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Misplaced Communities: The Reproduction of Locality in Twentieth Century Planning and British Literature

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Misplaced Communities:
The Reproduction of Locality in Twentieth Century Planning and British Literature

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Comparative Literature

by

Ameeth Varma Vijay

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Rei Terada, Chair
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2015

DEDICATION

For my mother and father,

Rekha Vijay and Nampalli Vijay,

who taught me to seek knowledge,

and who showed me the importance of kindness

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Misplaced Communities:
The Reproduction of Locality in Twentieth Century Planning and British Literature

By

Ameeth Varma Vijay

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Professor Rei Terada, Chair

This dissertation situates twentieth-century British literature within a larger historical discourse of *place* and identity, especially as articulated in urban planning and architecture. In the twentieth century, planning emerged as a practice of hegemonic and colonial power *within* Britain as well as internationally. In analyzing these discourses, this dissertation argues against criticism that would set such hegemonic power in strict opposition to the local; in fact, through planning and its notion of *place,* such power could make profound claims to locality and particularity. This larger context informs readings of postwar and contemporary British writers, from the materially-focused poetry of Roy Fisher and Ian Hamilton Finlay, to the juxtapositions of provinciality and migration in the work of Caryl Phillips, and finally to the encounters with marginalized dismalness in the fiction of and Rachel Trezise.

INTRODUCTION

From Riots to Trees

From April to July of 1981, 'race' riots broke out across England, first in Brixton, and

then in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool. Frustrated by endemic poverty,

decaying neighborhoods, police surveillance and brutality, and the incipient attack on the welfare

state, working class communities – white and black – took to the streets in violent protest. While

sparked mostly by incidents of police brutality, often against black youth already the frequent

subject of increased 'stop and search' policing, the riots were deemed to be the result of "racial

disadvantage," according to a subsequent government inquiry into the riots, the Scarman report.[1]

While asserting that institutionalized racism did not exist, the report nevertheless advocated for

affirmative action to prevent existing race inequities from becoming an "endemic, ineradicable

disease threatening the very survival of [British] society."[2] The riots were the result not only of a

rapidly changing economy but also of the contestation of 'British' identity that, in the postwar

period, pitted Britain's burgeoning 'postcolonial', migrant population against white nationalists,

and working class white and black youths against Thatcherite authoritarianism and

neoliberalism. Margaret Thatcher herself promised, in 1978, that if elected the British would

"finally see an end to immigration lest [they] feel rather swamped by people with an alien

culture."[3]

Governmental responses to Britain's racial and economic troubles came slowly if at all.

The riots however did have the effect of calling to attention the need for the state to assimilate

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[1] L.G. Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April 1981 : Report of an Inquiry* (Penguin, 1986).
[2] Ibid.
[3] qtd in Jaqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 61.

race and class minorities in urban spaces via "community redevelopment and planning."[4] In

addition to analyzing police procedure and economic inequality, the Scarman report also focused

on regenerating decayed postwar urban spaces as a means of quelling social discontent. As

Jacqueline Nassy Brown notes, "the most absurd outcome of the riots was that the British

government, after carefully studying their root causes, decided that what Black people really

needed was a more uplifting environment."[5] Influential in attempting to provide these

environments was then Tory Secretary of State for the Environment, and avid horticulturalist,

Michael Heseltine. Heseltine established Development Corporations in London, Merseyside,

and other places that became responsible for urban planning and automatically superseded local

planning authorities.[6] In addition to planting trees and other greenery in Liverpool, Hesteline

established a series of national garden festivals to aesthetically and spiritually combat urban

decay and late industrialization.[7]

Of these regeneration efforts, Heseltine predicted that "after the [garden] festival has

gone, houses will be built here, jobs and industry will develop, and a very large part of it will be

kept for the people of Liverpool as open parkland."[8] He contracted the charity Groundwork UK

to help with this tree-based urban regeneration. What Heseltine and others took for granted was

a direct association between the problems of social alienation and community conflict and

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[4] Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April 1981 : Report of an Inquiry*.

[5] Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*, 69.

[6] Funded publicly but with less oversight than other government offices, bodies such as the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation are still responsible for planning in Britain, in their case ensuring that east London becomes a 'Green Enterprise District', helping to create a low-carbon economy in London. The 2009 masterplan for Brixton, produced in part by the "entrepreneurial charity" BioRegional, similarly touts its sustainable "One Planet Living (OPL) principles". London Borough of Lambeth, "Future Brixton Masterplan," (London: London Borough of Lambeth, 2009).

[7] Paul Coslett, "International Garden Festival," BBC.

[8] SevenStreets, "Bloom and Bust: Liverpool's Garden Festival Site," http://www.sevenstreets.com/bloom-and-bust-liverpools-garden-festival-site/.

something called the 'environment'.[9] By restoring the ruined, derelict environment, perhaps by planting trees, one could also restore and regenerate individuals who were also seen as ruined and derelict. Or, as Groundwork's slogan succinctly expresses: "changing places, changing lives."[10]

This dissertation asks, quite simply: what conditions of possibility allowed the planting of trees and gardens to be offered as solutions to the complex social problems that had developed in postwar Britain? Or more generally, how do constructions of places – urban, provincial, pastoral, colonial – become socially cathected abstractions that have the power to ground or dislocate identity? What happens when the antimonies, hierarchies, and relationships that structure place and identity collapse?

The question of how changing places can change lives (as Groundwork would have it) is common to contemporary British political discourse, implicitly and in many cases explicitly, and gains traction because of the tirelessly vexed focus on ideas of *place* in British culture more generally. This in turn indicates the salience of criticism in several fields, including postcolonial studies and literature, that attempts to to track conceptions of place and identity in the context of twentieth and twenty-first century modernity, including considerations of nationalism, globalization, late capitalism, and colonial histories. In particular regard to the last of these, many of these projects critically re-spatialize former European colonial powers so as to both

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[9] The site was virtually abandoned after six months, became derelict again, was closed in 1997, and has recently been 'restored' again by private developers into condos. Current owners, property management company Langtree, write how the failure of regeneration prompted more regeneration: "Following the closure of the Festival, the site was sold into private hands and a number of attempts to deliver a lasting and viable use for the site pursued. Unfortunately, all have failed including a brief period when the site was used for the Pleasure Island leisure park which eventually closed in 1997. Since 1997, the site has remained closed to the public, unused and allowed to fall into a state of neglect and disrepair…In 2004 an opportunity to acquire the site became available and Langtree, a Merseyside based property company, sought to acquire the interest. A full masterplanning exercise commenced with the brief to create a residential scheme which delivered a new waterfront park that benefitted the site and maximised its riverside location and elements including the Chinese and Japanese formal gardens." Langtree, "History," http://www.festivalgardens.com/the-site/history/.
[10] Groundwork UK, "History," Groundwork UK, http://www.groundwork.org.uk/history.

understand the influence and effect colonial peripheries on the metropole and also to draw attention to and legitimate cultural practices illegible and resistant to European thought. In finding such resistances through re-spatializaiton, this strain of postcolonial criticism seems to triumphantly undermine the hierarchies of imperialism.

There are ways, however, that this critical literature actually uses terms and concepts that have structured the very colonialism they seek to contest. Characteristic of this dynamic is an influential work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, a book that seeks to "write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions…and ironies that attend to it."[11] The work is a disarticulation of the temporality of colonialism (summed up in the phrase "first in Europe, then elsewhere") by reference to a concept of place. [12] That is, Chakrabarty notes that 'modernity' has been tied to the abstraction that is 'Europe', so that the two terms (modernity and Europe) offer themselves as global theories that even the non-European, "non-modern," scholar must acknowledge. Much as Marx (in Hegelian fashion) claims that a term like 'capital' contains the entirety of its own history, so does 'Europe' offer itself a totalizing reference point, the telos of 'civilization'. Rather than an atavistic project that would impossibly seek to negate this reference point and return nostalgically to the space and time of the pre-colonial, he proposes uncovering practices that may seem like anachronistic practices but should be read as contemporary modes of being. For Chakrabarty, The supposed relics of the past are in fact different ways of being in the present.

In complicating the temporality of colonialism, however, Chakrabarty reifies the givenness of *place*, associating it with the particular, the provincial and the resistant against the

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[11] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 43.
[12] Ibid., 7. This text primarily concerns itself with the subcontinent

universalizing ethos of European capitalism. That is, he reacts against the assimilation of

particular places into universal structures by performing the opposite maneuver. He states:

> To "provincialize" Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. **It was to ask a question about how thought was related to place. Can thought transcend places of their origin?**[13]

The place of origin (in this case 'Europe') is a naturalized space and moreover capable of birthing

thought that is, or should be, forever tied to this particular locale. 'Europe' is not provincialized

here but recreated as a place that coheres as such. Chakrabarty claims that his text "turns

around" a distinction between the 'analytical' and the 'affective,' and accordingly he uses the

former out of necessity while elevating the latter tonally.[14] He then sets a series of clustered

terms in opposition over the course of the text (even as Chakrabarty recognizes the pitfalls of

making such distinctions): Analytical, Europe, Modernity, Abstract, Universal, Historicism,

Colonization, Capital, Thought vs. Affective (Lived Experience), India, Tradition, Concrete,

Particular, Unknown Histories, Postcolonialism, Not-Capital, Place. If he acknowledges that he

does not speak of the "real" Europe, it is only because he uses 'Europe' as an immobile

conceptual background (which he terms 'the analytical') in order to foreground 'lived

experience' as mutable, ungraspable, and resistant (the 'affective').[15]

Chakrabarty resolves the multiplicity and ambivalence of *place* into its hegemonic and

non-hegemonic parts, and sets these in relation to each other, whereas the indissociability of

place suggests a more complex relationship. Chakrabarty would thus like to use an association

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[13] Ibid., xiii.. My emphasis
[14] Ibid., 18.
[15] Ibid., xiv. Incidentally, Chakrabarty tends to privilege the body as a site of micro-resistances. He claims these resistances are "partly embodied in the person's bodily habits [?], in unselfconscious collective practices, in his or her reflexes about what it means to relate to objects in the world as a human being and together with other human beings in his given environment. Nothing in it is automatically aligned with the logic of capital" ibid., 66.

between particularity and place to ground resistances to the hegemony of capital, but he overlooks that this hegemony can also employ notions of locality and particularity. The question of whether thought can transcend place, then, occasions its reversal: can place fully transcend thought?

Though this question might appear non- or even anti-materialist it actually occasions a review of colonial practices that in fact consistently made reference to concepts of place, particularity and location in the material construction of empire. It also leads to further questions that are strangely not considered in depth in *Provincializing Europe:* as a place, what is Europe — or Britain, or England, for that matter? Instead of a static and inert location of colonial power, a blank and undifferentiated metropole, it might instead by thought of as a fragmented product of colonial *practice*, the result of a *technics* that never opposed nation with empire, as Arendt claimed, but produced them together within a dynamic ideological structure.[16] This would be a provincializing of Europe that renders Chakrabarty's distinction between the affective and the analytical simplistic if not untenable. The appeal to the local in postcolonial scholarship is enticing in part because it imagines a place that transcends thought, and thus has the power to confront thought, where thought itself conceived as colonial.

For this reason, this dissertation considers the material practices of place-creation in provincialities that are not currently typically regarded as colonial (or in some cases even provincial). The promise that place could transcend thought, and become something more than a imaginative creation, something unambiguously real and particular to itself, was in fact the promise of colonial and urban planning. Furthermore this project seeks to disassociate practices of colonialism with the formal structure of empire without disregarding the latter and while also understanding the former as dynamic and mobile, both feeding and responding to the

transformations of late capital. Put more simply, there are still trees in Liverpool that can attest to the continuance of colonial practice even (or especially?) 'within' Britain.[17]

These material practices, in particular architecture, are taken up more directly in Ian Baucom's *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. He argues in fact that a certain provincial, 'enclosed' England was undermined and disarticulated through its dissemination in the empire:

> as England dispersed its Gothic cathedrals, cricket fields, imperial maps, costumed bodies, and country houses across the surface of the globe, it found that these spaces, and the narratives of identity they physically embodied, were altered by the colonial subjects who came into contact with them…the history of English imperialism and of the imperial determinations of English identity can be read as a history of contested spaces, of locations in which the English colonists at once attempt to manifest their cultural identities and to discipline the identities of their subordinates.[18]

Baucom suggests that imperialism fundamentally disrupted and dispersed a notion of *English* national identity, creating a multiplicity of locales and place-specific Gadamerian lines of memory which still haunt post-imperial Britain. In this he suggests that place-making in a foreign space was bound to disrupt and contest the supposed unity of English identity, that the colonial encounter was multi-directional.

In this he relies on the always perilous distinction between "English" and "British" to create a structured opposition between a relatively homogenous and consistent ethnic nationalism (England) and a global imperialism (Britain). This reinforces the idea that "English" identity had any cohesion before the colonial encounter (itself displaced over a long period of time). Without this, there would be nothing at stake in its subsequent disruption. However, as

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[16] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 127.
[17] For this reason Homi Bhabha's understanding of the 'post' in postcolonail as determinative border and epistemological limit, though perhaps one even more ambivalent and less emancipatory than he suggest. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), 2-7.
[18] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 221.

Robert JC Young notes, "perhaps the fixity of identity for which Englishness developed such a reputation arose because it was in fact continually be contested, and was rather designed to mask its uncertainty, its sense of being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other."[19] That is, identity does not precede a hybrid 'contamination' but emerges from it.[20] Englishness and whiteness are both contingent categories of knowledge, not social facts, as is their association, all of which can be easily overlooked by naturalizing place. That is, the multidirectional aesthetic traffic that Baucom emphasizes does not, by itself, produce or connote anti-colonial resistance.

Locality for Baucom often signals contestation; however, by considering the ideology of British place-planning and architecture, one can see that localism, with its apparent contestations, were fundamental to advancing the colonial vision. This has the consequence of making the effects of the supposed contestation provided by place to be anticlimatic. For example, instead of being emancipatory, he writes that place can give the vernacular a "local habitation and a name." [21] Further, in the colonial encounter of Ruskinian architecture in non-English spaces, "belonging that is revealed not as unified and complete but as perpetually in progress."[22] It might be, however, that something unfixed and "in progress" can still be colonialist, and that "belonging" was only ever unified in the premises of his argument to be then made plural.

Both Chakrabarty and Baucom are indicative of postcolonial criticism that attends to place by invoking what amounts to overly simplistic relational perspectives. This too easily leads

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[19] Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 2.
[20] This is true of race as well: Baucom suggests that the middle class authors writing about the East End in the late nineteenth century were "exaggerating" its alterity or merely establishing a "metaphoric equivalence between the black and white subjects of the British Empire." Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*, 61-62. Baucom treats blackness as a static, undifferentiated social fact that could be metaphorically applied to whiteness, as if there could not be any 'real' differentiation in the latter. In fact, in the colony, "skin color, other physical markers, and birth-place provided insufficient proof of an individual's European or Anglo-Indian status" and "behavior and lifestyle made possible mainly by wealth thus determined racial categorization as much as ancestry, which could prove defiantly indeterminate." E. Buettner, *Empire Families:Britons and Late Imperial India: Britons and Late Imperial India* (OUP Oxford, 2004), 83.
[21] Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*, 210.

to a "trend in contemporary scholarship that finds critical bite in making the point that the

representations of 'hegemonic' institutions…are 'partial'… [or] in emphasizing what is small, or

local (and these two are often equated in this scholarship)" as inherently resistant to the

hegemony that has been invoked.[23] That is, assuming general categories (universal/particular,

hegemony/subaltern), it is easy to emphasize either the oppressive, wide-spread "dominance" of

the former or the capacity of the latter to develop resistant practices, in which alterity continually

'contaminates' the epistemological enclosure of imperial or national identity.[24] In fact that same

imperialism grounded itself in racialized and sexualized epistemology of place that continually

encountered and reworked those same relational frameworks with an emphasis on the local.

Both Simon Gikandi and Jed Esty follow the contours of Baucom's respatialization with

the intent of thinking Britain-as-island and Britain-as-empire together. Where Baucom mobilizes

a concept of Englishness that is transformed in the colonial encounter, Esty argues that 1930s

English provincialism and nationalism developed as an aesthetic response to imperial

contraction. What Esty acknowledges they have in common is a focus on how the provincial and

particular respond to, mediate, and even subvert a *British* imperial hegemony. Esty's project is

not just an integration of previously segregated spatalities, but also a reperiodization premised

upon a reading of late modernist texts that develop a sense of English particularity as a positive

aesthetic mode in the context of imperial contraction. In this, modernist elites (Woolf, Eliot, etc)

inscribed in their work a broader zeitgeist of home anthropology, the will towards identifying

Englishness as a homogenous tribal culture.

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[22] Ibid., 217.
[23] Annelise Riles, "The View from the International Plane: Perspective and Scale in the Architecture of Colonial International Law," *Law and Critique* 6, no. 1 (1995): 52.
[24] Which, in turn, produced biopolitical structures to manage colonial hybridity

Esty thus makes a rather neat and orderly distinctions between Britishness and Englishness, empire and nation, exterior and interior; these dualities, like those in Chakrabarty and Baucom, allow for flourishing particularity as such in his argument.   He writes, "the key figures in this version of late modernism are canonical English writers who measured the passing of British hegemony not solely in terms of a vitiated imperial humanism but also in terms of a recovered cultural particularity that is, at least potentially, the basis for both social and aesthetic renewal."[25]   These high modernist writers' late work both signals and produces a shift between the universalism of *British* imperialism that had earlier produced a metropolitan anomie 'at home' to an English national and cultural particularism. That is, "with the engines of imperial (and industrial) expansion sputtering in the thirties, England was recoded, or seen to metamorphose, from a Hegelian subject of world-historical development to a Herderian object of its own insular history."[26]

This is perhaps appealing because it ostensibly reverses Chakrabarty's temporality of modernity so it can be understood as 'first in the colonies, then in Europe'. However, home anthropology did not not begin at the end of empire, but was coterminous with high imperialism explicitly in the form of home colonization, as the first chapter of this dissertation will show. The deployment of model villages and garden city design show that the production of particularism, English or otherwise, was a fundamental concern within the epistemology of Gladstonian new imperialism (which existed alongside late nineteenth century new liberalism).

Furthermore, Esty writes that "modernism's nativist and culturalist turn represents the first part of a decolonizing dialectic in which the tropes and modes of colonial knowledge came home to roost at the end of empire," a dynamic he sees also at work in the Mass Observation

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[25] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3.

project and somewhat more problematically in the development of British cultural studies.[27] It

is not clear, then, why the techniques of dispossesive interpellation (i.e. colonialism) become, in

the hands of British/English elites, means to aesthetic self-renewal. A more likely reading of

these disparate culture-effects is within a longer history of home colonization through which the

national was both created and differentiated, a 'dialectic' that sees the operations of power

inherent in the development of particularism. For these reasons the British/English distinction,

even as heuristic, is not so useful, both because it produces a static and overly clean

differentiation between hegemony and resistance but also because it relies upon a relational

understanding of place to ground conceptions of nationalism, colonialism, and identity.[28]

Moreover, the simplistic narrative of a shrinking imperial Britain and a rising "cultural"

England both naturalizes Englishness via *place* and is unable to account for neocolonialism of a

global Britain. Esty refers to the work of Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, writing that "in

Anderson's influential analysis, the anthropological visibility and wholeness of tribal societies in

the colonial periphery drew attention away from comprehensive sociological knowledge of

England itself. As Anderson's colleague Tom Nairn puts the point, 'Historically, the inward lack

corresponded to an outward presence.' "[29] Again, one can note the peculiarity of the apparent

benign nature of "home anthropology" given its practices in establishing empire. Putting this

aside, it is indeed the case that, for Nairn, Britain in part corresponds to the increasingly pathetic,

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[26] Ibid., 16.
[27] Ibid., 9.
[28] Additionally, as will be discussed in chapter one, such a division between English lack and British colonial presence would be unable to recognize the ways in which a differentiated national identity was developed in settler communities. These dynamics have been explored at length in the following: Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995)., Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: University of Chicago Press, 2002)., Buettner, *Empire Families:Britons and Late Imperial India: Britons and Late Imperial India*.
[29] Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*, 7.

one might say dismal, attempt to "ensure that Great Britain will endure as a major ornament —

even a leader — of the Globalised future."[30]

However, for Nairn English "inwardness" was not opposed to but rather in service to a

British "outwardness" in the form of empire, a dynamic still very active in British politics. He

writes

> That configuration of outreach has always been a key ingredient of "Britishness," more
> like an organic extensions of the English identity than simply another layer of it, or one of
> its options. "Outreach" is both much less and much more than colonial, or even
> "informal," overseas empire. In the British case, it denotes something like an imperium
> of commerce, which for a time comprised foreign territories and "subject peoples," but
> was at no point wholly dependent upon these. And when they vanished between the
> 1940s and the 1970s, the imperium-core not only survived but flourished. That is, the
> City or exchange-centre of London retained or even expanded its function in the Cold
> War era.[31]

In this way Britishness and Englishness were never straightforwardly opposed (let alone clearly

identifiable) in some kind of zero-sum game for preeminence, but rather co-constitutive in the

service of what Narin calls the "imperium-core" literally centered in London. A sense of cultural

or political "decline" and the continuance or even intensification of inherited hegemonies are

also not mutually exclusive; decline works on specific objects whose later regeneration fuels this

new-look empire.

A narrative of British (imperial) decline is appealing especially if it ends in a happy

"colonization in reverse," but it occludes much else. In this case, the end of a formal empire

postwar "contributed to a misplaced presumption that the decline of Britain's 'greatness' was a

generalized phenomenon involving national economic failure as well as political retreat."[32]

Rather, it was "in the decades after 1945, when anxieties about British economic decline were at

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[30] Tom Nairn, *Pariah: Misfortunes of the British Kingdom* (London: Verso, 2002), 13.
[31] Ibid., 33-34.
[32] J. Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800* (I.B. Tauris, 2002), 120.

their height, that Britain's economic growth was by historical standards at its most impressive," as British 'greatness' continued to be transformed and reconstituted.[33] The relationship between a vague sense of decline or decay and the persistence of a hegemonic "imperium-core" is thus complex and partly symbiotic, and has its own history into which various versions of Britishness and Englishness have been reworked. This dissertation tracks this relationship by examining the continual reproduction of national identities *through* colonialism as a variegated and ongoing practice.

This is different from work in postcolonial studies that, as Simon Gikandi phrases it, reads "Englishness as a cultural and literary phenomenon produced in the ambivalent space that separated, but also conjoined, metropole and colony."[34] Englishness or the metropole is separated and conjoined, influenced, contaminated, provincialized or particularized by the colony, but not *co-produced* in that relationship. If the space analyzed in this work was truly, as Gikandi claims, ambivalent, it would be able to better account for colonialism as a set of practices that created the colony within the metropole.[35]

Work by Peter Kalliney, John McLeod and John Clement Ball continues the themes of the above work but with specific regard to London. Through their more narrowly focused work however, place bears a more complicated relationship to identity. Kalliney is able to present an Englishness whose postcolonial disruption is not premised on an earlier coherence, noting for example that in the late nineteenth century "no one in a position of authority...questioned the fundamental promise that the urban poor constituted a cancerous, foreign body in the heart of the

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[33] Ibid., 118.

[34] Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xii.

[35] as Raymond Williams writes, "it is a strange fate. The unemployed man from the slums of the cities, the superfluous landless worker, the dispossessed peasant: each of these found employment in killing and disciplining the rural poor of the subordinated countries" Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

metropole."[36] Ball, meanwhile, attempts to constitute a palimpsestic London without Michel de Certeau's urban theory, which he writes is "limitingly local, sentimentally poetic, even childishly utopian in its view of individual empowerment…[and] also based on a binary view that sets totalized power against dispersed resistance."[37]

These critics tell a story of London in its transition from imperial metropolis to national capital to a central node in a transnational network of global Englishness. London specifically becomes a place through which postcolonial subjects mediate relationships between the local and the global.[38] Ironically though maybe inevitably, these distinctions accrue values and meanings as "imagined" as those of London itself; Ball associates the local with the material, physical, the everyday and experience, while the global signifies histories as such, representation, and as such is "mentally processed."[39] It allows for and almost inexorably leads to a reading of postcolonial (i.e. migrant) literature that focuses on the everyday and the phenomenal for the sake of producing, as only the postcolonial can, a sense of resistance. For McLeod, London is a "transcultural space of social possibility" though existing with 'negative' aspects like racism and exclusion. It is problematically cliché when this leads, for example, to a focus on the dance floor in *The Lonely Londoners* as a multicultural, utopian place of expression and escape. Problematic for excepted reasons — that this is a new humanist stereotype and anyway fleeting — and the perhaps unexpected one that if it were not as such — local, visceral, particular, real — it would be neither a place nor utopian.[40] That is, the theoretical conclusions of this criticism is driven by what is at least partly unexamined assumptions about place and how it functions.

[36] Peter J. Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 43.
[37] J.C. Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (University of TORONTO Press, 2004), 10.
[38] Ibid., 18.
[39] Ibid.
[40] J. McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (ROUTLEDGE CHAPMAN & HALL, 2004), 33.

Rather than re-legislate periodizations, alternate geographies or terms of national identity, this dissertation seeks to problematize the way that *place* is produced and deployed by colonial practice. Place is elusive because it is continually prone to collapse. This makes Jacqueline Nassey Brown's helpful understanding of place to also be (helpfully) precarious: she writes that place is "an abstraction, not a set of physical properties just there for the eye to see," but rather "results from the impulse to map processes, practices, and phenomena [and] has no a priori spatial or social form" and that it does (or should) not connote the "specific," the "local," or the "particular" thereby serving as instance of or resistance to more "general" global forces, nor should it be a simple and equally natural expression of those forces.[41]

Place, as a concept, is more often thought as a tangible, sensual, and real space of inhabitance and familiarity for particular identities and communities, and either supported for this supposed particularity or opposed as parochial, limited, or inadequate to describe the multidirectional relationality of identity. That is, the dynamics involved in producing place have a tendency to repeat themselves in criticism that aims to discuss how place is produced, a subtle shift between the analytic and the normative. Thus instead of asking under what conditions and for what effect the local or the global are produced, they come to express methodological preferences towards conceptualizing identity through particularity or through "networked" relationality, respectively.[42] This is further ironic because, as this dissertation will show, historically the concept of place has been co-constituted through notions of particularity and relationality both.

Among the prominent geographers who wrestle with this problematic is Doreen Massey. In her collection of essays *Space, Place and Gender* she notes how terms like space and place are

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[41] Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*, 8-9, 133.
[42] these are examples, not exhaustive positions

constantly reworked in ways that prevent absolute normative definition. However, she then goes

on to say that place specifically

> includes relations which stretch beyond — the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside. Such a view of place challenges any possibility of claims to internal histories or to timeless identities. The identities of place are always unfixed, contested, and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) the the specificity of the mix of link and interconnections to that 'beyond'. Places viewed this way are open and porous.[43]

The frequent claim that some entity is "always unfixed, contested and multiple" lends to place its

own kind of conceptual integrity and boundedness, one that while not closely related to some

local territory in a conventional sense relies on conventional dualisms between global and local,

outside and inside to make a similarly absolutist point just from a different perspective. One

could easily say that the global (the universal, the abstract, capital, thought itself?) is always

"contested" in local places where identity is "unfixed" and "multiple."

> Massy, however, subsequently problematizes this way of producing knowledge:

> As with space, so with place certain formulations of the concept are embedded in concatenations of linked and interplaying dichotomies which in turn are related, both in their general form and in their specific connotational content, to gender. In the pair space/place it is place which represents Being, and to it are attached a range of epithets and connotations: local, specific, concrete, descriptive. Each of these carries a different burden of meaning and each relates to different oppositions. The contrary to these classically designated characteristics of place are terms such as: general, universal, theoretical/abstract/conceptual. It was this kind of opposition, these sets of dualisms, which were in play when a number of Marxist geographers criticized so strongly the renewed interest in localities in the 1980s.[44]

The dichotomies and relationships involved in defining "space" and "place" are usually

normative and can and have been reworked with regards to each term, and thus debates involving

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[43] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (London: Wiley, 2013), 5.
[44] Ibid., 9.

strong distinctions between the two are now limited in scope and value.[45] Also notable here is Massey's contention that the construction of these relationships is inextricably gendered.

This pertains not just to the ways in which one set of terms or another will establish or subvert and kind of normative dominance but also to the way that these debates repeat the gendered structure of place as it has been constituted historically. A useful example of this is found in chapter one and involves one of the most quoted passages from Ebenezer Howard's 1902 *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* where he writes on the need to relate and combine — but not collapse — the masculine town and the feminine country into the marriage of the garden city.[46] This primary relationship is what allowed the garden city to be a particular distinct place, and if it collapsed it would result in indistinction that another planner would call a "sterile, hermaphroditic beastlines."[47] It seems that in criticism as well, the concept of place reveals an anxiety over indistinction, one that could be explored through the concept of the ruin.

This dissertation argues that colonialist planning functions by identifying places in "ruin" and proposing to recreate and revitalize them through place-making interventions. The choice of the term "ruin" to critically describe this process is potentially confusing given the many connotations of the word and its typical usage within theory. In this dissertation, the term describes how cultural elites (writers, planners, architects, colonists, politicians, etc) conceptualized and rhetorically "prepared" entities, objects and people for their interventions (whether or not they were conscious of this process or of the ideology behind it). In this sense "ruin" might be substituted with a number of other terms, some of which were actually used to

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[45] e.g. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley, 1992).
[46] E. Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow: (Being the Second Edition of "to-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform")* (S. Sonnenschein & co., ltd., 1902), 48.
[47] Thomas Sharp, quoted in D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (Reaktion Books, 2005).

describe spaces and people: decayed, spoiled, degraded, damaged, and later, contaminated, failed, among others.

Thus the use of "ruin" in this dissertation is somewhat ironic: while not denying, say, the poor, unsanitary living conditions of Edwardian slums or their counterparts across the British empire, or the physical destruction of the second World War, this dissertation does not assent to their characterization as ruined (decayed, spoiled, etc) but rather attempts to examine how and when spaces or people become so-characterized and how that influences place-making as "revitalization" or "regeneration." It should be further noted that the use of "ruin" also does not refer to 'actual', officially designated historical ruins except to mark how cultural objects (aristocratic houses, certain trees or hills, the countryside as such) are reformulated in the twentieth century as part of a common heritage and in need of "preservation"; here, too, the use is ironic, though certainly not meant to imply that trees and such are not important.

That being said, the term is theoretically important because it gestures towards the stakes and implicit preoccupations of place-making in modern and contemporary culture. This is also potentially confusing, because in critical theory "ruin" often suggests the alternative temporality of Benjaminian *jetzeit*, including in work on postcolonial ruins.[48] In this dissertation, however, ruin as a theoretical term describes instead the absence of the qualities and relationalities that characterize *place*, especially for the aforementioned cultural elites (planners, etc). As will be described at length, 'real' places were distinct and particular and at the same time set into relation and reconciled opposing qualities (e.g. for garden city planners, town/country, society/individual, modernity/tradition; later, the relationships might be between global/national/regional/local). In this epistemology, "ruins" were that which were somehow indistinct and unable to produce such tidy relationalties (perhaps, for example, due to some vague quality of excess, such as attended

turn-of-the-century slums; they were too crowded, too modern, too industrial, too large, too

foreign and too impoverished to be functional places). In this sense, "ruin," both in historical

and cultural context and as a theoretical term, describes a state of *indistinction* and a *collapse* of

the relationships that produce and mark proper, functional, *real* places.

Collapse is a helpful concept in this case because it implies something that still exists but

in a compromised state.[49] Theoretically, it poses the problem of indistinction, or of a distinction

that has been *ruined*, but not completely erased.[50] The ruin is an alternative to *place* that is so

inherently unformed and simultaneously subject to the full, continuous weight of place's

hegemonic reorderings that it is not only not resistant, it is not even really a true alternative. This

view is pessimistic in the sense that it is critical not only of the tendency to reproduce an

alternative to hegemonic colonial and neocolonial processes through the same terms as those

processes (including the term "place" itself), but also with regards to the teleological desire to

produce alternatives as such.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One: Early British Urban Planning and Home Colonization

The urban tumult of the early 1980s was not unique to the era of course. It was also

characteristic, for example, of the scene in London and other industrial cities a century earlier, at

that time against the backdrop of industrial despoliation and liberalism (instead of postindustrial

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[48] Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Duke University Press, 2013).

[49] This could be extended out to describe official ruins (the ancient Roman house that is simultaneously a pile of rocks) but in the idiom of planning more aptly refers to something akin to spoilt milk (no longer real milk, still there).

[50] This suggests Foucault's heterotopic as a space composed of multiple times in direct conflict and yet inseparable, coexisting in resignation rather than resistance. The heterotopic, "destroys the *and* of the enumeration by making impossible the *in* where the things enumerated would be divided up," and is therefore a "disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry" Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xvi.

despoliation and neoliberalism). The idiom in which Heseltine and other urban planners spoke

in the 1980s was not only one of dereliction and loss but of futurity and regeneration. That is,

they were less nostalgic for places that had been ruined then attempting to remake place,

reinvesting it with authenticity and particularity, enabling the 'environment' to properly produce

healthy, vibrant, productive communal and individual identities. This, too, was a continuation of

a longer history.

Chapter one investigates this history of riots and trees in the context of "home

colonization," that is, the production of colonial practices in the development of space within

Britain. Whereas the riotous energy of British cities in the late nineteenth century occupied a

discursive position of excess, interventions of planned spaces were self-contained social

ecologies that tamed and regulated such excess. This was generally figured as a kind of social

philanthropy, as in the case of the benevolent capitalism of George Cadbury and William Lever's

model villages and Canon and Henrietta Barnett's settlements in the urban dark continent of east

London.

Most influential for the rise of urban planning as a modern field of knowledge, however,

was the garden city movement, which took the preoccupations and tendencies social and

produced planning systems. Specifically, through the intervention of a new environment,

specifically including increased space and a balance of urban and rural elements, social excess

could be transformed into productive social relationships. What was missing from the degraded

East End spaces, in addition to adequate housing, employment, sanitary conditions etc, was a

sense of particularity and distinction through which fully capable social individuals could be

formed. Once this kind of place was created, many of the other issues would be resolved.

Notably, distinction also created stable relations between opposed elements: town and country, society and the individual, and upper/middle and working classes. Indeed, the early planning ultimately sought to produce a relation between particularity of a place and the universality of planning principles, a relationship that condenses in the figure of the plan or the model itself — a will towards place's concrete creation and its abstract imaginaries.

Both relationality and localism in planning and geography is once again *en vogue*, but an examination of the above history suggests that place in its modern construction is unthinkable without reference to concepts of both particularity and relationality, so that the neither can so simply be opposed to the "top-down," but rather both facilitate the same ideological and material processes. Thus in returning to the relational and the ecological, critics may also return to relations between metropole and province and between planned environment and social identity — that is, to the relationality and place-creation of colonization, home or otherwise. The remainder of the dissertation tracks the discourse of relationality and particularity in place-creation in regards to the missing term, colonialism.

Chapter Two: The Concrete Futurity of the Postwar: Materiality in Ian Hamilton Finlay and Roy Fisher

In many ways, the garden city movement came to fruition in postwar Britain, when the project of literally and figuratively rebuilding Britain was most urgent due to the destruction of war. It is this period that saw the development of the welfare state, council housing, New Towns and modernist architecture, all of which remain politically contentious. Yet this period only entrenched the prerogatives of planning and of creating new places out of ruin. Thus although the aesthetic idiom had changed — New Towns were much larger than garden cities, architecture

was minimalist and made of concrete instead of quaint and vernacular — the imagination of what a place could do and its centrality as a means toward politics were if anything amplified.

To examine this relationship, chapter two first turns to the continuing conflicts, aesthetic and political, regarding modernist architecture, specifically New Brutalist architecture in concrete. The materiality of architectural modernism was central to its aesthetics: brutalism was not simply denotative of the use of unfinished concrete (*Béton Brut)* but was connotative of an aesthetic of brutal directness grounded in the (non-abstract) concrete. Where garden city planners employed vernacular architecture amidst trees and open spaces to create distinct places, the modernists they inspired looked to materiality to foreground a directness and honesty; both sets of place-makers, however, conceived interventions to cultivate a more organically cohesive society and forward-looking society out of ruins past.

In this way, modernist avant-garde aesthetics were not in retreat in this period, but rather proliferating while always understanding themselves in relation to national, sub-national, and regional identity. Architecture thus made natural allies in planning, design, and avant garde literature. Turning specifically to concrete poetry, which could even in the 1960s be considered late modernist, this chapter interrogates the suppositions of materiality and directness found in these aesthetics and the politics of identity that arise from them. The multi-modal work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and the work in his seminal journal *poor.old.tired.horse* indicates how relational, scalar identity is negotiated not through the cultural particularism (à la Esty) of the regional but through avant-garde, international concrete directness. The attempt of the concrete to produce distinction collapses as easily as the cultivation of the particular, and for the same reasons. That so much is at stake in these aesthetics and that the central concerns are so similar across a range of artistic media, cultural discourses and political institutions point toward an

epistemology that produces sociality. That is, these are the materials from which identity can be produced in this time period.

The chapter turns to the poetry of Roy Fisher, who more concretely responds to the ruination of war and the regeneration of the postwar in his long prose-poem *City*. This poem contends with the materiality of a spectral city not to recreate place but to dwell in the emptiness of its continuing collapse. Just as the excess of the urban created the problem of indistinction for planners who responded with garden cities and New Towns, here emptiness produces its own indistinction also remedied by the bulldozing place-creation of modernization and regeneration.

Chapter Three

Paasi writes of contemporary critical geography that "territorially bounded spaces have been like a red rag to a bull for many relationalists even though relational and territorial spaces may exist concomitantly."[51]   Indeed, as chapters one and two show, understanding place in relational terms is not opposed to the desire for particularity and distinctiveness; rather, the two are co-constituative.   An irony is produced when this critical distinction, between place as bounded territory and place as "network," is operationalized using, implicitly or explicitly, existing geographical relationships. Thus it can be the case that the ideological conception of London, for example, as a multi-cultural "world city," with its financial and social "networks," can be reified in opposition to those territorially bounded places that do not exist either for critics or for planners. These would be what Caryl Phillips' 2003 novel *A Distant Shore* calls "towns of unquestionable insignificance."[52]

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[51] Anssi Paasi, "Is the World More Complex Than Our Theories of It? Tpsn and the Perpetual Challenge," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 3 (2008): 406.
[52] Caryl Phillips, *A Distant Shore* (Vintage Books, 2005), 179.

These small northern English towns are produced as isolated and bounded through the relational structural processes of colonialism and late capitalism through which industrial organization has been "hollowed out" to make way for a consumer-economy "filling in," in the language of critical geography.[53] This is tracked in *A Distant Shore* through the creation of an antagonistic geography that self-consciously forgets its own history, as the fictional town of Weston is repopulated by wealthier, urban migrants in a new quasi-suburban kitsch-medieval development of Stoneleigh. This juxtaposition leads critics of the novel to read the residents of Weston as innate provincials, naturalizing place and identity and confining them within a critical narrative of a shrinking, melancholic, racistly retrenched England. Reading back into this scene a sense of relationality does not free it of its race, class, and gender antagonism but rather historicizes the (re)production of these split, antagonistic provincial geographies and of social marginality.

Chapter Four

Current trends toward new garden cities, ecotowns, localism, and new trans-regional organizations are the latest iteration of cycles of ruin and regeneration, both different in their concretion and configuration within different historical periods and similar due to the accretion of this history, latent or manifest, in understandings of place and identity. A response to this might involve formulating a new positive theorization of "sociospatial" relations or to locate resistance beyond the insincerity of neoliberal localism. In the meantime, what results from the collapse of place's relations and in non-dramatic ruins that offer no obvious and distinct forms of (local) resistance.

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[53] Rhys Jones et al., "'Filling in' the State: Economic Governance and the Evolution of Devolution in Wales," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 23, no. 3 (2005).

Chapter four considers the pragmatic confrontation with indistinction through an aesthetic of dismalness, specifically through the popular culture phenomenon of "crap" or "dismal" towns. Such dismalness is an unimpressed poetics of place that finds expression in semi-ironic magazine competitions, internet message boards, travel websites, and YouTube comments. Unlike discourses of regeneration, dwellers of dismal towns have no recourse to futurity or to distinction, for this reason dismalness is frustratingly (for planners and politicians) incommensurate with regeneration. Instead, there is the opaque negativity of a problem without a solution, pointlessly disabling not just for policy and planning but also for critical thought that must relentlessly move forward even as it disavows progress as such.

The second part of chapter four considers this aesthetic of dismalness in the short fiction of Rachel Trezise, whose writing is set in south Wales valleys. Dismalness here arises out of an almost rigorously non-nostalgic treatment of the valleys, negotiating as it does a paradoxically non-identitarian Welshness amid indistinct spaces and continued economic restructuring. Policy makers encourage places to competitively develop their own cultural particularity, but for the "outward" facing procurement of global capital, with its flexible employment and tourists.[54] Trezise's writing dwells in the immediate collapse of these pretensions, with scattered regeneration projects reproducing ruin before they even begin. What has collapsed is the cyclic temporality of regeneration, place, and identity, but the intempestive atopia that results is not radically re-ordering, but simply dismal.

In sum, the terms from which an earlier postcolonial studies was constructed are no longer sufficient and increasingly questionable as neocolonial forms and practices amplify. That which had previously been set aside and made distinct from the operations of colonial power

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[54] In the south Wales valleys this might result in new cultural centers funded by the EU or in ex-miners who have become tour guides in ex-mines.

may instead be shown to exist in a less easy and more muddled conjunction. This dissertation

will accomplish this in part by examining histories and aesthetics whose terms undermine the

distinctions established in the above-mentioned critical discourse. At the same time, the desire to

separate place from thought in these histories, and the continual inability to do so, problematizes

the way relationality depends on and reproduces distinction and particularity, a dynamic that

reflects back onto critical thought.

CHAPTER ONE

Early British Urban Planning and Home Colonization

In April of 2014, the Department for Communities and Local Government, led by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and MP Eric Pickles, published a housing policy proposal entitled *Locally-led Garden Cities.*[55] The goal was to "unlock up to 250,000 new homes between 2015 and 2020" in developments which will be "well-designed, and bring together high-quality homes, jobs, and green spaces in communities where people want to live raise their children."[56] Garden cities conjure "visions of fresh air, patches of lawn, a place to park the cars, and, of course, for the detached cottage itself," and in Clegg's words, "unless we take more radical action, we will see more and more small communities wither, our big cities will become ever more congested as we continue to pile on top of each other."[57] He described the plan as a "call to arms for visionaries," fighting against "ad-hoc, urban sprawl."[58]

Though the vision of Ebenezer Howard's 1902 *Garden Cities of To-morrow* always hums in the background to modern urban planning schemes, especially in Britain, their revival in this context speaks to the contemporary concern over climate change and 'sustainability' and interests — from planners and critics alike — in producing 'natural' cities.   This is evident in large scale planning projects and with support from politicians of all persuasions, for example the 'ecotowns', the sustainability-oriented Olympics, 'green' skycrapers and apartments, or in plans

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[55] Eric Pickles and Nick Clegg, "Locally-Led Garden Cities," ed. Department for Communities and Local Government (London: Department for Communities and Local Government 2014).

[56] Department for Communities and Local Government et al., "Government Offers Support for Locally-Led Garden Cities," (London: Department for Communities and Local Government , 2014).

[57] Jonathan Glancey, "Do We All Dream of Life in a Garden City?," *The Telegraph* 2012.

[58] Press Association, "Nick Clegg to Promise up to Three New Garden Cities with 15,000 Homes Each," *The Guardian* 2014.

for a £175 "garden bridge" across the Thames. [59]   This emphasis on nature and sustainability is

often commercial, producing what Hilary Cunningham calls "gated ecologies," where "wealthier

residents of cities not only enjoy socio-economic benefits, but also selectively reap the

advantages of clean water, adequate sanitation, beautiful parks, and environmentally friendly

buildings and products from within enclaves of privilege."[60] Nonetheless, the broader cultural

impetus that finds these developments and products appealing is one that understands the

problems of the contemporary period in terms strikingly similar to Howard, who, as a response

to the environmental and economic excesses of industrial capitalism, sought to bring town and

country together in his garden cities.[61] Clegg's attempts to create harmonious, "thriving

communities" has its figural roots in Howard's belief that real places could be restorative and

uplifting, reconciling social tensions and producing healthy, happy and productive individuals

and local communities without the need for overt political change[62].

Regeneration and sustainability may be the most recent additions to the urban

development lexicon in Britain, but the deployment of a restorative, healthy and green place is

not quite as novel. Rather what is now called "regeneration" recalls the rise of British town and

country planning in the early twentieth century. While the mournful loss of 'nature' is a

persistently reoccurring motif of British culture, as Raymond Williams documents, British urban

planning displaced this nostalgia into visions for the future, creating imaginary places predicated

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[59] Graeme Hayes and John Horne, "Sustainable Development, Shock and Awe? London 2012 and Civil Society," *Sociology* 45, no. 5 (2011).; Oliver Wainwright, "London's Garden Bridge: 'It Feels Like We're Trying to Pull Off a Crime'," *The Guardian* 2014.
[60] Hilary Cunningham, "Gated Ecologies and 'Possible Urban Worlds': From the Global City to the Natural City," in *The Natural City: Re-Envisioning the Built Environment*, ed. Ingrid Leman Stefanovic and Stephen Bede Scharper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
[61] For an advocation and application of garden city principles in the contemporary period, see John Simonds, *Garden Cities 21: Creating a Livable Urban Environment* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated, 1994).
[62] Association, "Nick Clegg to Promise up to Three New Garden Cities with 15,000 Homes Each."

on a desire for particularity, familiarity and identity.[63] These ideas germinated in Ebenezer

Howard's highly influential garden city movement, which proposed creating new communities of

open space with sunlight and gardens and spacious houses and genial trees that would reconcile

the social tensions and individual worries of urban, industrial life. Garden cities, however, were

part of a much wider net of ideas, ideologies and practices that concerned themselves with the

entire social and physical environment of the individual. Howard's movement had significant

overlaps with the building of model villages and company towns in the countryside and the

public park and other social reform movements in the city.

Howard's term for these new places of social reconciliation, achieved through planning

and architecture rather than through revolution, is revealing and significant: he termed them

'home colonies.' Many accounts of Howard's garden city saw it as a well-meaning, influential,

but overly-idealistic and ill-fated project, which produced boring commuter suburbs at best and

latently reinscribed class hierarchies at worst.   However, this chapter takes seriously Howard's

designation of garden cities as "home colonies" and examines how early urban planning was

implicated in colonial practices. That is, while it is clear that spatial development is always in

practice political, this chapter will show how the ways in which the garden cities movement

understood and conceived of the relationships between town and country, society and nature,

modernity and tradition and of place itself constituted an epistemology of colonialism infused

with gendered and raced power relations.[64]

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[63] Williams, *The Country and the City*. The loss of nature as an original trauma was also presented in Danny Boyle's dutifully kitschy London 2012 Olympic opening ceremonies.

[64] The latin colōnia connoted 'farm', 'landed estate' and 'settlement'. Similarly the term 'plantation', from plantātiōn, suggests propagation of new plants as well as a cluster of plants or trees, but also was used from the sixteenth century to also mean "The settling of people, usually in a conquered or dominated country; esp. the planting or establishing of a colony; colonization." In fact the precursor to the British Colonial Office was called the Board of Plantations. Thus it seems that the tree planting is etched into the varied etymology of colonization Oxford English Dictionary, *"Colony, N."* (Oxford University Press).; Oxford English Dictionary, *"Plantation, N."*

The process of home colonization which concerned itself not only with disciplining unruly subjects but also with caring for them, making them more productive, happy and fit to a particular place. The desire for control and the utopian vision of a harmonious society both invoked, implicitly or explicitly, the 'environment' as the determining factor of individual and communal identity. Finally, and most importantly, this colonizing conception of place was deeply intertwined with a notion of the particular as such, which was often signaled by reference to the distinct and local fields, gardens, streams, soil and trees — a restorative 'nature', which would complimented by planned spaces and architectural design. Urban planning as colonization did not involve acting on a pre-given place, but rather was the process of *producing* locality and place.

Framework: Home Colonization, Environmental Determinism, and the Particularity of Place

By producing place, these home colonies, like the 'away' colonies, were also way of creating and maintaining social hierarchies and mediating social tensions. Howard, in his seminal work *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, identified the source of these social tensions as a those inhabiting Britain's overcrowded and impoverished slums, including those in east London.[65] It was not for a lack of social sympathy but in fact because of his sympathy for the plight of working class people that Howard proposed new places — colonies — to relieve overcrowding. All other factors in producing disenfranchised and deprived members of the

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(Oxford University Press).; R.K. Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (E. & Fn. Spon, 1997), 2.

[65] James Winter notes a victorian term for this situation: "Urbomorbis," which delineates "the physical and moral evils supposedly arising from the crowded mid-Victorian cities." James Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment* (University of California Presson Demand, 2002), 25.

community were thus secondary to place, effects rather than causes of locations like the East

End. Howard employs the language of colonization explicitly, citing Edward Gibbon Wakefield:

> Wakefield, in his *Art of Colonization*, urged that colonies when formed - he was not thinking of home colonies - should be based on scientific principles. He said: "We send out colonies of the limbs, without the belly and the head, of needy persons, many of them mere paupers, or even criminals; colonies made up of a single class of persons in the community, and that the most helpless and the most unfit to perpetuate our national character, and to become the fathers of a race whose habits of thinking and feeling shall correspond to those which, in the meantime, we are cherishing at home. The ancients, on the contrary, set out a representation of the parent State - colonists from all ranks. We stock the farm with creeping and climbing plants, without any trees of firmer growth for them to entwine around. A hop-ground without poles, the plants matted confusedly together, and scrambling on the ground in tangled heaps, with here and there some clinging to rank thistles and hemlock, would be an apt emblem of a modern colony. The ancients began by nominating to the honourable office of captain or leader of the colony one of the chief men...The lowest class again followed with alacrity, because they found themselves moving with and not away from the state of society in which they had been living...it was a transfer of population, therefore, which gave rise to no sense of degradation, as if the colonist were thrust out from a higher to a lower description of community."[66]

In this passage settler colonialists are both the outcasts of the community but also attached and

included, as part of a body, a family, or a garden. The colonists -- paupers and criminals -- are

simultaneously the community's excess and its progenitors, establishing and affecting national

identity both within and without the putative boundaries of the nation. There is a concern here

for society's excess, the 'tangled heaps' of settlers who should not be left to wither away but

instead should improved and uplifted by the rootedness of their more stable and noble arboreal

cousins. The irony is that the social hierarchies this engenders, the loaded division between the

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[66] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1960), 119-20.. Wakefield is actually quoting one Dr. Hind (Dean of Carlisle) from his work *Thoughts on Secondary Punishment.*

brain and heart of the community and it's peripheries, were repeatedly recreated by the settler colonists themselves.[67]

In the case of *Garden Cities*, the purpose of home colonization is to reconcile the surplus population of London's slums with a society whose power structure he took for granted, and so Howard advanced a notion of place as restorative and uplifting.[68] He located his garden cities, however, in relative proximity of Hertfordshire, an area just north of London which had become depopulated because of urbanization, rather than in Australia. Colonization in this sense is thus a practice of creating place and not a territorial institution imposed upon an already defined space whose primary distinction is between England and Not-England. The language of domesticity, that is, of 'home' colonies, is certainly not unimportant, but at the same time does not imply homogenous social or spatial formations. Rather, as Ann Laura Stoler notes, colonization was a biopolitical practice of racial organization, creating national subjects while at the same time racializing them and positing them within social and spatial hierarchies.[69]

As much colonization intended to condition new subjects from the community's excess, it was also a 'safety valve' for that same population. The manufactured place of the colony was an outlet for the unruly surplus on the margins of capital. The garden city call of open spaces away from the city was repeated by the Commons Preservation Society, which declared in the tumultuous 1880s that the preservation of open spaces was an "absolute necessity" because

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[67] Wakefield was not only an advocate of "planned colonization for the poor" but also a supporter of some of the first master-planned colonies, Adelaide and Christchurch in Australia, designed by William Light. See .P.G. Hall and C. Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (J. Wiley, 1998). and W. Beinart and L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 159.

[68] Garden City was to include people from all classes, living in harmony.

[69] Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Stoler and Frederick Cooper note the similarity of this practice through the empire, including 'in' Britain: "In nineteenth-century South Africa or turn-of-the-century East Africa, the British used a vocabulary to describe Africans remarkably like that used at home to describe the lowest elements of the class order, 'the residuum,' the degraded class of criminals and casual laborers of Victorian cities." F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, 1997), 27.

"every wise Conservative knows very well that these free spaces are the great safety valves which protect property from that dangerous pressure which is daily becoming more severe."[70] As Peter Gould notes, this was not an isolated sentiment. S. Smith, in his article "The Industrial training of Destitute Children," would say at this time that "the great danger to our country lay in the growth of a poor miserable and degraded proletariat, living in close proximity to the wealthiest aristocracy the world has ever seen," necessitating the use of "the wonderful safety valve [of the] colonial empire."[71] Similarly, concerns like these would lead Reverend H.W. Mills to open the Home Colonisation Society in 1887, as a kind of countryside extension of the workhouse system. The creation of a utopian, planned place for Britain's lumpenproletariat was also the means to put them in their place, arising from the concomitant, and often overlapping, sentiments of sympathy and fear.

This type of racialization occasioned by the imaginary of a 'new' place resembles at some distance Hegel's discussion of the 'rabble' in *Philosophy of Right.* Hegel discusses the production of poverty that always seems to exceed the capacities of civil society "when a large mass of people is depressed below a certain standard of living – a level regulated automatically as one necessary for a member of the society." [72] When society cannot "check excessive poverty" the result is the "creation of the rabble."[73] For Hegel, this group is excess, the inevitable byproduct of society, which cannot be dialectically incorporated into the state and instead must be shipped off to the colonies. He writes that "developed civil society is driven" to colonization one way or another, and through this process "supplies to a part of its population a return to the family principle on new soil." The colony is civil society's outlet for the rabble, which is why Eduard

[70] qtd in Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900* (Harvester Press, 1988), 90.

[71] qtd in ibid., 139. Smith's stated goal was to "deorderize, so to speak, this foul humanity" and turn into a "productive and valuable commodity that which is not a wasteful and poisonous element in our social system."

Gans, in his commentary, writes that "liberation of the colonies proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother country, just as the emancipation of slaves turns out to the greatest advantage of the owners."[74] Hegel positions the rabble outside the place of his conceptual dialectic and outside the place of the community. In this outside place, the colony, the rabble could not harm civil society by their status as unassimilable abstract (rather than determinate) negation.

In planning discourse, however, this safety valve disciplines rather than dissipates those that pass through it. Planners and politicians meant for home colonies to relieve the social tensions of the city while also remaining at the margins. Home colonies, even in Mills' workhouse version, were not spaces of exile but rather laboratories of social production. For Howard "the ideal of a colony [was] as a means to universal reform by inspirational influence as a model," and in many ways the garden city became a model for early urban planning.[75]

The vision Howard advances in *Garden Cities,* then, is not explicitly repressive or even regulative; rather, it is productive, intent on maximizing the potential of workers, citizens and society as a whole. He conceptualizes place not just by appealing to a preference for greenery and fresh air, but also as a conditioning context for individual identity. This also speaks to the emergence of a sociological conception of the 'environment' as a determining factor in social and individual health and behavior. As James Winter remarks, "when Victorians and Edwardians used the word 'environmentalism,' they usually had in mind, not concern about the state of the planet, but an interpretative framework: the proposition that crucial aspects of human life and

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[72] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Alan White (Newburyport: Focus, 2002), 181.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 183.
[75] S. Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), 62.

history are determined by distinct physical settings."[76]   "Environment" encompassed elements

that were not just external and historical, but also the determining effects of an individual's own

biology on her identity.[77] In fact as related to garden cities and other types of planning, Stanley

Buder argues that the environment could be said to occupy a theological position, at least in

certain contexts, because "environmentalism by century's end had superseded the 'time honored

doctrines of original sin, grace, election and reprobation' as an explanation for behavior and

character."[78]   In writing *Garden Cities*, Howard appealed for example to the sense that"each

generation raised in urban crowding was successively more physically and mentally stunted."[79]

In this sense, the text attests to the changing notions not just of what place *was* but what it could

do, here acquiring quasi-transcendental powers over the individual.

Environmental determinism could then make way for a conception of the ideal

environment in the ideal place. The garden city is certainly set up like a self-sustaining

ecosystem — once the city is planned and developed, once the conditions are set, social harmony

and productivity would be the 'natural' result, so to speak. Phillip Steadman notes the ways in

which planning and design uses "biological analogies" when articulating the relation between

place and identity. In fact, he traces the 'roots' of this intellectual trend to classical philosophy in

the Western tradition, in which aesthetic form was linked to function; he specifically notes

Aristotle's *The Parts of Animals*, in which the author contemplates the natural, functional and

thus beautiful relation of parts to whole in the animal body[80]. Still, biological analogies, that is

ideas of functionalism and organicism in design, developed an epistemological specificity over

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[76] {Winter, 2002 #207@19
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[77] As influenced by the thought of Curvier, Lamark, Darwin, and others.
[78] Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 70.
[79] Ibid., 71.

the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they acquired a new sort of scientific

and social scientific currency. Biological analogies were used to explain or justify the design of

a particular building, tool, machine or even work of art) by relating it to 'nature.'[81]   Steadman

argues that European architectural theory in the nineteenth century made significant use of

biological analogy and also on the emerging concept of the 'environment,' wherein "physical and

material factors in the environment" affected what kind of buildings or tools might emerge in

any particular area. Not only this, but an 'ecological analogy' extended the metaphor to include

more "abstract environmental components" such as "social, economic and cultural

'environments' " which absolutely conditioned and determined the production of built, material

culture.[82] As indicated above, the 'environment' conditioned not just buildings and things, but

also people, and the wrong kind of place, one out of sync with a more natural environment, could

lead to physical, mental and moral pathology.

The ideal environment was thus also the most conceptually 'natural' one, which in turn

produced social harmony and individual productivity. This notion of nature was also its most

visceral appeal and helped Howard lend to place a character of *particularity*. As Howard writes,

> The key to the problem [of] how to restore the people to the land - that beautiful land of
> ours, with its canopy of sky, the air that blows upon it, the sun that warms it, the rain and
> dew that moisten it - the very embodiment of Divine love of man - is indeed a Master
> Key, for it is the key to a portal through which, even when scarce ajar, will be seen to

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[80] This type of organic economy is applied also to drama for Aristotle, for which the "form is integral or 'innate' to the work, rathe than being preconceived and 'impressed' on it." Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts* (London: Routledge, 1979), 9-10.

[81] Ibid. That is, the most successful (and aesthetically pleasing) building or tool would be the one that operated according to universal, natural design principles, so that the best idea for the form of a bridge, for example, would be the skeleton of a bison, the latter being designed 'by nature' to successfully hold weight.

[82] Ibid., 61-62.. The use of biological analogies was prevalent throughout European thought, though this led, somewhat inevitably, to contradictory ends. A rather austere understanding of function would later appear in the thinking of modernist architects, including the Bauhaus school. Meanwhile, others, like John Ruskin, naturalized a provincial English vernacular of a particular period, so that organicism consisted not just in the imitation of nature, but of the naturalized "true principles of Gothic building…[so that] for many architects of the English Arts and Crafts movement…functional principles were exemplified in vernacular building and in the unselfconsciousness and directness of traditional construction."   ibid., 15.

pour a flood of light on the problems of intemperance, of excessive toil, of restless
anxiety, of grinding poverty.[83]

This passage is typical of Howard's frequent recourse to sensual descriptions of a peaceful

nature, and draws from the generic traditions of romanticism and the cultural phenomena of

chartist and back-to-the-land movements. It points this nostalgia towards a future horizon, but it

is one that is consequently not articulated in abstract visions or utopian vagueness, but rather lent

a character of particularity. The garden city was not one upon a hill but rather one that presented

itself as tangible and discrete, the pragmatic result of meticulous planning. The creative and

fantastic speculations of early urban planning styled themselves as the opposite: place was

conceived not as fictive speculation, but as a tangible, sensual, and realizable space of

inhabitance and familiarity for particular identities and communities. In other words, positing an

identity necessitated conceptualizing a place for that identity, and features that were distinctive

and particular needed to link place and identity organically with the specific communities and

individuals it locates. As Patrick Geddes would later write while planning towns in India during

the first World War, "town planning must be folk planning as well as place planning."[84]   In this

way planning utilized the nostalgia for a yoking of place and identity, one centered around the

notion that "the England that we love is the England of old towns, tilled fields, little river towns,

farms, churches and cottages," as expressed by the Society for the Protection of Ancient

Buildings, founded in1877.[85] It did so not in the spirit of 'return', however, but in creation and

production a new place, the home colony.

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[83] Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 44.
[84] Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 165.
[85] M.H. Lang, *Designing Utopia: John Ruskin's Urban Vision for Britain and America* (Black Rose Books, 1999), 108.

In sum, urban planning figures place as particular, and therefore capable of grounding identity, and this figuration is central to the process of colonization. This argument will be subsequently explored by a consideration of a variety of related cultural phenomena. First, this involves a consideration of late-Victorian Industrialists in Britain who first saw the need to mediate social tension via place, and did so by building model villages (i.e. company towns) and encouraging the greening of the city. Second, this leads to the publication of Howard's *Garden Cities* in 1898, which was a seminal moment in developing urban planning as a practice, and is itself exemplary in the way it conjoins locality and particularity. His work extended and also influenced colonial planning which sought to create architectural environments conducive to maintaining an imperial presence. Third, the creation of locality in this period is intimately tied to 'biopolitical' understandings of identity, as is seen in the organic movement.[86] Place, as figured through the particularity of soil and trees, is sexualized and consequently conditions the purity, or not, of sexual and racial identities. Finally, the chapter considers the consequences of place which cannot maintain this purity, which is contaminated and ruined.

Model Villages and the Greening of the City

Home colonies were a response to a crisis of excess in Britain's fast growing cities. Between 1880 and 1900, over 100,000 male laborers left the land for the city, and by 1910 agricultural workers only account for 10% of the workforce.[87] This was because of the perception of increased economic opportunity in the city, catalyzed by a devastating agricultural

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[86] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Vintage Books, 1990).
[87] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 71)., A.D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 93.

depression in the 1870s which led to significant depopulation of rural areas.[88] Cities (especially

London) not only grew tremendously but haphazardly, subject to speculative building and

predatory landlords absent regulations.[89] Property speculation in the city and in the country

during this time period provoked questioning of not just to whom the 'land' belonged, but of how

space could acquire value and how that value itself could be captured (and by whom). From the

middle of the nineteenth century, it was the liberal party that sought to free land from its

aristocratic ties, with John Stuart Mill founding the Land Tenure Reform Association in 1871.

This included opening British agriculture to the global market,[90] and end to primogeniture, and

perhaps most significantly a tax on 'unearned increment,' that is, an increase in the value of land

(not produced by some labor). Thus, for different reasons and interests the liberal party was the

political vehicle for those supporting land reform, even those among the working class.

At the same time, land reform was a first step to mediating the ever-growing tension

between the bourgeois and working classes. These tensions were to be displaced onto the figure

of the 'land'. That is, the gestures toward land reform (which incidentally were not fully

addressed until the Town and Country Planning Act of 1949) were also attempts at staving off

more radical approaches. The works of two writers would be especially influential to the land

reform movement in both 'town' and 'country' in the socially tumultuous 80s. In 1880, Alfred

Russel Wallace argued in the *Contemporary Review* that landed property in Ireland should be

nationalized, and article that led to the formation of the Land Nationalization Society (LNS).

The LNS initially argued for a nationalization of all land in Britain, which evolved into the 'tax

or buy' principle, by which landowners would value their own land; if the value was too low, the

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[88] By 1902, 20% of farms were unoccupied in Hertfordshire (where the first garden cities were built) Hall and Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard*, 8. The countryside was also seen as less exciting than the city
[89] And indeed the idea that such a thing could be 'regulated.'
[90] A point of contention since the repeal of the corn laws in 1849

government could buy it cheaply, while if it was too high, the landowners would be taxed at a

higher rate.[91] A less radical approach was advocated by Henry George in his work *Progress and*

Poverty. George argued that land was the only fixed and limited factor of production. Land was

passive: landowners gain 'unearned increment', which was actually the "cumulative result of

society's industriousness" and which should be returned to society in a 'single tax.' George thus

stopped short of proposing nationalization, and his supporters founded a different organization in

1833 called the Land Reform Union (1883).[92]   Though rivals, both organizations have in

common the claim that people have a natural right to land, in line with the philosophy of the

English radical Thomas Spence.[93]

  While the land could be thought of as an initial 'safety valve' for simmering class anger,

these more radical approaches, and the influence they might have upon working people, were

met with trepidation among the middle and upper classes. There were many who thought that the

problems of overcrowding, poor sanitation, unemployment and general urban suffering should be

alleviated, but not for the sake of the poor so much as for shoring up the established social order.

It is not an accident that the first politician to seriously take up these issues was liberal Joseph

Chamberlain, who did not address wholesale land reform but instead suggested farm colonies

and individual allotments for unemployed city laborers. Gould remarks that Chamberlain's

"proposals of 'subversive radicalism' were merely calls for socialistic legislation which both

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[91] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 80.
[92] Renamed the English Land Restoration League (1884) and then later renamed again as the English League for the Taxation of Land Values (1902).
[93] Both groups campaigned through the countryside with their respective messages, the LNS with blue wagons, the ELRL in red. Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 84.

parties had adopted as an insurance agains social instability."[94] Allotments, gardens and open

spaces were compensation for inequality, unemployment and overcrowded housing.

This economic tension, to be relieved by place in the form of allotments, acquired moral

and sanitary dimensions that occasioned maintaining social hierarchy and spatial segregation.

The city, particularly those slums, filled with society's excess, became a threat to the moral and

biological health of the nation as a whole. By the 1880s, "investigators and reformers reported

that the level of morality of the poor was declining: large numbers were apparently ceasing to

accept the authority and values of the existing order… The morality of the respectable poor had

to be shored up and the tide of immorality halted and repelled."[95] The idea of sending the

unemployed poor to farm colonies was also a stopgap to prevent the moral and physiological

deterioration that would eventually overtake the entirety of the city. In this, the middle class

made a hierarchical distinction between the "respectable" and not-respectable urban poor, and the

fear was that the former would "sink to the degraded moral state as the 'underserving'."

Furthermore, "it was hoped that a form of *cordon sanitaire* could be erected around the most

degraded elements of the urban poor but its impossibility in the short term made the creation of

farm colonies more attractive."[96] The countryside-as-colony here is offered as a natural solution

to a biological and moral problem, not just a way to shore up blunt class distinction.[97]

The elite who were fortunate to not suffer as acutely from this kind of social

hypochondria were more concerned, rather than frightened, by the health prospects of the

community. Even among those who began farm colonies for the unemployed, there was a sense

that the "poor law administration had to be directed from punishment to the training of the

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[94] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 109. Gould also notes that Chamberlain could make "clever use of radical-sounding phrases whilst advancing conservative interests."
[95] Ibid., 88.

unemployed," that is, toward building a more productive and happy worker.[98] Some leading

industrialists decided the best way to accomplish this was through complete control of the

working environment, and thus used their wealth to create more comprehensively planned

colonies termed model villages. In this place, the company would become the organizing

principle of life, rather than just one facet of it. Built out of a concern for the workers' well

being, they were both less and more exploitative than an average factory in Manchester, say; in

any case, they were built upon the presumption that environment would produce different kinds

of people and different relations among people automatically or, one can say, organically.

Company towns were intended to be "total social environments" for their workers, including

everything from "night classes to work trips to the seaside."[99]   The model villages of the late

nineteenth century had a number of antecedents, some more radical visions of an alternative

community, like Robert Owen's New Lanark. Other approaches would indicate future trends:

oriented around the factory, they would also include village-like vernacular architecture as well

as large allotments and gardens[100].

　　　Model villages attest to the increasing currency of environmental determinism, as they

were exemplary of the attempts to produce whole social environments typical of both colonial

and urban planning. Two of the most important were built by Willaim Hesketh Lever, owner of

major chemical factories on the Mersey, soap manufacturer and the founder of what would

become Unilever. At Thornton Manor (1891) he "constructed the classic example of a model

village, replete with medieval symbolism and an idealized version of the rural vernacular (visible

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[96] Ibid., 128-29.

[97] The same was true of Chamberlain's failed "three acres and a cow" campaign

[98] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 128.

[99] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 61.

[100] Ibid., 62. Examples include communities built by Colonel Edward Akroyd, one called Copley (1849) and another called Akroyden (1861); Saltaire built by regally-named Titus Salt (1850); and Bromborough Pool, built by Price's Patent Candle Company (1853) and designed by George and James Wilson (who were from Lanark),

for example in the half-timbered cottages and the thatched shelter on the village green).”[101] He

also built Port Sunlight around the same time, the first attempt to build urban housing in a “rural

idiom.”[102] These quaint home colonies were not coincidentally where Lever manufactured

products from palm oil imported from Africa, whose colonization he vigorously supported.[103]

Neither the medieval symbolism nor the abundance of green spaces was a 'return' back to nature,

but Lever rather utilized these elements to create a thoroughly modern work colony, one whose

benevolent paternalism was aimed at disciplining the British working class.

Model villages were built in the spirit of philanthropy and social reform, what would be

called the "new liberalism." In this, they rejected a purely exploitative system of manufacturing

and instead were directed toward the the physical and moral 'improvement' of the workers,

thinking that such improvement would also prove beneficial to the company and the community.

The model villages of Bourneville (1898) and New Earswick (1902), built respectively by

George Cadbury and Joseph Rowntree, both Quaker chocolatiers, were planned in a similar style.

Jeremey Burchardt notes that “tree planting and a vernacular style continued the rural emphasis”

in these villages, and that they thus rejected the “artificial, rectilinear and unnatural appearance

of most contemporary urban working-class housing…by making the roads...curve and by

providing footpath access to many houses, thus allowing them to be set more completely amid

natural vegetation.”[104] As places of improvement, model villages often came with rules about

what sort of recreational pursuits were allowed, and when residents would be allowed to pursue

recreation. The company also compelled the workers to take part in group exercise and

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] In 1911 Lever established an operation in the Belgian congo which used massive forced labor and resulted in millions of deaths. History Channel, "Lord Leverhulme," http://www.history.co.uk/biographies/lord-leverhulme.
[104] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 63. New Earswick's architects were Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin who would later design Letchworth garden city and Hampstead garden suburb. Cadbury, Rowntree, and Lever would all become stakeholders in the first Garden City at Letchworth.

educational activities. Drinking, especially, was not tolerated.[105] Violation of the rules might

entail severance for the workers, who were of course not unionized.[106] Cadbury intended his

environment to produce healthier, more productive people, and indeed he "delighted in the

stronger physiques of his employees' children [at Bourneville] when compared to those

examined from areas nearby."[107] 'Improving' working conditions then became multivalent[108], a

call for more rights and resources by workers and the middle class alike because of the stress

placed on living in a healthy environment.

COMPULSORY PHYSICAL CULTURE OF MESSRS. CADBURYS' GIRLS IN THEIR OWN GYMNASIUM
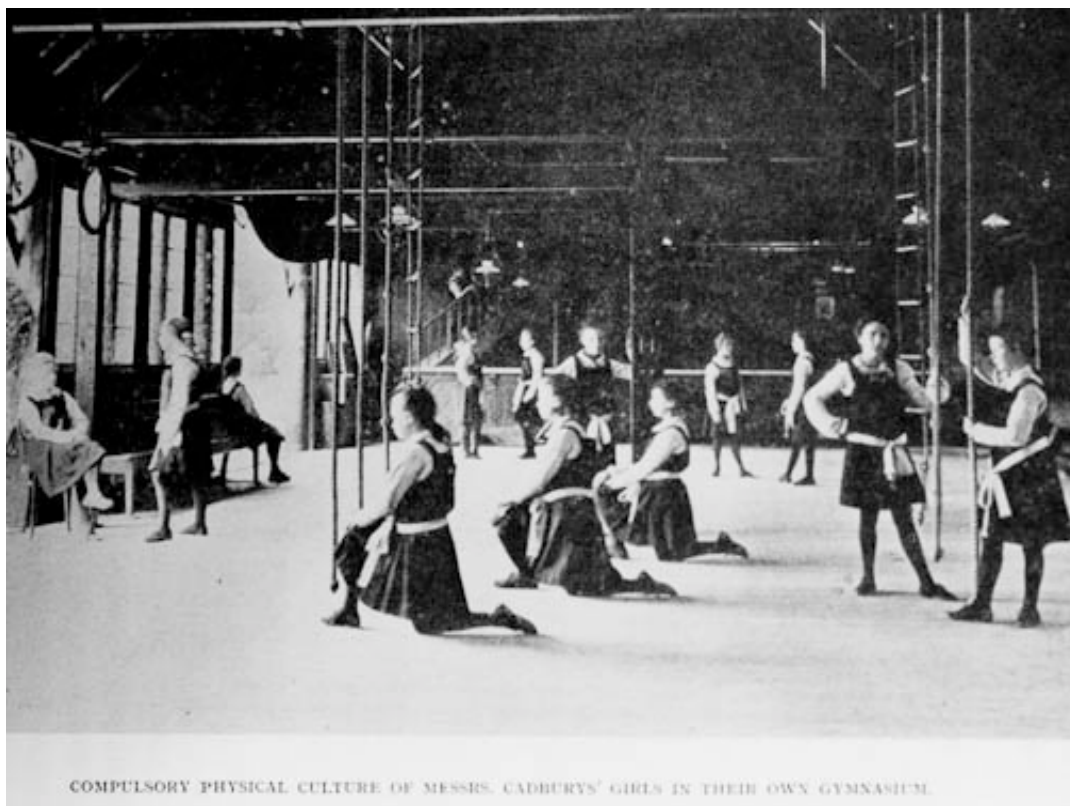
Figure 1: Mandatory Fitness Class in a Model Village[109]

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[105] Ebenezer Howard also raised the issue of alcohol in *Garden Cities:* "First, such a restriction would keep away the very large and increasing class of moderate drinkers, and would also keep away many of those who are scarcely moderate in their use of alcohol, but as to whom reformers would be most anxious that they should be brought under the healthful influences which would surround them in Garden City" Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 102. In fact the residents of Letchworth garden city would reject building a pub, opting instead for a coffeehouse.
[106] In this setting, this would also mean eviction.
[107] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 139.
[108] Budgett Meakin, *Model Factories and Villages: Ideal Conditions of Labour and Housing* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1905).
[109] Ibid.

The same spirit of environmental determinism and paternalistic social improvement was present in the cities, specifically London, where the environment was less amenable to wholesale change. Nevertheless, change was to be brought by intra-city colonization. The leading social reformers in the late Victorian period were Octavia Hill, Henrietta Barnett and her husband Samuel Barnet. All three worked with prostitutes and the poor in east London, attempting to find them employment but not helping them with direct financial aid, from the belief that monetary support encouraged pauperism and laziness.[110] Their activities were instead directed to affecting the environment of the East End to produce morally pure, and somehow less poor, individuals. Henrietta Barnett thus organized awkward dinner parties of people from all classes, from the belief that such intermingling would uplift the poor through contact with the bourgeois (a formulation reminiscent of Wakefield's dictums on colonization). For similar purposes, she curated art shows for the working class with pieces lent by her wealthier friends in what is now Whitechapel gallery, and held more festive parties with music.[111] In a similar vein, Samuel Barnett established the first university settlement at Toynbee Hall in 1884, whose purpose was to colonize the East End with middle class settlers, who would uplift the natives with their culture. University students thus would "fulfill the role of the gentry such as that fulfilled by the squire or rural clergymen. The links established between the settlers and the community were designed to

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[110] "Karl Marx had identified improvers of working-class conditions and charity organisers [sic] as amongst those desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society." Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 101.

[111] Micky Watkins, *Henreitta Barnett in Whitechapel: Her First Fifty Years* (London: Hampstead Garden Suburb Archive Trust
, 2005), 39. These parties were not always successful, from Barnett's point of view. She lamented the fate of one party in which "a crowd of abandoned girls…with their chaps came in…and rushed into lawless dancing. A bacchanalian scene ensued. We tried talking, Mr. Barnett to the lads, I to the girls, but excited evil was in the ascendancy and they would not desist." They eventually had to stop the music, to strong protests from the crowd.

bring the poor to the 'higher manners of life and thought'."[112] Settling the East End was a crucial

first step in creating the type of place conducive to the healthy formation of the subject.[113]

Changing the environment of the East End was thus a means of non-revolutionary social

and political reform, because environment conditioned physical, social and moral identity.

Above all, Samuel and Henrietta Barnett believed in the improving qualities of nature, the

"renewing and spirtualising [sic] effect…of the birds and flowers and trees [which] would have a

good moral influence on slum dwellers."[114] Henrietta Barnett organized trips to the countryside

for East End children, an activity that became generally popular among those wanting to 'do

good': in 1903, 34,000 children were given countryside holidays through the Children's Country

Holiday Fund.[115]

At the same time, as mentioned above, the East End itself was seen as a sort of colony-to-

be by the rest of London; an unknown, dark, unexplored territory filled with potentially

dangerous primitives. An article in the daily news entitled "Horrible London" sensationalized

the poverty by saying "in these pages I propose to record the result of a journey into a region

which lies at our own doors — into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the

General Post Office…the wild races who inhabit [it] will…gain public sympathy as easily as

those savage tribes for whose benefit the Missionary Societies never cease to appeal for funds."

[116] If the colony was a province for the metropole, and the village the province of the city, the

East End was a province of London, attached but marginal. In that it was a problem, containing

the not-respectable and possibly savage lumpen working class, the solution was environmental.

Samuel Barnett would claim that "it is not the poverty that is such a weight upon everybody in

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[112] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 98.
[113] Social reform of this kind also had a sociological facet, as exemplified in Charles Booth's maps of London
illustrating degrees of poverty.
[114] Watkins, *Henreitta Barnett in Whitechapel: Her First Fifty Years*, 58.

the East End, it is the ugliness," and similarly, Octavia Hill suggested that "if we could alter this [the ugliness of London] it would go far to refine and civilize them."[117] This being the case, it was not enough to temporarily remove East Enders to the countryside for a holiday; they must either be shipped off to the farm colonies for reeducation or the location of the East End itself must change by becoming greener and by offering open space that was not just compensatory but also morally uplifting. Individuals had to be made to feel a personal relation to their particular environment via attachment to certain kinds of spaces and things.

The creation of this improving environment initially took the form of increased public parks and open spaces. The Victorian period in general is notable for the development of parks in the London metropolitan area, including the development of Kensington Gardens and the opening of Regent's Park. This also includes Victoria park in the East End, which opened in 1845 and became known as the 'people's park' by the 1880s. The late Victorian period also saw the development of a large number of squares and smaller parks in the East End.

Park production was an ideal object for the optimism of urban architects intent on revitalizing the environment of the city: they were "drawn to the notion of the city as an organism that operates according to intelligible systems [and] confident that such symptoms as lethargy or antisocial behavior could be diagnosed and treated."[118] One the one hand, Victoria park was a refuge from the city, with spaces for sports, swimming, and public celebration and debate. It, and similar spaces, were also "highly structured, biologically and botanically simplified areas of greenery, requiring sophisticated technology, heavy expenditures of energy,

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[115] Ibid., 61.

[116] qtd in ibid., 78. This type of discourse would lead to an epidemic of 'slum tourism' in the 1880s.

[117] qtd in Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 91. She continued in the same vein: "There are many kinds of gifts which have now a demoralising [sic] effect on the poor, but such gifts as this of common land could do nothing but unmixed good. The space, the quiet, the sight of grass and trees and sky, which are the common inheritance of men in most circumstances, are accepted as so natural, are enjoyed so wholly in common, that however largely they were given, they could only be helpful."

maintenance, and strict surveillance."[119] Gareth Steadman Jones identifies in this time the desire

for London "gigantic village," which, however appealing, also involved the poor being led back

to "manliness and independence under the firm but benevolent aegis of a new urban

squirearchy."[120] The city, apparently, not only sickened and morally degraded, but (worst of

all?) emasculated. Parks were in fact popular, but they also served as a replacement for the more

more wild areas at the edges of the city, places were recreation was unwatched and unregulated.

Nevertheless, urban architects preached the benefits of greening the city for its residents,

not as a means of social control per se, but rather for improvement. Key among these architects

was George Godwin, editor of the influential journal *The Builder.* Godwin took the city and its

problems as an object, conceiving it "as a problem for which architectural arrangements were the

solution," and saying that the " 'health and morals of the people are regulated by their

dwellings'."[121] Solutions to the problem of city-dwelling, in which the masses were heaped on

top of one another, were attempts at restoring a particular connection between residents and the

place of residence. This involved planting trees along the side of roads, as well as encouraging

individual gardens where possible, or window flower hangings for those with more cramped

circumstances. The particular affects produced by flowers had by themselves the power to

mediate social tension: Godwin thought that the "love of flowers was building bridges across the

class divides."[122] Hanging flower pots and gardens were in fact a much approved trend.

Architect Sydney Smirke "was of the opinion that working-class horticulturalists stayed out of

pubs and were never lazy," while Samuel Broome specifically advocated the planting of

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[118] Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment*, 193.
[119] Ibid., 195. In addition, Victoria Park's 'gardenesque' style — herbaceous borders, elaborate and vividly colored bedding arrangements, specimen trees and shrubs — seemed to express this moral purpose."
[120] qtd in Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 89.
[121] Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment*, 196. Speaking of Victoria park, Godwin "agreed that users were doubtless improved by reading Latin tags on trees and shrubs."
[122] qtd in ibid., 202.

chrysanthemums, which he called "essentially a working man's plant…ideally suited to London's climate."[123] As much as a building or planned park, flora was part of the built 'environment', and became itself indicative of and a means toward class identity.

Inspired by the possibilities of readjusting social dynamics, architects, social reformers and industrialists set about the practical, empirical and grounded work of creating new places. In the city, this involved culling a definite *location* from the city's excessive spaces. Model villages, meanwhile, operated with more freedom, but also proposed places where the relation between environment and identity would be set in a clear, particular and incidentally regulated relation. The particularity of place here relies on its distinctness to create a sense of community, but also feeds off an attachment to the sensuality and tangibility of nature and vernacular building, the visceral reaction one might have against the city smoke and for the country air. The restoration of 'nature' was not a subject for poetry but rather for planning.

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[123] Ibid., 200.

Figure 10. Poor woman's roof garden (1862). To promote flower growing in slums, the *Builder* sent an artist to show what one woman had managed to create with a few plants and a collection of old pots. (*Builder* 20, 1862. Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London)
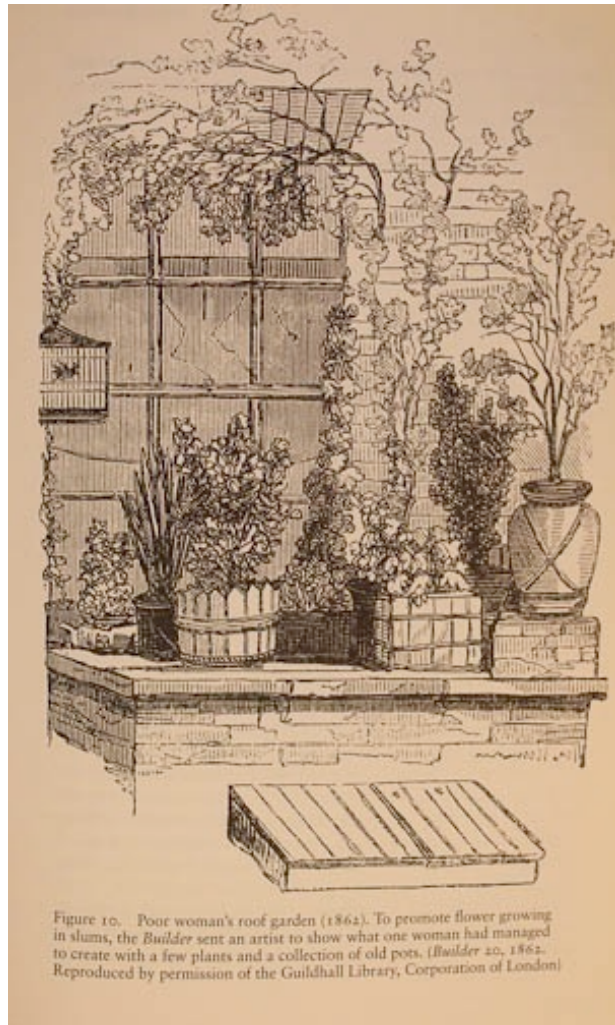
Figure 2: Rooftop Garden[124]

Garden Cities and Colonial Design

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engles spoke of the inadequacy of communes

and alternative communities:

> They still dream of experimental realization of their social utopias, of founding isolated phalansteres, of establishing "Home Colonies", or setting up a "Little Icaria" -- pocket editions of the New Jerusalem -- and to realize all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois. By degrees, they sink into the category of the reactionary conservative socialists depicted above, differing from these only by more systematic pedantry, and by their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science. They, therefore, violently oppose all

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[124] Ibid., 201.

political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from blind unbelief in the new gospel.[125]

In the case of model villages, it was bourgeois industrialists themselves who decided to realize their 'castles in the air', and indeed their support would be crucial to the garden city experiment. Ebenezer Howard also faced skepticism from the local press in his day, particularly from the Fabian society, including his close friend George Bernard Shaw, who were doubtful that such a project initially funded and run by the elite — Howard proposed "four gentlemen of responsible position and of undoubted probity and honour"[126] — could ever realize its communal ideals. For a harmonious community living in nature but reconciled to modern technology was central to Howard's vision. While he was partially inspired by the socialist thought of Spence, Owen, and the utopian novels of Edward Bellamy and William Morris, he was also a believer that the established order could be preserved and reformed by creating garden cities.

Howard himself was by all accounts a genial, well-intentioned and somewhat eccentric man. A lower middle-class stenographer with a wife and four children, he moved frequently throughout London, frequently living in cramped conditions and under financial duress[127]. He was perhaps alone in thinking the text that would become *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, with it's quaint hand-drawn plans and diagrams, would have any influence. In fact it did not initially, but when he finally found a publisher, his idea hit a cultural nerve. The garden city, for Howard, was not a place where the divisions in modern society — between the modern and tradition, science and religion, society and the individual, or town and country — would disappear.

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[125] K. Marx, F. Engels, and S. Moore, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (C. H. Kerr & Company, 1906), 62.
[126] Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 50.
[127] Howard's apartment in Stoke Newington may not have qualified as the 'substandard dwellings' which housed an estimated fourth of London's inhabitants, but it did demonstrate the character of London's growth, consisting in small apartments hastily thrown together by speculative builders. In fact, the local furniture stores carried "specially scaled-down furniture" for the tiny apartments Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 31.

Rather, they would continue to exist, but in peaceful harmony. As a place, the garden city was the vehicle for reaching this state of affairs. For this reason Howard was not interested in redesigning London; the city, with its sprawl and suburbs, was not a real place, and therefore new cities, with a low density and plenty of open space, had to be created and hopefully one day spread throughout Britain. In this way the garden city would be an *example*, that is the crystallization of an idea, a representation of its purest essence, which is at the same time explicitly not the totality of that idea, but rather one particular instance among others. Once realized, the garden city was thus to be both place and representation of place.

Politically, this meant that "Howard intended to steer a middle course not only between town and country but also between reform and revolution…idealism and realism were to be reconciled, as were socialism and capitalism."[128] Because *Garden Cities* addressed the contemporary problems of overcrowding and speculation, it did refer directly to the problems of land reform and housing. Howard's plan calls for urban laborers to effectively become property speculators themselves: he writes that "we will secure for ourselves an honest landlord, namely ourselves" and that "instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body...a state of things so ordered would be in perfect harmony with the moral law…under it all men would be equally landlords; all men would be alike free to become tenants."[129] The loan required to build the garden city was to paid off gradually through housing rates that would rise, reflecting increasing value of the property.[130] Garden City is presented as a place where problems that may arise work themselves out naturally. In this fashion, class

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[128] Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, 84.
[129] quoted in R. Beevers, *The Garden City Utopia: A Critical Biography of Ebenezer Howard* (Macmillan, 1988), 32.;Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 123-24.
[130] Rent would double as municipal taxes, because the community was effectively paying rent to itself. A point of confusion here is how the new Garden City dwellers - especially from the working class- would be able to afford the yearly rent increases which help the community 'take advantage' of the land's rise in value. Howard simply insists

differences are also resolved: "if the example were set of profit-sharing, this might grow into a custom, and the distinction between master and servant would be gradually lost in the simple process of all becoming co-operators," not by force, but by inclination.[131] The city here becomes a kind of ecosystem - once the conditions are set, any problems that arise disappear as quickly.

Seeking reconciliation and harmony, Howard identifies and puts into relation capitalist individualism and socialist communitarianism, preferring neither by themselves. Thus, even while he suggests collective ownership in a "quasi public body," he is at pains to quite often point out that the "experiment advocated does not involve, as has been the case in so many social experiments - the complete municipalization of industry and the elimination of private enterprise."[132] Howard is on the one hand suggesting building entirely new cities under an untried model of ownership and governance and on the other showing how natural and effortless the process will be. At times, this leaves the reader to wonder why the state of affairs that he imagines is not already reality, as when he claims that employers will not treat their workers poorly, for fear of "losing the good-will," and thus business of their customers.[133] He is of course selling his plan by making it seem that the pieces will fall into place easily, but the text's relentless insistence on balance and harmony, on pleasing everyone and upsetting no one gives it, at the same time, a utopian character. The garden city is a natural space, an ecosystem, but one that must be speculatively constructed.

The importance of creating a place that could reconcile without erasing difference is illustrated in a drawing not included in the final manuscript, in the figure of a key:

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that because rent would effectively obviate the need for taxes, it will be cheaper to live in Garden City than in London.
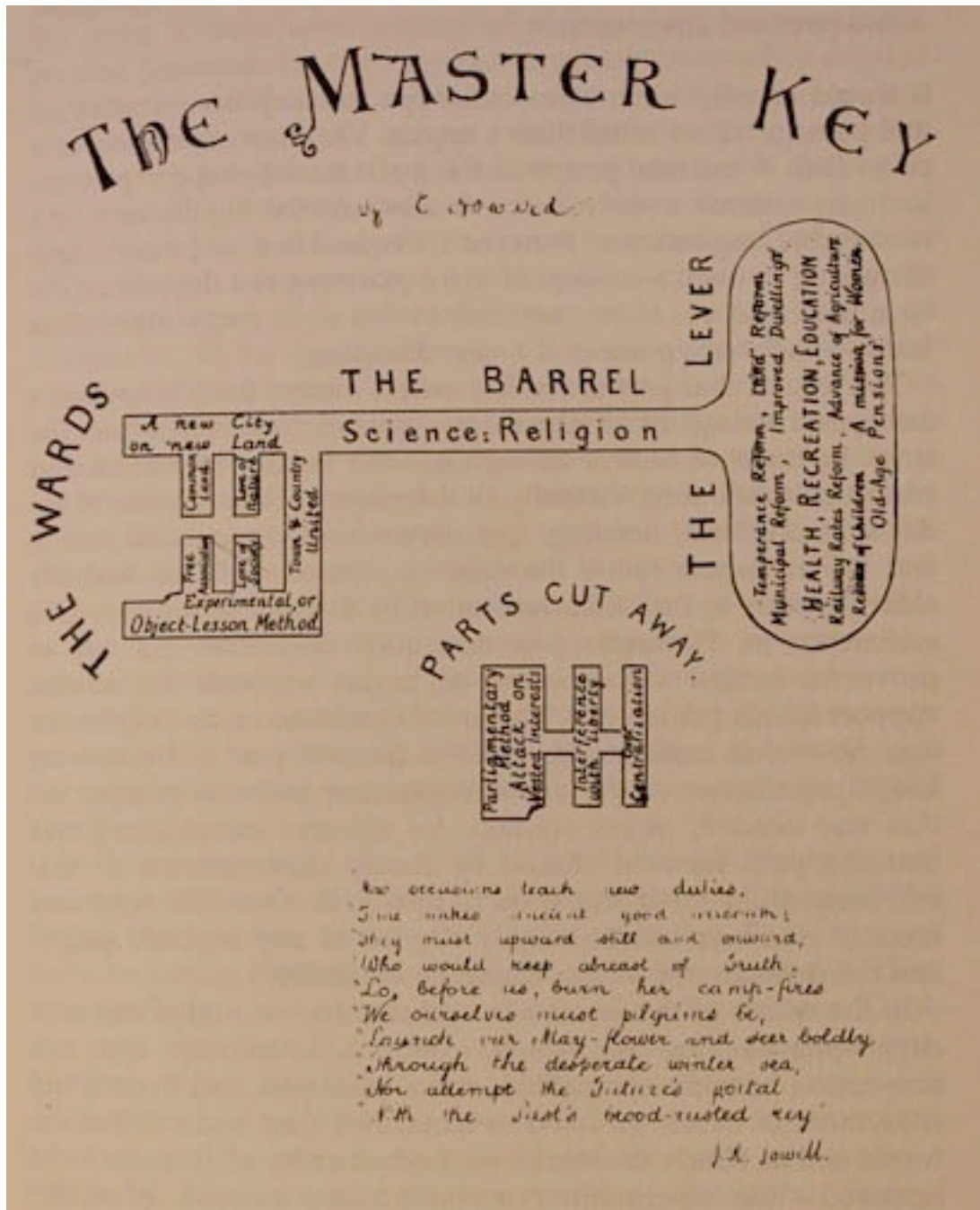[131] Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 101.
[132] Ibid., 93. 90.

Figure 3: The Master Key[134]

Howard was by no means merely nostalgic for a lost rural existence. Rather, the 'Master Key' he refers to (and which was at one point a provisional title of *Garden Cities*), is one that reconciles

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[133] Ibid., 100.
[134] Beevers, *The Garden City Utopia: A Critical Biography of Ebenezer Howard*, 41.

tradition and modernity, religion and science, the individual and society, allowing them to coexist harmoniously. Howard takes up the issues of the day in the 'lever' - most notably 'health,' 'recreation' and 'education' - and solves them through a harmonization of 'science' and 'religion.' The solution is, of course, Garden City, a new community that includes utopian elements but which, significantly for Howard, does away with the politics of social change.[135] 'Cut away' from the master key would be elements popular among socialist groups that he found distasteful or impractical.

The garden city emerges as an apolitical place in that it appealed to the concerns of all the political interests of the day. Howard begins *Garden Cities* by noting again and again the universality of the problem and his particular solution, saying for instance that "it is wellnigh universally agreed by men of all parties, not only in England, but all over Europe and America and our colonies, that it is deeply to be deplored that people should continue to stream into the already over-crowded cities, and should thus further deplete the country districts" or that "the Press, Liberal, Radical and Conservative, views this grave symptom of the time with the same alarm."[136] Howard was confident that, if built according to his specifications, the place itself would naturally produce organic social relations, obviating the need for antagonistic politics while retaining individual difference. That is, Howard was seeking to harmonize, rather than eliminate, particular social differences.

In this way, the garden city is proposed as a place to accommodate all forms of lived experience, in fact allowing experience to burst forth instead of constraining it within a merely political organization. Howard continually seeks to create economies in which difference can be

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[135] Also included is an exerpt from American romantic poet James Russell Lowell's "The Present Crisis." An abolishonist poem, its inclusion in the drawing not only evinces Howard's ties to social reformers but also suggests that his scheme is future oriented, rather than (just) nostalgic.
[136] Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 42, 43.

maintained, in harmony rather than in antagonism. These harmonies could also be seen as contradictions, the irony of *place*, as a concept: its status as both natural and manufactured, visceral and imaginative, as an example connected to a generality. In any case, Howard's concern in *Garden Cities* is to give his notional city essential qualities and its own specificity, making it appear natural and unique, and as capable of conferring identity, as such.

The distinction that receives the most attention in Howard's work is that between town and country. Appealing to the notion that town and country were polarities, becoming ever more separate and opposed, Howard advances the garden city a selective composition of the best elements of Town and Country, set into a relation. This is displayed early on in *Garden Cities,* as Howard presents the reader with a diagram entitled "The Three Magnets":

THE
THREE MAGNETS.

TOWN ... COUNTRY

THE PEOPLE
WHERE WILL THEY GO?
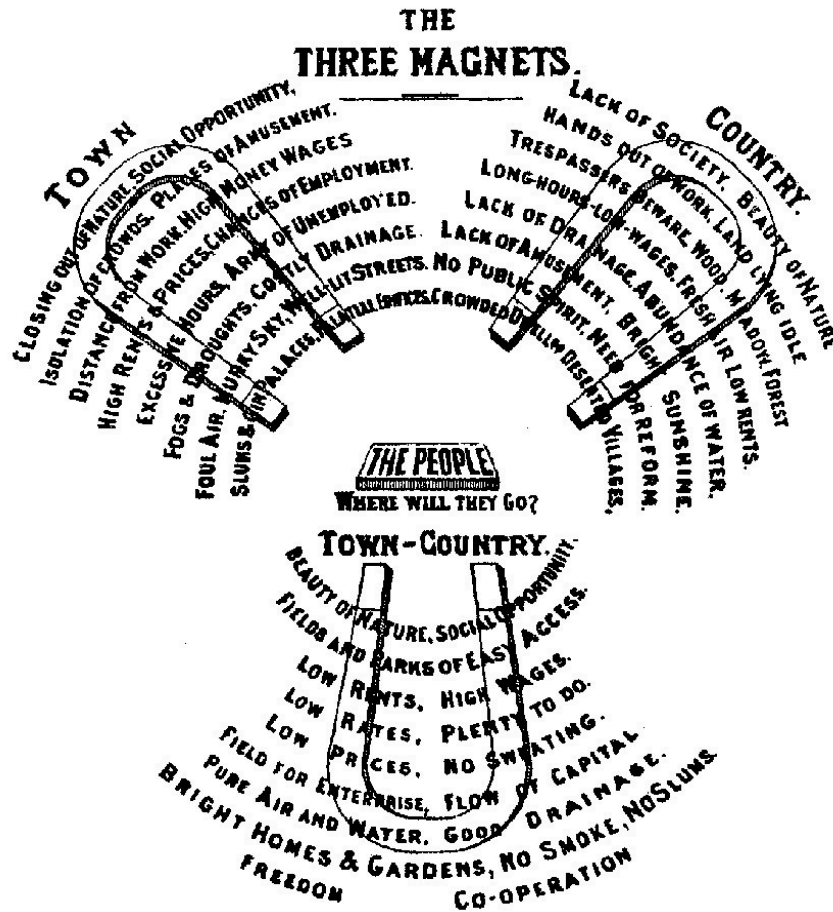
TOWN-COUNTRY.

Figure 4: The Three Magnets[137]

Howard imagined spaces as being magnets, having an attraction over people, commensurate with their benefits and minus their disadvantages. It is by combining the best aspects of both town and country that Garden City would propel "the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities to the bosom of our kindly mother earth, at once the source of life, of happiness, of wealth, and of power."[138] The metaphor of magnetism itself has a kind of rational naturalism about it; here and elsewhere, Howard assumes that social formations proceed 'naturally' from a relatively small set of conditions. Instead of forcing people into his Garden City, Howard seeks to create something that will naturally pull people toward it, leading, eventually, to a dispersal of

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[137] Ibid., 45.

London's population into a plethora of garden cities. In these drawings the town emerges as a

place of opportunity but also smoky disappointment, where there was a " 'cheek by jowl'

presence of mansion and slum, gin palace and museum, church and brothel," amusement but also

the "isolation of crowds" on the bright and dark streets.[139] The country, meanwhile, is a place of

simplicity and beauty but also abandoned, in decay and furthermore just really boring.

Compared to these, certainly the 'town-country' magnet would draw 'the people' in; not only

would it be a place of easy wealth and natural beauty, but it also would have 'freedom' among its

attractions.

What is significant here is not the way Howard figures 'town' and 'country' individually,

but also the careful way in which he positions their relation and combination in Garden City.[140]

It is worth quoting at some length here:

> But neither the Town magnet nor the Country magnet represents the full plan and purpose
> of nature. Human society and the beauty of nature are meant to be enjoyed together. The
> two magnets must be made one. As man and woman by their varied gifts and faculties
> supplement each other, so should town and country. The town is the symbol of society -
> of mutual help and friendly co-operation, of fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood,
> sisterhood, of wide relations between man and man - of broad expanding sympathies - of
> science, art, culture, religion. And the country! The country is the symbol of God's love
> and care for man. All that we are and all that we have comes from it. Our bodies are
> formed of it; to it they return. We are fed by it, clothed by it, and by it are we warmed
> and sheltered. On its bosom we rest. Its beauty is the inspiration of art, of music, of
> poetry. It forces propel the wheels of industry. It is the source of all health, all wealth,
> all knowledge. But its fullness of joy and wisdom has not revealed itself to man. Nor
> can it ever, so long as this unholy, unnatural separation of society and nature endures.
> Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope,
> a new life, a new civilization. [141]

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138 Ibid., 46.
139 Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 69.
140 Which he at first called "Rurisville" and then "Unionville" before finally arriving at "Garden City," a catchy
name which, for whatever reason, Howard later regretted. Ibid., 62.
141 Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 48.

The magnetic attraction here becomes an implicitly sexual metaphor. The country is a maternal figure that produces and sustains bodies "formed to it," and is a transcendental and eternal resource and inspiration for its transitory inhabitants. The town, in its ideal form, loses the negative qualities of pollution and poverty to become itself a place of social relation, a symbol of cultural creations (science, art etc). However, it is by insisting on their 'unnatural separation' that Howard can propose a solution in their unification which is imagined not as a merging but as a *marriage*. Here, a masculine town and feminine country keep their supposedly unique qualities but complete themselves in a harmonious relation. The garden city does not do away with the town/country dichotomy, but is predicated upon it, the child of a harmonious, fecund marriage. Marilyn Strathern has written about how new knowledge can be made by 'discovering' something inherent in a given, universal context (e.g. 'nature') or produced as something new, in relation to but critically standing out from that previous context (e.g. 'culture'), or as she puts it "uncovering what is in nature and making new knowledge through culture," which becomes a second nature."[142] Similarly, Howard creates a new relation between nature and culture in the place of the garden city, which is only realized to the extent that it stands out against the "unnatural" separation of town and country typical of modernity.

Again, this is not to say that Howard collapses the distinction between town and country, but simply that he sets them into relation. In fact doing away with the distinction between the two was just as dangerous as their absolute separation and non-relation. The marriage of town and country was the opposite of a space that was neither quite town nor country: the "principal characteristics of Howard's community are that it is a town and not a suburb [and] that it's

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[142] Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship, Law, and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11. Writing about 'biological' propery, Strathern (whose writing resists direct quotation) uses the example of a child, who is on the one hand bound to her parents via genetic heritage, and at the same time is

planned in advance of construction." [143] The garden city could not be the same as what was

common and commonplace in city development, the suburb.[144] David Matless argues that a

rejection of the suburb would be the organizing principle of the early twentieth century planning

movement, which made recourse to society's destruction of nature to justify the notion of master

planning, of thinking up new places.[145] Town and country were not problematic just because

they were overcrowded and depopulated, respectively, but because they were producing blurred,

amorphous spaces. Matless summarizes the planning prerogative in this time period as insisting

that "settlements are to have a form fit for their function [and] a town should be clearly a town, a

village a village," and goes on to say that "a normative geography of distinct urbanity and

rurality is asserted over an England-In-Between of suburb." [146] To distinguish Garden City from

a suburb, Howard gendered these spaces, which defined the proper conditions for their union. It

also would provide a vocabulary for discussing their improper combination, as planner Thomas

Sharp would thirty-four years later in his text *Town and Countryside*, writing that "the strong,

masculine virility of the town; the softer beauty, the richness, the fruitfulness of that mother of

men, the countryside, will be debased into one sterile, hermaphroditic beastliness. The crying

need of the moment is the re-establishment of the ancient antithesis. The town is town: the

country is country: black and white: male and female."[147]

This says little, if anything, about the 'suburb' (itself not a self-identical term or unified

space). However, it does indicate the garden city defined itself against all contemporary forms

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something new, something which steps away from that heritage. She does not 'naturalize' this 'Euro-American' way
of thinking, but abstracts it into a contingent epistemology of scientific and anthropological relation.

[143] Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 67.

[144] Howard here quotes John Ruskin from *Sesame and Lilies*, who writes that in an ideal, rustic town there be "no
festering and wrretched suburb." Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 50.

[145] Ironic, considering the destiny of master-planned communities

[146] Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 32.

[147] Sharp, quoted in ibid.. The irony here is that Sharpe is in part arguing against garden cities, which by the 1930s
were almost synomous with suburbs

of space: one could not live *only* in a city, or *only* in the country, or — and this was the worst —

in the suburb. Garden cities instead proposed '*urbs in rure,'* the city *in* the country. The garden

city could be a place because of its novelty and particularity, of having a tangible and distinct

quality. Howard's gendering of town and country is what allows him to define the particular

characteristics of the garden and how they would relate to each other without the social discord

of modern politics.[148] Other spaces at their worst were inauthentic, non-places whose identity

and thus inhabitants were elusive and non-locatable. In harmonizing - and not blurring or

undoing - these differences, Howard's invented place becomes 'spontaneously' natural, non-

political, *real*. That the garden city could be a place of restoration and reconciliation was based

on it being not just a particular place, but indeed a place signified by its particularity.

It is through thinking particularity and attempting to create it, to make a place that would

transcend thought, that Howard proposes to resolve the tensions and contradictions of modernity,

with its ambivalence to both town and country and their blurring in the suburb. However, in

trying to make a place that transcends thought, to make the abstract concrete and real, the garden

city actually proliferated the contradictions it was trying to reconcile. The garden city's appeal to

rooted particularity and local attachment ironically enabled to become a migratory thought,

traveling almost immediately throughout the world. Not just this, but the garden city became

what it was most strenuously trying to avoid — the suburb — even as planners consistently

invoked Howard's model of particularity as an anti-suburban intervention. In fact this would

become rather quickly the fate of the first garden cities, Letchworth and Welwyn. Burchardt

notes

> In many ways, though, the countless progeny of the garden city are a testament to the
> betrayal or at very least very partial application of the original idea…most middle-class
> suburbs look to some extent like garden suburbs. But the almost universal adoption of

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[148] Because all marriages exist without discord

the outward style of the garden city serves to disguise the equally universal abandonment of the principles which originally informed that style…By an ironic inversion of Howard's aim of combining the best features of town and country, the suburbs have often been criticized for uniting some of the worst features of both: the suppression of nature characteristic of the town and the social narrowness allegedly characteristic of the countryside.[149]

These are the latch-key 'progeny' of a failed marriage between town and country, one that is always, despite itself, becoming-suburb. However, what Burchardt lists as a betrayal and abandonment of principles is in fact the opposite; it is in earnest application of the principles of reconciliation, restoration (and now) regeneration that produce places that ironically embody the contradictions they were trying to resolve.

These progeny, then, were the products of good intentions, something that was almost immediately apparent Henrietta Barnett's adaptation of the garden city idea into Hampstead Garden Suburb. Barnett's aforementioned enthusiasm for the restorative qualities of 'nature' eventually became her most lasting legacy in the north London neighborhood centered around Hampstead Heath. She enlisted many of the same philanthropists as Howard, promising them an opportunity to 'do good' while at the same time make a modest profit.[150] Barnett compiled slideshows of forlorn-looking East End spaces and people side by side with pictures of trees and large houses built in a vernacular style in order to persuade British industrialists to invest in her project, which was not styled as a garden city but as a garden suburb, the distinction apparently lost on Barnett. She would enlist the architects of Bournville and Letchworth, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, along with Edwin Lutyens, to create Hampstead's intimate spaces.

The creation of these colonies — that is, the garden cities and suburbs — was not limited to Britain, as mentioned previously. In fact, immediately after designing Hampstead, Edwin

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[149] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 65-66.
[150] This was called "5 per cent phillanthropy"

Lutyens was enlisted to produce and execute a master plan for the new British capital in India, New Delhi. In choosing Lutyens, the colonial government sought to resolve the social tensions in India through place, much in the manner of Howard, Barnett and Cadbury. The capitol was to be moved from Calcutta to Delhi, because the former was the site of too much social agitation and challenges to British rule. Instead, New Delhi was to be created as a new site of harmony. This was a part of an overall British concern at the time to reconcile emerging Indian nationalism with British imperialism. As Herbert Baker, Lutyens' New Delhi co-planner stated, the goal was to "develop national civilizations on the lines of their own traditions and sentiment" but also prevent "a chaos in the arts such as in governments which History records our rule was ordained to supersede."[151] The colonizing designs of Lutyens and Baker were perhaps working at a different scale than those of Cadbury or Howard, but as practices colonization in India and 'home' colonization employed a conception of place as a means of social determinism and reconciliation.[152] Locality itself is a colonial production, one that was intent on deferring other political energies and producing capacious power structures. Here, localism promised a future free of social tensions, that made reference to a new place *outside* the contemporary frame of reference.

In moving from an architectural practice in Britain to one in the colonies, in this case India, Lutyens was not alone; in fact, the early twentieth century saw a bevy of architects and planning consultants emerge alongside the field of urban planning, and their work was

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[151] T.R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 196. Baker first 'applied' this theory in South Africa after the Boer war, where Cecil Rhodes, ever the believer in the "civilizing purpose of the British Empire" and its ability to bring people together, commissioned Baker to reconcile Boer and British settler communities via architecture (184). Baker explored the imperial potential of architecture with his friends and fellow architectural travelers in a publication with the curiously provincial name of *The Round Table.*

[152] Baker attempted architectural reconciliation by an architecture that combined styles, sometimes chaotically, "in an eclectic fashion, the crafts principles Baker had learned from [William] Morris, Cape Dutch ornamentation,

international in scope.[153] Many of these had direct associations with the garden city and suburb

projects, and indeed the journal *Garden Cities and Town Planning* was one of the main fora for

discussing planning in Britain and in the colonies. In this international context, that is, the

context of empire, Patrick Geddes became the leading planner of this early generation, and his

vision for what place could do, through planning and design, was explicit. The influence of

planning was of "direct political as well as social value" and had a "direct bearing on order and

stability — even of the Empire…by tending to check the revolutionary spirit by the Eutopian

one."[154] Writing this during the first World War, when he would do much of his work in India,

he thought of planning as supplying a "third alternative" to either war or revolution: it was a path

towards peace, harmony and stability when the fabrics of nation-state empire were fraying.[155]

Armed with a notion of 'garden cities' and town planning as a practice, Geddes and others spread

out throughout Britain and throughout the British empire to restore harmony via place.[156]

Colonial planning was thus not about depleting the resources of or imposing a 'European'

presence on a pre-given place, but was rather a technique of imagining a new place, one that

would realize the capabilities of imperial settlement by reference to local attachment. Geddes

himself was "more aware of the relationship between Indian social practices and the urban

landscape than British colonial officials had ever been" and "wanted to encourage the revival of

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especially gables and steps, along with features drawn from European medieval, Jacobean, and Italianate design" – a sort of colonial pastiche or unwitting kitsch. Ibid., 188.

[153] Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities*, 144. This includes Lutyens, Baker (who also did significant work in South Africa under Cecil Rhodes' government), Parker and Unwin of Letchworth fame, Patrick Geddes, Albert Thompson, Henry Lanchester, C.R. Ashbee (the arts and crafts enthusiast), Charles Reade (editor of *Garden Cities and Town Planning)*, Thomas Adam (director of the first Garden City Corporation at Letchworth) sand others.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 166.

[156] Elements of garden city design and town planning practice would be implemented in India (including New Delhi, Pune and Jamshedpur), Khartoum, Egypt (where in Cairo, 'Garden City' is a neighborhood, one that houses the current U.S. embassy), Greece, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Australia, New Zealand, the Federated Malay States, Cape Town, Lusaka, and Nigeria (including in Enugu, Warri, Sapele, Benin and Onitsha) ibid.

customs and traditions which promoted a clean environment."[157] Planners, acting for empire,

were at the same time acting for an environment free from despoliation and the production of a

cultures that were local and traditional. It could be argued that these ideas of planning are

'British' ideas exported to the colonies under the aegis of a bourgeois "global universality,"

thoughts from a particular place masquerading as universal and trying to impose themselves on

other particular places.[158] However, it was planning that was reproducing the notion of the

particular, local place as a ground for 'Britishness' itself; only in its wildest imaginations did that

place fully escape from thought, and yet that promise was its continual horizon.

In this way, it is not that colonial garden cities mimicked a British invention, but that

garden cities were part of a broader colonial epistemology. In the inability of the garden city to

transcend thought, it became an extremely multivalent concept. Lutyens' designs for New Delhi

were not marked by the mixture of classes that Howard and Barnett envisioned for their projects,

but instead constituted a garden city apartheid. Jane Ridley, however, notes the similarities

between New Delhi and Letchworth. In New Delhi, the "roads are wide and tree-lined,

sometimes curving and lined by bungalows set back from the road and surrounded by leafy

gardens, in the residential areas that are connected by broad, tree-lined avenues to a monumental

center," while in the 1903 Parker-Unwin plan for Letchworth "the grand approach which bisects

the symmetrical plan, and connects the centre to the regional transportation route, the

'monumental' centre and 'rural' city, the variety of vista, and the interpénétration of the landscape

and city." [159] Indeed, Letchworth or Welwyn became commuter suburbs for middle class

residents before Lutyens finished New Delhi (which in all likelihood contained more working

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[157] Ibid., 150.

[158] Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World*, 29.

[159] Jane Ridley, "Edwin Lutyens, New Delhi, and the Architecture of Imperialism," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 2 (2008): 72. Beinart and Hughes note that New Delhi "incorporated new ideas

class British settlers than all of England's garden cities and suburbs combined).   New Delhi had

the effect of separating its various populations, including among the settlers; it was in fact

criticized for "hierarchical arrangement of housing, which accommodated the poorer officials far

from the center."[160]   That is, both in Britain and abroad, all those signifiers of particular

attachment — trees, uncrowded space, vernacular architecture — produce here a highly

segmented place.

Noticing the contingency of places such as 'Britain' or 'India,' also reveals the shared

context in which colonial developments proceeded. The zeal for 'improvement' from London's

social reformers, termed 'new liberalism' was, for example, preceded by Disraeli's 'new-

imperialism' in which imperialism was an inclusive "imagined community within which the

differences between classes could be reconciled."[161]   More specifically, that which lent

particularity to a place was also a relational, rather than autochthonous, production. As Anthony

King notes, the 'bungalows' common to garden city apartheid planning are themselves

historically connected to the 'banggolo', a term for a peasant's hut in rural Bengal.[162]

In Britain, and subsequently among the colonial elite, they "were also associated with the

'modern, informal, individual and artistic houses, suggesting simplicity and style."[163]   The

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about garden cities, embowered by trees, which emphasized 'air and light and greenery' — bringing the countryside
within the city…wide streets were also seen as hygienic." Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 163.
[160] Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities*, 145. The city was also criticized by an
anonymous commentator in *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, who wrote that New Delhi was the "paradise of the
garage owner."
[161] R.H. Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (Yale
University Press, 2000), 224.
[162] King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, 1, 18-19.
[163] Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 162. These pre-fabricated, quaint Bungalows were popular in
Letchworth as well. In fact, in 1905 Letchworth held a Cheap Cottages Exhibition to encourage the building of pre-
fabricated cottages for rural laborers, although ironically the workers the GCA hired to build the cottages could not
afford to live in them. In any case, King notes that pre-fabricated bungalow construction was made possible by
empire: "As the bungalow had come from and then gone out again to the empire, so some of its raw materials were
also derived from there: rubber for 'ruberoid' roofs, asbestos, zinc for corrugated iron, tropical hardwoods as well as
the sisal carpets, rattan stools, bamboo screens and furniture and Indian mats, which furnished the 'simple life'
inside." King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, 121.

bungalow aesthetic connoted individuality and quaint artistry, eschewing complexity for the sake

of a particular attachment to place. Additionally, as Howard's garden cities were intended as a

model community, so were the efforts of the planners and architects who worked in the empire.

By the interwar years, for example, "colonial India was a surprising experimental ground for

urban design," which is actually not surprising considering how many planners used the colonies,

home and away, to work out their creations of place.[164]

Architecture and planning was not dismissive of a pre-existing 'tradition' of indigenous

culture, but rather produced that 'tradition', assigning it to locality in the service of a future-

oriented colonial project. 'Local tradition' here served the same role as that of the 'country' in

Howard's garden city; in the latter, the appeal of the 'country' spoke to a desire for the simplicity

of the English craftsman and overall village life as contrasted to the debased, modern urbanite.[165]

Parker and Unwin fulfilled this desire for simplicity, quaintness, and particular attachment in part

through the production of bungalows in a vernacular, quasi-medieval style. Similarly, the was

there a preference among some British for 'traditional' Indian design which had to be prevented

from disappearing in colonial modernity.[166] Modernity in this case also meant a burgeoning

Indian nationalism, and so reconciling this modernity with provincial tradition was a means to

marginalizing anti-imperial sentiment.

As Ernest Havell, an early twentieth century art-historian, noted at the time, Britain had

to "preserve India's village-based economy" and be the "active and sympathetic defender of the

village weaver, both the artisan and the artist, against the assaults of Western capitalism; instead

of being regarded as the strongest ally of the capitalist in extending the worse than savagery of

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[164] Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 166. Le Corbusier, for example, was allowed to plan a grand
project in Chandigarh by the authoritarian colonial authority.
[165] this concern and aesthetic found a wide voice in late nineteenth and early twentieth British culture, from the
influence of John Ruskin to William Morris' arts and crafts movement, to the English 'folk' revival.

European industrial slums to India."[167] This nostalgia for the past was not anti-modern, but

projected the 'savageness' of modernity onto Indian nationalism and instead offered another way

forward, through the mediation of architecture, design and planning.   The production of Indian

'traditions', accordingly, was the British effort to produce the particularity of design, signaled by

a picturesque vernacular and abundant evidence of 'detailed' work. Thus architect F.S. Growse

would create Bulandshahr markeplace as "a complete epitome of all the indigenous arts and

industries of the neighborhood," a place which which was as "picturesque [as its] medieval

English" counterpart would be.[168] Similar in character and absurdity were a number of

architectural schools established to encourage teaching of Indian crafts, run by men like John

Lockwood Kipling, professor of architecture (and father to Rudyard).[169]

Overall, planning and architecture, often through the ideas of the garden city movement,

was used for the purposes of separation and hierarchization, these emerging fields were not

simply repressive. Instead, as was the case with home colonies, imperial planning and

architecture also concerned itself with the care and cultivation of the native population through

civilization. Much as the British working class was continually split, between the morally pure

country farmers and the degenerating slum dwellers, or between the city's 'respectable' working

class and its undeserving, native populations were also split, an ideological move through which

planning and architecture could separate and discipline while also improving and uplifting. In

this sense, Geddes was part of a longer tradition seeking to 'preserve' local tradition within a new

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[166] Itself part of an anthropological zeitgeist in which collecting, cataloguing, displaying, and reproducing
disappearing histories and knowledges became prevalent activities under the aegis of scientific humanism.
[167] quoted in Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj*, 214. Correspondingly Havell
favored the "the master-mason [who] is both builder and architect, just as he was in Europe in the Middle Ages." 1
quoted in ibid., 163.
[168] Ibid., 168, 66.. Growse's analoges in Britain were self-styled ethnographic collector such as Cecil Sharpe, who
would record traditional songs and dances to "save them from the oblivion." Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll
and Social Change in England since 1800*, 96.

framework. Producing vernacular, local detail in colonial architecture could be a way of mediating the tensions produced by an imperial presence through place.[170]

Blood and Soil (and Trees)

Planners and architects mediated the artifice of their work not just by insisting on the 'naturalness' of their designs but also through reference to 'nature' itself, as abundantly evident in the development of parks, model villages and of course the garden city. In this sense flora (even 'found' flora) must also be considered part of the built environment. Cultivated in gardens and fields or preserved and apprehended 'as is', flora is material culture. As previously argued, social reformers and planners grounded their projects in the restorative effects of 'nature' and the ability for environments to produce healthy subjects and socially disciplined identity. In this planning was part of a wider confluence of ideas concerning the relation between place and identity to which it contributed, and as such early planning before the second world war co-evolved with other movements to produce notions of locality that have echoes after the war to the contemporary period. Extremely influential in this regard is the rise of the organic movement in interwar Britain.

The organic movement — which emphasized the need for healthy soil, whole food and composing as antidote to modern problems of pollution and mechanized farming — was concerned with producing and maintaining local places, whose particularity contrasted with homogenous, unhealthy mass-urban and suburban culture. However, while the organic

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[169] Havell did note the irony of the schools, remarking that sending English teachers to teach Indian art in India was a bit like "sending coals to Newcastle."   Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj*, 160.

[170] This included using architecture and design to identify, separate, and hierarchize Islamic and Hindu traditions, with the former providing something of a a figurative, aesthetic and even physical 'bridge' between Europe and India.   Producing architecture 'appropriate' to the environment reflected a vision of India as divided and in need of British guidance, which the British offered through reconciliatory place-making.Ibid., 36-37.

movement's focus on locality might seem to be the nostalgic extension of back-to-the-land romanticism, it was in fact future oriented, imagining a connected globe under British aegis which would at the same time be local in ever instance. Here, the organic movement suggest colonization anew as an outlet for a re-localized British population. Britain should first colonize her own land, producing healthy localities and identities which would serve as the "parent stock whose surplus…can provide immigrants to other unpeopled areas of the empire," as suggested by organicist Lord Lymington.[171] Here, the project of reforming the most local patch English countryside is the first step to a new colonization. Organicisim sought to purify England - including English food and English bodies - of unnatural, foreign, modern elements so as to globalize the English village.

The re-localization of British identity, then, carried elements of nostalgia for the past but redirected it into a vision for the future. The core of this vision was a purified British racial stock, and the path to this vision was through the soil, which literally served to ground organic identity, serving as the "base element refracting arguments about agriculture, nationhood, health, morality and spirtuality."[172] Organicists developed this focus on local English soil through comparisons with the colonial farmer, whose ancient practices and integrity made them another analogue of Growse's village weaver and craftsman. For example, Sir Albert Howard, Director of the Institute of Plant Industry in Indore, India, advocated the local farming methods which relied on only organic manure and saw the relation between human, animal, plant, and above all soil in a holistic frame.[173] His methods, focusing as they did on natural practices of the regional farmers and the local conditions, were taken up all over the empire in the interwar years.

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[171] Lymington, quoted in P. Conford and J. Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement* (Floris Books, 2001), 126.
[172] Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 106.

Similarly, nutritionist Robert McCarrison ascribed to specific indigenous groups an almost

mystic vitalism connected to soil quality, use of compost and manure, and their overall dietary

habits.[174] Others, like F.H. King and G.T. Wrench were fascinated by excrement, or the 'Rule of

Return', which was an essential part of a natural cycle that produced a healthy soil and people.

They looked to China and Japan for models of sustainable peasant agriculture, and were

specifically impressed by their capacities for recycling human and other waste; as Matless notes

"while [planner Patrick] Abercrombie had looked East for design principles, organicsts found

humus and recycling."[175] This concern with diet and excrement is a literalization of Fanon's

statement that the white man of 'civilized' modernity will from time to time "turn to the men of

color and ask them for a little human sustenance."[176] This sustenance was not limited to the

production of food, but resulted in a quasi-mystical attachment to location, which in turn would

result in the future community.[177]

The concern for soil fertility and the health of the English stock indicate the way in which

place was gendered for organicists as well. For example, organicist H.J. Massingham explicitly

feminized the the land he was cultivating in *England Herself* and *The Rape of the Earth*. In

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[173] Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 54-55. The city of Indore had just been redesigned by Patrick Geddes

[174] Boldly inaugurating a tradition of absurdity in nutritional 'science' that continues to this day, McCarrison fed groups of rats either a Sikh diet of "whole wheat flour chapatties, butter, whole milk, dhal (legume), fresh raw vegetables…and fresh meat with bone once a week" or an working-class English diet of "white bread and margarine, boiled vegetables, tinned mean, tinned jam, tea and sugar with a little milk." The chapti eating rats "flourished physically and co-existed harmoniously," while the others "became stunted and ill-proportioned, their coats lacked gloss, they were nervous and aggressive, and they suffered greater incidence of disease." Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 157.. Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 52.

[175] Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 111.. Another interwar organicist, Viscount Lymington, at various points referred to the vivifying "faeces of a nation" and suggested that "there should be a Chair in Oxford for the right uses of dung." Quoted in ibid., 167. This latter suggestion seems to recall Morris' *News from Nowhere*, in which London's houses of parliment have been convereted into warehouses for manure.

[176] Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 129.

[177] For example the back cover of Edgar Saxon's journal *Health and Life* included the following dictum: "A man should grow out of the land where he was born, he should have his roots in the soil whence his body is fed, he should bear the lineaments of his locality." Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 141, 43.

cultivating the land, he is like the craftsman, who "did not conquer nature but married her in husbandry."[178] In this way the relation between men and soil could be licitly or illicitly sexual. Urban and suburban ruination would be the latter, an unorganic and indeed unholy contamination and despoiling of nature, a menace imposed from without. In some ways similar to how garden city planners configured nature, organicists saw ruin of the land as miscegenation, an unsanctioned mixing and also a collapsing of categories which obliterated authentic spaces, and indeed authentic temporalities. The sexualization of place was also partially reflected in the social formations of organists themselves. For example, Richard St. Barbe Baker founded *Men of the Trees* as an officer in Kenya, a group which styled itself as masculine defender of the forests.[179] Men of the Trees reveals the paternalism of the colonial endeavor, attempting to cultivate a 'nature' that was, like the native inhabitants, feminine, under threat of destruction and in need of defense.[180] It also speaks to a kind of hyper-masculine imagined tribalism that often went hand-in-hand with organicist thinking.[181] Trees provided the occasion for groups of men to retreat to the forest and discuss how to make vigorous and vital human bodies. Though rural recreation was generally popular, for organicists such sojourns were not simple fun, but a "historical exercise, involving a re-evaluation of historical time…they were journeys into the past, and, in the process, assisted its remaking."[182] For Rolf Gardiner, this involved drunken, open air mystical celebrations, in which he and likeminded individuals would "perform Sword

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[178] quoted in Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 106.

[179] The forest was important for Baker because it was (by way of biological anlogy) the "perfect farming system, manuring itself, working quietly and efficiently with no need for pesticides and weed-killers killers."   qtd in Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 61-62.

[180] Baker also recruited native volunteers to replant trees in native forests, as well as to engage in a ceremonial "Dance of the Trees."   This organizaiton still exists, now as the International Tree Foundation. Ibid., 61..

[181] Though, to be sure, there were prominent women organicists, most notably Gabrielle Howard and Lady Eve Balfour, but also many more. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 305.

[182] Frank Trentmann, "Civilization and Its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 593. In fact they "detested [tourists'] suburban holiday atmosphere."

Dances in neighboring villages to symbolize the awakening of the earth by the rays of the sun" in an exclusive "dance of men, sworn to manhood, fiery ecstasy, ale, magic and fertility!' "[183]

This spiritualism, which grew out of the soil, also arose from particular, physical, lived experience, for organicists. The immediacy of this experience is set against the city, whose chaos is associated with separation from soil, place, plants and animals, all of which become mediated abstractions. [184] Thus, "physical experience was the root of the organicist model of culture beyond specific acts of labour [and] country is set against city, and the categories of 'true' experience set against 'artificial' modern distinctions of work and leisure." [185] Local, lived experience is here considered real, concrete and particular, as opposed to the confused abstractions of city life. Localism was also a subordination of analytical thought to (literally) grounded lived experience — a notion, espoused by Ronald Duncan and others, that "thought needed earthing, and that 'Idea-ots' should be avoided."[186] What was offered instead was not a simple return to the soil but in fact a new order of living.

The English organic movement suggested deep connections between the soil and the people, and while planning became only more statist over the course of the century, organicists disavowed elements of the state while necessarily retaining it for the purpose of the nation, embodied in (and from) the soil. In this way the transcendental characteristic of the soil did not bypass the nation but did bypass the state — the industrial and financial structures that were embodied in the urban environment. Therefore, "national argument is complemented by a stress on internal local political economies nurturing 'those vital associations which enable the

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[183] quoted in ibid., 607. Gardiner co-founded the all-male Kinship in Husbandry group in 1941 with several other prominent organcists.
[184] Organcism picked up on both 'English' continental philosophical trends, such as Theosophy, vitalism and the immanent philosophy of Bergson, Driesch and Smuts. Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 67..
[185] Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 144.

individual to become aware of his place in time and space and so make possible the good life,' "
as organicist Tom Rolt suggested.[187]   Or, more simply, William Beach Thomas claimed that
"geographically, climatically and, therefore, socially, England is a local country."[188] This is a
remarkable statement, in that it defines English nationality to some degree by its *lack* of cohesion
in the the form of an irreducible and unincorporable localness. At the same time organicism was
in large part formed in the colonies. Interwar organicist Rolf Gardiner would try to explain
simultaneous resistance to and use of the global structures of imperial modernity by referring to a
"interlocality, not internationalism," suggesting connections between places that never cede their
particularity to a global structure.[189] Again, 'universal' British colonialism composes itself from
the constructions of locality.

   The organic movement's disgust and pessimism with urban society, romantic interest in
folk culture, and a masculine, racialized obsession with bodily and community health gave
interwar organcism a well-earned reputation for being proto-facist.[190]   The care and concern for
the British worker, and the land as a means to improvement, was also the production of social
hierarchy, as seen in the discussion of model villages and public parks. In the case of the organic
movement, this became an explicit racialization of the British population. The fascist association
further suggests that the organic movement was not simply nostalgic for a lost 'folk' culture, but

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[186] qtd in ibid., 137. Presumably Duncan is playing on the words "idea" and "idiots" to ridicule the fixation with
abstract ideas.
[187] quoted in ibid., 115.
[188] quoted in ibid., 125.
[189] Ibid., 122.. This critical move is similar to those made by Marxist approaches to a notion of 'equivalence.' For
example, Chakrabarty writes, contra the use of "generalized exchange" via abstraction, his notion of 'affective
history' would 'translate' "between two categories without any third category intervening." Chakrabarty,
Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, 71.
[190] Indeed many of its adherents, including Lymington and Gardiner, were explicitly fascist, traveling to Germany to
meet with Hitler and his agricultural minister, Richard Darré. Others, like Henry Williamson and Jorian Jenks were
members of Oswald Mosely's British Union of Fascists (BUF).   Many others had more vague connections to
fascist groups, such as English Array and the British Council Against European Commitments.   However, not all
organicists were fascists. In the ambivalent politics of the organic movement there was a "curious mix of…High

invested in a new future. This future was also predicated on a split in the figure of the British

worker, with the noble farm worker being the victim of a predatory financial system for the sake

of others who were in excess. Thus Lymington could write that "in every great city there is a

scum of subhuman population willing to take any chance of a breakdown in law and

order…They are willing tools of the communist…Some of these are naturally the dregs of

English blood. But many are alien…these immigrants have invaded the slums and the high

places as well."[191] In this manner, some organcists played off the resentments of the British

working class, both urban and rural, in order to build support for a localized future folk

community.[192]

　　　The organicists emphasized the productive aspects of the land, that is, its capacity to

produce food, health and even social well-being. At the same time, their vision was of a highly

aestheticized countryside, one populated by the upstanding yeoman folk who would be the

(racial) future of the community. It was one strand of a more general trend that displaced rural

nostalgia into the future, and like many of the other strands, was not always very concerned with

the condition of farm workers, which deteriorated rapidly after the first World War. This

political aestheticization was in line with, if more explicit than, the way in which "Conservative

Party took advantage of the strong association which had developed between rurality and

Englishness," exemplified by Stanely Baldwin, the son of an industrialist who "carefully

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Toryism, guild socialism, imperialism, fascism" and others. . Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 118., Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 23.

[191] quoted in Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 121.. The co-incidence of rurality and racism finds an antecedent in William Cobbett, author of *Rural Rides* (1830) and early nineteenth century radical, who also wrote screeds against miscegenation. For example: "Amongst white women, this disregard of decency, this defiance of the dictates of nature, this foul, this beastly propensity is, I say it with sorrow and shame, *peculiar to the English."* qtd in D.A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester University Press, 1978), 30.

[192] The interwar agricultural depression was particularly hard on farm workers, whose wages were deregulated in 1921. This meant that, "hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and their families were forced off the land by farmers attempting to reduce costs by cutting back on labour." Farmworkers also bore a strong resentment of the

cultivated an image of himself as a countryman."[193] Baldwin's countryside was the "aesthetic

countryside, not the working countryside."[194] Baldwin was in this way able to direct the surplus

of veterans after the war into farm colonies in the country, or to settler colonies in order to defuse

the social tensions Britain experienced during a period of mass demobilization and high

unemployment after the war."[195] David Matless argues that organicism and 'planning-

preservation' as he calls it are opposing movements, with the former backward looking and

nostalgic and the latter oriented toward the future.[196] However, he overstates the difference; not

only did both movements have links "both at the level of ideas and of personnel," as Burchardt

notes, both were also concerned with national health and the recreation of a *future* community

through colonization.[197] Most importantly, the mutual concern for a healthy 'environment' and

their vision of a colonized Britain were both dependent on a construction of place as particular

and local.

Plotlands: The Ambivalence of Place

Planning in the first half of the twentieth century evinced a broad cultural interest in

aspects of the countryside and 'nature', but was forward looking rather than nostalgic. The

countryside, meanwhile, continued to be associated with agricultural production and with a long

history of literary and culture aestheticization, but it also became an object for mass

consumption. The terms of this consumption were contested, however. On the one hand, there

was a proliferation of 'preservationist' organizations, which as the name indicates sought to

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London financial class, which for some easily blurred into anti-Semitism. Conford and Dimbleby, *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, 23., Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 106-07.
[193] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 104-05. Burchardt claims that the association, between rurality, national-identity, and the conservative party, developed at this time.
[194] Ibid., 106.
[195] Buettner, *Empire Families:Britons and Late Imperial India: Britons and Late Imperial India*, 234.
[196] Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 103-04.

preserve the Wordsworthian 'nature' of England while also fighting for access to these spaces.[198]

These middle-class advocates, however, were often in uneasy tension with the fact that changes

in technology and the emergence of the 'week-end' meant that the countryside was not so far

removed for the average person. Rambling, once a hobby for poets and amateur scientists,

became a mainstream, collective activity in the interwar years with the formation of the

Manchester and Sheffield Federation rambling clubs. For some, this meant that "commercialism

colonized the rambling culture," and as more people vacationed in the countryside, "not only was

the solitude which many preservationists valued more and more disrupted, but physical damage

or defacement occurred…through erosion or littering."[199] Alongside this came an infrastructure

to accommodate these weekend tourists, including tea shops, camp sites, and roadside

advertisements.

Worse than this, working-class vacationers established semi-permanent secondary homes

in parts of the countryside, called plotlands. These were irregular, makeshift dwellings clustered

together without concern for accommodating streets and basic services, let alone an overall plan.

For many, they were seen in the same light as suburban development: an example of sprawling

mass development that was neither town nor country, but spoiled both, and plotlands had the

additional stigma of being associated with the working class. Both suburbs and the plotlands

spoke to the "intense horror that was felt by all 'right-thinking' people at the desecration of the

landscape they saw happening everywhere."[200]   In the words of a contemporary observer,

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[197] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 134.
[198] Ibid., 93-94. These include, among others, the Commons Preservation Society, Lake District Defence [sic]
Society, Society for Checking Abuses of Public Advertising, British Empire Naturalists Association, and the
Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, Kyrle Society, Society for the Preservation of Ancient
Buildings, National Footpaths Preservation Society, Plumage League, Society for the Protection of Birds, Society
for the Promotion of Nature Reserves along with the formation of the National Trust
[199] Ibid., 125.
[200] Hall and Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard*, 74-75. Peter Hall and Colin Ward see these
sentiments for example in Clough Williams-Ellis anti-suburban polemics, *England the Octopus* (1928) and *Britain*

referring to one such development on the coast, plotlands were entire towns of "hutments [that] completely *ruined* the scenery of that fine chalk headland."[201]

Plotlands speak to the ambivalence of place, just as they were themselves ambiguous, unidentifiable, and thus ugly places for many in the interwar period. As mentioned previously, planning in the twentieth century, especially its avant-garde, often styled itself as making anti-suburban interventions; that is, planning was considered a means to making a *real* place, a particular place that was not just any place. Planning is similar to how Dipesh Chakrabarty styles affective history. Instead of "places exchangeable with one another," it seeks to create places of "human belonging where life forms, although porous to one another, do not see exchangeable."[202] Despite themselves, planners consistently reproduced places of homogenous culture, places of ambivalent identity, non places that could be anywhere. On the other hand, Peter Hall and Colin Ward suggest that the disdain for plotlands signals only an elitism among the planner-preservationist class, a resentment that "the wrong sort of people were getting a place in the sun."[203] Instead they see these developments as a kind of working-class reappropriation of the commons, resistance, as it were, to the exclusivity and segregation in the city. They read the plotlands as a real place, because unplanned and 'makeshift", but then these places also mark the inauguration of a culture of mass leisure, consumption and tourism. In fact, plotlands were both autochthonous formations and the result of profiteering speculative builders and railway companies, sites of popular, 'low' culture and the homogenization of that culture, natural and yet ruinous of nature. They serve as a foil to planning because of their similarity to planned spaces,

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and the Beast (1937) or Howard Marshall who said "a gimcrack civilization crawls like a giant slug, across the country, leaving a foul trail of slime behind it."
[201] D. Hardy and C. Ward, *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (Five Leaves, 2004). My emphasis
[202] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 71. This slightly out of context quotation serves to illustrate how place functions in *Provincializing Europe*, specifically the work that it must do to ground affective identity and resistance to capital.

not because of their difference. The promise of *place* is its particularity, its 'realness', and yet its reality always seems more ambivalent.

For this reason critical appeals to place must be complicated, and the capacity for place to resist tempered. For example, in the introduction to the edited volume *Tensions of Empire*, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler claim that European colonies, as 'laboratories of modernity', could never produce "controlled conditions on colonial ground" and that, "what Europeans encountered in the colonies was not open terrain for economic domination, but people capable of circumventing and undermining the principles and practices" of colonialism.[204] Similarly, Chakrabarty cautions against a "simple application of the analytics of capital" that would "evacuate the local by assimilating it to some abstract universal," the latter being associated with European colonialism and thought.[205] That is, there are realities, on the ground, that still "do not belong to the 'life process' of capital," and as such are not "automatically aligned" with its logic.[206] Here we see a familiar distinction, between the domineering master-plan of colonial thought and its inability to fully realize itself 'on the ground', that is, in reality; for these critics, this is a surprising and novel conclusion.

The two garden cities created along the lines of Howard's masterplan in *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, Letchworth and Welwyn, certainly demonstrate the refusal of reality to cooperate with the planner's intentions. Intended as an anti-suburban intervention and place for those that dwelt in overcrowded slums, one in which they could live in harmony with people from other classes and govern themselves, Letchwroth and Welwyn both quickly became middle-class commuter suburbs owned by a private corporation whose board was stocked by wealthy

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[203] Hall and Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard*, 75.
[204] Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World*, 5.
[205] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 15,18.
[206] Ibid., 66.

industrialists. Additionally, the garden cities contested the dictums of Howard's 'analytical' plan by not attracting many businesses or workers, and moreover, not making the expected profit.[207] Both Letchworth and later Welwyn Garden City unsurprisingly reproduced the spatial segregation of London, albeit on a smaller scale.[208] That is, even if somehow designed to encourage more class interaction, "all that probably would have happened is that many of the middle class would not have moved there, for most sought only a pleasant place to live within commuting distance of London and a safe investment in their homes."[209] Instead, the middle class residents complained of the behavior and entertainments of the working class, and alleged vandalism. A prospect of building a 'public house,' that is, a pub, was voted down by the populace at Letchworth, and the Garden City Tenants Association voted against building more affordable housing for workers (which further inhibited industries from moving to Letchworth). Commenting on the resistance put up to his plan by what Chakrabarty might call the everyday reality of the garden city 'on the ground', Howard remarked that "the entrance of the ideal into the practical is a descent; it is surely attended with pain and difficulty."[210] Letchworth and Welwyn contested the terms of Howard's thought by reproducing existing social hierarchies without reconciling them in harmony, and thus becoming places that were, in the end, not very particular at all.

Ultimately, these garden cities reveal the indissociability of thought and and place, of master-planned ideations and abstractions, 'castles in the air', on the one hand, and firm, on the ground realities on the other. Colonialism was capable of producing resistances in thought and power structures reified in place. Planning sometimes spoke in the explicit idiom of power, but

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[207] Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 100-02.
[208] The housing was of a better quality obviously, and, of course, everyone had a garden.
[209] Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, 126.
[210] Ibid., 84. and Howard, quoted in Howard, *Garden Cities of to-Morrow*, 80.

at other times its intentionality was to some degree at odds with its own ideology; likewise, the

places produced were also ambivalent, existing but fragmentary and not fully present.

Chakrabarty is thus absolutely correct that "intimate space of capital" there is a "deep element of

uncertainty," as he is correct to emphasize the "plurality that inheres in the 'now,' the lack of

totality, the constant fragmentariness, that constitutes one's present."[211] However this

contingency does not come to rest on the supposed solidity and lived experience of place.[212]

Instead, as Foucault notes, place is a "disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible

orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry."[213]   This figure should be

taken even further however: the glittering fragments here are not like hard rocks, but lack shape,

size, color, continually dissolve. Here the distinctions between place and thought, affective and

analytical, particularity and universality, resistance and power are ruined: a theoretical plotland.

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[211] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 64, 243.
[212] That is, in "affective histories" which find "thought intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life."ibid., 18.
[213] Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, xvi.

CHAPTER TWO

The Concrete Futurity of the Postwar:

Materiality in Ian Hamilton Finlay and Roy Fisher

In south London's Southwark borough, near Elephant and Castle, stand the ruins of Heygate Estate, a large, mostly concrete structure built in 1974 and containing some 1200 units. Ruined, because Southwark Council has evicted its tenants (a process known as "decanting") and sold the building to various private developers as part of an ambitious regeneration project. Throughout this process, Heygate has emerged as a place that exceeds itself, whose apartment units, balconies, walkways, green spaces, playgrounds, entrances and streets hold within them an excess of meaning which overwhelms, overdetermines and obscures the place 'itself'. The Daily Mail notes that Heygate "has been described as a monument to the failure of post-war mass housing," that is, has served a metonym for an entire social project, itself multivalent and self-contradictory.[214] The picture captions for this article produce an associative web: scenes from the estate are labeled as "doomed estate," "apocalyptic," "abandoned," "left behind," "concrete jungle," "dilapidated," "smashed down," and, finally, "bleak."[215] Actor Michael Caine, whose 2009 film *Harry Brown* used Heygate as its murderous backdrop, called the estate a "rotten place [that] should never have been built."[216] It has also been used as a setting for the zombie apocalypse film *World War Z* as well as the more lighthearted alien invasion film *Attack the Bloc*. Others, like Ian Steadman acknowledge that "its broken lifts, broken lights, piss-soaked corridors and violent crime came to signify everything wrong with the post-war approach to

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[214] Daily Mail Reporter, "Secret Twilight of the High-Rise Housing Awaiting Demolition: How Guerrilla Gardeners, Graffiti Artists and Even Dance Classes Thrive in the Ruins of Abandoned Estate " *The Daily Mail* 2013.
[215] Ibid.

social housing and urban design," but argue that "the reality of what the Heygate was is more complicated than a concrete monstrosity taken over by the allegedly degenerate."[217] Steadman and others, for example, note the concrete inequity involved in spending £44M to buyout tenants at below-market rates, selling the estate for £50M to company that will make £200M profit from future sales, while only providing 79 supposedly-affordable units.[218] Resident Jerry Flynn comments sarcastically that "almost overnight we woke up to be told we were living on one of the worst estates in Britain."[219] For Steadman too, however, Heygate is a symbol "for everything that's wrong with London's housing and built environment," a metonym not for the 'failure' of the postwar welfare state but rather its intentional, neo-liberal dismantling and the real-estate speculation of London's smoke-and-mirrors regeneration schemes.

This debate is itself metonymic of similar conversations on the future of council estates and affordable housing in Britain more generally, with various estates and buildings serving, typically, as examples of the failures or successes of political policy or its implementation, of architectural designs or their actual construction. A symbol, then, but a concrete one, instantiated in city spaces, a tangible and visceral everyday reality. The estates are concrete not only in a figurative sense (i.e. as not abstract), but also in a literal sense. *The Daily Mail* opens its sensationalist article on Heygate by noting in particular its "bleak buildings and concrete warren of grey high-rise blocks," just as a *Mirror* article on "real life" in Manchester's Hulme claims that "with its bleak maze of grey concrete blocks, boarded-up shops and gangs of bored teenagers on every corner, Hulme seems the perfect example of a "concentration camp estate."[220]

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[216] Felix Allen, "Michael Caine's 'Rotten' Estate to Be Transformed," *London Evening Standard*, 07/08/2008 2008.
[217] Ian Steadman, "Look to the Heygate Estate for What's Wrong with London's Housing," *New Statesman*, 11/06/2013 2013.
[218] Mira Bar-Hillel, "Residents of the Heygate Estate Forced to Move out of London," *London Evening Standard*, 08/02/2013 2013.
[219] Stephen Moss, "The Death of a Housing Ideal," *The Guardian*, 03/04/2011 2011.
[220] Mirror, "Estate of the Nation: The Real Life of Uk's Council Flat Tenants," *The Daily Mirror*, 05/06/2009 2009.

Similar terms are produced in the idiom of "Broken Britain." For example The Guardian

reports of Iain Duncan Smith's tour of the east Glasgow's housing estate of Easterhouse: a place

that, for half a century "has been a byword for deprivation, for housing planning gone

disastrously wrong – a sink estate sunk to unrivaled lows of bleakness" filled with "damp,

rundown, grey concrete housing blocks scattered across acres of [a] needle and litter-strewn, job-

free wasteland."[221] What is broken about Britain is thus most easily epitomized not just by the

images of rioters but of their homes, the places from which they are thought to originate, the

isolated, crime-ridden wastelands of the country's public housing estates and provincial post-

industrial areas.

The horrors and failures of post World War II buildings and designs, and — by extension

— council estate structures and designs, planned spaces and planning designs, and the *ideas* that

suffused all these structures and designs, condense into concrete symbols, especially the material

of these very structures: concrete itself. Before the debris and the graffiti, the violence by gangs

and zombies, was the *material* from which postwar utopian fantasies would be constructed, and

accordingly their future ruin lay dormant within this very material.

Yet, it is the visceral quality of concrete, its ability to impose itself physically upon the

landscape (especially in the monumental 'new brutalist' constructions), that opens it up to the

dense network of associations which constitute its overdetermination. In his analysis of

contemporary British film, Andrew Burke finds that "the concrete high-rise is symbolically

overdetermined" because "these spaces are routinely associated in the popular imagination as the

sites of, and symbols for, the major social problems of contemporary Britain." [222] Ironically,

"concrete itself has a semiotic liquidity, representing in some instances the very material of the

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[221] Amelia Gentleman, "Is Britain Broken?," *The Guardian* 2010.

future while in others assuming the feel of cold incarceration, of subordinating those within it to the state's desire for rationality and modernity." [223] Heygate, like so many other such places constructed in postwar Britain, established itself as the material expression of a political consensus, utopian in that it transcended political disagreement through its very materiality. Conflict was to be overcome through the establishment of these concrete places. As Burke indicates, the concrete high-rise has become an anachronism. As a symbol, 'failure' inheres in place itself, in its very materiality, which continues to 'transcend' politics even as a very different set of associations condense into the concrete structures. In sum, concrete, once a self-evidently utopian material expression of future harmony, has become just as self-evidently an expression of that which is ruined, depressing, bleak, and dismal.

Composite Cultures

In debates around council housing, material facticity and symbolic overdetermination continually fade into each other to form the relational structure of place. The politics that so successfully root themselves in place depend on this facticity — the idea that the meaning of a place or a building could be self-evident, existing before thought as something raw and real, an origin for identity. Through this process, however, this supposed facticity itself is obfuscated and the naturalness and honesty of its grounding objects (tree, concrete high rise, etc) are given over to abstraction, though without anyone realizing it yet. Place is a relational construction not just because places exist relative to each other, even as types (e.g. town and country), but because it stages the relationship between the concrete and the abstract, fact and type.

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[222] Andrew Burke, "Concrete Universality: Tower Blocks, Architectual Modernism, and Realism in Contempory British Cinema," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 5, no. 3 (2007): 178.
[223] Ibid., 179.

Planning, as has been shown, has understood itself as knowing and producing relationality. Garden cities were concerned with the gendered relationship between town and country, and in producing places that would maintain the distinction between the two while uniting them in "marriage" (to use Howard's expression). So, too, then did the postwar state understand the places of the new Britain as relational, as when Aneurin Bevan[224] decried the state of prewar housing:

> You have castrated communities. You have colonies of low-income people, living in houses provided by the local authorities, and you have the higher income groups living in their own colonies. This segregation of the different income groups is a wholly evil thing, from a civilised point of view. It is condemned by anyone who has paid the slightest attention to civics and eugenics. It is a monstrous infliction upon the essential psychological and biological one-ness of the community.[225]

In fact this point of view was also expressed by Howard as others, as they sought not only to put town and country into relation but also the different classes — an emphasis on mixture with explicit 'biopolitical' valences. Here segregated communities — as "colonies" — are also "castrated," prevented from the kind of relationality promised by the "marriage" in Howard's schema. As Alison Ravetz notes, the new mixtures were still controlled in the management of council housing, which, like earlier philanthropists, retained rather than blurred distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' working class.[226] In Bevan's criticism, British identity is expressed as a composite of places and people that need to be set in a particular, managed relation.

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[224] Labour Minister of Health, 1945-1951

[225] Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing* (London: Routledge, 1988), 23.

[226] Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 24.

Marilyn Strathern identifies relationality as a knowledge structure influenced by English notions of kinship. Englishness is produced as an epistemology of perspective that Strathern calls merographic, after mereology, the study of part-whole relations.[227] She writes that,

> The relationship between the particular and the general, the unique and the representative, belongs to an elementary mathematics that both differentiates oneness and plurality and sees each as a product of operations done on the other. Thus, like 'society' itself, kinship may carry the resonance of a tradition or a community made up of a collectivity of values or of individuals' their attributes contribute to its aggregate character (enumeration). At the same time, kinship may also appear as a transcendent order which allows for degrees of relatedness…it is like an organism which functions as a whole entity to determine the character of its parts (volume)…'The English' similarly appear now as aggregate, now organism.[228]

The antimonies in question do not blur but remain distinct and in a dynamic relation, so that's Bevan's call for 'biological oneness' is also a desire to put complimentary traditions in relation. At root is a question about Englishness itself, whether if it is a mode that can be generalized or if it forever consists only in particularities; however, it is in fact "conventional," and thus general, "to deny that the typical ever exists…in denying the typicality of particular characteristics, one may well deny that one can ever think of what is typical about the English."[229]

Though a seeming contradiction, a place can be typically English in part by asserting a character of particularity, and furthermore, this play between the typical and particular can be thought of as particularly English. Though Strathern focuses on kinship in order to understand mereology, she necessarily turns to architecture and location in her analysis. In involving these and other relations, place offers a dynamic and malleable entry into politics as such. Strathern explains how relationships between parents and children, tradition and modernity, or society and

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[227] Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 73.
[228] Ibid., 29.
[229] Ibid., 1.

individual become transposed not just with each other but with relationships between countrysides and towns, exterior gardens and the interior of homes.

Thus proponents of either council *estates* or *home* ownership could have recourse to the same language of identity. They "still need pots for geraniums, and still associate families with houses, even to the detail of houses set about with gardens. Indeed, the late twentieth century has improved on the familial idiom in that it conflates the two; one now buys and sells 'homes'."[230] The talk about what a home could *do* and about how it could be taken as a metonym for community could be scaled down or up. As the garden provides the 'natural' context for the home, so can the garden itself be a metaphorical ground for the cultivated, growing individual, just like the "plants growing in the garden, the children in the house, talents within the person. Nature thus provided the ground to the cultivation of the person. Like religion, it becomes a background to the exercise of talent. What was educated, drawn out, was the capacity for moral conduct."[231] The nineteenth century notion of moral cultivation within a spiritual garden could be easily change scale to make the national garden — the countryside — the basis of communal identity, one that needed to be "enclosed for its preservation," where, "like many stately homes in England, the trees are no longer private property but part of everyone's past."[232]

The conditioning effect that a place — a garden, a home, the countryside — could have on some singular or plural structure and that linked the individual example to the type was of course not limited to the stately homes but was very much the core of what Bevan and other planners were attempting to produce in the council estates and new towns of postwar Britain. The objective in producing integrated, non 'castrated' communities was to relate societal elements through which a cohesive national culture could develop. As Robert JC Young argues

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[230] Ibid., 90.
[231] Ibid., 105.

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in *Colonial Desire*, the kind of hybridity being articulated here, the will to both combination and separation and ultimately to relation, has a deep history in producing Englishness as a racial category. He notes that

> in the different theoretical positions woven out of this intercourse [between "races"], the races and their intermixture circulate around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically…[the idea of race] only works when defined against potential intermixture, which also threatens to undo its calculations altogether.[233]

Furthermore, he notes that "in the 1860s…it was this idea of a living racial mixture that remains distinct that was developed by Matthew Arnold into a theory of English culture as multicultural."[234] Anglo-Saxon culture was inherently composite, so argued Arnold, and furthermore cultural strength could only be furthered through intermixture, so as to avoid stagnation. Young traces how these ideas of culture and *cultivation* were influenced by existing racial and biological theories, including those of Herder, Spencer, etc.

Similarly, one iteration of Strathern's merographic understanding of English kinship comes from literary critic William MacNeile Dixon, who claimed that the English are "an astonishingly mixed blend" — individualists who make up "a many headed people," and finally who become a "glorious amalgam."[235] Strathern comments that "English symbols of kin connection render the individual person at once an entity composed of parts and a part of other entities beyond him or her."[236] One could add that this notion of English identity, one that would develop more specifically into the idea of culture (through Arnold, Tylor, and others), was at the

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[232] Ibid., 117, 34.
[233] Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 18.
[234] Ibid., 17.
[235] qtd in Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century*, 30.. Originally in *The Englishman* (1931)
[236] Ibid., 83.

heart of the notions and projects of colonization; or, that notions and projects of colonization were always at the heart of English 'culture'. As shown in chapter one, theorizing the relations between spaces, times, and peoples — whether through planning's continuous attempts to produce and integrate the local or, say, in the organic movement's insistence on 'interlocality' — provided the basis for understanding identity and non-identity. As Young writes, "culture must apparently always operate antithetically. Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, unity and diversity, cohesion and dispersion, containment and subversion."[237]

Relationality and National Identity in Postwar Architecture

The 1941 special issue of the *Picture Post* contained an article in which Maxwell Fry declared that "The New Britain Must Be Planned."[238] His article was accompanied by pictures of modernist, block architecture and a cloverleaf freeway interchange. These images, which would today cause viewers to recoil in abject horror, signified the optimistic futurity to Britain itself; coming during a time of war, their optimism lay in even predicting the existence of a postwar Britain as such. These visions are what connected the war state to the welfare state and what enabled the transition from a war economy to a consumer economy.[239]

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[237] Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 53.
[238] Maxwell Fry, "The New Britain Must Be Planned," *Picture Post* 1941, 16.
[239] Ibid.

Figure 5: Planning in *The Picture Post*[240]

Moreover, Fry's statement once again linked planning, which proceeded through relational structures as discussed above, and British identity, even one that was 'new'. Early twentieth century planning and architecture cultivated an aesthetic of futurity that was catalyzed by the destruction of the second World War. Combined with a pressing need for housing and coinciding with the creation of the welfare state, Britain conceived of its re-creation through planning — both in protecting and recreating a sense of place. Planning thus contained the same contradictions between tradition and modernity that would belie the idea of a supposed postwar political consensus. Nevertheless, it was through conceptions of futurity and place that planning became inextricably linked not only with architecture but also with the entire apparatus of the welfare state.

Planning and architecture were not just a part of postwar reconstruction, they were its animating logic, and along with the new housing, hospitals, greenbelts, and entire towns would come a new society and new citizens, a reconciliation of 'Britain' with modernity as such.[241] This was a continuation and in many ways the culmination of planning in its modern articulation from the late nineteenth century, which was always a future-oriented endeavor that aimed to reconcile and integrate the traditional, rather than eliminate it. If this sort of integration of tradition into modernity was central to the articulation of a 'new' Britain and a new British national identity, constructed at a mass scale, then planning and architecture were logically its ideal vehicles.

The new welfare state presented an image of British *modernity* in part by suturing itself to architectural *modernism*, a specific style that had to contend with allegations that it was neither sufficiently traditional nor properly British (often articulated as a single claim). Thus Nikolaus Pevsner would argue in 1955 that characteristic English architecture "placed a premium on rationality and reasonableness rather than on mere decorative show." [242] As William Whyte notes, critics like Pevsner used this aesthetic argument against whose who saw modernsim as a "foreign invasion" and rather "sought to show that modernism and Englishness were entirely compatible" and that "modernism was in fact indigenous to England."[243] That an aesthetic might be typically English and at the same time contain a relationship with an outside, spatially or temporally, was already a notion common to Englishness, architecture, and for that matter, modernism. Thus Gavin Stamp could say, apparently without irony, that the postwar preference

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[240] Ibid.

[241] As told by Emmanuel Goldstein in Orwell's *1984*, "the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient—a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete—was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person."   George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Plume, 1983), 167.

[242] qtd in William Whyte, "The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1957," *The Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 02 (2009): 441.

[243] Ibid.

for modernist architecture resulted from "that typical English inferiority complex which always prefers a foreign name to a native one."[244] The simultaneous assertion and denial of such a relationship was the basis for English typicality.

In this way architectural modernism in England reconciled its relationship with continental influences and to 'traditional' English architecture at the same time (what counted as 'foreign' or 'traditional' in relationship to modernism were always contingent to the argument being made). One popular reference for modernists was the Arts and Crafts movement, which had influenced planners since Howard's time. Even in 1998, *Sunday Times* critic Hugh Pearman would contextualize British modernism by writing,

> Naturally, both high-tech and arts and crafts styles developed in the consciousness of movements elsewhere in the world... None of this alters the fact that our twin traditions have grown up with us as a nation. One – high tech – has always been the tradition of those who push the boundaries of what is possible, who are consciously experimenting with the new. The other – arts and crafts – was a formalising of what is termed "vernacular" building, the supposedly natural and unselfconscious built forms of the land as they evolved over time, using local handicrafts and materials. The British have proved very good at both of these.[245]

This account not only places the experimental 'high-tech' architecture in relation with the traditional 'vernacular', but also argues that this relationship is *itself* characteristic of "a quintessentially British approach to architecture."[246] Thus, just as William Morris and others crafted their aesthetic through its relationship with a (perhaps fabricated) English past and its utopian future, and just as Howard proposed a practical reconciliation of tradition and modernity in the garden city, modernists were also integrating a 'traditional' past with a utopian, technological future. Pevsner, writing in 1937, claims that it was the arts and crafts sensibility

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[244] qtd in ibid., 444.
[245] qtd in John W Nixon, "New Brutalism," (Belfast: Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 2007), 2.
[246] qtd in ibid., 1.

that had inspired continental modernism, so that "in finally adopting the modern style as it was developed abroad, England is only recovering what she once gave to the world." [247] Modernism could thought to be English because the two were already in a dynamic relation and furthermore because both terms were concerned with relationality in general.

This is not to say that there was agreement or 'consensus' regarding the Englishness of modernism. There was not, with proponents of modernism called communists and opponents called fascists and so forth. If there was any postwar consensus on these terms, it was only that notions and relationships of tradition/modernity, national/international and individual/society could be engaged by routing them through *place*, the figurations of planning and architecture included. Place was the way through which the *typicality* of English identity could be disputed, a process that could only be accomplished by creating, juxtaposing, and comparing *particular* examples. If place ever lost its character of particularity then it could make no claim to typicality, especially with regard to English identity. As such, arguing that a place or building did not contain particularity as a feature, a claim often leveled against modernist constructions, was itself a refutation of its Englishness.

The discourse surrounding modernism itself exemplified the contradictions and tensions involved in trying to articulate a generalized identity through architecture. As Whyte notes, "like their Victorian predecessors, the architects and architectural critics of this period assumed an axiomatic association between culture and architecture and between the spirit of the age and the buildings of the period."[248] Also like the Victorians, the aspects of the architecture they chose to emphasize were those which, they thought, communicated the specificity of a particular building in a particular location; only this sort of expression would suffice to make the more general

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[247] Whyte, "The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1957," 454.

argument about 'culture'.   Namely, postwar architects emphasized *materiality* in order to ground

their aesthetic in the particularity of place. That is, before their aesthetic could be related to

'material conditions' it had to first be related to *materiality*.

The way that English modernists and their allies among Labour-era planners could link

modernist style to national character was not only by integrating tradition into its modernity, but

through engaging with the relation between the particular and the general that had long

authenticated claims to identity. Whereas garden city planners would relate particularity to

sensual descriptions of nature or naturalness or to the indigenousness of vernacular architecture,

postwar architects sought out particularity through a focus on *materiality*. The emphasis on

materials as the starting point for a new architecture was already central to modernist architecture

from Walter Gropius to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to, especially, Le Corbusier, "whose wartime

designs for emergency housing, the béton brut of the Unité, and the soon-to-be-completed Jaoul

Houses, had demonstrated a turn towards the expression of materials."[249]   Of special interest

were the 'new' materials of glass, steel and concrete, all of which lent themselves to a 'direct' and

'honest' expression.

It was not always the case that materials, in particular these materials, carried these

connotations. In fact concrete, being a cheap, composite material, was never favored by

nineteenth century architects. One of the first modern references to concrete as building material

comes from a 1777 french text entitled *Cours d'Architecture,* which referred to a substance

called *mortier de betum*, "*betum* being Old French for a mass of rubbish."[250] Indeed, concrete

was often material left over or lying around, cemented together to form a coagulated building

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[248] Ibid., 449.
[249] Anthony Vilder, "Another Brick in the Wall," *October* 136(2011): 110-11.
[250] Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 21.

material. Especially in the British context, it was not only regarded as cheap and perhaps unsafe, but carried morally "derogatory implications."[251] Peter Collins notes that this is because concrete had no appeal in its 'natural' state, and "it is only by appreciating this that we can sympathize with the late Victorian architect's apparent obsession with the morality of facing concrete with other materials since, in accordance with Ruskinian doctrine, he must either justify his use of facing materials on ethical grounds, or eschew concrete altogether."[252] Choices in material and in presentation thus had ethical dimensions, and as such, concrete signaled impurity due to being aggregated rubbish.

The ethics of concrete and other materials changed, however, with the introduction of modernism. Now, it was *through* reference to the direct, honest expression of materiality that architecture could then form a relationship with and make claims on British sociality. Thus as early as 1931 (in a special issue of *The Architect's Journal* entitled "The New Materials") Wells Coates would argue that glass, steel and concrete could either be used as the "prisoners—the slaves—of old habits, old social prejudices, old visual prejudices; or as the means to new forms, new habits of life, a new vision."[253] As Ashely Maher and Elizabeth Darling both note, the idea the materials of a building were its essential content could quickly become the idea that one could use materials to also form and express latent social content; in the case of British architects, the new materials came to signify explicitly 'progressive' social goals.

Twenty to thirty years of British architects making the case for a modernism whose character of particularity inhered in its materiality culminated, perhaps, in the development of the "new brutalism," a term possibly coined and definitely popularized by former London County

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[251] Ibid., 47.. He is referring in particular to "On the Architectural Treatment of Rubbish," a paper by Gilbert Redgrave given to the Architectural Association in 1871
[252] Ibid., 49.

Council architects Alison and Peter Smithson. Brutalism was a modernism past modernism that

used concrete to express both the austerity and mass-production economy of war and postwar

Britain. Brutalism refers in fact to *beton brut* — 'raw' or unfinished concrete that still bore the

texture of its casting and was to be 'finished' (poorly, it turns out) by the lovely English weather

itself. John W. Nixon writes that

> New Brutalism was a 1950s', mainly British, architectural movement that asserted the
> primacy of the functionalist principles in services, materials, and structure. Anything that
> distracted from or disguised these was rejected. In its austere and inelegant rectilinearity,
> with plumbing, electric and other services exposed, and 'cosmetic' treatments eschewed,
> New Brutalism probably represents the extreme case of functionalism. Immediately
> following the destruction of World War II, it undoubtedly had a certain attractiveness to
> public authorities looking for economical means of rebuilding – New Brutalist buildings
> were very basic.[254]

Though 'brutalism' referred to the 'raw', unfinsihed concrete, the Smithsons and other architects,

however, encouraged conceptual mistranslation of the term: Georges Candilis remarked that "the

term has to be taken in the sense of directness, truthfulness, no concessions. I remember writing:

'You have to be direct and brute.' "[255]

The Smithsons, like many others, however also looked to Le Corbusier and his buildings'

"clarity, integrity and grand scale" and also their "'brutally' direct treatment of function, form

and finish – his concrete finishes tended to be what the French called béton brut, the patterning

of the rough timber shuttering left 'raw'."[256] Their concern seems to lie in producing an aesthetic

in which there would be no latent content and thus no attempt to 'hide' the building as functional

object. [257] The relationship between form and content could thus be immediate and direct, and

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[253] Ashley Maher, "'Swastika Arms of Passage Leading to Nothing': Late Modernism and the "New" Britain," *ELH*
80, no. 1 (2013): 260.
[254] Nixon, "New Brutalism," 1.
[255] Vilder, "Another Brick in the Wall," 108.
[256] Nixon, "New Brutalism," 2.
[257] this implies that, in their view, architectural form had the intent of 'hiding' its content.

because of this both the form of brutalist architecture and the social purpose of its buildings would be more marked.

Taking its cue from the more obstinate forms of modernist architectural thought, brutalism sought an unmediated aesthetic through reference to functionalist principles but also to simplicity and directness of materials, specifically (unfinished) concrete. Yet, though brutalist buildings could create a striking first impression, it has to be considered among the more conceptual approaches to architecture. This is also true — perhaps especially true — even in the case of those phrases that ostensibly referred to these building's unmediated aesthetic. Imprinted onto the buildings and indeed onto concrete as a material were a series of associations — concrete had, in its essence, clarity, integrity, truthfulness, directness and honesty. That is, architects and critics inscribed in concrete these concepts and in the same gesture naturalized them, as if they had been there all along. This was repeated in the buildings and places they created overall, which were "in the Smithsons' eyes, 'necessary' in this metaphysical sense."[258]

Including as it did an assertion of making truthful, as implicitly opposed to false, architecture, this aesthetic 'necessity' had a strong normative tenor; the Smithsons themselves write in their famous and confusing short manifesto, "up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical." [259] That is, the stakes not only of 'functionalism' but also of using concrete were deeply ethical and metaphysically important. Reyner Banham, critic for the *Architectural Review*, would write in 1954 in that publication that visible integration of the structural and decorative elements of a building "imposes an existential responsibility upon the architect for every brick laid, every joint welded, every panel offered up."[260] This is then a

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[258] Nixon, "New Brutalism," 2.
[259] Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, "The New Brutalism," *October* 136(2011): 37. This manifesto originally appeared in *Architectural Digest 27,* in April 1957 (p. 113)
[260] qtd in Anthony Vilder, "Another Brick in the Wall," ibid.: 117.

"new aesthetic of materials" that in its supposed honesty becomes, as Anthony Vilder writes, "the ethical side of New Brutalism."[261] Here the 'brute reality' of concrete and its specificity to a building's function and 'content' has, at the same time and apparently without contradiction, ethical, political and social valences. For these architects and critics, this is not a contradiction to be resolved because it is a relationship encoded *as a relationship* in the material itself.

The success of this assertion was and is variable. However what is clear is that social and ethical claims follow from the establishment of a certain necessity in place, in this case specific buildings whose function is manifest and that relates to its era in some organic fashion. From here, relationships to other times, spaces and concepts can and must be introduced. What is forgotten is the arbitrariness of these relationships, consumed as they are by the supposed naturalness of place, its prior facticity and its particularity.

The development of brutalism and postwar architecture more generally was the result of a confluence of factors. The most important of these was the war itself; the very destruction that it caused also catalyzed an acceptance for new ideas, both aesthetically and in terms of social policy. Significantly, "New Brutalism was born out of the postwar culture of 'austerity Britain'," specifically the importance of rationing and the *lack* of materials and resources at times as well as the communal/nationalistic sentiment these conditions created.[262] Just as planning used the resources it had been developing over the course of the century to address these conditions and appeal to the sensibilities of the postwar British public, so did architecture and art have ready-made aesthetic solutions. For the aesthetic of brutalism, this meant not only a simplicity in

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[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., 106.

materials but also an insistence that "all materials were used 'as found', untouched by cosmetic finishes (blockwork, for instance, being left unplastered)."[263]

In this emphasis on 'found materials' architects drew on earlier modernist ideas, as Banham noted at the time. Referring themselves to dada's preference for 'found' materials and gaining inspiration from the simplicity of Bauhaus architecture, these architects made a virtue out of austerity material conditions, while at the same time labeling the product of these international influences as undeniably English. The war-economy, with its industrial mass production and its austerity, provided the ethical and aesthetic tenor of a modernism that sought, through use of the war economy's materials, to produce 'honest' and 'truthful' buildings. As the Smithsons wrote,

> From individual buildings, disciplined on the whole by classical aesthetic techniques, we moved on to an examination of the whole problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community has to them... Any discussion of Brutalism will miss the point if it does not take into account Brutalism's attempt to be objective about "reality"—the cultural objectives of society, its urges, and so on. Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.[264]

From the premise that architecture must resolve the relationship between "building" and "human associations" (as different from "community"?), Brutalism tries to "be objective," "face up," and "drag a rough poetry." It would seem that architecture and what they call "classical" aesthetics had up to this point obscured something about its purpose or its material and social conditions. It had not pulled from these conditions their essence, but instead had obfuscated and submerged them in a metaphysically unnecessary form. The 'poetry' of the new form would be 'rough' so as to clarify the nature of mass-production, making its relation to the building as unmediated as the relationship between that building and social 'forces' more generally. From the austerity

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[263] Nixon, "New Brutalism," 2.
[264] Smithson and Smithson, "The New Brutalism," 37.

economy comes an austere aesthetic economy that imagines itself more direct, truthful, and 'objective' than its predecessors

Concrete Aesthetics: Avant-Garde Modernism and Ian Hamilton Finlay

Architectural modernism in Britain was overall defined by ambivalent relationships. It discovered something, perhaps something that had been lost, in British tradition while inventing and articulating an international modernity, to the delight of some and consternation of others. Architecture had an ambivalent relationship with modernism itself, taking inspiration from dada, futurism and bauhaus while creating very practical 'sculptures', aligned with the modernizing prerogatives of the state and within the rational and technical framework provided by planning. By the same token, however, these acknowledged ambivalences were created by the conditions of the postwar period and related to concerns shared across political, social, economic and cultural spheres. In this case the strength of the reaction against internationalist architectural modernism signals the degree to which architecture was useful in thinking about broader social patterns for postwar Britain. Thus it was the case that criticism of modernism did not end with architectural critics but extended to authors like John Betjeman and the isolationist Movement poets.

These ambivalences were more productively encountered, perhaps, by writers and artists influenced by the same currents within modernism that shaped postwar architecture. These include British poets who (re)turned both to 'avant garde' modernism and the international scene to ground their own interventions, including Bob Cobbing, Sylvester Houédard and the Scottish Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Finlay was important in particular for his own work and also in producing and editing the journal *poor.old.tired.horse* from 1962 to 1967 (which

featured heterogeneous work from poets from various countries). Though their work varied,

Finlay and others turned to the avant garde to make concrete poetry and art. In this, their

concerns aligned with those architects who made buildings *of concrete* itself, most significantly a

focus on *materiality* and an aesthetic that favored reduction, simplicity, and transparency.

Like brutalism and architectural modernism more generally, concrete poetry advocated

for the immediacy of the poem as object through extensive conceptual writings and manifestoes,

most significantly by Eugene Gomringer, the Noigandres group consisting of Augusto de

Campos, Decio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, Max Bense, Pierre Garnier, Cobbing and

others. In thinking of the poem as a constructed object whose materials were language,

including in its sonorous or typographical form, concrete poets not only shared concerns with

architecture but turned to architecture explicitly for inspiration; their poems would be 'built'.

They had in addition, however, a diverse array of modernist influences: the 'verbicovisual'

language of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, dada's conceptual interventions, Pound's imagism,

Futurism's proclivity for the manifesto form, and later the minimalist, abstract painting of the 50s

(which many concrete poets (and critics) termed 'concrete' painting).[265]

Swiss poet Eugene Gomringer's early manifesto *From Line to Constellation* (1954)

provides the tone and terms of the aesthetic. The text describes concrete poetry using terms

denoting reduction among other characteristics: restricted, concentration, simplification, essence

of poetry, form and substance, organic, new, perceived visually, whole, object, brevity, game,

invents, constellation, play-area, reality. [266] He opens by writing that "our languages are on the

road to formal simplification, abbreviated, restricted forms of language are emerging" and goes

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[265] Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer identify "concretism" as "the practice of regarding what is abstract as concrete" Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer, *Concering Concrete Poetry* (London: Writers Forum, 1978), 9.
[266] Gomringer, *From Line Constellation,* qtd in Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Hispanic Arts (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 67.

on to state that "restriction in the best sense — concentration and simplification — is the very essence of poetry." [267] Thus something reduced is concentrated, something concentrated is simplified, and something simplified marks the essence of poetry. He writes that the "new poem is simple and can be perceived visually as a whole as well as in its parts. It becomes an object to be both seen and used: an object containing thought but made concrete through play-activity, its concern is with brevity and conciseness."[268] Gomringer seeks to view the poem as a relational object that can be easily perceived through its visual character. Now as 'object', the poem features a merographic relationship between whole and part, transforming itself into "thought made concrete." Unlike other poems, the concrete poem is "a reality in itself and not a poem about something or other."[269]

A poem becomes a composite of elements-in-relation to which it can be productively reduced even if those elements are not as strictly functional as the exposed pipes in a brutalist building; in another manifesto Gomringer writes that it is a "matter of bare linguistic structure, and the visible form of concrete poetry is identical to it[s] structure, as is the case with architecture." [270] This emphasis on an open and perhaps more 'honest' structure is shared by the equally influential Brazillian Noigandres group, who write in their *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry* (1950-1958) that the "concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and more or less subjective feelings." [271] Similarly Max Bense writes that "everything concrete is nothing but itself...all art is concrete which uses its material functionally and not symbolically."[272] In 'reducing' language and in making thought concrete, this poetry also supposes itself to have made

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[267] Gomringer, *From Line Constellation,* qtd in ibid.
[268] Gomringer, *From Line Constellation,* qtd in ibid.
[269] Gomringer, *From Line Constellation,* qtd in ibid.
[270] Gomringer, *Concrete Poetry,* qtd in ibid.

form immanent with content, removing that which is outside and non-objective (feelings, etc) while also eliminating formal linguistic elements which are not 'functional'.

As American poet Mary Ellen Solt writes in reference to the *Pilot Plan* in the introduction to her anthology of international concrete poetry, "all definitions of concrete poetry can be reduced to the same formula: form=content / content=form." [273] Similarly, In *Concerning Concrete Poetry* Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer enumerate characteristics and definitions of what is or is not concrete poetry in a series of lists, quotes, and timelines that somehow seem like a manifesto in ironic fragments (that is, constructed with the same dadaist aesthetic that informs concrete poetry itself). They imagine two paintings, which are the same except one is entitled *Sunset* while the other is called *Red Circle on Blue*; they call the first painting abstract and the second concrete, thus defining concrete as "a non-mimetic abstract" and as "abstract minus mimesis."[274] However they also run into several problems trying to separate the abstract from the concrete; at another point they write that *both* abstract and concrete are "counter-mimetic." [275] This being the case, they cite the Oxford English Dictionary of 1865 to define "concretism" as "the practice of regarding what is abstract as concrete."[276] Their problem is intensified by the tendency to label non-representative art as "abstract," when such art is (in their view) trying produce the opposite.

In any case, representation and mimesis are the primary antagonists. They quote Le Corbusier in 1937 as well: "this art is concrete and not abstract…abstract in name is really concrete." [277] Le Corbusier's interest in the formality and materiality of art extended to his

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[271] Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatari and Haroldo de Campus, *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry* ibid., 72.
[272] Max Bense, *Concrete Poetry*, qtd ibid., 74.. Also see Cobbing and Mayer, *Concering Concrete Poetry*, 13.
[273] Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 13.
[274] Cobbing and Mayer, *Concering Concrete Poetry*, 9.
[275] Ibid., 5.
[276] Ibid., 9.
[277] Ibid., 12.

architectural designs, which were also attempts to be amimetic and true to materials (including concrete). As in architecture, concrete poems are spatial, in that they create definite spaces that they then can occupy. These spaces are non-linear, or are linear but many times over, and ostensibly are material and not representational.

The argument that form is not completely separate from content and that a reader does not need to look outside the poem to understand it could in fact be made regarding any poem. More interesting, however, is the stress on this point for these concrete poets/critics, for in order to eliminate the form-content distinction, they must forcefully articulate it, presupposing them to be at least quasi-autonomous categories in non-concrete poems. Instead, what they bring to the fore even in these manifestoes is the relationship between something called form and something called content and a seeming intent to make that relationship as compact and economical as possible. From their putative separation, concrete poem performs the miracle of reuniting form and content. Similarly, these manifestoes and others are full of statements like Solt's that seek to reduce even the definition of concrete poetry, to make their proliferating conceptual structures concrete and simple. That is, they attempt to reign in the conceptual excesses they themselves provide through a focus on the materiality of language and closed relational structure.

Concrete modernism in architecture and poetry both was international. *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* (*POTH*), published by Finlay's Edinburgh-based Wild Hawthorn Press and taking its name from a Robert Creeley poem, is credited for bringing concrete and postwar avant garde poetry to a British audience but was itself heterogenous, both in terms of the 'types' of poetry it published and the national identifications of its authors. Over its six-year run, it would publish work from, among others, Edwin Morgan (often), Mary Ellen Solt, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Georg Trakl, Hans Arp, Augusto de Campos, Pedro Xisto, Paul Celan, Robert

Creeley, Robert Lax, Eugene Gomringer, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Ernst Jandl, Lorine Niedecker, and of course Finlay himself. Also included were influences: E.E. Cummings, Creeley, Paublo Neruda, Horace, and, especially, Guillaume Apollinaire. Each author and translator was assigned a national identification in parenthesis. Later issues especially had a primary drawer or designer for the issues, which were typically 3-5 pages in length with an endearingly low production value, perhaps surprising for what was regarded as an avant garde publication. Each issue was only "9d," and one could obtain a subscription of 12 issues for 12 shillings or $1.75 (there were only 25 issues published total).

      POTH was a publication that looked back as much as it did forward, a broader tendency among concrete poets that Marjorie Perloff terms *arrière garde*, borrowing from William Marx. The role of the *arrière garde* is to "insure [the] success" of the avant garde, to preserve the revolution, so to speak; or, as defined by Barthes, "to be avant-garde is to know that which has died. To be arrière-garde, is to continue to love it." [278]The first instance of concrete poetry in *POTH* is thus Finlay's own "Homage to Malevich," referring to early twentieth century Russian painter Kazimir Malevich. [279] Accompanied by a somewhat whimsical drawing by Peter Stitt, this poem appears to refer to Malevich's black square paintings, presenting us as it does with a square 'block' of evenly spaced letters spelling out, among other things, "black block."[280] As with an acrostic word puzzle, "Homage" foregrounds the 'elements' of those words, for example the interior words "lack" and "lock" (the former through the deferral of the opening 'b', and both through diagonal readings), the vowels 'a' and 'o' which alternative vertically, and the long

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[278] Marjorie Perloff, "Writing as Re-Writing: Concrete Poetry as Arrière-Garde," *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 25, no. 1 (2008): 69.. See Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres Completes*, III, p. 1038, "Responses 1971)
[279] Not to be confused with Finlay's 1978 painting of the same title, now at the Tate. Finlay had many "Homages," which were not produced as a series.
[280] Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Green Waters," in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Edinburgh: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1964).. Also see Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Selections*, ed. Alec Finlay (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 136.

typographic shape of the 'b', 'l' and 'k'. "Homage" in this way is perhaps similar to Malevich's austere paintings *Black Square* or *White on White*, in the way that a monolithic, regular image also shows itself to be a play of elements.

For Susan Howe, this play of elements and of part to whole is a closed relational structure, and thus this poem is fully demonstrative of the concrete aesthetic. In what Perloff calls a "superb analysis,"[281] Howe writes

> If you give this poem time and thought, you begin to see that there are tightly linked elements here. Tightly linked, and at play. The two words lack and lock, look alike, but mean opposite things…The black (figure) and block (ground) balances with lock (stability) against lack (instability). Something open verses something closed...Do black and white open or close? Are they absence or presence? Sense or nonsense?…It is hard to separate color from color, shape from shape. Here form and content are bound (locked) together.[282]

This analysis reveals what more what Howe and others *want* from the concrete poem than what it 'innately' provided. Howe works hard to make this poem "a reconciliation of opposites," [283] most significantly when she asserts that either black/block or lock/lack are straightforwardly opposites. Howe focuses on these supposed relationships to both reinforce the abstractions of 'form' and 'content' and declare their tight alignment in the economy of the poem. The concrete poem thus provides the best case of form adhering to content, and is thus, perhaps, the most successful kind of poem. In fact, her reading proliferates difference in the poem, ascribing somewhat arbitrary connotations to the figural arrangement of letters such that what she produces is not a tight economy but an excess of meaning. That is, the differences *within* her reading, such as between 'lack' and 'instability' or between 'block' (the square shape of the poem?) and 'ground', render her neat relational analysis non-functional.

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[281] Marjorie Perloff, "The Deep Minimalism of Ian Hamilton Finlay," *The Battersea Review* 1, no. 4 (2015), http://thebatterseareview.com/critical-prose/170-marjorie-perloff-on-finlay.
[282] Susan Howe, "The End of Art," *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 4 (1974): 7.

What is in question here is if the concrete poem can in fact be a self-contained 'object' as its proponents argue(d). This ability (or inability) is dramatized when Finlay or others inscribe their poems on a medium other than the printed page, for example in *Fisherman's Cross*. This poem appears as a photograph in issue 24, which consists of images of concrete poems/sculpture/art taken at the Brighton Festival in 1967.[284] In this piece the words "seas" and "ease" are carved into a hexagonal stone slab, and thus of the same material as the medium. The 'ease' in the center is singular, centering the 'seas'. When the title is taken into account, ease connotes the restfulness of a fisherman at sea, or perhaps even their burial amidst swirling waters.

Howe notes that the poem gestures at death in this way, though her reading again strives to make the poem exemplary of a broader concrete aesthetic. For example, she asserts that this "is a poem whose visible form is identical to its structure. A concrete poem in concrete…form and content are one." [285] Advocating again for the merging of form and content and/or form and structure, Howe ignores many contextualizing questions. For example, The visible form is only identical to the structure if one takes the "cross" of the title into account (by looking at a caption in a book or a placard in a gallery). Also, what content has been merged with what form — are the words "seas" and "ease" is identical with their arrangement in a rough cross, or with the hexagonal shape of the piece, or with the stone itself? Furthermore, *Fisherman's Cross* is not made of concrete, and the provenance of the "concrete" in "concrete poetry" is open for interpretation (as discussed below). Howe continues, relating the 'ea' sound in the two words to "eat, ear, hear, cease, release, death, and east, where the sun rises. These are open words and the

[283] Ibid.
[284] Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Fisherman's Cross," in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Edinburgh: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1967).
[285] Howe, "The End of Art," 6.

things they name are open." [286]She then focuses on the one word from this arbitrary list that does

not rhyme with either "seas" or "ease," namely the word "death," to claim that "Life (seas)

rhymes with Death (ease)."[287]   In this reading, the single "ease" in the middle of the poem here

comes to *represent* Death; concrete becomes mimetic, despite its own apparent convictions.

For critics and many of the early, prominent practitioners of concrete poetry, the

particularity of the poem needs to exist but at the same time would ironically seem not to matter

if the most significant reading is always form=content. If anything, it is the free-form openness

and playful arbitrariness of Howe's interpretations that most easily show that form and content

are not one in this poem. For Perloff this arbitrariness is the principle aesthetic feature of

concrete poetry, above and in contrast to it's 'iconicity (the use of space and typography, etc)':

> The iconic aspect of Concrete Poetry, emphasized in the early stages by Gomringer and
> Max Bense was always subordinate to the necessity for relational structure, whereby, to
> enlarge on Jakobson's thesis, any phonological or visual coincidence is felt to mean
> semantic kinship. In this sense the material is the meaning.[288]

Perloff contrasts this Jakobsonian relational structure with the equation of form and content,

saying that "by naturalizing the ideogram (just as Pound naturalized the Image), [one assumes]

that word and thing can be one."[289] The question remains, however, as to what is concrete about

concrete poetry; for Perloff too, it seems to be a privileged form in which to explore a more

primary poetic function common to all poetry. Not only does this subordinate what many count

as the defining feature of concrete poetry (its 'iconicity'), but it also seems to hastily resolve

contradictions within the aesthetic itself, including those in manifesto or critical form.

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[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Perloff, "Writing as Re-Writing: Concrete Poetry as Arrière-Garde," 84.
[289] Ibid. In this context she is more specifically referring to Haroldo de Campos' commentary on Ernest Fenollosa's
The Chinese Written Character as Medium for Poetry

If concrete poetry (and writing about concrete poetry) demonstrates any abstract tendencies, they are the contradictions, desires, and unresolved tensions between form, content, genre, style and representation in poetic and visual aesthetics. In producing relational structure that Perloff identifies as a "necessity," they also produce contradictions between the simultaneous particularity and universality of material and structure. Howe's "a concrete poem in concrete" cannot be a statement of closure (albeit unwitting) but rather opens questions about not only concrete poetics, but also the 'poetics' of concrete.

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lackblockblackb
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lockblackblockb
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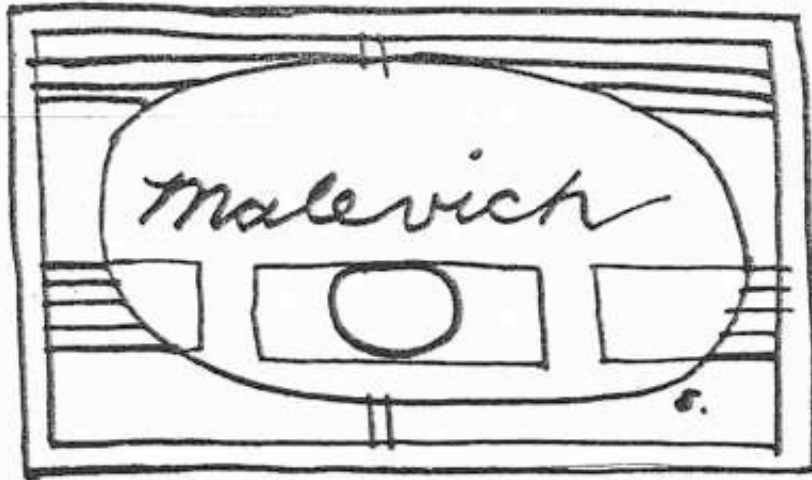
malevich

Homage to Malevich

Ian Hamilton Finlay   Peter Stitt

(Scotland)

Figure 6: Finlay - "Homage to Malevich" [290]

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[290] {Finlay, #765}

Figure 7: Finlay - "Fisherman's Cross"[291]

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[291] Finlay, "Fisherman's Cross."

The figure contains the following handwritten text:

Green Waters
Blue Spray
Greyfish

Anna T
Karen B
Netta Croan

Constant Star
Daystar
Starwood

Starlit Waters
Moonlit Waters
Drift

(note: Green Waters, etc.= actual
fishing trawlers, of Lowestoft
Aberdeen, and other ports.)

Ian Hamilton Finlay
(Scotland)
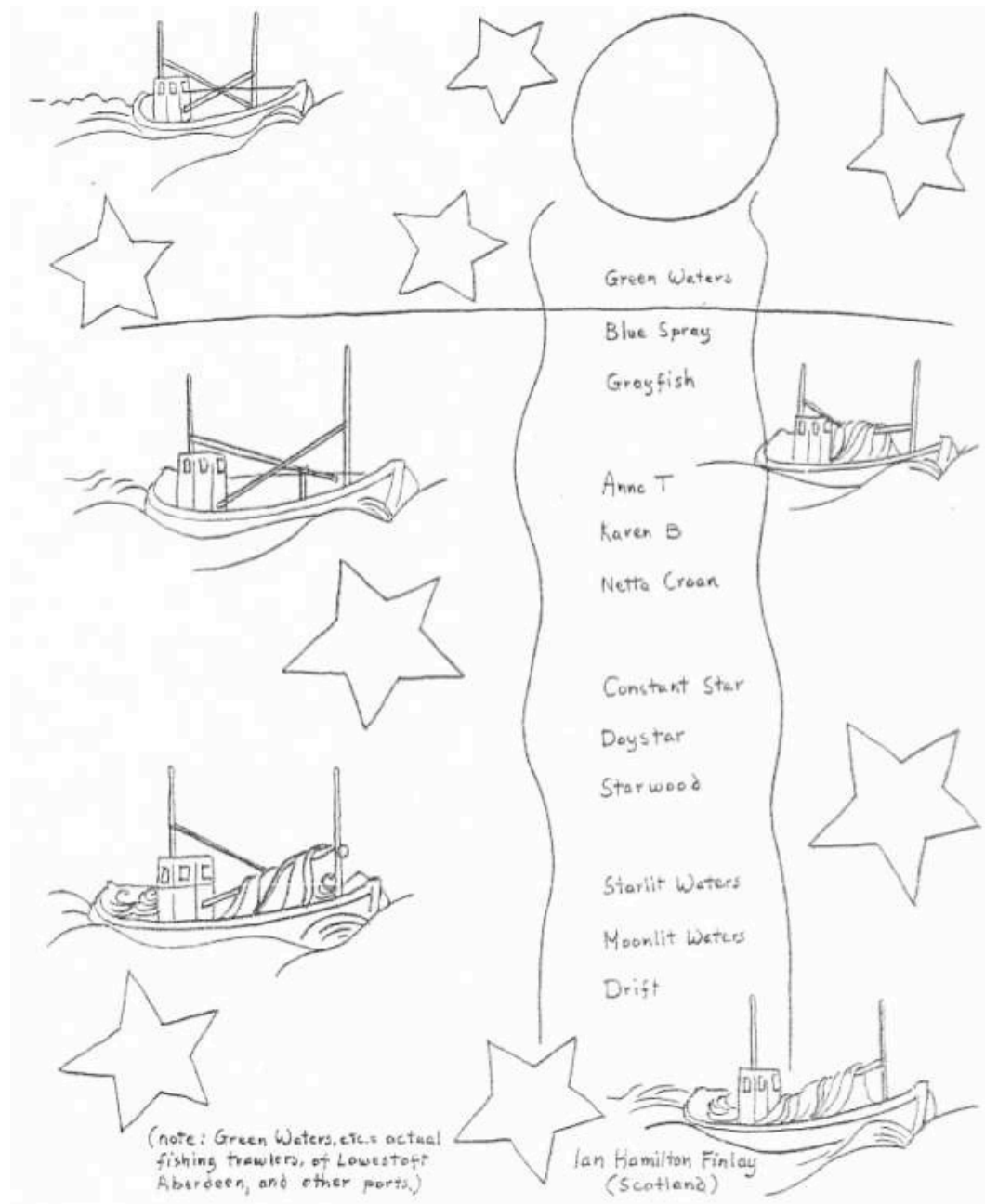
Figure 8: Finlay - "Green Waters" [292]

Through *POTH* and his own work, Finlay was a key figure in introducing and promoting international avant garde work and concrete poetry in Britain. Yet his relationship to concrete poetry and especially its austerity was ambivalent. In a letter to painter Ad Reinhardt in 1966 he writes

There is a problem with concrete poetry, I mean my own — that they are grave pictures. In Scotland there is a lot of heavyness that is something quite different from gravity, something quite unartistic and this made me feel that humor was a very important thing in so far as it makes a distance, a space, and art needs that sort of space.[293]

While he goes on to praise Reinhardt for paintings that are "grave" but not "heavy," one can see in Finlay a sense that simplicity and reduction were not sufficient as ends in themselves.

Most issues of *POTH* lack the orderly coolness of concrete poetry and instead feature a casual, sometimes quaint, visual style and a playfully immature, art-school sensibility. Thus we have Finlay's nursey rhyme poem "the tug," accompanied by John Furnival's drawing,[294] or the cover to issue 14, which has the explicit theme of "Visual — Semiotic — Concrete."[295] Most of his own work that appears in the journal is not concrete, but in many cases carries over some of the techniques and aesthetics of concrete poetry. For example, issue 10 contains mostly concrete poems from Robert Lax, Augusto de Campos, Eugen Gomringer, Anselm Hollo, Dom Sylvester Houédard, and Ediwn Morgan. Finlay's contribution to this issue is an untitled poem that is not as visually striking as the others in this issue and that will later be called "Lullaby."[296]

In "Detached Sentences on Concrete Poetry," written from 1964 − 1972, Finlay writes that "concrete poetry was considered childish because it was seen and not heard."[297] "Lullaby" can be considered a childish poem (and a concrete poem), then, not only due to its ostensible purpose, but also because it cannot quite be read. Contained in "Lullaby" are at least two overlapping poems, marked out *visually* through the use of capital and non-capital letters, whose relationship cannot be communicated non-visually.

[292] Finlay, "Green Waters," 5.
[293] Howe, "The End of Art," 5.
[294] , in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Edinburgh: The Wild Hawthorn Press).
[295] "Visual – Semiotic – Concrete," in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Edinburgh: The Wild Hawthorn Press).
[296] Finlay, *Selections*, 138.
[297] Ibid., 135.

The two poems that are created by this typographic gimmick are not equals overlapping but are in fact of two different orders. One might read, "a little poem to put your eyes to sleep," in what is almost a definition of a lullaby. These lines lay out the purpose of the poem, a critical frame that claims to situate itself generically, while also standing apart from its 'content' (the lower case words). This frames what might be considered the lullaby "itself," which gives the reader one of Finlay's favorite images, a boat. Characteristically for Finlay of this time period, the poem features ordered combinations and permutations of a small set of nouns and adjectives, namely "boat" and "sail" for nouns, and "blue," brown," "green," and "black" as adjectives, in that order. As described above, the nouns are concrete 'things' and the adjectives abstract qualities applied to them, and the poem re-forms these composites. There is something childish in this as well, as the poem rearranges a small set of simple words that seem to 'go together.' This sleepily repetitive lulling ends with the last "a…" signaling either a return to the top of the 'song' or the fade into a nautical sleep.

This poem takes principles of 'simplicity' and repetition in a different direction, using typography and juxtaposition to foreground form without the pretension that it would equal content. It also plays with the limits of visuality, and the inability for a poem to be only visual or only aural. A poem, especially one that cannot quite be read, is not a song. However, just as a lullaby is a song to silence children and put them to sleep, "Lullaby" is a (childish) visual poem that ironically promises to put "your eyes to sleep."

It seems that for Finlay simplicity does not lead to singularity but to multiplicity, the capacity of meaning to always be in excess. For example as a kind of footnote to his poem in issue 15, Finlay tells us that "Green waters, etc = actual fishing trawlers, of Lowestoft Aberdeen,

and other ports."[298] This statement would seem to concretize and place phrases that were, in their attachment to a boat, themselves meant to be connotative of a thing that is not a boat. Many of the names take the preferred adjective-noun form, sometimes combined further into a single word, and depending on the phrase, 'star' functions as both. As poem, the names in fact unanchor the "fishing trawlers" from their particular ports and also from their status as "actual." They instead become part of a semi-coherent boat imaginary, a somewhat cliché topos of green waters on (star)wood vessels, themselves reminiscent of people such as Anna T and Karen B. Though it could be overly simplistic, it could be said that through these names that the boats "drift."

Poems such as these and the playful aesthetic of the journal overall suggest that Finlay, who never produced a manifesto, was not content to limit poetry to the austerity of concrete, nor did he deem concrete to be the amimetic, purely functional and material deployment of language as advocated by Cobbing and others. In its opposition to *abstract*, *concrete* forgets its opposition to *discrete*. That is, these poems, even those that are non-iconographic, point to the composite aspect of *concrete*, in which even the simplest of adhesions ("green waters," "blue sail," etc) can be undone, reformed, extended, and recontexualized.

This is not to celebrate the relational, which found a voice in the manifestos of Gomringer and Noigandres also, but to point out the contradictions that inhere in concrete as an aesthetic, contradictions which easily escape a supposedly restricted and reduced poetic economy. Rather, for many poets (and architects) of this time, *concrete* was an aesthetic and ideological telos wherein the final immanence of form=content was delayed from the moment of its supposition. For Gomringer, this telos was a portal to an art sufficient for the "synthetic-rationalistic world of

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[298] Finlay, "Green Waters," 5. Issue 15 is actually themed "boats, shores" and accordingly features sketches of waters, fish, boats, etc by Margot Sandeman, (who we are told, as is the above-noted custom of this journal, is from Scotland). Also see Finlay, *Selections*, 142.

tomorrow." [299]This world was "international-supranational" [300]and "universal." From within the horizon of the postwar nation-state, arguably at its zenith, concrete imagined a space for a space age future.[301]

This problematic was engaged differently by concrete poets, and *POTH* demonstrates, contra Howe, the relative ambivalence of Finlay regarding the necessity of a concrete aesthetic. As described above *POTH* found it fitting to associate each author or artist with a national affiliation. It was conspicuously an international journal but also marked itself as a provincial one, not just in the sense that British poetry was marginal to the European, American and Brazilian avant garde, but also in the way that Scotland was further marginalized. That is, for Finlay to engage with concrete poetry, and its proposed reconciliation between the poem as a particular material object and as universal (international) form-content, was also to engage in the problematics of relation between national structures and their history within modernism.

Aside from the poems themselves, many of the translations and artwork in *POTH* issues was done by Scottish or Welsh individuals. As Robert Crawford notes, British modernism was created from its margins, and in the same way *POTH* looked backward not only to recover and re-present[302] modernism but to filter it once again through a structure that was equally marginal to British national identity. These historical relationships deflate the masculinist certainty of concrete. As part of their history of concrete, Cobbing and Mayer quote De Stijl artist Theo Van Doesburg: "nothing is more concrete, more real, than lines, colours, or surfaces…women, trees and cows are concrete, but in a painting they become abstract, illusory, vague and speculative,

[299] Gomringer, *Concrete Poetry,* qtd in Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 68.
[300] Gomringer, *Concrete Poetry,* qtd in ibid.
[301] Max Bill claimed that "strives toward universal unity" Cobbing and Mayer, *Concering Concrete Poetry*, 11.
[302] "Teapoth," in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay (Edinburgh: The Wild Hawthorn Press, 1966)..
Also see *Tea-Leaves & Fishes* (1966) which restricted its focus to "Non-Alcoholic Beverages, Certain Flowers,
Certain trees" Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Ian Hamilton Finlay and Concrete Poetry," in *Contemporary British Poetry:*

while a plane is a plane, a line a line; no more, no less."[303] Yet *POTH* is suffused with

'quaintness': poems about boats surrounded by pictures of boats, drawings of trees, a translation

of Apollinaire's *Bestiare* (by Edwin Morgan), an entire issue devoted to tea ("teaPOTH"). [304]

These elements were not an argument for landscape representation but rather signaled an

alienation from concrete austerity, which would eventually find a more polemical form in

Finlay's site specific work, in particular his gardens. It is by virtue of a provincialism, rather

than an internationalism, that concrete was historicized and politicized.

Thus, while Nicholas Zurbrugg argues that Finlay's work of the 60s positions itself, as

other concrete work, as "timeless" and that he only moves to more self-consciously historical

modes later, one can see that the diversity of his production and the aesthetic of *POTH* itself is

indicative of a marginal position with regards to national and international art and identity.

Futhermore, it was already in the mid 60s that Finlay would say "the simplicity achieved by

concrete…is only going to *remain* possible if we can get back to metaphor." [305]The relationship

that Finlay came to have with concrete can be seen in *Homage to Gomringer*, which recognizes

the force of a certain aesthetic "purity" but also contextualizes it in the postwar: the piece

features the "structural and mechanical purity and efficiency of the Second World War German

battleship, the *Prinz Eugen*."[306] This is not a glib association of the foreignness of the avant

garde with facsism, but rather illustrative, for an artist who seems to understand the world in

terms of boats big and small, of the ambivalence Finlay felt for an austerity that was his and not

his.

Essays in Theory and Criticism, ed. James Acheson and Romana Huk (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 130., Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Tea-Leaves & Fishes* (Edinburgh: The Wild Hawthorn Press, 1966)..
[303] Cobbing and Mayer, *Concering Concrete Poetry*, 11.
[304] "Teapoth."

Interlude: Concrete, a theory

If a word can be thought of as a concept, concrete in particular is suggestive of the ambiguous dialectics introduced above. Concrete is often used (correctly) as the opposite of abstract. In all the ways that abstraction is vague, given to generalities, without tangible significance, and, some may even say, academic, the concrete is specific, practical, and *real.* Whereas abstraction can be empty, idle, and only virtual, the concrete is actual, suffused with content and attentive to the particular. This distinction is parallel to one established in the first chapter, namely the (supposed) distinction between *thought* and *place,* with the latter forever trying to escape the former by concreting itself into a tangible and particular entity. Indeed, the tension between the abstract and the concrete is the same tension that planning attempts to mediate — the need to create physical places that can also be models or examples for other places, imaginative fantasies made real.

This distinction between the concrete and the abstract stems from early logicians, wherein concrete referred to a quality "adherent to a substance, and so to the word expressing a quality so considered."[307] The number "fourteen," for example, transforms from an abstract noun to a concrete adjective when modifying a specific, tangible thing, such as in the phrase "fourteen unicorns." The OED notes that concrete was subsequently applied to "substantives involving attributes" (they give as examples "fool, sage, [and] hero") and in fact to anything not abstract, "denoting 'things' as distinguished from qualities, states and actions." To maintain the distinction between concrete and abstract, one must first be able to identify a 'thing' separate from attributes or modifiers which themselves can be understood without relation to the thing. Furthermore,

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[305] qtd in Zurbrugg, "Ian Hamilton Finlay and Concrete Poetry," 125.
[306] Ibid., 127.
[307] Oxford English Dictionary, *"Concrete, Adj. And N."* (Oxford University Press). throughout this section

representation is necessarily abstract: concepts of redness and roundness are necessary to draw an 'actual' apple, and the word 'apple' is an abstraction of abstractions.

This dynamic has been a focal point for philosophy from idealism to poststructuralism, yet the distinction is maintained in popular usage: concrete connotes facticity, specificity and particularity. At the same time, however , "concrete" is also the opposite of "discrete." Concrete stems from the past participle of the Latin concrēscĕre, meaning to grow together, and as such is distinguished from discrete, which is defined as "separate; detached from others; individually distinct" (from the Latin discrētus). [308] In early uses, concrete indicated something which was "united or connected by growth" and later, substances "made up or compounded of various elements; composite, compound." Concrete thus suggested connection, continuity, and complexity as opposed to the specific, delimited individuality of the discrete. This is the sense in which it appears in music: concrete is a "continued sound or movement."

To complicate matters further, concrete, still in its early uses, was also that which was "formed by union or cohesion of particles into a mass; congealed, coagulated, solidified; solid (as opposed to fluid)." Here the sense of admixture is retained, but one in which various elements form a solidified relation, rather than merging together as a fluid. The sense of relationality and conglomeration, inheres, as it were, in concrete as a material, one made out of cementing a variety of other 'found' and often otherwise unsable materials. One can infer that the distinction between the concrete and the abstract (which, like the other uses, seems to date from the 16ᵗʰ century) was formed to describe an abstract quality adhering to, solidifying in, growing with, or otherwise touching upon a real thing. In this case an absolute distinction immediately deconstructs itself: any concrete thing contains traces of the abstract as part of its mix.

As happens with words, the above definitions are a self-contradictory mixture of usages and meanings in a diachronic language. What may emerge, however, is a conceptual problematic in which various sets of ideas can placed together in the same space. As a speculative theory, *concrete* contains tensions between facticity and thought, individuality and generality, separation and aggregation. Concrete is not only defined through the relationality of various congealed elements, but is (or can be) a theory of this relationality itself, an abstraction that connects to a material reality through no logical necessity or discrete, historical causality.

Roy Fisher's Ambivalent Cities

Roy Fisher's 1961 prose-poem *City* neither documents nor responds to the cycles of urban unmaking and remaking through war and development but rather thinks *through* them. That is, as he says in a 1991 documentary "Birmingham's what I think with. /It's not made for that sort of job, /but it's what they gave me."[309] The city necessarily but imperfectly orients identity and provides a way to perceive, think, and understand. It is a statement that, as Peter Barry writes, "takes for granted that poets make heuristic use of whatever material is 'issued' to them by the childhood environment in which they come into being."[310] In stating that this 'material' is "not made for that sort of job" there a recognition that the relationship between perception and thought is unstable and encounters difficulty or limitation. Similarly *City* is a text that provisionally offers modes of "perceptual thinking" that do not quite remain immanent to themselves but gesture towards edges, gaps, and empty spaces.[311] As a working method, Fisher

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[308] Oxford English Dictionary, *"Discrete, Adj. And N."* (Oxford University Press).
[309] Roy Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005* (Tarset2012), 285.
[310] Peter Barry, ""Birmingham's What I Think With": Roy Fisher's Composite-Epic," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (2000): 91.
[311] Peter Barry, "Language and the City in Roy Fisher's Poetry," *English Studies* 3(1986): 240. Barry asks of the seeming oxymoron: "does not 'perceptual thinking' here seem a contradiction in terms? Could Fisher have meant to say conceptual thinking?"

claims: "I'll play some perceptual games and I will de-Anglicize England, which seems to me absolutely essential."[312] That is, to think with Birmingham is simultaneously to defamilarize and de-Anglicize it, indicating gaps in the smooth continuity of the postwar narrative.

De-Anglicization creates or maybe simply acknowledges a social estrangment: characteristic in these lines about Birmingham is the vaguely ominous and surely anonymous 'they' that presents the city to Fisher. The social for Fisher is not fully known, but appears to the individual in the form of structures to inhabit, infrastructure to traverse. Political disagreement, from the postwar period (at least), is routed through contingent ideas of place and the practices of planning and architecture: not a consensus but rather a dissensus. *City* explores the postwar dissensus, though at the same time is not recuperative of any particular community or form of life among those extinguished or displaced through war and development. The poem opens with city streets that line "all the buildings [that] have been destroyed within the past year," and cars that "move cautiously across this waste, as if suspicious of the emptiness; there is little to separate the roadways from what lies between them."[313] We are thus introduced to this spectral Birmingham by what is absent rather than what is present, both defined by and blurring with the contours of the cities' passageways. *City* is sensitive to such blank spaces, the emptiness through which presence can be perceived.

The prerequisite to making place and making something *of* place is making emptiness; here, the war does not prompt community and solidarity and carrying on, but rather simply creates an emptiness that can be filled with something else. From a section titled "The Entertainment of War":

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[312] qtd in Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 79.

I saw the garden where my aunt had died
And her two children and a woman from next door;
It was like a burst pod filled with clay

A mile away in the night I had heard the bombs
Sing and then burst themselves between cramped houses
With bright soft flashes and sounds like banging doors;
…
Now the garden lay stripped and stale; the iron shelter
Spread out its separate petals around a smooth clay saucer,
Small, and so tidy it seemed nobody had ever been there.
…
These were marginal people I had met only rarely
And the end of the whole household meant that no grief was seen;
Never have people seemed so absent from their own deaths[314]

The bombs "sing and then burst between cramped houses" like a natural disaster, coming from the sky with no apparent volition, destroying that which was anyway marginal. They create death as absence, as an emptiness required for the speaker to "keep a long story moving."[315] The pacing in this section seems to mime that of war, with long, continuous lines broken suddenly by punctuation and followed by something deflated, empty, *burst*. The people here are marginal instead of heroic, and in the speed and totality of destruction the fact of their prior existence evaporates, so that there is nothing to lament.

Furthermore, this garden is not much of a victory garden, that symbol of community that yoked together wartime austerity and nationalized idea of the land and small-scale agriculture. Its destruction is total, but incidental. The lack of pathos reinforces the anonymity of the destruction — what is destroyed is not a community, but rather a household for whom no one grieves. Instead, wars "come down the streets from the unknown city and unknown world, like

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[313] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 29.
[314] Ibid., 34.
[315] Ibid.

rainwater floods in the gutters."[316] Rather than being connected to the social through an organic

sense of the purpose, the garden forms a boundary; what is outside of it may as well be another

world, and yet a world that is still intent on destroying what is marginal and meaningless to it.

The relation is opaque.

The damage caused by the war was in fact one of the greatest assets of those looking to

rebuild Britain in a different image in the postwar. What had been cleared could be rebuilt, both

literally and figuratively. This destruction as emptying-out was mimicked by urban planning. It

is certainly the case that postwar social housing, as part of an ambitious political project, did

much to alleviate poverty in Britain, and whose current disappearance has led to and exacerbated

inequality within contemporary Britain.   At the same time, Alison Ravetz notes while council

housing "can be credited with lifting many from degrading poverty, household drudgery and

disease… politically and culturally its effects were less enabling."[317] As it was, urban planning

in Britain grew out of Victorian social philanthropy, whose paternalistic attitudes lingered in the

modernist architectural spaces that were an "attempt by one class to provide an improved

environment and culture for another class."[318]

Modernizing the postwar city was not just a matter of rebuilding that which had been

cleared by war, but also involved its own clearances. While clearances of urban slums may have

cited objective criteria for when to remove and replace parts of the city, Ravetz remarks on their

arbitrariness:

> At the height of the clearance campaigns, it was quite normal for [officials] to condemn
> houses *en bloc*, sometimes from a cursory inspection made from a moving car; and the
> list of defects, when eventually released, might include trivial items like broken window
> sashes and banister rails. Owners were not allowed to see this list…Without knowing
> what was supposed to be wrong, owners could not, of course, put it right. And should

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[316] Ibid., 33.
[317] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment*, 6.
[318] Ibid., 173.

they decide to risk their own money on improvements, they could not get the necessary planning permission, on the grounds that their houses were condemned.[319]

The result was that people cleared from slums "were often ignorant, confused and traumatized by the prospect of losing their homes and being kept in suspense about where they would be sent and how long they had to wait."[320] There are places that shifted, then, from being too inconsequential to even be destroyed — places where, Fisher's *City* remarks, "the streets are not worth lighting" — to then warranting clearance for the sake of modernization.

The text describes this process:

These lost streets are decaying only very slowly. The impacted lives of their inhabitants, the meaninglessness of news, the dead black of the chimney breasts, the conviction that the wind itself comes only from the next street, all wedge together to keep destruction out; to deflect the eye of the developer. And when destruction comes, it is total: the printed notices on the walls, block by block, a few doors left open at night, broken windows advancing down a street until fallen slates appear on the pavement and are not kicked away. Then, after a few weeks of this, the machines arrive.[321]

In these streets the ruin that attracts the developer is, for a time, too subtle and incomplete. The developer, with its eye, is responsible for one field of visibility. It marks out areas that can be emptied and rebuilt and thus offers a future. It appears almost to be a roving spotlight, surveying the city to look for new opportunities. The vision of development is related to its practices of systematizing information. Michiel Dehaene argues for the importance of actual surveys in providing this view. For influential planners like Patrick Geddes, surveys "would gradually lead to a more balanced, complete and holistic understanding of the environment," often recorded in the form of maps.[322]

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[319] Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 75.
[320] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment*, 133.
[321] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 33.
[322] Michael Dehaene, "Surveing and Comprehensive Planning: The 'Co-Ordination of Knowledge' in the Wartime Plans of Patrick Abercrombie and Max Lock," in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-20th Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 39.

If there is an elision between developer and planner here, it is a historical one: Ray

Forrest and Alan Murie remark that "council housing has been largely built by the private sector.

It has been privatised in its production throughout its history. And this privatisation has affected

its costs and determined aspects of technology…council housing has never been separate from

the private market and its form and function have been largely determined by market

processes."[323]   The speed of the destruction caused by developers public and private, and that it

is total, however, links it to the arbitrary destruction of the war, notices of planned demolition

replacing warning sirens. The link was in some cases explicit, with the old war factories being

repurposed to produce architecture in concrete, steel and glass. According to Ashley Maher, "ex-

aircraft factories produced approximately one-third of postwar temporary houses."[324]

Notably there is not much to mourn about what is destroyed in Fisher's *City*, a fact which

does not affirm destruction. Rather, what is replaced was already impacted and meaningless,

isolated and parochial, and not able to imagine an environment beyond its local streets. This

slow half-absence is what deters a more complete emptiness, for a while. That is, the smallness

of these places in comparison with the bombs or machines or wind that come from an unknown,

transcendental outside, does not have an innate, redemptive particularity. The violence that

empties it out resembles those that brought it into being; here, "some have lived through three

wars, some through only one; wars of newspapers, of mysterious sciences, of coercion, of

disappearance."[325]

Rebuilding took itself as the project of combining and congealing the disparate and ruined

materials of the postwar into a new national community. Planning specifically contrasted its

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[323] Forrest and Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing*, 40.
[324] Maher, "'Swastika Arms of Passage Leading to Nothing": Late Modernism and the "New" Britain," 38.. Collins
writes: "theorists tended to regard reinforced concrete as only expressive when used in vast works of engineering,

own operations with the destruction of war and aligned its prerogatives with the promise of

futurity; in this it had no vocabulary to address its own destructive capacity and force of

imposition. The excess of a discourse of rebuilding produces an inarticulate remainder, creating

a scene of transition and ambivalence:

> Already, half-built towers
> Over the bombed city
> Show mouths that soon will speak no more
> Stoppered with the perfections of tomorrow[326]
>
> This 'tomorrow' is as vacant as
>
> the white-flanked towers, the stillborn monuments;
> The thousand golden offices,[327]

Just as the "tomorrow" of development linked itself to the concrete city, so do the untenanted

towers, standing over the bombed city, signify the emptiness of time and the vacancy of

optimistic planning and optimism in politics. What results is something atemporal; neither the

uncompromising futurism of modernist planning and architecture nor the saccharine and equally

idealist nostalgia for places of the past dominates in Fisher's city. He writes, "once I wanted to

prove the world was sick. Now I want to prove it healthy. The detection of sickness means that

death has established itself as an element of the timetable; it has come within the range of the

measurable. Where there is no time there is no sickness."[328] Ironically, the practices and tools of

the technocratic management of cities are those that drain the them of time. Whether one thinks

of the city as organism, as did Patrick Geddes, or as a measured machine, as did Le Corbusier,

what has dropped out of its composition is the timetable and the possibility of death. 'Healthy'

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and could only discuss the ethics of concrete construction in terms of grain silos, airship hangars and bridges."
Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture*, 93.
[325] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 33.
[326] Ibid., 31.
[327] Ibid., 33.
[328] Ibid., 41.

does not seem to connote any specific vibrancy but rather is a self-negating metaphor, because what is proposed is existence without the time of life. This might correspond to the existence of its inhabitants, whose sleep is "aqueous and incomplete, like that of a hospital ward."[329] The city is absent of its own life as its people were earlier absent their own deaths; in between, there is a timeless, incomplete sleep.

As Sean O'Brien writes of this half-real, at times surreal, city, "the place described seems at once charged and emptied, concrete but constantly sliding into the typical." [330] O'Brien thus connects the sense of emptiness in the text with the problematics of particularity and typicality that attend to discussions of 'concrete'. How (by what process) does the smallness of textual detail typify something more general or abstract? For critics, this relationship in Fisher becomes most clear when juxtaposed with the Movement poetry of the 1950s, which Robert Sheppard writes "privileges a poetry of closure, narrative coherence and grammatical and syntactic cohesion, which colludes with the processes of naturalization."[331] That is, he says, "its poetry favors an empirical lyricism of discrete moments of experience."[332] Sheppard's usage of 'discrete' is similar to O'Brien's use of 'concrete', and in fact it is from a collection and cohesion of these discrete moments that Movement poets are able to familiarize and generalize. The relationship and the terms in which it is constructed endeavor to be clear so as to produce a common understanding.

Set against the poetry-as-consensus of the Movement, Peter Barry writes that "Fisher is precisely the kind of British poet who will suffer from inappropriate comparisons with figures like Hardy and Larkin [because] if it is assumed that Fisher must be striving for such Anglo-

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[329] Ibid.
[330] Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), 114.
[331] Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents 1950-2000*, 2.
[332] Ibid.

Saxon virtues as concreteness and low-key precision then he will be taken to task."[333] The

implication is that a poet like Larkin produces a concreteness (here parallel to Sheppard's

'discrete') that renders him typically Anglo-Saxon, whereas Fisher is a different "*kind of British*

poet." *City* is a text where concreteness is a problem and a contradiction and where the empirical

fact of place occludes the emptiness at the edges and in the gaps of consensus. Instead, O'Brien

observes that "rather than helping the poet to establish a total picture, the detail forbids it."[334]

Similarly Ian Gregson writes of the 'documentary' gestures in the text that "for Fisher, realism is

an impossible goal whose pretensions, nonetheless, annex experience."[335]

This appears as a problem through the collage of styles and registers in the text; the

historical register is one and has an "ambiguous status in the poem" in that its realism is

"inspected and satrised" but also "part of what the poem refuses."[336] This has been indicative of

the text's modernist impulses, as the variegated form produces "provisional statements leading to

other provisional statements." [337] The heterogeneous form also disturbs continuity, producing

both unexplained gaps and abrupt associations between different modes of perception, and

between perception and non-perception. That is, this is not a perspectival modernism nor one

where 'experience' outside or structurally before the annexation that Gregson refers to above take

priority. Rather, the observing subject is also offered and withdrawn, suspended and stuck.

The transitional state of *City* marks itself through infrastructure and materials. There are

historical passages that describe how the city has changed, how once arterial roads have been

supplanted by others as the city grew, and how its edges are thus always in flux. This writing

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[333] Barry, "Language and the City in Roy Fisher's Poetry," 236.
[334] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 115.
[335] Ian Gregson, *Contemporary Poestry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 191.
[336] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 120.
[337] Gregson, *Contemporary Poestry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement*, 172.

itself bleeds into other modes, versifying at times. In a section entitled "North Area," one learns

that this is

> A place where I can never go.
>
> No point in asking why, or why not.
> I picture it, though —
> There must be dunes with cement walks,
> A twilight of aluminum
> Among beach huts and weather-stained handrails;
> Much glass to reflect the clouds;
> And a glint of blood in the cat-ice that holds the rushes[338].

This is the industrial "edge of the city," imagined because off limits, as if the city would lose its

coherence if set against an outside.[339] Once again a sense of parochialism is reinforced by this

refusal to venture forth, and in fact others "avoid all mention" of this place.[340] What is imagined

is both majestic and delimted: dunes, twilight clouds, and rushes in and alongside cement,

aluminum, and glass (and, mentioned later, dye works and "prefabricated workshops" (35)).

Here materials as such are mediatory: one sees the clouds in the abundant glass and knows the

weather through its mark on the handrail;[341] evening light is itself aluminum. If anything is

suggestive of people, it is the 'glint of blood'. For Marx, labor time congeals into the commodity,

which then takes on a life of its own, mediating relations among things and among people. He

compares the commodity form to communication, writing that the value of the commodity "is as

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[338] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 34.
[339] Ibid., 35.
[340] Ibid., 34.
[341] Brutalist buildings were meant to evince their connection with the local site through natural weathering. The buildings have become only more dismal in Britain, however, due to the fact that concrete does not respond well to rain. Barry referring to *City, notes* the "sharp contrast…between the massive funereal pomp of blackened Victorian public buildings and utilities and the contemporary greyish-white concrete buildings, which don't weather but merely turn vaguely shabby. Barry, "Language and the City in Roy Fisher's Poetry," 244.

much men's social product as is their language," though in its final form also "hieroglyphic."[342]

Here, next to lightly frozen water and clotted blood, are these materials learning to speak?

In this text materiality extends beyond materials, as "the sun hacks at the slaughterhouse campanile."[343]   Sun, light, wind, darkness acquire capacities to impose themselves onto the physical structures of the city and to condition its presences. In "By the Pond," vision is mediated by

> Brick-dust in sunlight. That is what I see how in the city, a dry epic flavour whose air is human breath. A place of walls made straight with plumbline and trowel, to desiccate and crumble in the sun and smoke. Blistered paint on cisterns and girders, cracking to show the priming. Old men spit on the paving slabs, little boys urinate; and the sun dries it as it dries out patches of damp on plaster facings to leave misshapen stains. I look for things here that make old men and dead men seem young. Things which have escaped, the landscapes of many childhoods.
>
> Wharves, the oldest parts of factories, tarred gable ends rearing to take the sun over lower roofs. Soot, sunlight, brick-dust; and the breath that tastes of them.[344]

Natural phenomena like sunlight, materials, and human labor form a kind of perceptual matrix through which the city is both understood and composed. Dryness — a quality not commonly associated with England, excepting humor — here is also the process by which the human body becomes encoded into physical works that age and decay. It is in this latter process that 'sun and smoke' concrete themselves into the building and enter into a relation, so that gables work to carry sunlight rather than partially blocking it. There is a spiritual totality here produced by the 'human breath', but what is produced is already ruined — 'blistered', 'cracking', and seen through its own dust. These materials are both objects of a perception and that which mediates and suspends perception: John Kerrigan observes both "the 'I's neurasthenic propensity to taste

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[342] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 167.
[343] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 36.
[344] Ibid., 35.

human breath in the air, to zoom in on body secretions and scrutinize decay" and how "the 1961 'I', however, is almost randomly the sum of its functions."[345]

The fragmented sentences indicate something in addition the romance of the ruin, however — namely the "things which have escaped." The obliqueness of this interruptive reference show how difficult it is to form a relationship with those escaped things and childhood 'landscapes' when the means of visibility are only brick-dust. Perhaps this is why the whole scene is unmistakably masculine, with little boys, old men, and dead men appearing or not. That is, the concretion of labor, bodies, breath, materials and sunlight into paving slabs and plaster facings omits more than it includes, even when it seems to include everything, and there is a lingering unease amid the resulting fragmentation.

Yet, in being placed next to each other, these fragments are not quite unified, not even through something like Elliot's negative spirituality. It is in fact not the case that, as Bassel Almasalmeh claims, "*City* revisits Eliot's The Waste Land not only in registering squalid and dull post-war landscapes but also in adopting a collage of heterogeneous materials that move towards achieving a unified whole." [346] Instead, whatever hints at unity or consensus remains subtle. Perhaps the text comes close in "Starting to Make a Tree," as some sort of community salvages materials for a sculpture, but this never quite commences, and then the city falls asleep as "night makes its own streets with a rake that drags persuaded people out of its way."[347] In fact, in the preface to the original edition Michael Shayder remarked: "what follows seems to me a ruined work of art. It lies around as a series of sketches might lie around a studio waiting in

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[345] John Kerrigan, "Roy Fisher on Location," in *The Thing About Roy Fisher*, ed. John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 21, 20.
[346] Bassel Almasalmeh, "Transcending Boundaries: Modern Poetic Responses to the City" (University of Leicester, 2007), 107-08.
[347] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 41.

vain for the total act of sculpture they were drawn to serve."[348] In this case it would be ruined in

advance, materials vaguely collected together, turned away from the gaps between them. This

would be a ruination without the pathos of the ruin because it would exist without a temporality

to occasion a lament.

Though people are scarce and isolated in *City*, bodies are not. In the city after

modernization "the eyes twinkle, beseech and veil themselves" while "the full, hard mouth, the

broad jaw — these are no longer made visible to all."[349]   Of those that may not see the latter:

> In the afternoon of dazzling sunlight in the thronged streets, I saw at first now individuals
> but a composite monster, its unfeeling surfaces matted with dust: a mass of necks, limbs
> without extremities, trucks without heads, unformed stirrings and shovings spilling across
> the streets it had managed to get itself provided with.[350]

Such an image of crowds is not unfamiliar.   However, from here the text changes scale to the

individuals in the crowd and finally to one individual: in the former people are "made of straws,

rags, cartons, the stuffing of burst cushions, kitchen refuse," and, given this, it is claimed of the

latter, "for a person made of such scraps she was beautiful."[351]   Clive Bush writes that this

passage "not only revalues something that has not truly been seen for what it is against a vision

of a tempting and too ethically insistent wholeness, but also simultaneously recognizes,

dispassionately, the loss of that wholeness. Even more subtly it articulates the depredations of the

neurotic desire for wholeness that produces 'composite monsters.' " [352] Thus the crowd, as

composite, becomes individuals and then one individual, made of scraps. These entities and

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[348] Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (New York: Oxord University Press, 1972), 168.
[349] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 36.
[350] Ibid., 37-38.
[351] Ibid., 38.
[352] Clive Bush, "In Sight and Time: Some Patterns of Appearance in Roy Fisher's Poetry," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (2000): 107-08.

their sociality seem to be conditioned by these changes in scale, perception, perspective.[353] The

'I' doing the seeing changes register and position along with the text, and at a given time is only

one partiality among others.

In the above passages the individual is made of collected scraps and rubbish and cements

itself with others to form a composite body. The city itself is a composite body whose

extremities can be traversed:

> The suburb lies like a hand tonight
> A man's thick hand, so stubborn
> No child or poet can move it[354]

The suburb is a shifting relational signifier appropriate for Fisher's concern with a lack of

centrality. For example Peter Robinson remarks that "Fisher's work is occasionally described as

'paradoxical,' a word gesturing toward the fact that while his apparent subjects tend to come from

a fairly strictly bounded territory, his styles and influences are fetched from much further afield,"

but that "this paradox evaporates outside the straitening conceptual boxes of centre and

periphery, home and abroad, provincial and metropolitan, rooted or cosmopolitan."[355] The

'problem' of *City* and its reception has been how to relate, after war, the part to whole, periphery

to center, individual to community, especially when the compact economies of such relationships

shift according to scale, perception or even by what is not quite perceived or not always

perceived. The paradox of Fisher's simultaneous regionalism and modernism is one that, as has

been discussed, is characteristic to the provincialism of most 'British' modernists that one that

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[353] to return to Strathern: "English symbols of kin connection render the individual person at once an entity composed of parts and a part of other entities beyond him or her. The person as a relative is also a conglomerate. Conglomerates constitute mixes of parts from different domains, such that one kind of relationship coexists in conjunction with another of a different kind."   Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century*, 83.

[354] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 41.

[355] Peter Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Thing About Roy Fisher*, ed. John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 7,9.

speaks to the ironically conceptual centrality of place. *City* thus appears as a work from a "locationally obsessed writer" who paradoxially claims that 'The 'place' tag is not very meaningful to me'. " [356]

The speaker in this section has "inadvertently been looking through another's eyes and have seen what I cannot receive."[357] Finally, "the light keeps on separating the world like a table knife: it sweeps across what I see and suggests what I do not…the countries on the map divide and pile up like ice-floes: what is strange is that I feel no stress, no grating discomfort among the confusion, no loss; only a belief that I should not be here."[358] The image of the sweeping table knife suggests division, fragmentation, and occlusion as the speaker disables its own perceptual capacity. The collapse of perception and the geography of fragmented ice-floes floating without unity or goal is at the same time the final process of reification: in this city, empty concrete buildings and roadways and drains speak to each other while a speaker that was never quite there shuffles out of sight.

Materials such as concrete are not just the means for physical and economic rebuilding but also have a relationship to the production of culture and sociality. In this chapter concrete has also served as a metaphor for the processes of amalgamation and desire for directness at work in the "rebuilding" of postwar Britain and in postwar modernist aesthetics. Between the two, concrete is the figure for how Britain mediated a postwar "consensus" and the raw material through which postwar environments were constructed. The photographs in the 1941 *Picture Post*, the planning models at the 1951 Festival of Britain, and many others, were all in this sense concrete: a hinge between the ideational and the material, thought and place. The ambivalence

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[356] John Kerrigan, "Roy Fisher on Location," ibid., 19.. Indeed for this reason Fisher has an ambiguous place in postwar British poetry and has had a "reluctance to be placed." Robinson, "Introduction," 12.. Donald Davie also observed in 1972 that Fisher has "published with provincial and more or less fugitive presses." Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, 152.

of what was being constructed — what consensus, what "culture," what spaces — was resolved

or at least deferred in the simultaneity of concrete as both non-abstract and non-discrete.

Concrete has seemingly exhausted itself, emptying out into the dismalness of the contemporary,

creating the ruined ground for the next rebuilding.

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[357] Fisher, *The Long and Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, 43.
[358] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

"Towns of Unquestionable Insignificance" in Caryl Phillips' *A Distant Shore*

Unlike many of his novels, Caryl Phillips' 2003 *A Distant Shore* not only features England as a setting, but specifically a provincial England. While his more recent *In the Falling Snow* (2009) portrays a middle-class black protagonist in cosmopolitan London, *A Distant Shore* explores the more isolated small towns and villages of the north. The novel's protagonists — Dorothy, a retired schoolteacher and Gabriel/Solomon, a former soldier and asylum seeker from an African country resembling Liberia or Sierra Leone — both live in the new suburban development of Stoneleigh at the top of a hill near the (fictional) village of Weston (Gabriel changes his name to Solomon). This village is itself near a larger unnamed town/city in north England where Dorothy was born. The vibrancy and commotion of the city is nowhere to be found in these places; rather they are characterized by a stagnant stillness matched by Phillips' turn to a more 'realist' prose style. Other towns in the novel, like the one inhabited by Dorothy's ex-lover Mahmood, are similarly isolated; like the other characters, he lives in a "place where if, on a Saturday afternoon, one happens to turn on the television set as the football results are being read out, towns of unquestionable insignificance will be freely mentioned, but Mahmood's small English town will simply not exist."[359]

This chapter explores the geography and figuration of English provinciality in *A Distant Shore*. English provinciality has not typically been considered an appropriate object for postcolonial studies; indeed, if anything it is an anti-object. It has likewise not prominently featured in British literatures of mobility and migration, the work of Phillips included, and is in

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[359] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 179.

fact associated with the opposite of mobility. However, *A Distant Shore* illustrates the necessity

of extending postcolonial critique to unlikely places in order to consider the contingency of place

itself and the way it is formed by colonial practices. English places can be thought of as "small

places," using Jamaica Kincaid's term; they are marginal to national culture as the result of

active political and historical processes.[360] Moreover, for a writer like Phillips to use a narrative

of migration to focus on English provinciality shows how this operation of power inheres in the

very split between global and local, province and metropole, or roots and routes, through which

places acquire particularity.

As such, Phillips uses the provincial setting to explore not only how political conflict

seems to follow from place (instead of the reverse), and also how different individuals and

groups can be both marginal and actively marginalize others. Several critics of the novel argue

that the geography of Weston and Stoneleigh can be read allegorically, but focus on the

marginalization of Dorothy and Solomon in relation to the hostile, majoritarian Weston. For

example, Allesandra Di Maio argues that Weston "stands metonymically for England" and the

community is "symbolic of the nation." [361] Similarly Petra Tournay-Theodotou reads the

geography of Weston/Stonleigh as "miniature spatial allegories of the nation at large," claiming

that "the division between the two communities thus encapsulates the tension between a

conservative, essentialist Britain with its inability to accommodate change, on the one hand, and

the demands of a society in flux, on the other."[362] These critics and others emphasize the

challenge that a globalized modernity, which they find particularly (and problematically) in the

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[360] Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).
[361] Alessandra Di Maio, "A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, ed. B. Ledent and D. Tunca (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2012), 257.
[362] Petra Tournay-Theodotou, "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," ibid., 296,97.

figure of Solomon, presents to a localized and essentialized nationality which in turn strikes back at the former with hostility and violence.[363]

However, villages like Weston are not places untouched by time, indicative of a stable rural much less national identity, but in fact have continually changed as the result of various planning policies, the deployments of speculative capital and alterations in political structures in the postwar period. Much like colonial spaces, towns like Weston have thus been *produced* as the other of Britain's supposed progress, and this active and on-going production of marginality is naturalized and absorbed by *place* itself in national discourse. In a sense, English identity is provincialized in relation to a British metropolitan center in which certain imagined cultural and economic elements of the former are appropriated while a paraochial, ethnicized nationalism is disavowed. This double structure constitutes a split and joined national identity; however, this is only valid insofar as it does not allegorize either Stoneleigh or Weston nor imagine that an English identity exists or existed prior to a colonization (temporally, spatially, or structurally). Instead, these places and the relationships between them and to other places are constituted *through* colonial processes. The provincial is postcolonial because it is constructed relationally.

The character of Weston's marginality lies, somewhat ironically, in its "unquestionable insignificance." Phillips' exploration of insignificance is in striking contrast to the scope and stakes of novels like *Crossing the River* (1993) and *The Nature of Blood* (1997), which take up themes of genocide and deep historical trauma. Indeed, the insignificance of Weston is dramatized even within *A Distant Shore* when Phillips describes the horrors of war that Gabriel experiences before he immigrates as an asylum seeker, where he later changes his name to Solomon. In this novel violence is etiolated and faded, as the north English countryside becomes

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[363] cf. Bénédicte Ledent, "'Of, and Not of, This Place': Attachment and Detachment in Caryl Phillips' a Distant Shore," *Kunapipi* 26, no. 1 (2004).

the end of the world. What is instead produced is a deadening stillness and banality in a novel where the climatic event (Solomon's murder) is revealed in its opening section, similar to how Dorothy states that the "policeman and policewoman came to tell me about Solomon as though they were enquiring about an unpaid parking ticket."[364] Weston is a place that requires one to re-spatialize the geographies of imperialism and neo-imperialism *without flattening them*. Place is produced relationally, and its character of distinction and naturalness is acquired through that variegated production, which is always one guided complexly by implicit and explicit ideologies.

That these relationships of power are complex and many times contradictory requires one to think about sociality as shaped by different kinds of marginalization. In this case, the working class residents of Weston exhibit a virulent racism but are also stigmatized as post-industrial remnants with no function in the contemporary economy. They are, for example, represented through Dorothy's increasingly unreliable narration as uncivilized, murderous brutes. Without denying the racism of this town, Dorothy's unstable and problematic narration also allows Phillips to hint at the historical and political processes that created economically and geographically marginal villages like Weston in the first place. These figurations of the rural community and its youth are not to be taken as literal at every point, but are rather the figural projections of a character (Dorothy) with a collapsing psyche that has been steeped in the (many and conflicting) stereotypes of English working class rurality. On the other hand, the same is true of the collapsing community of Weston, which projects *its* violence on the racialized and gendered bodies of Solomon and Dorothy. Through this ironic juxtaposition at the level of narrative, Phillips provokes a consideration of the structural and historical aspects of communal violence in all its multivalent complexity. In doing so, the novel illustrates contemporary forms of *ongoing* violence and oppression that characterize neoliberal Britain.

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[364] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 52.

Marginal Geographies

A Distant Shore begins in the first person voice of Dorothy, expressing a somewhat commonplace sentiment: "England has changed. These days it's difficult to tell who's from around here and who's not. Who belongs and who's a stranger. It's disturbing. It doesn't feel right."[365] Many critics of the novel have read this opening statement as one suggesting the disappearance of a stable, homogenous English identity in the face of postcolonial, transnational migration, and thus the context for the racism and xenophobia directed against Solomon by the 'backward' village. For John McLeod, this racism is certainly not new, and "actually not a lot has changed in England" while for Di Maio Weston represents "an England that has yet to come to terms with the fact that its million non-whites have contributed to the shaping of its national identity, and which is a part of a larger Europe."[366] The status of both *England* and *changed* in this reading is straightforward: 'England' is a stable, national topos and 'changed' refers to non-European immigration; the latter relies structurally on the former's stability in some sense, the idea that at least part of England "has not changed" and has resisted being a point of "globalized intersection."[367] *England has changed* would thus seem to be a simplified, almost cliché echo of Margaret Thatcher's infamous concern that Britain should "finally see an end to immigration lest [British people] feel rather swamped by people with an alien culture."[368]

In this novel, however, this statement has a more ambiguous and complicated geography. Dorothy continues:

> three months ago, in early June, I moved out here to this new development of Stoneleigh. None of the old villagers seem comfortable with the term 'new development.' They

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[365] Ibid., 3.

[366] John McLeod, "Diaspora and Utopia: Reading the Recent Work of Paul Gilroy and Caryl Phillips," in *Diasporic Literature and Theory--Where Now?*, ed. M. Shackleton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2008), 10; Di Maio, "A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," 251.

[367] David Ellis, "'They Are Us': Caryl Phillips' a Distant Shore and the British Transnation," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 0, no. 0 (2013): 6.

[368] qtd in Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*, 61.

simply call Stoneleigh the 'new houses on the hill.' After all, our houses are set on the
edge of Weston, a village that is hardly going to give up its name and identity because
some developer has seen a way to make a quick buck by throwing up some semi-detached
bungalows, slapping a carriage lamp in front of them and calling them 'Stoneleigh'.[369]

Dorothy's opening in fact contains no reference to transnational migration. Instead, despite the

fact that she is from the unnamed larger town closest to Weston, Dorothy is herself the

newcomer to this provincial north English village, moving out to spend her retirement in an Old

England-themed cul-de-sac. In this context the middle-class residents of Stoneleigh are the

agents of change, the strangers who do not belong, and yet it is Dorothy who is 'disturbed' by a

vague, unspoken, residual change in England. Dorothy is troubled by the ambiguity of her

position: she cannot tell who belongs and who is a stranger, because she herself belongs *and* is a

stranger.

What is produced instead is a geography in which, as Phillips has indicated, no one feels

at home.[370] However, this *includes* the residents of Weston, who, rather than representing the

majoritarian essence of old-Englishness, are in fact economically, geographically and culturally

marginal, particularly in the North.[371] Rather than existing since time immemorial, provincial

identity has indeed been *created* as the 'other' of capitalist progress, and as Doreen Massey

shows, the unevenness of the British economy has only increased since the 1980s.[372] Villages

like Weston have been continually 'giving up' their identities and recreating them;

correspondingly, rural social identity is not undifferentiated and static but heterogeneous and

always subject to change. In reading this passage, Josiane Ranguin recognizes that the "faultline

here is not race, but class," but argues that the division is only a result of a close-minded defense

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[369] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 3.
[370] Caryl Phillips, "A Conversation with Caryl Phillips, Author of the Novel a Distant Shore.," *ChickenBones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes*, October 22 2007.
[371] cf. The Economist, "The Great Divide," *The Economist* 2012.

mechanism on the part of the villagers and that "Stoneleigh is an allegory of England, class

barriers acting as social frontiers."[373] However, even this reading fails to recognize that though

close-minded the residents are also in a marginal position with regards to Stoneleigh, unable to

stop the building of a new suburban development that seeks to dissociate itself with the

supposedly less sophisticated working-class village; 'Stoneleigh' in fact attempts to reproduce an

imaginary rural England of the past while ignoring the bleak realities of the contemporary place.

In this way, place is dehistoricized.

Together, these readings of *England has changed* naturalize the city-country dynamics

presented in the novel, where cities like London represent flux and progressive change and small

country towns represent only anachronism and xenophobia. That is, they assume that *place*

produces politics, when the reverse is true: politics and history produce place. In this sense,

England has always been changing, and there have always been those to lament the change;

indeed, Raymond Williams notes that this is a primary structure of feeling in English

literature.[374] As many have noted, the idea of a rural 'country' existing autonomously from urban

'towns' is a demonstrably simplified and false construction, and yet one that persists in the British

imaginary.   Rather, rurality and urbanity are continually produced in relation to each other and

to other spatial formations and scales.

The geography of Weston is specifically post-industrial: Dorothy refers to "Mrs.

Thatcher closing the pits," when discussing Weston, and indeed coal mining and its demise

under Conservative Party policies are critical to understanding social change.[375] North England

in particular suffered drastically not only from agricultural competition but from the collapse of

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[372] Doreen Massey, *World City* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 121.
[373] Josiane Ranguin, "Borderland Strangers in Caryl Phillip's a Distant Shore," in *A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity*, ed. Silvia Schultermandl and Şebnem Toplu (Vienna: Lit, 2010), 206, 07.
[374] cf. Williams, *The Country and the City*.

energy prices and many lost battles with the state. Weston does not straightforwardly represent "old England, with its old ways" and "well-established identities."[376] Rather, as part of the coal mining community, Weston is a part of what Maragaret Thatcher called an "industry [that] had come to symbolize everything that was wrong with Britain."[377] At the same time that the state was responding to riots in cities over structural racial prejudice and unemployment, Thatcher and her cabinet were referring to north English miners — who were and are a strong Labour constituency — as 'the mob' and the 'enemy within' .[378] Tournay-Theodotou argues that "Weston's/Britain's security and well-being have been shaken with the closing down of the coal pits and the high rate of unemployment. Nevertheless, the community holds together, but is challenged beyond endurance when the posh neighborhood is established, as it represents an alternative that holds up the mirror to their dire existence."[379] This reading ignores the profound class and geographic marginalization of places like Weston in contemporary Britain. In fact, the interests of 'Weston' and the British state were never fully aligned, and they diverged further during the erosion of the welfare state and the deregulation of energy markets, and after the 1984 strike, mining communities were and are viciously split between those who went strike and those who did not.[380]

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[375] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 4.

[376] Tournay-Theodotou, "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," 296; Cindy Gabrielle, "The Civilized Pretence: Caryl Phillips and *a Distant Shore*," in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, ed. B. Ledent and D. Tunca (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2012), 310.

[377] qtd in M. Parker, *Thatcherism and the Fall of Coal*, ed. Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (Oxford University Press for the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2000), 8.

[378] Mining and provincial industrial production occurred in many areas of Britain of course, not just in northern England.

[379] Tournay-Theodotou, "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," 300.

[380] On the occasion of the former Prime Minister's death, John Burns reported on her legacy for *The New York Times*:

"The old man encountered at the derelict mine site refused permission for his name to be used because of the resentments that still smolder between miners who went on strike and others, still called scabs by the strikers, who chose to work on or, like the old man at the site, went back to the pits as the strike continued month after month, with many miners' families depending for their survival on soup kitchens and charity shops.

Decades after the strike, Weston shows the way in which marginalized people can easily latch onto essentialist and essentializing identities. There are many reasons why the "working-class people from Weston find it hard to accept" not only the people of Stoneleigh but also the idea that "the old ways of identification are no longer valid in a society where…one can be black but nonetheless a British citizen" as Cindy Gabrielle argues.[381] Gabrielle notes "these attempts to preserve a 'pure' English/working-class identity and traditional identification patterns at all costs are certainly at odds with the image of England as a nation of progress."[382] Again, in conflating Weston with English national identity, Gabrielle accepts a static notion of the 'countryside' and in turn ignores the way in which a town like Weston can be predominately white and protestant while still being marginal in terms of class and geographic identity. Rather, as Tom Nairn has indicated, it is the contemporary politics of 'Britain' that has produced "two Englands: New Labour's 'Roseland', versus an England not merely 'little' but marginalised where the defeated turn to the political Right, like Duncan Smith's Conservativism or even Nicholas Griffin's British National Party."[383] When this politics is ignored, xenophobia becomes naturalized into place, as in the epithetic spatial metaphor of 'Little England'.

In fact, the British state has considered both diverse urban areas such as Liverpool 8 and white working class areas to be 'problems'. It was also less that thirty years ago that Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright could report on the solidarity between racially diverse urban

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Others...told similar stories of a village where men who patronize a Whitwell miners' club that functions as a pub still go to separate rooms to drink, depending on whether they joined the strike or kept working. One man who was attacked on a visit to the miners' club in a dispute over the strike said he still carries a field hockey stick in his car trunk, in case his assailants come after him again.

'Mrs. Thatcher? She's not to be mentioned,' he said. 'Just don't mention the lady. She set people against each other, she broke up families, and it's still the same today. There are still people who won't talk to each other, who'll cross the road rather than run into somebody they worked with for 30 years.' " John F. Burns, "As Thatcher Goes to Rest, Miners Feel No Less Bitter," *The New York Times*, 4/16/13 2013.

[381] Gabrielle, "The Civilized Pretence: Caryl Phillips and *a Distant Shore*," 310.
[382] Ibid., 311.
[383] Nairn, *Pariah: Misfortunes of the British Kingdom*, 110.

groups and provincial mining communities during the strike.[384] If such solidarity is *no longer*

possible, it is important to ask what historical processes broke apart these previous alliances.

Such an inquiry of course does not to deny the very real and extreme racism present in northern

England.[385] Instead this essay argues that reading Weston as a spatial allegory for the nation

naturalizes a xenophobia and racism that has more complex and dynamic historical causes.

Weston in fact evinces the colonial nature of the nationalist project *itself* and its continual

production of local provincialities; in this sense, Stoneleigh is a new imperial front of speculative

capital that is making the countryside an object of consumption rather than of production. The

rural economy today looks much like the economy overall: dominated by finance and service

industries and increasingly unequal.[386] It is also more focused on consumption, with even the

Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire, where the 1984 strike began, having been developed into a

shopping center.[387] Increased ease of transportation has meant that many newcomers are able to

travel to larger towns for work, leisure or other services; in the novel Weston is only five miles

from the "main town."[388] By 2000, the majority of the population in English villages worked

outside the village, including incoming migrants who bought a country home but kept work

elsewhere.[389] As a bartender tells Dorothy, implicitly criticizing the new arrivals for not

spending time in the village pub, "I expect they need to make some brass to pay off their fancy

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[384] Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright, "Beyond the Coalfields: The Work of Miners' Support Groups," in *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*, ed. Huw Beynon (London: Verso, 1985), 152, 53.

[385] Of which there are innumerable reports; one example would be the case of Martha-Renee Kolleh in Yorkshire, who felt forced to place a sign on the window of her restaurant stating "I am a black woman... If you are allergic to black people, don't come in." BBC, "Ossett Cafe Owner 'Warns' Customers She Is Black," *BBC* 2013.

[386] Gordon Cherry and Alan Rogers, *Rural Change and Planning: England and Wales in the Twentieth Century* (London: E & FN Spon, 1996), 110.

[387] Mary Hennock, "Yorkshire: Slag Heaps to Ski Slopes," *BBC News* 2004.   Mary Hennock remarks, "while work has become more white collar and far less obviously dangerous, it has also become more short-term - call centres are already looking less secure as jobs move abroad." Mary Hennock remarks, "while work has become more white collar and far less obviously dangerous, it has also become more short-term - call centres are already looking less secure as jobs move abroad."

[388] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 4.

[389] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 188.

mortgages."[390] Indeed, aside from Dorothy and Solomon, the residents of Stoneleigh are largely

absent from the novel, indicating their disinterest in village life.

Longtime rural residents are not just marginalized 'passively' by structural changes in the

economy, but *actively* by incoming residents and government policy. There is a shortage of

housing in particular.[391] Howard Newby remarks that "resentment among local people has

grown at their inability to find housing for themselves and their children. Yet they have also

found that the newcomers have frequently opposed the construction of new housing, especially

council housing, on the grounds that it is 'detrimental to the character of the village' and detracts

from the rural environment."[392]   Thus 'posh' developments like Stoneleigh drive class

resentment and social alienation.

The middle class residents of Stoneleigh would have not only financial resources but also

experience with bureaucratic power structures, enabling them to exert an outsized influence on

local politics and development.[393] They might not only see the countryside as an amenity, but

have a specific, highly idealized notion of the countryside, one which does not include the

realities of contemporary poverty.[394] For example, Sue Glyptis comments that "in many villages

long-established residents aspire to provide better community facilities for their youngsters, but

this has been resolutely opposed by incomers who want to preserve their new-found rural

paradise exactly as they found it," or at least how they imagined it."[395] Meanwhile the

newcomers cast "the indigenous population into the role of rustic showpieces."[396] Government

policy tends to yield to these demands, and those of finance capital more generally. This

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[390] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 39.
[391] Cherry and Rogers, *Rural Change and Planning: England and Wales in the Twentieth Century*, 160.
[392] Howard Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 233.
[393] Ibid., 227.
[394] Cherry and Rogers, *Rural Change and Planning: England and Wales in the Twentieth Century*, 160.
[395] Sue Glyptis, *Countryside Recreation*, ed. Brian Duffield (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 12.

includes areas where the government has *withdrawn* support with the approval of wealthier

residents willing to trade state resources for lower taxes, which affects services such as public

transportation that the wealthy do not use. As Newby states, "the affluent majority of the rural

population has been able to overcome any problems which arise by stepping into their cars and

driving to the nearest town, whereas the poor, the elderly and the disabled have been particularly

vulnerable to any decrease in the provision of local services, and especially of public transport."

[397] Furthermore, the fact that services have been concentrated in larger villages has the

consequence of disadvantaging those who were already the most disadvantaged – the poor and

the elderly who lack access to transport.[398] In fact, it is possible that Weston is only visible to

Dorothy because she lacks a car, and thus must have *some* contact with the pre-Stoneleigh

community. Similarly, her relationship with Solomon is in many ways mediated by his access to

(and care of) his car.

Seen in this historical context, a more complicated reading of Weston develops. Its

geographical development has produced an "alarming degree of social polarization…between

those who had chosen to live in the countryside…and those who had been stranded in rural areas

by social and economic forces over which they had no control and which were frequently

reinforced by public indifference to their plight."[399] Aware of their own poverty due to its

juxtaposition with extreme wealth, socially alienated, and without a future, the youths of Weston

come to more closely resemble their counterparts in urban council estates. These are also the

ideal political conditions for the kind of racism and xenophobia that Solomon in particular

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[396] Ibid., 11.
[397] Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England*, 232.
[398] Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 188.
[399] Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England*, 223.

faces.[400] This racism is, importantly, not the result of an unchanged, quintessential English

provinciality encountering difference for the first time, but the result of only the most recent

political-economic shifts in a long and variegated history of rural change. Obviously, racism in

Britain is neither new nor confined to provincial areas but is also situational: the parameters of its

expression and conditions of its possibility change over time are are expressed in *place*. The

idea that place is stable and not given over to epistemic or economic change indicates an inability

to think in structural terms about race and the operation of power.

Naturalizing Place in 'A New Development'

Weston includes traces of all the elements indicated above, including closed mines,

derelict commercial rail infrastructure, a nearby town as a center of shopping and employment,

but also fields and more pastoral areas. Yet, in the text, these places do not appear to be the

result of the above political history but instead inhere in the *place* itself. That is, the figuration

that the text gives us mimics the operative dynamics of place in national discourse insofar as

their overtly historical aspects are concealed. *Place* absorbs ideology, history, politics into its

apparent primary naturalness, which conceals how the class and race dynamics of Weston have

evolved from state policies and structural economic changes.

Stoneleigh, with its gaudy suburban cul-de-sac and "plenty of satellite dishes," attempts at

the same time to resemble a supposedly quintessential English village for middle-class retirees,

who seem to show little interest in understanding the actual history and circumstances of

Weston.[401] In fact history appears, when it does, as the result of changes that took place long ago

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[400] Conditions in which Yorkshire could elect a Ukip MEP who would refer to third-world countries as "bongo bongo land." Rowena Mason, "Ukip Mep Godfrey Bloom Criticises Aid to 'Bongo Bongo Land'," *The Guardian*(2013), http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/aug/06/ukip-godfrey-bloom-bongo-bongo-land.
[401] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 5.

and have little relation to the contemporary period. Dorothy notes that "the only history around these parts is probably in the architecture," especially the "typical miners' houses" that face the noisy main road and which "now look almost quaint."[402] These museum-like traces of history bear no direct relation on the present but are instead reified as objects for consumption, as in the "estate agents's bumf about 'Stoneleigh', " where, referring to Weston's sister towns,

> it says that during the Second World War the German town was bombed flat by the RAF, and the French village used to be full of Jews who were all rounded up and sent to the camps. I can't help feeling that it makes Weston seem a bit tame by comparison. Apparently, the biggest thing that had ever happened in Weston was Mrs. Thatcher closing the pits, and that was over twenty years ago.[403]

The initial presentation of the town's history here is filtered through an advertisement for the new development with the invented name "Stoneleigh." With a flat affect, violent histories become commodified history, exciting events that lend drama and character to place as it might be conceived for tourists. Here, too, Weston falls short, being only able to claim an economic injustice that also seems part of its distant history, despite being a product of Thatcher's relatively recent reign. The novel alludes, along these lines, to various derelict structures of this advertised ruined history, from the village architecture to old railways, which Dorothy describes as "some kind of monument now."[404] All of this history, as history, thus seems barely relevant to the contemporary time of the novel. Change, in a phrase such as *England has changed*, here is spatialized, producing an opacity that also restricts some of Phillips's characteristic anamnestic impulses. Nevertheless, using a discontinuous narrative, place is imbued with its violent material conditions of possibility.

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[402] Ibid., 4.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid., 18.

Specifically, Weston is mediated through the unreliable narration of Dorothy, a character who is both producer and a victim of gendered social marginalization. It is in fact through the narrative of a collapsing psyche that Phillips is able to present not only the contradictions of her personality, but also the contradictions of a working-class town that can be simultaneously a victim of internal colonization (and the attendant class condescension from figures like Dorothy) and at the same time ruthlessly and murderously racist.

After being forced to retire, Dorothy "saw a drawing of Stoneleigh in the local paper and she bought her bungalow over the phone. Somehow the phrase 'a new development' sounded comforting."[405] Stoneleigh could easily be a development produced by a company such as McCarthy & Stone, whose website offers middle class buyers a choice of properties spread throughout Yorkshire (including the town of Market Weighton). McCarthy & Stone advertises the many amenities available to transplants: "Yorkshire is home to numerous attractions, comprising of ancient castles, World Heritage Sites, mining museums and galleries," and additionally, "tranquil gardens and innovative breweries can also be found in the region."[406] Similarly, Stoneleigh is conceptually 'a distant shore' for Dorothy, an escape, despite the fact that she finds herself in a "bungalow at the top of the hill in this village that is five miles outside her home town."[407] The bungalows of the new development offer themselves as a resolution, a place to spend a relaxing retirement.[408]

This is a bleak place, however, incapable of providing such a resolution. The text introduces itself by way of its setting in Weston/Stoneleigh, as just after Dorothy declares that

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[405] Ibid., 236.
[406] McCarthy & Stone, "Retirement Homes in Yorkshire."
[407] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 236.
[408] Originally, "the bungalow was the peasant's hut of rural Bengal. Subsequently, when it came to mean a house for Europeans in India, the criteria were explicitly racial and cultural." Within England, it would also come to symbolize "getting away from it all" for bohemian back-to-the-landers who were a "small, middle class minority in a

'England has changed' she notes that "our village is divided into two."[409]   Descending into

Weston, she notes:

> I was surprised by how busy the main road was, with big lorries thundering by in both
> directions. It took a good while before there was a break in the traffic and I was able to
> dash across. As it turned out there was not much to see, except housewives sitting on the
> front steps sunning themselves, or young kids running around. Doors were propped wide
> open, presumably because of the heat, but I didn't get the impression that the open doors
> were indicative of friendliness. People stared at me like I had the mark of Cain on my
> forehead, so I pressed on and discovered the canal. It's a murky strip of stagnant water,
> but because I was away from the noise of traffic, and the blank gawping stares of
> villagers, it looked almost tolerable. The skeletal remains of a few barges were tied up by
> the shoreline, and it soon became clear that the main activity in these parts appeared to be
> walking the dog. In the fields, the cows and sheep moved with an ease which left me in
> no doubt, that, despite the public footpath that snaked across the farmer's land, this was
> their territory.[410]

A contrast is drawn here between the busyness of the main road and the stillness of the town.

Weston is a place that most people move through and from which some people never move. It is

sonically elaborated through the noise of the traffic passing through, perhaps in part from the

other middle class residents exiting the town in their cars. On the other hand, the main road that

facilitates this traffic hinders Dorothy's own movement, and the town itself is marked mostly by

slight, banal activity such as walking dogs and sitting, a stillness connotative of the villagers'

isolation and one that continues into the canal which will later be the site of Solomon's murder.

Like the locals' 'blank' opacity, this pastoral landscape, with its stagnant water and skeletal boats,

is also uninviting to Dorothy, preventing her from entering and exploring. Instead, she must

retreat to her home, even though this landscape, animals and all, is supposed to be an object of

consumption and peace for people like Dorothy (hence the public path).[411]

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society marked by vast conspicuous consumption of the upper class on the one hand and immense poverty on the
other." King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, 1, 119.

[409] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 6.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Burchardt writes that "by the 1980s rural recreation had become one of the dominant uses of leisure time in rural
England." Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800*, 181.

Dorothy's experience with Weston is continually blocked, mediated by conflicting desires of association and segregation. This division is partially a class division; as Dorothy's says, "we're the newcomers, or posh so-and-sos, as I heard a vulgar woman in the post office call us."[412]   As is typical of Dorothy, she notes on the one hand a justified class resentment felt by the villagers for the people on the hill that negates any attempt she may have for association, while on the other hand seeking to disassociate herself from the common vulgarity of the villager. The dynamics of this local geography are such that they seem to place incompatible, distant elements in an unbearably claustrophobic space producing both connection through proximity and extreme disconnection through conflict.[413] This is repeated formally in a narrative that evokes Dorothy's increasing subjective retreat from reality as well as that reality's objective hostility, thus producing ambiguity as to whether the people of Weston really are so uniformly hostile or if Dorothy is projecting a stereotype onto them. As Newby observes, "for those newcomers who moved to the countryside in order to seek the social intimacy of a happy and integrated community life, the reserve (and worse) of the local inhabitants may have been a disappointment."[414]

In the aftermath of Solomon's death, Dorothy walks by the canal, wondering where *exactly* they found his body, and finds the small-town landscape again difficult: "It's been raining heavily so the towpath has turned muddy, and the odd puddle has formed here and there…You seem to spend as much time looking at your feet as you do trying to take in the

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McCarthy & Stone tout the "picturesque towns" and the many walking routes, including the "Malham Tarn Upland Farm Walk [which] is a good option for those that enjoy learning about the local history."   Stone, "Retirement Homes in Yorkshire."

[412] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 5.

[413] as Bénédicte Ledent notes, "togetherness is never very far from parting" Ledent, "'Of, and Not of, This Place': Attachment and Detachment in Caryl Phillips' a Distant Shore," 154.

[414] Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England*.

scenery."[415] For people like Dorothy these types of spaces are meant to be tranquil, idyllic areas

worthy of consumption. Instead the canal is abandoned, and the lack of people does not signal a

tranquil peace but rather ominous suspicion and submerged violence. For Solomon and Dorothy,

these are not places of safety. Indeed, the deep, historical violence that haunts Phillips' other

novels returns here as well, but through place and landscape in particular, for example in several

bus scenes where Dorothy "sits passively, soporifically watching the world barrel past."[416]

Dorothy turns to the landscape outside the bus due to her sociophobia, but these landscapes offer

little escape, and do more to signal a growing tension or crisis for Dorothy herself. Before

Dorothy knows that Solomon has been murdered, she thinks

> I was standing on the bus going home when I felt it in my blood that something was
> wrong. It wasn't just the sight of burly, unemployed men sitting in the seats reserved for
> the handicapped and the elderly that was disturbing me, there was something else. I
> stared out of the window at the town's terraced houses, great stripes of them arranged in
> narrow, ramrod-straight streets which, as we made our way into the countryside, finally
> gave way to a desolate landscape of empty fields over which the sun now hung ominously
> low.[417]

Typically for Dorothy, the bus offends her, specifically the unemployed men not respecting the

rules of mannered society. It is, in fact their disrespect for the space of bus that makes Dorothy

turn away. Her disdain for her fellow passengers recalls Margaret Thatcher's (most likely

apocryphal) statement that "a man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count

himself as a failure."[418] It also recalls Thatcher's not-apocryphal privatization of bus systems:

the communal, public space of the bus is one also of public withdrawal and privatization. For

example Peter Ambrose remarks that "government policy has been very much to reward

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[415] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 41.
[416] Andrew Warnes, "Enemies Within: Diaspora and Democracy in *Crossing the River* and *a Distant Shore*," *Moving Worlds* 7(1)(2007): 42.
[417] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 44.
[418] Phillip Johnston, "Home Front," *The Telegraph* 2006.

'successful' regions…by increased infrastructural investment, and not to spend money on incentives to attract new industry to those less-successful parts of the country, the parts where old traditional industries are in decline. By its pattern of support, or rather non-support, for public transport it has shown that it has very little interest in the more isolated rural areas."[419]

Similarly, when Dorothy is finally is forced to retire as a teacher she witnesses an argument between a man with a bicycle and the driver of her bus to her new home in Stoneleigh, and "she looks away, ashamed and puzzled. It is one thing to be frustrated by rules, but it is another thing to flout authority in such a vulgar manner. These are not happy times for anybody."[420] Dorothy's lack of a car forces her into this public space, but rather than community, what this space provides is only further disagreement and conflict. Finding offense at the non-community of the bus she looks away, but her gaze can only rest on the monotony and homogeneity of cheap consumer culture: "the bleak scene of unappetising fast-food places, an RAC stand, rows of unused telephones and neon-lit petrol pumps."[421] In fact, this 'landscape' contains all that which has threatened the economic stability of the postwar countryside: cheap, foreign, processed fast-food, the availability of easy transport (automobiles), and oil, whose cheap availability in a neoliberal, globalized economy helped put an end to the coal industry. Thus, inherent in both the apparently neutral space of the bus and the mediated landscape outside is a political-economy that emerges obliquely through the narrative.

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[419] Peter Ambrose, "The Rural/Urban Fringe as Battleground," in *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis*, ed. Brian Short (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[420] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 213.
[421] Ibid.

Unbelonging and the Collapse of Social and Psychic Reality

All of these instances and scenes are of course mediated by Dorothy and increasingly

indicate social phobia verging on paranoia. At the same time, these particular instances and

examples, in their singularity and sensuality, point to the general, material conditions of social

and psychic violence.   Dorothy's narration reinscribes the marginalization of Weston even as she

suffers from Weston's marginalization of her. As Stephen Clingman writes, this split is repeated

in the form of the novel and its "disjointed spacioternporalities…in which versions of migrancy

and internal exile co-exist but do not fully align, in which nation and narration are far from

cohesive, horizontally unified, or identical."[422] The disjunctive time of the national, however,

does not signal its demise, but rather its transformation in the age of neoliberalism. In the novel,

these temporal gaps give Dorothy's narrative its sense of incommensurability, as if the possibility

of her existing in Weston was foreclosed from the beginning. Instead, what is explored are

processes of social and psychic collapse, in which the postcolonial experience elides into

continuing neocolonial operations of power.

This split is perhaps appropriate for the *Daily Mail*-reading Dorothy. Maurizio Calbi

observes that the novel "is packed with issues that appear in British daily newspapers, for

instance, in the *Daily Mail*, the paper Dorothy reads: immigration, child abuse, cancer, violence

the lowering of standards in education, hospital care, and so on."[423] He notes, however, that the

novel is no mere reproduction of facts; but then, neither is the crudely sensationalist, middle-

market *Daily Mail*. In fact, rather than producing sober reporting on Britain's pressing social

issues, papers like the *Daily Mail* and Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun* instead peddle in dramatized

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[422] Stephen Clingman, "England Has Changed: Questions of National Form in a Distant Shore," *Moving Worlds* 7(1)(2007): 51.

stereoptypes about what David Cameron and the Conservative Party have recently called

"broken Britain," defined by the former as "the slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place

in parts of our country these past few generations," due to what he termed "moral neutrality."[424]

The latter he summarized in a series of pithy phrases: "Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as

if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline.

Reward without effort."[425] 'Broken Britain' characterized not just London's 'multicultural'

ghettos, but all those working-class places and estates that the postwar welfare state made

possible.

A place like Weston, with no remaining economic viability except that provided by

bourgeois interlopers like Dorothy, becomes stigmatized for its own marginalization (like

Dorothy, in her own way). For example, Sandra Courtman writes "while British cities might be

unequivocally multicultural, racism prevails in all-white villages where the inhabitants have

avoided routine encounters with African, Asian, and Caribbean settlers. Tribal law and

xenophobia go unchecked in such an enclave."[426] The 'unequivocal' liberal multiculturalism of

cities is, of course, not mutually exclusive with xenophobia, but more problematic is the way in

which Courtman suggests that the 'tribal' provinciality of northern English villages is simple

social fact. Rather, the 'tribal' characterization of Weston invokes a colonial structure of

primitivism, in which the north is temporally behind the south according to the new markers of

modernity. Weston's xenophobia is not imaginary, but here is naturalized into a spatial

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[423] Maurizio Calbi, "Encounters on the Estate: Memory, Secrecy and Trauma in Caryl Phillip's *a Distant Shore*" (paper presented at the The Representation and Transformation of Literary Landscapes: Proceedings of the 4th AISLI Conference, Venice, 2006), 60.
[424] BBC, "England Riots: Broken Society Is Top Priority - Cameron," *BBC* 2011.
[425] The Economist, "Not So Broken," *The Economist* 2012.
[426] Sandra Courtman, "Dorothy's Heart of Darkness: How Europe Meets Africa in *a Distant Shore*," in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, ed. B. Ledent and D. Tunca (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2012), 278.

configuration whose temporality does not take into account the complexity of historical formations.

Thus the text does, indeed, at times characterize Weston as 'tribal', with its residents in fact acquiring a primitive and hostile animality, but rather than consider this a simple representation of social fact, or more problematically allegorically indicative of a "broken Britain," one might be attentive to the construction of this 'brokenness' through the compromised narration of Dorothy.   Dorothy's sociophobia indicates the complexity and ambivalence within Dorothy and in her narration's tenuous claim to 'reality'. Her characterizations of the working-class masses in the novel are as sensationalist and subjective as a *Daily Mail* headline but also reveal a subtext of prejudicial violence that would find its full force on the body of Solomon. For example, in the town where she is a teacher,

> at 10:30pm there will be a sudden rush of people from the twin-cinema complex, some making their way home, but most dashing to the city-centre pubs for a final drink. Of course, these new pubs with their security staff, and sawdust on the floor and loud thumping music bear no resemblance to what she recognises as a pub, but mercifully she is under no obligation to enter such hovels. At 11 p.m., when the places finally close, the unwashed rabble will slouch out into the streets, full of drink and spoiling for trouble, but she will be safely tucked up in bed.[427]

This is the culture industry's unthinking mob, blindly seeking entertainment that is not that entertaining and in the meantime making all together too much noise. They represent actual cultural violence and potential physical violence and inspire Dorothy's further retreat to an interior, a home or a mind. Moreover, as a collective subject, they also exist in the text as figuration. In the text this group working-class subjects are a heterogeneous element, both an overly known cliché but at the same time unknown and opaque; in this way, the novel enacts a

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[427] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 209.

fragmentation between incommensurable entities. This violence is undeniably directed toward

racial minorities. For example, the patrons of Mahmood's restaurant are

> fat-bellied Englishmen and their slatterns rolling into The Khyber Pass after the pubs had
> closed, calling him Ranjit or Baboo or Swamp Boy, and using poppadoms as Frisbees,
> and demanding lager, and vomiting in his sinks, and threatening him with his own knives
> and their beery breath, and bellowing for mini-cabs and food that they were too drunk to
> see had already arrived on the table in front of them.[428]

This overwhelming anaphoric litany evokes the putrid physicality and drunken, racist stupidity

of an endless English hooligan mob. It is a masculine violence, in whose wake follows an untidy

femininity.[429] They are a collective subject which is aggressive, noisy, messy, ill-tempered and

ill-mannered as they demand, vomit, threaten and bellow, and they suggest the presence of an

unmediated violence in alarming proximity.

All of these instances and scenes are of course mediated by Dorothy and increasingly

indicate social phobia verging on paranoia. At the same time, these particular instances and

examples, in their singularity and sensuality, point to an absent generality, a broken society.

When she finally is forced to retire as a teacher and decides to leave this uncouth town, she

witnesses an argument between a man with a bicycle and the driver of her bus to her new home

in Stonleigh. The bicycle will not fit on the bus, and "soon the young man is shouting at the

driver, then cursing him in foul language…she [Dorothy] looks away, ashamed and puzzled. It

is one thing to be frustrated by rules, but it is another thing to flout authority in such a vulgar

manner. These are not happy times for anybody."[430] The 'young man' in this scene turns what

should be a merely personal reaction to a generality into a noisy public affair. Dorothy,

meanwhile, immediately ascribes general meaning to her particular reaction to this common-

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[428] Ibid., 180-81.
[429] Referred to here by the pejorative "slattern." The OED defines "slattern" as "a woman or girl untidy and slovenly in person, habits, or surroundings; a slut." The novel uses a slightly different spelling Oxford English Dictionary, *"Slattern, N. And Adj."* (Oxford University Press).

place argument. It is succulently final: the 'rules' (wherever those come from) are under vulgar

attack which signals brokenness for both societies and individuals, herself included. As she does

elsewhere, she turns away from this scene on the bus, and also from a man noisily and

offensively eating an apple and boiled egg, to the 'landscape' through the window, but only

"finds herself peering out at the bleak scene of unappetising fast-food places, an RAC stand,

rows of unused telephones and neon-lit petrol pumps."[431] Again finding offense at the non-

community of the bus she looks away, but her gaze can only rest on the monotony and

homogeneity of cheap consumer culture.[432]

That this scene features an impolite 'young' man is not insignificant. Dorothy's disdain

for young people may stem, perhaps ironically, from her profession as a school teacher (but only

perhaps). She teaches music, and over the years faced the ruination of music itself, namely "the

possibility that the pleasures of the classical world are in danger of becoming extinct."[433] Her

teaching also marks a boundary between Dorothy's tory sensibilities and her working class

background, as the introduction of comprehensive schools challenges her pedagogical

philosophy: "I've spent most of my life banging on about how it would be better if kids of all

levels and backgrounds could be educated together and learn from each other…And then four

years ago, the education authority scrapped grammar schools, turned us comprehensive, and they

put me to the test…Difficult kids I don't mind, but I draw the line at yobs."[434] The difference

between 'difficult kids' and 'yobs' is obviously a class distinction, but also a place where the

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[430] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 213.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Incidentally, this landscape contains all that which has threatened the economic stability of the postwar countryside: cheap, foreign, processed fast-food, the availability of easy transport (automobiles, serviced by the RAC (Royal Automobile Club)), and oil, whose cheap availability put and end (more than anything else) to the coal industry.
[433] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 204.
[434] Ibid., 5.. 'Yob' is 'boy' spelled backward and is thus a specifically masculine figure: "a boy, a youth; in mod. use, a lout, a hooligan." Oxford English Dictionary, *"Yob, N."* (Oxford University Press).

working class subject of her memory (for example, her father) and of the present is split, with the latter becoming savage and unruly. As her fellow teacher Geoff says, 'It's worrying though, isn't it. I mean these days everyone's a victim and nobody's responsible. Do you think it's because there's a lack of discipline and order in schools? Are we to blame?'."[435] It is a sentiment that forgets that both 'yobs' and the characterization of people as 'yobs' are not unique to the contemporary period, but rather refers to a complex production of otherness. The split in the child subject, as either 'difficult' or 'yob', reflects one of many splits within Dorothy herself, her simultaneous positions as a member of a dominant, educated class but also not, adherent to an ideology that itself suggests her own marginalization and 'victimhood', for which she is certainly not responsible.

This unruliness of children, however, becomes excessive when these children grow older; in fact, the group which is most often figured as ill-mannered and verging on unmediated violence is the teenage youth. Their excess is in fact *not* symptomatic of some deeper meaningfulness, but simply marks a structural gap in the wholeness of community. In this text, that youth is not the multicultural, rioting urban youth but rather the bored, provincial teenagers of Weston, some of who eventually do prove to be murderous when they kidnap and kill Solomon. They are introduced with the scene of this later crime in the background:

> I [Dorothy] sat on a low wall underneath some drooping willow branches and looked around. The soft back-lap of the canal was soothing, although the jerky flight of a dragonflly buzzing about my head seemed out of place. This wall belonged to the village pub, The Waterman's Arms, whose garden gave out onto the canal. In the garden some young louts and their girlfriends were braying and chasing about the place. I watched them as they began to toss beer at each other, and then shriek with the phlegmy laughter of hardened smokers…I could now feel eyes upon me, and for a few moments I wondered if some of these slovely youngsters, with their barrack-room language, weren't pupils that I'd recently had the rare pleasure of teaching. However, I thought it best not to turn and look them full in the face.[436]

[435] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 196.
[436] Ibid., 6-7.

Dorothy's focus on the briefly relaxing canal is interrupted by the animalistic presence of the teenagers; their shriek's and ('phlegmy') laughter indicates not the joyful promise of children playing but rather degenerate, unkempt beings, already ruined by alcohol and cigarettes and expletives. In this way, the text takes the caricature of 'Broken Britain's' youth seriously, recreating them as the violent, subhuman collectivity they are supposed to be. [437] When Dorothy feels eyes, it is *all* of them who are turning to her, and she tries to escape their notice as if they were violent dogs spoiling for a fight with a passerby. She does not look them in the face, and in a sense they are faceless; in the novel, they are, with one exception, given no voice or subjectivity but rather exist as objects of Dorothy's fear and disgust. Through her narration, the relative incommensurability that constitutes the heterogeneous, 'broken' society is not so much represented as staged — textual presences set into motion. Here the caricature, the cliché, is both untrue and true, imaginary productions of prejudice and real producers of violence.

Even as caricature, the youth are physical presence in its most visceral forms, a sensuality that is as vibrant as it is beastly. Later in the text, Dorothy sees another common scene: "Across the road in the pub car park, some louts, who are all tattoos and bared teeth, are now pushing and shoving each other and making the loud braying noises that suggest they are having a good time. She notices that two among them are brazenly advertising the contents of their bladders in triumphal watery arches, and then to her horror she realises that their performances are competitive."[438] The viscera here is somewhat literal, and accompanied by primal sounds. The indication of enjoyment is signaled not even by 'phlegmy' laughter by again by 'braying', seemingly unthinking animal noises. The enjoyment itself, lacking decorum, acquires

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[437] As a figure in British culture they might recall the boys in *A Clockwork Orange.*Anthony Burgess and B. Morrison, *A Clockwork Orange* (Penguin Books Limited, 2011).

undertones of violence — the bared teeth, the shoving — which all seem to justify Dorothy's horror, as if an even more visceral aggressively could present itself at any time.

Calbi, mobilizing Kristeva and Butler, argues that Dorothy's denigration of others is in fact a projection of her own abjection, and that furthermore, this illustrates "the social and psychic process of displacement whereby those who are cast out to the margins acquire a limited amount of power by actively marginalising."[439] This analysis could apply just as easily to the teenagers of Weston as it could to Dorothy. Through her narration, the relative incommensurability that constitutes a heterogeneous society is not so much represented as staged — textual presences set into motion. Here the caricature, the cliché, is both untrue and true, imaginary productions of prejudice and real producers of violence. In this way, the text reproduces stereotypes but through a character whose own ethical sensibility and psychological stability are compromised, and in doing so show how places like Weston can come to be made by a majoritarian discourse.

For Adorno and Horkeimer the savageness *of civilization* is immanent with and constitutive of 'progress' itself. They write that "adaptation to the power of progress furthers the progress of power, constantly renewing the degenerations which prove successful progress, not failed progress, to be its own antithesis. The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression."[440] The provincials of postindustrial Weston are not survivals from a previous era, but a necessary excess that enforces the system. Here what is 'broken', in all its vagueness, is the excessive production of those who identify and lament brokenness. Dorothy, Solomon and the residents of Weston are all elements that are subject to and selectively reproduce this diffuse

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[438] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 198.
[439] Calbi, "Encounters on the Estate: Memory, Secrecy and Trauma in Caryl Phillip's *a Distant Shore*", 59.
[440] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 28.

ideological machine, and thus are all partially minoritarian relative to each other. As a resident

of the new speculative development, Dorothy is an unwitting bearer of 'progress' and

'regeneration' which requires the identification of ruined, 'backward' places. As on the bus,

Dorothy repeatedly makes this identification and then turns away; here progress produces

regression, which it then cannot countenance. In *A Distant Shore*, the more that Dorothy retreats

into herself out a false prejudice and fear of an exterior, collective barbarity, the more that

violent collectivity becomes real.

Stoneleigh thus fails at being 'a distant shore', a place of refuge, for Solomon, Dorothy,

and for Weston itself. If the British nation is unstable, Dorothy's narration shows how the effects

of this instability are not distributed evenly, but are brought to bear most painfully on its

excessive subjects: Dorothy is no longer needed by the state school system, Solomon/Gabriel is

the byproduct of wars for the blood diamonds and minerals which fuel consumer modernity, and

Weston is a postindustrial backwater subject to real estate speculation and development. In this

material context, Dorothy's psychological collapse provides a narratological device that reveals

the multifaceted nature of marginalization in contemporary Britain, in which Gladstonian ideals

of 'progress' and 'civilization' continue to implode while the patriarchal violence of colonialism

and capitalism advance unabated. Dorothy's abandonment from reality is the only logical and

sane response to a reality that has always abandoned her. Phillips, by narrating Dorothy's

withdrawal from her own perspective, records both her tentative grasp on reality and that reality's

objective insanity.

Dorothy's unreilable narration and mental 'brokenness' has been frequently read as "an

embodiment of England," as Di Maio writes.[441] For some, Dorothy's "general mental instability

aptly reflect the current 'disturbed' state of the British nation," with the " 'break up of [her]

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European mind' " being "symptomatic of that of the entire nation."[442] In sum, "healing still is a long way away for Dorothy as well as for her melancholic, postcolonial England.[443] Like Weston, Dorothy is read, problematically, as a symbol for the troubled national community in which place and the nation are both represented as feminine, a structure that has a long history in national articulations. In a sense, Dorothy *is* figured in some ways like Weston: if in the latter *place* absorbs, mediates, and conceals histories of violence, Dorothy's body is also a site of historically contingent, ongoing social violence which does not appear as such. Here, the marginality produced by place also inscribes itself on the body. The above readings, however, accept this inscription and thus recast Dorothy, as a female body, as the figure of the nation and of place itself.[444] In this gendered national structure, Dorothy's psychic disorders are thought to be symptoms of a larger national pathology. At the same time, the nation as a whole becomes understood as a biological (and biopolitical) entity in which marginal individuals constitute a pathological threat to social health.[445] As Dorothy's mental retreat intensifies, her status as pathology eventually leads her to a place that might be the ideal of hegemonic, biopolitical planning, the psychiatric institution. In these readings, Dorothy's body becomes both cause and symptom of 'broken Britian'.

The psychiatric facility, as a place of 'healing,' and 'caring,' also serves individualize Dorothy, rendering social violence into personal illness. In the text, Dorothy's psychic condition

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[441] Di Maio, "A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," 258.
[442] Petra Tournay-Theodotou, "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," ibid., 295.
[443] Alessandra Di Maio, "A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," ibid., 258.
[444] Tournay-Theodotou does critically note the "traditional identification of the land/country/nation with the female body", but only with regards to the possible rape of Denise, a white girl, by Solomon a black man. This critique is not extended to Dorothy's figuration. Petra Tournay-Theodotou, "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *a Distant Shore*," ibid., 303.
[445] Courtman's frequent references to the compromised 'health' of the nation do not help dispel these ideological figurations: "Dorothy and Solomon are both refugees in unhealthy societies which prevent them from finding peace with each other"; "The collective trauma of civil wars in Africa have brutalized and maimed what should have been

is represented as a the result of a series of successive abandonments by male objects of attachment. Her identity is continually defined as dependence. For example, Dorthy's vexed, loveless relationship with Mahmood when she is still a teacher is very obviously one-sided: Dorothy cooks the lavish, semi-invented cuisine of high-mughal culture for Mahmood, accompanying it with wines she knows he will not appreciate, for the sake of mechanized sex with a married man. She also focuses her attention on his stories, while deferring her own: "Dorothy says very little about her own life, being concerned to make sure that the dominant narrative is male. After all, his story involves passion, betrayal, migration, sacrifice and ultimately triumph. Mahmood is a success. Her story contains the single word, abandonment."[446] She later asks him, "are you really interested in my life? I mean there's not much to it, you know."[447] As discussed, the successful Mahmood to which Dorothy refers runs a news stand in the middle of nowhere, with a wife that he hates, selling to racist customers. Apart from his lack of urbanity, however, he is an archetypal figure of postcolonial migration, one whose narrative is defined by a masculine hardship which is overcome for the sake of a hybrid existence in the global north.[448] More heroic than Mahmood is Gabriel, the young solider that escapes genocide and witnesses the trauma of war, endures a dangerous crossing, and finally creates a new identity in a foreign land.

As opposed to this is Dorothy: a narrative of stillness and passivity, consisting of the intricacies of relationships occurring within the relative safety and prosperity of the first world. The duel narratives of *A Distant Shore* are thus gendered along these lines: the masculine,

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a group of healthy young nations"; "The Britain and Africa depicted in A Distant Shore are profoundly unhealthy societies." **Courtman 271, 275**
[446] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 180.
[447] Ibid., 181.
[448] Whose image for Mahmood is of men from his village who send photographs of themselves from England "in which they posed holding a radio, or standing beside a television set, or sometimes just clutching a fistful of five-pound notes." ibid., 179.

'dominant narrative' of migration on the one hand, and the provincial, personal narrative of English inaction on the other. Even if under compulsion, Gabriel *abandons* his world and identity; Dorothy *is abandoned*, and defines her life by that term. All this leaves Dorothy in an awkward position, part of a dominant culture but also needing to defer to and dependent on masculine narratives. This gap expresses itself as a lack of content: her life is boring, nothing happened. What does happen, in turn, always happens mostly in relation to the male figures in her life, and their continual disappearance. She is defined by abandonment, alienation and her lack of solid, consistent connection with others, and as she is abandoned she slowly abandons the possibility of such connection, instead becoming radically alienated from the thought of connection and community, indeed from the idea of a shared reality. This alienation, however, is already prefigured in her structural inability to craft her own narrative, because such a construction is only 'male'. Her identity is constructed via negative absences which leave her without relation to place or community, and yet these negative relationships themselves constitute a positive articulation of identity.

When Dorothy moves to Stoneleigh, she has been abandoned by several people: Mahmood, Geoff, her ex-husband Brian, by her school which forces her to retire, and by her parents and sister who have died. Many of the men to whom she is attached had primary attachments elsewhere, a pattern introduced by her father, whose primary attachment was to her younger sister Sheila, "daddy's little pet," whom he sexually abused in the family's garden allotments during their childhood.[449] Dorothy learns of this abuse when Sheila is much older, and yet her reaction is not one of anger or sympathy but of jealousy: "The problem, of course, was that I did believe her…but underneath it all the real question that I wanted answered was

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[449] Ibid., 62.

how come I escaped his attention? Did he love her more than me?"[450] This abuse is at the heart

of the family's dissolution and in turn governs Dorothy's sense of self, even though she was not

subject to this abuse. These abandonments, several coming in rapid succession, lead Dorothy to

a physical and mental withdrawal in Stoneleigh. Bénédicte Ledent writes that Dorthy's search

for "surrogate" fathers shows that "in spite of its vulnerability and its faults the family is a

structure that you cannot do without, whatever happens to you."[451] Yet, Dorothy's family may

not be exception but rather rule. In terms Ledent uses elsewhere, the family (and its garden) as a

model of community implies both attachment and detachment to a monstrous, savage, and

ultimately ruinous violence (in the figure of her father). [452] This is a community that could only

be defined by its absence and abandonment, or by a radical dissensus.

Her withdrawal, however, is represented from within Dorothy's perspective, so that her

subjective tentative grasp on reality and reality's objective insanity are both recorded. For

example, the mother of a student Dorothy was tutoring in piano explains "I think you need help

don't you? Carla likes you all right, but she says you shout, and then at other times you're nice,

but most of the time you just stare out of the window and you don't hear anything that she's

saying to you."[453] Here it is clear that Carla, the somewhat petulant and bored piano student in

Dorothy's eyes, has also been trying to engage with an absentminded and eccentric teacher to

whom she nevertheless looks up, as is evident when Carla comes to Dorothy with proof of

Solomon's murderer. In this way, Dorothy's abandonment of reality is represented from within

Dorothy's narrative. That Dorothy 'needs help' because of this abandonment is only a sentiment

expressed from the outside, however; from her perspective, it is others who need help. When

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[450] Ibid., 61.
[451] Bénédicte Ledent, "Family and identity in caryl phillips's fiction, in particular a distant shore," *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 29, no. 2 (2007): 70.
[452] Ledent, "'Of, and Not of, This Place': Attachment and Detachment in Caryl Phillips' a Distant Shore."

Dorothy later runs into Carla and sees, at a distance, Solomon's future killer, she speculates "Maybe I'm imagining it, but I think Carla feels sorry for me. However, she shouldn't, for I'm quite resilient. People, especially young people, are always picking things up and dropping them again. Especially feelings. But I imagine Carla will find this out for herself in the fullness of time."[454] If Dorothy is the only one in this community to actually grasp reality, it is because she thinks of herself as comfortable with abandonment, with people picking up attachments and affects and then leaving them, suddenly or slowly. Dorothy's abandonment from reality is the only logical and sane response to a reality that has always abandoned her.

Solomon's death, however, is an abandonment — not just by Solomon, but by the World in general — which cements Dorothy's own refusal of that world. Already, "after Shelia died I wrote to myself and pretended it was her doing the writing."[455] However, the knowingly imaginary Shelia slowly becomes real, as Dorothy conjures up those who abandoned her so that they might do so again. Here, she also visits her parents' grave after Solomon dies to speak with them:

> I spread the jacket out on the grass by Mum and Dad's grave and then I sit down and begin to talk to them. I tell them everything about Solomon that I can think of. I know Dad has some opinions about coloureds, and that he wont be totally sympathetic to a lot of what I'm saying about Solomon, but I still want to tell them. Dad doesn't say much. After a while Mum starts to cry and she asks me what it was about Solomon that made me want to be seen with him. I think for a while, and I then tell her that there was nothing in particular, it was just that Solomon was a proper gentleman. In fact, one of the first gentlemen that I'd ever met, with his smart driving gloves…she goes on, but she's so upset that she can hardly get the words out. Didn't I understand what people would say about me if I were to be seen with a coloured, and particularly one as dark as this Solomon?…Eventually neither of them will speak to me…This isn't going anywhere and I'm starting to get cold.[456]

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[453] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 20.
[454] Ibid., 41.
[455] Ibid., 62.
[456] Ibid., 56.

Finding no validation of her friendship with Solomon in her life, nor even not much of a confirmation of the horror of his murder, Dorothy turns to the comfort of her parents who can be relied upon to once again abandon her and retreat into the silence of their graves. Her mother's comments recall that Dorothy is someone who the town "feels comfortable" talking about, an element of difference, like Solomon, through which the Weston community coheres.[457] If Dorothy is made to represent the national body, then the implication of miscegenation reads as a betrayal to that familial community. In this way, Dorothy 'fails' to achieve a gendered norm, but the fact that she is recreating and rehearsing this abandonment by her family suggests that such failure is in fact normative. Dorothy can only experience community (with groups or individuals) as rejection, abandonment and loss, which is evinced by this non-conversation with her dead parents.

Despite the indications that Dorothy is increasingly disconnected from reality, reality's unbelievability seems justified from within Dorothy's narrative after Solomon's death. Most notably, this takes the form of Weston's lack of concern over this death, the fact that "it's only two days ago that man was drowned in this village, but everything is just going on as normal."[458] This is a knowing fiction that is nevertheless taken for granted at the pub:

> "It's a sad business, isn't it? I'm sorry for him and I'm sorry for what it's doing to our village"… [bartender]
> "What it's doing to the village?" [Dorothy]
> "Well, it makes us look bad, doesn't it?"
> "I still don't understand," I say. This time I take a drink and stare directly at him.
> "Well it must have been an accident because there's nobody in Weston who would do anything like that."
> "I see."
> He looks over my shoulder at the other men in the pub. Now I understand. This is not a private conversation.
> "If you've lived her as long as I have, love, and you've grown up with folks like these you'd understand that there's not one of them capable of harming anybody. That's just

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[457] Ibid., 34.
[458] Ibid., 41.

how they are. Decent folk committed to their families and their community…we don't have murderers here,"
I nod, for I have no desire to upset his sense of community."[459]

This willing denial of reality by the bartender goes beyond a desire to save public face. This public conversation, one about village-values, community and decency corresponds to a reality that exists to deny it's own violence and which is conditioned by its own local exclusions. It is unbelievable, and yet in its surreal tenacity, accompanied by implicit threat, it makes Dorothy question the sanity of the place to which she has moved. She says, "Weston is simply not the place that I hoped I might be retiring to. I suppose I knew this yesterday when the policeman and policewoman came to tell me about Solomon as though they were enquiring about an unpaid parking ticket."[460] In its constitutive denial and nonchalance, the community reveals to Dorothy its insanity.

In the aftermath of his death, Dorothy walks by the canal, wondering where *exactly* they found Solomon's body, and finds the small-town landscape again difficult:

> It's been raining heavily so the towpath has turned muddy, and the odd puddle has formed here and there. Somewhere, behind the hedges, I can hear the rush of a stream that has been swollen by the recent rain, and over the canal there hangs a thin ribbon of mist, which makes the water look like it's sweating. At the best of times the stiles are an obstacle, but today it's like climbing Ben Nevis. I don't like traipising about when it's like this. You seem to spend as much time looking at your feet as you do trying to take in the scenery. The other thing about wandering up the canal path is that there are no benches, so this means that you have to keep going. And these towpaths always remind me of work. Straight lines, no messing, keep walking. Unlike rivers, canals are all business which makes it hard for me to relax by one. It's late morning, which probably accounts for why there's nobody around…which is why it doesn't make sense that Solomon should be down here by himself.[461]

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[459] Ibid., 42-43.
[460] Ibid., 52.
[461] Ibid., 41.

The canal, which for Dorothy was already uninviting, here becomes impossible, both restricting

movement and yet not allowing rest. As mentioned, for people like Dorothy these types of

spaces are meant to be tranquil, idyllic areas worthy of consumption. The footpaths are meant to

provide access to 'nature' as a general category; here they are utilitarian, rain drenched and

plodding, and do not allow Dorothy to 'take in the scenery'. More than anything, the canal is

abandoned, and the lack of people does not signal a tranquil peace but rather ominous suspicion

and submerged violence. For Solomon and Dorothy, these are not places of safety.

This time Dorothy confronts the animals whose stares, like those of the townspeople, had

earlier scared her away: "I stop and peer over a hedgerow where a white-ankled horse stares back

at me with that vacant quizzical look that they sometimes have. And your problem is? My

problem is that my friend was found face down in this canal and nobody seems to care."[462] Even

the animals appear in on the denial, which might seem absurd except for the animality of

Solomon's real murder.

The events of the novel set up contestation between the realities of Dorothy, one the one

hand, and everything else, on the other. Her placement in a psychiatric institution — the ideal of

a planned, intentional community — is meant to reconcile this tension through the healing

qualities of place. The failure of place and community is inscribed on Dorothy's body, which is

transferred and confined in yet another place and community. However, that the text lets

Solomon die and makes Dorothy (and Weston) live indicates that these inscriptions of failure are

differential, even if everyone, as 'monads', fails.[463] Here gender, invoking as it does the

biopolitical communities of the family and the nation, is a socially planned place that produces

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[462] Ibid., 42.
[463] Thus it is obviously not the case that "suffering is universal and knows no class, gender or racial boundaries," because all these sufferings are different, and some do not even appear as suffering Gabrielle, "The Civilized Pretence: Caryl Phillips and *a Distant Shore*," 315.

an excessive individual failure and ruination, to be solved by a more intensive and direct

planning in the form of the psychiatric facility.

However, Dorothy, in the sections where the text is in her first person voice, is not

convinced that she needs to be there:

> I should be going home. That's where I belong. I shouldn't be at this police station
> talking about convalescing…I'm all right. It occurs to me that if I just stare at Dr.
> Williams hen I can make him believe me when I say that everything is all right, but he
> simply looks back at me and the longer I stare, the more I begin to feel like a fool.[464]

The text breaks here, and the next section begins with a sarcastic comment from Dorothy:

"apparently I am convalescing."[465] As occurs often with Dorothy, silently staring at others

produces the opposite effect, signaling to others a psychological disconnection. For Dorothy, it

is Dr. Williams who always does not "appear to want to take me [Dorothy] seriously."[466] That is,

there is a mutual disconnection.

> The institution is another 'distant shore', a place of retreat. She says

> The unit, as they like to call it when they're being official, is supposed to be a place that's
> different from out there. A retreat. Somewhere where you can lick your wounds and
> gather some strength before going back tot he world. A place where you can learn to
> remember, and therefore understand your life. But what use is that now? They say
> they're protecting us. In here, time doesn't matter.[467]

Dorothy repeats the official and idealistic, not to say sentimental, idea of what this place could

be: a place for healing, which would be remembering, a suturing of a present identity to those

which have been abandoned in the past. However, even as she proposes this, it is clear that

Dorothy does not fully mean it, and that this place is not a special place, one that would revive a

particular identity, but the same or worse than any other place.

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[464] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 59.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Ibid., 51.

The institution is in fact a place of confinement, one that repeats the conditions of fragmentation and abandonment which have so far defined Dorothy. While it is thankfully a place of (excessive, sterile) cleanliness, Dorothy does not eat because she says "I hate the dinners because everything in this place is so childish…we have to sit and eat off the trays, looking at each other and deciding whether or not we have anything to say to the person who's watching us gulp our food."[468] In this childish and rather savage situation, Dorothy refuses to eat much or speak. Similarly, she notes that the two men who are here "look like food stains" while wondering "where are all the men…I suppose men drink their problems away in the pub. Or hit people."[469] The drinking in the pub and the violence recall the men (and boys) in Weston, and the link between their violence and Dorothy's confinement in this gendered space.

Dorothy's silence in this institution signifies her refusal of the terms of her confinement. Her narrative in these last few pages is confident and strong. She is in complete control about her presence in this place and her attitude towards it, and she notices but does not worry much that no one else seems to realize this. The text here accentuates the split between Dorothy and the world around her, and it is not the case that either has a monopoly on reality as such. T

Dorothy's silence is purposeful. She thinks, "today I've made a decision to not say anything to anybody, and I can see how uncomfortable this is making her [the nurse] feel, but it's not really my problem, is it? I'm interested in flowers and she's not, and that's about all there is to it."[470] Later, the nurse "asks me a question, but I say nothing in reply. I simply look at my nurse. I've no desire to keep her here against her will. If she wants to leave, then's she's free to

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[467] Ibid., 277.
[468] Ibid., 273.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Ibid., 270.

do so. Really."[471] Dorothy performs control: she *does* care about the psyche of her nurse, but there's only so much she can do after all. She will permit the nurse to leave. Dorothy's silence speaks to the different realities occupied by Dorothy and the staff at this institution, and the control in Dorothy's narrative voice presents both these realities as equally viable but structurally unable to interact and find phrases in common.

Dorothy nonetheless mediates these conflicting realties through *place*, specifically the garden of the institution. Instead of speaking, she gazes at the flowers which "are all supposed to have distinct personalities."[472] Flowers are useful to Dorothy because one can associate with them without communication: "Flowers don't speak. That's one of the things I like about them. You can sit quietly with them and they don't have to have your attention." [473] At the same time, these flowers occasion the only possibility of communication and community within the confines of the institution.

> Perhaps she [the nurse] does have an interest in flowers? Perhaps we can talk about them, and this would give us something in common. And I could share with her my only fear in this regard, which is to do with how secretive they are, for flowers grow so slowly that you never quite know what they're going to turn into. There's no talking to them about this, for they're quite cunning.[474]

Flowers thankfully do not speak, nor can they be directly spoken to, but provide an occasion for a being-together that would not need to resolve the situation. Dorothy is not particularly desirous of such a fleeting being-together, and certainly with her history has no illusions as to its permanence, but it would be something, anyway.[475]

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[471] Ibid., 271.
[472] Ibid., 269.
[473] Ibid., 275.
[474] Ibid., 271.
[475] Focusing on such moments of fleeting interconnection in the novel, John Mcleod writes that this text showcases a "richer, better informed, and more sensitive vision of England's *multicultural realities*" which "despite its predominately still and sobering tone, provides a more considered illustration of a progressively utopian milieu." [my empahsis] He uses Michel de Certeau's idea of the "tactics of everyday life" as a "moment of popular

When Brian, her ex-husband, comes to visit her with flowers and news of the failure of

his marriage and tourist business in Spain, it could be expected that some resolution to a previous

abandonment might follow. Empty speech and silence were in fact always a part of this

relationship, as during their marriage Dorothy "silently endured too many years of his

conversation in the form of monologues about the virtues of architecturally designed patios and

breakfast bars, and the superiority of South African whites over French Chardonnay."[476]

Dorothy chose to not respond to these bourgeois provocations, but also "quickly learned that

Brian had absolutely no interest in her opinions" and, however, that "by not answering back she

allowed him to look through and beyond her, until he finally convinced himself that she did not

exist."[477] This absent community was conditioned by Dorothy's silence, which was a refusal of

the very terms of his monologic communication. The abandonment occasioned by this silence

denies Dorothy access to the common reality and to her own existence and visibility. By the end

of the novel, her silence is a symptom for a vague pathology.

In this hospital Brian speaks and Dorothy is silent, and, existing in different realities, they

both feel sorry for each other. Dorothy notices that he is "well past his sell-by date" and laughs:

> Why am I laughing? I stop laughing. He's got to go now. I mean, this is embarrassing. I
> stare at him, which clearly makes him even more uncomfortable. He forces a smile, but
> he has not idea how unappealing this is. The nurse puts down her book, and I notice her
> fold over the corner of the page to mark her spot before she closes it shut. I hate it when
> people do this. They could easily get a bookmark, or a piece of paper or something. Why
> damage the book in this way. It shows no respect for the book. I want to tell all of this to
> her. Perhaps I will, but not now. ("Dorothy"). I turn and look at him. He's still smiling.
> He only said my name to get my attention. Flowers don't speak. That's one of the things

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creativity" in which Dorothy and Solomon for example "support each other in such a way which enacts its own
moment of refusal" of discourses of power. Perhaps, but it seems that what is at stake in the narration is the
contestation of reality itself, making categories of 'experience' and the 'everyday' radically multivocal and therefore
untenable in Mcleod's formulation. Indeed, he remarks that it is "dispiriting" that de Certeau views 'tactics' as
"placeless," perhaps because the particularity of place is necessary as a ground for a univocal, genuine and non-
ideological politics. McLeod, "Diaspora and Utopia: Reading the Recent Work of Paul Gilroy and Caryl Phillips,"
9,13,14.
[476] Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 176. These monologues also involved him railing against unions and the NHS
[477] Ibid., 177.

I like about them. You can sit quietly with them and they don't have to have your attention. ("Dorothy.") Again he stops. If he thinks I'm going to help him out, then he's very much mistaken.[478]

The incommensurable realities are here placed in close proximity, and they incompatibly play off each other in speech and silence. Brian's speech is rendered in parantheticals while Dorothy does her best not only to remain silent, but also to ignore him. In denying his presence, she habitually focuses on those elements of human behavior which have always annoyed her, for example the ill-mannered sloppiness with which a book page is folded over. How anyone could be expected to speak when the basic rules of respect and decorum are so visibly flaunted is beyond Dorothy.

She also thinks about the flowers, ineffably preferable when compared to humans such as Brian. This situation, however, becomes excessive:

He should go now. I shouldn't have to tell him this, or make a fuss in any way, but he's leaving me no choice…I'm not stupid, so why is this man treating me like a fool and repeating my name. He should go now. I don't like visitors and I don't want any more. Why don't they ever listen? I see the book slide from her lap, and I watch her start to turn towards me. And now she's holding her hand over my mouth telling me to be quiet. I begin to struggle because I don't like the way she's holding me. I can hear her shouting for help. She's telling Brian to go and he stands up and begins to back away. As he back-pedals I tumble out of the bed. The nurse is on top of me now. I can see the flowers that Brian brought for me. The red ones are the angry ones….He's walking backwards, and I can see red flowers.[479]

Here the gap between Dorothy's narration and what is "actually" happening is rendered clear by the text. Brian's refusal to stop speaking forces from Dorothy speech which, even to herself, presents itself from the outside, in a reality incommensurable to her own. The flowers, briefly able to mediate community, are here immanent to the incommensurable relation between Dorothy and the World. They are the objective anger and violence of abandonment, exclusion,

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[478] Ibid., 275-76.

abuse, and murder which have made Dorothy retreat and form her own subjective reality; still, this subjective reality bears the traces of a violence which now finds expression as the incoherent, incommensurable, meaningless rage of Dorothy. That is, the violent social production of her psychological retreat appears not as the general condition of possibility for community, but rather only as individual exception.

Provincializing England

Because much of Phillips' writing articulates the bonds of transatlantic intimacy and violence, and historical connection and trauma, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* is a frequently used paradigm for spatializing the presentation of identity in his writing. Opposing, as Gilroy does, the ossified and reactionary fixity of the local with the trans-spatial, both mobile and connected in historical consciousness, comfortable with cultural admixture and tending toward democracy, many find in Phillips a sense of possibility — realistic and somber, for certain, but also hopeful.

However, *A Distant Shore* yields less easily to this reading, as place becomes less a point of departure and more of a dead-end. As John McLeod writes (specifically regarding Gilroy's more recent work), "the admirable utopian principles of his [Gilroy's] work — equality, democracy, and freedom beyond the illiberalism of race and nation — at times divert him from a consideration of the ways in which the realities of contemporary Britain simply to not fit his schema."[480] That is, the quasi-utopianism that Gilroy finds in Black atlantic cultures — in particular youth cultures — not only do not recognize the continuance of colonial modes of power in the age of finance capital, but is in fact founded on a spatialization that precludes such recognition. The division that so many critics of *A Distant Shore* have made, between the

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[479] Ibid., 276.
[480] McLeod, "Diaspora and Utopia: Reading the Recent Work of Paul Gilroy and Caryl Phillips," 7.

transnational, Black Atlantic figure of Solomon and the essentially static and reactionary

nationalism of Weston, is one in which *place* naturalizes itself as determinative of social and

individual identity. What this reading does not — cannot — recognize is the contingency of the

relationship between place and identity and the ways in which both can be differentiated,

fractured and split. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown argues in her critique of Gilroy, the diasporic

community in England is segmented complexly through which an understanding of place is

shared. Simply put, the histories of violence that create Solomon as a black Atlantic subject also

subject him to renegotiations of place which interrupt any continuous diasporic identity. Instead,

Brown notes that the local is the mapping of "processes, practices and phenomena…[that have]

no a priori spatial or social form."[481] *A Distant Shore* shows how boundaries of affiliation blink

in and out of existence within a contested geography. Refracted through the novel, postcolonial

theory attends to the violent misrecognition that grounds community in the contemporary

moment.

As Timothy Bewes suggests, Phillips captures the spectrality of place through a language

whose "unreliability" is condition of possibility for any speaking at all, as demonstrated in the

third person limited narration of character who is also collapsing psychologically. That is, the

only way for the text to "represent" Weston would be to render it opaque but not unreal,

obscured behind the oppressive mirage of "Britain," broken or otherwise. As Bewes writes,

Phillips writing "is about nothing so much as the dialectic of possibility and impossibility, a

dialectic that describes and defines the postcolonial situation," in so far as the literal ground of

being is consistently staged and withdrawn.[482] He goes on to say for Phillips' writing, "

'diaspora,' the 'black Atlantic,' and 'postcoloniality' are limited in their critical efficacy as long as

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[481] Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*, 133.
[482] T. Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 51.

they are conceived in positive terms; that is to say, as long as 'diaspora identities' are imbued

with an ontology" rather than existing as a "counteridentitarian, negative-dialectical trope."[483]

Bewes is not referring specifically to *A Distant Shore,* but it is in this novel in particular that

features a geography, which, fractured as it is, also fractures the oppositions between roots and

routes which structure concepts such as the black Atlantic and postcolonial melancholy.[484]

Phillips accomplishes this through a narration that collapses around its collapsing

inhabitants. As Andrew Warnes suggests, the provinciality of the novel forces a different kind of

writing from Phillips, wherein narrative elements are "meticulously shrunk, suburbanized, and

rid…of any lingering mythic quality. The triptych format that Phillips favours for almost all his

other novels recoils in horror from *A Distant Shore*'s provincial setting, the body of postcolonial

theory with which it is associated seeming entirely too sophisticated for the brutish drunken

'strangers' - as opposed to 'survivors' - who litter the unhappy village."[485]   Yet, it is still the

violence of civilization that Stoneleigh brings to Weston that ultimately finds an outlet on

Solomon's body. What is formed is mutual non-identity drained of its utopian possibility and

dramatic metaphysics, postcolonialism provincialized. This is not, as Loic Waquant writes, "the

erosion of a sense of 'place' …[which] exacerbate[s] the experience and effects of

deproletarianization and destitution" but rather the fullest conceptual extension of *place* itself.[486]

Thus it is the case that postcolonial theory at times relies too much on a notion of place

whose untenability is indicated, with strong irony, by Phillips: in naturalizing place, the

postcolonial can be too "sophisticated" for the 'hooligans' of Weston, remnants of a civilization

that has given up on progress but not on savage violence. Phillips presents a place of

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[483] Ibid., 55, 52.
[484] c.f. Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[485] Warnes, "Enemies Within: Diaspora and Democracy in *Crossing the River* and *a Distant Shore*," 41.
[486] L. Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Wiley, 2008), 7.

unquestionable insignificance whose entrenchment is at the same time its character non-

particularity. *A Distant Shore* thus requires the postcolonial critic not only to encounter the

neocolonial but to do so without recourse to *place*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dismal Valleys and Crap Towns

In 2015, the magazine *Urban Realm* named Aberdeen Scotland's "most dismal town."[487] After what one imagines to be a lengthy debate, the editors chose Aberdeen over runner-ups Cumbernauld, East Kilbride and Leven for the "Plook on the Plinth" award, which has existed since 2000. Competition was fierce as usual, with no shortage of nominations. Levan was also deserving, according to Eric Eunson, who advocated for the town on the account that it was a "grim post industrial wasteland with regressive pretensions to being a seaside resort because it happens to have some sand."[488] Eunson may have undermined his argument when he admitted that Leven's negative qualities were not quite unique, saying "in fairness, it is the whole of Levenmouth which merits the award, since the conurbation is treated as a single entity and is uniformly depressing, ugly, violent and hopeless. I grew up here, I'm the local historian."[489] Futhermore, Aberdeen impressively took the award over perpetual nominee Cumbernauld, the only town to win the award twice, though not since 2005. Apparently not much has changed there since that time, when residents described Cumbernauld's town center as "abysmal: dark oppressive spaces, blocked routes and mess," a "rabbit warren on stilts," and the "Lego fantasy of an unhappy child."[490]

Given the dozens of towns nominated for this award over the years, it has been quite difficult to name the particular dismalness of any given place in Scotland, it seems. Some nominators emphasized their familiarity with the town in question in order to certify its

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[487] Urban Realm, "The Carbuncle Awards," Urban Realm Ltd., http://www.urbanrealm.com/carbuncles.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid.
[490] A. Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (Routledge, 2009), 117.

dismalness, such as the person who said of 2009 winner Glenrothes, "I have lived in this horrible New town for 40 years and I have always despised it," or the one that wrote, "having lived near Stonehouse for 14 years, I can personally attest to the fact that Stonehouse is a dismal, lifeless and featureless conurbation with no redeeming value," with its "pubs you wouldn't go into even if you were on fire."[491] Then, at least these residents were self-conscious of their town's dismalness, as opposed to the inhabitants of Ayr, as "Andy d." remarked that "the place is dead but does not realise it."[492]

Others indicated exaggerated pretensions: of Kirkintilloch, "the town proudly proclaims itself as 'The Canal Capital of Scotland' despite having one little canal running through it which is strewn with litter and not very picturesque in the least."[493] Some attempted to be positive about the town's better features, for example Stonehouse's ability to be avoided ("resembling the aftermath of a zombie invested post war film-set the only saving grace is the local bypass which allows thankful travelers the opportunity to avoid the village centre") or Denny's slow disappearance ("Denny is quite a bit improved now, by the simple measure of knocking down a good bit of the town centre").[494] Some took a more brute-force approach (of Motherwell, "IT IS A HORRIBLE TOWN SINCE THE CLOSE OF THE CRAIG AND THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS"). [495] For some, it was the distinct lack of particularity that made a town dismal, like Cambuslang with its "endless car-dependant cul-de-sacs with generic street names that could be absolutely anywhere in the UK."[496]

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[491] Realm, "The Carbuncle Awards." Another comments: Glenrothes won the Carbuncle award for 2009, since then the only thing that has changed is the fact that the council has planted flowers everywhere in a vain attempt to win a gardening competition.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Ibid.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid.
[496] Ibid.

Convincing as they were, they apparently could not compare to a place as inspirational as Aberdeen, prompting for example the following online comment from "Emma": "bleak, windswept, barren and austere; the grey, featureless high-rises perfectly complementing the grey sky and the grey sea."[497]   If Aberdeen is, in the words of one nomination, "where architecture goes to die" then these comments, and thousands of others like them in online forums and YouTube comments sections and the like, must bear some relation to British place-writing.[498] Though the amount of interested generated by *Urban Realm*'s Scotland-specific award is impressive, what can be termed an aesthetic of dismalness that emerges in the above comments extends to include the whole of Britain. More well-known are Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran's popular series of books about British "crap towns."[499] They base their rankings on what Joridson described as "amazing flights of purple prose" from the inhabitants of towns across the United Kingdom.[500]   These editors and that many contributors have varying goals: some hope the attention will bring funds and energy for "regeneration," some rise in spirited defense (especially members of local councils), and some have given up all hope; these goals overlap when residents, in fact, take pride in the dismal crappiness of their towns.

Place in twentieth century Britain was a dramatic response to the equally dramatic problem of *ruin*, the ruin of Victorian slums, of overcrowding and excess, of countryside decay, and of postwar bombing. Place was thus utopian and reconciliatory — tangible, specific, individual, and particular and at the same time ideal, universal in potential, communal in scope. It was colonial in that proliferated geographic and social hierarchy while cultivating identities as

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[497] Stephanie Linning, "Aberdeen Named 'Most Dismal Town' in Scotland as Residents and Visitors Claim the Oil-Rich Town Is a 'Grey, Shambolic Mess' " *The Daily Mail*(2015), http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2938376/Aberdeen-named-dismal-town-Scotland.html.
[498] Realm, "The Carbuncle Awards."
[499] Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, ed. Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran (London: Boxtree, 2003). Hull was the 2003 winnter, though, not to worry, Cumbernauld is a runner up there as well

distinct as their places of origin. "Regeneration" is the contemporary word for this process at a time when places themselves create value or are valueless and when the colonial state is more properly the corporate one. This is the context in which the aesthetic of dismalness emerges.

Towns that are dismal — and crap, bleak, horrid, etc — are places where there is nothing to do and nowhere to go. The local council is corrupt or useless, and they have been ignored and neglected by the government. The factories and mines have closed down, and the stores on high street are boarded up or are all pound or charity shops (i.e. thrift stores). An ugly mall with giant car parks and a cinema opened sometime in the 90s and hasn't been maintained, but it's the only place to go. The town makes an attempt at attracting tourists and wealthy new residents, which makes it a dismal place to live either because it fails or, worse, because it succeeds. The town is provincial, or at least has an air of provincialism about it even if it's 30 minutes north of London (Luton) or an outlying suburb of Glasgow. It is visually marked by postwar modernization. Inhabitants are connected to the global through consumer culture, like everyone; they like to reference Bruce Springsteen songs, somewhat ironically. The council estates are eyesores and the youth are bored, drunk and violent, or these towns are closeminded places where race and class chauvinism are rampant, depending on your point of view. They are prone to cliché.

From New Towns to Crap Towns

Anthony Alexander, in his book *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, offers a somewhat flustered defense of the postwar New Town program, intended to prevent sprawl while providing housing to large numbers of people. [501] Inspired by Welwyn Garden City and garden city ideals overall, the Royal Commission on the Geographical

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[500] Sam Jones, "Crap Towns Returns to Rain More Scorn on Worst Parts of Britain," *The Guardian*(2012).
[501] One million people by 1976 Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, 20,49.

Distribution of the Industrial Population, chaired by Sir Montague Barlow and including

prominent architect-planners Frederic Osborn (then honorary secretary of the Garden City and

Town Planning Association) and Patrick Abercrombie (who created the plans for postwar

London) produced the "Barlow Report" advocating for 'New Towns' to manage an increasing

population.[502]

The mode of argument regarding New Towns (like Cumbernauld) is 'defense' because

they have been consistently ridiculed since they were introduced as soulless places full for mass-

produced buildings — places that are neither the country nor the city…failed places."[503] For

example the opening page of Jordison and Kieran's *Crap Towns* features an illustration by

'Gwyn' featuring a group of 1960s town planners, whose leader claims "if it looks like a bunker,

smells like a bunker, and allows sunlight in like a bunker: logic dictates-then-that it <u>is</u> a library,

or school, hospital, or town hall."[504] As argued in chapter two, since the postwar, planning and

architecture have well-defined roles in British political discourse, but technocratic arrogance is

seemingly held in universal disdain, even by the contemporary technocrats.

In any case, the terms of this discourse leave critics like Alexander with only so many

tools to understand what places are and what they can do:

> The Garden Cities Movement and the Modern Movement sought to reinvent the way that
> places worked. The New Towns were the hybrid of their ideas. Yet the planners and
> designers were unable to prevent wider social changes following in the wake of
> technological progress. Consumer society meant that the way of life resulting was not
> anticipated by the planners…the cultural change in the UK between the start and end of
> the 1950s, from looking to Swedish welfare socialism to American consumer capitalism
> partly explains this. The New Towns were planned in an effectively pre-consumerist age.
> Liberal capitalism inherently drove technological and thereby social progress. The
> Garden City/New Town model was found in an age that still expected stability.[505]

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[502] Ibid., 68.

[503] Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), 139.

[504] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 7.

Also to blame for Alexander and many others is the decision in 1979 to 'wind up' the

development corporations running the new towns and the general policies under the ensuing

conservative government. Early and mid-twentieth century, garden-city influenced planners like

Abercrombie, Osborn, Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford looked to the 'great' cities in human

history in order to systematize the construction of a future utopia that would solve the problems

of ruinous wars and industrial pollution and overcrowding.

Planners and politicians now look at the 'failures' of the New Towns — another kind of

ruin — and propose as solutions "eco-towns" (David Cameron) or new garden cities (Nick

Clegg) or, even less rationally, the Olympics (Ken Livingstone, etc.). Planners will now speak of

the importance of both location and global accessibility, of places that are "future-proofed"

while also "open" to the contingency of the information economy. "Publics" are reassured of

everyone's good intentions. Thus the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions

and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment feel compelled to continue to

define 'good' places for the purposes of development in a report entitled *By Design: Urban

Design in the planning system: towards better practice*.[506] They write:

> Character: a place with its own identity
> Continuity and enclosure: A place where public and private spaces are clearly
> distinguished.
> Quality of the public realm: A place with attractive and successful outdoor areas.
> Ease of movement: A place that is easy to get to and move through.
> Legibility: A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand
> Adaptability: A place that can change easily.
> Diversity: a place with variety and choice[507]

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[505] Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, 128.
[506] DETR and CABE, *By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice* (London:
Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Commission for Architecture and the Built
Environment, 2000). They include a *second* subtitle that produces a cliché bigger that the sum of its clichéd parts,
one presumes, in case anyone was going to take them seriously.
[507] Ibid.

There is a focus here on legibility, clarity and distinction (one particularly gendered in the focus on precisely demarcated public and private spaces). This is not so different than "the unique character of the New Towns [that] is shaped by their origins in the Garden City Movement and what it aimed to achieve," namely the "Edwardian vision that sought to combine the best features of both urban and rural environments, the town and the country."[508] That is, what is sought here is distinctness through relationality, and what is threatening is a collapse of those relations into indistinction and opacity.

These continuities, however, have been carried through the economic restructuring of late capitalism, and that is the more specific context in which "regeneration" is deployed as a spatial practice. Central to this restructuring (and arguably the main analytic focus of critical geography) is the "hollowing out" of nation-state infrastructure leading to, among other things, the proliferation of housing associations and Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations (QUANGOs)).[509] In reaction to the negativity of "hollowing out," this shift from nation-state government to multi-scalar, public-private governance has also been called a "filling in."

An early and prominent example of these new structures is the London Docklands Development Corporation, an unelected public-private organization that transformed a "derelict" part of London into Disneyland for finance capital, complete with monorail. Development Corporations work across regions and scales, meaning in practice that they supersede local councils and can raise funds more easily from private sources (termed "inward investment").

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[508] Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, 169.
[509] "hollowing out" can be defined as "the destatisation of the political system, most clearly reflected in the shift from government to governance; the internationalisation of policy communities and networks; and the denationalisation of the state, in which state political and economic capacities are being reconfigured territorially and functionally along a series of spatial levelsösubnational, national, supranational, and translocal". Jones et al., "'Filling in' the State: Economic Governance and the Evolution of Devolution in Wales," 337.

Ironically, this vehicle of "denationalization" (i.e. Development Corporations) were invented to develop the New Towns across the U.K.

Planning incorporates ostensibly new relationalities in this context; it is relied upon not just to organize spatial relationships but also to further a wide array of policy goals. As Philip Allmendinger and Graham Haughton write:

> The importance of the horizontal reworking of policy boundaries becomes unavoidable when looking at the contemporary practices of UK planning, where spatial strategies are now expected to provide the main spatial framework not simply for land-use plans but for economic development, transport, housing, and other sectoral strategies. Increasingly, then, spatial planning requires examining how land-use plans are both shaping and being shaped by other sectoral policies, such as housing, health, economic development, transport, environment, and social policy.[510]

"Horizontal" here means the connections between planning as a discrete practice to other "sectors." As the authors themselves later recognize, the scope of place-making has often expanded to including heath, housing, environment among many concerns; in fact, the creation of these relationships was and is central to defining a place as distinct and functional. What makes such "integration" seem novel in the contemporary British context is the absence of a "national spatial strategy" and in its place "various systems for subregional planning within and across regional boundaries, city-regions, and local development frameworks" that produce a "complex picture not simply of rescaling `down' to the regions but also across regions, creating new linkages and planning structures."[511] "Integration," then glosses the opposite — a maze of public and private agencies governing overlapping "soft spaces" through the idioms of planning and place-creation.[512]

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[510] Phillip Allmendinger and Graham Haughton, "The Fluid Scales and Scope of Uk Spatial Planning," *Environment and Planning A* 39, no. 6 (2007): 1480.
[511] Ibid., 1479.
[512] Heley writes "In the case of the 'English spatial planning project', Haughton et al. call attention to the rise of 'soft spaces' of governance (prominent examples include the Thames Gateway growth area to the east of London), 'fuzzy boundaries' (used to define functional regions which do not conform to known political or administrative

These policy goals and their realization through 'integrated' planning approaches quite explicitly relates to how value is produced and exchanged in the neoliberal economy. Relational places collaborate through new planning jurisdictions but also compete with each other to "pin down" some part of the global economy by producing employment (in services or in 'knowledge' sectors), places and opportunities for consumption, and increased attractiveness to tourists and outside investors. As Jones et al. write that among policy-makers "attention is drawn to the fact that a range of nonstate and noneconomic factors, such as subnational social, cultural, and institutional forms and supports, are needed in order to hold down or embed increasingly global economic processes."[513]

Place-for-production gives way to place-for-consumption, and, like Britain as a whole, faces 'outward'. A place's value, then, becomes dependent on its attraction to the "creative-class" information economy with its creative-capital.[514] Abigail Gilmore thus writes that "New Labour's cultural policy expanded aspirations, which explicitly signaled culture's utility to a range of policy goals – including regeneration, economic development, social inclusion and health. These became explicitly tied to places through the regionalisation agenda," and that therefore places "aim to attract arts participants as tourists and improve place image, regional competitiveness and differentiation."[515] Gilmore somewhat optimistically looks specifically to "crap towns" to diagnose low cultural participation and engagement in "contrast to a more prevalent regard for the 'creative cities' or 'capitals of culture', imagined and/or designated."

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units) and new post-devolution spaces of planning (subregions, city-regions). At the same time, however, they also maintain that the so-called double-devolution in planning, where power and resources pass down from newly created territorial forms to local government, localities and neighbourhoods is 'largely illusionary' and that there is still strong central control." Jesse Heley, "Soft Spaces, Fuzzy Boundaries and Spatial Governance in Post-Devolution Wales," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 4 (2013): 1330.
[513] Jones, 2005 #803@340}
[514] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (Turtleback Books, 2003).

However these very measures of cultural engagement point to the contingent and appropriative ways in which place as such is valued within contemporary policy frameworks.

The different ways in which value is accounted for can be seen as councils respond to the claims of *Crap Towns.* For example, the West Lancashire District Council writes in defense of Skelmersdale (46 on the original crap towns list), "the Skelmersdale described in the article is not the town that we recognise" noting that "millions of pounds of public and private sector investment have..improved residential areas" and that "the artworks on roundabouts attract investment and improve the image of the town."[516] This was in response to resident Josh White's criticism of one artwork, a "£25,000, 18-foot monolith" that "apart from its purple colour, was almost identical to the monolilth in *2001: A Space Odyssey.*"[517] The rhetorical claim from the council that they do not even recognize the 'regenerated' parts of town as crap might be taken literally: there seems to be a relative *incommensurability* between the outward-facing, relational, pinning-the-global-to-the-local, place-making discourse of planning policy and the dismal tone of residents such as White. Thus for the council, regeneration only needs to continue and modernize the original New Town planning aims because the town is still not in its "planned 'completed state'," and if it is to "continue to progress and to fulfill the sub-regional function originally envisaged for it, rather than slip into a slow decline because it has been starved of resources, it is important that regeneration initiatives are funded and commenced as soon as possible."[518] For White, on the other hand, its dismalness was encoded in its planned modernization and Skelmersdale absolutely achieved its final "completed state" as a "a concrete holding centre for Liverpool's working class" soon after it was constructed: "40,000 people,

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[515] Abigail Gilmore, "Cold Spots, Crap Towns and Cultural Deserts: The Role of Place and Geography in Cultural Participation and Creative Place-Making," *Cultural Trends* 22, no. 2 (2013): 87.
[516] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 21,22.
[517] Ibid., 21.

many too poor to get a car, were trapped in a sinister concrete playground without so much as a rail link, hospital, or county court."[519] To this, the council can only respond: "the spurious comments made about the people of Skelmersdale are insulting and inaccurate. Also, there have never been any riots." [520]

Dismalness signals an aesthetic cynicism to ideas are presented in the contemporary idiom of "regeneration." As Jordison said of the 2013 sequel to the original crap towns book (*Crap Towns Returns: Back by Unpopular Demand*), "I think now it all feels a bit more raw… In 2003, there was a real hope that towns could possibly make a difference and there was money floating around and regeneration was a possibility rather than a sad joke."[521] Dismalness dwells in the non-dramatic, yet total, collapse of place's relationalities, materially and ideologically. It is an aesthetic that rolls its eyes at the pretensions of place-making without suggestions for or even access to alternative perspectives. It is non-dramatic because it is an ambient energy that cannot be converted into identity or organized for a politics, whether reactionary or revolutionary. In fact, compared to this serious work, complaints of dismalness are probably not worth discussing.

Dismal Regenerations

Of the New Towns that made the original top 50 crap towns list, the main complaints seem to be modernization as such, rather than of any particular type. Thus James Oliver laments, "Peterborough was a small town expanded by the New Town initiative of the 1960s. Whatever

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[518] Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, 113., West Lancashire District Council qtd in ibid., 142-43.
[519] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 20.
[520] Ibid., 21. This last bit seems to be added just for good measure, as no one seems to have claimed that the town experienced riots.

Charm this modest fenland community once had was soon buried under fifty million tons of concrete."[522] Similarly the editors describe Yate as a typical "modern English town," meaning of course "ugly lumps of concrete clustering around a hideous shopping mall."[523] One commentator, Simon Hacker, makes confused contradictory statements about Yate; one the one hand "the vast 1960s proto-newtown of Yate once enjoyed a claim to being the suicide capital of Western Europe, until the inhabitants acquiesced to the local anaesthetic of a revamped Tesco and brand new Lidl Mart" but on the other it is still "wrist-slittingly forlorn."[524]

In fact, these seem to be places that are not only not "pre-consumerist" but where the banality of consumerism thrives, especially in form of grocery stores. Modernization in the 1970s for South Woodham Ferrers meant, according to Kelsa Smith, that it was to be remodeled into a " 'Riverside Country Town' which was 'The Place To Be'… expansion followed, and now it has been transformed into a dormitory-town Legoland, only without any of the fun rides….The centre-piece of South Woodham is in fact the Asda Clock Tower, where heathen residents go to worship the God of Groceries."[525] The same is true of the aforementioned Cumbernauld, surely in the champions league of dismal towns, where Vinnie Brownlow remarks that "you know it's bad when Asda becomes a local night spot."[526]

This rhetoric is unsettling for councils that would see shopping centers as job-creating assets. Perhaps there are those who take a more negative view, conceding that M. Bailey says of Basingstoke, that "as with the majority of modern towns, there is the high street cluster of pubs all within puking or bottle-throwing distance of each other," but who exaggerate ordinary

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[521] Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran, *Crap Towns Returns: Back by Unpopular Demand*, ed. Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran (London: Quercus Publishing, 2013)., Jones, "Crap Towns Returns to Rain More Scorn on Worst Parts of Britain."
[522] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 80.
[523] Ibid., 23.
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid., 46.

dismalness into the full-blown, sentimental, moral panic of "Broken Britain," just making it worse for everyone.[527] Conversely, perhaps there is something to be celebrated in these dismal places that do not combine the best elements of town and country but instead muddle them together into indistinction that escapes the normative dictates of *place*; however, such a reparative view might be questioned by the Luton resident who described his city of important transport links as "the brick and iron temple to global pollution."[528] This is especially true when the former are likely part of the 'Chipping Norton Set ("a microcosm of everything that is wrong with the country, now with extra expensive cheese.") whereas the latter might populate Islington ("a stepping stone to the next staging post in the middle class diaspora (Hampstead) where they return to their natural foods, accents and dress-codes.")[529]

It is unfortunately difficult to refer crap town residents to the pleasures of everyday life when the phenomenology of Basingstoke can be summed up by "Andy" as "M3, carpark, carpark, roundabout, carpark, roundabout, carpark, tart, roundabout M3. Takes about three hours."[530] Perhaps this thought should be taken further, however. Perhaps dismalness is place at its most radically non-identitarian; in this case welcome to Hinchley Wood, which is "only a place to live in the sense that it connects you to somewhere else…if you want to live inside a space of radical indeterminacy and non-being then Hinchley Wood is the place for you."[531] The

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[526] Ibid., 147.

[527] Ibid., 111.

[528] Roya Nikkah, "Ugly, Grey, Depressing: Why Luton Really Is the Worst Place in Britain," *The Telegraph*(2004), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4193713/Ugly-grey-depressing-why-Luton-really-is-the-worst-place-in-Britain.html.

[529] Julian Gavaghan, "Do You Live in a 'Crap Town'? Prepare to Be Surprised by the Latest Nominations for the Dubious Honour," *Yahoo! News*(2013), https://uk.news.yahoo.com/-crap-towns--revealed--david-cameron-and-jeremy-clarkson-in-chipping-norton-set-105306518.html#0fS0l45., Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 86.

[530] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 111.

[531] Ibid., 12.

only significant downside is that such indeterminancy also "sucks the life out of you, like a mock-tudor vampire."[532]

Dismalness is a quality frequently applied to the consumer fortunes of a given town. Either the town lacks any shopping options ("Rothesay is a town of dilapidated buildings with no shops, no nice restaurants, filthy pubs & no facilities to enrich a life. All these factors lead to a malignant oppressive atmosphere of depression & simmering animosity. In short, a hole of Hell"), has housed its retail stores in bleak architecture (of Reading's Butt's Center: "a 1970s concrete shopping complex designed to attract gluesniffers from throughout the world") or, perhaps worst of all, bases its depressing existence on the "regeneration" brought by such stores ("the Fish-stench-ridden indoor market has recently been threatened by [Barrow-in-Furness's] greatest achievement — Debenhams. The youth can now aspire to working in the department store, thus doubling their list of aims in life next to working in McDonalds.)[533]

These diverse comments are united in the devolving geography of late capitalism in Britain. Many crap towns are defined by their mine and factory closures, the ensuing rise of knowledge and service economies and the contemporary shift into "post-employment." This has produced a spatial contradiction between the smallness of these places and the global economy, one that prompts scholar Jim Tomlinson to write that "this process of de-industrialization begat de-globalization. With the exception of a quite narrow range of financial services, manufacturing is the most globalized sector of the economy, so that as its role diminished, so did the economy's direct exposure to external forces through product markets."[534] The deindustrialization has resulted in places that feel themselves to be backwaters, boring and isolated places; yet the

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[532] Ibid.
[533] Realm, "The Carbuncle Awards.", Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 42, 16.

expression of this isolation in the form of dismalness often focuses on the products of the global

economy that inundate and define these towns and the physical links to a transportation network

that renders them non-places. Thus, of the reigning number-four crap town, Southhampton:

"grotty post-war developments characterise this town…it says something when the biggest

tourist attraction is the shopping centre."[535] The more vivid a town's dismalness, the more

indistinct it becomes.

Whatever it says when the biggest attraction of a town is the shopping center is said more

forcefully when shopping centers attempt to define themselves as towns. In 1996 the the

Department of the Environment issued planning guidelines aimed to restrict the construction of

regional shopping centers outside of established towns, with the result that the corporations that

own these centers and malls advocate for their spaces as the center of community life. As

Michelle Lowe recounts, Merry Hill mall, outside of Birmingham, made the case for it for it

being a town center on the grounds that:

> People on the ground have started to use the three elements together and perceive the area
> as a town centre because that' s how it operates. People go shopping at Merry Hill, they
> go out for the evening and they work there. They'll go to the Waterfront in the evening,
> or work there and then go out it' s the major leisure destination in the Borough. You've
> got Brierley Hill, a district centre, the library, the leisure centre. People are using it as
> such without it being called a town centre.[536]

Merry Hill was denied such a status, and Nigel Hugill, the then-CEO of real estate company

Chelsfield that owed the mall at the time was not happy: "an argument that says to residents of

Dudley it' s OK to develop in central Birmingham, it's OK to develop in the centre of

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[534] Jim Tomlinson, "De-Globalization and Its Significance: From the Particular to the General," *Contemporary British History* 26, no. 2 (2012): 217.

[535] Telegraph, "Crap Towns Returns: Top Ten Worst Places in Britain," *The Telegraph*(2013), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/picturegalleries/10360428/Crap-Towns-Returns-top-ten-worst-places-in-Britain.html?frame=2694573.

[536] Sean Nethercott, qtd in Michelle Lowe, "Britain's Regional Shopping Centres: New Urban Forms?," *Urban Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000): 268.

Wolverhampton, but it's not OK to develop here is unsustainable."[537] Lowe in fact argues that

the denial of Merry Hill was an "attempt to preserve the existing urban hierarchy at the expense

of the newcomer — Merry Hill."[538]

This was presumably made all the worse when Wolverhampton, apparently a part of an

"urban hierarchy," was made into a city in 2001.[539] Resident Michael Thompson describes the

scene: "As the nation shrugged, TV pictures were beamed into every home, showing

Wolverhampton's town crier…announcing this momentous event to at least six interested

residents gathered on Dudley Street in the pissing rain."[540] Merry Hill remains aspirational in this

regard.

The consumerism of shopping centers seems both grim and unavoidable, and as they

become town centers they also become cathected with all the excesses of capitalism. For

example Portsmouth's Tricorn shopping center, "surely the ugliest concrete monstrosity on the

face of the earth," itself captures the "gnawing, dripping feeling of dread, regret and panic that

epitomizes the town."[541] The incommensurability between dismalness and regeneration in *Crap*

Towns is often unwittingly reinforced by the officials who write in defense of their towns. For

example David Milward, in charge of media affairs for Reading, writes that "Reading is one of

the UK's top ten retail destinations, and is the only place outside London's Oxford Street where

you will find the country's top four department stores in one location — Debenhams, House of

Fraser, John Lewis and Marks & Spencer."[542] One imagines that someone like Milward registers

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[537] qtd in ibid., 269.
[538] Ibid.
[539] There are no particular criteria or additional benefits for becoming a city, yet competition for the appellation is still strong..
[540] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 79.
[541] Ibid., 100. The editors add here that "Portsmouth is currently the field for the sad yet ridiculous 'kebab war'. Several traders have been killed because of competition to land a prime spot on Portsmouth's meat street."
[542] Ibid., 42.

the excitement that comes with the opening of Marks & Spencer, but not, however, the deep

abjection of being excited by a Marks & Spencer.

One could say that such contemporary pessimism is indicative of a nostalgia for a Fordist

economy or even a mythical Britain, green and imperial. However, though a post-industrial

sense of abandonment and bait-and-switch pervades *Crap Towns*, anything resembling nostalgia

is difficult to find. Perhaps the closest are Charlie Hungerford and Sean Arnold's comments on

Stockport, near Manchester: "much of Engels' research for Marx's Communist Manifesto was

based on the appalling working conditions in the town's hat mills. And to be honest it's gone

downhill ever since."[543]   Towns would not be dismal if they could take comfort in some

previous moment or ideal image, especially when 'history' is presented in terms similar to and

often concomitant with 'regneration'.[544]

As if it were not enough that these towns are so depressing, they must also be British.

The non-particularity of dismalness is echoed by the editors in their introduction when they write

"Britain is crap. We can't lay any claim to the originality of the idea for this book. It was

already out there, staring us in the face."[545] Comparisons with the past can often reinforce

present dismalness, but not in way that nostalgia establishes temporal horizons and the promise

of return. Thus, when editor Sam Jordison writes that Morecambe, incidentally the inspiration

for the idea of crap towns, is "where a silent and grey day comes as a blessed relief from the

gales of black depression that generally batter its desolate promenade," he adds that he "can't

possibly think of why anyone would ever go to Morecambe, unless of course they're…attracted

to misery and squalor in the same way hearty moor-walking Victorians used to be attracted to

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[543] Ibid., 96.
[544] This is incidentally evident in the local council's characteristically misguided defense of Stockport: "Some mills we do still have — but they're being turned into unusual attractions like the Hat Works, Britain's only museum of hats and hat wearing." ibid.

graveyards and consumption."[546] Consumption, here, is slightly more romantic than the mere

dismalness of everyday squalor.[547]

Contemporary dismalness is of the moment because it in fact abjures typical temporal

horizons. Probably the most famous anti-planning poem, such that it is a genre of sorts, is John

Betjeman's 1937 poem "Slough," which opens with a call for war: "Come friendly bombs and

fall on Slough!"[548] This places many contemporary observers in the disagreeable position of

agreeing with John Betjeman. For the editors of *Crap Towns*, this poem was "blathered [by]

former Poet Laureate John Betjeman; in between attempting to rescue the Euston Arch and

penning his banal odes…JB was a bit of a fruitcake, but he knew a shit hole when he saw it and

ever since he wrote his famous poem about the town, Slough has been a by-word for failed urban

planning and concrete ugliness."[549] The first and last stanzas of "Slough" are as follows:

> Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough!
> It isn't fit for humans now,
> There isn't grass to graze a cow.
> Swarm over, Death!
> …
> Come, friendly bombs and fall on Slough
> To get it ready for the plough.
> The cabbages are coming now;
> The earth exhales.[550]

Putting aside the advanced metrical arrangement and innovative rhymes, this poem is a reaction

to modernity that believes to understand its past and potential future; in short, cows and

cabbages. Bombs did fall on Slough, and it was rebuilt into a town of new housing, Europe's

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[545] Ibid., 8. They add that when they came up with the idea of asking for resident-nominated crap towns in the *Idler* magazine "Hundreds of Idlers wrote back to us, delighted at the opportunity have a go at their unhappy homes."
[546] Ibid., 140.
[547] Though, as Grace Kline observes about Tintern, "it must be said that Wordsworth's famous 'Lines' were composed 'A Few Miles Above' it. He could stand the godforsaken town either." ibid., 52.
[548] John Betjeman, "Slough," Wordpress, https://exlaodicea.wordpress.com/2008/04/03/slough-by-john-betjeman/.
[549] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 30.
[550] Betjeman, "Slough."

largest industrial park and in 1975 the iconically unpopular Brunel bus station.[551] This bus

station was featured in the British version of the television program *The Office,* set in Slough*,* a

mockumentary about the spirit-crushing modern work environment, which further 'cemented' the

town's reputation. The council has since demolished the bus station and replaced the

neighboring Tesco with a Tesco Extra "hypermarket" (more cabbages), among other changes.

Dan Johsnon remarks that "it seemingly takes an age to drive through (or is that just time

slowing down)."[552] It may have always been this way for Slough, however, a medieval place-

name meaning "a place or hole in a road or way filled with wet mud or mire," or more simply, a

"muddy quagmire," and is only figuratively "a state or condition (esp. of moral degradation) in

which a person, etc., sinks or has sunk."[553] Defenses of the town fall short of the English ideal of

an earth 'exhaling': "Emma Cornelius, 36, who works for an American communications

company in Slough, said that geographic satisfaction was all relative. 'If you had a choice of

Slough or anywhere else in the area, Slough would be the last town you'd come to,' she said. 'But

compared to Watford, it's fabulous.' Or, as 16-year-old Diane Cotterell said: 'It's not the worst

place in Britain; there are worse places, like Liverpool.' "[554]

Collapse and Neocolonialism in Rachel Trezise's South Wales Valleys

In Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna Morgan's stepmother Hester receives a letter

from Anna's Uncle Bo in which he writes: "We hardly ever hear from Anna. She's a strange

child. She sent us a postcard from Blackpool or some such town and all she said on it was, 'This

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[551] The bus station was named after early nineteenth-century engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, recently played by
Kenneth Branagh in the opening ceremony to the London 2012 London Olympics.
[552] Jordison and Kieran, *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Crap Worst Places to Live in the Uk*, 30.
[553] Oxford English Dictionary, *"Slough, N.1"* (Oxford University Press)., Sarah Lyall, "A Town Trying Not to Live
up to Its Name," *The New York Times*(2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/21/world/europe/21slough.html.
[554] Lyall, "A Town Trying Not to Live up to Its Name."

is a very windy place,' which doesn't tell us much about how she is getting on."[555] In fact, if there was ever anything that would unite the subjects of the commonwealth it would be this precise sentiment. The half-Welsh Rhys, born in Dominca, would traverse provincialities, spending the last twenty years of her life in a town called Cheriton Fitzpaine, in Devon, that to her was "a dull spot which even drink can't enliven much." Dull as it was, she presumably preferred this place to the Wales that her father had escaped.

Though from a different era and context, these moments of deadpan dismalness in Rhys' writing bear a resemblance to contemporary Welsh writer Rachel Trezise. Trezise comes from the Rhondda valley in south Wales, known for its coal mines and castles — the architecture of a colonialism.   Now the economy revolves around services and tourism, not just of the castles but of the mines as well, such as Blaenavon, a UNESCO World Heritage site where one can take tours led by former miners.[556]

At the same time, Trezise's writing explores the negotiation of a postcolonial identity within the ideological infrastructure of contemporary planning, whose neocolonial character reconfigures the usual temporalities of nostalgic nationalism. Ironically, such spatial policy not only coexists with but operates through the "filling in" occasioned by legislative devolution (much like the current trend toward "localism"). Thus Jones et al. write "the National Council can be viewed as an example of the concern within contemporary policies to secure economic prosperity through supply-side policies in order to create a competitive advantage under

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[555] J. Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (W.W. Norton, 1982), 61.
[556] "Taking all of these authentic elements together, and it is easy to see how this is one of the prime areas in the world where the full social, economic and technological process of industrialisation through iron and coal production can be studied and understood."

globalisation. The National Council is clearly an organisation that seeks to enable Wales to `embed' or `pin down' global economic processes."[557]

They refer specifically to Education and Learning Wales (ELWa), a job training program of unclear jurisdiction and effectiveness, that seems to use the veneer of of semi-conscious national identification — "Wales trying to do something for Wales" — to coat a Whitehallesque, public/private corporate ethos. The resulting low-morale dismalness is thus unsurprising: one employee admits that "I think at the moment, we've got a reputation as a bad employer, because people have seen the redundancy notices and they think we're a bad employer," which is in contrast to the lofty goals of one "high-level Assembly politician" who says that "I think people ought to be proud of who they work for. They don't want to go down the pub and then hear the conversation turn to ELWa and then slink off into a corner…I think in terms of that corporate identity, I think that's very important."[558] The "corporate" identity and character of devolution-era programs mark the "fuzzy" non-boundary between planning policy in Wales and as it functions elsewhere.

Thus the Wales Spatial Plan of 2004, subsequently updated in 2008, repeats, in a familiar glossary, concerns about building place within a global economy. For example, it reconstitutes and rebrands regions within Wales. As Harris and Hooper write:

> The plan defines a vision for south east Wales — which it portrays as 'The Capital Network' — as 'An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life — international yet distinctively Welsh'. It is an area that is to be integrated functionally and better networked to both raise international competitiveness and reduce disparities within the area…yet even here, identity is reduced simply to about being recognised in the wider world.[559]

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[557] Jones et al., "'Filling in' the State: Economic Governance and the Evolution of Devolution in Wales," 342. They also note that the "success, or otherwise, of the process of filling in could, we believe, have direct implications for public attitudes towards the broader devolution project." ibid., 341.
[558] Ibid., 353,52.
[559] Neil Harris and Alan Hooper, "Redefining 'the Space That Wales': Place, Planning, and the Wales Spatial Plan," in *Territory, Identity and Spatial Planning: Spatial Governance in a Fragmented Nation*, ed. Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger (Milton Park: Routledge, 2006), 144.

Innovative, integrated, networked, competitive, above all international yet distinctively something — these are essential to the discourse of relational place-making in the conditions of first-world late capitalism, and they are notably not constrained or subverted but furthered through the bureaucratic devolution.

The "new" region of "south east Wales" lumps together Cardiff and the ex-mining, post-employment valleys where Trezise grew up, perhaps for the purpose of 'reducing disparities', but with the result being the next iteration of the center-periphery relationships which always structured the south Wales valleys as a place. Some of the resulting dynamics are discussed in *Dial M for Merthyr*, Trezise's nonfiction rockumentary about the post-hardcore band Midasuno from Merthyr Tydfil.[560] Concerning the up but mostly down fate of The Pop Factory studio in Rhondda, she writes that record company

> Avanti…moved its production facilities into the Corona pop factory at the gateway in the valley with the aid of a massive pre-Millenium grant, borne by Objection One funding. The purpose of the money spilling out of the EU coffers was to go some way to improving the poorest areas of Wales, the South Wales Valleys being the biggest of the. And at a time when the manufacturing industry was quickly thinning, but Welsh pop music was increasingly successful, the emergence of a venture making claims to train and employ local people in the art of music making and recording seemed like a perfectly sound idea. The building had been derelict for over twenty years.[561]

The Pop Factory thus reoppened in 2000, "our phoenix emerging out of all the decaying shit" of the valleys.[562] From the perspective of contemporary planning, this would might be the quintessence of making a place by "embedding" or "pinning down" the global (specifically "global" capital) to a locality; as a bonus, it involves something "creative" and "cultural."

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[560] Rachel Trezise, *Dial M for Merthyr: On Tour with Midasuno* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007). A book which contains dismal moments but ultimately yields to the generic requirements of music journalism, namely redemption-via-teenage-kicks

[561] Ibid., 104.

However, Trezise writes that "two years had passed when I began to wonder exactly what it was The Pop Factory did," aside from filming a staid television show featuring various bands: it was "exciting fro a twelve-year-old…[but] hardly life-affirming."[563] Aside from that, it seemed the studio had attracted the attention of the above-mentioned Education and Learning Wales:

> Elwa, Wales' tax-funded education body, awarded Avanti £4 million in 2002 to open an MP3 café in a derelict supermarket close to The Pop Factory site. It was intended to attract disengaged young people back to practical learning and would have web design photography and mixing facilities. Later it would emerge from an official audit report that Elwa had paid out the money in advance to sit unused in Avanti's bank account, the premises yet to be renovated; people yet to be trained.[564]

The predictable bathos of such contemporary histories are perhaps characteristic of dismalness; New Labour self improvement initiatives would be upsettingly neoliberal if they were not also so unsurprising. In fact, perhaps such an overused term such as "neoliberal" is perfect because it describes everything and nothing at the same time, like the company representative that Trezise interviews for *The Big Issue* who claims (in her paraphrase) that "The Pop Factory was a business, a brand, like 'Coca Cola', and while he had no intention of closing the door on Valleys people, profit was chief."[565]

It is difficult to know what is more dismal about this — the use of ELWa funds for ostensible profit, the non-existence of that profit, or the comparison between a mostly unused recording studio in provincial Wales to the global-par-excellence Coca Cola. All of which is to say nothing of the "yet unfinished MP3 café."[566] This may be dismal, but as such it is also not the end of the world, cause for revolution: "The Pop Factory is six years old now and anyone

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[562] Ibid., 105.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid.
[565] Ibid., 106.

who wants to go inside the building can, providing they pay the entrance fee, but it still often seems as though it isn't there at all.[567]

The Pop Factory's ambiguous presence makes it at home in Trezise's writing. Her stories can be described as postcolonial, though of a windy variety, one which is unable to base itself in dramatic temporal horizons and so attends to routines of bored violence. The short fiction in Rachel Trezise's collection *Fresh Apples* are in fact marked by opposing moods. On the one hand, there is a consistent description of the stagnancy and stillness of claustrophobic, provincial Welsh towns, which relate themselves to the outside world only though consumer culture and contemporary media. They are detemporalized in that they neither refer to a (nostalgic) Welsh past nor do they seem to have a sense of futurity; they are a dead present. On the other hand, out of the claustrophobia of ordinary existence comes figures of excess, especially for young characters who counter boredom with drugs, sex, violence, or often, sexual violence.

This is certainly the case in the titular story, in which the narrator sexually assaults a 16 year old girl, Sarah, with cerebral palsy and then attempts but fails to commit suicide by laying on train tracks (he fails the train passes on the adjacent track). The violence in this story is half-witted and habitual, merging into the atemporal ordinariness of the Rhymney Valley in which it is set. The teenagers in this story wait, deferring their desire for one another into small acts of violence, like throwing "stone chippings…at the Escorts when they went past, their techno music jumping" out of jealousy.[568] When Holly decides to start a forest fire in order to draw the attention of firefighters — "proper men" — the narrator makes the immediately-mocked claim that "we should be proud of this mountain, Hol. They haven't got mountains like this in England.

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[566] Ibid., 107.
[567] Ibid., 106.
[568] Rachel Trezise, *Fresh Apples* (Text Publishing Company, 2007), 3.

And you kill all the nature."[569] This seems to reference the kind of nostalgic Welsh nationalism of Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* (1931), which Trezise has specifically criticized, or even the saccharine provincial pride evoked in Christopher Monger's 1995 film *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain*.[570] That it is not only out of place among these characters but also awkward and somewhat forced in the narrative mark a turn away from these clichéd temporal and spatial figurations.

They are replaced by nothing, however, but this cycle of boredom and violence, by the "look of helplessness on the fireman's face while he sweated over the ferns, Holly asking him to fuck her. He knew that as son as he'd gone we'd start it again so he'd have to come back, sweating again."[571] The repetition of images like these — comical, deadpan, pointless — are equal parts tongue-in-cheek and heart-sinking, perfectly appropriate for submission to the nearest dismal towns competition. They are also waves of affectual flatness that wear away at a sense of narrative conflict, that there is anything in particular at stake, so that subsequent events — sexual assault, attempted suicide — slide into the ordinariness of existence.

Sexual assault, abuse and violence is a kind of leitmotif for this collection of stories, as it was for her first novel, the semi-autobiographical *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000). It is through the omnipresence and inevitability of such violence that Trezise maps a social geography of the dismal south Welsh valleys.

The short story is an appropriate form for this dismalness in that their brevity contains the correct assumption that not much will happen; instead what is presented are the outlines of a scenario and some characterization. "But Not Really" is a story about Jacqueline, an attractive thirty-three year old real estate agent with an extremely wealthy father who is being

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[569] Ibid., 4,3.
[570] With Hugh Grant starring as the said Englishman

blackmailed with revenge porn by her ex-husband Graeme and his teenage girlfriend Gemma.

Any drama this may cause within the story is efficiently resolved in the last half-page, as Graeme

is sent to prison thanks to the wealth and influence of Jacqueline's father.   Jacqueline has a

concern for appearances whose violence is structural: "It was easy at first: sex is the easiest thing

in the world. Girls are preened for it from an early age; heels to make your legs look better,

lipstick to make your mouth look as red as your cunt, taught to smile in the face of adversity.

There's a woman faking an orgasm somewhere in Wales right now."[572] The specificity of Wales

seems to bring the universality of the point home, as if to say, 'and that's just in Wales, that small

place'. However, Wales is also synonymous here (and elsewhere in these stories) with a lack of

escape, the interpellations of foreign fashion magazines notwithstanding.

Still Jacqueline thinks to herself that "beauty is like money. It means nothing when you

have it and everything when you don't."[573] For Graeme, Jacqueline's sexual appeal is

coterminous with her wealth, and he has a violent desire for and resentment of both. The

videotapes, involving "strangers [who] mounted her like an animal" and plenty of cocaine, are a

means to both during his marriage and now after, as he attempts to blackmail Jacqueline.[574]

Gemma, his new, fifteen-year old girlfriend suggests that Graeme does not control the terms of

this resentment-as-desire that was not fulfilled as the tapes turned Jacqueline into a "submissive

blonde wreck with a twenty pound note rolled to her face," nor would they be now that he was

still "obsessed," a suggestion met with a punch to the face.[575] In *Fresh Apples* sexual frustration

and violence is a metonym for the material and social circumstances of these valleys, "where

[571] Trezise, *Fresh Apples*, 5.
[572] Ibid., 23.
[573] Ibid., 13-14.
[574] Ibid., 23.
[575] Ibid., 23,16.

poverty surrounded you like a neck brace."[576] It is a violence that seems to always be swirling

and circling back in on itself in unpredictable ways.

The means why which an outside enters into the valley only reinforces its claustrophobia

and isolation. Gemma imagines herself as Tom Jones' daughter because "it was nice to think

[her father] could be Tom Jones, nice to think she was that close to an easy life, nice to think she

could snap her fingers and be in a Los Angeles pool party away from this council estate."[577]

Here we have the unlikely case of a contemporary fifteen year old fantasizing about the benefits

of being the child of Tom Jones.[578]

In addition to aspirations such as these, Gemma supports Graeme's attempts to blackmail

Jacqueline into giving up her house, which she "won" in the divorce, as the latter's wealthy

father, a capitalist caricature, tells her.[579] These winnings are similarly claustrophobic for

Jacqueline, however, ruined by the trauma of her marriage, with "ghosts watching her… [and]

breathing out sick and stale dioxide."[580] The parts of the outside that enter reinforce the

smallness of the interior, for example the "clicking of women's stilettos, half litres of vodka and

white rum hidden in the secret pockets of their leather handbags, those few precious hours set

aside for pure fun, Saturday night."[581] This image is familiar enough that it can enter

Jacqueline's home only through the sounds of the stilettos on pavement, women playing out the

expectations of gender in a provincial space and with the assistance of alcohol. These sounds are

matched by a piercing light: "however tight she screwed her face, her skin wrinkling like fruit,

the evening light penetrated it, as though she had pin prick holes in her eyelids like the holes in

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[576] Ibid., 17.
[577] Ibid., 19.
[578] Jones does have an 'illegitimate' child whom he has refused to meet, and did move to Los Angeles to avoid tax rates in Britain.
[579] Trezise, *Fresh Apples*, 18.
[580] Ibid., 20.
[581] Ibid.

the lining of her nose [from cocaine abuse]."[582] Penetration is what marks a relation between inside and outside so that neither are autonomous or the escapes that they are imagined to be. The relation is instead collapsed, with a variety of violences as a remainder.

The relationality of place is more explicitly posed in stories that feature travel outside of the south Wales valleys, even just to Cardiff. Here too, the physical accessibility of an outside world and its overdetermination in culture in fact reinforces and extends the provincialism of the valleys. In "Coney Island," New York is both archetypical and surreal: "To live and hardly ever leave a place where the world was something that happened elsewhere, invariably meant that elsewhere was Manhattan, the setting for a million, zillion films, the setting for a real proper life."[583] The protagonist of this story, Meaghan, has run away from a violent and stifling home, and at first "bought a bus ticket to London because that's what runaways on Coronation Street did."[584] Meaghan has occasion to be in New York because she is carrying a suitcase full of money for her new boyfriend, Denny. She is to meet with Denny in Coney Island, a place which reminds her of a Welsh reproduction: "the counterfeit Coney Island was a fun-fair in Porthcawl, where a younger boy from her school had been killed on the faulty water chute."[585] Upon reflecting, however, "she didn't understand now why one was real the one was false. The New York version wasn't any grander than the Welsh one."[586]

The diffusion of place-names and the overdetermination of the metropole is characteristic of a colonialism that creates spatial hierarchies. This perception remains and is even extended in the postcolonial, as history becomes genre. This is reminiscent of Samuel Selvon's The Lonely Londoners:

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[582] Ibid.
[583] Ibid., 91.
[584] Ibid., 85.
[585] Ibid., 91.

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he using the names of the places like they mean big romance, as if to say 'I was in Oxford Street' have more prestige than if he just say 'I was up the road'…Jesus Christ, when he say 'Charing cross,' when he realize that is he, Sir Galahad, who going there, near that place that everybody in the world know about (it even have the name in the dictionary) he feel like a new man.[587]

In "Coney Island," however, the spatial relationship is susceptible to collapse, for example as Meaghan realizes that the New York and Wales Coney Islands are not so distinct.   The result of this collapse does not reorder old colonial relationships, however. Rather what is left are implicit and explicit violences, the hierarchy without place as such. Meaghan narrowly avoids assault while waiting for Denny, dying in Coney Island "like the boy from her school" except from murder instead of the water chute.[588] Instead she is able to deliver the drug money from the Welsh valleys to the global metropolis, where it will be used to purchase firearms to take back to Wales.

The claim that towns in contemporary provincial Wales are postcolonial is not simply based on national and ethnic repression from some entity known as England since the thirteenth century; rather, they are provincialized due the economic and social relations they have to metropolitan late capital.

The haziness of producing identity in this context is explored in "The Magician," a story in which a character named Naomi wants "concrete truths."[589] She is in fact referring to a possible affair with an Englishman named Jack who is, again, a drug dealer, but this is also applicable to her search for identity as she and her friends take a weekend trip to Cornwall to attend a rave. Naomi, whose ancestors immigrated from Cornwall to the coal mines in Wales, seeks an alternate identity and "seeing as she hated Wales so much she thought some part of her

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[586] Ibid.
[587] S. Selvon and K. Ramchand, *The Lonely Londoners* (Longman, 2010), 84.
[588] Trezise, *Fresh Apples*, 93.

must be left here [in Cornwall]. She wanted to look for it in the harbours of fishing villages, in the surf, in the tin, in the watercolours of St. Ives, even in a rave on Bodmin Moor."[590]

The distinction between the identity she refuses and the one she may avow is unclear, however. For example, what she actually finds in Cornwall, after an "unimaginative stretch of the east Devon motorway," is that she is still confined by her "claustrophobic circle of friends," though among others, like a "skin-head whose facial zits were about to burst."[591] The idea of a weekend escape is itself shrunken and made to be in part hopeless and in part ridiculous. "Welshness" is undone in these moments, which follow a political geography as well. As Harris and Hooper write, "the politicisation of space becomes particularly evident as Wales is not functionally coherent as a region — its different parts are not well connected in terms of infrastructure and, in some ways, culture. This is especially the case between north and south Wales, significant parts of which are better connected functionally and indeed culturally to adjacent parts of England than to each other."[592] "The Magician" describes these alternate "networks" in all their mundanity.

Later in the story the group of friends, some English and some Welsh have a pub lunch while awaiting news of Steve, who was injured after consuming a sleeping pill he thought to be Ecstasy and falling over:

> "I like gravy" she said. "I like gravy a lot."
> "But in England we only put gravy on our meat," Jo said. It was hard to tell if she was being sarcastic or not. A parrot in a cage beside the bench squawked obtrusively, ending the strand of conversation. Everyone turned to look disconcertedly at the creature as it began to pluck its feathers out with its curling beak, making larger the bald patches beneath its enormous wings. Katie, who'd dropped two grams of amphetamine, and who had been wondering what to say next, said, "Mad, tha' parrot ini? I've never seen anything like tha' before." She took a deep breath which whistled ominously between the

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[589] Ibid., 49.
[590] Ibid., 54.
[591] Ibid., 51,57,56.
[592] Harris and Hooper, "Redefining 'the Space That Wales': Place, Planning, and the Wales Spatial Plan," 141.

gap in her front teeth. "while we're here as well, I jus' wanna thank Jo and Jack for inviting us to where they're from, 'cause it makes a nice change from home, even though Steve has smashed in skull in, and there's not enough gravy to go round. Serious now, thanks jack."[593]

The dismal boredom of both this group and the parrot is palpable and mutually reinforcing, and the sense they are in a different place seems to be over reliant on the uses and amount of gravy at the table. The parrot seems to mimic the aimless self-effacement of the group, perhaps Naomi in particular, who can more easily imagine slowly ruining her identity than she can adopting another one.

She tries to do so anyway, however, remarking of the pub, " 'This is the Jamaica Inn isn't it?' she said suddenly and adamantly, rolling her head around the room. 'Daphne Du Maurier wrote a book about it didn't she? "Alone in glory, four square to the winds," ' she said."[594] This is not a particularly inspiring reference and is in an case ignored because "all her friends were excited by was the prospect of getting shit-faced after a long week of work."[595] The mood in these stories seems always capable of being lowered further, scenes becoming relentlessly ridiculous. Any humor that arises only speaks to the humorlessness of the scene.

The generally depressing and not-hedonistic-enough atmosphere around this trip is enough to subdue Naomi's romantic feelings for Jack, who was initially exotic as a Cornish drug dealer in the valleys but becomes ordinary upon closer inspection. As does Cornwall, despite the status of this "barren area" as "The English Riviera."[596]

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[593] Trezise, *Fresh Apples*, 60.
[594] Ibid., 61. *The Rough Guide to Devon and Cornwall* is not as enthusiastic about the place: "In a previous incarnation the inn was described in Daphne du Maurier's novel of the same name as being 'alone in glory, four square to the winds', but it's now a popular coach stop, stripped of any vestigial romance." Robert Andrews, *The Rough Guide to Devon & Cornwall* (London: Rough Guides, 2013).
[595] Trezise, *Fresh Apples*, 61.
[596] Ibid., 63,68.

This is anticlimactic given that it only fails to meet a horizon of expectations that was already quite low, an identity crisis without identity.

There is, through all of this, a loop between scholarly work on these late-capitalist places and the expert class of planners and politicians that make them. That is, critical arguments that attempt to think about space in relational terms seem to be translated into policy structures, while critique of those structures comes to resemble description or even promotion and their organizational complexity fetishized. The consequence is that what began as analyses of how places (or spaces) functioned or work become normative, positive concepts. These analyses may have begun in opposition to "attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities and to claim them for one's own," and instead to produce "a view of space opposed to that which sees it as a flat, immobilized surface, as stasis," as Doreen Massey influentially wrote.[597] Instead of inquiring into the *conditions* — material, ideological or epistemological — that produce place-as-bounded or place-as-relation, these understandings are opposed in a false and oversimplified dichotomy. The result is that the 'complex network', coincidentally the self-conscious mode of contemporary planning policy, acquires a positive normative value.

Jessop et al., for example, attempt to co-articulate in quasi-structuralist fashion the "four distinct spatial lexicons" of critical geography: territory, place, scale, and network ("TPSN"); they write that

> initially, in conjunction with studies of spatial divisions of labor and local and regional economic restructuring during the 1980s, inherited views of place as a fixed, areal, self-contained, and more or less unique unit of sociospatial organization were rejected. Instead, places were increasingly understood as relationally constituted, polyvalent processes embedded in broader sets of social relations.[598]

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[597] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 4.
[598] Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones, "Theorizing Sociospatial Relations," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 3 (2008): 390.

Their aim is to produce "thick descriptions and more concrete-complex [as opposed to abstract-simple] explanations" and avoid "bad abstractions" and chaotic concepts."[599] Favoring the concrete and the complex but not the chaotic, their structural framework somehow forgets, as Anssi Paasi notes in response, the role of ideology in shaping socio-spatial relations (and potentially many other factors other than the privileged four).[600] Thus he poses as a problem not (just) whether abstractions are "rational" or bad/chaotic, but their adoption among the expert class:

> And further, while `churning' is a problem for academics, there seems to exist an accelerating `second-round circulation' of academic concepts that takes place in broader social practice within the deepening division of labour in expert society. Such categories as `region', `identity', `social capital', `learning region', `creativity', `innovations', or `trust', for example, have become important catchwords in regional planning and governance.[601]

While these terms circulate, there are several that are missing, like 'power', 'ideology' or 'colonialism', perhaps because those engaged in "governance" would be unlikely to use them.

Therefore, thinking about place relationally or as a network does not —as the planners themselves demonstrate — undo, negate or subvert but rather strengthens the fixation on particularity. Shifting "scales" is likewise conducive to the reproduction of hierarchical relationships between centers and peripheries, centers and margins. In the hands of the expert class, the "concrete-complex" has ideological uses that are obfuscated through their own apparently benign articulation.

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[599] Ibid., 394, 91. For "bad abstractions," they quote Andrew Sayer: "A rational abstraction is one which isolates a significant element of the world which has some unity and autonomous force, such as a structure. A bad abstraction arbitrarily divides the indivisible and/or lumps together the unrelated and the inessential, thereby `carving up' the object of study with little or no regard for its structure and form.'"
[600] Anssi Paasi, "Is the World More Complex Than Our Theories of It? Tpsn and the Perpetual Challenge," ibid.: 408.
[601] Ibid., 407.

CONCLUSION

Recurring Themes

The Festival of Britain, held in 1951, was a grand, country-wide exhibition of science, technology, architecture and design intended to reflect and reproduce sentiments of post-war and post-austerity national revival. A revival marks both a return and something new, a hinge between some tradition and some modernity. South Bank in London was the primary site for the festival and featured in particular modern architectural styles and approaches to housing problems and emphasized the importance of "good," rational design for modern Britain.

Though later deemed neither modern nor English enough for the new brutalists, the Festival had a profound influence, as William Whyte remarks:

> the festival proved to be highly influential, and its attempts to make England modernist seemed to work. Its first fruits could be seen in the Lansbury Estate, built to coincide with the festival and an attempt to reconcile the "housing traditions of the East End" with the most progressive architectural ideals. Soon there were others—and these were still more advanced: new buildings at Heathrow, new towns throughout the country, at Stevenage and Peterlee, in the Royal Festival Hall; the festival style, which is to say a self-consciously English modernism, spread out across the country. The festival style even influenced the ornaments at the Coronation in 1953. This avowedly national variant of the International Style found its strongest expression in Coventry and its lasting monument in Coventry Cathedral. This, as its architect asserted, was "a quiet design in the English tradition." As we have seen, not everyone agreed, but his apologia was now at least plausible—and it was undoubtedly accepted by many. Such was the confidence and rhetorical power of the postwar English modernists.[602]

Perhaps what was most typically English about this festival was in the staging of national culture itself, especially through this interplay between tradition and modernity in model housing, architecture, planning and design. That is, the festival cultivated national cohesion through these models, plans, and examples, material structures that were practical and educational

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[602] Whyte, "The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1957," 461.

embodiments of social ideas and aesthetic principles. Accordingly, the festival's legacy is not just that it recorded the moment's architectural thought but also extended that thought into a redeveloped South Bank, with the concrete Royal Festival Hall remaining from the festival and joined by the concrete National Theater a decade later.

In the late summer of 2013, the Southbank Centre hosted a revival, of sorts, of the Festival of Britain, called the Festival of Neighborhood.[603] Sponsored by MasterCard, the festival referred not just in reference to South Bank (a site composed of cultural and tourist venues anyway), but to neighborhoods as locations in general: "come along and get involved in celebrating our neighbourhood, your own and neighbourhoods across the world."[604] The exhibitions, scattered between the Southbank Centre, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and the Hayward Gallery, were also site-specific interventions and ones that to spoke to what designers, architects, artists and so forth were proposing for urban neighborhoods. The aesthetic was deeply garden-centric, playing plants and trees of the austere concrete surroundings to connote a sense of revival. They encouraged visitors to

> Relax in one of London's best-kept secret gardens on top of the Queen Elizabeth Hall: vegetable plots mingle with wildflowers – and a rooftop cafe nestles under scented bowers. This summer, the garden extends across to the Hayward Gallery with a peaceful Woodland Garden. The Queen's Walk is transformed by a series of large-scale allotments created from reclaimed windows, whilst Festival Terrace becomes home to Octavia's Orchard, a playful and imaginative interpretation of an urban orchard. Plus we have mini wheelbarrow gardens, Roll Out the Barrows, to encourage us all to get into growing. [605]

In this producing these exhibitions groups like Wayward Plants, The Edible Bus Stop, and What If: projects blur planning, architectural, and artistic practice, so much so that the aesthetic aspect

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[603] This occurred on no particular anniversary of the original Festival of Britain.
[604] Southbank Centre, "Festival of Neighborhood," Southbank Centre, http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/festivals-series/festival-of-neighbourhood.
[605] Ibid.

of the projects is completely subordinated to their capacity of revitalization of locations, and, it is implied, the people in those locations.

The implications of revitalization and regeneration, including their use in spatial planning and their colonial history, have received a sustained focus in this dissertation. To problematize these practices is also to encounter their recurrence or recursivity. Thus the proposal that trees can prevent riots finds itself reoccurring in different contexts and in different mutations, thus an idea formed by partiality: the part that marks the newness of revival and the part that connects to some history, the part that connotes particularity in a location and the part that is an example for location in general.

It does this, apparently, without any critical irony. What If: projects' *Octavia's Orchard* seeks to revive the legacy of Octavia Hill, the relentlessly moralizing late-Victorian social philanthropist mentioned, among her cohort, in Chapter One. They write that their

> work is focused in inner city areas and we develop ideas and strategies for more sustainable urban environments. We investigate neglected, forgotten and unloved spaces and develop opportunities these places can offer to communities and the city. Proposals for change are based on a detailed understanding of an environment and the people that inhabit it. Essential to the development and delivery of our projects is the engagement with local communities.[606]

Once again, some kind philanthropically-minded designers will venture into the neglected, forgotten, unloved (decayed? ruined?) spaces and plant some trees. The heritage makers at the National Trust will help with the local populace:

> During this Festival the orchard is open for adoption by local urban communities for relocation to their grounds, after which it will be divided into smaller orchards and transplanted to new permanent homes. To help create these new orchards four community groups will be twinned with National Trust places to gain support and training from their expert gardeners.[607]

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[606] What If: projects, "Profile," What If: projects, http://www.what-if.info/Profile.html.
[607] What If: projects, "Octavia's Orchard," What If: projects, http://www.what-if.info/Octavias_Orchard.html.

Hill and Henrietta Barnett used to juxtapose images of slum squalor with pictures of quaint houses on tree-lined streets to encourage support for their movement; here the juxtaposition is condensed into the visuality of a tree in a concrete planter or a garden in Newham. The planters additionally feature quotations from Hill herself, such as her 1888 remark that "There are indeed many good things in life which may be unequally apportioned and no such serious loss arise, but the need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise, and, I believe, the sight of sky and of things growing, seem human needs, common to all."[608] In the context of the turbulent 1880s, the "good many things" that can be "unequally apportioned" included everything produced rather than resolved by capitalistic home colonization.

This point was made more bluntly by a nearby exhibition called "The Sweepers" that featured two figures made from synthetic green hedges sweeping. Shipshape Arts made the sculputres after being "inspired by Londoners who swept up the mess created during the 2011 London riots" and "the idea that, 'If every man would sweep his own doorstep, the city would soon be clean.' "[609] The piece has two sculptures: a larger figure formed to look like a middle-aged woman and a smaller figure dressed in the racialized uniform of Broken Britain (a hoodie).

Much from Britain's late history recurs here in a context that appears, because of that recurrence, as "new." Against the moralism of these late Victorian interventions, an adequate second-order analysis might point out the conditions of austerity that produce riots and that are in excess of the balanced revitalization of a tree. What recurs in this analysis is a stability of the terms under analysis: the explanatory power of material conditions alongside a deep investment in locality, the overdetermined figures of rioters and trees. In this way the excess of the riots and the emptiness of their setting become amenable to a paradigm of relationality, the hinge that

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[608] Ibid.
[609] Centre, "Festival of Neighborhood."

turns a burning Tesco into the voice of the unheard. The statement in the introduction to this

dissertation attributing earlier riots to "endemic poverty, decaying neighborhoods, police

surveillance and brutality, and the incipient attack on the welfare state" is thus also ambivalent;

not undecided, but both self-evidently true and ironic, in the same way that a tree is nothing but

itself but also not, a thought and a place collapsed into indistinction.

Figure 9: Poster for 1951 Festival of Britain[610]

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[610] {Work, 2012 #816}

Figure 10: The National Theatre[611]

Figure 11: 2013 Festival of Neighbourhood[612]

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[611] {Theatre, 2015 #817}
[612] photograph by author

Figure 12: The Sweepers[613]

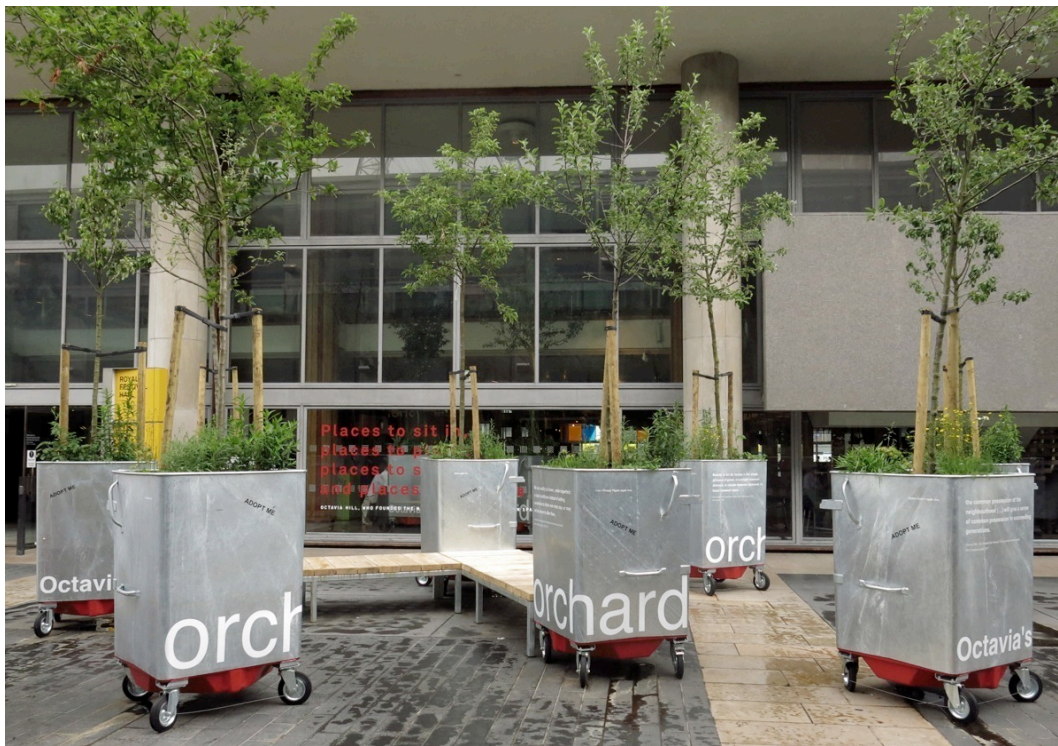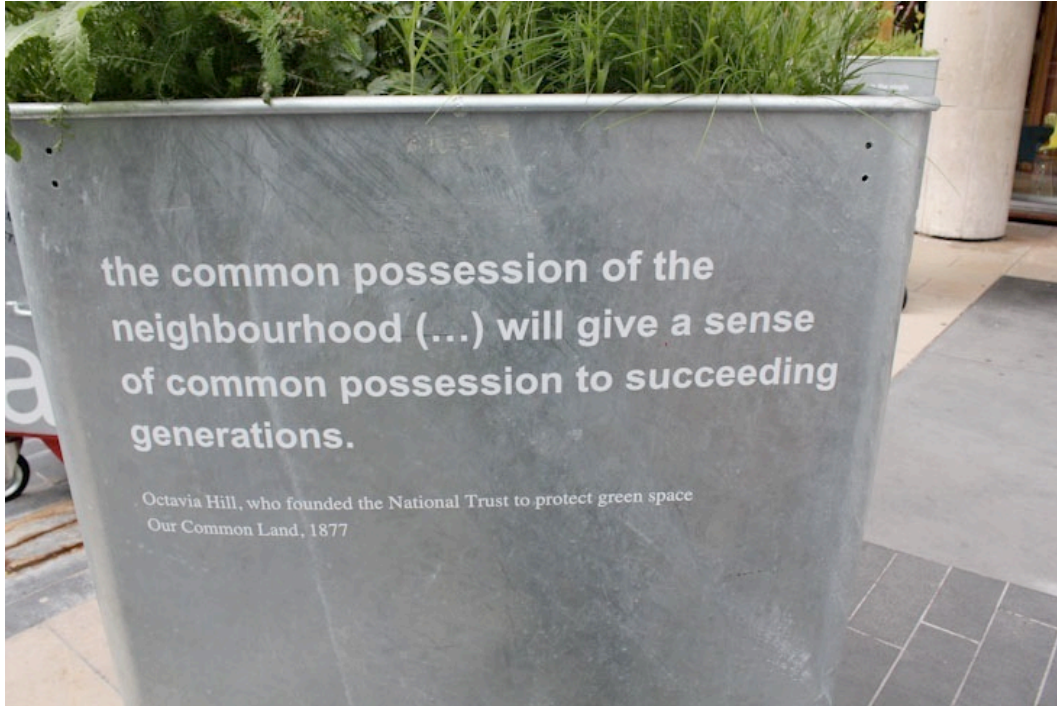**Figure 13: Octavia's Orchard** [614]

Figure 14: Octavia's Orchard (close up)[615]

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[614] Jail Studios, "Octavia's Orchard," Jail Studios, http://jailmake.com/workshop-news/octavias-orchard-southbank-centre-festival-neighbourhood-2/.

[615] Photograph by author

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