Amy's unfinished or open-ended story provides a space of literature where Amis can write his authorial apprehension into the text: an urban text he tries to appropriate, yet, which always eludes his grasp.

In a number of interviews Amis seems to suggest that he knowingly plays with various notions and ploys of torment; and, above all, he advances the somewhat contorted idea that violence and pain are essentially self-inflicted in his novels: characters suffer because they want to suffer - they are receptive to violence. Upon closely reading the narratorial constitution of violence, a circuitous structure appears: Mary's (and in turn Amy's) relation to the other characters, to the author and finally to herself is in a way a literary enactment of the interdependency of oppressor and victim that has generated much polemic in the fields of philosophy and sociology, and more increasingly and recently, in post-colonial discourses. In his article entitled "The Labyrinth," Bataille, preoccupied with such concepts as sovereignty and human sacrifice, offers a cogent analysis of the famous Hegelian master and slave bond.<sup>43</sup> According to Bataille, the intertwinement of master and slave underscores a basic principle of insufficiency at the core of human existence where "the sufficiency of each being is contested by every other" (*Visions of Excess* 172). Mary seems to intuitively understand this when she thinks to herself that "everyone need[s] someone to make them halfway whole" (*OP* 167). Moreover, when she visits Michael, the TV-presenter who was Amy's great love, he reminisces about Amy as a person who always had an air of insecurity about herself, as a result of which as soon as she started caring about somebody, part of her turned against that person.

---

<sup>43</sup> Bataille stresses that although the master initially divests the slave of his freedom, the supremacy gained this way rebounds by necessity since the master's existence will be in turn impoverished by his act of distancing himself from the material side or support of his life. He also maintains that what depletes the master's life enriches that of the slave.



It can be equally maintained that the further Mary advances in the world, the less real people become around her, and the more she regains her power to hurt. So, it is to be concluded that in the novel the language of affection and the discourse of love is *catachrestic* in the sense that it is dissipated from an absolute primariness of attachment.<sup>44</sup> In the article entitled “Crossing the Present: Narrative, Alterity and Gender in Postmodern Fiction,” Andrew Gibson writes with acumen about *Other People* and narrative ethics. Gibson reads the novel as primarily addressing the problem of ethics of loss: “Mary, the heroine, wants to be good, which, in the novel’s terms, means a loss of identity” (Luckhurst and Marks eds. 192). He rightly observes that: “For ethical Mary, being good is not knowing how to play the ‘memory game’ (11), and a fleeting return to a past self and identity instigates a ‘nausea’ in which she ‘can’t get rid of enough of herself’ (73)” (Luckhurst and Marks eds. 192). He concludes, “*Other People* is an ironic fable of the loss of ethics in the resumption of gender and full identity” (Luckhurst and Marks eds. 192); or, in other words, gaining experience and becoming knowledgeable about the world is concomitant with losing one’s identity and becoming other people.

In terms of the libidinal economy of love, Mary is alternately cast as the oppressor or the oppressed; thus, the narrative bounds her to enter the “broken circle” of emotional attachment: “She speculated. It could be that the point of love was to surround all people on earth with a circle, a circle which was often broken in places but constantly tried to be complete” (*OP* 154). Indeed, in the narrative, geometry assumes metaphysical properties: the figure of the circle is often configured as a spatial formation of completeness and plenitude; but, as the novel suggests, it can also mean its opposite, incompleteness, pain and futile repetitiveness. After Alan, who is hopelessly in love with Mary, commits suicide, Mary is frantically and aimlessly travelling around in circles on the London Underground: “Mary went on a journey, a journey that took several days. She rode the tubes, to and fro and round and round in the city’s fuming entrails. She rode the Circle Line until, on this new scale of time and distance, the Circle made her head reel. And it never got her anywhere” (*OP* 157).

---

<sup>44</sup> I am hereby using the term *catachresis* in a sense that Wolfreys proposed; he in turn took his critical bearings from Jacques Derrida. In this sense *catachresis* differs from its usual use as a rhetorical subtype of metaphor and more radicality is attributed to it: a violent production of meaning, so to speak, an abuse of language without any anterior or proper base; it is essentially a writing that is vigilant to the faults and deviations of language (*Writing London Vol. I* 67).

Consequently, her circular tube-rides are expressive of the messiness of her experience, as if the city had a decentring psychic mechanism. Her “spatial story” or “pedestrian rhetoric” (de Certeau 116) draws a trajectory of aimless circularity. She moves around in circles as an escape from feeling or thinking. While her movement is meant to signify a liberating sense of the annihilation of the senses and a potential losing of the self, the conclusive displacement of pain cannot take place in the text since she always returns to where she started from.

Conversely, repetitive movements can also help Mary become more familiar and knowledgeable about her environs. At first, in order not to dread urban places anymore, she had to walk through them seven times: “Mary walked the streets of London, London South, as far as up as the River, as far as down as the Common, carving a track of familiarity from the grid of ramshackle streets, eviscerated building-sites, and the caged sections of high wire concrete. You need to walk through something seven times before it ceased to be frightening” (*OP* 56-57). Not incidentally, a Freudian interpretation of repetition is that one masters through a play of repetition. But the apparent sensibility of this act is partly undermined by the irrationality of ‘seven times.’ The novel, driven by an absence of self-knowledge and a recoiling dynamics of urban locations, confirms repetition as a primary, or perhaps, the only spatial tactic Mary can muster in order to engage with urban space. Repetition, then, is not a form of unchanged sameness; it is more a kinetic narrative form or device of flux and change, but change in a sense of returning.

Accordingly, it is possible to refer to walking and travelling, especially circuitous and repetitive movements, as conveying a sense of not having or lacking a place. Walking and moving mark a continuous spatial shifting where one can become dissipated in the city. The sense of losing the self while being involved in the sheer physical act of walking echoes de Certeau’s notable correlation between walking, urban space and individuality:

To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of



lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but it is only a name, the City (de Certeau 103).

London's textual matrix similarly configures a mode of experiencing urban space in its placelessness. This spatial encounter, however, is generated by a metonymic sliding and transference where the de Certeauan 'deportations' cannot find their intersections or intertwinements with the urban fabric. As a consequence, Mary is marked as an urban drifter whose identity is ultimately dispersed as opposed to the ecstasy induced in the celebrated turn-of-the-century urban figure, the *flâneur*. In Walter Benjamin's famed study of Parisian *flânerie*, *Charles Baudelaire*, there is an ample description of the sensual, vibrant and synaesthetic world of the famous poet, who is quoted to have claimed that for him plunging into a crowd is similar to plunging into a reservoir of electric energy (*Baudelaire* 132). Benjamin continues: "Of all the experiences which made his life what it was, Baudelaire singled out his having been jostled by the crowd as the decisive, unique experience" (*Baudelaire* 154). Equally, for the female modernist writer, like Virginia Woolf, getting lost in the crowd was commensurate with experiencing freedom; for Mrs. Dalloway found her anonymity in the London crowd liberating. For Mary Lamb, however, walking in London's swarming streets means to be overwhelmed with a mixed feeling of exclusion and insecurity: "Each turning seemed more likely to deliver its possibilities of hurt and risk; soon, someone or something would feel the need to do her special damage" (*OP* 18). So, walking in the novel is a spatialised discontinuity of a quest for knowledge and comprehension; it is and at the same time it is not a medium for cognition for the stray figure of Mary, who inadvertently acts as Amis's unknowing literary geographer. Walking is therefore a kinetic figural representation of the elusiveness of Mary's life, a *kinaesthetic* link between Mary and the city.

The peripatetic mode of advancing through space used to be a privileged modality of engagement with the city; in the novel, however, it merely develops an

intoxicating anxiety in the relation of self and space. Mary's *citephobia* is intensified by the fact that the various places of home are in fact inverted domestic spaces. When Sharon reveals her plan to Mary that she wants them to go home, it is suggestive that she locates home on "the other side" (*O P* 32). The scene of arrival at Sharon's parental home is the novel's supplement of the generic image of the deracinated house of the post-industrial city as their homecoming is rather parodic: Mary is faced with a grotesque scuffle between Sharon and her parents as they are refused entry first. Once inside, she is surprised to see that "[e]verything was padded or reinforced, and it was hotter than she had thought it would be" (*O P* 32). After the initial family row and reconciliation, described as a "spirited reunion with a feeling of provisional panic" (*O P* 33), Sharon gives her a stand-up wash and dresses her for a night out. Trying to leave the house triggers a small fight again. So, Mary deduces, homes and houses are enclosing and fixed spaces, and stand strongly against the idea of transitoriness, a resistance that in an urban flux subtended by constant displacement can be even imperilling: "It all confirmed her suspicions about houses and homes. They were hard to get into; and once you were inside, it probably wasn't a good idea to go out again" (*O P* 35). Thus, she is cast to experience domestic space in a constant slipping between cosiness and dreadfulness.

Mary's feelings, simplistic as they may seem at first, echo the human geographer, Lefebvre's arguments about the reductive character of buildings. A house, he contends, "is about condensation of human relationships, it reduces the entire paradigm of space, it reduces significant oppositions and values, among them pleasure and suffering, use and labour" (Lefebvre 227). For John Self, the materialistic protagonist of *Money* thoroughly defined by the circulations of (non-existent) capital, the domestic is a place where he feels most displaced or disoriented because it refutes the value of money. Apart from being reductive, home, in *Other People*, is performed as an endlessly regressive place. After the Bothams (Sharon's parents) have been burgled, they put her out. She soon finds accommodation in the Church Army Hostel for Young Women, a place where fallen women are put up. Unfortunately, as soon as she starts to get comfortable, and even manages to get a job, she is thrown out from there as well, chiefly for reading the wrong books. Mary's conclusion is that it is trouble that gets her in, but it is also trouble that gets her out from there. 'In' and 'out' are spatial metaphors for failing to adhere to the laws of



specific spatial formations.<sup>45</sup> Her incessant movements perform the city while even the imaginary space of home is dispersed, and the hostels and squats she lives in further defer any notion of intimacy or fixity.

Home and placelessness can be significantly linked to thinking about language and self, an interrelatedness discussed with great discernment and sensitivity in J. Hillis Miller's analysis of Heidegger's philosophy of home and homelessness (*Heimatlösigkeit*) and its applicability to language:

The state of homeless drifting would correspond to an uprooted condition of language. In such a condition, the reference of each word is only another word, the meaning of that word yet another word, and so on. Language moves from word to word in a perpetual drifting, never being pinned down to anything outside language. In narrative theory, this might lead to the notion of "fiction about fiction" (*Topographies* 11).

Indeed, Heidegger contends in his well-known essay, "Building Dwelling Thinking," that the transferral of homes, the possibility of dwelling, is a dislocation of the possibility of self-knowledge. "Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken" (Heidegger 157). Crucially for Heidegger, real dwelling is thinking. Locations (dwellings) are demarcated by a boundary, yet the latter "is not at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is

---

<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that inside and outside are reversible spatial demarcations in Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological exploration of *The Poetics of Space*. Crucially, for him, it is this reversibility that enables a mapping and re-mapping of imagined or set boundaries. In this philosophical treatment of space, we are offered a psychology of the house as harbouring both the complexity and the unity of the inhabitants' imaginary. The house, as spatial container, is important because it acts as a shelter for daydreaming; "it is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (Bachelard 6). It is also a central topos that organizes the self and connects it with social space. The constant *peripeteia* that forces Mary to live her life as an urban nomad, however, dissolves the spatiality of the house, "of dream-memory," or "oneiric house" (Bachelard 15) that is so essential in Bachelard's discussion of domestic space.

that from which something *begins its presencing*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary” (Heidegger 154). So, boundaries are spatial etchings or inscriptions from which space and self can receive their ‘Being.’ In the novel, however, the rhetoric of movement (*kinesis*) taking shape in the crossing over or chiasmic structure (itself a figure of repetition) of ‘in’ and ‘out’ dissolve the function of boundaries, so figure (space) and word (language) jointly dismantle the metaphysics of presence and of *presencing* in Mary’s story.

In particular, considering the story from this angle - perspective (*horismos*) -, the frames (boundaries) of the text, Prologue and Epilogue, similarly deform the presence, or the unity of narrative geometry. The Prologue is dominated by past tense thus marking a paradoxical initial end or finitude of events, while the Epilogue is written in the present and future tenses, thus indicating the beginning of events. In *lieu* of a more “economical and shapely” (*OP* 9) way that the author wishes for in the Prologue, the narrative is prefigured to remain unfinished or cyclical. Temporal substitutions presented by the frames (boundaries) of the text also define experience, a central preoccupation of the text, as arriving in a discontinuous, anti-logical way instead of a well-structured one, taking its form in being read backwards, reconstructed from the horizon of the end.

As a final consideration of the novel, it is apparent early on in the text that Mary’s amnesia is not to be read as a simple medical condition riven by the ordinary empirical difficulties of mapping the world. Hers is a state of mind creating an idiosyncratic mindscape stretching into the metaphysical and the philosophical. According to Diedrick, Mary/Amy’s dual identity has great symbolic significance. In his view the novel repeats a major Romantic poetic allegory of the lost soul: the story of the Ancient Mariner, itself an allegory of human uprootedness previously alluded to. The mythic sailor of Coleridge’s famous poem is condemned to live forever in the realm of “life-in-death”; his plight is to endlessly relive and retell and thus never be able to rid himself of his transgression, the killing of the albatross:

The symbolic weight Mary/Amy carries in the novel is not unlike the albatross that hangs from the Mariner’s neck: it restricts her autonomy



and freedom of movement. Amis has partially compensated for this problem by making her an amnesiac, so that her largely affectless responses are consistent with her condition. But this does not eliminate the impression that she is primarily a narrative device rather than a character (*Understanding* 64).

The narrative's intertextual frame is perhaps relevant in more than one sense. The Ancient Mariner is to be regarded as a paradigmatic exile figure in Romantic poetry; he is compelled to wander the seas till the end of time, and never belong to any place, thus, to live in a perpetual state of homelessness. Exile is the kinetic performance of placelessness, a metaphor of not belonging, of infinite margins and horizons, or it can also be Miller's atypical that inhabits the psyche mentioned earlier in the text. It is a condition of deferred individuation that is also a renewed possibility of relating to 'the other.' The Mariner's story is a psychodrama of never-ending expiation, a life of irrevocable expulsion and constant displacement. Still, the act of story-telling does not only perpetuate his sinfulness and eternal damnation, but also stands for the prospect of producing a medium, a scene of writing where he can potentially gain redemption, where he can save himself.

The ostensible literary analogy of Mary/Amy's story as life-in-death is correspondingly suggestive of the narrator's attempt to help Mary/Amy survive this *demi-monde* (a world that stretches between the living and the non-living) through the act of writing. Mary's haunted self wants to escape from the idea that "her life has in some crucial sense already run its course, that the life she moves through now is nothing more than another life's reflection, its mirror, its shadow" (*O P* 90), and is in search of vindication from a "world [. . .] spanned out to accommodate her. Really the main thing about life was its superabundance: there was so much of it, and always room for more inside" (*O P* 85). During her ramblings, Mary endeavours to re-enchant time and time again the metropolitan places but the largeness of the city ultimately lacks its former mystery and romanticism. So, while the Ancient Mariner is cast to eternally roam the seas (itself a fluid topography between life and afterlife), Mary/Amy is forced to roam the streets of London. In this respect, London becomes

the place of exile and unalterable dissociation or topos of discontinuities Mary/Amy is compelled to revisit.

The enigmatic end of the novel can be taken to signify that closure in the narrative as well as in London's narrative is impossible. The city as a concrete geographical location evades confinement; and if the city is in a metonymical relationship with the self, then the story of self-formation is similarly interminable, and is perforce recreated in the act of writing; a reinvention that the end of the novel intimates.<sup>46</sup> As Vidler, a perceptive theorist of postmodern urban spaces posits: "And if beginnings have been rendered suspect, replaced or rather displaced by more dispersive concepts such as source, trace and difference, endings have become equally difficult to resolve" (Vidler 117). In all of this, there appears the possibility that narrated events can be put under erasure or can be unnarrated. Narrative iteration and its recursive structures, however, show that attempted appropriations of source and identity curiously unfold, or rather, fold back as stories of reversion or regression. The next chapter seeks to examine such iterations, repetitions, doublings and uncanny figurative diffusions ingrained in the urban novel.

---

<sup>46</sup> Amis holds that there is "a consistent but not a realistic explanation" (Haffenden 17) of the perplexing end of the book. The novel, in his view, is meant to suggest that there is no assurance that death will be less complicated than life: "Nothing about life suggests that death will just be a silence" (Haffenden 17).



## Chapter Four: Double Visions: Information, Authorship and Doubles in Literary London

The aim of this chapter is to turn to the arch-trope of doubling in Amis's fiction – formed by double identities, *alter egos*, twins, or near twins, but also by the narrative and rhetorical figures of repetition and (re)uplications- and to chart their relevance in terms of novelistic constructions and portrayals of urban spaces firstly in *The Information* (1995), and secondly in *Success* (1978). The previous chapter aimed to address the problems and ramifications of novelistic engagements in issues of representation and thus bring into focus the problematics of language, itself a dual, or rather, a double process of making and unmaking, haunted by a rupture of self, domestic spaces and writings of the city. More extensively, this argument hinges on a general observation running through the thesis that considers the imagery of the urban literary discourse and the writing modes that these novels put to work in order to subsume them as constituting a fragmented text whose relation to the material reality of London is deferred.

Much of the urban and literary criticism presented in the preceding chapters has illustrated that despite authorial efforts to make it look otherwise, the technical complexity of the narrative devices that Amis's fiction operates with can be rather repetitive. Conversely, it is also tenable that these precarious and discomposed literary conventions considerably feed the vigour of Amis's narratives through a playful figurative diffusion. Discarding literary decorum from narratives and implementing instead devices such as multiple points of view, authorial inversions, unreliable narrators as well as lack of narrative closure and flat, cartoon-like characters or crude types configure in a sense a literary space that is governed by the ludic, the formless, or even the illegible. Arguably, Amis's disavowal and provocative defiance of cohesion of text, character and subject-matter might perhaps yield a sense of aimlessness or superfluity to the theme of the urban. Still, a referential drive concurrently permeates these texts. My reading of the persistence and intervention of London in Amis's prose is consequently working towards locating the urban as a

peculiar writing that writes itself *through* and *against* his novels. It is in this sense that I would propose Amis as an uncanny or unhomely writer of London and urban spaces in the pantheon of contemporary literary and psychogeographers who situate themselves and are in turn accredited by the literary establishment with the status of being at home in the city.

A central concern of the chapter to follow is to demonstrate that Amis's novels can be taken to ultimately figure the impossibility of thematic reading, including the urban *topos*, in the sense that Nicholas Royle curiously attributes the feature of thematic aimlessness to the uncanny in his original book with the same title, *The Uncanny* (44). Admittedly, the textual coordinates of the urban can be at times difficult to uncover in Amis's novels; this chapter, however, is invested in a reading of the urban (sub)text in Amis's literary output as a permanent and inalienable possibility. The chapter proffers to delineate modalities of how the city and spatial considerations curiously absent themselves and at the same time are ghostly presences in Amis's novels. The uncanniness of London as a narrative figure constitutes in always exceeding itself and spilling over into the narrative. Indeed, as a unified excavation of the city's topography would run into difficulties, London in effect reads as a double of Amis's postmodern narratives. *The Information*, for instance, is a novel relating artistic and human dissolution against the backdrop of the publishing world in London where the urban is a supplementary text that still writes and accounts for the peculiarities of the plot. In such textual spaces, the city can be uncoverable in the form of traces rather than full presences. Amis's London, presumably, is not so much a tangible and coherent space as a disassociated one that allows him to stage what Steven Connor posited in the context of contemporary novels addressing "conditions of England" as "an alien and unrecorded England that is both concealed within and yet lurks menacingly outside official England" (Connor 84).



## Information, The Uncanny and Literature

In the following, the chapter aims to investigate the uncanny topology of conceptualisations of spatiality and of the urban in Amis's fiction and seeks to establish the ways they can perform as paradigms of spaces of literature primarily in *The Information*, a novel centred upon the literary rivalry between two fellow ex-Oxonians, Richard Tull and Gwyn Barry. The narrative takes a comedic-satiric turn on the anguish, envy and malice, Richard, a forty-year-old book reviewer and failed novelist, harbours against Gwyn's unmerited success whose simplistic and naively utopian books are best-sellers while his experimental novels, and then unbearably obscure manuscripts (given the generic title *Unpublished*), make people physically unwell and cause eyestrain as a result of their unreadability. Richard plots a scheme of vengeance to physically and socially harm Gwyn, but it all devolves into a revenge (at times slapstick) comedy.<sup>47</sup> In this play of 'measure for measure' of literary worthiness, Richard is relentlessly striving to professionally ruin his antagonist by cunningly accepting a commission to write a (he secretly plans defiling and bilious) literary profile, and also by authoring, in fact, plagiarising a work based on Gwyn's successful novel in the hand of a fictive author in the fifties in order to turn it all back on him and incriminate him with allegations of text-theft. In the end, in the literary vein of a black comedy, the novel concludes with all the intended literary reprisals backfiring on and ruining Richard himself.

To begin with, the title of the novel, *The Information*, is repeated several times in the text, albeit in a way that its reference is continuously modified. Tied up in a continuous displacement of its final meaning, the title can be taken as a prime

---

<sup>47</sup> To this end, Bradbury's succinct summary of the novel is much suggestive: "All of these injustices, the emptiness of the universe, the facts of mortality, need avenging. *The Information* is a revenger's comedy; in this world of literary and urban degradation, cultural slippage, cosmic depression, millennial anticipation, it is possible on the street to get a writer killed, for the price of eight book reviews" (*Modern* 533).

meaning-carrier or name-holder of the undecidable in the novel.<sup>48</sup> Firstly, Amis's deployment of the term information effects a strange concatenation of hardness (science) and softness (sensibility and sorrow): it is both the bearer of scientific knowledge about the universe - and thus supplements the novel's link with postmodern cultural discourses -, while it also denotes privacy and intimacy. Secondly, the uses of information are in a constant state of slippage between the comic and the cosmic. Moreover, a transmitter of technical or scientific intelligence, of metaphysical cognition and psychological understanding, the information is principally received by Richard. Information mainly comes at night and it is a transporter or a novelistic figuration of *aperçu* of death and inexorable ruination, cosmic, planetary, literary or personal. Lastly, and most importantly, it stands for the non-existence of answers to big questions; it "is nothing" (I 452), as Richard concludes towards the end of the novel.<sup>49</sup> Although it seemingly proffers clarification and explanation, information is irrepressibly polysemic and inchoate. It frequently conveys, for instance, scientific and astronomical data. Still, it remains uncertain to what degree Amis is aware of the occasional errors therein (he gives the speed of light as 186,000 miles per hour), or whether he deliberately misinforms the text and the reader so as to suggest problems, flaws and irrelevances with the notion of information. The information is thus uncanny since it cannot enunciate itself, since it has nothing to enunciate.

By the same token, as the critic John A. Dern has pointed out: "the information' is the nothingness that will become of Richard and so many others who are unable to 'not die' through the agency of literary immortality" (Dern 131). Instead

---

<sup>48</sup> The title, Diedrick suggests, is meant to parody such best-seller novels as John Grisham's *The Client* or *The Firm* (*Understanding* 175). Also, on the narrative function of the title, Nicole LaRose in a very recent article acutely comments that the titular phrase "appears approximately forty times, the same number as the years Richard and Gwyn have lived" ("Reading the *Information* on Martin Amis's London" 162).

<sup>49</sup> On another level, this can be read as an attempt to perpetuate recent scientific discoveries that have displaced and decentred man from the centre of the (scientific) universe whose existence now is nothing compared to a larger scheme. Linking Amis's interest to popular science, Diedrick speculates: "In the post-Hubble universe [. . .] stable meaning is an illusion. So is the idea of a stable center of self. *The Information* is Amis's most deconstructive novel; Richard's failed plotting, his failures of interpretation, points toward an unsettling indeterminacy" (*Understanding* 179).



of informing and thus explaining the forces acting upon Richard, the information keeps shifting its meaning, thus constantly misleading him; the information is estranging, then, since it is unfixed and aleatory. Likewise, Childs passed a most suggestive comment on the novel: "Like money, 'Information' is both a value-free 'good' and a commodity with which modern life is saturated in a society where the phrase 'knowledge is power' has become axiomatic" (Childs 52). The title, therefore, might also express that the forceful combination of myth and capital masterfully rendered in the depictions of the Victorian and turn-of-the-century city is being replaced by information and power. Nonetheless, "empowering" as information may be, it can be enfeebling and debilitating at the same time. At one point in the novel, Richard contemplates that his unhappiness could be a result of not being innocent enough for he is afflicted with an excess of information. So, in the novel, information can be an effective metaphor for excessive stimulation and supply. By the end of the novel, Richard has too much information that still will not suffice as regards deterring the harm on his family that he partly self-induces through his unrelenting scheming against Gwyn. Thus, information is a trope that puts into disarray the relationship of self, author and environment.

The novel's most suggestive intertext of the multivalency of information is Richard's repeated references to the *aleph* in Borges's short-story with the same title. The figure of the *aleph* is in fact a much-favoured configuration in recent theoretical discussions on the concept of space. It is "a sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere" (*The Aleph* 129), the narrator explains, a point of space "that contains all other points" (*The Aleph* 126). So, as a microcosmic space-formation that contains the macrocosm and marks itself as a centre without having a centre itself, the *aleph* can be read as a representation and interpolation of paradoxical and uncanny spatial formations. In like manner to information, the *aleph* can be also taken to signify the nothingness of the self.<sup>50</sup> The *aleph*, just as the information that comes to Richard at night, distorts or dissolves existence by making it seem insignificant; in other words, it signifies the gratuitousness and inscrutability of things. Its existence refutes the metaphysics of presence for the narrator called Borges is informed that even if he cannot see it, nothing can be taken to invalidate its existence.

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Diedrick in *Understanding Martin Amis* pp. 182-183.

In addition, the central scene of the story is imbued with the accidental as the failed and ridiculous poet, Carlos Argentino, relates how he stumbled upon this mythic spatial configuration as a child while looking for something else. Located on the underground level of the house, the *aleph* is carefully hidden in the cellar (a staple location of the fearful in Western cultures) and the way down, the descent is littered with household trivia and clutter. The instructions that are meant to help the narrator navigate his way - such as counting nineteen steps - are absurd and superfluous in comparison with the philosophical and metaphysical significance of this proverbial "*multum in parvo*" (*The Aleph* 128). The encounter with it is accordingly ineffable. "I come now to the ineffable center of my tale" (*The Aleph* 129), says the narrator upon realising that words do not measure up to describing the spatial infinity he has glimpsed in such a spatial multiformation. In its simultaneity, it is also a spatial setting that is subversive of conventional narrative alignment. When Borges leaves the house, his perceptive faculties are deranged since he is terrified by the familiarity of the faces in the street. The disturbance of visual perception that the *aleph* leaves in its wake reflects a common link between space, the uncanny and vision. Thus, the Borgesian dimensions of the *aleph* in their endlessness and repetition evoke or interpolate the figure of the double in the narrative inasmuch as Royle holds that *déjà vu* is the utmost experience of the double: it is the experience of the experience as double (Royle 183).

The spatial trope of the *aleph* is a representation *par excellence* of postmodern space formations in one sense; and it is inescapably archaic in another as it returns spatial concepts to pre-modern, mythical imaginations of space before the compass and the map. LaRose writes on the connotations and relevance of the title with regard to navigating the (textual) space of London, and rightly observes: "Throughout the novel, London becomes the text within the text, one of the many intertexts of the narrative" ("Reading *The Information*" 169). In addition, the title can transmit London as an intertext also in the sense that it links to the *aleph*, a literary spatial paradigm where, as the narrator divulges, London is seen as a "broken labyrinth" (*The Aleph* 130). London is like the *aleph* also in its unfathomability as it has no beginning and no end. The spatial figuration of the *aleph* in the novel is indeed all the more striking since it is representative of Amis's novelistic practice refusing historical-materialist accounts of the city in favour of phantasmatic or fabular dimensions of the urban.

It can be argued that the uncanniness of excessive and disorienting information finds its analogue in Amis's minimal character development as well.<sup>51</sup> Crucially, information can be distorting, especially so if read as a figure of repetition and inversion. James Wood's critical commentary upon Amis's text is much revealing in this regard. He notes that Amis's characters exist as elements of a catalogue: "He has killed off his subjects with words" as they are "already indexed and adjectively tagged" (Wood 195). To avoid the danger of "re-imprisoning" himself in the English burlesque, Martin Amis "needs to get beyond the information," concludes Wood (Wood 199). Implicit in this argument is the idea that information, in a way, can stand for the faults of the novel; too much information can pre-empt characters by the very linguistic structures they are made of.

Given the semantic proliferation of information, I would argue that the novel is to be read as a textual perpetuation and repetition of the workings of the uncanny in Amis's idiosyncratic literary geographies of space and the urban. This is all the more tenable not least in terms of Royle's self-reflective opening remarks on the uncanny taken as entailing "another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted" (Royle 1); in this respect then the title and the beginning of the novel are bound to be equally perturbed. In addition, this implies the impossibility of mastering the uncanny, its unsettling power deriving from a disturbance of the moment of commencement. It is Royle's contention that the uncanny "entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*: 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events" (Royle 1). In the context of the present argument perhaps it is most suggestive to veer Royle's polemics towards an application of the disturbance of the 'proper' to the notion of information in the novel insofar as 'proper' ('own') is taken to signify the domain of the intimate, the space of the private and the innermost. The uncanny relates to the novelistic functions of information also in the sense that secretiveness is a quality often attributed to the uncanny, especially that pertaining to the private domain; secrets of the self and of houses, also denoted at the level of etymology: the German original

---

<sup>51</sup> It has been often observed that characterisation (or the lack of it) is one of the main impairments of Amis's texts. Adam-Mars Jones notes in this context that Amis does not "develop his characters so much as wear them out" (Tredell ed.155).



*unheimlich* embeds *das Geheim* ('secret') and *das Heim* ('home'). Richard Tull feels invaded and disturbed by the information he receives at night with almost mechanical repetition (another crucial attribute of the uncanny). The arrival of information carries with it an eruption of the outside into the inside, of the unfamiliar into the familiar; a violent interference of the 'improper,' or of what is not one's own.

Nonetheless, any discussions of the uncanny cannot circumvent Freud's noteworthy enquiry into the concept. Freud famously designated E. T. A Hoffman's "The Sandman" as the archetypal story of the uncanny, while his subsequent readings of it reveal that the uncanny is fundamentally a spatial trope as it is brought about by an irrational spatial distress: fear of heights. The fear of looking down connects the uncanny with an abysmal scene of looking and reading, a spatial envisioning of *mise en abîme*, a critical term often taken to be a metaphor of the arbitrariness of linguistic signification. As Vidler surmises, it is a spatial trope that was instrumental in allowing an establishment of "the necessary relation between semiotics and psychoanalysis" in the deconstructionist writings of Derrida (Vidler 134). The uncanny undoubtedly has strong spatial associations; or rather, specific spatial structurations seem to give rise to the uncanny already grounded in Freud's attempt to describe it: he uses the spatial analogy of losing one's bearings in an urban setting. Strolling through the unfamiliar streets of a familiar Italian town, Freud got lost in the prostitutes' district. Rather than finding a way out, he repeatedly ended up in the same street against his will. Bound up in a position where he unintentionally repeated his actions filled Freud with the feeling of the uncanny. This autobiographical anecdote is revealing for our purposes since it was the structurations of the streets that fundamentally presented Freud with the perceptual ambiguity the self is confronted with when reading space.

One of the effects of Freud's essay was to link the uncanny for future critical discussions with the spatial concepts of home and homesickness. Homesickness, Freud famously argues, connotes a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire for non-existence, for death. Furthermore, Heidegger's essay, "Building Dwelling Thinking," mentioned in the previous chapter, contends that at a fundamental level "Being" in the world is defined by the not-being-at-home, by the unhomely (in other words, the uncanny). These two short but influential studies have defined subsequent thinking about the relationship of space, mainly architectural, and the self. According

to Vidler, master-theorist of the architectural uncanny, the uncanny becomes “a metaphor for a fundamentally unliveable modern condition” (Vidler x). Just as the place of home is forever regressing in Amis’s urban texts, the configurations of the uncanny, in Royle’s words, are “never fixed, but constantly alerting. The uncanny is (the) unsettling (of itself)” (Royle 5).

Considering Freud’s essay of 1919 as the primary critical text that brought to the fore the concept of the uncanny for Western critical discourses, it can be argued that the uncanny is to be apprehended and transmitted through the medium of language: to express it, a recourse to linguistic signification is needed. The fact that the initial theoretical texts on the uncanny were written in German and had to be subsequently translated into English to make it accessible to an English-speaking audience already institutes the very notion of the uncanny in our discussions about it. As Royle remarks: “what is uncanny or *unheimlich* is crucially a matter of the strange vicissitudes of translation, including translation effects within what may appear to be a single word: ‘unheimlich’ or ‘uncanny.’ We have from the beginning been doing something strange with Freud, ventriloquizing him into an English speaker” (Royle 11). Thus, the need for the German word *unheimlich* to be translated into English itself performs the estranging effect of the uncanny. There are doubts as to whether the multi-layered quality of the German *unheimlich* travelled well in the process of translation, and according to some, the necessity of having to be ‘domesticated’ or adapted to the economy (Gr *oikos*: house and *nomen*: law) of the English language, only attests to the originary violence or perhaps untranslatability of the uncanny.<sup>52</sup>

Royle rightly argues that the uncanny works against the principle of stability: it is dislocating, unpredictable and performative. More significantly, he goes on to maintain that the uncanny is also crucially “an experience of *writing*. And conversely of reading. One tries to keep oneself out, but one cannot. One tries to put oneself in: same result. The uncanny is an experience of being *after* oneself, [. . .] of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double” (Royle 16). So, the uncanny splits a unified sense of the self: “To write about the uncanny [. . .] is to lose one’s bearings, to find oneself

---

<sup>52</sup>It also attests to the uncanniness of the academic discourse that Freud’s essay, despite having been heavily criticised for being too inconsequential to claim professional acuteness and authority, instituted the concept of the uncanny and exerted great influence on subsequent critical thoughts on it.



immersed in the maddening logic of the supplement, to engage with a hydra” (Royle 8). As he puts it, “[w]hat ‘The Sandman’ shows, above all perhaps, is that the uncanny is a reading-effect” (Royle 494).<sup>53</sup> Equally emblematic in this respect is that our understanding of the uncanny has been markedly shifted due to Freud’s noted misreadings of Hoffmann’s short-story. Firstly, it is quite remarkable that the irony of Hoffmann’s text is largely ignored by Freud.<sup>54</sup> More significantly, in Freud’s reading what ultimately unhinges Nathaniel’s mind is not looking at Clara, as it says in the original text, but rather at Coppelius. Correspondingly, while for E. Jentsch, an early theorist of the uncanny, it was Olimpia who signified the automaton, and thus was a bearer of the uncanny, for Freud, it was the Sandman who was the uncanniest of all;<sup>55</sup> thus firmly grounding succeeding readings of the uncanny in a discourse on patriarchal anxieties.

*The Information* and the unexpected effects Richard’s latest novel has on the readers playfully engage with the unforeseen and unhinging effects of the uncanny in the process of reading. Diplopia, that is, double vision is an ailment of the visual faculties that one of his readers literally suffers from while reading the first chapter of *Untitled*. Richard receives a call from his publisher telling him that her assistant, Cressida, has an attack of diplopia of such severity that a lesion of her central nervous system is needed. Indeed, Richard’s book inflicts impairment on all readers and spares no literary critic either: a critic from Quadrant Press ends up in St. Bartholomew’s Hospital with an inflamed nose. The violence and animosity of his book soon reaches epic and comically exaggerated scale when the entire publishing community becomes

---

<sup>53</sup> The primal scene of Hoffmann’s story is eavesdropping where Nathaniel as a small child hears that his father and the visitor want to fabricate a man. The terror the child feels is enhanced by the warnings of the nurse who threatens him with the Sandman if he does not go to bed in time (i.e. respect the law of the house). The two scenes are connected in the imaginary of the child, and they typically conflate, and alter each other. From this the child constructs a frightful scene that tells him that his father and the mysterious guest want to use his eyes. So, the uncanny is undeniably produced by reading in certain ways where the self, as is also relevant in relation to *The Information*, is not a centre of knowingness.

<sup>54</sup> In contrast, and quite ironically, the qualities Freud attaches to the uncanny, to a large extent qualify for the comic mode as well, one of these attributes being the pervasive element of the mechanical, an attribute famously ascribed to the comic mode by Henri Bergson. Thus, the peculiar, often humorous, take of Amis’s text on the effects of information is resonant in yet another sense with the qualities of the uncanny.

<sup>55</sup> See Freud’s reading: in the tale “the optician Coppola really is the lawyer Coppelius, and, thus also the Sand-Man” (*The Uncanny* 139).



afflicted after Gal Aplanalp, his agent, has distributed his novel. As seen, in order for the uncanny to take place, reading has to be baffled; one has to misread and misapprehend, and any notion of veracity is to be replaced with perhaps what Freud calls “intellectual uncertainty,” surrogate terms for which could be the inexact or the ineffable.

By the same token, urban literary realism is in a sense a critically fabricated way of reading and seeing. The resistance of Amis’s novels to realistic descriptions of the city is, therefore, a resistance to the illusion of clear seeing and reading of the city. Opposed to the clarifying and descriptive tendency of literary criticism is the model of seeing and modalities of knowing reflected in the narrative deployment of the uncanny that imply the inexorability of *aporetically* experiencing urban spatiality. So, Amis’s vision of the city is a double (diplopic) vision since what it writes and represents, as will be soon demonstrated, is incommensurable with and in excess of the visible geographies of a location. As Richard acknowledges, “the only way to see London truly, swinging low over it, in a cab, in darkness-at-noon July. London traffic lights are the brightest in the world, beneath their meshed glass: the anger of their red, the jaundice of their amber, the jealousy of their green” (I 36). Here, Richard suggests a vision of the city where perception is held by an obfuscating yet vivid play of lights and colours that would disarray perception. A slanted view is an indirect, oblique or double vision; while as the citation implies, directly writing about the city is an aberration, or an impossibility.

Accordingly, Freud maintains, writers would often deliberately deviate from the conventional realities of a well-known setting to produce the effect of the uncanny; and thus a dialectic of recognition and misrecognition will be inevitably instituted, the unexpected familiarity of something previously deemed alien. To get to Amis’s ‘other spaces,’ the critic needs to forsake former, especially socially-oriented critical expectations, and to assume a different way of seeing and a different analytical tool. The contemporary spatial structurations significantly mark a (metaphysical) loss of vision and configure the urban as a site of partial visibility. According to Wirth-Nesher, to be a city-dweller is to inherently experience the condition of the outsider because in the imaginative reconstruction of the urban landscape one by necessity excludes or is excluded: “Modern urban life, then, is a landscape of partial visibilities

and manifold possibilities” (Wirth-Nesher 9). Amis as an author of the urban epitomises the observer’s permanent limited and incomplete visibility.

The loss of social vision and splintered visibilities consequently depict a distinctly pathological city where, as Vidler suggested, “the uncanny erupt[s] in empty parking lots around abandoned or run-down shopping malls, in the screened *trompe l’oeil* of simulated space, in, that is the wasted margins and surface appearances of post-industrial culture” (Vidler 3).<sup>56</sup> It is this sense of the uncanny that *The Information* is thoroughly imbued with: “Now in the dawn, through the window and through the rain, the streets of London looked like the insides of an old plug” (I 11), while the streetscapes of Ladbroke Grove are depicted as overrun by “human and mechanical effluvia” (I 489). The uncanny erupts into Amis’s urban settings by turning his urban vision into murky and pluvial cityscapes. One of the memorable scenes of cloacal London is the start of the second part of the novel portraying Richard as a riverine creature “slumped over a Zombie in the Canal Crêperie” (I 149). The bleak surroundings are suggestive of inner city aimlessness; the canal, generally an urban location undergoing massive regeneration, presents the image of a primal muck of dissolution: “sickly-hued even in the dark, turbid, caustic, like a Chinese medicine of ferocious efficacy” (I 149). As is manifest, in the run-down picturesquery of Amis’s London the uncanny is an aesthetic response to urban spaces; it supplements a commonly held link between urban ruins and the self. As a textual logic of space, it also demolishes urban place myths and thus disperses the originary heterogeneity of a place into a present sameness; in particular, it becomes a perceptual condition of urban transformations.

The image of forlorn and despondent Richard in affinity with London going to ruins around him can be read as a novelistic expression that the uncanny and its representation in modern urban architecture as torn apart and fragmented are imprinted on the self. Bernard Tschumi’s *folies* in Parc de la Villette in Paris can be considered to be apt architectural expressions of such postmodern sensibility. These constructions are deliberately unfinished, playful structures considered by Vidler to

---

<sup>56</sup> In *Success* Gregory Riding, by and large, designates parallel urban locations to the ones specified by Vidler as haunting Terry Service: “[c]urious, inconsequential things spooked him: parkies, too-tall buildings, [. . .] boarded shopfronts, any sudden noise or movement” (S 96).

expose an empty landscape. He reasons: “if it is a fragment of nature, it is more still life, a *nature morte*, than any attempted imitation of the real thing” (Vidler 114). The *folies* are extravagant pieces of urban architecture abstracted from their usefulness, while the only relation between them is the congruence of their spatial location. Parc de la Villette is exemplary of postmodern urban planning since it vastly opens into the city making it difficult to say where its boundaries are. As John Lechte affirms in his chapter playfully entitled “(Not) Belonging in Postmodern Space:” “Parc de la Villette is perhaps emblematic of the city today: the borderless city of chance configurations and absence of meaning” (Watson and Gibson eds. 110). So, the pathological surroundings of the canal and the *folies* constitute urban sites representative of a fragmented space that shatters or disintegrates a sense of place in the city.

Vidler argues that contemporary urban theory has removed the uncanny from the field of the private into the public; “the uncanny,” he insists, “finally became public in metropolis” (Vidler 6). I would add, however, that this is tenable as long as the space of the uncanny is still considered interior in the sense of being a mental space thoroughly imbued with the imaginary. So, perhaps Vidler’s postulation can be reformulated to claim that in the contemporary the uncanny supersedes the personal and becomes a collective condition. Vidler later adds that the uncanny is “a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal” (Vidler 11). Similarly, the scene of frenzied Nathaniel hurtling himself down to death from the top of the cliff strongly implies that, on the one hand, the uncanny puts an end to the limitless and unregulated mental mappings (Nathaniel is haunted by the nightmares he had of Coppélius as a child); on the other hand, it is a mental condition unreelied by the material since Nathaniel throws himself into death as a result of being confronted by the physical sight of Coppélius.

The elision of the division line between real and unreal scenes is thoroughly performative, a repeated forceful interpolation in Amis’s texts as well. One of its most distinctive and creative traces is writing London that rather names (creates) the places it evokes than (mimetically) describes them. Such an act of writing, as Pike also suggested, is *toponymical* in the sense of ‘naming the place.’ London is both beyond (exceeds) textual representation and is an inexhaustible source subtending it. As a result, his London places are unlocatable, even vacuous; indeed, with Amis, there is a



certain sense of refusing description, and this produces an unscriptable city. In an interview with Will Self, in response to Self's accusation that his writing, although evidently drawing on the cultural marker of the city, is preoccupied with a host of signs and the clouds and the sky above ("cloudscapes") but nothing else between, Amis responds: "your London is your world. It's this place that nobody knows, that's unwritten. A kind of shadowy super-suburb, beyond the 'burbs'" (Self, "Interview"). One of the many uncanny attributes of Amis's London is that there is no deep structure of the city only the 'eternal return of the same' urban surfaces. It can be also surmised from such comments that Amis's unmappable configuration of the urban differs from the celebratory or carnivalesque representations of the city, like Venice in *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino, or *The Passion* by Jeanette Winterson, where both novels feature Venice as unmappable due to a rich, multi-layered and entangled history of the city. In contradistinction, Amis is unwilling to consider the whole 'architexture' of the history of a place and opts for a conceptual displacement of it. Taking the perspective of negating the history of the place makes the realm of geographical imagination all the more important in Amis's novels. His London is mappable and at the same time unmappable because of the localized, intense and dispersed visualisation of urban events. His fiction is a willful misapprehension of the phenomenon of the city. In the next part, however, the focus will be on finding links between conceptualizations of authorship or the interposition of plagiarism and Amis's urban mode of writing.

### **Urban Fields of Production: Exercises in Authorship**

The novel is greatly concerned with a crisis of authorship, the commodification of its function (a sellable product on the literary market), the inadequacy of the author's intent to the literary text (the famous Barthesian polemic and its classic epitome as "the death of the author" is applicable not only to Richard and his novels but also to Amis and *The Information*), and last but not least, with the problems of straining towards positioning the authorial self in the literary tradition and the literary world of London. My contention is that authorship is ultimately shown in all of these respects to be an aspect of literary tropes of doubles, even

uncanniness. Quite ironically, the scandal that the British media generated around the publication of *The Information* was an ancillary manifestation of some of the novel's concerns. Indeed, the novel has been reviewed several times as a *roman à clef*.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as in most of Amis's novels, writing literature can be read as somehow substitutive of or importantly supplementing male competition and hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> The desire, in addition, to be accepted among the revered (patri)lineage of great literary authors, to be part of the canon, saturates his novels with the uncanny insofar as we accept Harold Bloom's influential contention that a literary work enters the canon as a result of its strangeness or uncanniness.<sup>59</sup> Bloom influentially argues that what makes a work canonical is a certain strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that assimilates so well that we cease to see it as strange. For Bloom, canon-formation constitutes a "misreading" or "misprision" thus implying that authors write against themselves inasmuch as they write against their literary precursor. Misapprehension, as a condition of writing oneself into the literary canon, is also acknowledged by the critic John Nash in an article that reads *The Information* as a self-reflective text on the critical debates over the reception and value of a contemporary literary work: "Literary parentage, influence, is not always determinable, but always necessary, so illegitimacy is always in the offing" ("Fiction May be a Legal Paternity: Martin Amis's *The Information*" 221). As Richard Tull himself puts it, the roots of plagiarism "lay in masochism and despair, in dreams of self-injury and self-defeat; and how, uniquely, it seemed to linger as a smear,

---

<sup>57</sup> The subtext was Amis's much publicized fall-out with fellow writer Julian Barnes, triggered by Amis leaving his publishing agent (Barnes's wife) to accept a substantially bigger advance on his book in process from a notoriously aggressive American agent at Harper Collins, owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

<sup>58</sup> Diedrick rightly remarks that the real-life parallel between father (Kingsley) and son (Martin) already produces a 'doubling' that especially haunts Amis's early fiction. Both received firsts from Oxford, and then won the Somerset Maugham prize for their first novels; both are writers of comedy and "have been alternately labelled voices of their generations and pornographers" (Lane-Mengham eds. 242). Gavin Keulk's recent *Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel since 1950* is a thoroughly researched book-length study on the singular doubleness of the Amises in this respect.

<sup>59</sup> Arguing for a detectable Bloomian "anxiety of influence," Diedrick proves to be a discerning reader of Amis when he indicates that *The Rachel Papers* is emotionally centred on Charles's relationship with his father (Lane-Mengham eds. 245) instead of what the narrative seemingly relates: Charles's relationship with Rachel.

infecting both the raptor and the raped" (I 463). The city, it is to be stressed at this point, is a collective site where legacies are passed on and new currents are circulated; while the novel problematises the question of patrimony in a way that is still conditioned by the city and its publishing world.

The literary canon is thus to be considered as a repository of the uncanny. Royle's close examination of the concept similarly involves it with "a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one's own experience" (Royle 16). Since one of its effects is that it dissolves the (imaginary) unity of the self, it can be also read, in Royle's suggestion, as "perhaps the most and least subjective experience, the most and least autobiographical 'event'" (Royle 16). It is in this sense that I understand the primary uncanniness of the autobiographically-conceived stream of reviews and critical incursions that *The Information* was hailed with on its publication. The novel, as most of Amis's other writings, surely bears the ghost of self-referentiality; still, the sweeping declarations that *The Information* bears too much on Amis's personal anxiety about authorship and is thoroughly imbued with his much publicised rift with Barnes and divorce from his wife write the novelistic narrative into the uncanniness of the autobiographical and at the same time out of it.

Towards the end of the book Richard's master plan is to implicate his literary foe in an act of plagiarism. According to the *OED*, the Greek root of the word plagiarism, *plagium*, means kidnapper. Not incidentally, then, Richard's favourite metaphor for his novels is "offspring," while at one point he describes the act of writing as a painful "parturition." Thus, considering that one of the main anxieties *The Information* conveys is a concern about the purity, innocence and vulnerability of children, the metaphor of the child as a signifier of geneology and works of literature gains much meta-literary relevance. It follows from this that if an author is plagiarized, something very elemental is taken away and in the process the place of origin is also contaminated. By dint of violating the question of authenticity, plagiarism is a transgressive act (creative or mimetic), an authorial exploit against the literary establishment. It can be also argued that plagiarism multiplies the narrating voices of and in a text, and in this regard, it is also a mode of ventriloquism, a voicing over, a superimposition of one voice upon another. Plagiarism, however, does not



only multiply voices, but can also signify losing a voice with the implication that an interest in authorship, authority and mimetic claims is also abandoned.

A disruptive form of authoring a text, plagiarism fosters a proliferation of readings and works against closing down a text; and thus, it lays bare the potential instability of all texts: it intimates that they are open to being re-written; an unmistakable revelation of how one text can be a rearrangement of other texts. It 'informs' the literary community that all texts can be taken to be somehow derivative, already written. It also derives from and feeds upon intertextuality, a space of literature composed of a series of echoes and repetitions of former texts. Showing that any certitude about the origin of a text is always contingent, this repetitive process opens up the question of legitimacy and signifies a loss of origin: plagiarism means a commingling of the authentic and the stolen. Moreover, it is a literary space of contamination, impurity and counterfeit. Text-theft is, then, shown to be improper (also pertinent to my argument above as the uncanny perturbing the proper and property), indecent and infectious. 'Plagiarus' is, therefore, a location of resistance to the received ethics of cultural-authorial practices.

Likewise, plagiarism as a mode of writing is amorphous, protean and theatrical, hence its close association with the idea of performativity. On a similar note, the art of the city is also playful and, above all, creative, an urban quality influentially exalted in Raban's *Soft City*. Raban also stresses in his imaginative urban mythography that the urban as a space for performative identities is crucially about self-fashioning; and in this it is on many occasions an illusion, an act of dissembling that will come to be especially tenable with regard to the surrogate twins of Terry Service and Gregory Riding in *Success*. Plagiarism, as conceived by Richard, is a textual spectacle since it self-flauntingly aims to disorient and confuse (misinform) the reader (observer). It importantly attests to Amis's continuing understanding of literature as a refined form of plagiarism and reproduction of earlier texts. Moreover, the workings of mimicry inherent therein act as an apt metaphor for the way Amis reproduces and repeats the scenes of London; so the textual field of the city becomes similarly multiple and disturbingly reproducible.

Richard's relationship to literature, to the literary establishment and to his own status as an author is a fitting illustration that the act of writing is simultaneously a quest for recognition as well as a suspension of the laws of the ordinary. Nonetheless, the literary text is also devised as a field where the authority of the writer disappears. Equally, in post-Barthesian and post-Foucauldian discussions on the conditions of the singularity or non-singularity of a literary text, signatures of style, in the wake of Derrida's weighty arguments on the subject, are recognisable as long as they are at the same time forgeable, reproducible and iterable.<sup>60</sup> So, stylistic properties are not so much guarantors or criteria of authenticity as textual components that instead interrogate and radicalise assumptions about full authorial presence. Markers of individual style are held to condition or determine rather than arrest the text's endless repeatability. Plagiarism, as a consequence, is an impure act of writing in yet another sense for it is straining towards effacing the signs of difference, an important affiliation or bearer of continuity of author and text. Forgery, stylistic or thematic, stands for an erasure of master tropes of difference of writing since it works on the principle that words, styles and meanings can be substituted. It ostentatiously turns writing into an interminable act of production conditioned on the uncanny 'eternal return of the same.'

The novel's engagement in plagiarism is accomplished so as to conceivably constitute yet another form of narrative (re-)doubling. Richard discovers towards the end of the book that the lines in Keith Horridge's poem, "Ever," are lifted from Borges's "The Circular Ruins," a short-story that famously treats the theme of literary paternity, mortality and the impossibility of an originary work of art. The end of "The Circular Ruins" discloses itself as an allegory of literary heritage as writers are revealed to be inventions of anterior ones who in turn reinvent their predecessors. The novel effects a further Borgesian recursive spin when Richard decides to implement the idea of unacknowledged copying to his own ends. He plans to take his revenge on Gwyn's success by constructing a mimicry, a replica, in other words, a textual superstructure of plagiarism. Nash points out that this is "an interesting reversal of the

---

<sup>60</sup> A highly engaging and well-known post-structuralist account of authorship is Seán Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* (1998); while Andrew Bennett's summative work on *The Author* (2005) is an important and refreshing addition to the past and present theories and conceptions of authoring a literary text.



plagiarism scenario. Furthermore, just as Richard is a fictional author, who repeats the work of an actual writer, so he invents a further fictional author in order to make the charge of plagiarism” (“Legal Paternity” 221). Richard Tull’s final aim is to dissolve or at least traverse the boundaries of mortality by means of producing works of immortal literary worth. The literary author may be striving to gain immortality through his works, he is nonetheless bound up in a doubling effect since a sense of endurance can only work on condition of repressing the impossibility of such eternity. So, the recurrent metaphors of ‘offspring’ or ‘parturition’ mentioned above as novelistic notions of creation and posterity are greatly problematised by the metaphors that compare Richard’s novels to “babies whom it was best to spirit away: a black bag in a loading dock” (I 214).

One way of supplementing his nugatory professional existence as author and literary critic is to sell Rory Plantegenet, a newspaper or rather ‘gutter press’ diarist, gossip about the literary world: advances, “divorces, infidelities, bankruptcies, detoxifications, diseases” (I 27). An alternative means of income is found by marking up worthless literary works and tedious biographies of hardly any interest to a larger audience. Conventional assumptions are subverted when Scozzy, the figure of the urban rogue with a “pro-violence stare” (I 24), is the one who reads high-brow literature like Elias Canetti. The narrative logic further inverts the role of literature by playfully asserting that this is not to be taken as a token of Scozzy’s discerning literary taste or superior intellect, but more as a revelation of his sinful past: the more well-read a person is, the more dangerous a criminal he is, the graver his crime: “Beware the convict with his Camus and his Kierkegaard, his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and his *Four Quartets*” (I 24). Thus, literature criminalises the reader; it is a bearer of sin whereby artist and criminal are doubles of each other: “the criminal resembles the artist in his pretension, his incompetence and self-pity” (I 106). The practice of literary criticism is also described in terms of aggression and sheer physical strength; Richard is described as a literary critic who “subscribed to the idea of the Critic as Bouncer” (I 67). In addition, his latest novel, *Untitled*, is to be published in America by a small publishing house in New York called Bold Agenda.

Richard is also Fiction and Poetry Editor at the Tantalus Press, a vanity publisher whose violent stance against the literary world is suggestively expressed in



its name. Its boss, Balfour Cohen, convinced that the mission of his company is the advancement of high-brow literature (since Joyce, Proust, Nabokov, among others, preferred private publishing), is a deviant figure; his main hobby is faking modern first editions. In Richard's view, the development of the literary genres from the heroic to the ironic, from the omniscient to the self-reflective is a process of increasing humiliation from the status of self-composed literary grandeur to the psychosis of modern consciousness. So, he ruminates, literature inevitably reflects a diminution of the position of the Earth in relation to the universe: geocentric, heliocentric, eccentric (*I* 129). The word 'eccentric' calls to mind both the geometrical and psychological connotations of the word. An eccentric circle is, according to the *OED*, is one that does not have its axis centrally; it is an irregular circle while an eccentric person is defined as odd, whimsical and differing from the usual in behaviour. Thus, the eccentric world of the contemporary is taken to stand for the off-kilter, decentred, irregular and singular. Furthermore, in the eccentric and anomalous world of the novel, literature and its various genres are closely linked to time and seasons as well, but in a way that the normal sequence of seasons is in disarray (thrown off kilt). This crossover between genre and seasons - playfully referring to Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism* - reveals that literary categories are in a state of confusion with the possible consequence of indistinctiveness.

*Success* also links the chapters to the sequence of months and thus creates a sense of change and repetitiveness, of things coming back. Similarly to *The Information* and *London Fields*, nature and the urban world are strongly inflected in the novel by the phenomenon of "intergalactic" weather tearing through the city. Thus, nature in the London novelistic scenes is in fact unnatural; it is perhaps, as Wolfreys would have it in a similar context, "a potent metaphor – or even a monstrous example of *catachresis* – for the inhuman. Psychic London's unconscious articulation of an irresistible and irrecoverable alterity" (*Writing London Vol. II* 66). On a similar note, it can be held that in Amis's urban novels weather, nature, the city and the state of literature uncannily correlate. Elsewhere, the reviewer and novelist, Paul Ableman, perceives *Success* to be "a parable about the decline of the old order in England and the new raj (reign) of the yobs" (Tredell ed. 36). Given that the weather, the seasons and the temporal confusion expressed through them interrelate with an urban mode of existence and the condition of literature, Ableman's remarks on the novel further

substantiate my argument about the performative engagement of the phenomenon of nature and natural change of seasons with the social fabric of new urban geographies. For Dickens as well in *Our Mutual Friend*,<sup>61</sup> London is best visualised as a sawpit, “a black shrill city” taken over by a natural phenomenon generated by its own uncontrollable industrial activities: “And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled” (*Our Mutual Friend* 147). This image develops into a refrain in the text, a novelistic *anaphora* in Alter’s view, a central metaphor conveying the abrasive and noisy effect of the wind and thus having “a paradoxical double effect. It takes over the scene, [. . .], but it does not diminish, and may even sharpen, the visual representation of the scene” (Alter 58). London thus is a vast stage of figurative transformation.

Richard’s idea of great (‘high’) literature is to write and compile compendiums of arcane and perhaps entirely redundant knowledge that nobody manages to grasp, while Gwyn’s pantisocratic novels are unstoppably growing in popularity. Richard’s novels are turgid and unreadable texts whose bar of readability is simply put too high: the title of his first novel, *Aforethought*, already presents an interpretative impasse. By contrast, Gwyn’s novels, *Summertown* and *Amelior*, although mediocre, are a nice and comforting read. Most of the high-profile authors on Gal Aplanalp’s list are celebrities, comedians, newscasters invested with the function of authors and novelists. The exploration of the decline of literary values in the novel, it can be argued, haunts and deranges Richard’s doubling, splitting and dissembling self. The double, thus, is also a figurative inscription of the arbitrariness and elusiveness of good writing and bad writing in the postmodern. Double writing is a disturbance as it hinges on the indistinguishable that renders the various kinds of literary discourses appropriate yet inappropriate at the same time. Richard uses the word “trex” to describe low-brow literature. Although meaningless on its own, ‘trex’ is a brand-name (a reinforcement of commerce and advertising) for a type of lard, thus signifying something greasy without substance, an apt critical terminology for the sub-literary.<sup>62</sup> ‘Trex’ is, I would add, strictly speaking, a non-existent word, and thus, perhaps a

---

<sup>61</sup> Reminiscent of Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer,” the title of Dickens’s novel is itself uncanny since the plot revolves around an absentee, John Harmon, who, in the aftermath of his identity having been stolen on a ship, is identified as the dead corpse in the Thames in fact belonging to his *nemesis*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Diedrick in *Understanding Martin Amis* p.178.



highly suggestive name-transfer to literary values that have become pre-empted by marketing and advertisement.

As a brief reminder of the primary theoretical text subtending the exploration of Amis's uncanny inscription of the urban, it is to be reiterated that the uncanny is significantly conceived as closely relating to losing one's eyes, eyes being a metaphor for vision and knowledge. Indeed, while on one level Freud's essay deals with the problem of representing private vision, the primary text, "The Sandman," is an imaginative enquiry into the clarity or, its counterpart, the dimness of vision. As regards Richard's literary envy, it is especially telling that Freud defines the 'evil eye' as one of the uncanniest and most forceful beliefs (*The Uncanny* 146). Envy is certainly a forceful drive in both novels, and it always turns the self into a half-human, in-between creature, into an amphibian. When Richard is envious of Gwyn, he is described as a "riverine creature," while, in *Success* the first glimpse Terry had of Gregory was a child gazing at him "with stolen eyes" (*S* 29). Similarly, Greg notices that although the previous year Terry "was like a big friendly dog to come home to. Now he's like a reptile, a quiescent, loathsome thing" (*S* 94). Consequently, the envy binds one to the other, and this doubling in turn disintegrates, so to speak, uncreates the integrity of the human self. Freud continues to explain that the striking uncanniness of the evil eye works on the assumption of the "omnipotence of thoughts" (*The Uncanny* 147), a principle that restores a performative and creative power to the self as it connects harmful thoughts to instant wish-fulfilment. Richard Tull's consuming sense of jealousy panders to such modes of thinking. It is all the more ironic that the place where Richard hires Scozzy to beat Gwyn up for being a successful writer takes place in the eerie setting of a clandestine casino, "a *spieler*: a private (i.e., illegal) gambling club, way up Edgware Road. You reached the back room through a low-morale beauty parlour and a half flight of stairs. The ambiance was one of entrenched and hallowed old-firm London villainy" (*I* 190). Envy in the novel is presented then as an abject feeling that is lurking underneath and takes action in underground and illegal *locales* while thoroughly criminalizing the self.

The full implications of the arrival of big corporate businesses, and their role in regulating the new spatial structurations of the literary scene of London are given ample satirical weight when Richard relates how the minor literary magazine he



works for is being continuously displaced.<sup>63</sup> The offices of *The Little Magazine* are in Soho but not for long. The history of the journal is one of gradual decline and urban migration: from the five-storey Georgian townhouse next to Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where it was founded, it was forced to move to Fenchurch Street, then to Holborn, Pimlico, Islington, and King's Cross. "It slept in attics, in spare rooms, it dosed down on the floors of friends" (*I* 159). Amis masterfully renders the dismal situation of literary publications when he describes how the journal "lurked and lurched across town with the ruddily averted face of bum or baglady" (*I* 159).<sup>64</sup> It has been evicted; it lingered in the dark "like a reeking squatter" (*I* 159). Its present location is on Frith Street in a triptych of doorways "shared with a travel agent and a shop that sold clothes to the very tall and the very fat" (*I* 160). The existence of *The Little Magazine* is that of a drifter or urban vagabond locked up in the vibrant yet garishly commercialised district of Soho. So, whilst Amis's writing responds in terms of the geography of the urban novel to a sense of placelessness on a palpably material

---

<sup>63</sup> It attests to the adroit irony of the novel that Gwyn is travelling around the globe, a corollary of a globalised literary market, to promote his essentially bucolic and pastoral novels. Also, the forces of globalisation significantly bear on the city of London since in the new realities of the publishing world London becomes an epicentre where literary marketplaces concentrate, which can, in turn, mean an end to its double, to regional publishing and regional writing. London can also bring the literary margins of Britain to inhabit the centre. Writing from the "peripheral" shores of Canada, Paul Delany, in *Literature, Money and the Market* (2002), puts forward a most interesting idea when he claims that the "boom in post-colonial literature was mainly created in London and was deeply implicated in the workings of a globalized literary marketplace. London publishers saw the possibilities of a new and profitable line of merchandise, as they had earlier profited from the feminist boom and the literary theory boom" (Delany 187).

<sup>64</sup> As a novel about the publishing industry, *The Information* finds an important predecessor in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891). Grub Street, near Moorfields, was the centre of the literary world in London up until the nineteenth-century and was inhabited by writers and hacks of trite or literally insignificant poems and biographies. Gissing's novel similarly features the antagonism and curious entanglement of the lives of two writers (one talented but penurious, the other successful but a hack) set against the turn-of-the-century crisis of literary values increasingly perturbed by the exigencies of metropolitan existence, and the incipient yet already forceful forms of mass or popularised forms of culture. Interestingly enough, Gissing's title refers to the name of the street at a time when it was, in fact, non-existent or officially erased: the street was re-named Milton Street in 1830 after a local builder, developer and carpenter in an attempt to "write off" the stain and association with literary hacks, deceit and indecency. Upon looking up Milton Street in the *Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names*, however, it becomes apparent that the content of the entry is more or less devoted to the erstwhile history and importance of the street as Grub Street. An intriguing bibliographic discrepancy also becomes apparent since according to this dictionary, the new name, Milton Street, originates in the locals' wish to honour the poet John Milton, who lived nearby instead of what is suggested (Milton was a local builder who owned the building lease of the street at the time) by the online resources of the Centre for Metropolitan History, drawing upon a different Dictionary of London, published in 1918 (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>. Date accessed: 23 May 2006) – a reminder that literary and mercantile considerations are always at stake on the London scene.

level, this continuous spatial dislocation is concurrently transposed onto a figurative plane to suggest a dissemination of the literary work, a constant permutation of the 'location of writing' also discernible in invoking the authorial practice of plagiarism.

As seen, through introjecting the literary device of plagiarism, certitude about unified authorship becomes contingent in the novel; so is the urban literary discourse turned to abandon mimetic claims as a faithful imitator (duplicate) of the city. Amis's decayed literary geography can be read as part of an ongoing literary response to a new sense of spatial structuration. As it gives full weight to the imaginary and the psycho-pathological, his urban writing inevitably raises questions of accuracy and plausibility; as a result, a London 'grotesquerie' is inscribed into his novels. The underground, for example, a recurrent haunt of the urban type of the double, is one of the most often featured urban spaces in the two novels under discussion. In *The Information* its entrance is described as "that patch of London owned by bums and drunks, exemplary in its way – the model anti-city; here, the pavement, even the road, wore a coat of damp beer [. . .]. It made Richard think of Pandaemonium and the convocation of rebel angels" (I 62). The underground is an urban location that invokes imaginary correlatives of the chaotic and ephemeral conditions of hell or urban jungle where 'Londonscapes' are figured as wasteful of human energies. Furthermore, London constitutes a subtext about the eeriness of human existence; the creative investment in the netherland of London features the city's substrata as a means of undoing sane minds. In *Success* its representation as an infernal site is supplemented by a striking image of calling the entrance "the jaws of the underground" and the arriving tube is an "ugly beast sprung from a trap" (S 167). The sound and visual effects (blinking sodium lights, whine of the undercurrent) of subterranean London are too overbearing for Gregory and force him to leave the station. Above ground, nonetheless, is just as over-stimulated as he watches "the colourful surface [. . .] in the mad motion sculpture of Marble Arch" (S 167). The up and down of the city's spatiality, it seems then, have been inverted, an *abîme* of London places analogous with the spatial reversals effected by the *aleph*.

Contemporary urban space is essentially a space of transformation, of losing faces and gaining new ones. Thus, a sense of unknowability of the city inevitably produces a loss of place that is well exemplified by Richard's observations when he



remarks that not even the railway station stayed the same. "In the meantime its soot-coated, rentboy-haunted vault of tarry girders and toilet glass had become a flowing atrium of boutiques and croissant stalls and limitless cappuccino" (I 261). Thus a new type of space has been generated that has in a way lost its original purpose, where trains are obsolete; they arrived apologetically and with an air of the accidental, creeping in round the back of the mob of "proud, strolling, cappuccino-quaffing shoppers of the mall. There was even a brand-new Dickensian pub called The Olde Curiosity Shoppe whose set was dressed with thousands of books – written not by Dickens but by that timeless band of junkshop set-dresser nobodies . . . In other words, the station had gone up in the world" (I 261). Such urban transformations admit of traces of London's history as a mercantilist city. Amis's vision of the city unfolds a double perspective between the past and the present of a place. In his urban writing, the history of London is an absent cause available only in spectral and visual effects. Whereas Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd see and seek to attune to the esoteric and mystical history of a place and London's present, consequently, is explored as a 'chronotope'<sup>65</sup> revisited by the ghosts of its past, Amis's novels present the discontinuities within these locations; they address the chaos, messiness and disconnectedness of the place. Still, his cityscapes are just as demonic partly due to taking the city and its images, in other words, the urban literary discourse beyond itself to the improbable and even the fantastic, and turning the place into an aspect of literariness, in excess of the visual, of sensory perception and of a critical one as well.

A momentary return to the primary objective of my urban analysis connects Amis's utilisation of plagiarism to Ackroyd's particular urban novelistic mode of pastiche, copying, translation and even, to a certain extent, plagiarism, which, he forcefully argues in an interview in 1989, presupposes an attendance to a different, earlier kind of authorship when the author "inherited" the theme and "deploy[ed] it in a different way." He adds, "I'm simply returning to an earlier sense of what it means to be a creator –so-called. Creation is not a self-inventing, self-originating process"

---

<sup>65</sup> Hereby I consciously use this critical term introduced by M. M. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* as a spatio-temporal matrix governing a narrative, a cognitive concept recovered by spatial readings of literature; see Paul Smethurst's *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Contemporary Fiction* for a recent example.



(Gibson and Wolfreys 243). Since then, he has indisputably turned this into his peculiar and highly-praised mode of urban literary writing where London places are in mediumistic relationship with their pasts. Such a novelistic practice betokens as much an obfuscation of identities of place and character as a deliberate or playful blurring of figures of authors. In the same vein, Amis's pluralisation or doubling of the composition of authorship can be instrumental in allowing us to pin down his London sensibility. In the following, the chapter proceeds with an elaboration on the ways the figure of the double and repetition are grafted onto Amis's urban narratives.

### **City Fellows (Twins and Doubles) or Doubling the Urban Text**

To start with, it is striking how Peter Brooker's following comments on Paul Auster's fiction can be uncannily related to Amis's creative practice: "His fiction returns again and again to the relations of fathers and sons; and *doppelgänger*s, substitutes, mirror images, and mistaken identities regularly occur in his stories, as of course do characters with the same name or with Auster's initials" (*New York Fictions* 156). Indeed, with Amis as well the figure of doubling, Diedrick is the first critic to suggest, works on many levels; it even becomes the organizing principle of *Success*: "In his own narration, Terry implicitly doubles himself with Oliver Twist, emphasizing the Dickensian qualities of his orphaned childhood, from the grim and violent squalor of his early years to his fairy-tale ascension into privilege when he is adopted by Gregory's wealthy family" (*Understanding* 41). First of all, Greg and Terry are foster-brothers, a relationship that already doubles as well as displaces the biological kinship of two brothers.<sup>66</sup> After the tragic events in his family, Terry is adopted by the aristocratic Rivers Hall, whose charity has been mainly called forth by the parallels and striking similarities between the two families that "captured the imagination of the Riding household" (*S* 26). Indeed, they were both nine when a fundamentally transgressive act happened in their lives: Greg started the incestuous relationship with his sister while Terry was also nine when his sister was killed by their father.

---

<sup>66</sup> Not surprisingly, Dern's chapter-title when discussing *Success* is "First-Person Plural" (Dern 70).

Leading on from a close reading of Freud's essay presented above, it is suggestive that when presenting Otto Rank's exploration of the notion of the double, Freud first selects the notion of the immortal soul as "the first double of the body" (*The Uncanny* 142). Freud goes on to assert that after passing through the phase of primordial narcissism, "the meaning of the 'double' changes: having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (*The Uncanny* 142). More closely to our postmodernist concerns, the double is held by Freud to signify an inherent relatedness of the primeval to technological advancements. Even though it presents an inconceivable duplicity of selves, the double essentially uncovers emptiness; it eventually intimates a primary absence at the heart of identity.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, Baudrillard, a postmodernist theorist, asserts that the double is strongest in its effect if it is imaginary, an image, a shadow (*The Transparency of Evil* 113). More significantly, the double binds up with the displaced self of the urban space in figuring the possibility of a state of non-being for it has been frequently asserted in theories of the urban that the city betokens that an inevitable condition of the self and of being is strangeness.

Another prominent characteristic of the double is an entangled process of (self-) interpretation. The figure of the double is unsettling perhaps because it works against reason; it is beyond logic - it is *paralogical*. The double, in this regard, then, can be conceived of as an interpretative delirium. It is also commonly held about literary doubles that a dual relationship of amicability and hostility is established

---

<sup>67</sup> The self started to be doubled into dissolution and turned into a 'flight-onto-death' in Søren Kierkegaard's famous philosophical treatise. For him, as he lengthily discussed in *The Sickness unto Death*, sickness (whereby he understood a mental sickness, or rather, a 'sickness of the spirit') is a way of spiritual betterment. It is the individual's responsibility to catch it, and what is more, it is a persistent condition because one continues to catch it. Above all, despair is not a disorder that should be prevented; in terms of spiritual development it is the main ingredient of the healing process since it is a catalyst of emotions. For him, despair is a 'negativity' that one has to pass through in order to arrive at some truth. This shows that spiritual progress is closely bound up with a state of sickness. The state of despair is one that distinguishes man from animals, and religious man from natural man, Kierkegaard contentiously asserts. Despair, thus, is a human prerogative. If Kierkegaard's definition of the human self is accepted that the human being "is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself" (Kierkegaard 43) while essentially "the relation to himself is something a human being cannot be rid of" (Kierkegaard 47), then it emerges that the relationship of one self to another is in an inexorable state of imbalance. Moreover, the ability to despair is "an infinite merit" (Kierkegaard 45). The sickness and its torment "are precisely to be unable to die" (Kierkegaard 51). Sin is not a question of comprehension for Kierkegaard; rather, it is an affirmative, a given.



between the two selves that is, nevertheless, in a constant process of alteration while having the dramatic effect of splitting the self into two (one of the fears “The Sandman” expresses is a mutilation or splitting of the body). Thus, the double is also a fear of not having a physical unity and, in a more abstract sense, of not coinciding with oneself. Crucially, as regards the fear of losing the self, the double also intimates angst about dejection, persecution and suppression, of being subjected to silence and not finding a voice, an important term with respect to the self-reflexivity of postmodern texts; in Amis’s case especially so since he always insists on the primacy of voice over conventions and forms of narrative.<sup>68</sup> Admittedly, the drive to find a voice is uncanny itself; seeking to acquire an urban voice therefore is a doubly uncanny act.

Amis’s texts figure an urban text of confused plurality saturated with the co-presence of different voices. In this context, J. Hillis Miller’s argument towards the end of *Others* stating that his study strains towards constructing and maintaining a “law that says the other does not arrive except in different voices” (*Others* 276) gains great import. Indeed, it is a common trait of Amis’s urban male characters to have a dissembling voice, to want to imitate each other; in a way, they are all ventriloquising an imagined self. *Success*, perhaps, dramatises this most explicitly. It is interesting to note that the first images of both Terry and Greg present them talking on the phone and engaging in an act of lying. So, the opening speech-acts of the novel (as a matter of fact, double-talk is a staple speech pattern Amis’s characters typically rely on) embed their respective stories into a narrative frame of ventriloquism. Deploying the technique of double-voicing in the form of dramatic monologues while staging the demise of the characters, a skilful layering of the narrative is realized so as to conjoin the novel with the common theoretical position that upholds the double as a figurative disclosure that the desire to be not the self but another is ultimately destructive.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> See the interview with Christopher Bigsby where Amis declares: “Style is not an icing, it is an ingredient, perhaps the main ingredient of your way of perceiving things” (Bigsby 31). He continues: “I think I have got less interested in formal considerations, in the neat, well-made book. It doesn’t interest me so much: anyone can do it. What makes you an individual as a writer is something else, which is a kind of flow that has to do with the voice” (Bigsby 32).

<sup>69</sup> Undoubtedly, a common, psychoanalytically-inflected reading of the double is that it is a literary expression or sublimation of self-destructiveness, a human characteristic that Amis has been immensely fascinated with. The short stories in *Einstein’s Monsters* all treat this theme, albeit to



The double has fundamental spatial references. If the prevailing element of animosity is considered, then the double also signifies a hierarchical spatial arrangement. As regards the mutual aiding and enmity that binds and unbinds double figures, it is ironic that Richard's position during the American publicity tour is at best complementary to promoting Gwyn's novels: his mission is to distribute Gwyn's books to bookshops. More intriguing in this respect is one of the closing scenes of *Success* where Terry Service is featured as travelling on the train back to, or rather, "on the look-out for London" (S 223) from his foster-father's funeral. As the text suggests, he is most likely returning to the swish flat in Bayswater from which he has successfully driven out the real owner, Gregory Riding. Particularly stressed in relation to doubles is an unremitting drive at ousting, or supplanting the other, and this logic of dissension and dislocation can significantly saturate the representational configurations of the city as well. As the logic of the double undoes the notion of dwelling and fixed location, of property and permanence, so does Terry on the way back from the countryside dream of the urban locations that can only stand for transitoriness and displacement: "The countryside gives me the horrors these days: I long for the reassurance of underground stations, streets, tramps and pubs" (S 223).

*Success* aptly enacts the double character's interplay of self-loathing and self-assurance within the self. Terry and Gregory are companions but also contrapuntal representations of each other. Even their full names, Terrence Service and Gregory Riding, compose a phonetic elision into one another as the surnames themselves strangely and uncannily repeat the endings of the first names. Equally, the subdivision of each chapter into two, written alternatively by Gregory and Terry, greatly contributes to the performance of the double in the text. Thus, a complementary yet contradictory portrait of both characters is gradually being formed. Gregory's world is narcissistic and psychotic, but his delusion transfers; this is unmistakably evinced in the development of the plot based on the characters' transmuting into each other. By the end of the novel, Terry fully supplants Gregory. The meaning of the title, *Success*, as a consequence, appears itself to signify a narrative fulfilment of the workings of the double: an attainment of a chiasmic crossing over, a narrative slippage where Terry is Gregory and vice versa. The double is doubly performative in the novel also in the

---

different ends, mainly as a way of responding to the imminent threat during the cold-war nuclear arms race.

sense that *Success* is successful not least because it can be read as a contemporary narrative that folds over or critically duplicates the decadence of late-seventies London.<sup>70</sup>

Martin Amis himself concurs in the explicitness of the figure of doubles in *The Information* when he replied in an interview: "If you want, the scoop on this book it's that both Richard and Gwyn are *me*. One is the overrewarded side and the other is the whimper of neglect side" (Quinn 35).<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the novel is replete in structurations of the double. Richard is not only doubled in Gwyn (also marked by their consecutive birthdays), but also in his sons, Marco and Marius, themselves twins, that is, biological doubles of each other. Through them, however, a curious insufficiency of the figure of the double is being projected into the novelistic text. They disrupt a given logic of the double not because they are not identical twins, neither because they are "strikingly dissimilar in all their talents and proclivities" (11); rather, the doubling rupture is marked on a much more primary level in the text: by their different birthdays as midnight divides the two; thus, they are inexorably linked yet inevitably separated.

The twins also read as surrogate author-figures; in particular Marco, the more sensitive of the two, is associated with the figure of the novelist, a point also made by Diedrick (*Understanding* 186). The observation that Marco is Richard's double returns the novel to Freud's ideas about the experience of the double linked to

---

<sup>70</sup> While *Success* is on one level a scathing and pointed satiric anticipation of the fiercely materialistic yuppie years of the Thatcher era, Robert Louis Stevenson's novel about Jekyll and Hyde famously displays the anxiety at the heart of complaisant Victorian society about the hidden side of the respectable bourgeois patriarch.

<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Joe Moran in an article observes of the novel that it revolves around two "wholly contrasting central characters" and continues to draw parallels between Mark Asprey and Samson Young from *London Fields* and, Terry Service and Gregory Riding from *Success*; "but the doubling in *The Information* seems particularly marked and permeates all aspects of the narrative" ("Artists and Verbal Mechanics: Martin Amis's *The Information*" 307). Mars-Jones noted alike: "Much of the new novel is structured around [. . .] the trope of rancorous twins. The protagonist and his antagonist are two talentless novelists, one of them (Richard Tull) hyperliterary and caricaturally unsuccessful, the other (Gwyn Barry) subliterate and caricaturally successful" (Tredell ed. 155). Childs also remarks that in *The Information* "Amis's literary persona is split between two novelists" (Childs 51). What Amis's critics seem to jointly gloss over, nonetheless, is that these doubling authorial personas importantly relate to the problematics of authoring an urban literary text, a textual tension that this chapter is expressly concerned with.



childhood. In his short essay "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming" (1908), Freud considers the process of writing creatively as a mental continuity or exchange of the role of playing in childhood: "The child's favourite and most intense occupation is play. We may perhaps say that every child at play behaves like a writer, by creating a world of his own" (*The Uncanny* 25). Marco loves fairy tales and becomes hysterical when they end perhaps because he prefers the interminability and endlessness of narratives. Accordingly, his mental habits are different; he has problems thinking logically (in terms of conventional cause and effect chain) about events: if asked why the chicken crossed the road, he would be only interested in what the chicken did next, what its name was, where it went. An evocative resemblance of the mind-set of a novelist, his thinking implies that creative activity presupposes an anti-logical perception of the world. Diedrick posits "[h]is learning disability" as "suspiciously similar to the 'stupefaction by first principles' Richard says all artists are reduced to" (Lane-Mengham eds. 250). Thus, doubles and twins are configured in such a way in the novel as to tie up with or probe the question of literature and literary representation. Claiming that the double foregrounds the problem of representation, it is also necessary to stress that in this the double can be taken to be an event (manifestation) of art, and by way of extension, of the art or act of writing the city.

Amis's double urban writing is both reassembling London from scraps and pieces and defacing it, diffusing it, writing it apart with the effect that, as Wolfreys suggests, the "city never exists as such, nor do its traces operate as so many signs of an intelligible, discernible reality. London is discernible, if at all, as merely the effect, produced in a reiterated fashion, from the remainders of incalculable and excessive phantasms, which, though immaterial, leave their trace on the urban subject" (*Writing London Vol. II* 179). Amis's characters indeed have an uncanny relationship with the debris, the refuse of the city. Richard, for instance, lives in an area of London that is in decline, on Calchalk Street, an unreal and imaginary street off Ladbroke Grove - a real and geographically locatable street:

For a time it looked as though Calchalk Street was going up in the world. Richard and Gina had formed part of the influx of new money [. . .]. Then all the couples moved back out again, except Richard and



Gina. Offered gentrification, Calchalk Street had said – no thanks.  
 Instead it reassumed a postwar identity of rationing and rentbooks.  
 Offered colour, it stayed monochrome; even the Asians and the West  
 Indians who lived there had somehow become saxonized –they looped  
 and leered, they peed, veed, queued, effed and blinded, just like the  
 locals. (I 48)

As the quotation reflects, Amis's text greatly concerns itself with the divisive element and the incommensurability of different worlds alternating in London. Indeed, many would argue that the history of the city is importantly detectable in the ways community is organized in relation to land. The etymological origins of Ladbroke Grove also attest to the long history of development schemes and speculations in the city's history. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names*, the street bears the name of a family called *Ladbroke*, who owned the land there, and then "sold it for development purposes in 1845" (130). A spatio-psychological corollary of such urban developments is that the common markers of cityscapes will be dualities and duplicities. For instance, in *Success* the "plush and velvety window displays of Mayfair" (S 119) in the "bijou area" (S 42) of West London where Greg works are counterpointed by the monstrous image of London's streets as "the yapping hell of Queensway" (S 154).

It is notable that Amis's fiction conveys a sense that in his writing naturalistic description would constitute an artistic malpractice. It is no surprise then that Amis's singular (urban) novelistic poetics have divided critics. The critic, James Wood, disapproved of *The Information*'s weak and unimaginative presentation of the familiar West-London hinterland. He reads the figure of repetition as one of the main narrative devices of the novel, but adds that instead of performing the role of a building block, repetition is better apprehended as destructive since its workings draw a bleak vision of deterioration: "England has declined, it seems, like Richard's literary genres; it is a story of increasing national humiliation, from moral pastoral to urban *policier*" (Wood 192). Opposed to this is Diedrick's take on the novel: "Urban energy and squalor have always elicited some of Amis's best prose, and his extended descriptions of Chicago

and New York in *The Information* are marvels of punk-poetic evocation” (*Understanding* 181). So, while for Wood, repetition, a practice of writing over, is a narrative device that undermines and enervates Amis’s urban prose, for Diedrick it can be a genuine source of creativity.

One of the most striking images of the city is a new London crowd of greedy foreign tourists “looting shops,” a swarm of aliens thronging in the streets so that born Londoners can only be found in “diasporas” (S 118). As a result, it is a daily act of fight to wade “through boisterous peninsulae of Pakistanis, step aside for vast cohorts of panting, flaxen Scandinavians, negotiate Jumbo-loads of torpid, Italianate trudgers, forge through great continents of Middle-Eastern immigrant workers” (S 118). This induces a feeling of placelessness where a cognitive mapping of London becomes problematic as Queensway “could be anywhere” (S 118). In fact, a sense of linguistic incoherence is being created by the absurdity of signs advertising “ENGLISH SPOKEN HERE” (S 118). It is curious that the English language appears to be displaced or is almost defunct in a place that in terms of geographical coordinates is firmly located in England. The great legacy of London as a mercantile city is inverted by the omnipresence of commercial signs in other languages than English: “CAMBIO – WECHSEL” (S 118). So, the novel’s variation on the urban uncanny is the vision of the city overrun by foreigners. However, this is a form of uncanny with a social message: “We live in Bayswater – district of the transients. Nearly everywhere is a hotel now; their porches teem like Foreign Legion garrisons” (S 31). Through the unequivocal xenophobia of Gregory, Amis is indirectly a vocal and acerbic critic of the predatory gentrification of London and of the fiercely acquisitive exploitation of the social, cultural and architectural heritage of the city.

The spectral or uncanny turn of the urban narrative also erupts when Richard, an authorial double or fictional *semblable* of Amis, leaves his familiar West-London haunt and arrives in a different part of London that confronts him with “a landscape out of one of his own novels – if you could speak of landscape, or of *locus*, or of anywhere at all, in a prose so diagonal and mood-warped” (I 170). Here the city is spookily geometrical and rectangular. The nominal and visual mapping of the square city generates place-names that are blank in their repetitiveness: “[I]t branched out like an inbred slum family whose common name was Wroxhall. Wroxhall Road, the

Wroxhall Gardens. Then Court, Lane, Close, Place, Row, Way. So Drive, then Park, then Walk" (I 170). Repetition of the name pre-empts the singularity of the place; in this sense, the city is unscriptable. "Such topographical and architectural listing," Wolfreys writes in a different yet similar context, "sketches in quicksilver fashion the urban traces that articulate a provisional city identity. But they do more than this. For, even as this is a sketch, it is also a performative moment, a double text redrawing London according to an unavailable and disquieting logic and grammar" (*Writing London Vol. II* 178). Repetition performs an assemblage, yet it also involves empty sets of topographical categories or disjunctive additions: this grid city impresses at first as dense only to ultimately leave emptiness in the observer. Repetition can also be a figure of undecidables, an interpretive ambivalence or dilemma, therefore, a rhetorical figure of the uncanny. Also, through reiteration, in the confluence of different semantic fields, the invisible can be made visible, a thoroughly uncanny act. The textual figure of repetition is also a continual return to the anxiety of Amis's readers and critics that the ultimate uncanniness of his text is the possibility of the compulsively repetitive and selfsame proliferation of depthless or empty novelistic structures.

Through repetition, specific locations are incessantly duplicated; and this, it appears, is an apt literary device to articulate the post-industrial urban site. Cities in the post-war period have seen an extensive and, if compared to previous ages, rather rapid re-planning and regulation of urban public spaces. The narrative mode or economy of Amis's urban novel curiously registers how disjointed, fragmented, formless and in the end groundless such an urban geometry can be in spite of the imagined continuity of the place (tenable in the successive recurrence of the names). Repetition, in addition, works against the principle of the assumed intransitiveness of a proper name; it disturbs the properness or singularity of a place; hence, it can be yet another manifestation of the spatial uncanny. In particular, urban spatial structurations can be representative of the human geographers' critique that late capitalist urban redevelopments seek to effect a cultural amnesia of collective history. Amis's urban novels enact the habitual vacuous urban politics or policies of writing space.

This kind of topographical naming works as a collage as well: the former emptiness of the land is cross-mapped by nominal and performative incantation.



Doubling or repeating topographical names indeed serves to fill an originary lack, or to veil it: 'Wroxhall' is an imaginary London space; it is created by Amis's text as a close homonym of Wroxall Road in the outskirts district of Dagenham, or Wroxham Gardens in Southgate, and Wroxham Way in Barkingside respectively. As a place-name, 'Wroxhall' names the singularity and simultaneous reitribility of London, as Wolfreys would have it, "it names London without naming it, and names it, quasi-simultaneously, as other" (*Writing London Vol. I* 50). So, as a result of Amis's continuing penchant for *paronomasia*, these disparate fringe areas of London are brought together; they collapse in an imaginary topography of London reinterpreted, and literally reshuffled into an unwritten and unknown shadowy cluster of suburbs, "beyond the burbs" that Amis specified in the interview mentioned above. London in *The Information* with the changing confines of its suburbs is a 'burb' whose centre and circumference, like the *aleph*'s, is everywhere.

More central to the novel and its topography is Richard's address, 49E Calchalk Street, which, specific as it may be, is in fact a non-existent or a cartographically unlocatable place. To locate it, the reading is dependent, as LaRose also suggests, on the coordinates of Ladbroke Grove, Portobello Road, and Kensington Park Road ("Reading *The Information*" 172). This is exemplary of Pike's idea of *toponymical* urban writing referred to earlier in the chapter. The narrative spatialization can be apprehended in this double urban vision that infracts the limits or borders of a physically available London, transfers it from the map to the literary scene only to frame or recompose our knowledge by (re)inscribing topographical referents to it. In sum, through repetition, Amis gradually undermines what he calls the author's "first principles" (Self, "Interview") and puts in practice a textual digression, a "padding" (Self, "Interview") where it is the imaginary locations that act as geographical correctives or emendations to the fabric of actual London.

The flat geography or oblique transcription of the city can be also perceived in the iterative representation and sameness of the pubs, a point taken up by the previous chapter with reference to the alterity of urban vision. The pub where Terry takes Jan (a new temp at his workplace), The Enterprise in Fox Street, for instance, is familiarly cavernous, ramshackle "with dark marble walls and sad windows" (S 80). Thus, a liminal city is presented whose material production hinges upon the reproducibility of

places, types, and characteristics. A wine bar off Westbourne Grove is evocatively described as “a long and low dark place full of Sunday desperadoes” (S 145). The repetitive sameness of urban pubs writes a ground narrative of Amis’s city as a *locus dementia*, gaining full weight in the Swiftian vision of the city permeated with “an agreeable whiff of Yahooism” (S 194). In such a textual practice, it is difficult to apprehend the singularity or particularity of the city. However, as J. Hillis Miller contends in *Others*, the double (of a place) does not repeat, duplicate or reproduce the presence (of a place), but rather supplements it, allowing a reading of the originary difference. Repetition is, therefore, an uncanny mode of writing the city, a moment of urban art, a paradoxical continuity and narrative cut, a rhetorical act of accretion that both enables and disables the spatio-temporal identity of the city. Ultimately, this double writing creates a sense of unreliability where everything potentially becomes a misnomer. Quite fittingly in this respect, on the final page of the novel, Richard compares himself to “Abel Janszoon Tasman (1603-1659): the Dutch explorer who discovered Tasmania without noticing Australia” (I 494). This self-parodying analogy is an apt metaphor for the figure of the author engaging in spatial practices, in writing the place, missing the mark, or evading the epistemologically given, yet discovering something else in the act of accidental exploration.

## Chapter Five: London Visions: The City, Metafiction and Topography

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the cultural and literary spaces of the city in Martin Amis's fiction can be uncovered in the arch-tropes of the fragmented body, the figure of the double as well as in the elusive relation between memory, language, movement and the city. This chapter, by contrast, will make the transition to one of Amis's most representative novelistic conventions: the multi-layered narrative, or the self-referential literary text. Proposing to explore the significance of the deployment of self-reflective narrative techniques in *London Fields* (1989), my reading aims to address the specificity of implementing codes of reading in order to produce an in-depth analysis of the novel creating the space of literature in a way that can be concurrently relevant for literary configurations of urban space. As in most of Amis's novels, there are alternate worlds created in *London Fields* as well; nonetheless, in this novel, laying bare the literary device while framing and recording the literary encounters between contemporary urban spaces and the self will gain much significance. As the chapter progresses, it will become all the more tenable that the novel ultimately resorts to the transposition of the emerging plurality of reading and writing these urban relations onto the level of the metanarrative. Moreover, the novel will be shown to further sustain one of the underlying objectives of the thesis: tracing the complex mirroring between the multiple and elusive structures of Amis's postmodernist writing and the dynamics of the literary urban space. In other words, the focus will be on discovering the ways the notion of the city is to be taken as structuring Amis's narrative, just as narrative structures are to be considered as conducive to imagining the city. Reading Amis's novels and Amis's novels reading the contemporary city yield a model that reveals the primary creative act embedded in any novelistic attempt to map out patterns of urban spatial organization. So, the practice of reading the city will indeed stand for the act of writing it, while the novel offers a compelling dramatisation of this tenet.



*London Fields*, loosely described as an end-of-the-millennium apocalyptic thriller, relates the story of a murder set in London. At the start of the novel, the first voice the reader is presented with is that of the narrator-writer, Samson Young. He has recently moved over to London from America as a result of a rewarding swap of apartments with the British author, Mark Asprey. He has been suffering from writer's block for a long time, but has finally found good material for his novel: "This is a true story but I can't believe it's really happening" (*LF* 1), enthuses Samson on the very first page. Soon, he meets Keith Talent, the bad force in the novel, who is "a bad guy [. . .] a very bad guy" (*LF* 4). Keith, with "a tabloid face" (*LF* 9), is the figure of the villain in the story, a crook who makes a despicable living from petty burglary, and trading in the streets. Moreover, he is often described as an animal, a reptilian or "a murderer's dog" (*LF* 9). He lives in a tower block with his neglected wife, Kath, and baby-daughter, Kim. Apart from indiscriminately sleeping around with women, his only passion is darts. He and the narrator make good friends in no time; Keith will prove to be a resourceful guide in the underworld of London pub life. It is in the pub called the 'Black Cross' on Portobello Road where the main characters meet. Nicola Six, the female 'murderer' in search of a murderer, enters the pub after having attended a funeral. Guy Clinch, "a good guy – or a nice one, anyway," who "wanted for nothing and lacked everything" (*LF* 27), enters after having aimlessly roamed through the streets of West London. It is soon revealed that both Keith and Guy are attracted to Nicola; she has "these powerful feminine auras, these feminine shockwaves" (*LF* 61). However, she, having found her murderer in the pub, is already busy working out various schemes to put "her story" into action. Several meetings take place between the main characters until the final *dénouement* when Nicola is killed, a climactic scene that has been set and foreshadowed several times in the text.

Each chapter in the novel is divided into two parts: the first section develops and stands for the novelistic plot itself while the second is Samson Young's extended, self-reflective cogitation on the actual act of writing the novel. Most significantly, towards the end of the novel he is increasingly uncertain about his authorial supremacy: it dawns upon him that Nicola and the mysterious M. A. (Mark Asprey or, perhaps, Martin Amis) might have "outwritten" him. The novel overtly draws upon a narrative involution that is made all the more marked by a wilful play with initials and

pseudonyms. Nonetheless, it is not only the place of the author that is distorted in the novel; the entire text is interspersed with fragments of a foreboding apocalyptic vision of planetary deformation and death. As a way of summing the plot up, it is worth considering Diedrick's succinct appraisal of the novel: "an unstable mixture of millennial murder mystery, urban satire, apocalyptic jeremiad, and domestic farce" (*Understanding* 147).<sup>72</sup> In short, the novel applies itself to a general deterioration and waning that implacably permeate Londoners' life further sustained by a spectral reiteration of the forthcoming murder and the possibility of total destruction.

### Mapping Worlds: Fields of London, Fields of Fiction

In terms of inscribing the convoluted relations of novelistic spatial attributes and reading schemes, the Note, placed at the very start of the novel, is of great significance. It is a *paratext* as it is beyond or besides the main novelistic text, a frame that, nonetheless, acts as a threshold in the various stages of interpreting the novel. The Note is also pivotal in relation to setting the scene of writing. Firstly, it figures as the opening act of writing, of establishing a relationship between London and the world of the novel. After divulging to the reader the various titles the cryptic narrator, M. A., considered then rejected, he continues:

I kept ironic faith with my narrator, who would have been pleased, no doubt, to remind me that there are two kinds of title – two grades, two orders. The first kind of title decides on a name for something that is already there. The second kind of title is present all along: it lives and breathes, or it tries, on every page. My suggestions (and they cost me some sleep) are all the first kind of title. *London Fields* is the second

---

<sup>72</sup> See also Malcolm Bradbury summary of the novel as a depiction of "London as a failed Arcadia, a murder-haunted metropolis on the eve of ecological holocaust" (*Modern* 401).



kind of title. So let's call it *London Fields*. This book is called *London Fields*. *London Fields*...

This is, undoubtedly, a paradigmatic site of the novel's figuration of the space of a postmodern text, of the way the novel is writing and creating its own space as a fictional narrative about the city of London. The name 'London Fields' is clearly a component of London's topography as it names a real place in East London, north of the Thames.<sup>73</sup> It is a geographical name designating a park in the city (as such a transitional place between nature and the built environment). However, on closer consideration the name 'London Fields' turns out to be problematic since in terms of bearing reference to a physical place, the name is a linguistic incongruity: London is a city, and in this sense the parataxis of "fields" is inapposite. As a place-name, it can be argued, it is a referential trope leaning onto a paradox that suspends two contradictory poles of signification: it is a semantic *field* that simultaneously denotes the urban and the rural. As a result, the title, as a code of reading, turns into an oxymoron that will significantly stretch over into reading patterns in and of the novel.

Above all, the name contains the historic sedimentation of the way London as a city evolved; London, especially where "the real" London Fields lies nowadays, was not an inhabited area of the city for a long time. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names*, 'London Field' (1540), or 'London Felde' (1547) used to be

---

<sup>73</sup> J. Hillis Miller in *Topographies* expounds that the word *topography* combines the Greek word *topos*, place, with *graphein*, to write. To put it simply, the etymology of the word is the following: the writing of a place. For us, Miller proposes, the word has the following meanings: "the art or practice of graphic and exact delineation in minute detail, usually on maps and charts, of the physical features of any place or region,' or, by metonymy, 'the configuration of a surface, including its relief, the position of its streams, lakes, roads, cities, etc.' "(*Topographies* 3). However, all topographical signifiers are normally inscribed in two different kinds of words: general terms ('mountain,' 'river') and proper place names ('Key West') (3). Miller adds: "By a further sideways slippage, 'topography' has come to be the name for what is mapped, apparently without any reference to writing or other means of representation" (3). The latter usage is now the most common and it is a product of a triple figurative transference: it first meant the verbal metaphorical correlate of a landscape; then, it became to represent a landscape according to conventions of signification used in mapping; and, finally, "by a third transfer, the name of the map was carried over to name what is mapped" (4). For Miller, the third level of the transference has important implications as it has reached a point of referential or performative plenitude where the names of the places are almost like instances of speech-acts: they create by naming. "The place names are motivated, they tell what the places are like [. . .]. You can get to the place by way of its name. Place names make a site already the product of a virtual writing, a topography, or, since the names are often figures, a 'tropotopography' "(4). It is in this sense that I would propose 'London Fields' works, creates or performs as a topographical name the textual field of London in the novel.



a meadow or ground for grazing sheep. Its name most likely derives from the fact that it was on the London side of Hackney Parish before the inhabitants of London gradually appropriated and incorporated it into the city (*Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names* 141). The place-name, as a consequence, presents or marks a place of ambiguity in the interpretative process since unarguably one cannot go back to the stage of London as a field any more; and even if one wanted to, a destruction or disfiguration of that part of the city would be needed. Accordingly, what the name does is echo and uphold a figurative relation - a figurative relation that already rests on effacement - to the urban history of London. By the same token, the characters in the novel inhabit an imaginary relation to the postmodern condition of urban existence where the convention of realistic (historical) and fictional (literary) discourses is provisional and, thus, open to conflation, and where, in addition, a disruptive sense of spatiality insists on the coherence of their narrative. Thus, *London Fields*, as a novel about the city, reads in terms of J. Hillis Miller's definition of the *atopical*, or of the placeless; a place that is everywhere and nowhere, "without location on any map. It is without ascertainable face, figure, or feature. Any attempts to give it a face only deface it, as a critical essay defaces a literary work, writes all over it" (*Topographies* 53).

The park of London Fields lies in a relatively wasted area of London, an apt metaphorical image of Amis's preoccupation with the underworld of city life. Considering the title on the level of metafiction, another layer of reading can be added: with *London Fields*, Amis can be considered to have found his "residual place" in the force-field of postmodern cultural narratives where, as many critics have emphasized, different kinds of cultural discourses struggle to make their way. The novel, therefore, signals an elusive way of writing the city irrefutably apprehended in the name 'London Fields,' which is the title of the novel, a geographical place in London, and an imaginary place constantly imagined and dreamed of in the novel. The novel is mainly set in West-London, and Childs makes a pointed observation in underlining that "the book's title represents for the narrator not a place but an ahistorical, prelapsarian time of innocence" (Childs 47): "If I shut my eyes or even if I keep them open I can see the parkland and the sloped bank of the railway line. The foliage is tropical and innocuous, the sky is crystalline and innocuous. In fact the entire vista has a kiddie-book feel. [. . .] It is all outside history" (*L F* 323). Elsewhere,

Dern sees the title as “nondescript” (Dern 47).<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the Fields of the title remain undefined, blurred, utopian and imaginary, altered and (re)iterated between different locations and narrative levels of the text.

More intriguingly, despite the overt existing topographical referent of the title, very little takes place in that part of London. So, the sense of displacement is concurrently written into the narrative at several levels: in terms of plot, the identity of the author, and not least, of the murderer, while the very site of the murder is the novel’s fitting conception of Miller’s theorisation of the *atopical* (placeless) mentioned above. Throughout the novel it is suggested yet never clearly indicated that the scene of violence is the park of London Fields. Hence, the repeated figuration of the park is misleading, a ‘misrepresented’ scene of Nicola’s murder. This is the novel’s most emphatic disclosure of an urban narrative born out of constellations between geographical particulars and abstract literary configurations where the urban representation is always-already defaced or displaced. ‘London Fields’ is, I would suggest, the ultimate signature of Amis’s mode of urban writing and serves as the novel’s mirror to representational verisimilitude; it is a punctuating mark in the reflexive and interrogative relationship between city and writing. *London Fields* therefore, informs and deforms topography and narrative, even the historical narrative of the British nation and its violent colonial expansions. Portobello Road, the street where the central location of Black Cross stands, for instance, was named after the Panaman city of Puerto Bello, a site of British victory in 1739 in the Caribbeans (*Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names* 181). It is the contention of this thesis that Amis’s modalities of writing the city closely relate to Miller’s patent concerns in *Topographies*, that is to say, to Miller’s thinking of space in a way that, as a matter of fact, is detectable in a vague form in some other much-referenced urban thinkers, like de Certeau, Lehan, Lynch or Pike: the language of topography, topography as a form

---

<sup>74</sup>The ambiguity of the title is also mentioned by Dern, albeit only in terms of the postmodernism of the novel: “The title could hardly be more oblique. It is often referenced by Young but never with further clarity. Like the lack of clarity about the metafictional authorship of the work, this lack of clarity adds to the book’s postmodernist status” (Dern 46).

of writing place and literature.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, *London Fields* insists on the ironies and ambiguities resulting from the relations of literature, language and place rather than resolves them.

In an interview with Francesca Riviere, Amis admits that London ultimately took over the novel and “brought together all kinds of interests and preoccupations” (Riviere 113), while in what follows the park of London Fields will be demonstrated to function as the novel’s focal point of dispersion. ‘London Fields’ is a central topos of conflating the real topography of London with the literary presentation of the place. On the other hand, the unending generic hesitation between the fictional or geographical existences allows for London, and by extension, the urban to be an irrepressible presence in Amis’s fiction. The weakening of the boundaries between the various ‘London Fields,’ as represented by the text, is Amis’s textual dramatisation of Raban’s suspension of the limits between ‘hard’ (factual) and ‘soft’ (imaginary) cities. Thus, in a sense that will be relevant for the rest of the chapter, it can be maintained that the various functions of the title already compel a reading where text (novel) and cartography (map), play and reality, inside and outside must be thought together.

Taking up the problem of performativity of topography in the manifold title, the novel is additionally an adroit engagement with a more general drive of the postmodern urban novel to displace the notion of place as a static spatial category. The way the title functions, assimilating notions of space, geography and language in the process of narrativising space, significantly connects to de Certeau’s analogy between space and the act of speaking. Space, de Certeau argues, is “like the word when it is spoken, that is when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (de Certeau 117). In order to define the subtle but very important distinction between ‘space of literature’ and ‘place of literature’ (the actual location

---

<sup>75</sup> Topography is hereby understood in J. Hillis Miller’s sense of the term “either as the name for the inherent features of a landscape or as a term for the mapping of those features in words or images,” but essentially always involving “the notion of limits or borders” (*Topographies* 266).



where the events take or do not take place), it is useful to turn to de Certeau's productive exposition of the differences between space and place as such.<sup>76</sup> He fastens the idea of place on stability; and, most significantly, on the exclusion of the possibility of two things being in the same location. For the purposes of my research, this can be extended to also suggest the impossibility of two or several configurations of readings taking up the same position, the same place. By way of distinction, space is seen as mobile, constructed by variables of speed, time and direction, and the conflict of these operations. De Certeau goes on to contend that as opposed to place, space lacks the univocity or stability of a "proper." The law of a place is reducible to being-there, while the law of space is determined through operations. Thus, stories transform places into spaces, and vice versa (de Certeau 118). In other words, the "propriety" or "properness" of place appears to be premised on a general spatial practice wherein place has a name while space is nameless, so to speak. However, the title shows that, to be effective, naming must be a movement away from the logic of unified referents since the more precise and fixed a terminology, the more inadequate (in terms of covering the gap between language and reality) it must become. Hence, naming, the novel discloses, is by necessity unfixed and caught in a perpetual shift in meanings. It follows from this that place organises space, and space organises place just as there are multiple Londons (fictional spaces) and *topoi* (places in both the rhetorical and topographical senses) mutually organising and configuring each other.

The interpolation of the face and voice of the author is a frequent novelistic convention in Amis's prose, a gimmicky postmodern literary device that would irritate many a reviewer. Furthermore, the recurrent musings on the role of art and the mechanics of writing the story present the text as a veritable palimpsest of a multiple scene of writing, each layer of which distances us from the Samson Young's voice. The novel thus concurrently discloses and conceals the question of origin. Placing the Note at the start of the novel figures as an act of putting the story into a frame; and this gesture disturbs the reading, or the credibility of Samson's narrative. It shifts his

---

<sup>76</sup> De Certeau's distinction between space and place is far more sophisticated and helpful than Lutwack's, who in his attempt to argue for the importance of "the rhetoric of place" in literature finds place as the most applicable category for literary criticism. Space is the realm of the philosopher and the social scientist, he contends, "far too removed from the sensory and imaginative experience to be of much value for literary studies" (Lutwack 27). Human geographers', specifically, Yi-fu Tuan's generic differentiation in this respect is that enclosed and humanised space is place.

place in the space of the story and brackets all of his attempts to present us with a “true story,” as he suggests in the first sentence of the novel. Thus, the Note has the effect of a *mise-en-abîme*, a vertiginous narrative space where an involution takes place and, therefore, the reality of the book instead of being reinforced is relegated to the status of a figure to figure, a play within a play. The relationship of the title, the Note, and the rest of the book situates the novel as an oxymoronic enterprise born out of its own impossibility and negation. On the other hand, the resulting textual puzzle is one of the main props of Amis’s aesthetic strategy and is instrumental in pointing towards textual indeterminacies to suggest that there will always remain something ‘unrepresentable’ (indefinable) about London striving to be represented and defined.

In the novel it is Nicola Six who is most striking in identifying herself with London.<sup>77</sup> She has indeed lived in many areas of the city. When the novel starts, Nicola, who understands London, lives in a dead-end street, a spatial metaphor about the dead-end situation of her life while in the scene where she is first shown, she is preparing for a funeral. Dressing up, she recalls previous journeys through Clapham and Brixton “where London seems unwilling ever to relinquish the land, wants to squat on those fields right up to the rocks and the cliffs and the water” (*L F* 20). In this image London is shown to be devouring the land and turning it into a wasteland of physical debris. This way the novel leads one to consider the possibility that this kind of urban erosion of the natural surrounding will inevitably lead to a marked change in the subjectivity’s reflection on the self inasmuch as inhabiting such an environment alters one’s perception of the self and its relationship with its surroundings.

---

<sup>77</sup> The metonymy of the city as a woman is a well-known imaginary frame of reference in critical readings of the city. As Wirth-Nesher elucidates in *City Codes*, in travel books at the turn of the century Paris was pictured in the figure of a flamboyant and giant woman. More notably, in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* the spirit of the city is best apprehended in the female figure of the prostitute. More recent novels also frequently draw upon the conceit of woman as a city. In *Invisible Cities*, for instance, Italo Calvino’s imaginary (yet historical) traveller, Marco Polo, invokes a foundation myth of the intrinsic relation between the two by relating a story set in prehistoric times of men chasing a woman, losing her and then building a wall and founding a city around the spot where they lost her trail. Last but not least, according to the *OED*, the etymology of ‘metropolis’ is the Greek compound form of *mētēr* (mother) and *polis* (city).



The theme of decay and death interlacing the novel's representation of urban landscapes is indeed most prominent in the images of funeral and ruins, further reinforced by such metaphors as shroud, pall, ghost and shadow. Death stalks the city and enhances the atmospheric writing of the novel. Furthermore, the sustained vision of deformation and millennial malaise, the cryptic repetition of the final murder scene all form a parallel with a dystopic urban mode. The latter, with the central image of the city in ruins, is reminiscent of former visionary writers of London (Blake, De Quincey, or Gissing) for whom the city has become a violation of its spiritual and social aspirations, influentially grounded in Plato's *Republic* as the cultural topos of utopia. Thus, *London Fields* is a continuation of the metonymy of the city as a site where the living and the dead are indivisible and part of the same reality.<sup>78</sup>

The threatening nature of London in the novel is further supplemented by a dark vision of the city as a labyrinthine construct ruled by a spatio-scopic logic whose recurring pattern of reading is the placeless, or the unlocatable. At one point Samson Young ostensibly ties the ability to read the streets of London to gaining some sort of redemption of the self in this urban mesh. Thus, the novel signals that contemporary novelistic representations of the urban regard the city not only as a physical conglomerate of buildings, but also as a state of mind wherein reading the self means reading the city from within: "There was a time when I thought I could read the streets of London. I thought I could peer into the ramps and passages, into the smoky dispositions, and make some sense of things. But now I don't think I can. Either I'm losing it, or the streets are getting harder to read" (*LF* 367). So, it appears that the city ultimately resists reading.<sup>79</sup> The critical moment of understanding the fundamental impermeability of the city comes only towards the end of the novel (when it has

---

<sup>78</sup> In this respect see Patrick Parrinder's excellent article "'These fragments I have shored against my ruins': Visions of Ruined London From Edmund Spencer to J.G. Ballard" in *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis*, edited by Susana Onega and John A. Stotesbury pp. 19-34. Lewis Mumford's conjecture in *The City in History* is also intriguing: he believes that the first cities were in fact the cities of the dead in the sense that nomadic tribes returned to the grave sites of their dead, and with time settled down and used the cemeteries as patterns and routes that functioned as a basis for the development of their settlements, and eventually cities.

<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that Edgar Allan Poe's famous short story about London "The Man of the Crowd" ends on a similar note. After having followed the mysterious old man for several days, the narrator realises that the old man is the enigmatic embodiment of the spirit of London that does not allow any final reading: "*es lässt sich nicht lesen*" (Poe 188), concludes the perplexed narrator.



become clear that he has lost control over the narrative), a final intimation that the city of London resists deciphering.

This spatial problematic reflects the larger cultural framework of the postmodern, and, more closely, it expresses contemporary urban narratives' shift in the paradigms of space formation. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey claims that while for the modernists space was saturated with social purpose, the postmodernists see space as something more autonomous of an overarching social agenda. In the postmodern, space is to be shaped according to quite eclectic aesthetic aims and principles. Perhaps, the most representative postmodern environment is the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, of which Fredric Jameson records that it is an architectural representative of the postmodern hyperspace that "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world" (*The Cultural Turn* 15). The novel 'visibly' relates to the cognitive difficulties of mapping such a world. After Samson Young has literally landed in his writing environment (London), he instantly starts to contemplate and to position himself within the spatial attributes of the city: "If London is a spider's web, then where do I fit in?," he asks himself. "Maybe I'm the fly. I'm the fly" (*L F* 3). These self-reflective ruminations read as a subtle foreshadowing of his fall and death at the end of the story. The narrator's proleptic act of identifying with the image of a fly suggests an infernal configuration of space in London, a spider's web being an apt analogy for a mental map of the city. As a spatial referent, the coiling conformation of the web also suggests the inadequacy of straight lines of space, and by way of extension, of narratives. Furthermore, when he sees himself as a fly caught up in a spider's web, he unwittingly projects a powerful image about the self's experience of the city. This image reads as a rich metaphor of the relation of self and space since it suggests an entrapment of the body (fly) within the built environment (spider's web). However, as it turns out by the end, the ultimate spider's web is the novel itself.

Foregrounding the spider's web as the novel's analogy for London, ties in with a more widespread spatial correlative of the city: the labyrinth, often taken as the very

condition of urban space.<sup>80</sup> Disorienting and displacing to all who witness it, the labyrinth implies an inherent disruption of the fixedness of self. Elizabeth Wilson in *The Sphinx of the City* advances the labyrinth as a defining image of the city with the immediate implication that it is 'centreless.' She adds: "Even if the labyrinth does have a centre, one image of the discovery of the city, or of exploring the city, is not so much finally reaching this centre, as of an endlessly circular journey, and of the retracing of the same pathways over time" (Wilson 3). Wilson's argumentation is in line with recent spatial theory that necessitates a new conception of centre, a centre that has no natural, material site, or a fixed locus, being visualized instead as a function. The changed nature of centre and the ways it grounds the so-called heterotopic models of the city will be discussed in the next part of the chapter where the representation of the pub, the Black Cross, will be considered. Here, I only wish to turn to the indefinability of the labyrinth and centre that supplements the theme of the characters' incessant tracing of each other and to the inevitable deception implied in this process. Not least, the city as labyrinth precipitates a mode of reading where one never retraces the same pathway twice because the city is in a constant stage of changing, thus partly contributing to the often invoked phantasmagoria of the urban.<sup>81</sup>

It is a prevailing view among human geographers that mass media informs contemporary urban life to an increasing extent, intriguingly exemplified by Keith Talent's vision of London as conspicuously fashioned after tabloid papers and television: "It was the world of TV that told him what the world was" (*L F* 55). Through him, the novel offers an even more intriguing example of what informs urban life. For Keith, London can be best read in terms of an elaborate map of an alternative darts world that is being saturated with images fed by low-brow mass media. He is frequently portrayed as sitting overwhelmed by "the swimming beauty of the dartboard" (*L F* 386) on the garage wall. In his world the darts board stands for a "kaleidoscope of every hope and dream" (*L F* 386). Indeed, the only time he willingly engages with any kind of book culture is when he consults his darts books. His main reading is a book entitled *Darts: Master the Discipline*, which, among other things,

---

<sup>80</sup> See also Borges's short story, "The Aleph," commonly regarded as a literary prefiguration of contemporary space production, where London is seen as "a broken labyrinth" (*The Aleph* 130).

<sup>81</sup> See also Wilson p. 3.

links major historical events in British history to darts; it contends, for instance, that Stonehenge was a dartboard in ancient times; thus, the novel jocularly puts forward a reconsideration of common sets of relations between English landscape and history.

Keith's inner thoughts are mainly recorded in the form of a darts diary, a spiritual existence that can be encapsulated in sentences like "Remember you are a machine. Delivering (*sic*) the dart the same way every time" (*L F* 396). It is also interesting to note that in an article (suggestively entitled "Darts: Guttled for Keith") written around the time of writing *London Fields*, Amis associates darts with "the killer instinct," or a sense of predatoriness (*Visiting Mrs Nabokov* 225). Thus, the suggestion that within the context of the novel the dartboard assumes a figurative role gains much validity. Likewise, to the imagery of the dartboard Catherine Bernard attributes "infinite allegorical implications, social, sexual, political, London finding itself potentially at the heart of the nuclear nightmare 'like a bull's-eye in the centre of the board' (*L F*, 16)" (D'haen and Bertens eds. 140). If the dartboard is being devised in the novel as a metaphor of Keith's reading skills, a prism that refracts the urban world around Keith, then it emerges that this narrative trope expresses a process of mechanization in urban existence. The implementation of the dartboard as a figure of reading may be considered as a narrative extension on the consequences of technology's saturation of reading sensibilities.

The Introduction provides the theoretical background to the ways in which the postmodern city and its literary representations are being increasingly noted as forming a contested and problematic space, a phantasy text speaking in many voices. Moreover, critical readings are generally undertaken with attention paid to the ways these literary urban environs articulate a larger cultural anxiety. *London Fields* explores the anxiety-ridden urban spatial imaginary in terms of a metafictional text where the referential logic of conventional realism is suspended and the place of the author is also destabilised. The unreliability of the author is generally taken to signify a loss of meaning for the subversion of authorial position is, by way of extension, a subversion of representational certitude. A problematisation of epistemology is, therefore, inscribed in the changing relationship between the author, the world and the text. By token of an authorial involution, Samson Young cannot mastermind the outcome of the story: "There go my unities" (*L F* 388), he says towards the end.



While this has been generally considered as attesting to the composite nature of narrative voices in the text, Peter Stokes in an article on *London Fields* as representative of “postnuclear narrative” expands the narrative scope of multiple voices: “Amis’s critique opens up a space for the productive potential in the radical indeterminacy of the postmodern subject and postmodern knowledge production. And Amis locates that productive potential, particularly, within the endlessness of apocalyptic discourse” (“Martin Amis and the Postmodern Suicide” 300-301). Indeed, the apocalyptic, a recurring element in Amis’s fiction, inescapably makes his writing strive towards quering origins, and thus inscribes a decided concern with eschatology, especially tenable in *London Fields* as well as the short-story collections of *Heavy Water and Other Stories* (1998) and *Einstein’s Monsters* (1987). Still, as Stokes also proposes, the apocalyptic theme is to be ultimately considered as productively unbinding the present and ‘unfixing’ epistemological certainties.

London not only emerges as a textual product of various authorial voices, but it also engages in contradictory perspectives; thus, the city is always different depending on the observing or the observed subjects. Guy Clinch unawares discovers this multiform spatial dynamic in one of the few scenes of the novel that are not set in London. He goes with his wife, Hope, who is “brightly American” (*LF* 27), to Venice on the doctor’s advice to have a break from their inhumanly aggressive and diabolical child, Marmaduke. Walking in the labyrinthine streets of Venice, Guy stops and looks, craning his neck, into the water of the canals: “‘Wait, Hope,’ he said. ‘Please look. If I move my head, then the sun moves on the water. My eyes have as much say in it as the sun.’ [. . .] ‘But that means – for everyone here the sun is different on the water. No two people are seeing the same thing.’ [. . .] ‘But then it’s hopeless. Don’t you think? It’s . . . quite hopeless’” (*LF* 31). Thus the novel signifies that space (and by implication narrative space) is plastic, changeable, ambiguous and plural while simultaneously foregrounding the principle of undecidability as a structural condition of the narrative and of the relations of self, vision and space. The instability and dislocation of perception and of the perceiving subject also bring to the fore the novel’s overt attempt at suspending a presumed singular literary space of London upon which realist narrative thought drew. Indeed, *London Fields* exhibits a recent pluralisation in conceiving space, spaces of knowledge and locations of writing. When reflecting on his interactions with the other characters, Samson Young evokes

“Heisenberg’s principle that an observed system inevitably interacts with its observer” (*LF* 181). In this passage it is manifest how theories of space become bound up with the structure and writing of the novels. Thus, the reading (perceiving) self is driven time and time again to re-engage with space. The following part will explore Amis’s innovative re-engagement with the city through, for instance, rearranging the London scene as a pub.

### **Heterotopic London: Writing the City as a Pub**

It can be argued without forcefully reading against the text that the novel’s Lynchian ‘node’ or ‘nodal locale’ is the pub, the Black Cross. As a matter of fact, this interpretation is ostensibly invited by the text: “If London’s a pub and you want the whole story, then where do you go? You go to a London pub” (*LF* 14). While Lefebvre firmly locates the hub of the urban community in the market place as the definite site of exchange (a site not only of business but also of entertainment and theatre), Amis has shifted the urban hub to the pub. One of its effects is the domestication of pub life in the London-novel. The Black Cross is an iconic urban setting; it is to be read as a prototypical place reflecting contemporary social life in the city; as such, it is a microcosm of the novel’s world. London’s pub scene in its multifariousness evinces Amis’s artistic credo that writing fiction is “a kind of high anthropology” (Haffenden 15). On a more abstract level, the pub exemplifies that various space constructions can collapse onto one another in the postmodern, thus, further insisting on the general experience of instability in the novel. Taking the pub as the centre of action folds the argument back to the problematics of transference in relation to centres, as considered earlier in the chapter. It is due to such originary works within the field of human geography as Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* that centres have become to designate shifting *topoi* within the urban spatial matrix that resist pinning down not least because contemporary cities have been consensually described as evolving according to the spatial dynamics of the centrifugal.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, trying to regard the pub as a veritable site of economic exchange of goods would

---

<sup>82</sup> A particular trick of urban coincidence is that the Black Cross re-appears on p. 486 in *The Information*.

baffle our reading since the pub clearly lacks the disciplined regimentation of serious business. The novel constructs the pub as the main scene of bonding and socializing, but also as a thoroughly anti-institutional place of violence and constant duplicity, a locus of farcical nemesis.

The Cross also prompts a reading as a novelistic reproduction of Foucault's *heterotopias*, by which Foucault understands the juxtaposition in a single real place several spaces or sites that are incompatible ("Of Other Spaces" 25).<sup>83</sup> Examples of such heterogeneous space formations are cinemas, museums, cemeteries, gardens, and mirrors. *Heterotopias*, in Foucault's understanding, are counter-sites where *topoi* of culture are simultaneously represented, contested, inverted; such places "are outside of all places" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). The pub is similarly outside all places in the sense that it is a figurative place that contains the entirety of London. It is a site of permanent conflict as much on a physical as on an ideological plane where everything has an uncertain ontology. Bernard reads the various figurations of the Black Cross as a key instance of the figurative overkill, a recurrent shortcoming of Amis's style in the view of a number of critics:

Amis also sorts (*sic*) to the caricatural use of overdetermined object correlatives, the most archetypal of which are the cross and the darts board. At the centre of the narrative space of the text stands a pub, the Black Cross, where the destinies of all the characters converge. The cross must be interpreted as a visual representation of the text's metaphorical and allegorical syncretism since it symbolizes all at once the subversion of the Christian paradigm of sacrifice (Nicola's suicide is a mock cathartic murder), the narrative interaction of characters

---

<sup>83</sup> In addition, featuring a pub called the *Foaming Quart* is also indicative of the multi-layered spatial production in the novel. One of the first of many darts games takes place in this pub in Brixton, a place regularly used not only as a pub, but also as a discotheque, a church and a school. The representation of the *Foaming Quart* also invokes a literary counterpart among Amis's contemporaries. In a short story entitled "Pornography," Ian McEwan similarly describes a church in Brixton that has been turned into a warehouse for pornographic material (*In-Between the Sheets* 8). So, both Amis and McEwan imply that spatial reordering is an intrinsically transgressive act.



linked by death (“they still form their black cross” [LF, 238] and the geographic disorientation of a world which has lost its bearings (D’haen and Bertens eds. 140).

Bernard, thus, considers the pub from at least three angles: as one of the central scenes for the characters’ interaction, as a novelistic thematisation of sham spirituality, and, finally, as a *tropological* place of spatial disorientation and death. Thus, critical interpretations themselves are shown to reproduce and repeat how the pub unawares ‘undoes’ (in the sense of simultaneously enabling and disabling) the possibility of reading thematically the various spatial formations. Indeed, places are not open to effortless epistemological investigation in Amis’s novels; instead a vivid mental *socialscape* is proffered that, in turn, invites a revision of the cultural values associated with a location.

As shown above, while attempting to express the identity of a place (like the Black Cross), the novel simultaneously stresses the workings of artifice therein, an act of writing that ties Amis’s novel in with the contemporary novelists’ methods of writing the city. Nonetheless, Amis’s multi-layered configurations of urban space differ from recent novelistic heterotopic models of space, increasingly viewed as the urban novel’s incorporation of historiographic metafiction, that representative mode of postmodern writing famously advanced by Linda Hutcheon. The novels of Peter Ackroyd are widely considered as exemplary of an inventive merging of historiographic metafiction and urban writing. Ackroyd’s novels constitute a textual practice where imaginatively reconstructed pasts associated with an urban location interact or collapse into one present with macabre consequences (such novels include *Hawksmoor*, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* and *The House of Doctor Dee*). One result of such narrative excavations of meaning associated with a place is that the nature of facts and evidence is problematised. A deep archaeology of a place is dissipated in the process since any attempts to produce an unequivocal knowledge of

it are mocked or subverted.<sup>84</sup> In this respect, Amis's fiction is a sort of 'blank metafiction' since he is not in the least preoccupied with the history of a location; instead, he strives to show the discontinuities or discrepancies in the heightened present of a place. What Amis shares with Ackroyd's historiographic writing is, nevertheless, forging an urban writing similarly enables him to subvert (ideological) totalisations in representing a place. While Ackroyd achieves this by trying to mimic the past (*mimesis* and ventriloquism), Amis performs this by conceiving of writing the city as a semiotic process (*semiosis* and performativity) constantly folding back on itself. D. J. Taylor's description of the cityscapes of *London Fields* as "clotted dreamscapes" (*After the War* 295) substantiates a reading of the novel as a captivating expression of the poetics of the urban - city as *semiosis*.

The names of the barman, God, and a Black Cross regular, Shakespeare ("the local shaman" *LF* 41), are equally suggestive of the inverted spirituality of the place.<sup>85</sup> The representation of the pub as the *locus* of community and bonding, spurious as it may be, suggests that the world outside, hence, the city of London, too, has ceased to offer a stable anchoring of the self: "Once upon a time, the entrance to the Black Cross was the entrance to a world of fear. Nowadays things had changed places, and fear was behind him [Guy], at his back, and the black door was more like an exit" (*LF* 149). Indeed, one of the most enduring images of Guy Clinch is when he is depicted as sitting in the Black Cross "in a damp pocket of pub warmth" (*LF* 36). So, it seems that for him the pub and its "human furniture" (Wood 191) have been transformed into a world of familiarity while the outside world remained imbued with the precarious, a fundamental condition of contemporary existence also shared by Martin Amis.<sup>86</sup> The function of the pub is an indication of the urban geographers' position that living or using the spaces of the city is not coterminous with the functionality of the built environment. It is also indicative of a complex relation

---

<sup>84</sup> Such urban narratives have been reviewed to work in the Foucauldian sense whereby archaeology is conceived as a narrative of the past full of disruptions and discontinuities while in the process a revision of the discipline of history as a constructed text is in most cases argued for.

<sup>85</sup> Another regular drinking den of Keith Talent, the one with the "pub charisma" (*LF* 36), is a pub suggestively called the *Golgotha*, which they normally frequent only "out of brute territoriality" (*LF* 153).

<sup>86</sup> See the interview with Christopher Bigsby p. 24.

between the physicality of the city and its psychodynamics difficult to be apprehended by a sociologically oriented reading of space. Accordingly, the novel conceives of spatial formation as a discursive category - it violently animates a particular site and, thus, realigns meanings associated with it.

In contradistinction to Guy's adjustment and growing comfort in the pub, a great many scenes in the novel depict this environment in distinctly hellish terms: "They entered the pub and its loud world of primitive desires, desires owned up to and hotly pursued and regularly gratified. Daily fears having been put aside for the night: that was the idea. [. . .]. Hell will be noisy and crowded, he thought. Hell will be *busy*" (*L F* 372-373). On many occasions the Cross is hot and humid, "loud and crowded, and cocked tight, hairtrigger: one false move and it could all explode" (*L F* 109). As shown in these quotes, drawing upon pub life in order to describe life in London marks a different, a more primal and crude experience of the urban. So, writing the city as pub perhaps marks a stage in a more generic process of literary representations of the city whereby the regulated and easily decipherable city is turned into something more fabular in the sense that the narrative duly transforms the city into a phantasmagoria of mythical and infernal places.

Nonetheless, it should be stated that the literary site of London cannot be conclusively imposed on one site only. In former literary periods, a governing image of London was the prison for Charles Dickens, or for William Wordsworth it was best observed in the hustle and bustle of Bartholomew Fair, while Thomas De Quincey was mesmerised by its opium dens. Amis's response to the city is to transpose it onto the diverse site of the pub. As suggested above, the pub is being devised as a fitting Foucauldian heterotopic model of the city: it stands in relation to other sites (prison, market, theatre, pleasure dome) but in a way as to suspect or invert these sets of relations (q.v. "Of Other Spaces" 24). The pub, as a heterotopic place, therefore, can absorb the profusion and fragmentations of all meanings associated with it. It is as if the novel wanted to evince time and time again that the spatial production of the city in literature is indeed configured from multiple texts, voices, replications and transpositions, none being more originary than the other. In this respect, Amis shares Paul Auster's mode of urban writing cogently commented upon by Jenny Bavidge as producing a city not only "read through the images associated with its past or its



future, but an implosion of stories, myths, predictions, 'clues and ruins'" (Bavidge 186). It ought to be mentioned at this point that like Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, Amis emphatically devises the city as a site of exploring questions pertaining to subjectivity and authorship, a correlation that has been attended to in more detail in Chapter Four.

Not only are several spatial levels placed upon each other in the Black Cross, but temporal dimensions are also compressed: "Really the thing about life here was its incredible rapidity, with people growing up and getting old in the space of a single week. Like the planet in the twentieth century, with its fantastic *coup de vieux*. Here, in the Black Cross, time was a tube train with the driver slumped heavy over the lever, flashing through station after station" (*LF* 36). Likewise, according to Foucault, *heterotopias* are most powerful when they arrive at an absolute break with their traditional time-frame. He understands this spatio-temporal separation as either indefinitely accumulating time, like libraries or museums, or, as making time fleeting or transitory, like festivals and fairgrounds, and, one should add, the Black Cross. Time is generally a strong textual force in most of Amis's novels; in *Time's Arrow*, for instance, it is even the structuring principle of the entire narrative. Asked about the origins of *London Fields*, Amis repeatedly stated that the genesis of the novel partly derived from an authorial wish to put into a literary frame the idea that the collective imaginary of this age has been preoccupied with the notion of time. Amis hereby meant the ways new (scientific) assumptions about time repeat and bear out the proximity and finality of death: the knowledge that not only human beings, but the planet as well is ageing (as opposed to former times, when, for example, writers in the eighteenth-century were not aware of this).<sup>87</sup> These new conceptions of time, in Amis's view, have precipitated a significant number of self-destructive and annihilating stories in contemporary literature. In insisting that a changed conception of time can shift the paradigms of cultural and literary discourse, Amis goes against the grain of postmodernism inasmuch as the postmodern is typically characterised by an erosion of the temporal, as contended by Fredric Jameson in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

---

<sup>87</sup> See Reynolds and Noakes p. 18.

Elsewhere, Amis revealed that when writing about a future London in *London Fields*, Dickens was the writer he thought of most (Bigsby 43). He explained this apparent contradiction by claiming that since the future is empty (perhaps because of the futility of existence implied by recent scientific theories of time), writing about it has to be illusory, or even regressive in the sense of having to look back to the past. Suggestive references to London and the nation's past are certainly made by setting November 5 as the futuristic date of destroying London and the planet, an unmistakable historical allusion to an earlier conspiracy to blow up the Parliament and ruin the ruling class of the country. So, the novel's geopolitical theme of global extinction is intriguingly tied up with the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The novel suggests that London and the world have come to the end of their existence as a result of spiritual corruption and exhaustion of values and environment.<sup>88</sup> In spite of the apparent prevalent exhaustion where everything and everybody is preparing to die (even the babies are dressed as if they were old), London is very much intense and animated; the imagery of London as tinderbox is pervasive throughout the novel. The city is superatmospheric (its clogged and polluted cityscapes much reminiscent of Dickens); clouds travel at a supernatural speed and entire season pass in thirty seconds (*LF* 116). Moreover, 1999, the year when the novel is set, conveys a certain ulteriority. So, in this respect, 'London Fields,' as an urban site inscribed into and constructed by the novel, is a spatial dramatization, a place of *memento mori*, so to speak, of a mode of urbanity that has ceased.

According to Lefebvre, every spatial plane constitutes a mirror for the rest (Lefebvre 183). The larger significance of Lefebvre's view is that, in this way, a mirage effect of the conflation of inside and outside is being produced, a point also made in the Introduction. The novel certainly plays with the idea that the outer and inner spatial levels can be taken to hold up a mirror to each other. When scenes of driving are described in the novel, traffic (outside) and human desire (inside) interrelate at several points: "Traffic is a contest of human desire, a waiting game of

---

<sup>88</sup> Peter Childs is reminded by the novel of previous works vilifying a corrupt, decadent, and aimless London society, for example, of Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* "a novel which ends with the vision of a cataclysmic war in the future" (Childs 50).

human desire. You want to go there. I want to go there. And, just recently, something has gone wrong with traffic. Something has gone wrong with human desire [. . .]. In traffic, now, we are using up each other's time, each other's lives. We are using up each other's lives" (*L F* 326-327). However, the novel throws a perplexing light on the interplay of traffic and human desire; it does not so much verify as destabilise the implicit connection between the outside world and the inner self. As Alter also notes, "There could scarcely be a better situation for illustrating the breakdown of community in the modern metropolis, its systematic dysfunction, than a traffic jam" (Alter 19). Elsewhere, the novel is more conspicuous in rendering perceptible the idea that there is a disengagement between the inner (spiritual) and the outer (physical): "but this is London; and there are no fields. Only fields of operation and observation, only fields of electromagnetic attraction and repulsion, only fields of hatred and coercion. Only force fields" (*L F* 134). The citation above is indicative that *London Fields* reflects an altered urban psychodynamics where it is increasingly more difficult to relate emotionally to the physical surrounding, where something has gone astray with the relationship between the physical and the psychological. Above all, the passage is an effective illustration of how Amis's writing tropes urban topography since the 'lost fields of London' are concurrently figured to suggest both the increasingly violent physical environment of the city and the lost psychological condition of happiness.

The novel unfolds the conditions by which not only the city but England as well has come to her limits. As part of a sense of the impenetrability of future, Amis confounds the present familiarity of the West-London scene: it is not only an urban site of exuberance, theatricality and comedy, but also a place of decay, sleaze and violence. West-London as the centre, the heart of the city and of the novel's plot, is sinister and deteriorating. However, Amis manages to artistically reinvent it from its ruins, a view also shared by James Wood, who appreciates the novel's "marvellous slashes of description, particularly of West London's balding and dismal parks" (Wood 191). Under Amis's hand the city is shown to be a space of differences. His novel gives artistic expression to the chaos and irrationality, in other words, fissures of Lansdowne Crescent (where Guy has his family home), or Ladbroke Grove, that unusually straight long road among the coiling streets of Notting Hill, a rough



demarcation line (faultline) on the western boundaries of Amis's artistic 'haunt.'<sup>89</sup> Moreover, on many occasions Amis delivers the divisiveness and disruptiveness of the urban environment by foregrounding that the very act of naming a place is intertwined with implications of territory and ownership, cultural appropriation, language and social division.

In contemporary theoretical discourses the city is frequently constructed as an architectural machine through which economic and social relations are produced, reified and subverted. A closer inspection of some of the characters' names is already illustrative of the urban theorists' premise. Amis has repeatedly emphasized that for him names have an inherently performative nature; they are almost like speech-acts.<sup>90</sup> Keith Talent's name, for instance, can be read in terms of an ironic reference to his disfiguration as a city-dweller. In his extensive study on the relationship of individual, body, and urbanity, *Flesh and Stone*, Sennett explains that in ancient Athens only a few people were wealthy enough to become 'citizens' (officially recognised city-dwellers) and spend their days debating. To be accepted among the leisure class, an Athenian citizen needed a fortune of at least one *talent*, the equivalent of 6,000 drakhmas, the exclusive value of which can be surmised if it is considered that a skilled labourer earned a drachma a day (Sennett 52). On the basis of Sennett's remarks, the complex import of naming - talent (money) and Talent (surname) - can be considered as a suggestive naming-transposition. The surname and the specific denotation of the currency mark a crossing over of two sets of significations, a permutation in meanings that unwittingly discloses that the city, originally born out of a drive for thinking, philosophical disputations and thus sublimation (and perhaps salvation), turned into a site of decline and corruption.

Amis is often described (and disliked) as an author who challenges assumptions about English cultural hegemonies. While in the view of Lefebvre, in the seventies it was time that the social values of space were considered and recognised as

---

<sup>89</sup> Previously, Raban, nomadic mythographer of London, described the area as follows: "The streets around Ladbroke Grove, with their architecture of white candy stucco, are warrens of eccentric privateness; they are occupied by people who have taken no part in the hypothetical consensus of urban life" (Raban 165).

<sup>90</sup> For an influential scholarly discussion, see J. Hillis Miller's *Speech Acts in Literature* (2001).

opposed to the previous restrained abstractness of space, then, contemporary fiction's present interrogation of what constitutes social behaviour similarly needs to be addressed.<sup>91</sup> Transformations in the very idea(l) of the social can be most readily mapped out in urban spaces. In Amis's case as well, the city seems to be an appropriate ground where he can revise the legacy and myths not only of Englishness but also of modes of urbanity. In other words, Amis embraces the legacies of Englishness but as the precondition of deconstructing received narratives of national identity. If Guy Clinch is being devised as the everyday negotiator of urban space cast to reify urban rationality, then, his figuration as the dupe ultimately signifies a subsuming of the ordinary practices of urbanity by an irrepressible dynamic of transgression taking shape in Keith Talent. He is surely the epitome of the postmodern character with a divided subjectivity, unreservedly mutable and ludic. As a city-type, Keith is neither the urban walker nor the stalker, rather the idler. Moreover, Keith embodies the shrewd thug, one of the archetypes of the urban scene. However, his wit is constructed out of a collage of values and images propagated by the mass media and television culture. Not showing signs of any unmediated thought, he lacks a sense of individuality. D. J. Taylor rightly describes him as a "sublime barbarian" (*After the War* 192), an ironic inversion of the Rousseauian 'noble savage' in the city.

Some critics have, in fact, labelled *London Fields* a condition-of-England-novel. However, as is usual with Amis, most of the genre's conventions are parodied

---

<sup>91</sup>Freud's ideas about the interconnectedness of society and violence can be intriguingly relevant for addressing these issues. Most specifically, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (original publication 1930) he argues that the oceanic feeling (bonding) that holds society together leans upon the suppression of the aggressive nature within humanity. For Freud the oceanic feeling is a substitutive condition that affects a sense of belonging for the suffering caused by the repression of the primeval oceanic feeling. The feeling of attachment and love is consequently closely linked to aggressiveness; what is more, Freud proposes that love is but aggression redefined: human love is something like an oceanic aggressiveness that threatens to obliterate civilization. Leo Bersani in the Introduction that accompanies Freud's book convincingly explicates that: "civilization in Freud [. . .] is merely a cultural metaphor for the psychic fulfilment in each of us of a narcissistically thrilling wish to destroy the world, a wish 'fulfilled' in a monstrously ingenious phantasmatic scenario of self-destruction" (*Civilization* xix). It is also a Freudian tenet that conscience results from or is born out of the renunciation of drives. It is from the inversion of such well-established habits of thought that most of Freud's much-contended propositions feed. Amis is extremely susceptible to such psychological reversals in human behaviour, (the leap in the subversion of received cultural assumptions, as in the example above, conscience containing the imperative of self-destruction, and not vice versa), and often develops such inversions to their extremes. This can result in some of critics labelling him (often in tandem with Ian McEwan) as disturbing. See George Norton p. 9, or Kiernan Ryan's article, "Sex, Violence and Complicity: Martin Amis and Ian McEwan."



or pre-empted; for instance, on the final pages of book, Samson observes of the characters that “they’re like London, they are like the streets of London, a long way from any shape [. . .], strictly non-symmetrical, exactly lopsided” (*L F* 463). As a response to the ruthless materiality of the Thatcherite years, the condition-of-England-novel (gauging the social, moral and political consequences of Thatcher’s era) pushed itself and the novel as such towards the burlesque and the fantastic. Theoretical discourses on the urban as well try to forestall a conceptualisation of space as a new ideologically overdetermined form. This intertwinement makes a complex contribution to the transcription of the postmodern condition of the cities into the literary narrative. It is necessary to stress, then, that the urban novels are not to be read as works simply reflecting the ‘reality’ of the city; the representation of ‘city in literature’ is not a fictive image of the ‘real’ city just as fictional and ‘real’ are not concepts for the production of the literary city on which the latter can lean. On the contrary, these notions are effects of and produced by the very form of ‘city in literature.’ So, it is all the more curious that the production of the city in literature in this novel takes a distinctly sinister turn. In the following the chapter will move onto an examination of a writing environment born out of a relationship between writing a fictional text, on the one hand, and writing a literary murder mystery, on the other, and their respective bearing on the modalities of writing the contemporary urban scene.

### **Transpositions: Death and Narrativity**

This section will open by contending that the circular and sometimes vertiginous unfoldings of the postmodern space can be greatly relevant in terms of the reading schemes in the novel. It also proposes that such spatial structurations can be considered as *metatexts* of the space of contemporary literature and novels. In terms of the creative dilemmas facing the contemporary writer, it is worth turning to David Lodge’s proposition in *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971), since then a noted paradigm in literary criticism on recent British novelistic practice:



The novelist who has any kind of self-awareness must at least hesitate at the crossroads; and the solution many novelists have chosen in their dilemma is *to build their hesitation into the novel itself*. To the novel, the non-fiction novel, and the fabulation, we must add a fourth category: the novel which exploits more than one of these modes without fully committing itself to any, the novel about itself, the trick novel, the game novel, the puzzle novel, the novel that leads the reader [. . .] leaving him ultimately not with any simple or reassuring message or meaning but with a paradox about the relation of art to life (22).

Martin Amis is undoubtedly seeking to bring into play the narrative conventions of the realist and the fabular. *London Fields*, thus, unravels some peculiar conditions of reading (and writing) that are produced in the intertext of the self's convoluted engagement with real and imaginary cities of London. Most significantly, the novel can be taken to function as a hyperbolic text that attempts to negotiate both modes of writing not only on an epistemological plane but also in an ontological sense, by having recourse to metafictional devices, and, thus, transposing onto the level of the metanarrative the possible multiple relevance of the narrative as well as of the murderous and reading self.

Patricia Waugh rightly suggests in her formative study on the genre that metafiction is literature's metaphor for looking at "the world as book" (*Metafiction* 3). Furthermore, metafiction is in a way a generic term for the literary devices that break the frames of a narrative. However, as Mark Currie claims: "Not only is this boundary dramatised or signified within fiction as self-commentary, but also problematised by the idea that metafiction is less a property of the primary text than a function of reading" (Currie 5). As frames and boundaries are shown to be produced by reading, and interpretation is revealed to be as much uncovering of meanings as creating them, the prevalence of misconstruing the meanings of literary works gains an extra dimension in Amis's fiction. There are a great many characters who have difficulties reading literary texts (the most memorable of whom is John Self), or they keep

misreading such works, and this has a considerable impact on their lives. Reading literature gains some sort of ironic metaphysical import in these novels: to be a bad critic or an inept reader brings about condemnation. Interpretation and misinterpretation is an ominous activity in this novel as well, and death is inscribed (prefigured) from the start in the ensuing dark comedy of errors.

The interpretive mechanisms initially provided by *London Fields* are quite simple: Keith Talent is cast as the murderer of Nicola Six. Since the supposed identity of the murderer is revealed at the beginning, the novel, or rather, the conventions of the novel as a potential murder mystery are subverted; in this sense, it is an anti-detective story.<sup>92</sup> The way the novel develops and solves its own mystery is developed through the medium of a multiple authorial voice constituting and ‘deconstituting’ one another. The prolonged foreboding of the murder comprises the central narrative strand of the story; hence, the moment of revealing that the real murderer is the narrator, Samson Young, is a major disturbance in the narrative and reading logic. The moment the identity of the murderer is disclosed –the *peripeteia* in the story-, constitutes a scene of violence (literally and figuratively) as solving the murder case turns out to be parallel with making it happen.

In *Reading for the Plot* Peter Brooks defines detective fiction as the most elaborate type of narration that implicitly posits deviance as “the very condition for life to be ‘narratable’ [. . .]. In between a beginning prior to plot and an end beyond plot, the middle—the plotted text—has been in a state of *error*: wandering and misinterpretation” (*Reading for the Plot* 139). Deviance, in this context, can be obviously substituted with the more familiar critical terms of dilation and suspense. Narratology has long connected the process of reading with desire derived from constant narrative delay; Brooks binds this textual erotics to a sense of an ending: “If the motor of the narrative is desire, totalising, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end” (*Reading* 52). Accordingly, a bifurcating plot builds up

---

<sup>92</sup> My reading of *London Fields* as a murder story subverting the narrative conventions of detective stories or crime fiction is much indebted to Tamás Bényei’s stimulating *Rejtélyes Rend: A krimi, a metafizika és a posztmodern* (2000), a masterful and comprehensive analysis of the genre’s complex and continually evolving paradigms set in the wide context of the theoretical debates (literary or philosophical) that propose to engage with it.

in the novel as well. One aims at bringing the narrative forward, it is the plot of “concordance,” as Samson would have it, and the other aims at delaying or disorganizing it, a narrative of “discordance” detectable in the novel’s enigmatic inscription of *Crisis*, the significations of which vary from political and atmospheric to the more literary bad timing or being out of joint. The playful dichotomy of “concordance” and “discordance” overlaps with crime novels’ frequent figuration of murder embedded in a seemingly meaningful pattern, only to be eventually overthrown by a random and contingent event.

The double-oriented plot advocated by Brooks as subtending narrative discourses is made more composite by dint of Amis’s frequently drawing upon the theme of regression. This novelistic predilection can be taken to support a number of literary critics who maintain that the general theme of post-1945 English fiction is that of decline and withdrawal. Indeed, in postmodern literature repetition, as a stylistic device, draws upon the loss of origin and form, a general shapelessness where everything can be potentially multiplied. Connor similarly observes of contemporary fiction: “telling has become compulsorily belated, inextricably bound up with retelling, in all its idioms: reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche” (Connor 166). Samson Young’s artistic belief openly relates to this: “Perhaps because of their addiction to form, writers always lag behind the contemporary formlessness. They write about an old reality, in a language that’s even older. It’s not the words: it’s the rhythms of thought. In this sense all novels are historical novels” (*LF* 238-239). So, repetition is variously bound up with incompleteness and imitation that cannot adapt to or is always displaced from what it is supposed to represent, thus affirming that understanding always arrives too late (an authorial discordance) in the contemporary novel’s relation to its own present.

In terms of implementing narrative techniques, it can be claimed that repeating or doubling scenes is one of the fundamental narrative conventions in *London Fields*. Most crucially, the central scene of murder is repeated in a cryptic way several times in the text. Brian McHale holds that one, if not, the most important function of postmodernist fiction is the reiterative dramatization of death: “In a sense, every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death; so foregrounding ontological boundaries is a means of foregrounding death, of making death, the



unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way” (McHale 231). Indeed, repetition, it can be maintained, is generally held to disclose, reveal or come closer to something hidden or secretive. In the novel, however, repetition should be considered as textual grounds for reversion or hiding and, therefore, for prolonging and accruing reading patterns in the text. In this sense, repetition is conducive to the development of the bipolar plot mentioned above: it moves the story both forwards and backwards. Moreover, repetition is the main vehicle for creating the suspense of the narrative, a necessary ingredient of good story-telling. Suspense is mainly considered unsettling because it is ultimately a structural game threatening to forever delay the moment of deciphering. Fastening upon the haunting recurrence of the crime scene, the narrative tool of suspense is central in enabling me to propose that repetition is essentially an incomplete and open narrative paradigm of the (urban) novel. In contemporary novels solving the murder is often constructed as a textual repetition of it, as if repetition came full circle. As a consequence, the closure, open-ended as it may be, is after all, a product of repetition as well. Moreover, repetition is fundamental in experiencing the urban literary text as it indirectly dramatises some of the epistemological ambiguities inherent in crime fiction. In the contemporary urban murder story, the epistemological uncertainty revolving around the identity of the murderer, for example, gives way to the often-noted ontological plurality of possible selves and identities in the postmodern. In this case, the plurality of the city is written in the intersection of various narrative lines.

In the novel the nature of the murder and death is metaphysical. Necromantic Nicola Six claims to foresee her own death and that of the planet while several times she compares herself to a black hole, the latter perhaps suggestive of the ontological vacuum at the heart of literary London. Thinking of herself as a priestess of death, she attends funerals of unknown people. Furthermore, her place in the narrative is both that of excess and deficiency. She is in excess to the plot in the sense that she knows that she is going to be killed; on the other hand, she is incomplete in her role since she needs a murderer. In seeing herself as a human analogy of a black hole, Nicola Six not only evokes diverse apocalyptic images, but also some more familiar connotations in the context of the present research: sexuality and death, magnetism and destruction and also, absence in the sense of being an ‘absent character,’ an artifice and a mere

fantasy-figure.<sup>93</sup> Nicola is beyond the narrative, yet inexorably propels the narrative through her destructive vigour. She admits that she also sees herself as representing the death of love in the twentieth century. Imbued with destructive forces, she is a frightening impersonation of the Freudian tenet that cultural progress is intertwined with a draining of the principle of Eros and happiness.<sup>94</sup>

Nicola's death is a metaphor for an implicit link between creation and death, a relationship sustained and repeated through every act of reading the novel. Connecting the theme of death to writing and reading literature invokes Maurice Blanchot's observations in his remarkable study, *The Space of Literature*, wherein he suggests: "To read is thus not to obtain communication from the work, but to 'make' the work communicate itself. And, if we may employ an inadequate image, to read is to be one of the two poles between which through mutual attraction and repulsion, the illuminating violence of communication erupts" (Blanchot 198-199). Thus, for Blanchot, the act of reading a text marks both the start and the end of the possibility of meaning and signifying. Furthermore, Blanchot's understanding of the space of literature that can be compared to a site of exile and a place where unequivocal meaning disappears turns literature into a "place where someone dies: a nowhere, [. . .], which is *here* [. . .]: it is all departure, moving off, *éloignement*" (Blanchot 10), as Ann Smock explains in her Introduction to the book. The space of literature is then simultaneously inaccessible and inescapable, adds Smock, "it is its very own displacement or removal" (Blanchot 10). Similarly, *London Fields* knowingly pays heed to the idea that any closure in reading a literary text is a misreading, a closure achieved or created only at the expense of displacing or removing other readings.

The deathliness of creativity is also repeated in Samson's relationship to his own writing. Lodge's textual duality delineated above encapsulates the problematic

---

<sup>93</sup> In this respect see George Norton's dissertation, "Sexuality and Sexual Politics in the Writings of Martin Amis and Ian McEwan."

<sup>94</sup> In *Eros and Civilization* Herbert Marcuse similarly suggests that there is an inevitable link between progress and the gradual increase in guilt. This dialectic of human civilization – originating in renunciation and developing under progressive renunciation – projects its own self-destruction because as culture demands continuous sublimation, it is weakening Eros. The impoverishment of the sexual drive unbinds destructive impulses and "[c]ivilization is thus threatened by instinctual de-fusion" (Marcuse 71). The novel's playfully responds to this theory with the idea that the dinosaurs perished because of the death of love between them (*L F* 298).



relationship between fiction and “reality,” art and life. Postmodern characters are self-aware that they are dead signifiers as fictional figures; yet, they have a great potential for signification. After one of the sessions Nicola and Samson regularly have about the story they are ‘co-authoring’ during which they, among other things, discuss their parts in the course of events, they go out for a walk during which Samson Young thinks to himself: “Violence is near and inexhaustible. Even death is near. But none of it can touch Nicola and me. It knows better, and stays right out of our way. It can’t touch us. It knows this. We’re the dead” (*L F* 260). On the level of metafiction, Samson’s presence in the text essentially fastens upon the final experience of death. This can be read as a significant interpolation into the urban literary text of the deathly nature and intricacy of writing, a complicity that taps into such widely-held notions as there is no ‘outside’ place in the space of writing that does not always already deform or disfigure one’s position (i.e. impartiality). Kiernan Ryan pointedly remarks that it is the preoccupation with complicity that gives “Amis’s and McEwan’s fiction its most distinctive twist: complicity not merely as a theme, but as a condition of writing and a consequence of reading” (“Sex, Violence and Complicity” 212). More directly, the workings of collusion bind characters and author(s) alike and lead to the saturation of the text with the theme of contagious venality; in this respect, the novel can be read as an extended trope on art as an impure affair, a tenet Amis stresses in almost all of his novels.

Samson’s position as narrator and reader turns out to be unreliable, deflected and iterated. As an author he is turned into the space of the text and becomes part of fiction. This involution does further violence to the body of the literary text as the intrusion of the author in a way stands between the reader and the text. So, in a slightly different sense, yet turning back to the argument above, this place between the reader and the text, Samson’s place, is coterminous with the place of his death: “We’re the dead. Amazing that we can do this. More amazing that we want to. Hand in hand and arm in arm we totter, through communal fantasy and sorrow, through *London fields* (*sic*). We’re the dead” (*L F* 391).<sup>95</sup> As a result, all acts of writing *London Fields* must reside within the context of trying to cover over the violent disruptiveness of this self-cancelling knowledge.

---

<sup>95</sup> Emphasis mine.



Alternatively, in terms of *London Fields* as a metafictional novel about writing the city, Samson's loss of control over the narrative marks a breaking down of the singular authorial voice, a collapse that also signifies a cancelling out of an authoritative description of London. In other words, the disintegration of the singular voice inexorably gives way to the contemporary city often described as a city of many voices where each character creates his or her London. In the novel the voice of the city can be compared to "the cries of dogs or babies" (*L F* 404). Amis gives further colouring to his description of urban existence by repeatedly featuring tramps, the homeless, the street-people, thus reiterating a prominent thematic feature that the city is a *topos* of the alienated individual.<sup>96</sup> Just as on the metafictional plane writing fiction and writing the city in literature are linked to the experience of death, the narrated city's last voice in the novel is deathly and steeped in negation: "At last, late at night, the cries of the city are coming together and turning into something, with the eclipse so close now – the city is finally finding its voice, like the thud of a sullen heart, saying, 'No . . . No . . . No . . .'" (*L F* 412). All of these voices provide an alterity to urban fiction, and therefore make the claim that the city is composed of the supplementarity of various narrative voices all the more relevant.

The conflation of narrative voices and planes within the spatial matrix of the novel, and the ensuing dislocation can be likened to Fredric Jameson's previously mentioned assertion that postmodern spatial formations disorient the self, pictured as the viewer who cannot ultimately behold the multitudinous spatiality of Bonaventure Hotel. By the same token, the inventive or aleatory nature of the postmodern narrative opens up a space that refuses to predetermine the self, or in this case, the identity of the murderer. On the very first page of *London Fields*, we find Samson Young buckling down to his long-awaited novel. He sees himself as if precipitated into the inner world or space of the story. Reflecting upon the possible outcomes, he realises that in order for the story to take place somebody has to die: "I know the murderer, I know the murderee. I know the time, I know the place. I know the motive (*her*) motive and I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal, [. . .]. The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can't stop people, once they

---

<sup>96</sup> A ckroyd notes that the two most common London types used to be the beggar and the butcher (*London* 253).

*start creating*” (L F 1). This realisation intimates on a *metalevel* the forthcoming intertwinement of death, creativity and narrativity (the possibility to narrate and to be narrated respectively). Although Samson kills and survives Nicola, the sense of possible worlds in the novel has become so overbearing that it propels him towards self-extinction as the novel ends with him writing a suicide note in preparation to die. Ultimately, Samson Young collapses into the novelistic play of figuration just as, in some respect, the materiality of space (London Fields) is dissolved by the self-referential play of the novel. It can be argued that, in a metapoetic sense, Samson must die in order to arrest the (urban) play of difference indefinitely.

Crucially, the fact that Samson Young will die only becomes manifest in the epilogue written by Samson himself. The postscript entitled “Endpapers” is a medium for Samson’s emptying himself out of his own writing inasmuch as writing, as post-structuralist critics would have it, is both a form of repetition of life (thus an assurance of enduring the imminent annihilation suspended throughout the narrative) and a marker of the author’s death. The final part functions as a coda that supplements all the stories running in the novel; it is the ultimate rearrangement of all the narrative elements that consequently institutes a certain reading backwards. In addition, it marks yet another disturbance in the workings of readerly expectations, exhibiting as it does a conflict between reading schemes and “reality” and thus breaking once more the frame of Samson’s narrative. It is therefore the revelatory arrangement of the novel’s rhetoric of reading, a negative assertion whereby the meaning of the novel becomes available to the reader in this interstitial or transitory state between story and frame. In conjunction with the Note, the Endpapers is a marker of a discontinuity between the world of the novel and of the ‘real’ London Fields. It is a novelistic setting, a textual imprint or narrative carving of the boundaries where the ‘reality’ of the novel ends or dies. The novel’s pun on this rupture of relations is the last chapter’s title, “The Deadline,” an epithet that can mean at least three things: Samson’s deadline for finishing the novel, the line of life and death beyond which Samson, as the author, is dissolved as well as the end (death) of the novel. It is through the construction of such spatialised textuality (created by the Note, the novel, and the Endpapers) that Amis’s fiction can produce an imaginary cartography of relations between the space of a novel and modes of urban spatiality, and can, additionally, render a specific Anglo-American literary landscape - momentarily marked by the insertion of a blank

page when Samson, it seems, briefly flies back to America - an important transatlantic cultural correlation to be explored in the following chapter.



## Chapter Six: Changing Fields of Vision: Urban *Textscapes* of Anglo-America

The last chapter investigates the formation of a specific Anglo-American metropolitan identity and urban novelistic discourse within Amis's fiction; more closely, it traces out how *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) generates new cultural tropes within the urban that reconceive the 'city novel' in terms of a transatlantic site of circulations, fluxes and transferrals, monetary, aeronautical, spatial, libidinal, and linguistic. Amis's exorbitant transatlantic geographies will be read as sustaining and sustained by constant permutations, acts of consumption, waste and excess and the intercontinental rifts between such modes of expenditure. It is to be preliminarily noted that as the ostensible cultural dominant, America's sway on Amis's prose is strongly literary, primarily discernible in the fact that both of his major literary mentors, Saul Bellow and Vladimir Nabokov, were American writers (even if naturalized Americans). Bellow and Nabokov, as is substantiated by the collections of essays and articles, *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America* (1986), *Visiting Mrs Nabokov* (1993), and more recently, *The War Against Cliché* (2001), and his highly enjoyable memoir, *Experience* (2000), have been greatly influential in the formation of Amis's artistic *credo*. Indeed, as is also revealed in nearly all of the interviews Amis has hitherto given, their influence in terms of language and narrative concerns represents an indelible mark in his fiction. More pertinently to our purposes, both Bellow and Nabokov have been critically acclaimed for their remarkable narrative skill in giving artistic rendition to the unique and ever-changing urban speech-patterns.

In a number of interviews Amis has asserted that America's main draw for him is the linguistic similitude, a similarity that, I would add, zestfully renders the difference or transatlantic disparity between the various usages of English all the more pivotal. Amis's transatlantic narrative can be similarly taken to engage in representations of American cities so as to shed some critical light on urban formations on this side of the Atlantic. What is seemingly proposed thereby is that one

way of knowing London is by knowing the other's (America or New York) sameness and difference. His novels, notably, *Money* under closer scrutiny in this chapter, inescapably inscribes this ambiguity into a shifting narrative that while stretching out the horizons of the city of London in literature, also shows a grotesque debacle of transatlantic travelling and subsequently creates problematic definitions of the often-celebrated transatlantic urban self. It is the aim of this chapter to analyse the transforming, so to speak, travelling representations of Anglo-America in *Money* with some relevant examinations of the ways *London Fields* tangentially constructs the imaginary place of America within the matrix of the contemporary city.

### English Journeys: Literary Travels in Transatlantic Space

Apart from regular contributions to American newspapers and journals (such as the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Atlantic*, *Esquire*, and *Vanity Fair*), Amis's most overt intellectual commitment to date is a collection of journalism entitled *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America* published in 1986. In the introduction to the book Amis reveals that he understands America less as an empirically well-defined geographical place and more as a transcendental presence, a cultural ubiquity: "America is more like a world than a country" (*Moronic Inferno* ix), claims Amis. The element of the imaginary, and perhaps the fantastic, ascribed to America by such a definition is further enhanced by the title of the book itself: *Moronic Inferno*. The synecdochic title is an act of naming that is, as Amis has put it, "resonant and prescient" of "a possible future, one in which the moronic inferno will cease to be a metaphor and will become a reality: the only reality" (*M I* xi), the prefatory remarks hereby disclosing a possibility of the linguistic figuration taking over what it names.

Moreover, Amis also took notice of how he "had already written a book about America – unpremeditated, accidental, and in instalments" (*M I* ix). America, it seems, was taking shape gradually, by accretions, "unpremeditated" (*M I* ix) in his

writings for the idea of collecting them into a book arrived only much later. America's insistence in his writing forms a persistent yet inadvertent relationship that, albeit accidental, can concurrently reveal something intrinsic about the place of America within contemporary cultural discourses and novelistic practices. In particular, the procedure of assembling an investigative book piece by piece, article by article can be as restrictive as revelatory and productive of America as a narrative scheme, a concept or a place best approached "if you come at her from at least a dozen different directions" (*MI* ix).<sup>97</sup> By the same token, the phrase 'moronic inferno' does not describe only a relatively local American condition; rather, it is meant to stand for something more global and eternal (x): "It is also, of course, primarily a metaphor, a metaphor for human infamy" (x). Imagining it as a chaotic place, the narrativised reportage of the book ultimately locates America anywhere and nowhere at the same time, claiming that it can be at any place and at any time. Thus, the intriguing title-phrase and America's representation in Amis's writing assumes a figurative and metaphoric import that indicates that direct, factual and unequivocal description of the complexity of America would be erroneous.

As the concluding sentences of the previous chapter suggest, the transatlantic novelistic mediation is significantly taken up by *London Fields*: "No doubt there'll be surprises when I start to look around, but I always felt I knew where England was heading. America was the one you wanted to watch" (*LF* 3), says Samson Young to himself on arrival. The novel upholds therefore a geographical connective much present in Amis's fiction wherein America is the 'space of writing' while the actual scene of writing is London. On a metafictional plane *London Fields* unfolds a supplementary logic between America and England: Samson Young comes to England to put an end to his writer's block and write a novel after twenty years, while Mark Asprey, the English writer, goes to America for a source of inspiration - one of the subtexts of the novel is then a narrative economy of exchange. It adds to the complexity of Anglo-American supplementarity that Samson Young suffers from a terminal illness; so, he comes to London not only to write but also to die, thus

---

<sup>97</sup> The origins of 'moronic inferno' are similarly multiple and composite as the phrase has been handed down and reinterpreted from writer to writer: Amis admits that the expression was put to his attention by Saul Bellow, who, in turn, attributes it to Wyndham Lewis (*Moronic Inferno* x).



psychopathologizing the act of urban narration. Amis's innovative way of drawing distinctive transatlantic geographies of place, identity and authorship leads one to consider Randall Stevenson's poignant appraisal of the status of British contemporary fiction in the early nineties. A fictional correlate for Stevenson's arguments is found in the enigmatic heroine, Sarah Woodruff, in John Fowles's celebrated *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The opening novelistic scene, showing Sarah standing at the shore of the sea waiting for her French lover to return (who remains an imaginary lover since he will not return to the shores of England), is a metaphor, according to Stevenson, of British novelists' tendency to look abroad for inspiration (Smyth ed. 32).

On a similar note, Samson Young looks to America and plans to return for a visit, but in the end, in the middle of Chapter 12 he oversleeps at Heathrow airport. Between the end of one section, "Let's go to America," and the start of the next one, "Well I'm back," the vista the reader is presented with on page 237 is a blank page. A zero degree of representation as such, the empty page negatively brings into relief some important characteristics of such a typographical exposition. In this regard, Richard Brown makes an important claim in his chapter, "Postmodern Americas in the Fiction of Angela Carter, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan," whereby he advances as America's closest metaphor in *London Fields* "a postmodern version of the familiar Enlightenment concept of the *tabula rasa*, continuing the identification of America and writing" ("Postmodern Americas" 102). The critical concept of the empty slate is a suggestive memory trace in the text since in proffering *tabula rasa* as a spatial trope for America the text takes account of missing worlds in the novel: in terms of topography the image of a blank page or empty slate is an empty placeholder both in the figurative and the literal senses. Travelling and journeys in terms of spatial psychodynamics have been considered to be analogous to mental movements; generally, there is some implicit epistemological import attached to them: the self travels from one place of knowledge to the other. "In the cult of Enlightenment," argues Sennett, "people sought to move for the sake of physical stimulation and mental clarification. These hopes derived from science, extended into the design of the environment, the reform of the economy, even into the formation of poetic sensibility" (Sennett 275). *London Fields* presents, however, that travelling is not so much a progression as a regression; it is yet another disclosure of the self-effacing

narrative logic of the novel for in failing to relate to rites of passage or to gaining experience, the (imaginary) journey signifies a place of lack (another blank page). Its fictional content, if any, is reflected by its formal or graphic existence as a vacuum.

Inserted at the end of Chapter 12, the empty page or space of America also disturbs Samson's command over the narrative as this chapter significantly marks a clear division in the thematic and typographical arrangements of the twenty-four chapters. Before Chapter 12, the chapters are arranged in clusters of three, while the last twelve chapters are grouped in one section. Moreover, on closely considering the titles, a subtle authorial trick reveals itself: while the first twelve chapter-titles appear to sustain Samson Young's position as the author-figure of the novel, the last twelve chapters suggest that there is at least another level implemented in controlling the narrative, thus effecting a destabilisation of the authorial position. When Samson "returns" from America he is "in bits," he "really took a tumble" and has "lost everything" (*L F* 238). On a *metalevel*, a planned yet never accomplished visit to America signifies that the nothingness of America can nevertheless significantly textualize authorship: the blank page is an aperture staging an exchange of authorship. Samson's loss of control over the narrative does not only mark a displacement or iteration of a singular authorial voice on London, as formerly discussed, but also an obliteration of a voice - or masking an absence in its very proliferation - that always promises to survey American cityscapes yet ultimately fails to directly address it. Concurrently, the blank page is mimetic of the logic of the narrative since it fragments the text; it creates a little narrative within the larger one, and thus complements on a material or physical level the disintegration of narrative urban voices.

The blank space of America, however, can be also conceived as full in its emptiness since it can incorporate any act of inscription. As a textual metaphor of writing, it invokes a place that has been scraped over, a spatial metaphor for what is un-written, or, alternatively, un-European. It suitably figures a process of unlearning and is simultaneously the first signifier for writing over an undesirable past. The topographical ellipsis is also indicative of American urban spaces, themselves vast cultural palimpsests constantly scribbled over. In this respect the novel can be a revelation that the Promised Land or Elysian Fields of America- as opposed to 'London Fields' or "Somnopolis" "reek[ing] of sleep [. . .], and of insomniac worry



and disquiet, and thwarted escape” (*L F* 2) - can be essentially hollow, a vast and empty space. The blank page thus stands for the possibility that the supposed monumentality of American cityscapes is a void or that there is no adequate objective signifier for the experience of America. In this the novel corresponds to Baudrillard’s view of America as a landscape of vanishing points given over to an “aesthetics of disappearance” (*America* 9). Indeed, in his philosophical travelogue through *America*, Baudrillard’s vision of the void subtending American spaces would be the desert, its “geological monumentality” (*America* 3), the signs of which are “void of all meaning, arbitrary and inhuman, one crosses without deciphering them” (*America* 127). Furthermore, in *America*, Brian Jarvis comments, even the cities are “interpreted exclusively as the reproduction of a mythical desertscape” (Jarvis 38).<sup>98</sup> Indeed, a “sublime form” (*America* 49), the desert dissipates social discourses in Baudrillard’s view; it is an “ideal schema” (*America* 19) of society’s disappearance and driving through it is a “spectacular form of amnesia” (*America* 8). All in all, *America* maps America as a land of contradictions, or to be faithful to the concept of *tabula rasa*, as a space defined by self-erasure always-already containing the counterpoint of any description (such as utopia – dystopia). If, on the other hand, in the words of de Certeau “[e]very story is a travel story – a spatial practice” (de Certeau 115), so is the narrative of America a travel story within the novel, even if absent. In *London Fields*, it can thus be concluded, America is the novel’s point of absence, a narrative schema of disappearance, and, not least, a vanishing point of Samson’s authorship.

In the novel America is a hidden intertext and Amis seems to be able to only come to it through his writing’s insistence on its fictional order. The novel, as a consequence, diminishes the expansive topography of America into a *topo-graph* of what it fails to describe, a graphic trace of travelling represented as an empty form of (authorial) exchange. The ontological instability (non-presence) of America in the novel functions as a memorial to the failure of the novel’s topography and of writing place. The blank page is a major epistemological rupture that partitions the realities of

---

<sup>98</sup> In *Postmodern Cartographies* Brian Jarvis offers the following list as elements of the “geocentric” American cultural imaginary: “the Frontier, the Wilderness, the Garden, the Land of Plenty, the Wild West, the Small Town, the Big City, the Open Road” (Jarvis 6).



London and America, but also the worlds of the book, hence the cut is ontological as well. As a novelistic juncture of authorship, it can be argued that it is a place where the reality of Samson Young's London is dissipated and the materiality of the book is thrown into relief. As McHale has commented on the significance of blank pages in postmodernist fiction, "the introduction of blank space has the effect of foregrounding the presence and materiality of the book, and of disrupting the reality of the projected world. Spacing, we might say, allows the book to show through the fiction" (McHale 181). It ultimately figures as "the spacing of the text" (McHale 182). America is thus a space of semantic, material and narrative discontinuity in the novel, or to fold my argument back on the previous chapter, it is yet another transposition in the text.

It is possible to conclude then that America's space in *London Fields* is an abstraction whose substance can be described in terms of its 'placelessness;' it is its erased essence that attests to the concept of America as the new frontier of the British novelistic discourse and urban novel for Amis's fiction in a sense marks or begins an erosion of the gap that has long divided the American and British novelistic scope.<sup>99</sup> Conversely, in *Money* America has a very strong material existence. The dual

---

<sup>99</sup> As Patricia Waugh has noted in her important study on the status and influences of post-war British fiction, *Harvest of the Sixties*, whilst America initially signified a cultural vacuum in the British literary imagination, it subsequently became one of the main sources of change in the cultural paradigms of Britain. A long-standing tradition among British writers (like George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh) was to "indic[t] America for its cultural barbarism;" after 1960 however, a number of them "sought inspiration in its contemporary writing: Hughes, Gunn, Tomlinson, Dunn among the poets; J. G. Ballard and Martin Amis, with his style of morally insouciant urban radical chic of the novelists" (*Harvest of the Sixties* 48). D. J. Taylor also acknowledges Amis as one of the first writers to imagine and give literary rendition of an Anglo-American landscape. *Money*, in Taylor's view, "is one of the first novels to appreciate the fact that we inhabit not so much an English or a Western as an *Anglo-American* society" (*A Vain Conceit* 131). Another influential critic of post-war British fiction, Bernard Bergonzi, author of *The Situation of the Novel* (1969; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1972), equally perceived *Money* to be an important "transatlantic" novel. In an interview conducted in 1990, Bergonzi was asked how he saw the relationship between the English and the American novel in the light of the acclaimed rejuvenation of the English novel in the 1980s in the wake of its previous dullness and small-scale domesticity. In this interview he singled out Amis's *Money* as a: "most brilliant novel which has a great deal of American writing in it – Mailer, Burroughs and so on – but which is also painfully sharply observed work of English social comedy: he's got them both going at the same time" (Tredell ed. 60-61). More recently, John Begley in an article entitled "Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism: The Transatlantic and Dialogic Structure of Martin Amis's *Money*" calls Self a "transitional figure, a harbinger for an emerging culture that remained incipient in Britain during the early 1980s" ("Satirizing" 82). Begley's article, although seemingly conjoins with the critical concerns that the present chapter is about to undertake, only appreciates, as the majority of the other articles dedicated to the novel also only do, the social realist comedy and political satire reflected in the conspicuous consumerism subtending the narrative. My reading, however, is informed by more textual and discursive modes of interpretation comprehensively affiliated with disentangling the hitherto barely considered urban fabric of the novel.

locations of America and England in *Money* can be taken to gradually work towards eroding the difference between the two where London becomes America and America becomes London in a palpable cultural commutation of the two, this constituting then an important instant of *osmosis* in the text. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Amis knows London because of its difference, inconsistency and its resistance to the possibility of becoming a reassuringly representative rendition of the urban experience. In this case, however, London is hovering on the verge of becoming assimilated into a transatlantic space. John Self significantly reveals that he “pitched” his “voice somewhere in the mid-Atlantic” (*M* 196). Shuttling between the two countries nevertheless lends figurative and thematic ingenuity to Self’s story and such novelistic preoccupations return us to Brown’s article and his arguments that:

The space between British and American culture provides a space from which their [Angela Carter’s, Ian McEwan’s and Martin Amis’s] writing can emerge. In none is America simply defined as ‘other.’ Though each constructs a cultural identity, each does it in the context of what Fredric Jameson has called the ‘erosion of difference’ itself, characteristic of the postmodern world. In each this ‘other’ may be recognised by its tendency to become increasingly present as part of the ‘self’ from which it is supposedly displaced (“Postmodern Americas” 108).

As a brief reminder of *Money*’s plot, it is interesting to note that in spite of its overt postmodernism, the novel’s *fabula* is markedly linear or conventional. In the interview with Riviere, Amis curiously delineates *Money* as “essentially a plotless novel.” He adds: “It is what I would call a *voice* novel” (Riviere 113). John Self arrives in New York to be the director of his first feature film, *Good Money*, contracted to be partly based on his life. The American producer of the film, Fielding Goodney, Self’s chief “moneyman,” best defined as a “million-dollar laugh” (*M* 125), deceptively addresses him as Slick throughout the novel (as it turns out this is a farcical misnomer) and entices him with the limitless luxury he will be permanently



indulging in after the film, he is promised, becomes a blockbuster. At the start of the novel John Self is at the height of his fortune; he is an advertisement producer in London, his life a metonymical extension of the excesses his commercials promote. His trademark is to advertise anything trading on or pandering to sensual pleasures. Seemingly in control of the entire production process, he has high hopes concerning the fabular financial rewards on his film, originally set in London, then relocated to America. He shuttles several times between America and Britain, but his trips to New York gradually devolve into futility as he is increasingly disintegrating. He has made another contract (an outright literary venality) with the writer Martin Amis, a metaphoric act of losing command of the production process. Apart from the several women he pursues and gets entangled with, he is seriously involved with two: Selina Street, his girlfriend (who also sets him up eventually), and Martina Twain, the “sublime object” of Self’s fantasies. “The thing about Martina is that I can’t find a voice to summon her with. The voices of money, weather and pornography (all that uncontrollable stuff), they aren’t up to the job when it comes to Martina. I think of her and there is a speechless upheaval in me” (*M* 119). By the end of the novel, he has become insolvent; the production of the film has turned out to be a fraud; Selina has left him and he has suffered a double-defeat. Firstly, he suffers quite literally at the hands of Fielding Goodney (Fielding attacks him cross-dressed in the disguise of the mysterious caller, Frank the Phone, who was constantly harassing him whilst in New York); secondly, on the last pages of the book, Self is beaten in chess by the writer-character, Martin Amis. John himself concludes the narrative of his life as follows: “My life was a joke. My death will be serious” (*M* 380).

It is the contention of this chapter that the novel as travel writing fastens upon an Anglo-American dialectic, while the great deal of motion displayed by it finds an equivalent on the level of narrative discourse in terms of fast language and quickly shifting novelistic scenes. The curious circuitousness of the narrative logic shows that this constant movement does not so much bring forward Self’s *telos* as mimics through an iterative movement and incremental variation a mode of travelling whose primary narrative is full of action, while its secondary one is empty. Travelling is one of the central modes of narrative expenditure in the novel, a form of self-depletion that induces Self’s blackouts and gradual breaking down - it only shows places in fragments and eventually leaves the self in ruins. The subtending map of Self’s travels



is embedded in what could be described as that of a figure to figure whose ground is textual, metonymically shifting and reproductive of the narrative logic of repetitiveness and accretion without progress. In *Money* moving in space is turned into an exorbitant pattern of jetting; thus a diffuse awareness of spatiality and a loss of vision is all the more stressed. As a means of transportation, shuttling through space replaces urban perambulation, strolling and surveying with a new viewpoint of panning. By the same token, while trams were often construed as images of the incessant motion and interconnectedness of the Modernist city (like Joyce's Dublin),<sup>100</sup> in the postmodern it is airplanes that in terms of traversal represent the new mode of acceleration, or rather, a quick to-and-fro movement where the focus is on sheer repetitive motion, punctuated by metallic noise. In this sense, it can be claimed that in John Self's perception the energy of the solid because material city turns more and more into Iain Sinclair's widely-recognised concept of 'liquid' city.

Likewise, the disjointedness of sets of linguistic constructs to be soon discussed can be held as critical-textual transmissions of the constantly shifting scenes between London and New York whereby the novelistic scope and questions of motivation are being endlessly reconstructed. John Self is always in transit, in a cultural or consumerist flux. The transatlantic jetting continuously propels him away from the possibility of identity and Englishness, and also of a coherent narrative, almost rendered superfluous in being propped on fleeting presences between planes taking off and landing. Rapid traversals and too much motion can pose important questions as regards Self's identity. The novel typically conveys this in a comic way; when asked if he is English, Self's response is: "I'm half American and half asleep" (*M* 9). The novel is, in addition, saturated with images of "attrition," "fraying" and loss or depletion of energy imitative of the friction of planes landing on the tarmac. Distance thereby is transmuted into speed in the novel; volition is driven out by velocity:<sup>101</sup> the repetitiveness of shuttling devolves into a non-narrative where shuttling becomes the image of spatialised time, of a circular passage temporal and

---

<sup>100</sup> In *Ulysses* Joyce calls the constant urban event of "coming" and "passing away," of demolishing, building and rebuilding, the energetic stop-and-start rhythms of urban existence as "cityful" (Alter 127).

<sup>101</sup> In this respect see Paul Virilio's *A Landscape of Events*.

spatial. In the next parts of the chapter the objective remains to extensively consider the ways the energy and dynamics of the urban text, the flows and fluctuations of capital, the momentum of travelling and the often-quoted resounding verbal performance of the novel significantly correlate.

### **Character and Form: Audio-Specular *Topo-graphics***

The chapter will now turn to addressing Amis's verbal artistry and its bearing on writing and mapping the novelistic geography of London and New York respectively. The argument of the chapter is that the topographical descriptions generated in the novel assert a subversive link to realism's conventions. *Money* is exceptional in Amis's *oeuvre* since the urban idiom therein is so animated that language almost becomes a character in itself. As Diedrick has pointed out, the first passage of the novel is representative of the distinctive vocabulary of the novel subtended by an intersection of character as language, language as character (Lane and Mengham eds. 244): "As my cab pulled off FDR Drive, somewhere in the early Hundreds, a low-slung Tomahawk full of black guys came sharking out of lane and sloped in fast right across our bows" (*M* 1). In these descriptions language becomes a landmark (in the sense of using Americanisms) while cityscapes (visual) become sound (auditory). The opening sentence of the novel is also an apt manifestation of the eclectic activity of the city; it suggests that *Money* will be an acutely visual novel firmly invested in fully manifesting the visceral immediacy of urban spaces. Zooming in on the first scene, it can be already noted that urban stratum or the novelistic plan of spreading the city out blends visual precision and phantasm. The sheer extravagant presentness of the city is enhanced by foregrounding the very materiality of language via sounds and vocals; so, as a result, cityscapes are not described, rather they are performed. Indeed, Amis's urban textscapes are theatrical and performative, in the words of D. J. Taylor, the novel is "a skit-on-a-skit-on-a-skit, an infinitely layered text" (*A Vain Conceit* 106), a string of rapid urban episodes wherein the city is captured in lists and catalogues taken over by phonetics (a profusion of assonances and consonances):

New York is a *jungle*. Beneath the columns of the old rain forest, made of melting macadam, the mean Limpopo of swamped Ninth Avenue bears an angry argosy of crocs and dragons, tiger fish, noise machines, sweating rainmakers. On the corners stand witchdoctors and headhunters, babbling voodoo-men – the natives, the jungle-smart natives. And at night, under the equatorial overgrowth and heat-holding cloud cover, you hear the ragged parrot-hoot and monkeysqueak of the sirens, and then fires flower to ward off monsters. Careful: the streets are sprung with pits and nets and traps (*M* 193).

In the passage above it is also tenable that the novelistic diction, although perhaps uneasy and edgy, conveys a reverie of perception, the urban vocalized as a drama, a vibrant montage of sensory impressions. In these lists the auditory urban is dissonant and abrupt; it simultaneously engages and disengages the self. It is also manifest that the urban texture of the novel substantially resides in sonar fragments and ruins, thus at the same time making the visual in a way inadequate to the material. In this the city truly emerges as a “punk-poetic” form: “the air hung above and behind me like an old sink full of old washing-up” (*M* 159). “Blasted, totalled, broken-winded, shot-faced London, doing time under sodden skies” (*M* 159) is shown as if probed for creative transcription, yet significantly differing from Sinclair’s autographic city such as *Lights Out for the Territory*, which signifies itself at every turn.

Analysing Amis’s unique style of rendering the environment of his novels, the critic Richard Todd is unawares suggesting further implications as to their role as spatial referents. Todd’s main concern lies in the nature of the intrusive author in *Money*, a narrative device that, he rightly claims, inevitably structures the literary text into a self-reflexive complexity. Narrative voice is stylised to an extent, Todd’s argument goes, that elements of topography have been depleted of reference to the tradition of realistic representation (“The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction” 135), inevitably contributing to fading out a sense of reality from the places John Self inhabits: “On masculine Madison (tightly buttoned, like a snooker



waistcoat) I took my left and headed north into the infinite trap of air. Cars and cabs swore loudly at each other, looking for trouble, ready to fight, to confront. And here are the streets and their outlandish personnel" (*M* 19). More relevant to the present inquiry, though, is the argument that the diffraction of style and description combines with a dispersal of self into several voices, a fragmentation that confirms "our sense of a single selfhood complexly refracted through the existence of various, duplicitously conflicting, voices" ("The Intrusive Author" 136). Voice thus is prefigured in the novel as failing to be revelatory of an intrinsic relation between language and the self. A fundamental rapport is being woven, as a consequence, into the fabric of the narrative, a relationship that builds upon the shifting nature of the contemporary city constructed of many voices, where the self alternates between belonging and not belonging to these urban configurations. If Amis's novelistic discourse is caught up in attempting to capture the ceaseless flow of urban life, then so, too, is the reader compelled to consider the possible gap between experiencing and knowing the city.

John Self is in a sense cast as a desiring automaton propelled along a dense route of serial pleasures, or in his own words he is "a salty slipstream thinning out and trailing down over the black Atlantic" (*M* 264). In his inner space or "private culture" (*M* 123) money, erotic desire and language become interchangeable in a circuitous set of signification. His is a frantic libidinal economy that is fragmentary and produces several voices in his head: the jabber of money, "sums, subtractions, compounded terrors and greeds" (*M* 108), the voice of pornography, "the voice of ageing and weather, of time travel [. . .], the ever-weakening voice of stung shame, sad boredom and futile protest" (*M* 108). These voices can be also marked as sites of narrative babelism, moments of internalising the sonic overload that the urban presents. Alternatively, such perspectives signify the collapse of language onto itself: these voices produce semantic excess or surplus illustrative of the performative effect of the differential city. Elsewhere, Diedrick has suggested that the last two types of voices contradict the first two, although Self is not aware of it, this marking, then, a key narrative act of the four dissonant voices constituting a decentred and fragmented Self (*Understanding* 73). The image of the contemporary urban is, one could argue, further reinforced as a mental state of cultural barbarism with a thoroughgoing profanation of a sense of identity. The voices are sites of enunciation, always divided and plural

showing that Self is captivated: his head is a corporeal terrain constantly replaced by 'other spaces.'

Amis is masterful in conveying the rhythm and mental experience of the contemporary city. Acoustic dissonance can be taken to stand in analogical relationship to urban street culture, as if Self's complaint that his "head is a city" (*M* 26) was indeed "happening" in the jamming of voices into an almost semiotic incoherence: "Jet take-offs, breaking glass, ice scratched from the tray" (*M* 1). It is noteworthy in this respect that throughout the narrative Self suffers from tinnitus, a medical condition of a persistent and disturbing noise in the ear. Lacking any external physical source, tinnitus further attests to Self's existence as delimited by spatial confusion and psychic fragmentation. Given the textual conjoining of images of the city and perceptions of the self, the novel constitutes a resonant echo of the connection between the metropolis, the superabundance of sensations and visual data, mental life and *blasé* attitude proposed by Simmel, in particular in his strikingly prescient "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903). It ought to be also mentioned at this point that the street used to be a place of discourse in the urban, an unorganised public forum where people could talk and exchange ideas before (the logic of late) capitalism disrupted urban interaction. In its immense energy and exuberance, one of the striking features of Self's urban *patois* is that it is often incoherent; the entire novel can be conceived of as sustained *cacophony*. The acoustic delirium of the four voices Self hears in his head can be taken to relate to the huge varieties of language simultaneously present in the streets of London or New York. On the one hand, the vivacious chatter in the streets of New York supposedly fed to a great extent on multilingualism; the medley produced by the pedestrians was a site of negotiation for the immigrants, a place of acculturation. On the other hand, the novel mocks the figure of the *heteroglossic* cosmopolitan: "stereo, radio crackle, interference. They speak sonar, bat-chirrup, pterodactylese, fish-purr" (*M* 87).<sup>102</sup> John Self's encounter with the city, it can be concluded, produces a memorable urban vernacular of the postmodern city, psychotic and at the same time exhilarating, essentially refusing to mean 'coherently.' Self's verbal city is noisy and polyphonic, a discursive din figured

---

<sup>102</sup>On a Bakhtinian heteroglossic note, in *Einstein's Monsters* West-London is called "carnival county" (27).



as if drowning out the meaning from words, logocentrism from language, and civilisation from the urban. The clamour produced by urban commotion has been previously chronicled in literature; in particular, Victorian London was noted for its unceasing roar or deafening noise. Ackroyd in *London: The Biography* imaginatively considers the “sense of disturbing, almost transcendental, sound” of nineteenth century London as “an aspect of the mightiness and horror” of the city; its noise “became numinous,” Ackroyd asserts (*London* 75). Indeed, in *Money* as well Self’s consciousness, obfuscated by hearing “computer fugues, Japanese jam sessions, didgeridoos” (*M* 5), points beyond itself and thereby aptly records the disjointedness of urban existence that the narrative is implicitly documenting.

In the novel great emphasis is placed on the ‘linguistic materiality’ of New York and London. A tumultuous urban idiolect is created that shapes the city with frenzied vividness. Linguistic formulations are febrile and assume an animism that gives over to a certain *grand guignol* quality of London that perhaps Diedrick calls a “dazzling punk-poetic eloquence” (*Understanding* 75): “I strode through meat-eating genies of subway breath. I heard the ragged hoot of sirens, the whistles of two-wheelers and skateboarders, pogoists, gocarters, windsurfers. I saw the barrelling cars and cabs, shoved on by the power of their horns. I felt all the contention, the democracy, all the italics, in the air” (*M* 6). In this passage the cars, skateboarders, two-wheelers as minutiae of the city are all figures, or rather vehicles of the urban mode bringing the city to life via incremental repetition and thus representing the nervousness, velocity and energy of the urban. The urban discourse of *Money* is traceable in fragmentary reductions and juxtapositions. The space of the city is in this regard arhythmic, a place of confluence and clash of power structures. Such descriptions of city life, one may assume, are meant to be satirical at the expense of the new urban scene; what they also critically imply, however, is a loss of agency in the midst of rapid transformations of the post-industrial metropolis. The novel, as a consequence, implicitly addresses the problems and effects of living in the fast hence placeless urban spaces of New York.

It could be argued that of all of Amis’s novels to date *Money* stages and performs most directly and on the largest scale the encounter of Amis’s fiction with the urban. An underlying premise of the novel is to present the condition of the



American metropolis in all its paradoxes, one being that in spite of all the energy, the urban ican be a disembodied or enervated space. Baudrillard sees New York as a land of solitude, of minimal co-existence where only the charged field of electricity and being crowded in close proximity keeps people together (*America* 15). John Self, however, experiences the electric field of New York in a different way, in the beginning at least. He revels in “all the hustle and razz” that puts him in “a different position [. . . ], pulled together, really on the ball” (*M* 96). The “thrust, the horsepower, the electrodynamics of the Manhattan grid” (*M* 189) charges him up. America is a place of “dense variety” that “stirs” him, so London can only feel “watery, sparse” (*M* 118) in comparison: “In summer, London was an old man with a bad breath. If you listen, you can hear the sob of weariness catching in his lungs. Unlovely London. Even the name holds heavy stress” (*M* 85). So, the form the city of New York takes in the novel is not to be determined through physical and esoteric functions (as one would find in Ackroyd or Sinclair), rather the city is a haphazard projection of erotic intensities experienced through Self’s libidinal zones. Self is engulfed by the sensations of New York, by the iron and glass immensity of the city, suffused with the affects of “barbaric nausea” (*M* 2) - the city is perceived to be indefinite, grown beyond the powers of imagination. There is an element of the superabundance, hence non-representation, in these descriptions whereby New York is permeated with an energy depicted in primal images of violence, even more of entropy and a permanent state of confusion. New York is somehow revealed to be imponderable in its excess, revealing itself or making itself available in its imponderability. The city of New York becomes a state of mind in the novel, a state of insanity, which for Elizabeth Wilson “reveals postmodernism as a late-romantic sensibility, in which loss of control is pleasurable as well as frightening” (Wilson 138).

Through Self the reader sees New York and London in their excess rather than in their substance and materialistic unity. It is also significant that the way the novel opts for writing London in the throes of drastic Thatcherite transformations is by demolishing the social fabric of the city only in turn to re-electrify it as a nightmare of corporations and frantic flows of money gyrating out of control. In such urban formations hardly anything has any thematic weight. As a result, one might contend, the literary cartographies of Amis’s fiction are truly free-floating in the sense that they

are not heavily encoded with moral, social or artistic imperatives. The valorisation of any socio-economic practice is refused in the novel. The contingency and multiplicity of urban themes and narratives is implied in a comic way when John Self considers the London crowd and says: “London is full of short stories, long stories, epics, farces, sit-coms, sagas, soaps and squibs” (*M* 257). Through half of the novel at least John Self lives in hotels, a hotel room (Room 101) being one of the pseudo-places in the novel, a potent metaphor of living in the postmodern city that Brooker defined as “urban nomadism” (*New York Fictions* 149). Furthermore, Brooker rightly asserts that each nomad has a different story whereby the city is theirs to tell; a narrative position that the cited sentence reverberates. The quotation above also suggests that the city is full with alternating stories while the hectic pace and tone of the novel amplifies the urban satire of the novel. John Self is ceaselessly recounting the names (mainly expressed by numbers) of the Avenues he is zooming through, thus presenting New York as a place where the logic of verisimilitude is locked in a repetitive process. Moreover, streets are described as full of loops and circuses, where Broadway snaking through is “the only curve in this world of grids. [. . .] Broadway is the moulting python of strict New York” (*M* 29). So, the numerical place names – early Hundreds, Nineties, Forties, etc. – meant to locate the novelistic scenes are spatial anomalies since while describing the city by means of throbbing enumerations, the narrative disorients or ultimately ‘deterritorialises’ the city.

In its overwhelming immensity, New York can be incomprehensible, a spatial monstrosity, an architectural and functional promiscuity always presenting the possibility of geographic disorientation. New York is a grid city, but it is also suggested that in this the streets are endlessly reproducible, thus betokening the novel’s analogy to the psychosis of over-regulated urban reality where the space of differences is physically transformed into an architectural irregularity: “the gnashed, gap-toothed skyline, the graphics, the artwork of New York” (*M* 181). It is to be remarked that one of the ways that New York streetscapes are formed in the novel is through a perspective of a constant state of drunkenness and hangovers blurring into a literary vision different from the opium-induced reveries of the eighteenth-century writer De Quincey, for whom the streets of London were transformed into an inner mindscape of immateriality and sensation, a site of entertainment and, most crucially, revelation. The De Quincey-like opium-induced London was a world exempt of loss;



essentially a city of sublimation with *oneiric* fragments of great civilisations, like Rome or biblical Jerusalem. Such metaphysical or at least spiritual visions of the city are undoubtedly dissolved under Amis's hands. While opium facilitated a feeling or illusion of 'temporal ubiquity,' the state of being "smudged with" (*M* 10) drugs only give John Self a sense of loss and cause several of his blackouts.

So, in contradistinction to *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, where wandering and vision are intrinsically linked, and opium signifies an unhooking from topographical constraints in order to enter a visionary realm, in *Money* the erotics of vision and streetwalking only produce a kind of travesty of knowledge. This is also in contradistinction to the *fin-de-siècle* or the early modernist project of the *flâneur* for whom walking and sights lead to a depth of knowledge. More recently, in the 1960s French Situationists experimentally sought in the wilful practice of such recurrent urban formations as passage, drift (*derive*), chance and labyrinth, a radical mode of urban existence meant to be a critique of contemporary urban spectacle, "of the commodification of the experience and the boredom induced by contemporary city life, the capacity to engage with the city rather than passively consume it" (Middleton and Woods 300). Engagement with the city was to be gathered by walking through a changing cityscape that disorients the self, "and thereby forces social and experiential engagement with one's geography and spatial environment" (Middleton and Woods 300). In this, the Situationists' aim was to restore the urban subjectivity to the act of living. Opposed to this is Self's eroticised psychogeography of the city gradually dissipating into a process that empties itself out. However, productive play is constitutive of both since the city is only taking shape in these moments, always aleatory and contingent. In more detail will be soon considered a different yet related ceaseless activity or movement in the city that engineers many a shift in John Self's life: the protean activity of commerce or the novelistic circulation and apportioning of money.

One of Self's patent speech patterns is talking in lists, the elements of which quickly follow each other yet have lost focus and are directionless, not unlike the devolving futility and seriality of jetting or the non-productive logic of monetary exchanges in the novel. Self's catalogues or linguistic congeries are representative of an exuberantly carnivalesque language, not least in the sense that Bakhtin proposed as



a mixture of high and low discourses. In these lists elements are often incongruous or incompatible: Al Capone equals Einstein, or Huckleberry Finn Macbeth. John Self uses words from various stylistic registers that would be otherwise unrelated, thus disrupting causal links and hierarchies. More intriguing is the comedy and especially the rhetoric of Self's idiosyncratic chronicles for they frequently follow or display the rhetorical logic of *zeugma* or *syllepsis* respectively, ascribing as they do appropriate and inappropriate attributes to one (grammatical) category:<sup>103</sup> "Next, I had to frisk myself, to make sure I still had my wallet, limbs, face, dick, being." (*M* 122).

Alternatively, in these pilings of phrases incompatible components are subordinated to one chief element: "Life is all losing, we are all losing, losing mother, father, youth, hair, looks, teeth, friends, lovers, shape, reason, life" (*M* 273). Self's disruptive verbalizations can be read to imply something intrinsic about spatial representation as well in the novel. It can thus be inferred that spaces of yoking or adherence are simultaneously spaces of inadequacy or disparateness in Self's diction. Also, if some of the lists are essentially constructed of repetitions, it is evident from such important critical works as Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* that they can be considered as yet another carrier of the anti-narrative logic of the novel. The register of Self's urban lingo, it should be added, reproduces the free verse of the streets; they are narrative locations of hoarding; quick and phantasmagoric shifts from image to image and concept to concept. These linguistic shorings, therefore, overcrowd the text, and the novelistic discourse is thus akin to the city inasmuch as a list in itself constitutes a semantic density or overabundance. Thus, the intractable disorderliness and intoxicating fullness of urban life, is, I would argue, amply typified by *Money*. Likewise, the whole rhetoric of the novel, as if imitative of the transatlantic transferrals, is teeming with antimetaboles, chiasmic crossings dismantling primacies and hierarchies: "money is freedom. That's true. But freedom is money" (*M* 270). Such at times paradoxical meaning-productions in the text fastening on interchanges also lay bare the lack of teleology of the plot, or more generally, the impossibility or the infinite displacement of a final signified in the postmodern text. Moreover, John Self, enraptured with verbal artifice, unwittingly makes the narrative display the

---

<sup>103</sup> For this point, and a couple of minor ones in the final part of the chapter relating to the novel's modalities of expenditure, I am much indebted to the manuscript version of Tamàs Bényei's essay "The Passion of John Self: Allegory, Economy and Expenditure in Martin Amis's *Money*," forthcoming in *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond* edited by Gavin Keulks.

*catachrestic* drive markedly present in all of Amis's urban novels - the figurative and abusive transfers of language forced to name something that has no proper name, like a new product on the market: for instance, the hamburger 'Hamlette.'

Crucially, Self seems to be unaware of the workings of a higher rhetoric, being confined to a primary level of signification. Tautological as it may seem, statements like "fear really scares me" or "Fear is a bully [. . .]. Fear, I suspect, is really incredibly brave" (*M* 4), as Bényei has pointed out, come closest to reading or misreading the redemptive potential of Self's story in a way that reveals that in Self's world signifiatory practices (including monetary) always fold back upon themselves ("Allegory and Allegoresis in Martin Amis's *Money*"). A similarly illustrative case of Self's inability to discern the figurative use of language is provided by a comic scene when Martina Twain takes him to the Opera in New York to see Verdi's "Otello," and John Self reveals his ineptitude at understanding tragedy and the tragic mode:

The flesh spade general arrives to take up a position on some island, in the olden days there, bringing with him the Lady Di figure as his bride. Then she starts diddling one of his lieutenants, a funloving kind of guy whom I took to immediately. Same old story. Now she tries one of these double-subtle numbers on her husband – you know always rooting for the boyfriend and singing his praises. But Otello's sidekick is on to them, and hoping to do himself some good, tells all the guvnor. This big spade, though, he can't or won't believe it. A classic situation. Well, love is blind, I thought, and shifted in my seat (*M* 299-300).

Apart from giving a comic and simplistic account of the plot, John Self is far from being purged through the ennobling emotions of pity and terror. Rather, during the performance he is being continuously distracted by his primal bodily needs torturing him to be purged. His base needs form a farcical contrast to the elevated aim of the story; in his parlance the story is more a parody than a source for the solemn and cathartic feelings of pity and terror symptomatic of the tragic mode. Thus, John Self's

response is barely that of reconciliation after a major crisis; instead, “Otello” is a key scene of *trompe-l’oeil* in Self’s (mis)reading of the deceptive set-up he is cast into.<sup>104</sup> However, positing a symbolic or allegorical content at this point would collapse back onto a primary level of signification.

Admittedly, the novel is celebratory of epistemo-linguistic ruptures that are being produced by Self’s poor reading skills. The novel reveals that reading as one of the many modes of appropriation in the text, or to put it differently, the economy of reading is repeatedly staged as a huge investment on Self’s part, yet it does not compensate Self, neither does it return his efforts or yield according to his expectations. The most graphic rendition of Self’s concerted attempt to “get on with reading” (M 203) is when he tries to read *Animal Farm* that Martina Twain gave him as a present:

The big thing about reading is, you have to be in condition for it.

Physical condition, too. This body of mine is a constant distraction.

Here I am, trying to read, busy reading, yet persistently obliged to put

my book aside in order to hit the can, clip my nails, shave, throw up,

clean my teeth, brush my rug, have a handjob, take an aspirin, light a

cigarette, order more coffee, scratch my ear and look out of the window

(M 203-204).

It is equally suggestive that when reading *Animal Farm* he first compares himself to a rat, then to a dog tethered to a fence suggesting that from time to time John Self seems to be aware that the form imposed on him by the reckless pursuit of money is far from

---

<sup>104</sup> Shakespearean references, apart from a plethora of the figures of speech -mostly *zeugma* and *syllipsis*-, constitute a novelistic intertext in other scenes as well. John Self fails to apprehend the tragic import of Hamlet’s story in the same way, and unwittingly uses it as a catchphrase for his promotions. He produced an ad in Stratford for a new kind of junk food, a “fresh-friable pork-and-egg bap or roll or hero called a Hamlette. [. . .] There was the actor, dressed in black, with his skull and globe, being henpecked by that mad chick he’s got in trouble. When suddenly a big bimbo wearing cool pants and bra strolls on, carrying a tray with two steaming Hamlettes on it. She gives him a wink – and Bob’s your uncle” (M 69).



being a glorious one: “Where would *I* be in *Animal Farm*? One of the rats, I thought at first. But [. . .] after mature consideration, [. . .] I am a dog. I am a dog at the seaside tethered to a fence while my master and mistress romp on the sands. I am bouncing, twisting, weeping, consuming myself” (*M* 207). Indeed, the dog is a recurring image whenever Self reflects on himself. As regards the shallow reading schemes of a Thatcherite transatlantic traveller, this scene discloses yet again that he cannot think in abstractions or grasp complex linguistic models. The scene of Self reading *Animal Farm* is additionally ironic in the sense that Self is reading a book which is one of the most exemplary texts of political allegory in English literature, a paradigmatic work of literature of “speaking otherwise” (the mirror translation of the Greek original *allēgoria*) of the problematics of ideologies, and the ensuing state of being conditioned. It is equally tenable that casting Self as resisting the allegorical message of *Animal Farm*, and reducing the content to its sheer physicality is Amis’s way to ironically “speak otherwise” about its subject-matter - ideology, the latter significantly revealed by post-structuralist discourses as a theoretically constructed misapprehension, a fantasy structure of the material conditions and social relations of human existence.<sup>105</sup>

Self’s pornographic and other exploits in America resist or subvert the assumed enlightening power of the culture of travelling. Characteristic of his entire status in the novel is a recurring attempt to teach himself self-discipline (expressed on a *metalevel* by Self wanting semi-colons in his life which are refused until the end of the novel); however, he always opts for having some good time instead, thus undermining the posited transcendentalism of moral rectitude: “What is this state, seeing the difference between good and bad and choosing bad- or consenting to bad, okaying bad?” (*M* 26), John Self asks himself. *Money* has been previously compared to Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (for example by Diedrick and Lodge) as an important continuation of the Russian *skaz* narrative. Furthermore, John Self in a way ends up in the gutter, a final narrative affinity with Dostoyevsky’s unnamed narrator, the Underground Man. Even more striking in this respect is the imperative,

---

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1997): “The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself” (45). Another interesting Orwellian correlation is that *Money* was published in 1984, the year of Orwell’s famous dystopia with the same title, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

so to speak, of dental decay, hair loss, bodily pain and tinnitus in the narrative, Self's compulsion to pain and paranoia, his instinctual urges to endlessly debase himself. Indeed, there is a discernable lack of eschatology in the novel (the recoiling end of the novel upholds this assumption as well); John Self moves ahead, if anything, by continuously tripping over. It is to be noted, therefore, that the notion of fall and downward movement is pervasive in the novel and significantly contributes to the feeling of disintegration, individual or social. John Self, almost as if precipitating his ultimate fall, is constantly losing balance, falling down, spiralling down, or suffering from a nagging feeling of falling apart. Indeed, there are all manners of falling in the novel; not incidentally, dizziness, vertigo, tripping over and collapse are concomitant of tinnitus.<sup>106</sup> It is also possible to hold that the novel correspondingly poses the problem of shape, form and coherence in contemporary urban space formations, also represented in Self's keen sense of being jostled and jolted by the urban phenomena and the crowd, or "the tide people" (*M* 130). John Self feels dwarfed by New York; not surprisingly, whenever he refers to himself, he feels he is "gouged pinched and tugged at, and squeezed into this funny shape" (*M* 119); "a thing made up of time lag, culture shock, zone shift" (*M* 264).<sup>107</sup> Constantly referring to himself as being crammed into his own life, Self playfully admits that a summary of his existence would consist of the series of humiliations he has suffered: "Things still happen here and something is waiting to happen to me. I can tell. Recently my life feels like a

---

<sup>106</sup> Fall and the pervasive sense of demise further attest to the novel's ironic engagement with and problematisation of guilt, the tragic mode and the generic correlation with the multitudinous formations of the self. An acclaimed investigation in European critical thinking is one of the earlier works of Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this philosophical treatise, Nietzsche famously argues that the tragic is born out of the dualism of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces (the taming of the dark Dionysian wisdom by the artistic Apollonian); the Dionysian principle being that of intoxication whereby the subject becomes a complete forgetting of the self. In contrast to the Dionysian impulses seeking the destruction of the individual, Apollo, the deity of all plastic forces, is the transfiguring genius of *principium individuationis*, a term borrowed from his critical forebear, Arthur Schopenhauer, to mark the unifying principle holding existence together, organizing it and making it representable. Tragedies, for Nietzsche, are artistic permutations of the mythical figure of Dionysus, who experiences the torments of individuation as he is being dismembered by the Titans, a story to be read as an allegorisation of the condition of individuation as the origin of all suffering. Taking Nietzsche's line of reasoning a step further, it is possible to hold that to be cast into individuality is inescapably immoral since separation from a generic embeddedness entails a contamination or disturbance of morals.

<sup>107</sup> Even Karl Miller, a critic belonging to a more traditional school of literary criticism, considers Self to be "not a person but a part, a burlesqued proclivity, a preposterous Johnsonian humour, a bundle of at times incongruous – as distinct, we may feel, from dualistically inconsistent – bad habits" (Miller 414).



bloodcurdling joke. Recently my life has taken on form. Something is waiting. I am waiting. [. . .] Awful things can happen any time. This is the awful thing” (*M* 3-4).

In critical discussions of contemporary literature terms like ‘cipher,’ ‘figure,’ ‘surface,’ or ‘cartoon’ to describe or to occasionally substitute characters evidently imply a lack of unity of ‘self.’<sup>108</sup> In the novel the notion of self is problematised to the extent that John Self disclaims responsibility for his thoughts saying: “They don’t come from me. They come from these squatters and hoboes who hang out in my head, these guys who stroll past me like naturalized, emancipated rodents (passports and papers all in order), like gentrified rats” (*M* 267). This is one of the many representative ways of *Money* flaunting its textuality and dismantling the conventional depiction of realistic characters. John Self, the epitome of the postmodern character, is composed out of practices of its own mimicry, of its own images as a real character: “I think I must have some new cow disease,” says John Self at one point, “that makes you wonder whether you’re real all the time, that makes you feel like a trick, an act, a joke” (*M* 60).<sup>109</sup> As one critic, Elie A. Edmondson has put it, Self is a centreless character, a comedy of “Self-as-Master,” of “imperial self” (“Martin Amis Writes Postmodern Man” 154). Talking about the difficulties in the process of writing the script, Self implicitly taps into his own problematic status as a character: “We have a hero problem. We have a motivation problem. We have a fight problem. We have a realism problem” (*M* 237), he complains. Likewise, when he is asked by the author-figure Martin Amis what the motivation of the characters in his film is, he is simply, in his own words, “flummoxed.” John Self represents a transatlantic urban identity that can be best defined in terms of mobility, an interstitial state of ‘transculturation.’ In the novel’s reading, however, ‘transculturation’ is taking shape in the form of a curious negative logic of events, a narrative inversion that brings to the fore shifts and transpositions of ‘reality,’ the self and knowledge. The novel is interspersed with occasional *metalepsis* as in some of the dialogues between the author-figure and John Self the nature of mimesis and fabulation is addressed. Nonetheless, the division of narrative planes is done away with since in interpellating the gap instituted between

---

<sup>108</sup> A useful collection of essays in this respect is *British Postmodern Fiction: Postmodern Studies 7* edited by Theo D’Haen and Hans Bertens (1993).

<sup>109</sup> See also Gavin Keulks p. 195.



the two, the novel does the exact opposite: it conflates the two - it dramatizes realism's erroneous status as authentic. Blurring the boundaries of fiction and metafiction, *Money* is a "crossover fiction" or a novel of transference in yet another sense.

Alongside the fixity of the self, the notion of memory is also contested in the novel, reflecting a wider assumption that the postmodern urban contributes to a gradual diminution of moments of remembrance by living excessively in the present: "Memory's a funny thing, isn't it. You don't agree? I don't agree either. Memory has never amused me much, and I find its tricks more and more wearisome as I grow older. [. . .] My memory's in good shape, I think. It's just that my life is getting less memorable all the time" (*M* 26). As a great deal of the novel is being spent on transatlantic planes, "spurred by travel and transfer" (*M* 99), Self's sense of being uprooted and unattached effects his "pimpled vision, memory wipes" (*M* 264). 'Rethink' and 'redo,' terms often used by John Self, allude to his mechanical thus machine-like and unthinking self. Indeed, apart from frequently comparing himself to animals (dog or reptile), he also refers to himself as a pawn, a robot, an android, a train, a 'skinjob,' or a cyborg (*M* 329). He undoubtedly commands the greatest vocabulary about technologies and machines. The connection between libidinal economy, technology and spectrality is in fact one of the salient concerns of the novel: the "space-game arcades" are described as "ghosts of the New York night, these darkness-worshippers, their terrified faces reflected in the screens, stand hunched over their controls. They look like human forms of mutant moles and bats, hooked on the radar, rumble and wow of these stocky new robots who play with you if you give them money" (*M* 25). In effect, Self's specular geographies depersonalise people and environment since both are scripted in technical terms. Indeed, current theorizations of space turn the city into a metaphor of the machine where space is flat, "'ironed out' in order to speed things up" (Smethurst 37). America is mainly configured by the novel as an aggregate of increasingly uniform and indistinguishable game parlours and topless bars, spaces resisting acts of remembrance. This geographical state of conflating places is a kind of placelessness where making indistinct various spatial formations is manifest to the greatest extent, as postmodern geographers often argue, in the simulation of so-called "pseudo-places," business parks, theme parks, porn dens and game parlours Self frequents. In the final analysis, the chapter will enquire into

the ways these new resources of writing postmodern urban spaces and the radical economy of the self are steeped in the novel's insistent repetition of 'money' in various forms, in the circuitous economy of the plot and the depleting expenditure of its spatial interests, or better, venture.

### Fiscal Geographies of the Postmodern City

The altered reading sensibilities of the transatlantic traveller considered above and the dividends of comedy that the reader is issued with in the process can be placed alongside the narrative's focalization on the prospects of financial prosperity. In Amis's fiction America is often presented as a paradigmatic place of big money transactions.<sup>110</sup> The performativity of the disfiguring effect of money comes to the fore when John Self starts to feel invaded or "crashed" by the voices the cult of money produces in his head: the "jabber" of money often "sounds like the rap of a demented DJ" (*M* 108). Furthermore, money can be a figure for the intrinsically parabolic nature of writing. The pervasiveness of the logic of monetary interests and the related theme of consumerism in the novel is augmented by the recurrence of 'money' and its connotations in naming, also discussed in a slightly different context by Leonard Ashley in his article, "'Names are Awfully Important': The Onomastics of Satirical Comment in Martin Amis' (sic) *Money: A Suicide Note*:" "Bob Cambist (derived from *cambio*), Ricardo Fisc (from *fiscal*), Tab Penman (suggesting an accountant), Bill Levy (a Jew, with the added suggestion of levying tax), Gresham Tanner (where 'tanner' is slang for British penny while Gresham's Law concerns bad money driving out good money)" ("Names" 9). In addition, I would suggest, Fielding

---

<sup>110</sup> The centrality and deforming power of money in the lives of the characters is yet another thematic similarity that Amis's writing shares with Dickens. Amis himself declared in an interview that he believes money is "the central deformity in life, as Saul Bellow says, it's one of the evils that has cheerfully survived identification as an evil. [. . .] It's a fiction, an addiction, and a tacit conspiracy that we have all agreed to go along with" (Haffenden 13-14). In a different yet related sense, Self's demise further endorses the fiscal realities of the postmodern wherein speculative money (with the enormous imbalance of credit and debt it generates) is reaching such proportions, according to Baudrillard, that it forms a little planet (space) of its own "whirling about the Earth in an orbital rondo. Money is now the only genuine artificial satellite" (*The Transparency of Evil* 33).



Goodney, the name of Self's "moneymen," can be read as a contraction of Good Money; the name then intriguingly blends finance and person.

Money also incites figurative devices in the text, especially, personification or *prosopopoeia*: "Inflation, they say, is cleaning up this city. Dough is rolling up its sleeves and mucking the place out" (*M* 3). Such fiscal imageries of the city are reminiscent of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, a novel that has offered some resonant images of London cityscapes engulfed by swirling money producing growing heaps of material clutter, drowning people or stalking the lives of the inhabitants. The cash nexus holds the characters together, and the litter that is money pollutes the London sky; it literally chokes out life in Dickens's London. Robert Alter's following commentary on *Our Mutual Friend* can be taken to be a more than fitting account of *Money* as well: "The metaphoric equation of garbage and money has a distinctly disorienting effect: superimposed on the image of London littered with refuse is an image of 'currency' fluttering all over the cityscape, imparting a sense of the unseemliness, the worthlessness, of the very thing universally pursued" (Alter 59). Indeed, in Amis's novel too there is an inexorable interlink between commercialism, scatology and the desiccation of urban vitality; the city texture is thoroughly pervaded with economic flows that diffuse any residue of social relations.

For John Self money represents the absolute (omnipotence); when he speaks of money, Self often borrows the discourse and rhetoric of the numinous, seeing it as an all-powerful agency that "softens the fall of life" (*M* 263): "You know the thing I want more than anything else- you could call it my dream in life-is to make lots of money" (*M* 92) because "[i]t's either that or fear and shame" (*M* 335). Money is abstract (invisible) and concrete (visible) at the same time. As a result of its semiotic emptiness, money is curiously attributed the transcendental: "Money is so near you can almost touch it, but it is all on the other side-you can only press your face up against the glass" (*M* 153). Money lacks concrete attributes and is invisible because it is fluid and versatile - "[y]ou really have to give money credit for that" (*M* 55). Money induces its own proliferation; its self-propagating mechanism is compellingly captured in the mesmerism of city corporations. Financially successful Ossie Twain, Martina's husband, "in his spectral towers on Sixth Avenue and Cheapside, [. . .] uses money to buy and sell money [. . .], he buys money with money, sells money for



money. He works in the cracks and vents of currencies, buying and selling on the margin, riding the daily tides of exchange. For these services he is rewarded with money. Lots of it. It is beautiful, and so is he” (*M* 120). Money then goes around imitative of the narrative plot revolving around travelling; so, the novel is saturated with a fiscal gyration that is not unlike the circulating mechanisms and means of transportation of urban spaces.

The inverted parallelism in the workings of capital and everything it affects can be perceived also in repetitive rhetorical acts of crossing-over: the discourse of the novel repeatedly personifies the abstract or, alternatively, the physical is time and time again made abstract. Not least, the *chiasmus* between the rhetorical levels of the text is appraisable in the spillages between the many variations and valencies of the term ‘money’ itself. Primarily, ‘Money,’ as the title of the book, constates the novel; it names the text itself. On a different level, it refers to the main body of the text; it denotes or stands for the content of the novel. Also, it can connote or gain currency as another work embedded inside the story since Self is reading a book entitled *Money* towards the end of the novel. In a performative sense, however, it is outside the text for the novel itself *is* money. *Money* is an enterprise; so reading it is taking part in the financial dealings called for and presented by the text. As the note prefacing the novel betokens, *Money* is a “suicide note” that is “meant for you out there, the dear, the gentle” to exchange your banknote for it, and thus save the text, or transfer it from its non-existence via your transactions. The title-phrase, therefore, is in itself a *chiastic* trope of transporting - carrying across - in the text. Most importantly, between these rifts of narrative levels, I would argue, the critical difference of the reality or realism of *Money* is disseminated.

Just as the various currencies and currents (transactions) of monetary denotations are immeasurable or cannot be ultimately accounted for in the novel because distributed in numerous instalments (including some pertaining to the archaic economy of gift-giving – as opposed to a capitalist one - such as cowrie or dibs), the name ‘Self’ also turns out to be manifold and deceptive in easily lending itself to functioning as a contractual constant while also serving as an ironic index of Self’s

lack of identity.<sup>111</sup> ‘Self’ as a surname, it emerges, gravely malfunctions since it can not only be singular but generic too; his name, potentially signifying a limitless number of people or himself, becomes a semiotic field in the narrative, a denomination or novelistic signature of the dispersal of the transatlantic urban self. In particular, Self is a hermeneutically open name that induces his fragmentation and is conducive to wasting his assets precisely by means of its excessive reduplication: while at first John Self believes that by signing some contracts he directed “more and more money [his] way” (*M* 24), in the end this initially remunerative flourish aiming to generate money by a sleight of hand turns out to be his undoing. All the contracts and bills, it eventually turns out, bear only his signature doubled “once under *Co-signatory*, once under *Self* (*M* 378). As a result, the power and verity culturally ascribed to contracts while promising to gratify Self in the end consume him. His name is a floating signifier much the same as the floating exchange rates and monetary systems introduced around the time when the novel was set. So, seemingly a site of investment, his proper name through the very surplus it generates figures his loss.

Representative of the anti-productive narrative logic of the text subtended by Self’s tautological or maybe antimetabolic maxims is that he paradoxically relinquishes most of his free will - “freedom” - in the hope of self-achievement - “freedom” - through the excesses of consumerist gratifications and commodity culture he so willingly embraces: “the whole trouble with dignity and self-respect: they cost you so much [. . .] money” (*M* 153). John Self, one can argue, inhabits the condition of the so-called ‘hyperreal,’ a cultural turn that disintegrates boundaries of empirical reality and artificial fantasy, a condition that Amis has perhaps later defined as “moronic inferno” (*Harvest of the Sixties* 46). To this end, the novel can be taken to tie up with the ideas of Baudrillard, who has made the contentious assertion that in the postmodern a “kind of unintentional parody hovers over everything, a tactical simulation, a consummate aesthetic enjoyment is attached to the indefinable play of reading and the rules of the game [. . .]. So art is everywhere, since artifice lies at the heart of reality” (*Symbolic Exchange and Death* 75). Moreover, Baudrillard has

---

<sup>111</sup> Indeed in an interview Amis reveals that John Self was first called John Sleep then John Street (*Contemporary Authors Vol. 27*).

developed the notion of ‘spatialised’ economy within which all commodity objects become mere signs defined by their relations to other objects. It is also to be mentioned at this point that Lefebvre also sees the “the world of commodities” and its monetary realities as essentially producing abstract space (Lefebvre 53). Equally pertinent is that Lefebvre further defines abstract space as one wherein its users cannot recognise themselves (Lefebvre 93). Appropriately, Baudrillard changes the Marxist “exchange value” into “sign-value” only to later advance the concept of “symbolic exchange” as a forceful antithetical critical practice seeking to dismantle the principle of production itself. Most crucially, the concept of symbolic exchange valorises expenditure, excess, sacrifice and waste.<sup>112</sup>

Into all this Baudrillard significantly interpolates the idea of ‘simulacrum,’ a phenomenon that in its serial replication is broadly understood to do away with the dividing line of original and facsimile. Thus, the possibility of simulating not only images and objects, but also the past and even the self is suggested. Interestingly enough, when Samson Young is asked about America in *London Fields*, he replies that it is crazy, “like an X-ray laser” (*L F* 78), an effective image of the frenetic simulacric quality of American life. *Money* correspondingly presents American cityscapes as a place of illusion, and fascination, a spatial phantasmagoria that allows for an extensive play with the semantics of a place. The city configured in Amis’s prose is a confused text, so is the urban discourse turned inside out by a hyperreal twist. It is an “unreal” city, the imaginative and mythic powers of which are nonetheless exhausted. Ultimately, the novel’s representations of cityscapes on both sides of the Atlantic offer a vast backdrop for rethinking the analogical relations between sign, act of signification and the material. Marking the end of representation in a conventional sense by opening up the representative models, the act of simulation is founded on pure “operationality;” it is an anticipation of the real (*Simulacra and Simulation* 122). Hence, a major recourse to the postmodern modes of novelistic urban cartography is representative of the many ways Amis contests the cult of the original. Baudrillard also provides an illustrative analogy from cartography for what he understands by “effacing reality” by simulation: when explorers run out of virgin

---

<sup>112</sup> A useful summary of Baudrillard’s postmodern spatial formulations is found in Brian Jarvis’s *Postmodern Cartographies*, in particular, “Everything Solid Melts into Signs: Jean Baudrillard” pp. 31-41.



territories, there remains no space available to the imaginary and, as a consequence, the principle of reality disappears (*Simulacra and Simulation* 123). ‘Reality’ then seems to fasten upon the availability of the unknown or imagination. Conversely, it remains to be mentioned that upholding that the ‘simulacrum’ does away with the difference of real and imaginary is a different way of depleting the imaginary in the postmodern.

John Self’s urban existence is contiguous with a cultural space that can be best defined as an intersection of the street and the shop window; the city perceived by Self is a spectacle that needs to be confronted. John Self cannot rid himself of visual and imaginary relations; his observations are thoroughly absorbed with the cinematic. He is an architect of spectacle and surface glitter, a self-proclaimed urban poet of ephemera and all things transitory. Cinema and television saturate Self’s world whereby the self is revealed to be multitudinous, a permeable ‘surface’ recast and redefined over and over again by each instance of televised interpellation. The following passage is one of the best articulations of television’s extensive command of Self’s life: “Television is cretinizing me - I can feel it. Soon I’ll be like the TV artists. You know the people I mean. Girls who subliminally model themselves on kid- show presenters, full of melody and joy, Melody and Joy. Men whose manners show newscaster interference, soap stains, film smears” (*M* 27). Laying bare the epistemological uncertainties and indefiniteness of characterization, the novel also exhibits the precarious ontological status of literary characters where through excessive display, in Docherty’s words, they “are always differing, not just from other characters, but also from their putative selves” (*Alterities* 60). Through the inconsistencies of Self’s pornographic libidinal investments is revealed that Self inhabits an urban space inducing a new mode of eroticism and male encounter with the figure of the prostitute: here personality is a vacuum, aptly captured in the image of the girl dancing in a bar, “spider-dark, and hefty, and good at her job- the face all voided as it must be” (*M* 61).<sup>113</sup> The gaps and divisions instituted by pornographic relations give prominence to the idea that character is inadequate, a novelistic tenet reflected in John Self’s divulgence that he carries on with activities related to

---

<sup>113</sup> Another present that John Self receives in the novel from an anonymous sender (from Frank the Phone, as it later turns out) is a plastic doll. The dummy can be read as an *anamorphic* reflection of Self’s desires.

pornography only to remain in character, for the sake of artifice: "Sometimes you really have to buckle down to it, as you do with all forms of exercise. It's simply a question of willpower" (*M* 64).

The dissolution of the notion of unitary self is in parallel with John Self's depthlessness as a character.<sup>114</sup> Eroticism and commodities are the principle modes of producing, consuming and expending in the urban geography of the novel. The text's implied criticism of commodities has a theoretical correlative in Lefebvre's observations on the production and transformation of space in commodity capitalism. Crucially, in capitalism space is mastered by being produced. Transportation grids are exemplary of productive consumption: they move things and people through circuits of exchange and they also constitute an investment of knowledge in social reality. The role of commodities is not to be solely apprehended as facilitating exchange; rather, commodities and the values attached to them are essentially meant to exceed the principle of necessity. As regards the ongoing endeavour to map the postmodern geography of the city, an infinitely suggestive remark was made by Norman O. Brown in *Life Against Death*, where he fastens the existence of the city upon the element of the excessive and the superfluous: "A city is by definition divorced from primary food production, and therefore by definition superfluous, its whole economy is based on the economic surplus" (282). This helps us better understand the link that is often set between capitalism, especially late-capitalist production defined by the key concept of surplus-value, and the specific characteristics of the contemporary city.

The novel aptly shows that consuming is wasting, a pattern of wastage that nonetheless signifies abundance not least in the logic of travelling already mentioned. The textual economy of travelling is like that of late-capitalist monetary expenditure: surplus is produced by circularity, and benefits of it are the commodities and pleasures continuously enticing Self. Similarly, what Self seems to find in transatlantic travelling spiralling out of control is neither financial wealth nor knowledge, rather a "deterritorialization" of New York and London where he seeks to

---

<sup>114</sup> A different way of reading this kind of depthlessness is Lyotard's concept of "intensities" which are, as Fredric Jameson asserts, "free-floating, impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria" (*Cultural Logic* 16).



be taken over by travel itself, in other words, by absence, by not really being present anywhere. Indeed, “What London makes plain,” Wolfreys observes, “is that the reading and writing of any city finds itself transformed irrevocably by a motion that does not await consciousness but takes place ahead of any perceptual construction” (*Writing London Vol. II* 18). Orbiting around the world creates a surplus, a textual gradation of the narrative also imitating the feverish material production that consumerism is conditioned on. The thrill of ‘changing places,’ due to the loss that it produces in its very excess, is a textual site or epitome of expenditure whereby Self dissipates himself: travelling is a mode of un-production in the text.

At the end of the book Self suffers a metaphorical defeat in chess, a game widely regarded to be a battle of minds in order to assert cognitive supremacy in the ability to create alternative worlds. As Linda Hutcheon argues in *Narcissistic Narrative*, one “of the favourite metafictional game structures seems to be that of inherently narrative one – chess – with its characters of all classes, its intrigue, and action” (83).<sup>115</sup> He is forced into *zugzwang* at the hands of creator-writer, Martin Amis. Despite frantic travelling that supposedly opens horizons, overcomes geographical exclusion and precipitates self-knowledge, John Self ends up *zugzwanged*, a position in chess where the one who has to move first will lose. This is the ultimate spatial metaphor of Self’s standing in the novel as by the end of the novel he has lost everything and has become a tramp.

The last section of the novel is written in italics, marking a different stage in Self’s life. This also forms a frame that is, in a sense, after the coordinates of the novel, in Self’s words beyond, “*the pentagrams of shape and purpose*” (M 384), a new geography that, in Keulks’s interpretation, marks “Self’s release from the world of definition and form, from the world of dependency, narration and plot. Whereas he had earlier described forebodings of illusive reality, or ‘ulteriority,’ [. . .] Self notes in the final chapter that his life has begun ‘losing its form,’ that he can identify only ‘present . . . continuous present’” (Keulks 196). So, while travelling takes over the narrative and its figurativity spills over, the present of the novel similarly overflows.

---

<sup>115</sup> In this respect see also Waugh’s *Metafiction*, in particular “Play, Games and Metafiction” pp. 34-48.



Crucially, travelling marks a disconnection from the regular passage of time, so the present continuous Keulks specifies gains more weight within the context of my reading. As Brooker has recently put: “from the beginning of the century, ‘metropolitan time’ was felt not as the ‘meanwhile’ of dual, parallel moments along a common time-line, but as an experience of instantaneity and all-at-onceness” (*Modernity and Metropolis* 18). The end of Self’s travels then marks his arrival in a continuous present at the expense of losing form notwithstanding. Thus, the novel is expressive of postmodern critical readings of literature wherein the concept of ‘present’ is seen as divided within itself; the contemporary essentially signifying a moment of conjoining incommensurate times where the self cannot exactly apprehend (be present to) the moment, and hereby must remain incomplete.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, the note preceding the novel implies the story in advance; it predates the narrative. Thus, what follows - the future of the novel - can only be a recount of the past. So, one could argue, the novel’s present is in effect pre-empted; it is void or absent. The inherent inconsistency of the present, its lack of fixity is one potent explanation for the ironic ending, the narrative redoubling and further deferral of the possibility of conclusion within the novel.

The application of concepts of postmodern narrative theory to the apprehension of urban space, and the critical focus on consumerism and the various modalities of expending the self can be considered as rich models conducive to thinking the city, urban experience and postmodern culture as interrelated. It appears, therefore, that urban dynamics construct a space of disengagement and unlearning where, as part of the wider postmodern cultural dominant, meaning-closure recedes. As seen, Amis’s urban text conveys a constant flow of physical movement that is also reflective of the self-exhibiting tendency and the much-lamented depthlessness of the postmodern text, even more so of the shifts in meanings with each act of reading. In sum, taking the form of at times unsavoury yet irresistibly comic foray into configuring narration, self and space, the novels under consideration jointly reveal that Amis’s urban fiction is a singular text within cultural geographies of

---

<sup>116</sup> *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present* (1999), edited by Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks, contains a particularly inspiring and useful collection of essays exploring the topic.

contemporary urban spaces. They are all rich exponents of Martin Amis as a dissident voice continuously present, albeit somewhat disjointed, among contemporary British urban novelists.

## Bibliography

### Works by Martin Amis:

- Amis, Martin. *Dead Babies*. London: Penguin, 1984.
- . *Einstein's Monsters*. London: Vintage, 1987.
- . *Experience*. London: Vintage, 2001.
- . *The Information*. London: Flamingo, 1995.
- . *London Fields*. London: Penguin Books, 1989.
- . *Money*. London: Penguin Books, 1984.
- . *The Moronic Inferno*. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- . *Night Train*. London: Vintage, 1998.
- . *Other People*. London: Vintage, 1999.
- . *The Rachel Papers*. London: Penguin, 1984.
- . *Success*. London: Penguin, 1978.
- . *Time's Arrow*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- . *Visiting Mrs Nabokov*. New York: Harmony Books, 1994.

### Other Primary Texts:

- Ackroyd, Peter. *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. London: Minerva, 1995.
- . *The Great Fire of London*. London: Abacus, 1982.
- . *Hawksmoor*. London: Abacus, 1986.
- . *The House of Doctor Dee*. London: Penguin, 1994.
- . *London. The Biography*. London: Vintage, 2001.
- Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.
- Barnes, Julian. *England, England*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1998.
- . *Metroland*. London: Picador, 1980.
- Bellow, Saul. *The Adventures of Augie March*. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths*. London: Penguin Books, 1970.
- . *The Aleph*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
- Calvino, Italo. *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*. London: Vintage, 1977.
- . *Invisible Cities*. London: Picador, 1979.
- Carter, Angela. *Wise Children*. London: Vintage, 1992.



- Conrad, Joseph. "The Secret Sharer." *'Twixt Land and Sea*. London: Penguin, 1988. 81-124.
- Dickens, Charles. *Little Dorrit*. London: Penguin, 1998.
- . *Our Mutual Friend*. London: Penguin, 1997.
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground. The Double*. Trans. And Intro. Jessie Coulson. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- Eliot, T. S. "The Waste Land." *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
- Ford, Madox Ford. *The Soul of London*. Ed. Alan G. Hill. London: Everyman, 1998.
- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street*. Intro. Bernard Bergonzi. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.
- Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf*. Trans. Basil Creighton. London: Penguin, 1965.
- Hoffman, E. T. A. "The Sandman." *The Golden Pot and Other Tales*. Trans. and Intro. Ritchie Robertson. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Trans. Idris Parry. London: Penguin, 2000.
- McEwan, Ian. *The Comfort of Strangers*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- . *In Between the Sheets*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- Moorcock, Michael. *Mother London*. London: Scribner, 2004.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. London: Penguin, 1988.
- . *Pnin*. New York: Avon Books, 1969.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Raine, Craig. *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1979.
- Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Sinclair, Iain. *Downriver*. London: Paladin, 1991.
- . *Lights Out for the Territory*. London: Granta Books, 1997.
- . *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge*. London: Granta Books, 1995.
- . *White Chappel. Scarlet Tracings*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion*. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The London Scene*. London: Snowbooks London Ltd., 1975.
- . *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

## Secondary Texts:

- Alexander, Victoria N. "Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov." *The Antioch Review* 52.4 (Fall 1994): 580-590.
- Alter, Robert. *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 2005.
- Ashley, Leonard R N. "Names Are Awfully Important: The Onomastics of Satirical Comment in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*." *Literary Onomastics Studies* 14 (1987): 1-48.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Baker, Stephen. *The Fiction of Postmodernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2000.
- . "The Fiction of Postmodernity: Dialectical Studies of Martin Amis, Don DeLillo and Salman Rushdie." Diss. U of Edinburgh, 1997.
- Barry, Peter. *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 2000.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977.
- . *Mythologies*. Trans: Anette Lavers. London: Vintage Classics, 1993.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990.
- . *Sade, Loyola, Fourier*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Cape, 1977.
- . *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Bataille, Georges. *Eroticism*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. London: Penguin Classics, 2001.
- . *Literature and Evil*. Trans. Alastair Hamilton. London and New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1997.
- . *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings: 1927-1939*. Trans. Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. Manchester: Manchester U P, 1985.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Trans. Chris Turner. London and New York: Verso, 1988.
- . *Seduction*. Trans. Brian Singer. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- . *Selected Writings*. Mark Poster ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
- . *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. U of Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1988.
- . *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1998.
- . *The Transparency of Evil*. Trans. James Benedict. London and New York: Verso, 1995.

- Bavidge, Jennifer. "Representations of Urban Space in the Postmodern Novel: Ellis, Ackroyd, Auster, Sinclair." Diss. U of London, 2001.
- Begley, Jon. "Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism." *Contemporary Literature* 45.1 (2004): 79-105.
- Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. 1-93.
- . "Making Space." *Textual Practice* 16.1 (Spring 2002): 31-55.
- Benjamin, Andrew, ed. *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London and New York: Verso, 1992.
- . *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zorn. Intro and Ed. Hannah Arendt. London: Pimlico, 1999.
- Bennett, Andrew. *The Author*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Bényei, Tamás. *Acts of Attention: Figure and Narrative in Postwar British Novels*. Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Peter Lang, 1999.
- . "Allegory and Allegoresis in Martin Amis's *Money*." *HUSSE Papers 1993: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English*. Debrecen: Lajos Kossuth University, 1995.
- . *Rejtélyes Rend: A krimi, a metafizika és a posztmodern*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000.
- Bigsby, Christopher. *Writers in Conversation. Vol.I*. EAS Publishing: East Anglia, Norwich. 2000.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Trans. and Intro. Ann Smock. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1982.
- Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1980.
- Bond, Robert. *Iain Sinclair*. Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005.
- Botting, Fred, and Scott Wilson, eds. *The Bataille Reader*. London: Blackwell, 1998.
- Boyer, Christine M. *The City of Collective Memory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern British Novel rev ed*. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
- , ed. *The Novel Today*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 1977.
- . "The Cities of Modernism." *Modernism 1890-1930*. London: Penguin, 1976. 90-104.



- Brannigan, John. *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945-2000*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*. New York and London: Cornell U P, 1996.1-47, 235-263.
- Bristow, Joseph. *Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Brooker, Peter. *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- . *New York Fictions: Modernity, Postmodernism, the New Modern*. London and New York: Longman, 1996.
- Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- . *Reading for the Plot*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U P, 1992.
- . "Unreal City: Paris and London in Balzac, Zola, and Gissing." *Realist Vision*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 2005.
- Brown Richard. "Postmodern Americas in the Fiction of Angela Carter, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan." *Forked Tongues? Comparing Twentieth Century British and American Literature*. Eds. Ann Massa, and Alistair Stead. London: Longman, 1994.
- Brown, Norman O. *Life Against Death*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1959.
- Burke, Seán. *The Death and Return of the Author*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1999.
- Buttimer, Anne and David Seamon, eds. *The Human Experience of Space and Place*. London: Croom Helm, 1980.
- Carter, Angela. *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. London: Virago, 2000.
- Casey, Edward. *The Fate of Place*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.
- Caws, Mary Ann, ed. *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Childs, Peter. *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Cohan, Steven and Linda M. Shires. *Telling Stories*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Connor, Steven. *The English Novel in History, 1950-1995*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Coupe Laurence. *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1997.

- Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Currie, Mark, ed. and Intro. *Metafiction*. Harlow: Longman, 1995.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, California : U of California P, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. Preface. Michel Foucault. London and New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Dern, John A. *Martians, Monsters and Madonna: Fiction and Form in the World of Martin Amis*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- D'haen, Theo, and Hans Bertens, eds. *British Postmodern Fiction: Postmodern Studies 7*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1993.
- Delany, Paul. *Literature, Money and the Market: From Trollope to Amis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1979.
- *Blindness and Insight*. New York: Oxford U P, 1971.
- Diedrick, James. *Understanding Martin Amis*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1995.
- . *Understanding Martin Amis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004.
- Docherty, Thomas. *Alterities: Criticism, History, Representation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- . *Reading (Absent) Character*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1983.
- Draper, R.P, ed. *Tragedy: Developments in Criticism*. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- . *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- Earnshaw, Steven, ed. *Postmodern Surroundings: Postmodern Studies 9*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994.
- Edmondson, Elie A. "Martin Amis Writes Postmodern Man." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42.2 (Winter 2001): 145-154.
- Ellmann, Maud, ed. and Intro. *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1994.

- Ermath, Elizabeth Deeds. *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1992.
- Finney, Brian. "Narrative and Narrated Homicides in Martin Amis's *Other People* and *London Fields*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 37.1 (Fall 1995): 3-15.
- Fokkema, Aleid, ed. *Postmodern Characters: Postmodern Studies 4*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1991.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 2002.
- . *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I*. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin, 1986.
- . "Language to Infinity." *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*. Ed. and Intro. Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P, 1977.
- . *Madness and Civilization*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Random House Inc, 1982.
- . "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* (Spring 1986): 22-27.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2002.
- . *Totem and Taboo*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Arks Paperbacks, 1960.
- . "The Uncanny." *The Pelican Freud Library. Vol. 14.*, gen. ed. James Strachey. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985. 335-376.
- . *The Uncanny*. Intro. Hugh Haughton. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1957.
- Frisby, David. *Cityscapes of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001. 1-158.
- Gane, Mark. *Baudrillard's Bestiary*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. 1-25, 48-74, 104-117, 143-157.
- Gąsiorek, Andrej. *Post-war British Fiction: Realism and After*. London: Edward Arnold, 1995.
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Forward. Jonathan Culler. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.
- Gibson, Andrew. *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- . *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1996.



- Gibson, Jeremy and Julian Wolfreys. *Peter Ackroyd: The Ludic and the Labyrinthine Text*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Gilbert, Pamela K, ed. *Imagined Londons*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2002.
- Gottdiener, M. *Postmodern Semiotics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995.
- , and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, eds. *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*. New York: Columbia U P, 1986.
- Gregory, Derek, Ron Martin and Graham Smith, eds. *Human Geography: Society, Space and Social Science*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time and Perversion*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Haffenden, John. *Novelists in Interview*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Harris, Greg. "Men Giving Birth to New World Orders: Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*." *Studies in the Novel* 31.4 (Winter 1999): 489-505.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwells, 1990, 1-118, 201-307.
- Head, Dominic. *Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge U P, 2002.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. and Intro Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1975.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- . *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1996.
- . *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998*. London: Verso, 1998.
- . *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P, 1994.
- Jarvis, Brian. *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 1996.
- Jaye, Michael C. and Ann Chalmers Watts, eds. *Literature and the Urban Experience*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 1981. 11-133.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard U P, 2003.
- Keulks, Gavin. *Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel since 1950*. Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 2003.

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Trans. Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin, 1989.
- King, Geoff. *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies*. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew, eds. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Laplanche, Jean and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Karnac Books, 1983. 211, 449-453.
- LaRose, Nicole. "Reading the Information on Martin Amis's London." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 46:2 (2005): 160-176.
- Leader, Zachary, ed. *On Modern British Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2002.
- Ledbetter, Mark. *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative or Doing Violence to the Body*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.
- Lee, Alison. *Realism and Power*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Lee, Robin. "The Fictional Topography of Samuel Beckett." *The Modern English Novel*. Ed. Gabriel Josipovici. London: Open Books, 1976. 206-224.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Lehan, Richard. *The City in Literature*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1998.
- Lodge, David. *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- . *The Novelist at the Crossroads*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. 3-83, 247-283.
- Luckhurst, Roger. "The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the 'Spectral Turn'." *Textual Practice* 16.3 (Winter 2002): 527-546.
- , and Peter Marks, eds. *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*. Harlow: Longman, 1999.
- Lukacher, Ned. *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1986.
- Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel*. Trans. Anna Bostock. London: Merlin Press, 1971.

- Lutwack, Leonard. *The Role of Place in Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse U P, 1984.
- Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, M A and London: MIT Press, 1960.
- Lyotard, Jean François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester U P, 1986.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization*. London: Abacus, 1972.
- Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.
- Massie, Allan. *The Novel Today: A Critical Guide to the British Novel 1970-1989*. Harlow: Longman Group Ltd, 1990.
- Mellor, Philip A. and Chris Schilling. *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity*. London: Sage, 1997.
- Mengham, Rod, ed. *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990. 1-11, 69-89, 202-218.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- McQuillan, Martin. *Paul de Man*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Menke, Richard. "Narrative Reversals and the Thermodynamics of History in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44.4 (Winter 1998): 959-980.
- Middleton, Peter and Tim Woods. *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 2000.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982.
- . *Others*. Oxford and Princeton: Princeton U P, 2001.
- . "The Critic as Host." *Deconstruction and Criticism*. Harold Bloom et al. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
- . *Speech Acts in Literature*. Stanford, California: Stanford U P, 2001.
- . *Topographies*. Stanford, California: Stanford U P, 1995.
- . *Tropes, Parables, Performatives*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
- Miller, Karl. *Doubles*. New York: Oxford U P, 1985.
- Mills, A. D. *Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2001.
- Milner, Andrew. *Literature, Culture and Society*. London: UCL Press, 1996.
- Miracky, James J. "Hope Lust or Hyped Lust? Gendered Representations of 1980s Britain in Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* and Martin Amis's *Money*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 44.2 (Winter 2003): 136-143.
- Moran, Joe. "Artists and Verbal Mechanics: Martin Amis's *The Information*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 41.4 (Summer 2000): 307-317.



- Muecke, D. C. *Irony and the Ironic*. London and New York: Methuen, 1970.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- Nash, John. "Fiction May be a Legal Paternity: Martin Amis's *The Information*." *English: The Journal of the English Association*. 145.181 (Spring 1996): 213-224.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000.
- . *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1996.
- Norquay, Glenda and Gerry Smyth, eds. *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores U P, 1997.
- Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Norton, George. "Sexuality and Sexual Politics in the Writings of Martin Amis and Ian McEwan." MA Diss. U of Leeds, 1991.
- Onega, Susan and John A Stotesbury, eds. *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002.
- Pillips, Lawrence, ed. *The Swarming Streets: Twentieth Century Literary Representations of London*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004.
- Pike, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1981.
- Pile, Steve. *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.
- . *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Porter, Roy. *London: A Social History*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
- Punday, Daniel. *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Punter, David. "Blake's Capital Cities." *London in Literature: A Symposium Organised by the English Syndicate of the Roehampton Institute*. London: Roehampton Institute, 1979.
- Quinn, Anthony. "The Investment." *The Independent* [London], 25 March 1995, magazine section: 34-39.
- Raban, Jonathan. *Soft City*. London: The Harvill Press, 1998.
- Rabinow, Paul, ed. *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Ltd., 1976.

- Reynolds, Margaret, and Jonathan Noakes, eds. *Martin Amis. Vintage Living Texts*. London: Vintage, 2003.
- Riviere, Francesca. "Martin Amis: The Art of Fiction CLI." *Paris Review* 146 (Spring 1998): 108-135 (interview).
- Robinson, Alan. *Imagining London, 1770-1900*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Rowson, Martin. "Four London Maps." *Granta* 65 (Spring 1999): 103-111.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 2003.
- Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999.
- Sarup, Madan. *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1996.
- Self, Will. "An Interview with Martin Amis." *Mississippi Review* 21.3 (1993): 143-69. 5 May 2006. <<http://www.mississippireview.com/1995/07amis.html>>.
- Sennett, Richard. *Flesh and Stone: The Body and City in Western Civilization*. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994.
- Sharpe, William and Leonard Wallock, eds. *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art and Literature*. Baltimore: John Hopkins U P, 1987.
- Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism*. Transl. and Intro. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965.
- Sim, Stuart. *Beyond Aesthetics: Confrontations with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Simmel, Georg. "Spatial and Urban Culture." *Simmel on Culture*. Ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 137-187.
- Sinfield, Alan. *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1997.
- Slater, Maya. "Problems When Time Moves Backwards: Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*." *English: The Journal of the English Association* 42.173 (Summer 1993): 141-152.
- Smethurst, Paul. *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000.
- Smyth, J. Edmund, ed. *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1991.

- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies*. London and New York: Verso, 1989.
- Sontag, Susan, ed. *A Barthes Reader*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P, 1986.
- Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.
- Stokes, Peter. "Martin Amis and the Postmodern Suicide: Tracing the Postnuclear Narrative at the Fin de Millenium." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 38.4 (Summer 1997): 300-311.
- Stratton, John. *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 1996.
- Synder, Cara L. "Morality in Six Novels of Martin Amis." Diss. U of North Texas, 1996. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996. 9627567.
- Taylor, D. J. *After the War: The Novel and English Society since 1945*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993.
- . *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980's*. London: Bloomsbury, 1989.
- Tew, Philip. *The Contemporary British Novel*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Todd, Richard. "The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis." *Exploring Postmodernism*. Ed. Matei Calinescu, and Douwe Fokkema. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Cornell U P, 1975.
- Tredell, Nicolas, ed. *The Fiction of Martin Amis*. Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2000.
- Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. London: Edward Arnold, 1977.
- Turner, Bryan S. *The Body and Society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications, 1996.
- Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996.
- Virilio, Paul. *A Landscape of Events*. Trans. Julie Rose. Athens, GA: MIT Press, 2000.
- Wachtel, Eleanor. "Eleanor Wachtel with Martin Amis: Interview." *Malahat Review* 114 (1996): 43-58.



- Watson, Sophie and Katherine Gibson, eds. *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*. Oxford and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1996. 1-183.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Harvest of the Sixties*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1995.
- . *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984.
- Weber, Max. *The City*. Trans and Ed. Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth. New York: Free Press and London: Collier Macmillan, 1966.
- Wells, Lynn. *Allegories of Telling: Self-referential Narrative in Contemporary British Fiction*. Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V, 2003.
- Wheale, Nigel. *The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Verso, 1979.
- . *The Country and the City*. London: Hogarth Press, 1985.
- Wilson, A. N. *London: A Short History*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. Berkeley, California and Oxford: U of California P, 1992.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996.
- Wolfreys, Julian. *Writing London. Vol. I*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1998.
- . *Writing London. Vol. II*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Wood, James. *The Broken Estate*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1999.
- Young, Robert, ed. *Untying the Text*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995.
- . *The Metastases of Enjoyment*. London: Verso, 1994.
- . *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997.
- . *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1991.