MONASH University

Delinquent Palaces: Adolescent Museum Visitation in Literature

Gwynneth Porter

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Monash University in 2020
Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture

Copyright notice

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which museums are visited by desiring adolescent subjects in literature. Arising from a process of anthologising museum visitation narratives, this study identifies that their protagonists are often adolescents in crisis. Adolescence is developed in the analysis as being not necessarily a category of age, rather a state of being an open structure that seeks ways and means to reorganise subjectively. It is a positive exploration of the non-work of the delinquent in annexed or repurposed transitional public space of a faint mnemo-mythological order.

This subjective production takes place in relationship with space, and the collected novels employ the museum as a site for characters to mitigate crises. The museum appears as other or alternative space, and is explored in this study through a variety of theoretical tropes: as aesthetic space where redistributions of the sensible can take place, as labyrinth, heterotopia, as opening to multiple temporalities and passages, a place where techne and determined order can be experienced and interrupted, contested. It is a place in which to gamble and tear the present, to find or make a breach, and to search for a solution to problems with today by getting lost.
The novels show an experience of the museum as an organ or expression of modernity, but a changing one. The contemporary narratives register an erosion of the sense that the museum offers emancipatory possibility in disciplinary society. The museum experience is exhibited as hollowed out from the neoliberalisation and semio-financialisation of the institution in the society of control. It can no longer yield any delinquent satisfaction to subjectivities that are marketed to, determined, crowded, flattened out, homogenised, surveilled, and interrupted in their individuation.

It is argued that these museum visitation narratives are analogous to the function of modern literature in their mutual involvement with dissensus, redistributions in aesthetic-political presents, and fictioning methodologies. Fiction is not considered the opposite of reality, rather a way to produce, distribute and receive new realities, hope, and coming communities. Philosophy has long understood the importance of literature in aesthetic and political thought. Through its images of adolescents in the museum, we can perceive subjectivities and the desire to risk transformation and becoming's fleeting possibility among the remains of the past.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Gwynneth Porter
7 October 2020

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude goes firstly to Jan Bryant whose generous, erudite criticality, nuanced sensibilities (aesthetic and ethical) and courage, skill and endurance with text, have guided me and in my work in unexpected (and never boring) ways. My greatest thanks goes to my son Ness for his insistence that I keep working to completion, and for showing me new ways to see all the time. I am always grateful for Noel and Philippa Porter's unwavering support and role modelling of curiosity as parents. I have dear friends without whom not much would be possible in life or work – thank you Layla Rudneva-Mackay, Renée Habluetzel, Julia Holden, Debbie Malligan, Maggie Harris, Holly Childs, Tessa Laird, Lara Strongman and Holly Best, for your comprehension, love and care. Thank you also to et al., Ralph Paine, Judy Darragh, Ani O'Neill, Kirsty Cameron, Allan Smith, Lisa Crowley, Anne Noble, the Upritchard family, Valia Papoutsaki, Rob McKenzie, Rob Campbell, Julian Gooi, Tim Holmes, Andrew Barber, Warren Olds, Simon Cuming and the Physics Room's writing group for your encouragement and support during this study to think, work and live. Thank you to Dan Arps and Kirstin Carlin, and to Uncle Richard Porter for supporting Ness and I as family so steadily as the years have gone by. Thank you too to Regina and Andy Dean, and to Penny and Simon Barnes for taking my son under your wing. And I am grateful to Fiona Macdonald, Spiros Panigirakis, Tara McDowell and Helen Hughes at Monash for the appreciated engagement and input along the way. My appreciation also goes to the exacting Marie Shannon for proofreading this thesis. Lastly, to Penny Dawson and Bessie Seymour Porter, the trace of your love and delinquent complicity will always make me stronger, happier, bolder and more aware of myself – and of what is important and interesting. Thank you to you all.

Delinquent palaces: Adolescent museum visitation in literature

Contents

A loss of something ever felt I—
The first that I could recollect
Bereft I was—of what I knew not
Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about
As one bemoaning a Dominion
Itself the only Prince cast out—

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is—
I find myself still softly searching
For my Delinquent Palaces—

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now and then
That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven—

— Emily Dickinson[1]

[1] R. W. Franklin (ed.), 'A loss of something ever felt I—' (959), in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999, p.436.

Introduction

The material of this thesis is a collection of museum visitation narratives taken from literary fiction. The museum appears as a portal to a reality that appears plastic, malleable, its passages and spaces offering a way through. The aim is to trace the actions of protagonists who demonstrate adolescent approaches to the museum spaces, and in turn how the image of the museum is formed by these encounters. The narratives were drawn together over a nearly 30-year period that began when I started working in art museums as a young woman. I would pick up a thread now and then that I had fallen upon, and keep it, somewhat stubbornly with the rest, not attending to them methodically for some time. I began this without a fully formed concept of museums, literature, or myself, which, as an uncertain, perpetually opening, wandering position has been instrumental in this study's method.

I found these literary fragments interesting as they seemed to be lying in wait, uninscribed and, in describing freedom, liberating. They were expressions of the emancipatory desire, resistance and alterity of the minor – minor in the sense of both biological age and holding a non-majority share in the apportioning of power. Minor, here, is used in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari used to explore how language operates, the revolutionary working against the official. They put forward that a minor language works inside a major language and changes it from within, instigating new uses for it, and its metamorphosis. The minor is a "revolutionary force" that makes what they repurpose "vibrate with new intensity."[2] Gathered together, these fictional images of museums and their visitors differed greatly from those found in museological texts, which tend to focus on the project of museums as state institutions rather than on the subjectivity of the people entering or inhabiting them as public space. Sometimes they do little more than draw their estimated community into market research-oriented studies – essentially psychographic and demographic analyses that group people around income and buying tastes.

The attention of museum studies discourse seems to be mostly directed to the administrative and 'public-facing' programme delivery functions of the museums, and their wider project as moulders of consciousness, cultural influencers and gatekeepers of posterity (history). The visitor is aligned with definitions of audience, that is, as the passive receiver of the exhibition, rather than an active or emancipated visitor (or deterritorialising minor) engaged in their own projects of subjective production or reorganisation of the psyche. This kind of visitor remains in the main unrecognised, rather, museums tend to treat audiences as a problem to be solved, or to be strategically developed. In contrast, the literary fragments that form the body of this thesis seemed to serve as a gentle, productive supplement that imagines the being, experiences and desires of the museum visitors. Together they indicated to me some sort of an

[2] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (*Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*) [1975], trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.19.

alternative guide to museum visitation, and I wanted to discover what commonalities could emerge from their anthologisation and analysis.

The passages I began collecting spoke to me of people in crisis and in processes of becoming as desiring subjects in modern, capitalist economies. They are taken from books written between the late 19th Century and the present day, and exist in a nascent neoliberal environment where agency has been diminished and eroded under marketing and visitor number strategies that control the way 21st-century museums operate.[3] The characters brought together in this thesis rush at the institution, its architecture, its expressions, desiring a kind of fecundity suggested by the museum in the imaginary. This possibility exists in spite of – and also because of – varying degrees of awareness that such institutions are organs of disciplinary society, a society in which we are trained to attend in a particular way: to be docile, surveilled, compliant and threatened with consequences – corporeal punishment, deprivation, ostracism – for failure to perform our proscribed functions as workers and consumers.[4] Museums are not visited in fiction as acts of straight rebellion, with characters acting against the institution as oppressor, but rather as a complex engagement with and against the institution *as* institution – as social machine where power is visible, articulated, and able to be acted in, with and and against, in self-determining micro-revolutions, generative breaches, becomings. Michel Foucault's conception of heterotopias is a useful matrix to consider the transformative nature of the museum as institution, as he described it in 'Of Other Spaces':

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.[5]

In the literary narratives gathered together in this study, museums seemed to be used differently by visitors than as described in conventional studies of institutional practice,

---

[3] The use of the term neoliberal here follows the theorisation of David Harvey: "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets." *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, London and New York: Oxford, 2005, p.2.

[4] For example, see Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey, New York: Picador, 2003.

[5] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' ('Des Espace autres') [1967], trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, 1986 (22-7), p.24.

history and functioning.[6] The museological accounts of visitation also differed from the way I had experienced museums, both as youth and adult, and how I came to understand them operating from the inside in my work as a 'museum professional'. Furthermore, I became aware that the way in which museums have been inhabited in literature has changed over time. This seemed to be significant as a fictive index of intensifying and shifting economic, social and psychological conditions. What I ended up concluding was that the visitation narratives that I had been amassing, observing often at a delay, lightly at first, but with more application as the collection grew, were fragments of dissension. I realised that what interested me was how these were threads of rebellion against 'productive' time, against the museum as a flowering of disciplinary society, an expression that contained an opening, its own breach.

Reading these passages, my own life experience spoke to me – how I had used the museum as public space after shoplifting, truancy, wondering at what was coming as the time when one left school and home loomed monstrously, ecstatically. When we smoked in the museum's courtyard, a port in an unmappable sea that did not seem to support our interests, we could see our own breath and knew, or at least inferred, we existed. The Emily Dickinson poem 'A loss of something ever felt I—' contains the epithet "Delinquent Palaces," its capitals suggesting a title. In the novels I was reading, at first in parallel with museum studies texts, I noticed adolescent and dissenting approaches to the museum. The image of the museum is forced by them to be something other to comply with their desires, with their intervention. They enter into a particular space of the *dispositif*, which they transform, temporarily, layering over in different ways something 'other' than the ideological intentions of the museum.

I recognised adolescents/adolescence in narratives that involve discontented figures attempting to transform their realities. And as I applied theory to these narratives to attempt to articulate their mechanisms, I came to understand – initially via Julia Kristeva's work – that adolescence was not a set period of physical development, but a state that does not pertain to age.[7] Rather, it is a transformational state a subject can descend into at any time of life to reorganise themselves psychically, emotionally, relationally, structurally. The museums are depicted as places where it is possible to enact such redistributions. In novels, the museum is approached, entered, inhabited, by people on the run, off the tracks. And, to be particular, it is the art museum that is described in these novels – or if it is any other kind of museum, it is a museum of human history, inhabited itself by aestheticised representations and remains of habitation, or attempts at living. Here, in this preface, are examples of the figures in the narratives, listed as bare threads:

[6] For example Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1991; Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994; Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of the Museum*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978; and Robert Lumley (ed.), *The Museum Time Machine*, London: Routledge, 1988.
[7] Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (*Les Nouvelles maladies de l'ame*) [1993], trans. Ross Mitchell Guberman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

The youth who, in trying to disguise his school expulsion from his parents, is using the museum to secretly meet his sister to tell her of his plans to leave and start a new life in a forestry town.

The youth who, having adopted another family, follows his ne'er-do-well 'older brother' to his new job at the local maritime museum, where they are enchanted by a haunted statue.

The novelist-gambler who keeps climbing on chairs in the museum in the casino town he is haunting.

The belle-époque lovers – a newlywed and a bohemian divorcée – who use the museum to dare to dream that they might escape the rigidities of their social scene and be together in a gallery of vitrines full of ancient tool fragments.

The mother who repeatedly takes her young son to the museum in a trajectory towards a radiant place she despaired of reaching amongst the statuary.

The newlywed who flees her pompous academic husband and the commune in the countryside to visit a portrait gallery in the city, and considers becoming a witch.

The queer youth who chooses the museum as a place to kill time with a friend, a beat writer, while he decides if he will hand himself in to the authorities for killing his lover.

The young man unhinged by the establishment portraits in his local museum, and another man who is completely disoriented by the hallucinogenic labyrinth of interconnected galleries of a museum he probably only entered because it was raining.

The group of radicalised German worker-youths who visit a reassembled Greek temple in a city museum to consider whether to join the Spanish resistance.

And then there are the contemporary novels (written in my lifetime, which corresponds to the technological intensification of neoliberal policy and behaviour, and gross financialisation of *bios* – of life and its means in unprecedented entirety) that seem to only feature protagonists who visit museums symbolising historical remains or models in dreams, or deliriums of inauthenticity and pointless travel; or else they do not really want to be there at all and ended up there because someone else made them go (and then the museum exploded); or they flee from a celebrity opening; or they will sit and stare at the same painting week in and week out for years; or watch *Psycho* slowed down 12 x in a museum gallery near the gift shop; or just want to get lost in the Louvre, and really apply herself to the task in order to meet her own death.

I came to understand youth, in these texts, as a trope for risk-taking, so that if protagonists were older than young, and they were trying to kick a hole in a wall, they were *comme des jeunes*. Accordingly, Kristeva's idea of adolescence being a state of reorganisation of the psyche, making passages to different states of being – youth and museum both as open

structures – is used in the study of these narratives. And if we proceed from an understanding that power is established in the sphere of knowledge and at the level of the body, and that ideas are born from manufactured consent, rather than the enactment of physical coercion, it is not hard to see why the museum has long been considered a hegemonic force, an extension of state power and ideology, an organ of the disciplinary society. Its origins, according to Foucault, are effects of nationalism on the body and spoils of empire in the 19th century, in the rise of industrial capitalism and the intensification of technologies that articulate it. Deleuze responded to this work in an article, 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle' (1990), describing it as "an environment of enclosure – prison, hospital, factory, school, family" that makes an interior – "scholarly, professional, etc." – that is designed to enact "supposedly necessary reforms."[8] The museum orders and transmits narratives and preserves privileges, but it appears in fiction as more than something crushing or deleting to desire, libido, liberty – its image is generative, a site of great possibility.

I turned to the history of the museum to try and understand how this can be, attempting to find research that engaged with the subject in terms of subjective production, or the behaviour and possibilities of the institution. Gerome Bazin, in his evocative 1967 text *The Museum Age*, argued that there is a complexity in the nature of the museum that arises from its pre-modern origins: "To write a history of the museum is to give an account of the evolution of two concepts: that of the Museum, and that of time."[9] Whereas archaic civilisations knew only a time that endures, rather than a time that passes, the rapid cultural change that occurred in ancient Greece brought its people face to face with what Bazin calls "the historical sense." He gives an example of the imagined experience of the citizens of Athens who lived through a series of wars and upheavals:

> The burden of time increased when humanity became conscious of universal destiny – holding itself responsible for its own actions, when the individual, disengaged from the group, thought of himself as cause and no longer just as effect. … Deprived suddenly of the history of their city, estranged from the familial life on a grand scale that it had meant, men felt like atoms lost in vast empires, no longer citizens but subjects. When the present becomes unbearable, there are two means of escaping it: the past and the future.[10]

The museum, he explains, finds its origins in the Hellenistic fostering of the archive and library: "Established as an absolute, the past also becomes a refuge."[11] Rome took up the museum impulse, which grew more root stock in the Renaissance and then finally burst into flower following the French revolution. "The appetite for museums" in the 20th century was for a museum that is a "temple where Time seems suspended":

[8] Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), pp.3-7. Translator not cited.
[9] Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* [1967], trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill, New York: Universe Books, 1967, p.5.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

> An entire literature for half a century has celebrated the supreme detachment from all appurtenances which make of the instant a transcendent moment, lived in the innocence of a sensuality restored to its place as a virtue anterior to Original Sin. To detach from Time one of these contiguous fibres that is an instant, to make it vibrate like the string of a violin, is to give the being the illusion of knowing intuitively his essence and his strengths.[12]

Bazin also considers whether the 20th-century fascination for prehistory in the museum might not evince a desire to make a reunion with the time of the past as absolute, "to elude the relative time of the present," and the time of myth.[13] The museum may be a state-driven apparatus of discipline and reform, but it can also be taken as a dispositif of temporal transformation and historical fantasy.[14] Bazin's idea is an example of the supposedly contradictory functions of the museum, complexities which make it attractive to novelists as a shimmering site of possibility and tension – at once restrictive and liberating; both "an escape from the vertigo caused by the acceleration of time" and oppressive apparatus that can be disrupted by visiting the museum out of time, with desire to burn.

A pattern emerged from consideration of the gathered narratives in which the museum attracts subjects in crisis – the marginalised, 'off track,' powerless, nearing punishment – who are seeking an alternative to life experienced as adverse, hoping for change. It assumes, in the novels, an identity that could be characterised as a dispositif in that it is one of the mechanisms by which power is articulated or brought to bear in society. The subjects enter the museum as an enclosed site of "traditional human territorialities" to enact an explosion that liberates "the atomic energy of desire."[15] Museums exist in the carceral continuum Foucault described for institutions of the disciplinary society, and it issues an invitation to dissent that is accommodated in the way it also offers itself as assemblage. The explosion is the subjects' dissent against disciplinary or biopolitical foreclosure, and it is enacted by repurposing the museum *to their own ends*, using it in ways that run counter to the institution's palpable intentions to provide non-ordinary experiences to a tamed public who yield to the visitor experience they are served.

The adolescent museum visitor in these narratives does not comply with the museum as an organ of disciplinary society. As Tony Bennett explains in *Birth of the Museum*, "Through the institution of a division between the producers and consumers of knowledge – a division which assumed an architectural form in the relations between the hidden spaces of the museum, where knowledge was produced and organized *in camera*, and its public spaces, where knowledge was offered for public consumption – the museum became a site where bodies, constantly under surveillance, were to be rendered docile."[16] These protagonists demonstrate that there is scope for disobedience, and there is fertile soil for employing what the museum provides generatively, dissentingly. Those visiting the museum rebelliously

[12] Ibid., p.7.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1995, p.164.
[16] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.89.

ventured another way, spurred on by the institution's overt demonstration of power and would-be dominance. Their way insists on being active, emancipated spectators, living in the ordering and informational spaces, engaging with them to make small ruptures in the dispositif.

Michel Foucault's dispositif (apparatus) is "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid."[17] It is the system formed by the interrelations of these elements. Giorgio Agamben offered that "an apparatus is literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings."[18] By this reckoning, museums are themselves apparatuses, along with "prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, judicial measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself."[19] A museum is an apparatus in that it *does* something, a pharmakon – something that can be 'taken' by entering and resisting, creating ruptures, and repurposing it as a labyrinth that disorients and destabilises the present, and does so with full measure if its heterogeneity to facilitate those who enter to *become other*. The visitor is not separate from the museum in a fluid system of exchangeability, and neither is stable – they are part of an assemblage that, as new components enter it, forges new articulations.[20]

Furthermore, there is a tension that makes an opening that invites disruption in the operation of the contemporary museum, one that has been progressively intensifying as competing demands on the museum pull it in different directions. This has been well characterised by Bennett as being "fuelled by the mismatch between, on the one hand, the rhetorics which govern the stated aims of museums and, on the other, the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning – a mismatch which guarantees that the demands it generates are insatiable."[21] Museums are supposed to be open and accessible to all, yet "the public museum embodies a principle of general human universality in relation to which, whether on the basis of gendered, racial or other social patterns of its exclusions and biases, any particular museum display can be held to be inadequate and therefore in need of supplementation."[22] I contend that it is this yawning need to supplement the ostensible homogeneity of the museum by mining its fundamental potential as aesthetic, heterogeneous space that is at the root of its appeal as a setting in fiction. The rebellious museum visitor is analogue for poet, philosopher, artist, agent of politics, truth-teller, and in resisting what is

[17] Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh,' interview [1977], in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper, London: Pantheon, 1980, pp.194-228.
[18] Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?" in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, p.14.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Viz. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Mille plateaux)* [1987], trans. Brian Massumi, London and New York: Continuum, 1992.
[21] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp.90-91.
[22] Ibid.

there, something new is released from minor, redemptive fissures torn in the surface of experience:

> For Agamben, it is only when chronological time is perceived as broken and dispersed that the contemporary actually appears, for it is s/he who, in coming too-soon and already-too-late, is able to urge, press and transform it.[i] This is where the poet is to be found, in the middle of an enhanced present, timeless and obscure, an emanation that is dark and unsettling, or what Agamben describes as the "shattered backbone of time". It is the poet, he writes, who falls into "the exact point of this fracture," concluding that the poet *is* the fracture.[23]

These visitation narratives show a form of intervention or seizure of so-called public (state-funded) space and involve using the museum as a place of play where there are different temporalities and the jurisdiction of muses whose visitation can spark much needed savoir-faire in the ailing. The institution becomes understood less as an entirely conservative space that defines history or experience, and more as a machine – institution as assemblage – that, in actively producing new realities, operates in a manner akin to literary fiction, which produces new effects, and therefore alterations to the sensible. The museum may be an organ of disciplinary society, but it is an ailing one if we follow Gilles Deleuze's assertion that it has given way to a society of control and its "ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system."[24] In this system, the museum has a different, less potent role, dissolved, consumed by control's limitless postponements. We have gone from being people enclosed to people in debt in the open circuits of the corporation:

> In the disciplinary societies, one was always starting again (from school to barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything – the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation.[25]

As an organ of disciplinary society, we can see the museum, historically, as an agent of the regime of the police that Jacques Rancière characterised as "not repression but rather a certain distribution of the sensible that precludes the emergence of politics" that can be resisted.[26] This regime is challenged by the delinquent visitors in the institution but also within their own subjectivities that have inevitably internalised the totalising desire for power and control and suppression of disorderly elements. Understood in this way, museums do not simply carry out the work of the police order, they are sites of the push and pull of common power, and in

---

[23] Jan Bryant, *Art Making in the Age of Global Capitalism: Visual Practices, Philosophy, Politics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, n.p.
[24] Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' p.4.
[25] Ibid., p.5.
[26] Jacques Rancière, *Flesh of the Words: The Politics of Writing,* trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, p.185.

this literature, these visitation narratives, they are drawn as places where politics are contested. They could be seen to be microcosms, expressions of the social space Rancière describes that sees individuals engaging with the distribution of the sensible, jumping into identifiable gaps to take their share – not just to take space, but to claim perceptibility:

> I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common leads itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.[27]

The distribution of the sensible is open to contestation – who can look and think, what is said, and what is perceivable are negotiated; in short "who has a part in the act of governing and being governed … who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and the time and space in which this activity is performed … what is visible or not in a common space endowed with a common language…"[28] Viewed in this way it is possible to see museums as a heightened site for sensible contestation in the literary imaginary being a site of display, summation, visibility, and therefore inviting negotiation. When considered thus, Rancière's words could be seen to directly address the activity of the museum in modernity: "It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, or speech and noise that simultaneously determines the stakes of politics as a form of experience."[29]

Politics is the negotiation of "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, and the properties of spaces and the possibility of time," and the museum is a site that habitually indexes significance.[30] This aspect of its institutional behaviour is important given that ours is a time when the very ability to register significance is reputedly hampered. Bernard Stiegler holds it that the technological avalanche of change we live with, and constantly adapt to, is disconnecting people, generations, and promoting an appallingly inhospitable atmosphere of a-significance as a by-product of "the organization of the loss of individuation" which to function properly needs the 'I' to be bound generatively to the 'we.'[31] This surely affects the way that a museum appears as a site of possibility – here, perhaps, we can find significance, mourn its loss, feel a vague nostalgia for some supposedly more benevolent time, or for a less troubled belief in the possibility of ideals; to witness a passing and experience the loss of confidence and shame that invariably accompanies grief.

---

[27] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (*Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*) [2000], trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London: Continuum, 2006, p.12.
[28] Ibid., p.8.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Bernard Stiegler, *Acting out* (*Passer à l'acte*) [2003], trans. David Bariston, Daniel Ross and Patrick Crogan, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p.32.

The museum does participate in an economy of deciding and displaying what is in, what is out, and who is in, who is out, and part of its doing so stems from its system of manners, rules and guidelines of participation that separate the respectable, the rowdy, as Bennett puts it.[32] The museum also performs a process of behaviour management and modification as an organ of the hegemonic systems of the society of discipline that aims to groom society to conform to a set of norms. Theorists such as Gramsci and Foucault have described how good citizens are differentiated from the criminal, the aberrant, the abnormal, the deviant, the delinquent, the antisocial, and the museum plays its part in this dynamic: "In this way, while formally free and open, the museum effected its own pattern of informal discriminations and exclusions."[33] These palpable codes invite this other type of person, the undesirable, the disorderly, the agent of the political gesture to intervene and to disturb balances; and to do so in an atmosphere accelerated by the intensification of surveillance and rigid narratives focused on a type of welcome, agreeable customer. Those, however, in the narratives studied here are outsiders in their different ways, on the fringes of acceptable society, and their entrance into the museum – which is not showing them hospitability – is a provocation. These are stories of those seeking to disturb realities, balances, shares in slight, personal gestures of defiance, or more simply negotiation; and as such they become texts in which we can study what Guattari called the "micropolitics of desire": "For political struggle to coincide with an analysis of desire, you have to be in a position to listen in on whoever is speaking in from a position of desire, and above all, 'off the track'."[34]

In considering these narratives, I am struck by Rancière's assertion that "Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality." They both define "regimes of sensible intensity" that draw diagrams of the sensible that show what we can see and what we can't, who speaks, how things are done and "the abilities of bodies."[35] He describes that these statements, of thought or act, "widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images."[36] We are literary animals, he maintains, because we are political animals (and vice versa) who let themselves be "diverted from [their] 'natural' purpose" by the power of locutions, be they spaces and words.[37] It is the corresponding literariness of museums and novels that has thoroughly captured me – the one inside the other resonates so strongly.

Here, in the literature studied, the museum may exert and express control, and broadcast the stories of the victors, but it is also imagined as a place where this control can be subverted and something new may be produced. It becomes a set for adolescent subjects to act out their own narratives, develop their subjectivities, and shift the distribution of the sensible. It may be a disciplinary site inviting contestation, but possibilities also slip in from the museum's heterogeneous nature, rooted in an interplay of different temporal registers, and kaleidoscopic

[32] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p.100.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Guattari, *Chaosophy*, pp.158, 159.
[35] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p.39
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

assembly of material. It may be inhospitable in its regulatory codes, but it is hospitable in its being an institutional assemblage offering becoming constantly to those who can recognise the potential.

The museum appears in the literature studied as aesthetic space in the sense that Rancière intends of the term – a space where things are multiple, reactive, shifting, generative. Yet museums are also intensely culturally ordered, manifestations of oppressive regimes power – state, class, dominant narratives. To understand this apparent contradiction, it has been important to not see it as paradoxical – rather, as an expression of the constant reorganisation of the subject, its place, voice, its share, and of the greater political system to which it belongs. Dissent necessarily underpins the functioning of democracy in its truest sense.

In these narratives, the museums appear as a reactive space that characters in crises are drawn to as sites of possibility, where the *partage du sensible*, the balance of power, may be redistributed – in other words, the apportionment or sharing out of the conditions of our being together. What the museum makes sensible gives the adolescent characters momentum for revolt, providing in its hegemonic institutional space and being something for their dissensus, their flows, to run through. It is approached as opening, labyrinth, idiorrhythmic space by adolescent outsiders, and, in turn, these encounters are examined in the light of the theory studying emancipatory practice in modernity.

The museum is a place of possibility, but also of loss in the collected narratives, and these visitations play out against a backdrop of foreclosure – the breakdown of episteme and sovereignty in an intensified capitalist environment. A desire to redistribute power runs up against a terrible disintegration of democracy, *savoir-faire*, trans-individuation, in our time. The protagonists collected together often show their marginal vulnerability – members of the underclass, tenants, disenfranchised youth, loser sons and daughters, the poor, the queer, the immigrants, the spare people; and they are about to feel the consequences of their rebellion.

Modern literary fiction has been characterised as a practice of forming new realities, and also of breaking traditional hierarchies within fiction to admit subjects formerly considered ignoble, or too lowly to have literary value.[38] It shows lives that jolt the canon and its system of privileging – and fiction is not imaginary in the sense that it is as opposite to reality. This thesis contends that this aspect of literature – that is, the establishment of new realities, other times, in the only ways possible – is analogous to the action of dissenting adolescents in these museum narratives. The museum visitors seek new realities, disturbances, to feel and be sovereign; to take space, inhabit cities, explode, start over. Acting as philosophers, poets, artists of their own destinies, conducting research, enacting education in reverse, they are expressive of adolescence as Kristeva described it. This study suggests that literature chooses the museum as a site to show something of its own aesthetic process of becoming by admitting the minor in this time of epistemological crisis. In the novels the reader can inhabit the subjectivity of the protagonists – the emotional, aesthetic and political motivation of the visitors is drawn, and the poetry of the encounter is explored – and it is possible to see the

[38] For example, see Jacques Rancière's *The Lost Thread* on this subject.

form of an open structure in them and the museum, and the practice of writing itself as subjective production.

The spirit of adolescent becoming in the novels drawn together here can be likened to the figure of the girl, the stammerer, the left-handed person described by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*.[39] As a study of outsider protagonists exercising emancipatory practices in modernity, it is a study, in form, that connects with the concerns of this thesis. The methodological model Deleuze proposed in *The Logic of Sense* is a depthless surface, made of points of intensity that flare and pass. As an extension of Deleuze's charting, the surface in this field of study is where sense is played out between elements, and is the space natural to this band of 'losers,' the invisible, the fatigued, those prone to the desire to rush the palace, but hampered by dwindling savoir-faire.

The study ends with consideration of why, at some point in the closing decades of the 20th century – corresponding to the emergence of the societies of control Deleuze identified – there seemed to have been a change in the nature of museum visitation in literature. It is impossible to prove a negative, but it appears that the museum has lost its charm in the imaginary, as the ways the museum is visited in these more recent works (since the late 1970s) seem weak, as if the volition has drained out from the subject, and any potential from the assemblage. The possible reasons for this are explored – as shifts in conditions, subjectivity and the institution – through the work of Stiegler, Rancière and Franco Berardi, which suggest that there has been a general foreclosure in the sense of possibility for dissensus in the age of global capital that we try to inhabit. What is left is an image of the adolescent museum visitor, one that corresponds to the contemporary subject as conceptualised by Howard Slater in his delicately insightful essay 'Poetry as Self-exile.'[40] He explains that inside any system and in every one of us is a hidden third that we tend to suppress as it disturbs the stability of the host. It needs to rise if the systems or people are to grow and adapt and flourish. These narratives give flesh to these hidden thirds that exist as exiles in society and within ourselves, and their expression is poetry, or actions of dissent. This is the part that disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed when it mobilises from a position of weakness to attempt to redistribute the sensible, to produce different effects in reality by using whatever means are at hand. In so doing, a third person is brought into being, and new tertiary retentions for the common repository.

Methodologically, this thesis is structured as a field of related episodes that present findings and analyses as if registering cardinal points on a surface, sense being an accretive, not a singular entity. It could also be read as if the elements are rooms in a large building being explored, an institution that is a machine in which deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation take place. The writing is, as Deleuze put it in *The Logic of Sense*, "a display of events at the surface.[41] The surface is inverted depth, and it is here that the event and the release of the

[39] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (*Logique du sens*) [1969], trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p.10.
[40] Howard Slater, *Anomie/Bonhomie and Other Writings*, London: Mute, 2012, pp.26-36.
[41] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.9.

incorporeal double take place – the third person that is the essence of both literature and becoming.[42]

Theodor Adorno's 'The Essay as Form' was instrumental towards developing a working accretive methodology as an alternative to a model oriented towards the singularising production of resolution and revelation of universal truths.[43] In his writing on the essay as impure form, which puts forth the value of pluralities, of multiplicities, youth appears specifically as the figure freedom:

> The essay, however, does not permit its domain to be prescribed. Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done. … Luck and play are essential to the essay. It does not begin with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to discuss; it says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete – not where nothing is left to say. [44]

Here, the essay as form or method has an adolescent character in its fragmented occupation of a bright present, lighting up cardinal points moving over a surface. The essay "as speculation on specific, culturally pre-formed objects" is, like the museum visitor and the adolescent, works against – out of – the categorising project of "equating knowledge with organized science":

> In order to be disclosed, however, the objective wealth of meanings encapsulated in every intellectual phenomenon demands of the recipient the same spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is castigated in the name of objective discipline. Nothing can be interpreted out of something that is not interpreted into it at the same time.[45]

Adorno believes the essay to be a force field, but his consistent use of the male pronoun makes me wonder whom the territory serves and how it is demarked, what and who its agents are, what it contains, refers to, values and produces.[46] Ursula Le Guin offers a different spatial metaphor for writing, albeit of fiction, which is the image of the carrier bag into which subjects gather, constellate, fabulate.[47] But both writers converge on the idea that the meaning and strength of the work, its precision, develops from the proximity of one element to another in the composition rather than from heroic scaffolding, or a victory of definition.[48] In Le

[42] Ibid., p.10.
[43] Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' in *Notes to Literature* (*Noten zur Literatur*) [1958], Rolf Tiedmann (ed), trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen, New York: Columbia University, 1991.
[44] Ibid., p.4,
[45] Ibid., p.3.
[46] Ibid., p.13.
[47] Ursula Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' [1986] in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, New York: Grove Press, 1989.
[48] Adorno, pp.160-1.

Guin's words we can see a foraging, nomadic aspect to research practice, and writing drawing matter together alchemically, or conjuring a territory like a spider does a web between points:

> A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us.[49]

From a surface made up of museum visitation narratives in modern literature, as outlined above, I became interested in the figure of 'youthfulness' that emerged – predominating – their visitations dissenting, delinquent, repurposing, part of a crisis period of rapid subjective growth and risk that is adolescent in itself. As I started to group the narratives, it became apparent that youth could indeed be thought of as an ageless, radical condition. Both youthful museum visitors and essayists break into the palace (the museum in fiction, sense in life) that at once articulates oppressive, unsympathetic, intelligible grids of power, and the possibility of breaching this territory in the encounter. These two threads – the institution and dissenting subject, the museum and the visitor, in assemblage – were interwoven in the same cloth. And so I pulled them.

Black sheep, there is the door. Come in. Come in together. Unburden yourselves. Can you imagine happiness?

[49] Le Guin., p.169.

1.
Adolescence and crisis

Breaking into the palace

I had gathered together over many years, but with no firm intent, novels that feature museum visitations. And then I took take a step back. From the body of work was a common refrain of delinquent, dissenting adolescents approaching the museum as if it was an abandoned building or a portal to somewhere else – to find something different, altered. The figure of youth looking for a new way of being, living, stands proud from the rest. I begin with actual adolescents, but in the other narratives that I have gathered here there is a different sense of adolescence – an adolescence past puberty, a youthful explosion of the self. As I started to gather them together, and to think of them in these terms, to see these characters and consider their subjectivities, sometimes music would come, often a song with verses that drew that image too – do you know it? – desiring sedimentary ways of life-giving way to others:

> So, I broke into the palace
> With a sponge and a rusty spanner
> She said, "Eh, I know you, and you cannot sing"
> I said, "That's nothing – you should hear me play piano"
>
> We can go for a walk where it's quiet and dry
> And talk about precious things
> But when you're tied to your Mother's apron
> No-one talks about castration
>
> We can go for a walk where it's quiet and dry
> And talk about precious things
> Like love and law and poverty
> Oh, these are the things that kill me
>
> We can go for a walk where it's quiet and dry
> And talk about precious things
> But the rain that flattens my hair…
> Oh, these are the things that kill me[50]

[50] The Smiths, 'The Queen is Dead,' Rough Trade, London, 1986. [A note to readers: I am profoundly disappointed by Morrissey's descent into open xenophobic racism. What this music stood for to me – delinquent pride, queer solidarity – has flown a terrible trajectory that I cannot understand in any other way than as a sad and dangerous madness. Where he once seemed to show me re-visioned beauty, young bodies strong and luminous, the music, as a result of his actions, is now reproduces ugliness.]

Time moves on. 'The Queen is Dead' was the kind of song we listened to on tapes with very little information other than what we were told by our friends or read in music tabloids. A couple of years ago I asked my young son to put a cassette tape into a borrowed car's stereo that could still take them and he tried to shove the whole thing in, plastic case and all. The terms of reference were just not there. I am mindful of the way this song's impulse – which at the time held a hand out to unnamed losers, minors, anyone in transit, queering, disconnected, or in danger of disappearing, drowning in a sea of voice fragments, unformed questions and ruminations – connects so seamlessly with the narratives I have been collecting. In the conspiratorial, liberating encounters that people are seeking, the novels provide an opening to a field of research that tells of delinquent and youthful people. They are standing close together, somewhere quiet and dry, as if in a ruined shrine, trying to work out what to do next. An escape? They show the way to a new redistributed sensible reality that others may also inhabit. There is a destructiveness that is positive but still violent, for to live, to survive, to become, sometimes requires killing something off in our subjectivity. In fiction, and in adolescence, a third person can be made – the prior self is made other by a new organisation or manifestation of self, and this new I is more powerfully free and malleable.[51]

As I studied these narratives, they carried me back to Ōtautahi Christchurch in the mid-1980s, to my own adolescence, and how I would meet a friend at the local provincial art museum and use this place to our own ends, as a *pied-à-terre* of sorts. We were fifteen and supposed to be practising for a chamber music lesson that we shared but we would go there instead, smelling of cigarette smoke. The air was still, close, and we would talk with no urgency, lying on black leather benches, tending complicity – a coming community? The air never moved, and the lukewarm stillness had no time, or at least no time that demanded anything of us. Not to talk, to attend, to improve, to understand. I can still conjure the smell of the air, and how it seemed to emanate from the rich, polished, coarse cork floor – a pause.

Sometimes I came there after shoplifting to meet her, and she might talk lazily about an article she had just read in *Vogue* about vitality or some other rubbish. We might have been there after watching the ballet corps through the studio window from our practice room. We may have been playing our pieces very, very slowly, funereally – sludge, shoegaze, composed music on muscle-relaxants – as slowly as we could to the point where rhythm is lost, reformed, freed, towing more and more towards post-punk. Our lesson was in a nearby vacated Victorian-gothic university complex, full of eccentric rooms, some in a state of disuse, many of which had been repurposed by people who occupied them. It had been superseded by a new brutalist campus, designed to prevent the gathering of crowds, in the affluent northwest suburb in which I lived, and, thus, the former became the ruin it was destined to be. One we favoured had a couch and a beanbag and sometimes we found discarded amorous thank-you notes to the ballet dancers we would watch through a high window from a bench in the cloister. At one point my friend had put a listing into a syndicated newspaper classifieds service asking readers of the 'personals column' if someone could please tell her what is the point. She would receive letters *poste restante* to the central post office that fell into three groups – some concurring with her that sadly there was no point, and how fucked that was,

[51] See Maurice Blanchot's 'Death as Possibility' in *The Space of Literature* on this point, pp.87-107.

the others urging her to get help, concerned she would harm herself. And some offering to pay her for sexual favours. We would open the envelopes and read the contents slowly on our low, contemporary bench deep in the old-fashioned gallery, not saying much, passing paper things between ourselves.

Whatever we were doing in this building – a picture gallery, a 1920s ruin based on a Greek temple, and resembling, somewhat comically, Robert Smithson's drawing *The Museum of the Void* (1966-68) – we were always, at a basic level, on the run from our childhoods and the approaching adult world. It had a pleasing, sunken, columned, apricot marble foyer, opening up high into a domed ceiling. Today, it has been unoccupied by the institution for some twenty years, the victim of a new gallery project – a glassy building project that offers little concealment and has no obvious entrance or opening. The old gallery was in the botanical gardens (a garden enclosed within a garden), and behind it, between it and the old university, was the museum. Built by the same medievalising architect, it had a land-that-time-forgot tearoom in its very centre that opened up onto an interior courtyard that had a large, square Japanese-style pool, and the full skeleton of a blue whale. I would smoke there and marvel at the vast chest cavity of the enormous mammal as I drew smoke into my own: I exist, the sight of the smoke affirmed. We had started smoking in emulation of Joan Collins in *Dynasty*, who would inhale, speak and then blow out smoke, which was entrancing.

At some point in my twenties, in a room close to the museum's interior courtyard – which has since been built out as if it never existed to provide an administration block – there was an unexplained exhibit of confiscated weapons made in secret by inmates at the men's prison on the outskirts of town. Studying the table-cases, moving through the small, ratty, otherwise empty space, looking at these fearful things made to attack and defend was like dreaming. It was paired with an air-rifle range that was unsupervised. It turned out that I was a very good shot. Kim Gordon said that women make natural anarchists because we live in a patriarchal environment. This is why women look great carrying guns she said. The last woman I saw holding a gun was outside one of the Ōtautahi Christchurch mosques where the shooting had taken place. She was slight and the automatic weapon large and she was rocking from side to side under the trees of the adjoining park like she was holding a baby. For the five hours following the shooting I was under lockdown with my son at the 'new' public art gallery. Museums are dreams, constructed from the fragments of culture to make strange inhabitable images.

This provincial museum was to me a strange and inhabitable image, but one that had an undertow of hostility, of settler violence. Entering from the street – then and still today – a swift right turn to avoid the desk takes you to a narrow passage that opens up onto a small gallery in which there are three dioramas that purport to represent pre-colonial Māori life, along with a taxonomic display of implements. These have always been hard to stomach, shameful, at as they depict tangata whenua as primitive to the point of Paleolithic – when it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the colonists arrived in earnest, and 800 years since the first wakas arrived from Hawaiki. The skillfully made figures are grimy, spiritless, dehumanised, even seeming without language or emotion – there is nothing fine or beautiful or philosophically deep about any of these representations. They are sinister in their

archaeological declaration that this culture is already dead, and what a clever pin 'we' have put through it. This part of the museum would make me think of a Patricia Grace story I had read in high school called 'Parade' about a young Māori woman, Matewai, who has been called back by her family from the city where she has been living to take part in an annual carnival. She performs as part of a kapa haka rōpū on the back of a flatbed truck in her small town in the North Island Te Ika-a-Māui. Hoea ra nga waka, e te iwi e they sing, but she feels abandoned and "dry as an emptied flax pod that rattles and rattles into the wind."[52] She feels her uncle and cousin are being looked at like clowns, and all of them, the adults and tamariki in the party together, as zoo animals. Or as museums:

> …stuffed birds, rows of shells under glass, the wing-span of an albatross, preserved bodies, shrunken heads. Empty gourds, and meeting houses where no one met any more. I kept thinking, and trying not to think, 'Is that what we are to them?' Museum pieces, curios, antiques, shells under glass. A travelling circus, a floating zoo. People clapping and cheering to show they know about such things.[53]

When her Nanny ask her to perform again later, to take her place in the forming lines for waiata, she tries to sit it out. Her nanny tells her she sees she is sad today, and they sit with that. Matewai (whose name corresponds to the te reo Māori for thirst or thirsty) says people are looking at them like relics, amusement. That are put on show one a year. After a while Nanny says that she thinks she will understand more as she gets older. "No one can take your eyes from you." A koro tells her, "It is your job, this. To show others who we are." She realises what has been put upon her: " Then I went towards the group and took my place and began to stamp my feet on the cracked earth, and to lift my voice to the sun who holds the earth's strength within herself."[54] Later that night, home at the end of the road, paddock gates opened and closed, she goes to the sea:

> I took in a big breath, filling my lungs with sea and air and land and people. And with past and present and future, and felt a new strength course through me. I lifted my voice to sing and heard and felt others join with me. Singing loudly into the darkest of nights. Calling on the strength of the people.[55]

I imagine Matewai coming to the museum to chant karakia at the dioramas, the cabinets of tools, taonga, insects, to utter incantations, to cut the air. To invoke, summon powers, energies; to self-determine and claim a subject position in the face of this othering. I was becoming aware that this was a place, a site of the establishment, fast becoming a museum of a museum – a museum perhaps of the reproduction of whiteness – but without the vocabulary

[52] Patricia Grace, *Waiariki*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1975, p.84.
[53] Ibid., p.85.
[54] Ibid., p.88.
[55] Ibid., p.89.

with which to discuss this negation of living Indigenous culture. Following recent complaints and media attention, the museum has strangely covered the glass of just one of the dioramas with a translucent film which has gaps in it like tiger stripes so people can still see through. The one they chose to obscure does not seem less upsetting than the other two. And recollection of the words of Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* disturb the stale air:

> …the museum by itself is nothing; that it means nothing, that it can say nothing, when smug self-satisfaction rots the eyes, when a secret contempt for others withers the heart, when racism, admitted or not, dries up sympathy; that it means nothing if its only purpose is to feed the delights of vanity…[56]

I have yet to find a novel by an Indigenous writer in which a character visits a museum, and surely this is evidence of some order – even though you can't prove a negative – of the oppressiveness of the museum as a flowering of colonisation and neo-colonial endeavour. However, in a later edition of John Puhiatau Pule's epic love poem *The Bond of Time* (1985), he makes it clear that he wrote this work as a young man, a lover, and a museum visitor:

> When I wrote this poem at the age of 21, I was unsure about the systems of life. This was my first attempt at looking at erotic love, at trying to understand its reasons and existence.
>
> I saw love as a singular, narcissistic entity, concerned only with itself, so when I set out to write *The Bond of Time*, I sought the landscapes, architectures, store houses and peoples of the world, and delved into history; anything that generated melancholy or joy, or resonated with stillness or energy. I spent a lot of time in the Auckland Museum.[57]

He has not written a novel in which a character visits a museum, but the whole poem seems to express, to shimmer when held at a particular angle, his experience of coming to know love better – the elements of life, their interplay, passages – by punctuating his existence, his project's growth, with visits to the Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. As I read I started to mentally underline in soft pencil the nouns, as it was full of naming words that gesture to being in a museum – animals, plants, birds, insects, flowers, fruit, vessels, gathered specimens, things to nourish, geographies, phenomena, body parts, ruins, geological samples, weapons, implements, illuminations, waka, poisons, transports, clothing and bedding, marks on the skin, albums, statues, a door, a church, a bell, rain, letters, blood, filth, fire, silk, dust, roots, images. The whole registers as a machine to break down distinctions, the space between nouns and verbs, the vā – the non-empty space "between the betweenness" where things are eventually decided, "where our words take on meanings."[58] "…va spaces, that

[56] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (*Discours sur le colonialisme*), [1950] trans. Joan Pinkham, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, p.71.
[57] John Puhiatau Pule, *The Bond of Time: An Epic Love Poem* (1985), Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2014, p.vii.
[58] Ibid., p.ix.

which is in-between us that is more than you and me, what in you that is more than you."[59] In this text, being in the museum appears to be the attempt to understand things by inhabiting the space between us and things and each other, and how – in it, and in relationship – we know and be, and come into ourselves:

> I go to museums and give my future to
> The past. I go to parks and take what new
> thing nature has given birth to. I sleep
> on grass to feel her moving her fields.
> I sleep on her because it is ephemeral.[60]

In the museum, I read the poet entering and inhabiting the museum as an ethnographic constuction, and he could, in this artificial territory, use – still grounded – this Eurocentric history to feel against, to generate and register emotion. The space is co-opted to connect with elation, sadness, grief, and have stillness and be stirred up – to move emotion, and to understand great love from a wider view than an enclosed, narrow, amorous self.

As an inadequately conscious youth, I found museum spaces conciliatory in a thoughtless, alert sort of way, like the "snipe's bandage" Colette found in the story told to her by her typist.[61] But I could likely do this with facility for, because I am Pākehā, nothing in these spaces told me I was other. It is clear that one person's heterotopia can be another's diminishment; one person can have an empowered dialogic relationship with space or what is exhibited, and another can find it inherently unsafe or irrelevant.[62] And because of the way we respond the material around us, to our built and owned environments, on one day we can feel something, on another nothing. One day something can swallow us, and on anohter we can swallow and digest it. To me, as a youth, museums and books were space-time sequences,[63] but I was and still remain curious about how other minors, adolescents, experience the museum and what it is used for. And more curious still about how it is pictured in literature, where the ideas are seemingly less self-conscious or instrumentalised.

---

[59] Albert Refiti, 'Woven Flesh,' *Interstices Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, No. 6, 2005, p.54.
[60] Ibid., p.80
[61] "This is what I used to call, and still call, a particular king of unremarkable and soothing event that I liken to the dressing of wet clay the snipe binds around its foot when a shot has broken it. A visit to the cinema perhaps, provided the films are sufficiently mediocre, counts as a snipe's bandage. But, on the contrary, an evening in the company of intelligent friends who know what it is to be hurt and are courageous and disillusioned, undoes the bandage, Symphonic music generally tears it off, leaving me flayed, Poured out by a steady, indifferent voice, pronouncements and predictions are compresses and camomile tea to me." Robert Phelps (ed.), *The Collected Stories of Colette*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982, p.357.
[62] Consider, for example, how much fear might need to be overcome to be able to enact a positive becoming operation with painting such as this: "Even if I'm their hostage when I look at them, I'm not inferior to them. I lie down, stand, or sit in front of them and, in this moment, I'm everything they affect in me." Jutta Koether, *f* [1987], Berlin: Sternberg, 2014, n.p.
[63] Ulises Carrión, 'The New Art of Making Books,' *Kontexts*, no. 6-7, 1975. http://www.reflexionesmarginales.com/biblioteca/15/Documentos/Ulises_Carrion:The_New_Art_of_Making_Books.pdf

Indeed, as I gathered narratives together, it became clear that they presented an image of the fictional museum as a phenomenon of white literature, and that the protagonists were more likely to be men than women, straight than queer. This is predictable, given the traditionally colonial, patriarchal, hetero-normative projects of museums and publishing, but the starkness of the omissions, erasures, exclusions, occlusions is still striking. The question 'whose heterotopia?' hangs in the overall space of this study: who can use the museum as transformative space? For whom is it generative? For whom is it violent? And what is there in the bothness of these questions that might produce deterritorialisation? For example, a museum in Aotearoa is clearly not the same space for colonised Māori or diasporic peoples of Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa as it is for descendants of settler colonists; for women or minors anywhere as it is for empowered male subjects of the dominant straight white culture. But the potential is there to work against and with what the museum makes visible, perceptible, artificial, aesthetic, to contest the sensible.[64]

I, myself, ended up working at the old art gallery for a time in my early 20s as a curatorial assistant, and some time afterwards I learned that people would come and make out behind the large, heavy crimson velvet curtain that partitioned off a door to the storage areas. (Today, young people come to the new gallery, where I currently work 'in visitor programmes,' to take selfies in front of a wall-size pastel light-box work, which seems like a paltry development.) I was also told that an entire circus of animals had been shot in the early 20th century and buried beneath the garden beside the gallery's south wall to the right of the entrance portico. The circus had run out of money at the ends of the earth, so the animals had been shot by their keepers. Apparently, many of the taxidermised animals (predators and prey alike) that were on display in the adjoining museum were from this contingent. I remember with horror the mother bear and her cubs. More recently I was told that at around the same time I would bunk music practice with my now-dead friend – and as the experience of feedback in music was obliterating my connection with chamber music, and the needle on the record had begun making me a little faint, as needles can – the then director used to permit a man, a respectable local figure, a friend, to arrive by the back entrance at night, dressed in a ball gown. He would move in a slow dance around the arched loop that composed the arcade of picture galleries on the polished coarse cork floor in ecstasies, transported, free. Under these conditions he was ageless, re-forming, and on dry land, the cruel sea shut outside the heavy doors of the entrance.

Two paintings from the old art gallery burned images onto my consciousness as an adolescent. The largest canvas showed an 18th-century Dutch funeral on ice, a meditation on death. In its bottom right-hand corner was this strange patch of dead, fine reeds coming out through the snow, buckled, rendered in gestural strokes that did not match the central figures, which for the life of me could have been used in industrial or shit-core or winter-pagan album art. Another, a smaller painting, all reds and silvers and rough figures with the small words 'I heat up I can't cool down' inscribed on it, frightened me in a visceral way when I first saw it. Shortly afterwards, I was aware it impressed me greatly that a painting could made me feel faint, the spectre of suicide buzzing with insect-like wings, a large cockroach passing through

[64] It seems that for performed interventions into the museum by Māori and Pasifika people, we must look to the visual arts, where the dissensual encounter with the museum is enacted most visibly.

the air leaving a faint meaty metallic smell. Here there was the revolutionary laughter of girls at their insufficiency, outstripping fear. A tide coming in to fill an absence, some warmth. Disaster, the dark rising, but greased we slip through the narrow space and fall out into a strange one. And our liquid eyeliner, stolen. Stay for as long as we can stand it, breathe the old air, be seen, knock things over. *Shall we go to the costume hire?*

In the aftermath of my own errant youthful visitation, I gathered stories of museums and those who use them. Eventually, the narratives laid out like a cloth, I pull a thread. It is the delinquent adolescents that keep appearing in the literature again and again, desiring, searching for openings and the sense of a coming community. The museum visitations are narratives of becoming, and contrite to the image of the museum as transit space, waiting rooms for the soul. They constitute something of an alternative guide to museum visitation – one focusing on the subjective production of the agent in space that is both oppressive and productive, the tension magnetic. The first story-fragment, one of many rooms we will visit, is a museum visited by a teenager on the run from people demanding his compliance. It is a place where nothing changes, and he goes to it as an insect against the window of a lit room, knowing he, clueless and unsupported in his breakdown and rebellion, needs things to be very different. He risks punishment, failure, his sense of self, and the support of his family that demands he behaves in a certain way, looking for a soft place to fall, flying apart, wide open, anxiety to the eyeballs, towards something else. The museum isn't just a place where everything stays the same; it offers something else, something of a non-distinct passage. And he is brave enough to inhabit this ambivalent space, to be one with its tensions, like the tension (sculptural, painterly, gestural) that strong art, strong substances, deal in, and from which new states and realities emerge. He is like a juvenile bird or detective, without trusted feathers or understanding of horribly complex, unintelligible and unsympathetic episteme. The museum seems knowledgeable, gracious, but at the same time entirely complicit in the ungenerous and rigid milieu that sees him as a loser son. He can, at once, with the genius plasticity of the adolescent, suck in its promise, and rebel against its strictures.

<u>Everything stinks and you suck</u>

We were given literature to study at high school, 'coming of age' rites-of-passage texts so often given to the young, stories that told us not to trust the adult world – *The Go-between*, *The Whale Rider, Bonjour Tristesse*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies* – that were all narratives of abandonment. In their derangement of standard, safe, predictable stories of childhood, they both cast doubt on ourselves, our human nature, the weird formless adult future (like a grub), and opened the possibility of new realities, new choices we could make, and how we could resist something and take risks. In *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Holden Caulfield's disgust for the adult world is so very clear. He uses the word 'phonies' and the adjectives 'crummy' and 'lousy' all the time. To him, it's all wrong, and he is calling it. You are all liars. You people make me sick. Fundamentally spoiled and privileged, he is still the image of someone trapped and wanting to transform. His risk is lessened, insulated, less horrific, but he still has the desire to kick a hole in a wall and go through and kill off something of himself.

Holden is at his fourth prep school. He is a rich boy, sent to boarding schools, who clearly does not want to live any longer with teachers and students who are to him dishonest, abusive and corrupt – even if his own self-centredness and sexism is invisible to him – and he does not want to live as his milieu expects him to once he graduates. He has been expelled, but it will be several days before his parents get wind of this news at the end of term, so he decides to leave early and spend a few days in New York on his own before going home to his parents' apartment on the Upper West Side. He calls girls, older friends, a prostitute he heard of from someone at school. He gets a hotel room, goes to a nightclub, the movies, gets drunk, has two dates, and tries to track down his younger sister without his parents knowing. He even sneaks into his own home at night to spend time with her, seemingly the only person with whom he feels safe. He looks like he is planning his own death, but he says he is planning an escape to somewhere else, out of the city, out of this world, to the wilds of New England.

As he explains to his first date – whom he invites to join him in his escape during ice-skating at the Rockefeller Centre – his schools were full of phonies, and that it stinks, and you are supposed to study so you can buy a Cadillac and you stick with whatever group you are supposed to stick with. She offers that plenty of people get more out of school than that, and he gets agitated: "I agree! I agree they do, some of them! But that is all I get out of it. See? That's my point. That's exactly my goddam point. … I don't hardly get anything out of anything, I'm in bad shape. I'm in lousy shape."[65] He asks her if she wants to split with him and his $180 to Massachusetts and Vermont where they could chop their own wood and have a horse instead of a car. But after she says no, and tells him it sounds like an ill-conceived plan – why does he not slow things down, and graduate, and we could get married after you find a good job —he calls her a pain in the ass. She walks off home alone, and he retires to a bar where he tries flirting with some women to no avail. He wanders a few blocks up to Central Park, where he hopes to find his sister.

In the park, he bumps into a child whom he recognises from his apartment block and asks her if she has seen her. She says no, but suggests looking in the museum – they had been there in class that week. He asks her which museum, the one with the art, or the one with the Indians. So, "even though it was so damp and lousy out," he walks towards the Museum of Natural History, ruminating about frequenting the institution as a child – a teacher had taken him there almost every Saturday. However, it is Sunday, and Holden "knew that whole museum routine like a book."[66] I quote this at length because the passage reinforces the way in which museums are domains, accumulations of the particularities. In the museum, he is in communion with the thing-ness of the objects, their mute indeterminacy, and their stability, time's arrest. They mean nothing, nothing means anything, and therefore nothing matters. The way they, unlike him, do not change:

[65] J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, New York: Bantam Books, p.131.
[66] Ibid., p.119.

> Sometimes we looked at the animals and sometimes we looked at the stuff the Indians had made in ancient times. Pottery and straw baskets and all stuff like that. I get very happy when I think about it. Even now. … It always smelled like it was raining outside, even if it wasn't, and you were in the only nice, dry, cosy place in the world. … The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deer would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you. Not that you'd be so much older or anything. It wouldn't be that, exactly. You'd just be different, that's all.[67]

He starts to think about how his sister would see the same things when she went regularly as he had, and that the idea that she would be different every time starts to get him down. "Certain things they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway."[68] Once he gets there, he realises he does not have the slightest desire to enter the museum, and heads back to the city. After a failed date, trying to visit his parents' apartment and a former English teacher who might have made a pass at him, he wanders Fifth Avenue until the morning. This is where he decides, in disgust, to go west, and become a petrol-station attendant and recluse. He then decides to go to his sister's school, and give a note to someone at the principal's office to ask her to meet him at the museum at lunchtime – she'd be passing on her way home for lunch anyway, he reasons. But climbing the stairs he feels faint, like he is "gonna puke"[69] and sits down to get it together. But right there on the wall someone has written 'fuck you' in pencil. He frets over what little kids would think of that and how they might worry for days what it meant, and thinks he should rub it off, but imagines someone would catch him and think he wrote it there himself. He rubs it out anyway and proceeds with his plan, and to the museum. Once inside, he waits for his sister in the foyer, but two smaller boys come up and ask him if he knows where the mummies are. Despite feeling nauseous, he asks the boys why they are not in school, toying with them a little, and then takes them to the exhibit. He tells them how the Egyptians buried their dead. The littler of the two becomes more afraid and doesn't want to go in, and they leave Holden alone, which he finds peaceful. Until he discovers another 'fuck you' written in red crayon under the glass part of the wall:

> That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write "Fuck you" right under your nose. Try it sometime. I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say "Holden Caulfield"

[67] Ibid., p.121.
[68] Ibid., p.122.
[69] Ibid., p.201.

> on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say "Fuck you." I'm positive, in fact.[70]

He is overcome with nausea in the bathroom and he faints. He gets up – not knowing how long he has lain there – feeling somewhat better, less dizzy. His little sister arrives with her suitcase, wanting to run away with him. He refuses, and she is so upset he decides to stay. He feels happiness watching her ride the carousel in the rain. The story ends narrated from Holden in some sort of hospital or institution where he is recovering from what is sketched as a breakdown. He is scheduled to start a further school in the fall. (See you in the fall, or not at all, as the cowboys say.) Considering the nature of the visitor and of the museum in these passages, the museum, here, to Holden, the errant, anxious visitor, has a charm – a safe place that is dry and comforting, unchanging, in contrast to an outer world that clearly is not cosy in any way and where things keep happening, requiring us to improvise change. It offers a frail hope that the downward slide might be stopped, by arresting it behind glass, stopping it where it can be studied, circled, before it becomes an unstoppable avalanche, and he is ruined and all is lost. Here there is hope for people like Holden, those who do not fit well into the world they are expected to conform to, to reproduce its code; those who are being rebuked and need things to be different. If only he knew how. He needs change and sees the museum as ambiguous possibility, a place where he might magically find a way through – the museum as disturbed, arrested temporality, a freeze-frame in which he might buy time, get an extra life. But the museum and its unchanging quality does not stop his disgust from breaking through. It seems to represent little more than a rendezvous point in the end. He is left with the sick feeling in his belly, and a nasty taste in his mouth, from emotional revulsion and anxiety. His disgust has led him to rebel, but it has fallen flat – the museum seemed to offer a space where he might be able to start a new phase in his life, and a place for him to commune with his trusted sister, but inside he has lost hope – there are still people, and the weight of convention. This is the museum's double-edged sword: magical-seeming and a different time-sphere, but still carrying the narratives and organisation of state power. He has not the strength to take flight more fully or sharpen his claws against such displays of 'significance.'

The Catcher in the Rye shows us an adolescent in crisis, turning in a confused way towards the museum. Hoping that it will do something to assuage his feelings of foreboding and confusion. His adolescence seems mutant, and the museum is cast as a site that receives this desire to transform in multiple ways. It arrests time, disturbs it, and opens a possibility for derangement. In this space he can fall apart while time has stopped, and perhaps by osmosis be able to form sense from chaotic fragments surrounded by narratives presented about the mysterious past. But it all stays a mystery even if it is ordered artificially as a continuous and sensible history within the walls. It is as if he is guessing that inside he can hesitate, let the fragments fall, and maybe make new constellations that serve him better – a reconfiguration of the self – or maybe just a throw of the runes? The museum and adolescence are imagined as reactive surfaces, substances, spaces, entities that can interact, show new paths and passages,

[70] Ibid., p.204.

clues. To use the language of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, they participate in a transaction, elements of an assemblage, agents of deterritorialisation – leaving a territory, altered, and extending self and territory at the same time – and reterritorialisation – self, reality, power coming together again in new ways, the territory changed by its reacting materials; the reconstitution of a world.[71] The adolescent seeks to break up, to change quickly, to adapt successfully, victoriously; the museum trades in other times, groupings and arrangements of things, lists of words, with stories overlaid, suspensions of order over chaos. In these spaces the adolescent can imagine *something else* in its quiet, enclosed frozen frame. She can act as philosopher or artist, both deranging sense and spinning new formations from chaos that are ideas and images of the self – in other words, producing subjectivity by her own design, clumsily, risking probable failure each time.

There is also the glimmer here of the relationship between the work of the novel in modernity and the image of the museum. Annie Dillard, a consummate writer of the mystery of things, of mental objects, of epistemological crisis, wrote in *Living by Fiction* (1982) of the problem of knowing the world, and how it is rooted in a problem that it is inside it, which is the need to "examine the mind's own way of knowing."[72] If the museum and fiction, together, deal an effort "to establish that things are here,"[73] the catalogue of things presented to us in a museum can be read as being of a different, fictional order – of the future rather than past – as belonging or participating in another class of objects, those "brought into being by hope."[74] As such, this evidence of things, of knowing, of existence, of transit by hope, can offer a portal to another reality.

Drumming and the supernatural

This rebellion against the museum as house of the father, coupled with an attraction to it as portal, is also visible in a museum story from another novel that brings us an adolescent's desire for freedom. His disgust for what his family has laid out for him is strong – Holden may be a troubled bourgeois castaway, but the next youth is a petit-bourgeois midget who moves nomadically (disdaining roots) away from a broken family, to a child-gang, to a circus, all the time beating repetitive refrains on his drum, and breaking glass with his cries.

Gunther Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959) chronicles the life of Oskar, a dwarf, who tells us his story late in life as long-term patient in a mental hospital. He tells of his family of origin, the place he was born into in 1924 – The Free City of Danzig – his childhood, adolescence and adulthood in the Germany and Poland over which the rise of Nazism hung like a dark, spectral pall. Oskar tells how he believes he was one of the clairsentient children who are born with their full intellect present, but whose bodies cannot yet be used to match it. He overhears his

[71] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Mille plateaux*) [1980], trans. Brian Massumi, London and New York: Continuum, 2003.
[72] Annie Dillard, *Living by Fiction*, New York: Harper and Row, 1982, p.53.
[73] Ibid., p.58.
[74] Ibid., p.60.

father (or who he was told was his father, himself having other theories about that) say two things before his third birthday that change the course of his young life: that he is to take over his family grocery store, and that he will receive a tin drum for his birthday. It is also at this time that his father intentionally leaves open a door, which enables Oskar to fall down a flight of stairs. Oskar takes this fall as an excuse to not grow, to never have to be of adult size or be subject to the demands made of a 'normal' adult. His mother buys him the drum, and he drums all the time to control sensory space around him, to draw attention to himself, to bring his desires into present reality, and later, in life, it is the only mechanism that enables him to remember his past in detail. From the age of three Oskar's body does not grow in height. He lives his childhood, drumming, and controlling any assaults on his freedom by shattering glass with ear-piercing shrieks.

After his mother dies, Oskar is left with his feckless father, and ends up spending most of his time with a family upstairs who indulge him. He hangs around a lot with the son, a young man back from the war and out of work, until, after maternal pressure he comes home in the grey uniform of a guard at the Maritime Museum. Oskar insists on following him to work on his first day, and will not go home when they reach the Museum. Herbert eventually relents and paid for his pass, and lets him spend the day with him in his appointed role as guardian of the pride of the Museum's collection, an antique figurehead called Niobe. This sounds like a simple enough task, but she is in her own room for a reason – she has a history that makes her supernatural powers very clear. She: a luxuriant wooden woman, green and naked, arms upraised and hands indolently clasped in such a way as to reveal every single one of her fingers; sunken amber eyes gazing out over resolute, forward-looking breasts. This woman, this figurehead, is a bringer of disaster. She had been commissioned by Portinari, the merchant, from a sculptor with a reputation for carving figureheads; the model was a Flemish girl close to Portinari. Scarcely had the green figure taken its place beneath the bowsprit of a galleon than the girl, as was then customary, was put on trial for witchcraft. Every ship that Niobe had ever graced had burst into flames, so eventually she was put into dungeon-like storage away from ships and those who sailed in them. A foolish museum director had brought her out of storage fourteen years later, and three museum directors and a researcher had died from chest wounds inflicted by sharp objects from the collection. As a result, it was hard to find museum attendants willing to undertake the risky job of guarding her. Cleaning women had stopped coming to the aid of the green kitten, as she had become known.

The two spend this first day happily, Oskar drumming periodically, and Herbert resting at stages, stationed on a chair outside the door to the space that Niobe inhabits. This pleasant time is repeated for two more days until, emboldened, and "on the pretext of cleaning," they enter Niobe's chamber:[75]

> It would not be accurate to say that Niobe left us entirely cold. Her lures were heavy, but nor unshapely and she was not backward in putting them forward. We did not look on her with eyes of covetousness. Rather, we looked her over in the manner of shrewd connoisseurs who

[75] Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrommel*) [1959], trans. Ralph Manheim, London: Pantheon, 1989, p.186.

> take every detail into account. Herbert and I were two aesthetes soberly drunk on beauty, abstract beauty. There we were, studying feminine proportions with our thumbnails. … We purposely simplified, reducing the whole problem to two terms and insulting Niobe on principle. We were unforgivably rude to her. Herbert picked me up so I could beat her breasts with my drumsticks, driving absurd clouds off sawdust from her sprayed and therefore uninhabited wormholes. While I drummed we looked into her amber eyes. Not a quiver or a twinge, no sign of a tear. Her eyes did not narrow into menacing, hate-spewing slits. … We felt safe. With a malignant cackle, Herbert drove a nail into her kneecap: my knee hurt at every stroke, she didn't even flicker an eyelash. Right under her eyes, we engaged in all sorts of silly horseplay.[76]

Herbert has wasted no time in declaring that she was not his type, saying he preferred slight, dainty women. The 14-year-old Oskar is dubious about this claim, as he can see her seductive charms. At the time Oskar and Herbert feel that Niobe is indifferent to them, and that the museum is a place they can take greater and greater license. Over the next fortnight, they take to dressing themselves in costumes and acting out military battles they have learned. They feel immune to punishment or recrimination. However, much later, from his hospital, Oskar reflects that, "Today I know that everything watches, that nothing goes unseen and that even wallpaper has a better memory than ours. It isn't God in His heaven that sees all. A kitchen chair, a coat-hanger, a half-filled ash tray, or the wooden replica of a woman named Niobe can perfectly well serve as an unforgetting witness to every one of our acts."[77]

Their play comes to an end when, trying to enter the Museum together at the start of another workday, the child is refused entrance on the grounds that he has behaved irresponsibly. They manage to convince the guard to let him come one last time, but it feels different. At one point in the day, horrifically, the light catches Niobe's amber eye, setting it aflame. This destroys their feeble attempts to make a game out of the fear of the statue's ability to sense them, and the unavoidable fact that they have become subject to municipal authority. The next day, Oskar waits outside, drumming, on the steps of a building opposite. Herbert comes out to see him at lunchtime and gives him his blood sausage sandwich, and the two repair to a bar. In the afternoon, Oskar watches the sun proceed across the carved polychrome frontage of the Museum until he can see it entering the window where it will be in line with Niobe's eye. Then an ambulance arrives, and Oskar enters with the attendants to discover his friend impaled on the statue:

> The emergency squad who came rushing in not far behind me had difficulty in getting Herbert away from Niobe. In a frenzy of lust he had torn a double-edged ship's axe from its safety chain; one edge had been driven into Niobe and the other, in the course of his frantic assault, into himself. Up top, then, they were perfectly united, but down below, alas, he had found no ground for his anchor and his member still emerged, stiff and perplexed, from his open trousers.[78]

[76] Ibid., pp.186-87.
[77] Ibid., p.187.
[78] Ibid., p.190.

Niobe is taken off display once again and entombed in the basement of the museum, where she is to be restored. Oskar knows this will not stop her: "But you can't lock up disaster in a cellar. It drains into the sewer pipes, spreads to the gas pipes, and gets into every household with the gas. An no one who sets his soup kettle on the bluish flame suspects that disaster is bringing his supper to the boil."[79] The impending disaster is not specified, but I am deducing that it is World War Two being blocked out in the story. It is certainly enough of an all-pervasive human horror for it to have seemed to be in the very air, like radiation, or a curse. Oskar was 14 in 1938. The statue had been brought out of storage at about the time of his birth. Oskar survives the war but neither his official father nor his possible father do. One is executed during the invasion of Poland, defending the post office; the other, to avoid his affiliation being exposed, chokes himself on his Nazi Party pin when the Russians take Danzig.

During the war Oskar joins a travelling troupe of dwarves who perform for German soldiers, and then forms a criminal youth gang in Danzig. After the war, he moves with his remaining family, his step-mother and her child, who may be Oskar's, to Düsseldorf. There he works as a life model and monumental mason. He eventually gains great fame as a jazz drummer and falls in love with a nun who is later murdered. Oskar allows himself to be wrongfully convicted of her death and is committed to the psychiatric institute from which we receive his recounted memoirs.

It is the chapter 'Niobe' in which the youth enters the museum. It is where the teen goes, an intensified episode in a lifetime of determinedly avoiding the future presented to him by his parents, who have the weight of social convention behind them. From his vantage point in forensic psychiatric seclusion, he explains his position by describing the first photograph taken of Oskar with a drum:

> Here I've got it. I've got my drum. It is hanging in front of my tummy, brand-new with its serrated red and white fields. With a solemnly resolute expression, I hold the sticks crossed over the top of it. I have on a striped pullover and resplendently patent leather shoes. My hair is standing up like a brush ready for action and in each of my blue eyes is reflected the determination to wield a power that would have no need of vassals or henchmen. It was in this picture that I first arrived at a decision which I have had no reason to alter. It was then I declared, resolved and determined that I would never under any circumstances be a politician, much less a grocer, that I would stop right there, remain as I was – and so I did; for many years I not only stayed the same size but clung to the same attire.[80]

Oskar's is a clear vote of no confidence in the adult world. Even to the sphere of politics, or the demos. The drum may have been chosen as a literary motif by the author because of the idiomatic phrase 'to beat a tin drum,' meaning to make a racket to draw attention to an issue or to strengthen the position of a cause. His unrelenting drumming – protected by his terrible glass-shattering scream – is an ongoing protest staged against his condition – the world of

[79] Ibid., p.191.
[80] Ibid., p.56.

work, the political sphere, being on the receiving end of capitalism, the hypocrisies of the petit bourgeois life, the balances of power, the rule of the state. Or it could be rebellion against what could be thought of as the tyranny of the real. That 'everything happens' is perhaps horror enough. Is experience not just a constant psychic invasion?

Oskar and Holden are both strictly adolescents in terms of an age-based definition, but in some of the other narratives that I have gathered in this study, there is a different sense of adolescence in evidence – one that is not limited to biological youth. There are passages undertaken by older characters who may be thought of as adolescent in the riskiness of their reckless undertakings, and in their following of desire to uncertain consequences. Just what adolescence is in character, it is argued here, is more to do with attitude than age, more about openness and improvisation in response to personal crises. This idea that youth might not be age specific but methodological opens the potential for youth to be considered more as trope than shackled to biological adolescence. Adolescence can be read in the behaviour of our fictional characters, who are undergoing transformational, reorganising processes, and rushing down passages without impulse control. Control stands between the subject and what it needs, and the adolescent character of any age ignores it at common sense's peril. The risks must be taken and caution thrown to the wind, and such processes can be even more powerful when there is, at once, a structure to work against, and to use as a model to form order from chaos after 'the revolt.' The museum's architecture is inviting to the rebel, the waster of time, the rewriter of self, the sorcerer's apprentice.

Adolescence as trope

Julia Kristeva's chapter 'The Adolescent Novel" in *New Maladies of the Soul* discusses the treatment of the adolescent analysand and the role of writing in the transference that underpins the therapy. But I am less interested in her analysis of young people than her writing about the adolescent 'subject,' and her multichannel methodology:

> The adolescent, like the child, is a mythical figure of the imaginary that enables us to distance ourselves from some of our failings, splittings of the ego, disavowals, or mere desires, which it reifies into the figure of someone who has not yet grown up, Moreover, the adolescent allows us to see, hear, and read these subjective fluctuations. … When I say adolescent, I mean less a developmental stage than an open psychic structure. Just as biologists speak of the "open structure" of living organisms that renew their identity by interacting with another identity, it could be said that the adolescent structure opens itself to that which has been repressed. At the same time, a tremendous freeing up of the superego permits it to initiate a psychic reorganization of the individual. … Just as there are '*as-if*' personalities, there are '*open structure*' personalities. … The adolescent represents this structure naturally, and it could only be termed a '*crisis'* structure within the context of an ideal and consistent law.[81]

[81] Julia Kristeva, 'The Adolescent Novel,' in *New Maladies of the Soul*, pp.135-36.

Kristeva employs an account of her work with a borderline patient, Anne, to discuss the passage of writing in the life of this young person. Anne, obsessed sexually with policemen, had been encouraged to write fiction, because to Kristeva, her therapist, fiction is "More real than a fantasy," since it "generates a new living identity":[82]

> Writing had replaced law and order. … In this case, as well as in other cases of adolescents who do not display Anne's borderline symptoms, I would tend to see writing as a semiotic practice that facilitates a renewed organization of psychic space – a process that preceded an idealised maturity.[83]

The adolescent is identified in these museum narratives as someone engaging an open psychic structure in the sense that Kristeva meant it. And following this conception, the writing of fiction, in the hands of the adolescent, becomes the site of a psychic redistribution, whereby the minor becomes sovereign in her empowered transformation. She even seems to produce freedom from the figure of the law; or the conditions that have given rise to illness or, in Kristeva's parlance, 'malaise.' Kristeva presents writing as a kind of cure: "Understood as the elaboration of a style, *writing resembles the subject's flight* against schizophrenia or depression."[84] But to differently frame this, we could see writing as the subject's schizophrenic flight in response to capital, against the depression that is the traumatised loss of energy from the experience of its swarming excesses. We do (and must) work with what we are and what we have at hand. There is no transcendence, just immanence and becoming. In the latter part of the chapter, Kristeva marvellously switches to the study of literature, to explore the figure of the adolescent, and the process and images of writing. This is useful to my own study because she goes further to explore not just the writing of fiction, but the reading of it, to isolate narratives and character case-studies that shed light on the psychic redistribution that has transformative properties or modes for survival.

It is important to underline at this point that this thesis involves the study of novels, not of museums. These narratives are explored as telling fictions, and as analogous of transformative processes, of which the writing process is one. What the character is doing is writing themselves. Acting out what writing does. Writing itself is very much a part of this story. You have the visitor and the museum, but this is the method. This sense of writing – altering – is the story of modern literature itself. Of philosophy. Of pharmacology. But, to return to Kristeva's analysis, at the ending, she offers the example of the work of Witold Gombrowicz and Vladimir Nabokov, which are used to interpret the seduction of the minor: *Lolita*, *Pornografia*, *Trans-Atlantyk*, as metaphors for the questioning of patriarchal values "which stem from an inevitably adult society."[85] The adolescents "impose themselves onto novelists

[82] Ibid., p.137.
[83] Ibid., p.138.
[84] Ibid., p.139.
[85] Ibid., p.151.

like metaphors of that which is not yet formed – a mirage of pre-language or an indecisive body":

> In this sense, Witold Gombrowicz, who has devoted his work to the pursuit of narrative forms appropriate for the fluidity of experience, including its annihilation in aphasia or in absurdity (see his *Cosmos*, 1964) nevertheless writes that "form is not in harmony with the essence of life." He glorifies "that which is formless and inferior, immature – the essential characteristics of youth, that is, or everything that lives." … To the adult world … Gombrowicz opposes the fascinating adolescent world. … My first goal, of course, is to bring the minor term of the boy, the adolescent, into prominence, into the world of official altars, by adding still another tone that is a tribute to the young God of the Worst, of the less good, of the inferior, the 'unimportant' that nevertheless finds strength in its inferior power.[86]

I am drawn, here, to the idea of an agent introducing something into a system that is alien to it with the goal of altering it (perverting it from its expected path or point of view). This gestures to the delinquents who enter the museum and repurpose it for themselves, in contradiction to the way its visitors are ostensibly envisaged to use the institution. I am also attracted to this passage because of the reference to altars. There are many analogous spaces for museums (from Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, "Dream houses of the collective: arcades, winter gardens, panoramas, factories, wax museums, casinos, railroad stations"[87]), as there are analogies for the crowd (from Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, "fire, the sea, rain, rivers, forest, corn, wind, sand, the heap, stone heaps, treasure"[88]). The sense is that there is an imaginary potency to these institutional sites, to these reactants. They have the character of oxidising and reduction agents, of hard drugs, strongly psychotropic and medicinal pharmakons:

> For the reader, is the written representation of an essentially open structure much more than a drug? In any event, the novel, which is close to catharsis, offers a certain working out that is not unrelated to the one inspired by transference and interpretation. I would call it semiotic. … This semiotic working-out provides the frame (the form), or simply the mirror of the adolescent passage.[89]

What is being sought is something effective in order to live, but the problem seems to be that the characters are trying to change that that has already been changed too much. Kristeva addresses this problem at the outset of the book, asking, in her chapter title, 'In Times Like These, Who Needs Psychoanalysis?' She answers this question by positing that the need for analysis is based not just on problems with the soul but on living in a society that leaves us without souls – the problem is, horribly, and in a secular sense, all to do with aesthetic-

[86] Ibid., p.151.
[87] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*)[1927-40], trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p.405.
[88] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht*) [1960], trans. Carol Stewart, London: Gollancz, 1962, p.75.
[89] Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, p.152.

political difficulty. Analysis is one way – a passage, an altar – that we might try to build a soul again:

> These days, who still has a soul? … today's men and women – who are stress-ridden and eager to achieve, to spend money, to have fun, and die – dispense with the representation of their experience that we call psychic life. Actions and their imminent abandonment have replaced the interpretation of meaning. We have neither the time more the space needed to create a soul for ourselves, and the mere hint of such activity seems frivolous and ill-advised. … Modern man is losing his soul, but he does not know it, for the psychic apparatus is what registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject. Ultimately, that darkroom needs repair.[90]

It is called delinquent, this visiting of the soul, this becoming-psychic, this writing of significances. Our adolescents are attracted to the aesthetic space of the museum – a place of fictions apparently freed of contradiction, time-interrupting, a plane of immanence. Their visiting is vitalist, dissenting, challenging, in crisis, critical. And amorous. They "make love everywhere" in the sense of making love that Félix Guattari gave us, beyond just human sexual relations: "There are all sorts of ways of making love! One can do it with flowers, with science, with art, with machines, with social groups."[91] Because they are the outsiders, in the terms of psychoanalysis, the task of the young museum visitors is to change the socio-symbolic contract that has until then excluded them. But their task is so very fraught – with no soul, no foundation for a soul, little or no sense of significance, and so much riding on it. But still, the museum glows as a place of images, as aesthetic space, as a space where something magical might happen, so it could be a place to build a soul – I mean, doesn't it seem to declare it is a place of significance, a place for significant things?

Delinquency and frivolity are othering nouns, but looked at from another angle, the delinquent exists in the time of art, in the slow time of art's materiality and temporality. There, the delinquent tries to heal wounds with images, with aesthetic space, but the delinquent stays mobile – theirs is a writing methodology to cover considerable ground. The characters in the books I have gathered are these open structures, adolescents of any age, or adolescents freed from calendar time, seeking something else. But thinking like this might account for the way the characters, as time goes on, flutter about the museum, or enter weakly, confused, as if in a dream, not connecting, wanting, but it's not working. The drug doesn't seem to be kicking in. Tolerance? No, it just does not match the receptors any more.

The image of Holden Caulfield travelling to the Egyptian tomb inside the Met, and going no further – his terminus – hangs in the air of the novel. A thread or strand of spider silk connects this image with a passage in Deleuze's *Proust and Signs* where he claims that all apprentices are Egyptologists:

---

[90] Ibid., pp.7-8.
[91] Dagmar Herzog, 'Desire's Politics: Félix Guattari and the Renewal of the Psychoanalytic Left,' *Psychoanalysis and History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp.7-36.

> Learning is essentially concerned with signs. Signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not 'the Egyptologist' of something. One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything that teaches us something emits signs or hieroglyphs. Proust's work is based not on the exposition of memory, but on the apprenticeship to signs.[92]

The spectre of hieroglyphs in this narrative sends out a signal that we are perceiving the actions of an Egyptologist-apprentice, patching together their learning, trying to find their way in a forest of confusing signs. It also sends out the question, are we not all swimming in so much information, novelty and sensation? Low on know-how, never knowing much yet, we are all adolescents, reading the signs, learning our trades, retraining, 'pivoting.' At worst, we are staggering around in a very confusing environment, disoriented. Too much change is our permanent crisis, and the youth in the museum in Salinger's novel, piecing together signs, could well be our peace-seeking avatar. William Burroughs often conjured Ancient Egypt in his writing (see, for example, *The Place of Dead Roads* and *The Western Lands*) and argued that hieroglyphs, being a more direct form of communication, let us go straight to the source – to the information, to the image, to the material – and avoid the control he abhorred:

> No matter what the spoken language may be, you can read hieroglyphs, a picture of a chair or what have you; makes no difference what you call it, right? You don't need subvocal speech to register the meaning of hieroglyphs. Learning a hieroglyphic language is excellent practice in the lost art of inner silence. "It would be well, today, if children were taught a good many Chinese ideograms and Egyptian hieroglyphs as a means of enhancing their appreciation of our alphabet." If you are able to look at what is in front of you in silence, you will be able to write about it from a more perceptive viewpoint. What keeps you from seeing what is in front of you? Words for what is in front of you, which are not what is there. [93]

It is plausible that the museum is a symbol of our desire to freely know on our own terms, to be guided by the purity of objects, its sound-vacuum helping us to this fabled inner silence. We are aided by the relative meaninglessness of museum exhibits (if we can ignore the contemporary museum's attempts to info-mediate) to write ourselves. We are freed by the hieroglyph-as-communication system of objects because they have, as Burroughs pointed out, no built-in facility for 'but,' 'who,' or 'what,' no past-present-future.[94]

---

[92] Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (*Proust et les signes*) [1964], trans. Richard Howard, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p.4.
[93] William S. Burroughs, 'Hieroglyphic Silence,' in William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*, New York: Viking Press, 1978, n.p.
[94] Allen Hibbard, ed., *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999, p.159.

Tendencies to fiction

Recourse to fantasy is sometimes considered, derisively, magical thinking. The form of the affidavit to delinquent acts is appropriate in that it is conventionally considered a crime to be non-compliant, to not defer to your 'elders and betters,' to not do what you are told, to not take the place that has been prepared for you. To 'waste time' as if time productivity is required and one's being merely a human resource in the production schemes of systems that one does not benefit from. The next narrative under examination involves a youth who knows that he must find his own way as a hustler – no other avenues are open to him in the straight world. His is a crisis he must outrun, so he sets sail.

Felix (the so-called lucky one) of Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (1954) is the son of a German industrialist who inconveniently became ruined just as his boy was to enter the world of adults in the early 20th century. Evading the draft, Felix takes flight to find his fortune in Paris, trying his hand in the hotel trade. Here he meets, charms and cons idle guests, and soon falls into an ambitious rort. A young marquis wants to stay shacked up with a servant he has fallen in love with and our man agrees to impersonate him on a tour to keep his family in the dark. The novel was unfinished at the time of Mann's death, but the narrative proceeded as far as Portugal, an early leg on fantasist-liar-confabulator Felix's (now the fictional Loulou the marquis) tour. On the train he meets the director of Lisbon's natural history museum, and he thrills our charmer, blowing his mind, with philosophical and scientific metaphysical mysteries:

> There was no question, he said, that life on earth was not only an ephemeral episode, but *Being itself was also* – an interlude between Nothingness and Nothingness. Being had not always existed and would not always exist. It had had a beginning and would have an end, and with it space and time; for they existed only through Being and through it were bound to each other. Space, he said, was nothing but the order of material things and their relationship to one another. Without things to occupy it, there would be no space and no time either, for time was only the ordering of events made possible by the presence of objects; it was the product of motion, of cause and effect, whose sequence gave time its direction and without which there would be no time. Absence of time and space, however, was the definition of Nothingness. This was extensionless in every sense, a changeless eternity, which had only been temporarily interrupted by spatio-temporal Being. A greater duration, by aeons, had been vouchsafed to Being than to Life; but some time of a certainty it would end, and with equal certainty the end implied a beginning…[95]

In Felix we can find expression of Kristeva's idea of open structure – philosophy undoing lucky Felix's pedestrian conception of reality, bringing forth a reorganisation heralding glimmers of possibility, of salvation, of a share, of being important – a sovereign subject rather than a disenfranchised minor, a disdained delinquent. Here, however, the terms adolescent and

---

[95] Thomas Mann, *Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (*Bekenntuisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*) [1954], London: Penguin, 1958, p.244.

delinquent can be thought of as hand in glove, and delinquency can be thought of as a liberating practice. The approach of the museum in the narrative at this point signals the museum as transitional space, a reactive site of territorialisation, and as philosophy not only deranging sense but forming constellations from chaos. Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation always coexist as operations.

As soon as he is in Lisbon, Felix visits the museum and from there makes conquests of the director's daughter and wife. He ends up in jail, the book tells us earlier on, but this part of the story was not written by Mann. The museum itself is visited quite hurriedly by the young man, but there is an air of it being a place that will deliver what he wants. This sense perhaps comes from the explanation the gentleman gave on the train about the evolution of man, and the appearance of life itself, and how there seems to be a magical element to it: "if we want to talk about descent, then we must say that men are descended from animals in just about the same way that the organic is descended from the inorganic. Something was added."[96]

The implication is clear. If this magic was possible, other magic is possible. His capacity for fiction is encouraged and amplified in the face of circumstances that are not at all what he wants for himself. The museum attracts him as a site of a sort of gnostic knowledge and power that he can harness for himself like some sort of misplaced teen god. Indeed, when the director is talking to Felix on the train about dinosaurs that walked on two legs, he offers his layperson impression that they can't have been much like Hermes, introducing the realm of myth and its supernatural potential to the conversation. This messenger-god with perfect proportions and winged feet was also the god of thieves, the divine trickster, and conducted the dead to the underworld. Hermes was also said to have the amorality of a child.

The situation of the story of a young person with strong tendencies to fiction in a museum is a pattern that recurs in this literature. These individuals are discontent, ravaged even by capitalism and its technical effects, determined to turn their horror into a dream. The mythic-aesthetic space of the museum, its magical pharmakon (something that rearranges, deranges, dis- and re-organises, transforms) of a labyrinth appeals so strongly as a narrative device. When Felix was being given a tour of the museum by our metaphysician and agent of the trip of geomorphic history, they did the animal world first. Then the director announced they were to descend to the basement to see the story of man. First the Neanderthals – which Felix could only see as images of a species striving for his own physical perfection, and having the sense they, like him, were made of "finer clay,"[97] The museum gives him an image of the potential to flourish – or people like him to prosper, a new breed, distinct from the beasts or those that have no soul. Latent possibility is the atmosphere, and Felix feels an excitement as if he is ready to fly.

Then they, curator–gatekeeper–keeper of the threshold and youth, look upon the primitive homo sapiens, a diorama of a man in his prime raising a bunch of flowers to the sun in a prayer for abundance. It is no mistake that this supernatural appeal is made in the natural

[96] Ibid., p.243.
[97] Ibid., p.275.

history museum in this novel – it becomes symbolic of the potential of evolutionary history and metaphysical philosophy to derange normal sense, and to 'ruin one's life' in a positive sense. The museum becomes a crucible to open the eyes to different possibilities for the conception of time, being and becoming for those on the run from reality. The novel's own ontological status as fiction too can be read as a corresponding symbol of the role of fictionalising (fiction being the production of new realities) and fantasy in subjective development. Anything new is a form of fiction, if it has been made up on the run.

Adolescence as subjective piracy

In search of applicable articulations of radical adolescence, I found a potent expression of this state of being in Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996). No museums are visited in this novel, but youth is its central theme, and adolescence as a condition can appear as being at sea, of running away to sea. Crisis drives subjects to look for islands and international waters, lawless or un- or less-determined places. The maritime image is meshed with the image of the museum in *The Tin Drum* to magnificent effect – a double sense of possibility for transformation and liberation, of *dérive*, "a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances."[98] Acker's adventure holds hands with the maritime-inflected Niobe sequence, with its ships, sailors, vengeful women and elemental perils – her pirate girls and boys are the shipwrecked of the world. The delinquent adolescent is the social weed, the neglected offspring, the person brought into an unfair, emotional desert where the advantages are kept for some other alien few, who must play by the codes of the advantaged, or become one with the whores and criminals – expelled, but full of potential:

> According to the dirty, filthy boys, the body is still in a process of being forged. … The body, the kid said further, when not being robbed blind by family and religion, has an infinite capacity for self-transformation.[99]

Of his youth gang, The Dusters, Oskar says, "We were against everything,"[100] and Holden Caulfield railed against 'phonies.' The adult world is something to reject, at huge personal risk – the 'grown-ups' can make the light go out on the day, as the establishment can draw its huge bat wings and cut off the sun. In *Libidinal Economy*, Jean-François Lyotard (Acker's colleague) wrote that labyrinths are opened by cries, and it is the responses of the young to their crises that make the very spaces, the intensities, in which they can work their transformational magic.[101] The implied architecture in this conception of the act of crying out

[98] Guy Debord, 'Definitions,' *Internationale Situationniste*, Vol. 1 (June 1958). Translated by Ken Knabb. Retrieved from https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html
[99] Acker, *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, p.40.
[100] Grass, *The Tin Drum*, p.361.
[101] Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (*Economie libidinale*) [1974], trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Athlone Press, 1993, p.41.

is profound – and it is a passing architectural analysis in Acker's novel that spoke to me strongly as I considered the form of the museum and the action of the young in it. It is as if Acker is describing the enclosed museum space of Salinger's and Grass's novels within the practice of storytelling between her protagonists:

> St Barbara, a whore in the oldest brothel in Alexandria, developed a political theory of religion: "Every revolution starts in a church or in the place of the church because churches and brothels do not have windows that lead to what lies outside. And so are refuges to all the shipwrecked of the world."[102]

An image of the museum is building. Layers, accretions. A fictional place or representations, enclosed, the sense of discoverable origins, a non-site of myth. The visitor profile: the shipwrecked. Those that have had violence visited on them, and epistemological devastation – not just having been told that there was knowledge, which was a lie, but also having a sense of knowing-what-to-do eroded by the vile experience of the time of the clock, and the disorientations of modernity. Embodied time, on the other hand, is something else. The motto of the sailor remains "any place but here," and the museum is an any-place-but-this.[103] A somewhere else. A something else. An island. A non-site. Acker's book makes me think of shoplifting as research. To explain, research is whatever we do when hardship is encountered, as Irit Rogoff puts it:

> Research, in the contemporary sense, is both a set of relations as well as a set of critical insights. It is, as such, that research links hands with the ongoing desire for criticality in a world where we can no longer step outside of problematics, cannot ever exit and have an external viewing position. In the final analysis, research is the potential for immersion and engagement without drawing conclusions or making predictions – the potential for making the world our own.[104]

In this light, museum spaces can be sites of contestation between accepted knowledge, inherited knowledges, and research practices. Pure research, as in the working out of whatever methodologies in response to difficulty, is what our adolescents are doing. The museum visitation narratives figure research in the sense that it is the practice of seeking out openings into transformative spaces.

[102] Acker, *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, p.31.
[103] Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* [1994], New York: Grove, 2018, p.156.
[104] Irit Rogoff, unpublished lecture, Monash University, Melbourne, March 1, 2018.

2.
Minor characters in transitional space

The possibility of the transformation of subjectivity

In an analysis of Kafka's *The Castle*, Deleuze and Guattari write: "A minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language."[105] The minor works inside the major, with the fabric of the major, rending it, rendering it, repurposing it, mutating it from the inside like a contagion. The minor becomes with the major, which is a creative process, "But the primary characteristic of a minor literature involves all the ways in which the language is affected by a strong co-efficient of deterritorialization."[106] This analysis can be applied to the museum visitation of adolescents in fiction cleanly by virtue of the youths being technically minors, but the term minor can apply in a sense beyond biological or legal age – to the subaltern or all-ages adolescent who seeks reorganisation in and beyond self. In the museum, the minor can bring another reality into play in the novel; a new community can be produced:

> …this situation makes [them] all the more able to express another, potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility. … The literary machine functions as the relay for a future revolutionary machine – not at all for ideological reasons, but because it provides a collective utterance, missing everywhere else in this milieu: literature is the affair of the people.[107]

The image of the museum arises in modern novels as a palace of possibility in the *transformation of subjectivity*. The minor changes the major from the inside, and literature indexes their becoming in a place that offers a multitude. As Michel Serres put it in *Genesis*, "The multiplicity of the possible is here, it is now."[108] If "the most common forgetting is that of the possible,"[109] the young remember:

[105] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What Is a Minor Literature?' *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter/Spring, 1983), pp.13-33. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20133921, p.16.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., p.17.
[108] Michel Serres, *Genesis* (*Genèse*) [1982], trans. Geneviève James and James Nelson, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1995, p.23.
[109] Ibid., p.24.

> The raucous, anarchic, noisy, variegated, tiger-striped, zebra-streaked, jumbled-up, mixed-up multiple, criss-crossed by myriad colours and myriad shades, is possibility itself. It is a set of possible things; it may be *the* set of possible things.[110]

In this chapter, the museums in Leonid Tsypkin's *Summer in Baden Baden* (1981) and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) are sought out as catalysts for different forms of resistance to societal limitations, to force the means for transformation. They effectively write themselves as a minor literature, working inside an edifice of the majority, and inside the society that they are still a part – although they risk dismissal in their bids for freedom that require the breaking of rules to mutate the system that does not favour them or their desires. The museum is chosen by authors as a narrative device, a setting, a motif in which dissent or rebellion, a longing for a solution, can be acted out. They demonstrate the way in which the modern literary imaginary tends to cast the museum as a place of apparent escape or respite, or ludic repair, where conventional considerations do not apply; where conventional consequence is eliminated or, at least, suspended. The museum appears as a literary nexus that connects fictioning and the transformation of subjectivity, where subjects are driven to act experimentally, freely, aesthetically, without impunity.

Perhaps there exists, somewhere in the subterranean psyche of the city-dweller, knowledge of the etymology of the word 'museum,' which comes from the ancient Greeks who established temples of the muses, places of divine inspiration. From the Greek, the Latin word, *mouseion*, the 'seat of the Muses,' came a name for architectural sites, aedifices, dedicated to research and creativity, and to the appreciation of the arts. The muses, female deities – it is a blessing to be able to conceive of gods as female and multiple – were imparters of knowledge, and their medium was lyric verse and songs that embodied mythological and scientific wisdom. That these were not ring-fenced discourses is interesting, as is the museum's semantic foundation as transfiguring space. Youth is interested in any form of transit, so the typology of museum architecture stands out in its resemblance of a transporting temple enclosing splendid and arcane collections, barely supervised and sparsely occupied spaces. In vast passages, with rooms left and right, with its stagnant air and the baffled silence, is the feeling of history, origins, of significance and self-assured (but ultimately nonsensical) order.

Before consideration of Tsypkin's and Wharton's novels, two texts suggest elements of the charm of the museum that novels such as these trade on: a demarked interior space that can be annexed, and a way to live together that is sympathetic. The first is a poem by Janet Frame, 'The Guggenheim Museum, New York,' and the second is a seminar by Roland Barthes. Frame likens the Guggenheim Museum to a spiralling shell, and the narrator is the supernatural snail herself:

> To view the public hangings
> a pastime they have long been accustomed to
> The people blaze their cultural trail downward inside me

[110] Ibid., p.22.

Demanding, How do you pronounce *Klee*?
Klee? Fire-clay? Or Klee, the pattern of a bird's cry
Above grey and white water solidified in oil
(the news has not yet reached the submerged mammals who must come to the surface and breathe
or the new mermaids with nowhere now to enact their betrayal.)

Water is sliding, spilling over thing tongues of glass
Arranged on my separate floors in *tiers* as if each tongue were
An apartment tasting and spit-raining people, returning them
To the heart of the fountain.
What marvels
Are contained in my shell, enough to invite
The sun to swoop down without charity
To take my intestines my flesh my bones my tourist parasites
This loving perplexed ineradicable infection
For choicest meat.
Swoop, sun and sky and blackbird
Upon my solid unfearful pearl! It is you
Will break your wings and light against my shell![111]

A multitude housed by a protective shell inside which magical things happen: this is the image of the museum I see in novels when they describe museum architecture as enclosed, windowless, like a church or a brothel. This poem whispers that the hard shell of the snail is rumoured to be the basis of the idea of *all* architecture. The building offers accommodation to people whose metaphysical task is living in society with all the clumsiness, perceived threats and failure involved.

Roland Barthes, in lectures drawn together in *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, termed such sympathetic spaces 'idiorrhythmic.' With this term the author shared with us a fantasy of architectural space in which people can be together that is conducive to *synaxe*, or prayer in its widest sense, as one would contemplate in a library. He offers that these are spaces "[w]here each subject lives according to his [or her] own rhythm":[112]

> 'Idiorrhythmy,' 'idiorrhythmic': this was the word that transmuted the fantasy into a field of knowledge. Through that word, I gained access to things that can be learned. Which is not to say that I was able to learn them: bibliographically speaking, my research has often been disappointing. … [It] has to do with subtle forms of way of life: moods, unstable configurations,

[111] Janet Frame, 'The Guggenheim Museum, New York,' in *The Goose Bath: Poems*, Auckland: Random House, 2006, p.93.
[112] Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces* (*Comment vivre ensemble: Simulations romanesque de quelques espaces quotidiens*) [2002], trans. Kate Briggs, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p.6.

> phases of depression or elation: in short, the exact opposite of an inflexible implacably regular cadence.[113]

Barthes goes on (forever open about his uncharted process of learning, which is, like adolescence, necessarily inelegant but sometimes sublimely fortunate in line and form), at the end of a section on fantasy in his opening lecture, to give an example of the kind of space he is willing into existence. Breaking with rigid rhythm or cadence gives rise to shared space or an episode that must be improvised if it is to be discovered:

> From my window (December 1, 1976), I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade's victims being whipped. She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son's rhythm is different. And she's his mother! –> Power – the subtlety of power – is effected through dis-rhythmy, heterorhythmy.[114]

Tsypkin's and Wharton's novels show characters straining to find a new rhythm with others in the muse-monitored space of the museum. The museum seems to place the characters in sympathetic space where individuals can come and be together in complicity or union, and ideally in communion, too, with themselves. Here, in such a palace, crisis and disconnection can be overcome, or at least that is the widely rumoured or imagined possibility presented in this selection of museum narratives. This effect is intensified if the museum is visited as a break with the way the individual has been living – a rupture to their milieu, activities, responsibilities, obligations. When a routine is interrupted, the balance is discharged, making way for new arrangements, new alliances, new senses. To leave home behind and stay out all night. Or sleep all day. Whatever it takes to overcome a subjective crisis.

Exceeding trauma at the summit

> The ideal of the shock-engendered experience is the catastrophe. This becomes very clear in gambling: by constantly raising the stakes, in hopes of getting back what is lost, the gambler steers towards absolute ruin.[115]

---

[113] Ibid., pp.7-8.
[114] Ibid., p.9.
[115] Walter Benjamin, 'Convolute O: Prostitution, Gambling,' in *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*)[1927-40], trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p.515.

A terrible frustration. In modernity, if the subject experiences disorientation, desperate uncertainty, trauma as a result of technological change, this shaking is registered in the novel as an index of seismic activity, presenting simulations of everyday spaces, and of experiences and projected realities. Leonid Tsypkin's *Summer in Baden Baden* is a book that could be seen as a microcosm of this set of conditions, and of the derangement of the subject under pressure, as it seeks to adapt and survive a shifting ground. In it, a narrator recounts a period in the life of Dostoevsky, and how he (Fedya) came to be repeatedly driven to stand on a chair in a museum, raising the ire of the guards. And what this action in the museum setting represented as an aspirational horizon to the protagonist.

In this novel, a middle-aged novelist-gambler haunts the casino town with his despairing wife, losing time after time. Periodically he takes time out from gambling to pace the promenade, thinking of things to sell. The narrator moves backward and forward in time, with a comforting lack of respect for the idea of linear time, and tells us about the early stages of the couple's relationship, in Moscow. The couple would visit the fabulous Pushkin State Art Museum daily in a way likened to taking the waters: "for a rendezvous or simply to stand about observing the comings and goings, and then go to lunch."[116] Fedya tended to live beyond his means in many ways, buying delicacies for his wife, Anna Grigor'yevna, annexing splendour… Fedya, however, within this supposedly vacuous visiting regimen, has begun a process of his own – arising out of haunting (literally swimming) images of sex with his beloved wife and recollections of physical abuse at the hands of a commandant. He had been incarcerated, for discussing anti-Tsarist literature, for four years in a Siberian camp and a further six in military service in exile. He had been beaten, bare-assed, over a polished table by the cruel commander in front of others looking in through the bars. In the museum, he begins to fixate on a particular chair that sits close to where the painting the *Sistine Madonna* hangs. He is attracted to it, but as his wife passes, he follows in her current. It isn't a chair that looks like it has been placed there for people to rest on – perhaps it is for an attendant, or part of a display? A fantastic impulse begins to grow:

> And the first time the thought became tangible, a shiver ran down his spine, it seemed so audacious, so inconceivable – preparing himself for action, he passed the chair and once almost placed his foot on it, but a lot of people were in the room, and then the bored-looking attendant dressed in his uniform jacket was leaning against the wall – and perhaps he should have done exactly that in front of everyone, the attendant in particular, as preventing it was precisely the attendant's job – approaching the chair, his heart would stop, and after a second of hesitation, as if pondering which way to walk around the chair, he would pass by, peering at the Madonna with exaggerated interest – but that night, as Anya swam away so distantly and he floundered somewhere near the shore, unable to reach the bottom – that night he made a solemn vow to do exactly that – and so, entering the gallery as usual next morning, he headed immediately for the room where the 'Sistine Madonna' hung, the beat of his heart echoing in his ears, a crowd jostling in front of the painting…[117]

[116] Leonid Tsypkin, *Summer in Baden Baden* [1981], London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005, pp.10-11.
[117] Ibid., p.21.

The image is of a man confronting his own impotence, his own humiliation, having been dominated by an abuser. He draws a psychodrama parallel with the authority figure in the museum, the guard, the policer of the palace, he who is in charge of the treasure, he who holds power. He pushes his way through the crowd and deliriously, momentarily blinded by his action, climbs onto the chair, looking down onto a sea of heads, pygmies they were, the attendant – coming towards him now – included. Anna implores, "Fedya, are you mad?"[118]

The painting in this episode is replaced with the image of the commandant cringing, begging, the supplicant. The heads really do become sea, and he and his wife swim, rhythmically, into the distance, the pleading commandant, like a beggar asking for alms, receding into insignificance. The attendant politely points out that "standing on chairs is forbidden in this gallery, sir," and gives him his arm as though offering support. Anna leads him away, but he is not satisfied, and the commandant's face is back, and he is again being beaten in front of an audience. Deciding he should not have submitted to the wishes of the guard, he brushes her hand away and returns to the chair, climbing onto it again. The guard is not there, and he gets down when he wants to. The commandant winks and he slaps him, and knocks him to the floor. He stands on top of the vanquished tyrant's stomach and the crowd cheers. He has overcome his humiliation, and he walks purposefully from the gallery, past the attendant in the next room, knowing that if the attendant had seen him this second time he would have had been deposed and led away by force, as he had resolved to stay there for as long as he wished.

In the art gallery, he can find a daily reprieve, bathing in its restorative atmosphere, but he can do more than this; he can transform his experience, by rewriting the past, bending time. The painting can provide access to a horror that he can replay. The museum's chair can be repurposed to his own very urgent ends – the churning of the trauma can be arrested, and the victor vanquished. The loss of energy can be stopped, and his impotence smote. The register of fantasy, a space accessible in the repeatedly visited museum, like the safer space of regularly scheduled analysis – it operates for him on the level of fiction – is where one will not die, and replays are entirely possible.

Fedya and Anna visit a museum in Basel later in this novel, later in life. It is a dull day, and the museum is badly lit, but not as badly as the cathedral they have visited beforehand. The only work they are taken by is Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520-22), a work which does not disguise the decomposing corpse of the Son of God. It is viewed by Anna in terror, but sees Fedya leaping up onto another chair in ecstasy. He is momentarily haunted by demons from his past, but they disappear, leaving Fedya with the feeling that he is on top of a mountain. He is led as if sleepwalking from the chair by Anna, who takes him kindly from the building:

> …along the streets filled with carriages and omnibuses, past the large houses with their plate-glass windows, passing people hurrying somewhere, noticing nothing – and he was on the

[118] Ibid., p.22.

> summit of a mountain, that very peak which had earlier seemed inaccessible, and from this peak there opened out a view over nearly the whole planet with its towns, rivers, little villages, oceans and churches, its entire life, bustling and full of tragic contradictions – and perhaps he was not in that Palace of Crystal which he had stared at so fixedly as he tried to clamber towards the summit.[119]

Climbing, in *Summer in Baden-Baden*, figures as the aspiration of our tragic lead character to break free from the constraints of a world driven by gambling and harrowing consequences (although the degradation seems part of his method). Just as the museum is a place in which climbing up has efficacy, the mountains around Baden-Baden seduce him. At a point in the book, Anna has run from him, taking refuge at the start of a popular mountain walk, to avoid him asking her for her last coin. He does find her, does get the coin, and decides to climb the mountain not by the path, but dangerously up a rocky face framed by thundery skies and intermittent little avalanches. People laugh at him, and he is treating his body roughly, but he is driven to try and reach the peak, a utopian place for the broke writer. (He has a need to pour out energy and kick holes in walls in a world that requires money to be possessed or earned, and probably invested for it to flow, and the author needs to write in long sentences so as not to lose the energy of his drive with stops.) At "the very peak of the mountain, where, in a violet storm-cloud torn by flashes of lightning, lay the hidden Palace of Crystal, the dream of humanity, his dream which he had cradled and nurtured deep within himself almost to the point of purposely mocking it – but now the avalanche drowning out the shouts and roars of those laughing faces, and the claps of thunder raining down from the violet cloud had inspired him with faith in the possibility of realizing that dream…."[120]

The Palace of Crystal is an image conjured by Fedya as he is on a winning streak, and the mountain, the chair within the architecture of the museum, the gambling table are openings for the writer where he can achieve a transport from ordinary life on the plane. In the palace, he can fly, free from certainty, language, and terrifying debt. (How quickly it mounts – why not climb on it?) This image of the palace is a key to understanding the draw of the museum to fictional characters as the seat of magical powers. The architecture of the museum is as much a shimmering complex of fantasy and metaphor as the crystal palace Fedya hunts for in the alps and at the gambling table. It is as predictable that he will try and wait for the piles of coins to make perfect little peaks before he can take them for his own as it is to return to the chair in the museum, representing benevolent powers, architects of destiny, radical acts, dreams of freedom and of healing. He climbs in front of the *Sistine Madonna* to try to derange his trauma out of existence – to stop the energy being lost as the trauma spins energetically, exhausting his threadbare emotional resources that are as tattered as his clothes.

Georges Bataille's poetic explorations of architecture as a suppressive phenomenon, of the existential figures of the labyrinth and of the summit as emblematic of our struggle to be, connect with this narrative. In his *Encyclopedia Acephalus*, under 'Architecture,' he writes the following:

---

[119] Ibid., pp.207-209.
[120] Ibid., p.140.

> Architecture is the expression of the true nature of societies, as physiognomy is the expression of the nature of individuals. However, this comparison is applicable, above all, to the physiognomy of officials (prelates, magistrates, admirals). In fact, only society's ideal nature – that of authoritative command and prohibition – expresses itself in actual architectural constructions. Thus great monuments rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority to all unquiet elements….[121]

From this we might view the attraction of the museum as a vague potential to render still any disquiet by the majesty of its imagined palace. When considering Fedya in *Summer in Baden Baden*, irresistibly drawn to the chair in the museum, he is attracted to it because he identifies a palliative mechanism to contest the authority that has cruelly acted on him. The imagery in the novel of the summit where his Palace of Crystal stands, and of the beckoning healing mounds of coins also connect with passages from Bataille's *Inner Experience*. Here, surely deep and intoxicated, headless, in the maze of language, Bataille recognises that this drive to seek out and scale summits is a vital part of just *trying to be*, a task that makes our very existence labyrinthine:

> This flight headed towards the summit (which is the constitution of knowledge – dominating the realms themselves) is only one of the paths of the 'labyrinth.' But we can now in no way avoid this path which we must follow from attraction to attraction in search of 'being.' Solitude, in which we attempt to seek refuge, is a new attraction. No one escapes the constitution of society: in this constitution, each path leads to the summit, leads to the desire for an absolute knowledge, is necessity for limitless power.[122]

Bataille wrote in the first issue of the journal *Acéphale* in 1936 that "Man escapes from his head like an escaped man from a prison."[123] I am assuming he means women too, but, in any case, it expresses his belief that we must enter the drunken space of the labyrinth in order to be free – and that hopefully this freedom would help us to find our way – but there are no guarantees when taking subjective risk. Acephalous, headless places, practices, destroy hierarchies and capitals within and without – in the decapitating labyrinth we can tackle ourselves and the powers to which we are subject. The museum has this strange assembling and dissembling power – as architecture, it sends off signals that it offers a way of calming disquiet, as the seat of a soothing (and frightening) magisterial power. It also promises an opening to a labyrinth in which we can lose our heads, fight authority, cut off all sorts of apexes and disrupt balances of power. Even further, the edifice provides us with an analogy of the condition of being in language and in literature as it engages, in its staging of history, its summaries, with fiction. Considered this way, the museum is understandably a potent site in the literary imaginary as an opening to an affective labyrinth that, by virtue of its architecture – enacting silence as the

[121] Georges Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, trans. Iain White, London: Atlas Press, 1995, p.35.
[122] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience (L'Expérience intérieure*) [1943], trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988, p.86.
[123] Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée,' in Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski and André Masson, *Acéphale* Vol. 1 (June 24, 1926), p.4.

power of the past, the state, possibility, the infinite – offers a seductive passage to somewhere else.

The Palace of Crystal gives Fedya a summit to climb, so he may enter the labyrinth of his own troubling being. This image of the palace of crystal is one that Tsypkin has drawn from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* [1864], a novella that purports to be excerpts from the strange writings of a philosophising retired public servant. His thoughts roam, considering suffering, pain and its necessity, and the fraught complexities of free will and consciousness. The crystal palace was a figure in Russian thought at the time, following the international design phenomenon that was the Crystal Palace in London, which, picturing modernity and progress, provided a political and technological gesture to contest. It was presented as model for Russian society to aspire to in socialist author Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done*? To him, it beckoned to a path that would lead the way out of a certain sense of Russian backwardness generated by a comparison with British culture based on the supposed virtue of industrialist advancement, but in Dostoevky's writing it is a more complex image – both oppressing and liberating. Here, science and reason are described as having the ability to relieve people of their need to think and act, their model sweeping away free will and replacing it with a mechanical automation of the spirit, and a blissful absence of mistakes. There is no need for consciousness if the music is already composed, or if there is a table of algorithms to guide our every move. Once this fully takes effect in a culture, a palace of crystal, a golden age, will appear: "a new political economy will come into existence, all complete, and also calculated with mathematical accuracy, so that all problems will vanish in the twinkling of an eye simply because all possible answers to them will have been supplied."[124] Everything will be very sensible, and probably quite boring, and its advent will result in people wanting to knock it over.

When Dostoevsky writes critically of utopianism as prescriptive and robotic, of the controlling regime of Enlightened rationalism effectively correcting our volition, the image of the adolescent materialises – are these not classic adolescent complaints and desires for free will and consciousness? To live?[125] To act and exercise imagination and creativity, and strike out on one's own to make a new world? "Of course boredom leads to every possible ingenuity," our narrator asserts. "Really I should not be in the least surprised if, for example, in the midst of the future universal good sense, some gentleman with an ignoble, or rather a derisive and reactionary air, springs suddenly out of nowhere, puts his arms akimbo and says to all of us, 'Come on, gentlemen, why shouldn't we get rid of all this calm reasonableness with just one kick, just so as to send all these logarithms to the devil and be able to live our own lives at our own sweet will?'"[126] Dostoevsky's underground man, withdrawn and scathing, reminds us that not everyone wants the standard wellbeing settings; he even finds wellbeing unseemly, and that smashing things is sometimes just what the heart needs. He demands the right to his own caprices – suffering or happiness is merely collateral, and he is certain that "man will never deny himself suffering and chaos."[127] If we define and establish universal truths, there will be

[124] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], trans. Jessie Coulson, London: Penguin, 1972, p.33.
[125] Ibid., p.39.
[126] Ibid., p.33.
[127] Ibid., p.41.

nothing left to do or learn – consciousness, volition, to him is key. He fears the inviolable palace, and insists that he be allowed his building of crystal, his castle in the air, to dream of what he is told are impossibilities. "What difference does it make to me, so long as it exists in my desires, or rather, exists while my desires last?"[128] Edifices, he says, must be about more than keeping dry – they must house our desires and consciousnesses, ill advised, stupid or irrational as they may be. Immature is a relative assessment, and acts that are classed as such could also be seen as the efforts of adolescents of all ages to retain or attain agency, in contrast to a robotic meditation of established values:

> You believe in a palace of crystal that can never be destroyed … and perhaps I'm afraid of this edifice, precisely because it is crystal and forever indestructible … suffering means doubt, negation, and what would be the good of a 'palace of crystal' if there could be any doubt about it? … Once you have mathematical certainty there is nothing left to do or to understand. There will be nothing left but to bottle up your five senses and plunge into contemplation.[129]

The image of the palace of crystal, rushed by the rebellious adolescent, expressing doubt and desire at once, can be read as overlapping with the figure of the museum in Tsypkin's novel. Fedya tries to break his bonds and unleash his senses and volition in the frame of the institution's "calm reasonableness." Attainment as a goal is feared and disputed by this behaviour, and the rebellion of the adolescent. "In short, mankind is comically constructed; all this plainly amounts to a joke."[130] The comedic aspect of adolescent museum visitation in fiction stands proud in this light. We see it most clearly in film – Ferris Bueller, Godard's trio in *Band of Outsiders* and in Ken Russell's *Savage Messiah*, where the young sculptor character scales an Easter Island head in an anthropology museum to show off to his girlfriend – but it is also there, bleakly, in literature. It is the punk humour of the delinquent visitor in Grass, and standing on a chair is black comedy; born of episodes of existential crises political subjectivities experience that require something be kicked over to resuscitate volition. What better place to do this than the museum, an institution founded on ordering, science, the study of the laws of nature, plotting, tabulation, licensed versions of events, re-education, the common good, and regulated monotony?

In *Summer in Baden Baden*, Fedya is a man and adolescent at once, wanting something else, and fast. Even though this man is middle aged, he could be seen to enact a destructive adolescent process – he wants to break something for (or in) himself, to change his image of himself into something that worked for him, something he can live with. But this requires an interaction with a guard, who becomes a proxy for the abuser from his past. He can individuate or, to use a term employed by Bernard Stiegler, trans-individuate – the process of co-individuation in which the 'I' and the 'we' are transformed through each other[131] – only with

[128] Ibid., p.42.
[129] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, New York: Vintage Classics, 1993, p.35.
[130] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], trans. Jessie Coulson, pp.40-1.
[131] Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, 'Transindividuation,' *e-flux journal,* March 14, 2010. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/

others, and emerge from the encounter anew, no longer a minor in the same way. Becoming, to an extent, sovereign, he is golden, in a shower of coins, favoured by fate.

Walter Benjamin's short essays 'Notes on a Theory of Gambling' and 'The Destructive Character' shed interesting light on the nuances of Fedya's practice as a gambler, for it is a deeply purposeful one. Benjamin points out that the true gambler does not seek to work a system over time, rather, their gamble is always a one-off hit of chance. Like the soldier, the gambler has no time for morality – they must act quickly, making a series of fateful decisions, as they rush towards ruin, shattering time.[132] The winner's happiness, their elation, is "being rewarded by fate, having seized control of destiny."[133] As such this lover's surrender is a form of divination that is entered into at the last minute, spontaneously, with intuition open to the guidance of muses. It is a superstitious, even paranoid activity, that to Benjamin, pertains to the young:

> The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age; it cheers, because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, of his own condition.[134]

Destruction removes the victim from where they once stood in place. It allows for a reworking of reality by clearing away the past: "The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room."[135] In the open space created, anything is possible, and there is passage to something else awarded by fate and providence:

> The destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there, too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined. Because he sees ways everywhere, he always stands at a crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble – not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.[136]

I have only read the of destructive character in negative terms, as the capitalist whose determination or way overpowers all other concerns, or as the pointless behaviour of someone

---

[132] For a consideration of Walter Benjamin's and Benjamin Constant's thoughts on gambling, see Robyn Marasco's 'It's all About the Benjamins: Considerations on the Gambler as a Political Type,' in *New German Critique* Vol. 133, Col. 45, No. 1 (February 2018), p.9.
[133] Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005, p.298.
[134] Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005, p.541.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., p.542.

off the rails, so this is an interesting interpretation. We have long superficially understood delinquency as killing time, but this is done with the manic thrill of the gambler, the soldier of fortune – and time is really smote, broken down to rubble. Benjamin's theory also shows us that the youthful destructive character has a necessary link with the past, as they have "the consciousness of historical man."[137] The highly anxious are indeed students of the past, for one cannot be so troubled unless there is already experience of things going badly wrong, and a belief that they will continue to do so. The gambler and the destructive character have decided, from research and analysis of the past, that they have nothing left to lose, that everything will probably continue to be denied them *if they do not act in just the right way*, assisted by fleeting fortune, the right moon or conjunction of planetary bodies, prayer. They are the "stepchildren of love"[138] who by gambling can take possession of both the future and the past. "Indeed, isn't its ability to alter the visage of the past the greatest expression of its power over the gambler's heart?"[139]

Transformation, metamorphosis, is the heart's wish of the gambler and the adolescent both. And Benjamin's writing gives us a further clue to why a character such as Tsypkin's Fedya might go to the museum to gamble with his life, to try and blast a path through the past and present to a transfigured future. He likens the destructive type to a traditionalist in that they both pass elements down to posterity. The traditionalist deals in the preservation of things but the destructive person passes on situations "by making them practicable and thus liquidating them" – both operations fit the shape of the museum.[140] It has also been pointed out that gambling became popular to a far wider public in the 17th century, which is also the period from which the museum sprang. Perhaps we see subjectivities in these novels running headlong to the museum not to succeed, but to fail – for it is in ruin that the stepchild can find a way through in a space that comprehends the consciousness of historical creatures. Counter-intuitively, the cure for crisis is demonstrably more destruction, and this is brought to us by the image of the gambler courting disaster in an aleatory encounter with the museum.

Or is something being courted other than ruin? In an analysis of Benjamin's writing on gambling, Michael Rosenthal argues that he relates games of chance to prophecy, divination and magic, and that the gambler is at once an archaic and modern type – a fencer, hero, lover, adventurer – seeking "experience that stands outside the ordinary chain of events in a life."[141] In their ruinous relation to finance, and their supernatural trans-temporal bearing, the gambler is a sign of the potential to make a tear in capitalist society.[142] There is continuum of practice identified whereby the gambler, and potentially the museum visitor, deals in an intoxicated "presence of mind" by which they may "steeplechase over the hurdles of [their] own ego."[143] The casino could be likened to the museum in Benjamin's description in 'The Path

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., p.413.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., p.542.
[141] Michael A. Rosenthal, 'Benjamin's Wager on Modernity: Gambling and the *Arcades Project*,' *New German Review* Vol. 87 (2012), p.262.
[142] Ibid., p.264.
[143] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O13, 3, p.513.

to Success in Thirteen Theses' in the way it seemingly transmits possibility signals – desire may be fulfilled here, change is possible, let's bend time – and its relation to the past: "And what intoxication it is in this city of opportunity. … Chance … is the surviving trace of primeval energy."[144] Benjamin also indicates that gambling has a relationship to the vertigo of time that Chris Marker had situated in the museum (as he did in his film *La Jetée*), "The process of continually starting all over again is the regulative idea of gambling…."[145] Rosenthal also likens gambling to the rites of passage that are dwindling in contemporary society, so engaging in the practice is a kind of re-enchantment of threshold experiences that also link past and present, reverie and awakeness.[146] He also points out that gambling disturbs the "terrestrial or worldly time," according to Benjamin:

> Well, what is gambling … but the art of producing in a second the changes that Destiny ordinarily effects only in the course of many hours or even many years, the art of collecting into a single instant the emotions dispersed throughout the slow-moving existence of ordinary men, the secret of living a whole lifetime in a few minutes – in a word, the genie's ball of thread? Gambling is a hand-to-hand encounter with Fate.[147]

Is this the eternal or at least attenuated time of the visitor? A time in which revelation is possible, or that "elevates the human being beyond himself"?[148] In Ursula Le Guin's early work of speculative fiction, *Rocannon's World* (1966), a young woman travels to a museum on another, more technically advanced, planet to reclaim a family necklace. When she returns, after what she thought was a short trip, many years have passed. Ordinary time and its passage are disturbed in the museum, making it a site for breaking or casting a spell to disrupt what might otherwise seem natural, normal, perfect or inevitable. Fedya's gambling and conflated museum visiting has a spectrum of possible motives and effects if looked at through the lens of Benjamin's thought – disrupting worldy time, re-enchanting a life disconnected from threshold rituals, the ability to start over, prophesy, bringing the past into the present in a continuum of extraordinary events, overcoming ourselves, rupturing capitalist society. All of these can be seen to be elements of adolescent volition, and all are played out in relation to the museum in this delinquent narrative of transformation.

Heterogeneous powers and redistributions of the sensible

Summer in Baden Baden shows us a character with the desire to transform, and he chooses to do this, to alter himself and his future-fate, radically in an encounter in a museum of art.

---

[144] Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.146.
[145] Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, p.331.
[146] Rosenthal, 'Benjamin's Wager on Modernity,' p.269.
[147] Walter Benjamin quoting Anatole France's *Le Jardin d'Épicure* in *The Arcades Project*, O4a, p.498.
[148] Ibid., O13, 3, p.513.

Jacques Rancière's *Ten Theses on Politics* is useful in articulating the position of Fedya, and other reprobates – those who find themselves in a weak position in the community of citizens in which they are trying to live. For Rancière is perennially concerned in his philosophical work with those who have no part, as he explains: "The 'people' that is the subject of democracy – and thus the principal subject of politics – is not the collection of members in a community, or the labouring classes of the population. It is the supplementary part, in relation to any counting of parts of the population that makes it possible to identify 'the part of those who have no-part' with the whole of the community."[149] It is the way in which the people who "have no part" seek to make a place for themselves, to be seen, heard or to have power to engage in political activity. Dissenting takes place in perpetuity.

Rancière's conceptualising of the political is extended onto how the aesthetic regime operates politically. He posits a theory of dissensus (disagreement) at the level of aesthetics, which he frames as the "distribution of the sensible": "an apportionment of parts and positions based on a distribution of spaces, time, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution."[150] Equality – or the ideal that we are all able to participate in how the aesthetic regime is formed – is unreachable. Furthermore, he contends that being in the position to determine how things unfold aesthetically is not a goal with a permanent end, something that can be achieved once and for all, but a constant and ongoing dispute: any emancipation achieved is intermittent, precarious and impermanent.[151] Fedya could be seen to be trying to participate in this process of dissensus, which is "a political process that resists juridicial litigation and creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the inadmissible."[152]

Rancière's theorisation of the aesthetic-political complex in which we live and of fiction has aspects that might explain why the museum appears to be a place where transformation can take place for a delinquent, an adolescent type, a subjectivity in crisis. His conception of the aesthetic regime offers a description of the museum as a complex flowering of modernity, affording it a sensible "heterogeneous power."[153] He contends that in the early 19th century something began to change, transforming "an organized set of relationships between the visible and the invisible, the perceptible and the imperceptible, knowledge and action, activity and passivity."[154] It is palpable in expression across the range of the arts, but is not separable from the society or institutions that produced it. The museum, the aesthetic regime and modernity are intertwined, and the museum, indeed, is an institution that came into being as we know it, in modernity. In his repeat and fevered visits to the museum, Fedya seems drawn to such a metamorphosing power whereby form can become foreign to itself, exceed its reality:

---

[149] Jacques Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics,' in *Theory and Event*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2001). Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/tae.2001.0028.
[150] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p.12.
[151] Ibid., p.89.
[152] Ibid., p.88.
[153] Ibid., p.18.
[154] Ibid., p.85.

> In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, logos identical with pathos, the intention of the unintentional, etc. This idea of a regime of the sensible that has become foreign to itself, the locus for a form of thought that has become foreign to itself, is the invariable core in the identifications of art that have configured the aesthetic mode of thought from the outset….[155]

Rancière explicitly sets together the aesthetic regime and the museum in his analysis. He contends that in "the aesthetic regime of art, the future of art, its separation from the present of non-art, incessantly restages the past," and that it is born of the same set of conditions that parented the museum:

> The aesthetic regime of the arts is first of all a new regime for relating to the past. It actually sets up as the very principle of artisticity the expressive relationship inherent in a time and a state of civilization, a relationship that was previously considered to be the 'non-artistic' part of works of art (the part that was excused by invoking the crudeness of the times when the author lived). The aesthetic regime of the arts invents its revolutions on the basis of the same idea that caused it to invent the museum and art history, the notion of classicism and new forms of reproduction.[156]

Modernity, he contends, is a complex, temporally heterogeneous field which does not exist apart from "the context that allows for their existence: history, interpretation, patrimony, the museum, the pervasiveness of reproduction."[157] And other aspects of the aesthetic regime and the image of the museum are powerfully attractive, such as its dissolving of hierarchies: "This equality destroys all of the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community without legitimacy…."[158] And with de-hierarchising comes re-hierarchising – in such aesthetic space, one's part can be contested. The order is visible in the museum because it is an organ of state power, of the police order in Rancière's parlance, but the museum is also an institution that trades in making things visible in a more general sense. It makes abstractions of history perceptible, and gives the adolescent something to kick against. Dissensus is a constant process of conflict, so a place where the established order shows itself offers those who have no part an opportunity for "challenging the established framework of identification and subjectivization."[159] And perhaps it is the enforced calm of the museum that also invites action in that "political subjects forever remain precarious figures that hesitate at the borders of silence maintained by the police."[160]

---

[155] Ibid., p.18.
[156] Ibid., p.20.
[157] Ibid., p.21.
[158] Ibid., pp.9-10.
[159] Ibid., p.94.
[160] Ibid.

Rancière argues that the Ancient Greeks were suspicious of the theatre, whose stage was "the exhibition space for 'fantasies'" and so "disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities and spaces."[161] In the imagination of the author, perhaps the sense of possibility that emanates from the image of the museum is the confounding of the institution with the character of theatre or other forms of fictioning. In the museum, the adolescent, the gambler, can write her own future, can hope to contest her part, can believe that she fashions her own emancipation – at the moment when the dice are in the air. Against the idea of a civilising objective, each character is setting its own course, un-learning, experimenting, being undone and remade by heterogeneous processes that they undertake in their errant visiting. The role of museums in this fiction appears to be that of an arena in which such heterogenous contestation can take place – an image of an attempt to shift the distribution of the sensible in favour of the minor. Adolescent disruptions are possible in fiction despite the museum's role in the *dispositif* – the social apparatus, or the system of relations that is established between the elements that make up the lived environment, the reality of people.[162] Its determinations can be perceived and contested in the museum, and the characters approach the museums with awareness that they are not theirs – they approach as outsiders to power, to dominant narratives. They are trying to outrun their crises, as delinquent characters are wont to do: they are breaking into the palace. To take shelter, as in the waiting room of a metaphysical transport hub.

New ways of being

> One is compelled to return to the fundamental structures that keep us going, if only in the mode of stationary mobility and according to archeophiliac determination – meaning that one is magnetized by the return of and driven by the return to ancient objects, concepts, formulae when piecing together the remnants of the world.
> — Avital Ronell, *Loser Sons*[163]

In joining dots, making constellations from fragments, I see an image of the museum emerging from the literature of subjects under pressure in the irreconcilable circumstances produced by modernity. Pushed this way and that, everything changing, with no trust in one's own knowledge, nor in a reality that will not stay still or constant, subjects seek solutions, sympathetic spaces. In a museum, it seems, it is possible to safely carry out desires *in effigie*, without fear of death.[164] Yet a sad, infuriating line from *The Age of Innocence* hangs in the air as I reconsider this novel: "But I am improvident. I live in the moment when I am happy."[165]

[161] Ibid., p.8.
[162] Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh,' pp.194-228.
[163] Avital Ronell, *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012, p.xii.
[164] Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005, p.4.
[165] Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* [1920], New York: Macmillan, 1986, p.133.

Edith Wharton is known for her astute studies of the social mores and architectural spaces of bourgeois New York in the late 19th and early 20th century.[166] Her works can also be seen to study the ruinous development of aspects of dominant American culture, especially in its relation to material wealth, its codes and its display, often set in contrast to an image of Europe as white America's other. Set in the 1880s, this is a tale of two would-be lovers who struggle to be together in the face of punitive social codes and certain scandal. Countess Ellen Olenska is a young woman of 'good family' (to follow the language of the setting) who has married young a European aristocrat. She leaves him after finding him to be an abusive rake, and returns to New York, setting about trying to re-establish herself somehow, despite her scandalous status a wife who has deserted her husband and reputedly had an affair with a man who helped her escape. Newland Archer is a wealthy young man of Belle Époque New York gentry who is engaged to the Countess's cousin, May, yet he falls in love with Ellen. If Newland were to break off his engagement or divorce his new bride to run away with the Countess his family would be brought into disrepute and he would likely be disowned. They would never be accepted by 'polite' society, for those around them are "the product of a system" which is "precise and inflexible in such matters."[167]

When Newland decries, "Who had the right to make her life over if she hadn't?" and "Women should be free – as free as we are," he soon knows he is blowing hot air, and that he cannot back up his declaration with risk and action of his own and elope *in toto*.[168] When Newland panics and wants to marry his fiancée sooner because of his conflicted feelings, May rebukes his haste and lack of decorum: "We can't behave like people in novels, can we?" "Why not?" he demands. Because it is vulgar she replies.[169] She has clearly "spent her poetry and romance on courtship," Newland thinks to himself.[170] Still the conservatism of their families, their wealth and position, the systematic nature of their ordered world and the grid of the city are like a narcotic to him.[171] But he wriggles, feels stifled, dead already. He stares out his open window at a city and is comforted that a world beyond his fortress exists.

This is where the novel begins to get interesting. His desire to flee, the references to fiction and its relationship to the museum, his name takes on the complexion of the identity of a risk-taker, one (Newland) who seeks a new land, a different reality. Who, (Archer) lets fly an arrow and runs after it. He wants to defy convention, as Ellen already has and does, and be true to himself, to a fledgling value of freedom and equality. To make something new. But Ellen knows he is dreaming, and guesses that his conservatism will win over. She is, herself, unable to seriously entertain hurting her family. Fiction stands in this novel as an image of the desire to construct an ideal reality, in the face of the lived reality that is confining, apparently unassailably. And the museum looms as a possible passage to some mysterious land where another reality is possible. He cries, "I want – I want somehow to get away with you to a world where words like that – categories like that won't exist." To which she replies, "Oh my dear,

[166] Viz. James Tuttleton, "Edith Wharton: The Archaeological Motive," in *Vital Signs: Essays on American Literature and Criticism*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2008.
[167] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, pp.8, 36.
[168] Ibid., pp.41, 43.
[169] Ibid., pp.82-83.
[170] Ibid., p.295.
[171] Ibid., p.289.

where is that country? Have you been there?"[172] Undeterred, Newland asks Ellen to meet him, hoping to persuade her to run away with him. "Somewhere where we can be alone," he insists.[173] But where? "In New York there are no churches… no monuments." "There is the art museum in the Park," Newland offers.[174]

By seeking out the museum, they are seeking a new position wrought from their two, dialectically, catalysed by being together, alone, in a space conducive to solitude. Their quick thinking, their improvisation, is similar in orientation to James Joyce's Bloom, who in *Ulysses* plans a heel's quick escape from blame to the National Museum in Dublin: "Quick. Cold statues: quiet there. Safe in a minute."[175] The lovers' desire for solitude, emotional silence against the clamouring noise of societal expectation, is also reminiscent of Maurice Blanchot's hope that those in crisis can "wait to reach the pure centre where we would find our bearings again in that which exceeds us."[176] They meet the next day at the Metropolitan Museum, which, opening on this site in 1880 was still a relatively new institution, and swiftly seek the desolate company of annexed Cypriot artefacts:

> Avoiding the popular 'Wolfe Collection', whose anecdotic canvases filled one of the main galleries of the queer wildness of cast-iron and encaustic tiles known as the Metropolitan Museum, they had wandered down a passage to the room where the 'Cesnola antiquities' mouldered in unvisited loneliness.
>
> They had this melancholic retreat to themselves, and seated on the divan enclosing the central steam-radiator, they were staring silently at the glass cabinets mounted in ebonized wood which contained the recovered fragments of Ilium.
>
> "It's odd," Madame Olenska said, "I never came here before."[177]

She rises from the bench and walks across the room. He regards her as he would an object, absorbed in the details that make her unique. Seal skin coat and a heron wing in her fur cap making her seem taxidermic. Wearing the violets that he had brought for her, and that they flutter with her breath, makes her seem to me all the more like an exhibited novelty of flora–fauna–anthropology. But, to Newland, "it seemed incredible that this pure harmony should ever suffer the stupid law of change."[178]

---

[172] Ibid., p.290.
[173] Ibid., 308. Interestingly, in a *Vanity Fair* article on the rise of the blockbuster exhibition following the touring show *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* in the 1970s, it was revealed that the then new, youthful director of the Met had, in his office, a copy of *The Age of Innocence* in which he had underlined "Somewhere where we can be alone." This instance sits in curious relation to his subsequent decision to remodel the museum into a place of exponentially increased visitation. David Kamp, 'The King of New York,' *Vanity Fair*, March 19, 2013.
[174] Ibid., p.308.
[175] James Joyce, *Ulysses* [1922], New York: Vintage, 1986, p.150.
[176] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p.121.
[177] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p.309.
[178] Ibid., p.310.

> Presently he rose and approached the case before which she stood. Its glass shelves were crowded with small, broken objects – hardly recognizable domestic utensils, ornaments and personal trifles – made of glass, clay, of discoloured bronze and other time-blurred substances.
>
> "It seems cruel," she said, "that after a while nothing matters … any more than these little things, that used to be necessary and important to forgotten people, and now have to be guessed at under a magnifying glass and labelled: 'Use unknown'."[179]

The novel becomes interesting in terms of this study when two of its elements came together – the desire to live as if in a novel, fictionally, a trans-operation in effect; and the museum as a site to overcome an obstacle, or to make it disappear, become irrelevant. Newland seems to view the museum as a private place where fantasy can take over and work its magic in a life that is critically dissatisfactory. But Ellen relates to it differently – she sees it as a place of unreality, but one that is more profoundly other. She acts as if she has walked into a Robert Smithson-style non-site (or 'tripped,' as someone of Smithson's generation might have put it). It is as though the museum is a diagram of something in the world – it is abstract, not a representation. It is a fiction where time is vast, and human endeavour insignificant and soon to be abandoned. Her understanding of temporalities is that they open, gape, spiral, abstract, and vary. She is looking at the remains of human lives long since extinguished as if regarding strata in an archaeological midden. Looking at the remains without any prospect of redemption or consolation – this is not her method. She looks at the outmoded artefacts and sees forgotten people, abandoned technologies, discarded theories. Human endeavour blows away like sand in the face of archaeological or mineral time. Surely human concerns are trivial – what does it matter what we do in this insignificant tiny now of ant or mouse? In the museum time wobbles, and, in aesthetic space, and within abstraction, we are surely not subject to the demands or rules of the world. Things just do not matter. To Newland, convention might not matter – to Ellen, perhaps not even Newland matters: men, fortune, home, *rien*. She is much more of a proto-existentialist character, with her doubts of meaning and consequence, the absurdity of American romantic desire.

For our failing lovers, the space of the museum appears to interrupt measured time and predictable outcome. This disorientation of the present offers to both characters the possibility of a place of becoming, where something new might emerge. There is an atmosphere in the museum of fantasy, or of the suspension of conventional reality (or at least of ontological complexity). The Metropolitan Museum, as Wharton has written it, appears to offer a sphere of emotional trans-reality set apart from the repressive society on the other side of its threshold. The museum stands still – emblematic of the deeply confusing projects of processing history, reality, and intra-dependence – as immobile and labyrinthine as its edifice, a repository of the infinite, like Borges' mosque of Amr in which "the entire universe lies inside one of the stone pillars that ring its central court."[180]

---

[179] Ibid, pp.310-11.
[180] Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Aleph,' *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933-1969*, trans J. L. Borges and Norman Thomas di Giovanni, New York: Dutton, 1978, p.30.

But the characters do not make good on the museum's promise, its magic does not work on the prudent, principled, enlightened Ellen – far groovier than clumsy Newland and his attempts at being artistic. He has not had the courage to act with libertine integrity from the outset – a new reality has eluded him. May takes charge and their fantasy is over. It is not until Newland goes to Paris as a much older man, a widower, in a time that no longer cares about divorce, that he has the opportunity to see her again, in the late afternoon at her apartment, but cannot enter the door of her building and climb the stairs. Instead he stays outside on a bench. He visits the Louvre, and tries to imagine Ellen there, in the rich air, and in the golden light. *The Age of Innocence* concludes with Newland being unable to cross the toll-bridge of spontaneity to see Ellen again in Paris following his wife's death.

> For an hour or more he wandered from gallery to gallery through the dazzle of afternoon light, and one by one the pictures burst in on him in their half-forgotten splendor, filling his soul with the long echoes of beauty. After all, his life had been too starved.[181]

The identification of the museum with a different vital solitude imbues it with the potential for a radiant liberty. Further, it is a place where things are preserved, do not change, are not spoiled or broken or faded by the sun. Wharton gives us an image of the museum harbouring, aiding people in psychological transit to come to accord in ethical thought – even if they cannot come together, transindividuate, in person. Ellen moves on, back to Paris, and to a more fertile ground for herself.

If the function of the fiction is to make new realities, as Rancière asserts,[182] Ellen's life corresponds to this operation – she, insisting on living in a different way and on her own terms, lives in an analogue to such fiction. Newland is not one of her kind, and labyrinthine places like the museum are no real use to him. He has, in the end, no facility for fiction, or freedom, or desire – he has no flow; or his flows are stopped, reterritorialised abruptly by the convention that privileges him, where he is in control and provided for. An insider, protected, his whim ill thought out, insincere, he has not been beyond anything – a dilettante in the business of escape and exile. His humiliations small, his fears less founded. Love is not eternal, and nothing is stable for Ellen, an emotional itinerant, if not happy, content, to flow with the river. The atmosphere around her is one of once-splendid ruins to be explored, gaps or openings in reality, languorous fantasy, soporific bliss. Reality seems to change around her, emanating outwards in a wide circle from her moving point of presence as a virtual world is generated around a video-game avatar.

In *The American* [1877], Henry James (himself a friend of Wharton's) describes "the strong contagion of the place" working on the strapping leading male Newman (new man) as he visits the Louvre for the first time.[183] In *The Ambassadors* (1903), James describes the Louvre as

[181] Ibid., p.358.
[182] Jacques Rancière, 'Skopje: Time, Narrative, and Politics,' trans. Drew S. Burk, *Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2015), pp.7-18.
[183] Henry James, *The American* [1877], Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.5.

having a "charged, iridescent air."[184] Likewise, Wharton's Countess and her paramour Newland are sensitive too to the museum as potential pharmakon – a substance to heal or transform. They hope to change their realities in the assemblage of the institution; but when Ellen looks at the historical remains in the museum, and remarks on how sad it is that these things do not hold significance, she is saying, with the despair and powerlessness of the minor, she knows that it all melts away. But still she goes on the run: hers is the adolescent character in essence – he, on the other hand, is a risk-adverse adult dreamer who chooses to stay with the existing balance of power, rather than embrace any radical plasticity. He grows up.

Catherine Malabou, in *Ontology of the Accident* writes of a "process of destructive plasticity, for metamorphosis is existence itself, untying identity instead of reassembling it."[185] Her theory explores the way in which, following an accident or trauma, neural circuits change – "the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person."[186] This conceptualisation is applicable to the way Ellen lives in *The Age of Innocence*. As she moves through time, she is fictioning, writing herself as she goes, living in a projected third person. This identity outside of her unsafe self provides a structure of intelligibility and, ultimately, acceptability of the situation.[187] It is a way of life for the traumatised subject; *the* way of life for a human brain in crisis as it constantly unties and makes new pathways. Further than this, the question is posed: Is untying itself the process that enables identity? If all form is plastic, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are necessary for the function of the social (co-becoming) organism, especially for the female subject in patriarchy. The adolescent museum visitor is enacting destructive plasticity when she seeks the disorganisation of experience in aesthetic space, bucking against the order that does not recognise her interests by changing herself – and believing all will morph around her.

This is where the dissent is evident in museum visitation narratives – in the push and pull of interests that make up the redistribution of the sensible that characterises the process of dissensus. There is an attraction to places where power and control are exhibited, but where there is also evidence of an accessible assemblage, a pharmakon, in operation. Neither are simply positive or negative, like the political – they are productive, machines, but only functions of the elements that are working together to produce new realities, for the eyes and ears of the future. Some subjectivities are weaker, less supported and tolerated, less welcome – they have no share to speak of. And, in the novels I have gathered here, they are draw to the museum, sometimes repeatedly, to untie their identities and find new harmonies – and it is telling that they are primarily museums of art, a function likely of the myriad openings to fictional fields with which one can transform sensibility.

Perhaps, in modern literature, the museum has the corresponding allure of the figure of the institution as Deleuze described it, that is, the mechanism by which people try to meet their

[184] Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, 1903. Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/432/432-h/432-h.htm
[185] Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012, p.15.
[186] Ibid., p.1.
[187] Ibid., p.8.

needs in communities. By displacing negative elements outside, as distinct from law's regulations, an institution is, ideally, a system of positive, nurturing transformation:

> …law is a limitation of actions, institution a positive model for action. Contrary to theories of law which place the positive outside the social (natural rights), and the social in the negative (contractual limitation), the theory of the institution places the negative outside the social (needs), so as to present society as essentially positive and inventive (original means of satisfaction). Such a theory will afford us the following political criteria: tyranny is a regime in which there are many laws and few institutions; democracy is a regime in which there are many institutions, and few laws. Oppression becomes apparent when laws bear directly on people, and not on the prior institutions that protect them.[188]

In these novels, the museum is embraced as an institution in the sense of it being a positive model for action. Our lovers may be cast out of their social or familial milieu and run afoul of the institution of marriage, but the museum is cast as an institution that meets a particular societal need – for space in which to transform realities in seclusion. The museum in these two novels, in all those gathered here, invites inventive use. The protagonists are experiencing crises of emotion, spirit, psyche, subjectivity they need to move through, and this institution of museum-as-possibility is sought aspirationally, hoping that it will aid transformation like some sort of philosopher's stone aedifice. A place where Fedya can meet his demons face on and gamble his way to release, and where Ellen and Newland can be delivered (or dial themselves up) a plan of what to do, of how to play their hands and not lose out. They all want to experience the visitation of an angel of sorts. They must all deal with imminent threat, and only a place sympathetic to fiction will suffice.

Apocalyptic feeling

> You went looking for me, dear?
> Down by the sea
> You found some little silver fish
> But you didn't find me
> I was hiding, dear, hiding all way
> I was hiding, dear, hiding all way
>
> You went to the museum
> You climbed a spiral stair
> You searched for me all among
> The knowledgeable air

[188] Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, trans. Mike Taormina, Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004, pp.19-20.

> I was hidden, babe, hiding all away
> I was hidden, dear, hiding all away
>
> — Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 'Hiding all Away,' *Abattoir Blues / The Lyre of Orpheus*

What is the cry of the adolescent? Why is transformation so keenly sought? What kind of crisis is this? It is not knowing. Fedya seeks to heal trauma, and does so in the company of art, in the aesthetic space of a museum, where each work is a way of "doing and making that intervenes in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility."[189] To him they are all openings onto a future that encourage him to manifest his own, standing on a chair. But, if we consider the particularities of the 'museum scene' in Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, we are left facing the image of two people contesting their fate against a collection of technical fragments, objects from an ancient culture. (And I use the term 'scene' purposefully as the book has the air of cinema – written as it was in the age of the silent film, it is possible that Wharton was applying its form or texture to a retrospective study of life, youth, a generation earlier.) They seek reorganisation, some sort of miracle among the artefacts in the decorative-arts bowels of the art museum, but from what do they want deliverance? I think it is an epistemological crisis, and sense can be made of this, and how it is sketched out in a museum with these fragments, by referring to the work of Stiegler. To fathom this conjunction, his theorisation of the techne and the crises of being in our time can shed light on why they might have decided to go there, and what this encounter 'did' for the lovers.

Stiegler openly worries that the connections between people and generations are being short-circuited by the effects of progress and renovation inherent in modernity; that the long-circuit retentions needed for trans-individuation – pharmakons with the potential to nourish, such as ways of remembering, keeping memory and sharing knowledge – are being crowded out by those causing addictogenic harm, eroding agency, sovereignty, connection and knowing-how. He calls for a re-enchantment to counter this disenchantment – to reverse the flow from damage to repair, from disorientation and liquidation to fidelity, and in the direction of what makes life worth living.[190] As potential pharmakon, an architectural image of possibility, the museum exists and functions in this economy in literature – as index of enchantment, disoriented modernity, or accumulation of relics of technical history; and as a place where long-circuit retentions can be courted if the space is taken as aesthetic, and as such a pharmakon of considerable potency to those on the edge. As Stiegler explains in *What Makes Life Worth Living?*:

> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the disadjustment between the social systems and the technical system … underwent an extraordinary increase owing to the fact that technics, science and industry arranged and configured a new epoch, characterized by constant modernization, that is, by structural obsolescence This was what was called 'progress', and it

[189] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p.13.
[190] Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* (*Ce qui fait la vie vaut la peine d'être vécue*) [2010], trans. Daniel Ross, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013, p.84.

> dictated the imperative of permanent innovation, but it will turn out that the eventual outcome of the disadjustment – after passing through two global military wars and the so-called Cold War – is a global economic war *imposing, in the name of adaption, that is, the renunciation of the normativity and the individuation that [is] both creativity and health*.[191]

Disadjustment prompts a desire for readjustment – and the museum looms, beckons a place to make transformations in a world that Stiegler describes as subject to a vast, violent and sterile pathogenesis that "leads to the liquidation of every form of knowledge – savoir-faire, savoir-vivre, and theoretical knowledge".[192] Through a process of disapprenticeship, we are left unable to take care of anyone, or attend to ourselves, or pay attention at all as subjectivities. Stiegler describes a loss of savoir-faire, or knowing-what-to-do, as a necessary and painful by-product of such a profound disturbance to the collective techne[193] – the state of knowledge, making and doing:

> In the course of this 'perfecting' or (improvement), technics constantly compensates for a *default of being* … by *constantly bringing about a new default – always greater*, always more complex and *always less manageable* than the one that preceded it. This constant disadjustment induces frustrations, narcissistic wounds, and melancholy.[194]

To understand this loss of savoir-faire we must grasp the full extent of the disturbances to people and societies wrought by the rapid technological (cultural, emotional, relational, temporal, epistemological, psychic) changes of modernity. Stiegler explains some of this with reference to how we retain information, memories, learning – secondary or tertiary retentions being, respectively, memories (that belong to the past, and are former primary retentions), and the records of these secondary retentions. Both secondary and tertiary retentions are, to Stiegler, hypomnesic pharmakons (external reagents) that "enable attentional affects to be produced."[195] Simply put, the way things are remembered and then externalised has a generative effect on the now, on our primary retentions, on our passing present. Any system that intensifies and capitalises tertiary retentions has the potential to distort our technical operations and cause far-reaching disturbance. Stiegler has made multiple impassioned statements about the situation in which we have found ourselves – and that on which we are

---

[191] Ibid., p.32.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Technics, in Stiegler's rubric, is an effort to describe not just the way that as beings we externalise knowledge to carry it past our own existences – as genes do in our physical bodies – or the development of knowledge, or even of our entire technological system and its effects, but is, he argues, more fundamental. It is not a matter of cause and effect whereby technology (object) is produced by humanity (subject), but rather that "is the very the horizon of human existence, and is interwoven with temporality" – a theory he developed in his philosophical trilogy *Technics and Time*. Here, Stielger makes the distinction between techne and episteme, as Stiegler argues that the full understanding of technics has been suppressed in the tradition of continental philosophy. (See in particular *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (*La Technique et le temps: Tome 1, La faute d'Epiméthée*) [1994], trans. George Collins and Richard Beardsworth, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.
[194] Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living*, p.15.
[195] Ibid., p.85.

not adequately focused, probably because it affects our very ability to pay attention and register significance.

The museum could be a salve, to a-significance, to not knowing, and seems to have that appeal in fiction – appearing as a place of slowed or arrested time where things do not change, and where tertiary retentions can be studied as captured objects. The museum has earned the image of a reactive pharmakon as it is made of and for electric tertiary retentions. An arrow holds in its physicality information, and bears this information forward beyond its own time to react with the present of later others. It may have earned its glow, the museum, but it also holds a record of breakdown and disenchantment.[196] Characters are attracted, the museum has its charms, but the pharmakon cuts both ways, as it can be both therapeutic and destructive. Stiegler has warned that it is possible that things have marched beyond the ability of the subject to attend, care, or have functional technologies of the self.[197] But he also hopes that "the pharmakon be reinvested as "a remedy, a cure, as a transitional mediation understood as transindividuation"?[198]

That the museum has been chosen as a site for adolescents to visit in times of subjective crisis in modern literature, is, then, not so surprising. Museums may be, in the literary imaginary, symbols, signs of the fragile technological crossroads humanity is at, and the apocalypse of attention and care that is close enough to smell like something burning. The potent retentions they hold, and the sympathetic temple-like spaces they offer, beckon the lost, offering a hope island that is deeply attractive to those still able to aspire to growth, escape, or change. The technical fragments that surround the lovers as they try and make a passage to the act work as symbol of the pharmakon that Stiegler hopes for – one that is remedial rather than toxic. The fragments around them externalise knowledge – they seem to hope that, by osmosis, the museum will help them know what to do. That the pharmakon will help them to care for each other, to transform their disadjustment; to stop the process of erosion or care, attention, and significance. And being in the museum among the array of tertiary retentions did tell them what to do – that they must desist. All they can agree on is one liaison, not to be repeated, although perhaps it would have been the beginning of a new reality emerging from their throw of the dice.

The museum stands as an index of disturbance, of unsolvable crisis. A runaway train.
A tide of forgetting. Of disconnection. Yet it has the transformative power of the hypomnesic pharmakon. They want transformation to fix the epistemological crisis caused by too much transformation, a hopeless strategy by conventional standards or according to non-aesthetic logic – which allows for moving to new realities, for something to become foreign to itself, metamorphosed by fantasy and attendant heterogeneous powers – but the only one remaining, other than to just give up.

[196] Ibid., p.76.
[197] Ibid., p.84.
[198] Ibid., p.76.

3.
Museological time and vertigo

Turn the page

This chapter explores the way the museum appears in this literature as a site that opens to a multiplicity of other times, a vertigo of time. This term is involved in Chris Marker's analysis of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* – to Marker, the vertigo in this film is not one of heights or spatial dizziness, but a disorienting disruption to a stable sense of linear time. This "madness of time" is a spiralling encounter with the opportunity to reinvent time, to replay, resurrect, double, invert, cheat its customary passage.[199] This temporal disruption offered in the museum is examined through a cluster of novels: In Janet Frame's *Intensive Care*, Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*, Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, and John Updike's story 'Museums and Women,' crises of women are set in proximity to museums. Their 'problems with today' spur desires to turn the page, to spin or play again, to interrupt time and force a new outcome. The museum is chosen as a setting for this gamble because it presents a possible through-access to other senses of time, to disturbances of temporality that offer transformation to their being. These novels are also considered against other orders of time – geological, oneiric and labyrinthine – recognised as being sited in the museum in Robert Smithson's, Roberto Calasso's and Jean-François Lyotard's writing. The museum offers a possibility to the minor – the self without a present share – of a vertiginous temporality, a radiant place where new reality is possible, where there can be a new version of themselves, a third person, no victory for death. Unhinged in a temporal lacuna, chance plays out, a dawn colours. Unstuffed birds sing.

The three-pronged attack of minor literature, as Deleuze and Guattari describe the operation, can be recognised in traits in the collection of novels gathered here. These entities are a disaffected crowd, powerless, discontent; the young and the restless in enemy territory, burrowing out a new domain. They intervene in time and space with what means are at hand:

> The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political, the collective arrangement of utterance. Which amounts to this: that 'minor' no longer characterizes certain literatures, but describes the revolutionary conditions of any literature within what we call the great (or established). Everyone who has had the misfortune to be born in the country of a major literature must write in its tongue, as a Czech Jew writes in German, or as an Uzbek Jew writes in Russian. To write as a dog who digs [their] hole, a rat who makes [their] burrow. And to do that, to find [their]

[199] Chris Marker, 'A Free Replay: Notes on Vertigo.' Retrieved from https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker/a-free-replay-notes-on-vertigo/

> own point of underdevelopment, [their] own jargon, a third world of [their] own, a desert of [their]own. [200]

We see the life-acts of the minor played out in literature when it indexes the work of an imagined subjectivity on the outside of power, meddling in the machine room. Janet Frame is a consummate minor author, her female characters inflected with unconventional 'madness,' and her own writing methodology driven to deterritorialise language. She appears, in her work and personae, to be as determined as a plant to derange customary inequity, imbalance in the favour of narrow immemorialities discriminating against refracting multiplicity. Or as Thora puts it in *The Edge of the Alphabet*:

> I . . . live at the edge of the alphabet where words like plants either grow poisonous tall and hollow … or show luminous. … One day we who live at the edge of the alphabet will find our speech. Meanwhile our lives are solitary.[201]

Janet Frame's *Intensive Care* (1970) charts the course of a Peggy, a lowly older, unmarried woman, who is treated as fallen in her small town. The temporal zone of the novel is post-World War Two, and it is a world that has not treated Peggy well – support is contingent on a pairing with an amenable male. She has struck up a relationship with an old bachelor, Tom (like the cat), hoping to inherit his run-down house and garden, and escape her desolate bare-life post as a live-in caregiver at a rest-home. He unfortunately dies before their wedding can take place, and she stoically sets about renewing a relationship with another bachelor. Her allures are ageing in the way a cat's fur does, at the end looking like what it is, an old fur bag that contains a cat. She sets things in motion towards the sympathetic Canterbury Museum, an oasis of stasis in the provinces:

> Late that night Peggy phoned her barman friend.
> 'I'm free for the weekend,' she said.
> He was, too.
> 'Let's go up to Christchurch on the Friday night. We can stay at the French (the racing hotel). We can even go to the museum and look at the moa. Ha, ha.'[202]

He (Ted) asks what happened to her fiancé, and she told him that it's over, he died, and that there was nothing in it for her. When queried about that – was she really going to marry him? – she counters with a "Why shouldn't I settle down at my age?":

---

[200] Ibid., pp.17, 18.
[201] Janet Frame, *The Edge of the Alphabet*, Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1962, p.3.
[202] Janet Frame, *Intensive Care* [1970], Auckland: Vintage, 2008, p.165.

> 'Why shouldn't you!'
> 'Goodnight,' Peggy said, 'I'll tell you about it in the weekend while we're looking at the moa.'
> 'The moa, eh?'
> 'The moa,' Peggy said softly. In her role she was a full-page photograph in black and white, she and the man half-dressed in the hotel room, he with a three day's growth of beard. And she? The caption read: 'Now that Tom was dead I was determined to make the most of my affair with Ted. I knew he had been deceiving me but as we lay there in bed…'
> Full page. Black and white. A relief from the exacting subtleties, the light and shade of the full range of the spectrum of loving. Turn the page.[203]

The phrase 'turn the page' indicates to me an opening that the character crawls through, to safety, or fantastical providence. Here, mention of the museum is butted up against the idea of space that is reduced in scope, abstracted, romantic, lurid, transitional from one frame to the next. The image of the moa presents the possibility of a totem that might work as a portal to a better world, a world apart, over the written page – a temporal opening, or a bubble in time. She is no adolescent, but as a disrespected and unsupported older woman, a perpetual minor, she has the scattered energy and momentum, risk-taking; lack of consideration of safety and desperation are all the hallmarks of youth. She is attracted to the moa in a black-and-white abstraction of its extinction – is she mourning the passing of her youth, her capacity to inspire desire in men, or is it something more fundamental? In *Sans soleil*, Chris Marker has his film's narrator intone a consideration of wounds, recounting correspondence with an unnamed confidant, and of the effect of encountering the accretion of things over footage of a strange Japanese sex museum-shop-chapel:

> Who said that time heals all wounds? It would be better to say that time heals everything except wounds. With time, the hurt of separation loses its real limits. With time, the desired body will soon disappear, and if the desiring body has already ceased to exist for the other, then what remains is a wound… disembodied.
>
> He wrote me that the Japanese secret – what Lévi-Strauss had called the poignancy of things – implied the faculty of communion with things, of entering into them, of being them for a moment. It was normal that in their turn they should be like us: perishable and immortal.

"The castle has many entrances,"[204] and the tactics of the minor make openings for mere moments (and shells) in unexpected places, and then close again. Their conception of the minority as someone who is not an "agent of a dominant social code,"[205] connects with Stiegler's investigation of the degradation of institutions *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*. Due to the undermining of our systems of public education – by which we may become sovereign subjects reaching maturity and autonomy – we all stay

[203] Ibid., p.166.
[204] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What Is a Minor Literature?' p.13.
[205] Ibid.

minors, and live like tenants.[206] Minors are those without agency, so disturbing dominant codes, deterritorialisation, is something vital for those whose priorities, goals, methods, desires, are not those of the dominant order. It should not be thought of in terms of "liberation as opposed to submission – it is a matter of line of flight, escape … an exit, outlet."[207] Experimentation, entrance, occupation, is the way forward. Trip time out, turn the page.

Problems with today and a free replay

In Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971) a troubled woman lives in the shadow of the museum. It is a harrowing book about a writer who is married to an abusive man who is curator at an army museum. Having a relationship with another man who withdraws everything without warning, her foundation is precarious at best, her social and material safety entirely dependent on her husband's support. She is registered in the book as carrying out her work poorly, delinquently (disdaining occupations, she would have them all banned), missing deadlines, sheltering in the covert abuse, waiting for her chance to make an undefined break from the deletion that her husband is effecting: "Anything that transpires elsewhere, what he calls my little stories, are never allowed to be discussed":[208]

> My relationship with 'today' is so bad that people mistake extreme attentiveness for absent-minded gaze. This today sends me into an anxious haste, so much so that I can only write about it, or at least report whatever is going on. … But when I say 'today' my breathing grows irregular, and my heart beats a syncopation which can now be captured on an electrocardiogram, although the graphs do not show that the cause is precisely my Today, always urgent and new; however, I can prove this diagnosis correct. To use the confusing code of medicine, the disorder precedes acute phobia; it renders me susceptible, it stigmatizes me; although as of today I am stull functional, according to the experts, I'm just afraid 'today' is too much for me, too gripping, too boundless, and that his pathological agitation will be part of my 'today' until its final hour.[209]

At the end of the book an ambiguous event takes place. She disappears into a wall in the house she has been emotionally hostage in, but it is not clear if she has been murdered by her husband, or if she is killed by her own hand, or if a strange fantastical disappearance has taken her through a wall. The writing describes a wobbly perceptual field that, in its ambiguity, its fathomlessness, seems to have no ground, and there is a fall in sense, in time, that might be miraculous. Tzvetan Todorov wrote that the element of the fantastic in fiction is there to compensate for a deficient causality – deficient because its range of possibilities is too narrow and does not yet admit the supernatural.[210] And in this pre-emptive dreamer's way, she has

[206] See Bernard Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century* (*États de choc: Betise et savoir au XXIé siècle*) [2012], trans. Daniel Ross, London: Polity, 2015.
[207] Deleuze and Guattari, 'What Is a Minor Literature?' pp.13-14.
[208] Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* [1971], trans. Philip Boehm, Teaneck, NJ: Holmes and Meier, 1990, p.81.
[209] Ibid., p.2.
[210] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard and Richard Scholes, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975, p.110.

been waiting, biding her time, hoping something will open up, that time may dilate. Spin again, it might work this time, something might break. She has the patience of the captive, hyper-sensitised to detail. Death is usually the end of time, but in this revised temporal space, a linear modelling of death gives way to the possibility of another life beyond an undermined idea of finitude.

The pairing of problems with today and the museum shimmers as an apparition, offering, a supernatural possibility. The proximity of crisis and the museum in this narrative implies that this combination can facilitate a visitation with providence. Problems with today need a miracle, and the museum seems to offer a portal along the lines of the vertigo of time Chris Marker identified in his long consideration of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). He sees it not as a matter of physics or a fear of falling, but as a vertigo of time that allows second chances – a real solution to problems with today: "The vertigo the film deals with isn't to do with space and falling; it is a clear, understandable and spectacular metaphor for yet another kind of vertigo, much more difficult to represent – the vertigo of time."[211] Marker replicates the conceptual implications of both the film *Vertigo* and Proust's novel on time and memory (not to forget that Hitchcock's leading character was named 'Madeleine') in his experiment with CDRom technology in a work he named *Immemory* (1997). The user determines the story's direction by selecting from a myriad of trajectories on offer, and the desire to play again – to replay reality, start over, even restart is explored ad infinitum:

> 'You're my second chance!' cries Scottie as he drags Judy up the stairs of the tower. No one now wants to interpret these words in their superficial sense, meaning his vertigo has been conquered. It's about reliving a moment lost in the past, about bringing it back to life only to lose it again. One does not resurrect the dead, one doesn't look back at Eurydice. Scottie experiences the greatest joy a man can imagine, a second life, in exchange for the greatest tragedy, a second death. What do video games, which tell us more about our unconscious than the works of Lacan, offer us? Neither money nor glory, but a new game. The possibility of playing again. 'A second chance.' A free replay.[212]

The mystery woman, Madeleine, visits the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco. She sits in front of a 19th-century portrait that seems to be a depiction of her, as though she is alive, over and over in different guises despite the passages of generational time. Time runs in many directions, many speeds, parallels, different structures. It trips. It offers radical possibilities, and escapes, solutions. The minor wants such a vertigo of time, and fresh chances. It wants to do the work of the witch and change things rapidly and radically. In Iris Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958) we see this will-to-power taking place in a museum as if it were a shrine to an almost forgotten, but still responsive, deity.

[211] Marker, 'A Free Replay: Notes on Vertigo.'
[212] Ibid.

In *The Bell*, a woman overtly identifies as witch, or enacts a becoming-witch, to act against her community, to "make a miracle" following her inhabitation of a museum space.[213] Dora, our young lead, a former art student, is taken by her art historian husband to be part of a lay Anglican religious community in the country. In the community. Here she discovers a medieval bell submerged in the lake, associated with the death of a nun in the distant past, that she wants to secretly, rebelliously, resurrect. Towards the end of the book, she is conducting an affair in London with Noel, having already left her husband once. Very close to leaving her husband again, she bolts from her lover in a taxi and decides on the spot to go to the National Gallery, a place she has been to many times before, always alone. It has been terrible, her domineering husband and the imposition of his husbandly possession of her, and she wants to escape to something of her own:

> Dora did not need to peer. She could look, as one can at last when one knows a great thing very well, confronting it with a dignity which it has itself conferred. She felt that the pictures belonged to her, and reflected ruefully that they were about the only thing that did. Vaguely, consoled by the presence of something welcoming and responding in the place, her footsteps took her to various shrines at which she had worshipped so often before. ... Dora was always moved by the pictures. Today she was moved, but in a new way. She marvelled, with a kind of gratitude, that they were all still here, and her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless.[214]

The key was that "the pictures were something real outside herself," and it is this moving beyond the edge of the self that generated a radiant feeling a revelation in Dora as she looked upon a tender, sombre Gainsborough: "She gave a last look at the painting, still smiling, as one might smile in a temple, favoured, encouraged, and loved. Then she turned and began to leave the building."[215] Dora returns to the country, knowing that reality is somewhere else, in an altered state, able now to rewind, fast-forward, edit. This is when she decides she and her friend Toby in the community will raise the massive bell from the lake. Her transformative experience in front of the painting left her feeling touched by something supernatural, as though she has a magical destiny to carry out. It is not clear if she wishes to do damage to the community or perform some sort of miracle. He, naturally, is incredulous, but she persuades him they can do this marvellous thing:

> And indeed, as she stood there in the moonlight, looking at the quiet water, she felt that as if by the sheer force of her will she could make the great bell rise. After all, and after her own fashion, she would fight. In this holy community she would play the witch.[216]

---

[213] Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* [1958], London: Vintage, 1999, pp.183, 184.
[214] Ibid., pp.189, 191.
[215] Ibid., pp.190.
[216] Ibid., p.199.

The time she spent in the museum as shrine strengthened her connection with the idea that reality can be altered with a sweep of the hand, or wand, tearing the air, rending it, making an opening. The visit was a pharmakon of an order that was available to her, and had positive effect – she works a minor literature inside the institution of marriage and a patriarchal collective by effectively killing off a weaker version of herself, bolstered by the presence of something she believes to reside in the museum. The time of submission and obedience, of women colonised by servitude, is no match for this young witch, she who can swirl matter and space and happenstance into a vortex at will. She acts as a minor – part of the band of outsiders, the band apart, described by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* that comprises girls, stammerers, the left-handed – for all minors.[217]

Break and enter

In *The Space of Literature* Blanchot writes that suicide and writing are analogous, because they involve stepping outside of oneself: "both movements testing a singular form of possibility."[218] Writing, together with the choice to act on one's own life as a killer, stand here as ways of opening possibility up beyond the singular, and to go outside a "self-stripped of all possibility."[219] By extension, sites that seem outside of our conventional living time and spaces are catalysts for leaving a self that is ruined. To Blanchot, literature's space is an other to the "time measured by achievements."[220] It is a barren self-contained time that is the only place where the dewy newness of a fresh day is made safe – and literature demands that we return to dawns again and again, to start over.[221] "The poem – literature – … always speaks anew and is always starting over."[222]

When I read characterisations of literature such as these, I think of the museum, appearing as it does in literature, as a representation of literature's own space – a place to start over, offering an "other time."[223] For literature, to Blanchot, is similarly a site of withdrawal, to aesthetic space as no-place (u-topic?), involving a withdrawal even of what is normally meant by a place. It is a displacement of sense, being, meaning, consequence.[224] It is "wasted time," time adrift, which brings us into contact again with the figure of the delinquent.[225] And the plot thickens further in this analogy between the space of the museum and Blanchot's understanding of the space of literature: "To write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens. It is to surrender to the risk of time's absence, where eternal starting over reigns."[226] The museum and literature both give realms to those wishing to withdraw and allow fascination to make a new dawn.

[217] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.10.
[218] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p.106.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid., p.11.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid., p.37.
[223] Ibid., p.11.
[224] Ibid., p.10.
[225] Ibid., p.3.
[226] Ibid., p.33.

Blanchot is not promoting actual physical suicide as a course of action in time of distress: quite the opposite. He understands the impulse, but he is instead advocating a different channelling of the energy for change (wanting things to be different in the face of diminished possibility). He encourages us to do what art does when it is called for, that is, to manifest something powerful that has hitherto been obscured:

> Art is not religion, 'it doesn't even lead to religion.' But in the time of distress which is ours, the time when the gods are missing, the time of absence and exile, art is justified, for it is the intimacy of this distress: the effort to make manifest, through the image, the error of the imaginary, and eventually the ungraspable, forgotten truth which hides behind the error.[227]

The space of literature and the museum may give us a retreat from un-ease but neither offers peace in any simple way, just as the work is always unsettling – that is its ontological destiny. As Rancière said of Winkelmann's sculpture in *Aisthesis*, "The work of art is never connected to repose, it has nothing to do with the tranquil certitude which makes masterpieces familiar; it does not take shelter in the museum."[228] When considered in this way – a correlation drawn between the act of writing and of visiting the museum – it is understandable that an author might chose a museum for a setting and an adolescent for a protagonist. Established in this way, such a narrative can show and tell a story of dissensus, of hope for radical change and a space in which it feels possible.

In some novels, this is explored through describing an altered relation to time, an expanded perception of time, or a sense of emergence replacing a determinist sense of linear time. For example, Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018) gives us a story of a young woman at the point of emerging from a year's agoraphobic isolation. She staggers, blinking, back into the Manhattan streets. To ease herself back into awakeness, for she has over-slept, drugged, for a year, unwilling to deal with the emotional vacuum of her life, she takes a tentative trip to the Met. Before her year 'out' she worked in a dealer gallery after graduating with an art history degree, so, to an extent, she is used to contemporary art. She finds herself standing in front of a still life, wondering about the lives of the artists who paint alone. Looking at painted areas that mimic grapes, she is grasped by an idea, a vertigo, at the point when a guard challenges her for being too close to the painting:

> The notion of my future suddenly snapped into focus: it didn't exist yet. I was making it, standing there, breathing, fixing the air around my body with stillness, trying to capture something – a thought, I guess – as though such a thing were possible, as though I believed in the delusion described in those paintings – that time could be contained, held captive. I did not know what was true. So I did not step back. Instead I put my hand out. I touched the frame of the painting and then I placed my whole palm on the dry, rumbling surface of the canvas

[227] Ibid., p.83.
[228] Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul, London: Verso, 2019, p.204.

> simply to prove to myself that there was no God stalking my soul. Time was not immemorial. Things were just things. 'Ma'am!' the guard yelled, and then there were hands gripping my shoulders, pulling me to the side. But that was all that happened.
>
> 'Sorry, I got dizzy,' I explained.
>
> That was it. I was free.[229]

In the museum, in a scene at the very end of the novel, she experiences a release of sorts from a prison that had existed in her thought, confining her to the everyday understanding (or fiction) that time originates in the past. What had seemed a self-induced delusion that time can be stopped, arrested, even disturbed, replaces this earlier 'truth.' The still life presented a strong sign, an immovable object, that such an arrest is not only possible, but is the museum's very method. The museum's air is still in many senses, and in this pause, this arrest, it is possible to commune with a vertigo of time that is indeterminant. The future is uncharted, not blindly subject to narrow causality or fate. There is a new start, a new dawn, and a new emancipation. This vertigo of time gives her the opportunity to adopt the generalised role of the philosopher that Stiegler describes in *Acting Out* – with the odd tone of having passed the reader a note almost covertly:

> In the *philosophical* vocation – if such a thing exists – there does not seem to be this dimension of *speciality*: no one is devoted to philosophy in particular; *all* of us could be *devoted* to philosophy, which would immediately constitute *a gift, precisely, common to all*. The philosophical vocation cannot be a determination of such and such individual in particular. *All of us*, precisely insofar as we form a *we*, would be devoted in *potential* to philosophy, in a way that is not the case for other kinds of knowing. …
> If there are people more *particularly "devoted"* to philosophy, this would be, then insofar as they are capable of *making the passage to the act* from the common potential.[230]

In the museum, Dora ('gift') and Moshfegh's unnamed woman protagonist are encountering something fixed, immovable, that their consciousnesses cannot wretchedly consume. There is a power in the museum that makes a different reaction take place, one that creates an open still space that they can fall into, and shift their conception of themselves – from fixed to free, from powerless to witch. Possibility or potential is actualised in the heterogeneous duration of the museum.[231] It is as if being in the museum makes them yield to reterritorialising in a

---

[229] Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, New York: Random House, 2018, pp.351-52.
[230] Stiegler, *Acting Out*, p.2.
[231] See Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*) [1889], Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001. Although it is important to note that Bergson found the term 'possibility' to be problematic in relation to considering duration and subjectivity, preferring 'virtual' as a concept. He distinguished between space and duration as pertaining to materiality and subjectivity (subject / object, external / interior, numerable / non-numerical) respectively, and identified different orders of multiplicity pertaining to them – matter is countable and homogenous, and the uncountable changing multiplicity of duration and subjectivity is heterogeneous. The possible, in Bergson's thought, was only applicable "to matter and to closed systems," Deleuze explains in *Bergsonism*: "On the other hand, a non-numerical multiplicity by which duration or subjectivity is defined, plunges into another dimension,

process that resembles the capitulation to a god. I am thinking of the shift that occurs in praying that goes from begging submission on one's knees before a patriarchal god that denies the sinner, to standing at one's full height, arms raised, channelling the universe *in a time of distress*.

A museum and geological time

The museum appears in literature as a site of different orders of time, as a place where other times can be accessed. The time of the museum is multiple: geological, oneiric, archaic, mythological, vertiginous. All these forms of time are long-form, stretching and deepening time, and confounding the idea of an ideal museum visitor obediently moving through a familiar landscape, entertained, insulated. By broadening scope, and dragging the passage of time into a slower register, there is a shift in the way possibilities can register to the modern subject, to subjectivities ravaged by speed and shallow focus.

At a point in Robert Smithson's 1970 film *The Spiral Jetty*, the camera wanders around a geological museum, a voice intoning, "The earth's history seems at times like a story recorded in a book each page of which is torn into small pieces. Many of the pages and some of the pieces of each page are missing…"[232] We are told that these words are from Thomas H. Clark and Colin W. Stearn's *Geological Evolution of North America* of 1968. Soon, as the helicopter films Smithson's earthwork as though it is an inhospitable war-zone, a toxic place, a place of undisclosed spiritual danger, we hear (from Samuel Beckett's 1953 novel, *The Unnameable*):

> *The Lost World.* Nothing has ever changed since I have been here. But I dare not infer from this that nothing ever will change. Let us try and see where these considerations lead. I have been here, ever since I began to be, my appearances elsewhere having been put in by other parties. All has proceeded, all this time, in the utmost calm, the most perfect order, apart from one or two manifestations the meaning of which escapes me. No, it is not that their meaning escapes me, my own escapes me just as much. Here all things, no, I shall not say it, being unable to. I owe [my] existence to no one, these faint fires are not of those that illuminate or burn. Going nowhere, coming from nowhere…"

In this deep unchanging time – pre- or post-human – meaning is not accessible. In this deterritorialising spirit, the film then offers a passage from mathematician and science fiction writer John Taine's 1931 novel, *The Time Stream*:

> Gazing intently at the gigantic sun, we at last deciphered the riddle of its unfamiliar aspect. It was not a single flaming star, but millions upon millions of them, all clustering thickly, together

---

which is no longer spatial and is purely temporal: It moves from the virtual to its actualization, it actualizes itself by creating lines of differentiation that correspond to its differences in kind. A multiplicity of this kind has, essentially, the three properties of continuity, heterogeneity, and simplicity. In this instance Bergson does not have any real difficulty in reconciling heterogeneity and continuity." Gilles Deleuze, *Bergosnism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p.43.

[232] Robert Smithson (dir.), *The Spiral Jetty*, 32 minutes, colour, 1970.

> like bees in a swarm, their packed density made up the deceptive appearance of a solid impenetrable flame. It was in fact, a vast spiral nebula of innumerable suns.
>
> He leads us to the steps of the jail's main entrance, pivots and again locks his gaze into the sun. 'Spirals,' he whispers. 'Spirals coming away … circles curling out of the sun.'

The image of the spiral that the jetty indexes, in earthwork scale, tells me that inside time and space are curled potentials for expansion and growth that are larger than were thought possible, and that the emerging forms – a leaf from a koru, for example, or a galaxy from a nebula, a moth from a caterpillar – are vastly visually and operationally divergent. The spiral is an image of potential revolution or transindividuation, and the museum too has an image of expansive potential – its myriad details are radiant and mute, and, because it is ontologically of objects, is an object itself, contains no narrative in and of itself, beyond the technical traces in collection and architecture. The museum in literature seems to deny the narratives inserted, inscribed, by museum professionals, dedicated – ant-like – to education. Becoming occurs and the new emerges undetermined for those in an unhinged process of change.

In this film, which abuts the museum with an image of the spiral, museological time is cast as a function of the geological time it represents. I am thinking of Smithson's writing about Central Park, in which the built features of the landscape seem observed by alien eyes – as if part of some post-apocalypse landscape and its dubious atmosphere.[233] The Met as an edifice – its hugeness, its fortress-like quality, its mysterious range of significant contents, its judgmental institutional quality – read as a void to Smithson, who was seemingly disparaging in his characterisation of the museum in general: I am mindful of his drawing, *The Museum of the Void* (c.1966-68), picturing an opening in a temple, and his essay 'Some Void Thoughts on Museums' (1967). I quote this short essay in full because in it I sense enthusiasm for the terrible potential of the museum to mobilise the eye, to undermine our confidence in sense data in the productive, generative acceptance of our vacancies:

> History is a facsimile of events held together by finally biographical information. Art history is less explosive than the rest of history, so it sinks faster into the pulverized regions of time. History is representational, while time is abstract; both of these artifices may be found in museums, where they span everybody's own vacancy. The museum undermines one's confidence in sense data and erodes the impression of textures upon which our sensations exist. Memories of 'excitement' seem to promise something, but nothing is always the result. Those with exhausted memories will know the astonishment.
>
> Visiting a museum is a matter of going from void to void. Hallways lead the viewer to things once called 'pictures' and 'statues'. Anachronisms hang and protrude from every angle. Themes without meaning press on the eye. Multifarious nothings permute into false windows (frames) that open up into a variety of blanks. Stale images cancel one's perception and deviate one's motivation. Blind and senseless, one continues wandering around the remains of Europe, only to end in that massive deception 'the art history of the recent past'. Brain drain leads to eye

[233] Robert Smithson, 'Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape' [1973], in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

> drain, as one's sight defines emptiness by blankness. Sightings fall like heavy objects from one's eyes. Sight becomes devoid of sense, or the sight is there, but the sense is unavailable. Many try to hide this perceptual falling out by calling it abstract. Abstraction is everybody's zero but nobody's nought. Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum. Painting, sculpture and architecture are finished, but the art habit continues. Art settles into a stupendous inertia. Silence supplies the dominant chord. Bright colors conceal the abyss that holds the museum together. Every solid is a bit of clogged air or space. Things flatten and fade. The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that mobilize the eye.[234]

In Smithson's cataloguing of the effects of walking through the museum in his 1967 missive, he presents a sort of stoned possibility to the encounter in the void, in the vacancy, in the deletion, in clear space or cleared space. An explosion of reality by history and the remains of the recent past. Delinquents value just such a variety of blanks and fake windows, dominant chords that give way to diminished, and abstraction, inertia and theatre. The voids are where expansion can take place. The museum touches the infinite, but in a troubled way in Smithson's writing, past the opening, we enter into something that is part veritable labyrinth, part pantomime maze.

Oneiric time and the dream of the museum

Before we turn to 'Museums and Women,' the nouns like two blocks of stone, exhibiting the shape of extinct or vanquished entities – let us consider a contemporary study of a late-19th-century Parisian milieu parsed through the writing of a poet, in order to consider the museum as a place of oneiric time. Roberto Calasso's *La Folie Baudelaire*, an inspired work of literary and art history, opens with an account of Baudelaire's habit of visiting the museum with his mother:

> Baudelaire used to suggest to his mother, Caroline, that they meet surreptitiously at the Louvre: 'There isn't a place in Paris where you can have a better chat, it's heated you can wait for someone without getting bored and what's more it's the most respectable meeting place for a woman.' The fear of the cold, the terror of boredom, the mother treated like a lover, surreptitiousness and decency conjoined in the place of art: only Baudelaire could combine these elements almost without noticing, as it were fully natural.[235]

Literature, to Calasso, has a dissembling function, and so does quasi-literary behaviour – the delinquent tendency to create and break and re-create the self, to enact fictions in aesthetic space. This is the adolescent's "bold and desolate rebelliousness," and the museum is shown to

[234] Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996, pp.41-2.
[235] Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire* [2008], trans. Alastair McEwen, London: Penguin, 2013, p.1.

be a space where dissembling can occur for the self-writer:[236] "Writing, like eros, is what makes the bulkheads of the ego sway and become porous."[237] Calasso conveys how this understanding of the museum as fictioning is acted out in Baudelaire's sprawling depiction of the museum as a dream palace in a later chapter titled 'The Dream of the Brothel-Museum,' Here he shares a dream that Baudelaire had committed to writing in a letter to a friend who later published it in his magazine – the closest thing to a short story or prose piece that the poet ever made public. The museum within the dream has the stretched duration and space of the labyrinth – the time within dreams is open-ended, the firewall between known unknowns and unknown unknowns being functionally absent. The museum, drawn in, borrows this potential, making folds in time, and the scatterings of points ordering and reordering on a sensitised plane.

Baudelaire feels a need to tell a brothel-madam that his book has been published. On the street he meets a man, Castille, with whom he decides to share a cab. In the cab he realises it is an obscene book, and that this must be the reason for giving it to the woman; and that this is a necessary pretext for setting foot in a brothel, and for hopefully getting laid. He leaves his friend in the cab, promising to not be long. Once inside he realises his dick is hanging out of his open fly and that he has only one shoe on. He finds himself in vast, dingy, adjoining galleries. There are women scattered through the space, talking to men, and some high-school boys. The walls are covered with framed drawings, not all obscene. Some Egyptian and architectural subjects, some birds, some amorphous foetus creatures. Here he has an epiphany – the popular newspaper *La siècle* was of course the only organ stupid enough to fund this brothel-museum and to include science in it (the foetus component), and that it did so out of "*its mania for progress, science, and the spread of enlightenment*. Then I reflect that modern stupidity and arrogance have their mysterious usefulness, and that often, by virtue of a spiritual mechanics, what was done for ill turns into good. I admire in myself the rightness of my philosophical spirit."[238]

But lo, there is a creature living in this museum-brothel. A monster, born in the house who spends all his time on a pedestal. Burnished, thick with pinks and greens, and in a contorted position. There is a dark snake-like object wound around him that starts from his head and is somewhat elastic. The snake seems to add an element of shame or affliction to the beast who has been sentenced to creation and existence in a whorehouse. It shows a suffering that could speak of the poet's struggles with impecunity and the disapproval of his mother – who would always ask where his promised novel was (his castle / Castille in Spain?) – his hated military stepfather, his derisive mistress, an establishment that called his work obscene and pulled him into court about it. The snake could indicate the presence of a threat, but here, one that is inseparable from him, has been internalised. Or is this stupidity, this *bêtise*, the stupidity of the century?

The part of the dream where he has a realisation about the role of the newspaper in this whole scheme, and the whole scheme itself – as Calasso put it, the house that has the capacity to

[236] Ibid., p.32.
[237] Ibid., p.6.
[238] Ibid., p.134.

display itself as a museum is important in the construction of my narrative at this point.[239] Baudelaire is showing himself, in an oneiric image, that, "by virtue of a spiritual mechanics," things can be transfigured from foul to wonderful, and that this is achieved by cultivating and enacting "a philosophical spirit."[240] What is important here is that the museum is the imagined site for this realisation. It is described by Calasso as a grand mnemotechnical aid to the protagonist of the dream, whereby the elements inside this labyrinth are drawn together in an articulated arcana given shape in writing, in image. The implication is that in such a space, a place of no windows and no visible exits, of passages, and of artifice, abhorred beings can be transmuted:

> Here he was destined to breathe, forever. … The past could never have given him such a landscape. And if it all presented itself like a hieroglyphic language, to which Baudelaire realized he did not possess the key, it left him euphoric. Now it was no longer necessary to consider images as an enemy to be run through with the blade of significance, but as the messenger from the unknown….[241]

We have a "sovereignty *d'en bas*"[242] when we make new realities apart from unacceptable mundane and oppressive ones in the sensitised fields of aesthetic space. If all space is understood, considered, treated, as aesthetic, we see it is as a reactive assemblage – as an institution in the sense that Deleuze proposed it, all of which, museums especially, perhaps, are unnatural. An institution is the artificial means through which instincts and tendencies are channelled:

> An institution is always model for action – a set-up, construct, or assemblage in and through which desire is borne. And once constituted, an institution has the added feed-back effect of transforming these very instincts and tendencies, of changing this desire: habits form, norms are created, patterns develop and redevelop. In this sense, not only schools and prisons, museums and marriage, but also friendship and neighbourliness – even queerness – can be thought of as institutions.
>
> The museums, so invested with the resplendent attractions of power – architecture/exhibits/systems of thought/language – such major assemblers of collective desire, are they impossible to walk away from? Or perhaps museums have become so enmeshed in the security-entertainment complex that it's more the case of how could we not walk away? In this sense museums would be negative preconditions for our becoming – which is what history itself is for all becomings.[243]

[239] Ibid., p.147.
[240] Ibid., p.134.
[241] Ibid., p.152.
[242] Ibid., p.67.
[243] From correspondence with artist Ralph Paine, 2014.

The museum hovers, in Calasso's account, as a building of a heterotopic order – here many things are possible, and the logic of the dream holds sway. Just as the dream remixes memory and experience (at least), the museum indexes and reassembles what has taken place for those who visit or pass into its radiant, palliative sleep. Its still, constant atmosphere seems to beg for many more benches, even daybeds, on which troubled visitors can recalibrate, create openings in time.

A radiant place

In a suburban library sale in the early '90s, the spine of a book stood out from a trolley-full of books, stamped 'withdrawn from stock.' It said *Museums and Women*, and I picked it up hoping that it was a work of museo-feminist theory. I was in a museum studies degree programme at the time and it would have been a joy to find such a book. Disappointingly, it turned out to be a book of short stories by John Updike, a sexist, privileged, white male author from a time when such a voice was the absolute norm of literature. I bought it, and read its title story, and as much as I did not want to, I found in it something valuable, an image that in no small part sparked this study.

In it is the figure of a woman desiring another order of time, and repeatedly visiting a provincial museum, and its bloodless statuary, to find her way out. Hers is the covert, invisible risk of the adolescent, the break-and-enter artist full of the desire to trip, to become. Desire has no use for cowards as it requires the reorganisation that Kristeva identified as the hallmark of adolescent methodologies – the structure must be open, and to be open requires commitment to things changing, and uncertain outcomes. Adolescence is by this definition an emergent practice. But the mother in this story is also the author's (male, son) other.

That this narrative makes a woman the other and is set in a museum is consistent with the analysis of museums in Hal Foster's *Recodings* that sees them as institutions that other anyone on the outer of white patriarchy.[244] Her resistance is not just to the stability of her subjectivity, but to her socio-economic lot; and her dissent – her attempt to access an alternate reality – is sensibly played out in the museum as expression of patriarchal modernity. There are a number of women in Updike's story, and all are ostensibly annexed, instrumentalised individuals, drawn into the orbit of a narcissist who visits several museum sites at different stages in his life.

The narrative begins when the male subject is still a child with his mother on a visit to a provincial museum in ficto-Pennsylvania; and later to the same museum on a school visit, mooning after a girl in his class; to another college museum with a girl he meets on the stairs and would later marry; alone in a museum where he finds a statue of a sleeping girl on a mattress, about the size of a cat, nude; at a museum in New York, the Guggenheim, with a

[244] See Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1985.

woman he is heavily hitting on, and with whom he is about to have an affair; to a Manhattan house museum with her after they had been "swimming" at a hotel pool; and again, as he visits her at her museum workplace after breaking it off. He has refused to leave his wife and this provides the structure for the story.

It is an analogy for human experience of a dominant mode in our time that Avital Ronell points out, and asks for it to be investigated. In *Loser Sons* she writes, "To the extent that narcissism serves as a controlling cypher for our era, backed by capital and other state-sanctioned tyrannies, including technological addiction, narcissism's run calls for enquiry, for a real sense of how it instates the negation of all relation…."[245] Living within this mode fuels a crisis that forms part of this formula for trans-individuation: (crisis + need for redistribution of the sensible = adolescence) + (museum = aesthetic space). The motivation for a marginalised subject to try and reorganise things more favourably at the edges of possibility is entirely understandable; the drive to try to make some things visible – via fiction if this provides the means available. And it is the visitor who carries a strong desire for things to be transformed, as if magically by a *radiant possibility* of metamorphosis in other times at the core of fiction.

Updike's story starts with a passage proposing that the words 'museum' and 'women' have a similar visible form, the M central in women being "like a dark core winged with flitting syllables."[246] This winged image bears resemblance to the angel of Rilke, one that represents in completion the transformation with which we are engaged in our spiritual development, in our transition from the visible into the invisible. And such an opening affects a disorientation that might be Updike's cleverest description of the museum-effect sought by the protagonists. The museums in this story figure, to follow Rilke, as "towers or palaces of the past," or places where we work up the courage to proceed to "our next-deeper reality"; [247] to "discover a second face behind the one you see."[248] The man did not interest me – it was the mother who was doing something interesting, deterritorialising, and it was his wife as a young woman who showed a fictioning power.

Quietly, she was there, his mother, in the shadows of his bland college-educated brilliance. I was left with a residue of the shape of this third person, as with those red and dark-brown negative-paintings that happen on the insides of one's eyelids after watching someone, listening to them, maybe, from across a room. His mother (never given a name) would take him to the museum often, on Sunday afternoons:

> She had descended to me from thin clouds of pre-existent time, enveloped me and set me moving towards some unseen goal with a vague expectation that in the beginning was more hers than mine. She was not content. I felt that the motion which brought us again and again to

[245] Ronell, *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority*, p.xv.
[246] John Updike, 'Museums and Women,' in *Museums and Women and Other Stories*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1973, p.3.
[247] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies: The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, ed., New York: Vintage, 2009, pp.4-5.
[248] Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Volume 1, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, p.172-3.

> the museum was an agitated one, that she was pointing me through these corridors towards a radiant place she had despaired of reaching.[249]

Updike urged readers, in a piece about reviewing books, to "submit to whatever spell, weak or strong, is being cast."[250] And in this story, he links the museum and women (museum and muses) with images of temples and dragons – both orders of entities implicated in the provision of aesthetic space:

> When *he* came up to a college museum in the winter, crunching up the stone steps, the snow squeaking under his soles, he saw a young woman at the top of the stairs smoking. The smoke and the steam billowed from her mouth, and she was like a dragon-gatekeeper – "… she seemed, posed against a fluted pilaster, a white-faced priestess…"[251]

I am attracted to this forceful, somewhat occult image – and he asks her if she is a stoic (to build the mythological atmosphere), then follows her, the fine arts major, from gallery to gallery up and down stairways and along corridors, "in the very process of capturing the very gatekeeper of the temple of learning that must be the radiant place"[252] his mother had indicated to him in his childhood. But even in his determination to make her seem weaker, there is a trans-human, nameless magical force seeping through the cracks: "She could listen. She was like a room of vases: you could enter and find your sense of self abruptly sharpened by the vague, tranquil expectancy in the air."[253] To him, "Museums are in the end nameless and continuous … So too, the women were broken arcs of one curve."[254] Museums and women are here characters in an emerging fiction, forming in the breach that opens up in conventional time and life (the openings to possible resistances): "between the evaporation and the recondensation of desire, was like a bridge whose either end is dissolved in mist…"[255]

After re-reading this story after many years, it was the mother's image I held onto. I wanted to know more about her, her motivations, her visitation. Her reaching, generative dissent, and her determination to find a portal to somewhere else, something effective, transporting. Aesthetic. I admire this adolescent effort to piece something together – to be philosopher, artist, emancipated spectator – in the face of societal indifference to her supposed insignificance as an unremarkable woman, mother, service provider. This traditional writing-off would have us believe she, and women like her, come to a museum dully, dumbly, empty of ideas, of interesting motivations. But modern literature, if we trace it as a tradition stemming from such works as *Mrs Dalloway*, permits the supposedly insignificant subject the opportunity to fly. Here, women who have no right to say anything, like the minor entity that

[249] Updike, 'Museums and Women,' p.6.
[250] John Updike, *Picked Up Pieces*, New York: Knopf, 1976, p,15.
[251] Updike, 'Museums and Women,' p.7.
[252] Ibid., p.11.
[253] Ibid., p.10.
[254] Ibid., p.12.
[255] Ibid., p.14.

haunts Lucia Berlin's *Manual for Cleaning Women*, can be an agent. In the museum in literature, aesthetic space responds to her repeat visiting, like an incantation that works by accretion. Or are all s/hes entities and agents plural? Woolf points out that we all have "a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as a thousand."[256]
I am taken by two instances where something seems to bleed through – the mother looking for radiance, and the young woman as priestess – where it stops being about the man and becomes about a female subject interested in disturbing a balance, in making a new reality. Women here appear as powerful agents of something approaching the occult. They may be othered ostensibly in the narrative, and in the museum, but there is a power in evidence at these points that is aberrant and uncontrolled. They take the museum as their own territory, functionally resisting the museum being the dominion of the establishment, as Foster describes it:

> The business of the museum "is patronage – the formation of a paternal tradition against the transgressive outside, a documentation of civilisation not the barbarism underneath. … it recoups the outside dialectically – as a moment in its own history – and transforms the transgressive into continuity."[257]

Museums are, he suggests, heavily implicated in the power–knowledge matrix of modernity, in "the luminous spread of Western domination … we live in a time of cancelled limits, destructured oppositions."[258] And he warns of the effects of this claustrophobic closure, this dissolved absorption, as heralding a time when (quoting Paul Ricoeur), "the whole of mankind becomes a kind of imaginary museum."[259] To make a breach in Foster's analysis, with these female characters' actions, "the transgressive in its transfigured (contemporary) moment – in all its disruptions of aesthetic logocentric categories" is acknowledged and thought.[260] These two dissenting characters redraw the abusiveness of the museum as described by Foster, neutralising it in a small way with their adolescent transgressions, their barbarism, by not doing what they are supposed to be doing as compliant mother, girlfriend and museum visitor.

A radiant space is sought that is a release from the time of our times – neoliberal, financialised, the time of the clock, the time of capitalism. Fast time, in which nothing secure is generated, where we must contend with instabilities, precarity, constant modernisation to stimulate primitive accumulation of capital, increased margins. The system expands and runs down at the same time in a permanent attenuated crisis – a war on the worker, on the marginalised, on the others to capital. The radiant space that the mother sought in 'Museums and Women' by visiting over and over, going through the opening, looking for hidden

[256] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Harmondsworth, UK, and New York: Penguin, 1945, p.171.
[257] Foster, *Recodings*, p.191.
[258] Ibid., p.197, 205.
[259] Ibid., p.207.
[260] Ibid., p.191.

passages, for ways out, in this different time–space that the museum offered her, was to get lost.

In fiction, it seems that the museum offers the semblance of eternity. But it is a contested eternity – Bob Dylan sang in 'Visions of Johanna' that "in the museums infinity is put on trial."[261] This seeking of other times – older, cosmic in scale, the times of gods, the time of airless deep space that looms at the edge of consciousness – is for an oblivion of sorts. Of an even deeper time, the time of geology, or of the artist. The frame of the painting demarks an opening to a space that has an intimate generosity of the exchange of flows. The museum, too, appears as a frame, demarking an entrance into other times, into territory where reterritorialisation can happen: the work of the delinquent.

Get lost!
With pleasure

The time of the labyrinth

> …the longer I stared upwards with my head reaching painfully back, the more I felt as if the room where I stood were expanding, going on forever in an improbably foreshortened perspective, at the same time turning back onto itself in a way possible only in such a deranged universe. … I remember, said Austerlitz, that in the middle of this vision of imprisonment and liberation I could not stop wondering whether it was a ruin or a building under construction that I had entered.
> — W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*[262]

Michel de Certeau wrote in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that tacticality is the domain of those who, on the outer of power, must act under the radar. Their operations need to be stealthy, covert, anonymous, imperceptible. Preferably beneath language so their lack of semantic definition makes them slower to distinguish, hopefully impossible to discern. A tactic, he writes, "is a manoeuvre 'within the enemy's field of vision," … and within enemy territory:

> It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It

[261] Bob Dylan, *Blonde on Blonde*, Columbia, 1966.
[262] W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001, p.191.

> poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.[263]

I am left mindful of a part of a study of museum visitation at the Pompidou that contained an odd bracketed phrase: "(an immigrant worker on sick leave who spent all his afternoons there told me, 'I'm like anyone else, I just like to be among people')."[264] I came across this at about the same time that I discovered Updike's *Museums and Women*. Together, the image of the mother in his story, and the image of the nameless museum user provoked a greater curiosity about the subjectivity of the museum visitor, and how a represented pattern of creative visiting might relate to the frame of delinquency. In answering questions to myself about the practice of subaltern or dissensual museum visitation I turned to Rancière's conception of the 'emancipated spectator.' The society of the spectacle (this passive-inducing force) may have overtaken us, but we need not be passive within it. And we all have this capacity, Rancière argues, for there is no inequality of intelligence based on privilege or lineage between intellectual and worker:

> In the past, property owners who lived off their private income were referred to as *active citizens*, capable of electing and being elected, while those who worked for a living were *passive* citizens, unworthy of these duties. … Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting: when we understand (that) the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing, themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection.[265]

It is the minor that Rancière is interested in, and he demands that there be acceptance of the equality of intelligence and capacity for action. This is the mass capacity for something explosive, to disrupt "the distribution of the sensible which would have it that those who work do not have time to let their step and gazes roam at random; and that the members of a collective body do not have time to spend on the forms and insignia of individuality."[266] To Rancière, and those who wish to participate in a rebellion against an impotence that feeds a terrible melancholy, "emancipation is not the comprehension of a total process of subjection. It is the collectivisation of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus."[267] This dissensus involves an unbalancing and an opening up so that balances shift, and it makes sense that space will be sought out that lends itself to transformation – the museum offers a vertigo of time, a labyrinth to metamorphose in its prismatic duration, and especially to the repetitive visitor. The day can be written anew by those who can't stand today *as it is*. To the young, the

---

[263] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (*L'Invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire)* [1980], trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984, p.37.
[264] Nathalie Heinich, "The Pompidou Centre and its Public: The Limits of a Utopian Site," in *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. Robert Lumley, London: Routledge, 1988, pp.207-208.
[265] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (*Le Spectateur émancipé*) [2008], trans. Gregory Elliott, London: Verso, 2011, p.13.
[266] Ibid., p.19.
[267] Ibid., p.49.

future is huge and it needs to look viable if one is to bother with it. Literature bears these traces:

> …books of philosophy and works of art contain their sum of unimaginable sufferings that forewarn of the advent of a people. They have resistance in common – their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present.[268]

There is a clue to the nature of the museological time and of its function for the adolescent in crisis in the form of the labyrinth. Like invocations, incantations, Lyotard, as the situationists, made a study of the labyrinth as a form, an image of disorientation; as pharmakon in the face of a capitalist society that wants passivity, consumption and compliant work and controlled movement from its people. The labyrinth is an image of disorientation that suggests freedom and creative power. Disorganisation, to the situationists, is a strategy to switch from *homo faber* to *homo ludens* – in play, we learn to treat to the world as dynamic labyrinth, a place to get lost and stray in discovery of new paths. Or, as Constant Nieuwenhuys, a member of the Situationist International from 1958–61 put it in his text *New Babylon* (1956–74), "The liberation of man's ludic potential is directly linked to his liberation as a social being."[269]

Constant proposes that it is less a matter of creating disorientation than it is of recognising the innate and valuable disorganisation of the world, and honouring the horror of concretisation of meaning and identity. By allowing, encouraging, modelling such freedom in how we recall and configure ourselves, he was debunking the idea that fixed organisation is a perfect or natural or aspirational state. This attraction to the labyrinth on this basis is key to understanding the attraction of the modern novelist to the museum as a literary device. The importance of the labyrinth to Constant and the situationists was its unfixability, its movement. The novelist transposes the ideal of the labyrinth onto the museum in the literary imaginary, and in doing so it becomes a place that allows the fictional character to get lost in their negotiation. The novelist wins ground for chance and surprise against the static, knowing order of the museum: "Founded on notions of fluidity, creativity, disorientation and play, ideal space exists in a state of permanent transformation."[270] The articulations of the situationists of their methodology of the liberationist spirit shed light on the attraction of writers to the museum-as-labyrinth. The labyrinth offers an escape from the tediousness of the capitalist directive, and is distinct from retail and entertainment-complex traffic-flow systems, which do not liberate. It isn't just about being free, it is about being disoriented from standard modes of perception, or being, of reality as plastic:

> To succeed in life is to create and re-create it incessantly. Man can only have a life worthy of himself if he himself creates. When the struggle for existence is no more than a memory, he will

[268] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*) [1991], New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.110.
[269] Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*, 1972, n.p. http://www.notbored.org/new-babylon.html
[270] Jan Bryant, 'Play and Transformation (Constant Nieuwenhuys and the Situationists),' *Drain Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006. http://drainmag.com/ContentPLAY/Essay/Bryant.html

> be able, for the first time in history, to freely dispose of the whole of his life. He will be able, in complete freedom, to give his existence the form of his desires. Far from remaining passive toward a world in which he is content to adapt himself, for better or worse, to external circumstances, he would aspire to creating another one in which his liberty is realized. In order that he may create his life, it is incumbent on him to create that world. And that creation, like the other, entails the same uninterrupted succession of re-creations.[271]

Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* declares at the outset, "Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to love." It is divided into six sections, the first called 'The great ephemeral skin.' The last of its seven subsections is 'The labyrinth, the cry,' and it is clear from the trajectory of the chapter that Lyotard is not talking about labyrinths in a commonplace architectural sense. Labyrinths are spaces that open when a cry is uttered – they are spiritual spaces that may be echoed, indexed in architecture, but they are openings in the psychic fabric, in the great ephemeral skin. There are as many labyrinths as there are strong emotions, Lyotard explains, for the labyrinth: "each encounter gives rise to a frantic voyage towards an outside of suffering."[272] We flee perhaps to learn, or to localise our experience in time and place, to rediscover that that has been encountered, but we can never learn the labyrinth as it shifts and multiplies endlessly:

> It must not be said that the encounter takes place in the labyrinth, but that the labyrinth issues from the encounter. There are only encounters, each tracing at full speed around itself a multitude of transparent walls, secret thresholds, open grounds, empty skies in which each encounter flees from itself, overgrows itself, is forgotten – or
> is repeated, ceasing then to be an encounter.[273]

Lyotard draws us a picture to illustrate this idea of the labyrinth as sensorial space. He gives the example of a friend who visits an art museum, an opening of an exhibition of photographs hosted by a friend who is cultural director of the institution. The crowd of friends-of-friends, scattered through the newly renovated museum's spaces, make a chain of people to encounter as he moved through the spaces. His tiredness and isolation, balancing each other out, "alleviated and aggravated," he finds himself circulating on his own, around and around, looking at the traces of human aesthetic effort.[274] He is brought to a halt by a photograph, pinned to the wall amongst others from a certain time-period, of his former girlfriend, a painful memory. He leaves, determined to find some people to talk to, but finds himself returning again and again, in laps of the galleries. He eventually takes the photograph at the end of the night. In his car, heading home, he finds himself driving to her apartment where he slides the photograph under her door. He flees and, seeing the woman's boyfriend running to the street, is unsure if he has been spotted. She calls weeks later asking him to please explain

[271] Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*.
[272] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Libidinal Economies* (*Economie libidinale*) [1974], trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Athlone, 1993, p.33.
[273] Ibid., p.36.
[274] Ibid., p.33.

what he did, but he cannot. Lyotard tells us this man has found himself compelled to act. He has circulated the labyrinth four times, but has not learn it. The encounter in the museum is followed by another – feeling his theft, he opens another labyrinth in the streets. The suffering he encounters gives rise to more labyrinths, none learned or solved by our pained lover:

> There is no intensity without a cry, and without a labyrinth. … Every labyrinth is traced as flight towards an outlet. There is no outlet: either one grows accustomed to it, as the professor waited for the beast to do, the way of being accustomed that is depression or inhibition; or else through and encounter, in a new cry, another labyrinth, another time opens up, but nobody is the master of encounters. Love is not giving what one does not have; it is having to cry near to areas struck by lightning.
>
> My examples are of suffering: they could have been of elation. There are labyrinths of joy, the latter no less mad than suffering, very close to it.[275]

The labyrinth, as Lyotard describes it, and the situation of his explanation in the space of the museum with its joined galleries and corridors and circulatory–circuitous dynamics, "forms a closed chain,"[276] and gives us a potent image of the use of the museum for the alienated suffering subject; to the subject trying to mitigate or move through a barrage of intensities – the kind of intensities peculiar to modern life. The museum, in literature, seems to have the visual or spatial sense of the labyrinth, and appeals, because, unlike the labyrinths that open up within our beings or subjects, which have no physical characteristics or stability, it can be visited and passed through more successfully. It inspires recurring visitation – there is the hope that we might become mistress or master of the encounters that unfold. Just this once, it might make sense, resolve, appear familiar, or give to the subject something to surrender. Or to the adolescent museum visitor in fiction, the attraction might be that the physical labyrinth is a model or figure of the invisible psychic labyrinths that we open and swell with our cries as we play in time, with time. Here, nobody is in the time of work, or responsibility, or financial consequence, but in the sphinx-temporality of fiction, of the multiplicity of the work of art. Youth knows how to trip out straight-world time. Protection is needed from the present, from problems with today. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* – her youthful gender-queer, time-traveller extraordinaire – tells us so:

> No one need wonder that Orlando started, pressed her hand on her heart, and turned pale. For what can be more terrifying than that it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on the other.[277]

With the array of significant historical items that accrete in the museum's interior spaces, it's tempting to think of museological time as being generally oriented to the expanse of the past.

---

[275] Ibid., p.41.
[276] Ibid., p.33.
[277] Woolf, *Orlando*, p.171.

But it is also possible that the museum's sense of time is grounded in the present, but in a way that invites an alteration to our method of interface. All the things there, the displayed remains, the architectural volumes, the sound and air, the reserved company, offer the opportunity for us to train our observational capacity on the present. We can come out of our emotional selves and strengthen our observer position. We are, from there, more able to go beyond an isolated sense of self, to be more aware of how we are a part of, just a part of, something larger that is constantly becoming, and we with it. We are in a time–space that is not singularly that of the working day, of conventional success. It is delinquent, telescoping time made multiple, the temporality of the possible. The characters' presents are not only more bearable, but they are luminous, plastic.

4.
Delinquency and disorganisation of the self

To Possible Readers

This book is like any other book. But I would be happy if it were only read by people whose souls are already formed. Those who know that the approach, of whatever it may be, happens gradually and painstakingly – even passing through the opposite of what it approaches. They who, only they, will slowly come to understand that this book takes nothing from no one. To me, for example, the character G. H. gave bit by bit a difficult joy; but it is called joy.[278]

— Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*

Making love in the museum

Clarice Lispector's book *The Passion According to G. H.* opens with a dilated lucidity about the potential and value of disorganisation, disorientation, and its importance to becoming a subjectivity, a soul. A subjectivity that is open, becoming and vibrating with life – flying into a new territory formed by her flight from the past she'd rather give to someone else; never knew what to do with anyway. If she is not set in a shape from a previous organisation, she can fit in to something new, what she has now, or what she may have as it unfolds:

———————— I'M SEARCHING, I'M SEARCHING, I'M trying to understand. Trying to give what I have lived to somebody else and I don't know to whom, but I don't want to keep what I have lived. I don't know what to do with what I lived. I'm afraid of that profound disorder. I don't trust what happened to me. Did something happen to me that I, because I didn't know how to live it, lived as something else? That's what I would like to call disorganization, and I'd have the confidence to venture on, because I would know where to return afterward: to the previous organization. I'd rather call it disorganization because I don't want to confirm myself in what I lived – in the confirmation of me I would lose the world as I had it, and I don't know if I have the fortitude for another.
If I confirm my self and consider myself truthful, I'll be lost because I won't know where to inlay my new way of being – If I go ahead with my fragmentary visions, the whole world will have to be transformed in order for me to fit within it.[279]

[278] Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.* (*A paixão Segundo G. H.*) [1964], New York: New Directions, 2012, p.3.
[279] Ibid.

Might this be another way to address the adolescents of all ages that inhabit the books gathered here? Does visiting the museums come from a desire for this disorganisation? Is it through such deterritorialisation that they form the soul that Kristeva warned has been so eroded by alienated, modern life? "These days, who still has a soul?" she asks in New *Maladies of the Soul*.[280] In this text, she describes a new breed of patient, a product of our politically and technically disturbed times, belief, temporality and ethics adrift, sexuality and amorousness worn thin, manners shattered. Her idea of soul seems to link to a sense of stability that allows for a depth of being – perhaps the roots that Simone Weil tried to show we still need. But that this can only be reached by a new organisation, more upheaval. I read this desire as related to the experience of existing through time, and the difficult relationship we have to what we think of as the past. The abandoned past, in this light, seems one that is not to be reconciled, but to be swum in like the sea, or explored like ruins. Things crumbling are perhaps the physical or symbolic expression of forgetting, or of experience dissipating, never brought into sense or language or form. And this being an empire that we each rule over. It is a formless past. It is a proposition based on Lispector's bid: "I am the vestal priestess of a secret I have forgotten."[281] Her words crumble away, and there is nothing definite, nothing remaining that would hold water.

In this spirit, the world as we have it can be intentionally disorganised and an order can be resisted, upset. Places of disorder are enjoyed as such, as freedom corresponding to what we have lived and it is utter complexity. It is with this method that the spirit is formed, reformed and dissolved. Three stories, the focus of this chapter, hallucinatory recollections of existences all, show this will-to-derangement in the museum: William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac's *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks* (1945); Vladimir Nabokov's 'The Visit to the Museum' (1963), and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938). Each narrative is based on a significant personal crisis, and while their reactions differ, the characters are all drawn to visit a museum. In the first, the museum attracts the visitors as a cool space in which a crime's inevitable punishment might be undone. In the second, the museum, turning out to be a frightening maze, advances the crisis. And in the third, a young man is overwhelmed by establishment portraiture in his efforts to exceed his low opinion of himself. The characters' desire to overcome the self by disorganisation, to unhinge in order to become, can be met in the museum, which as aesthetic space is by its very *eidos* heterogeneous, deranging.

Benjamin says that the gambler, with a tripping "presence of mind" can "steeplechase over the hurdles of one's own ego."[282] The museum visitor too can exceed the self, overcome its limitations or oppressions by making love in the museum, as Guattari puts it – here, we can couple and make new assemblages.[283] But the background to all this is the general disorientation we experience in modernity, which messes up our ability to trust, feel, speak, act, attend, care, be amorous. The museum is an organ of modernity, expressive of its effects,

[280] Julia Kristeva, 'The Adolescent Novel,' in *New Maladies of the Soul* (*Nouvelles maladies de l'ame*) [1993], trans. Ross Mitchell Guberman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p.7.
[281] Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, p.8.
[282] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O13,3, p.513.
[283] "Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand. … We always make love with worlds." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (*Capitalisme et schizophrénie: L'anti-Œdipe*) [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London and New York: Continuum, 2004, pp.323, 325.

and not immune from the disorientation that Stiegler argues is symptomatic of living in a society subsumed by industrial capital, which absorbs desire and reason. He argues in *States of Shock* that the constant changes in techne we are subject to – our mechanisms for externalising knowledge, attempting to understand our environment and communicate knowing-how – produce gross disorientations. Technological 'progress,' on which capitalism depends, takes us beyond the point of shock, of ruin. In literature the museum becomes a space framed off from capitalism's time of progress in which a line of flight can take place. The image of the museum marks a territory in which a becoming *could possibly* take place for those on the run, loving on the line. But their success is by no means assured – a line of flight can fail, as the fairly tragic characters in the novels gathered here so often have. A line of flight can produce a becoming and a new land, but it can also be stopped in its tracks by something very rigid, or the subjectivity can be reterritorialised into the coded strata from which it sought to fly away. And who is to judge the flight's success? A new land is by definition unknown and unmeasured.

Friendship, shock and flight

> But there is no confusion in this; these are two different states of time, time as perpetual crisis and, at a deeper level, time as primary matter, immense and terrifying, like universal becoming.
> — Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*[284]

I am drawn to a passage from Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* that discusses film as an operation in which "diverse sheets of the past will be evoked and will embody their aspects in movement-images": "as soon as we reach the sheets of the past it is as though we were carried away by the undulations of a great wave, time is out of joint, and we enter into temporality as a state of permanent crisis."[285] When I think of this also as an operation of museums, the institution appears as a place where we have access to different layers of time – the time of crisis, and beneath, something primordial, trans-human – that are decidedly un-modern, or a-modern.

> It is as if by breaking up and becoming unbalanced the regions of the past have entered into the element of a superior justice which stirs them up; from a past in general where existences pay each other the price of their injustice....[286]

It is as though Deleuze is talking about a museum and its framing, with its decontextulised technological fragments, a space that trades in the past but is not fixed, unified, not singular,

[284] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (*Cinéma 2, L'Image-temps*) [1985], Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.115.
[285] Ibid., pp.111, 112.
[286] Ibid., p.114.

made of myriad sheets of the past that reorganise, kaleidoscopically. In this space the visitor is no longer subject to clumsy functions like human justice. How might a soul go about deranging sense or exploding its organisation, in conjunction with the image of a ruin – an architectural ruin or the ruin of an existence, the traces of an apocalypse of one's own?

By way of an answer, I turn to William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac's early novel *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks* (1945), a book written about youths in crisis in the high heat of summer in NYC in 1943. One has killed his lover. He has turned to two friends to be with him in the shock of the crisis. The progression-in-crisis of the characters in the novel takes them from crime, to bar, to arcade, to cinema, to museum. This is telling, for each stop is a place where things are stirred up, where the past is adrift and endlessly re-composable, no solid ground. The title refers to a subterranean zoo fire that happened around the time, and carries an image of heat burning things up: but heat is also the term for crisis, or of transgressions about to catch up with a breaker of enforceable codes. Heat, in terms of physical sciences, causes molecules to become excited, and it is in this excitement that their states and affiliations change – they can become gaseous, liquid, or re-bond with other molecules of attractive valencies to form new compounds. This is necessary for the transformation of matter. The tank could read as a frame enclosing something burning out, like the novel is a frame to show how a crisis unfolds, and what substances remain after the event. The tank could also be an image of the museum as frame – a catalytic structure in which an event can take place, and molecules rearrange; a plot from which subjects can transgress, break, fly, laugh, play truant, quit, mix it up.

The book is written in two voices, Will and Mike (the author-proxies) taking turns to write chapters, to tell us what happened with Phil, their friend in crisis, this aspiring poet, this killer of Al. It is as if they are on the stand, presenting testimony of the collision of desire and law; of freedom in relation to social codes and reward systems; of "creation and waste."[287] Mike is a sometime-seaman getting ready to ship out again. Will is working at a bar, and then for a detective agency, serving summonses. Before killing Al, Phil was planning to go to sea for the first time with Mike.[288] At sea he felt that he would be able to write his poetry more easily, without Al – "he's a dead weight on all my ideas. I've got some new ideas. He belongs to an ancient generation."[289] One that would not understand that "The artist's consciousness is expanded by derangement of the senses."[290] But now Al is dead and these adolescent dreams, to be without encumbrance, have spiralled back onto him: the crime, the law, the impending sentence; an adult-world barrier to his flows, his line of flight from the segmentarity of convention that would in a blink of an eye fold him back in and put him in his place.

---

[287] William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks* [1945], New York: Grove Press, 2008, p.6.
[288] Phil is the proxy for Burroughs' and Kerouac's friend Lucien Carr who had, since a youth, had a close, fraught, and possibly sexual relationship with an older mutual friend, David Kammerer (Al) – who had known Burroughs since school – and followed Kammerer to New York from their native St Louis. One night, Kammerer followed Carr on his way home and in Riverside Park on the Upper West Side he made a sexual advance that was rejected. A fight ensued, Carr stabbed him with a boy-scout knife – he was a scout when they first met – and then tied him up, weighed him down with rocks and threw him in the Hudson River where, according to the autopsy, he drowned.
[289] Ibid., p.17.
[290] James Campbell, *This is the Beat Generation*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001, p. 26.

Phil, in shock, goes to Will, who tells him that he should turn himself in and frame the murder reductively as an attempted homosexual rape of a younger, smaller, definitively heterosexual youth. Phil goes from Will's to the Anchor Bar and calls Mike, who hastens to meet him at the bar, leaving his seaman's bags behind – all deals are now off, and things are changing rapidly, horribly, and are fantastically uncertain. A hole has been kicked in a wall and the men climb through. Because they both have shaking knees, Mike and Phil go from one bar to another with air-conditioning – already at 9am it is very hot.[291] Phil has decided, he tells them, to go to his uncle for help. He has political power and will "know just what lawyers to get."[292] Mike follows Phil's trajectory:

> We talked about that for a while, then Phillip said he wanted to go.
> "Where are you going?" I asked.
> "Let's go to the Museum of Modern Art and spend a few hours there."
> "Okay," I said, "but let's have a few drinks before we go in."[293]

They leave in a taxi, heading for the museum, but Phil stops the cab in Times Square where they spend time in an arcade looking at risqué penny movies. Mike plays Benny Goodman's 'The World is Waiting for the Sunrise' on the jukebox. After the arcade they buy some peanuts and sit in the park of the New York Public Library and throw them at pigeons. Phil says, "Wherever they send me, I'll be able to do what I would have done at sea. … I'll write poetry."[294] They tarry still, now going to a movie on 42nd Street. By the time they exit the cinema it is 3.30. Finally, they enter the museum. Mike writes:

> In the air-cooled museum Phil spent ten minutes in front of a portrait of Jean Cocteau by Modigliani. I wandered off to look at Blume's vast studies of the decline and fall of the West, with Corinthian pillars fallen and always the same underworld types plotting in cellars while priests wail at the sacrifice and Oriental-looking troops gut the city. Then we both stopped in front of Tchelitchew's *Cache-Cache* and looked at that for a while.
>
> There was a tall blond fag, wearing a striped polo shirt and tan slacks, who kept looking at Phil out of the corner of his eye. Even when we went downstairs to see the one-hour movie, the fag was sitting just behind us.
>
> The movie was an old Italian film made in 1915 with Eleanora Duse in it. Phillip and I thought she was great. There was something virile in her attitude towards tragedy, as though she were defying God to knock off the chip He Himself had placed on her shoulder.
>
> We went back upstairs to the paintings. I wanted to drink some beer but Phillip insisted on staying in the museum till closing time. I looked around to see if the fag was still tailing Phil, but I didn't see him.

[291] Burroughs and Kerouac, *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks*, p.169.
[292] Ibid., p.171.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid., p.173.

> Phillip again installed himself in front of Modigliani's portrait and kept looking at it, with a smile on his face.[295]

A painting has no clear meaning or consequence. It frames an opening into which we flow and out of which it flows to us, and we and it are in flux – in this exchange there is no definite outcome. In this relation, in this time of becoming, Phil is free, an alchemical amalgam of youth and painting, stronger than before and charmed to be safe. He can now entertain turning himself over to his uncle, 'a reduction agent,' who will turn one state (hunted) into another (sorted). The pair – murderer and sympathetic libertine friend – have ended up at the museum in a state of time-rending complicity. They set about disorientating together, complicit, seeking cool, idiorrhythmic places – bars and movie theatres and arcades. But the most conducive of all for loosening reality is the museum, its labyrinthine spaces protected from the heat of the street and the terrible mess Phil has got himself into.

The non-killer loses patience with the museum, but the youth who has committed a crime and knows he will be prosecuted wants to stay as long as he can, needing as much of a break with consequence as is possible, away from the heat. What is he gaining from this action? What event is taking place? The association with the heat, with the law and the conventional sense of crime and failure, contrasting against the cool of the bar and the museum, is important. When his vision becomes fixed on the painting, the museum gives him access to hallowed space where reality can be manipulated, and a new reality produced – perhaps there is new subject rising from disorientating air; in a space of fiction, he can get through this without consequences, magically, somehow. When Phil's vision is fixed on the painting, I am thinking of what the poet Yeats writes about his experiences of frequently visiting museums, of the liberating, transforming, generative effect of becoming-art, in a 1906 essay called 'The Thinking of the Body' – only two paragraphs:

.

> …painting could move us at all, if our thought did not rush out to the edges of our flesh, and it is so with all good art, whether the Victory of Samothrace which reminds the soles of our feet of swiftness, or the Odyssey that would send us out under the salt wind, or the young horsemen on the Parthenon, that seem happier than our boyhood ever was, and in our boyhood's way. Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body.[296]

What Yeats seems to me to be describing is deterritorialisation, taking flight, leaving a territory, and finding/making new ground on a plane of immanence to which there is no outside and within which everything happens. But there is nothing in this process that is easy, guaranteed, comfortable, and outcomes are never pre-determined. Or as Lispector puts it, "I

[295] Ibid., pp.174-75.
[296] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats, Vol. 8: Discoveries, Edmund Spenser, Poetry and Tradition and Other Essays*, London, UK: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1908, p.43.

got scared because I don't know what entrance that opens onto."[297] But it is that the characters in *Hippos* set off on their day of turned-on fiction-writing together that is key. There can be no process of trans-individuation without others – it is a moving between the 'I 'and the 'we' that is its mechanism. One friend refuses, the detached observer figure in the form of Will, going to work as planned for the detective agency. He is drawn as someone who only wants to deal in actualities – the space where we can breathe "for a moment in the clean air in which there are only facts – and anxiety, inhibitions and neurosis dissolve."[298] Mike, the other friend, understands that he is needed, and agrees to walk through the opening with him into the territory of the event where things can flow and mutate. In this book, two young men are staring into paintings, fields of positive disorientations.

Popular film gives us an interesting version of this event in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, in which the three main characters, Ferris, his girlfriend Sloane and his troubled best friend Cameron, whom Ferris aims to teach to rebel, visit the Art Institute of Chicago. [299] Cameron is transported in front of Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte,* desire and crisis melding, his vision telescoping in vertigo fashion to the strains of The Smiths' 'Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want':

> Good time for a change
> See, the luck I've had
> Can make a good man
> Turn bad
> So please please please
> Let me, let me, let me
> Let me get what I want
> This time
> Haven't had a dream in a long time
> See, the life I've had
> So for once in my life
> Let me get what I want
> Lord knows, it would be the first time
> Lord knows, it would be the first time[300]

Their behaviour in the museum may have been mostly juvenile, but in this scene, there is adolescent deterritorialisation taking place right before our eyes. Hidden in the folds of the bubblegum films that John Hughes was known for are glimpses of existential distress and productive dissent for a mass teen audience – marketed delinquency.[301] This scene is staged as a version of a musical, or ironic music video, the museum being treated irreverently with the air of a trickled-down stock image that is consistent with the theme. Delinquency as a word contains a tension that shows it to be destructive and constructive at once – "it expresses not

[297] Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, p.4.
[298] Burroughs and Kerouac, *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks*, p.54.
[299] John Hughes (dir.), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Paramount, 1988.
[300] The Smiths, 'Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want,' *Hatful of Hollow*, Rough Trade, 1984.
[301] For example, *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Pretty in Pink* (1986).

only a way of evaluating crimes, but a new way of committing them."[302] The museum's earnest presentation of significance, its quiet air of knowledgeability and authority, is something to kick against using stupidity as a sharp tool to carve a name in a banister. Youth's resistance in the museum in fiction is genuine struggle against a prevalent lack of a sense of significance – at the loss of these skills and the dwindling to nothing of this economy of the sensible.

A taste for ashes

Jacques Rancière's book *Dissensus* provides another way of looking at delinquency as a method via the concept of aisthesis. Structured in two parts, the first being 'The Aesthetics of Politics,' and the second, 'The Politics of Aesthetics,' it repeats, hoping it will sink in, that these fields are not only not separate, they are vitally coexistent. From his 'Ten Theses on Politics,' a cribbed explanation of this line of thought, this passage to the act:

> The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and supplement. Society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places.[303]
>
> The logic of the *arkhê* … presupposes that a determinate superiority is exercised over an equally determinate inferiority.[304]
>
> The people (*demos*) exist only as a rupture with the logic of commencement / commandment.[305]
>
> The essence of politics is *dissensus*. Dissensus is not a confrontation between interest and opinions. It is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself.[306]
>
> The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in the control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible.[307]
>
> The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of *dissensus* as the presence of two worlds in one.[308]
>
> …the political aspect of these categories always consists in requalifying these spaces … – in short as participants in a common *aisthesis*. It consists in making what was unseen visible; and in

[302] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille plateaux*) [1987], London and New York: Continuum, 2003, p.67.
[303] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Continuum, 2010, p.36.
[304] Ibid., p.30.
[305] Ibid., p.33.
[306] Ibid., p.38.
[307] Ibid., p.36.
[308] Ibid., p.37.

> making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech and in demonstrating that what appeared as a mere expression of pleasure and pain is a shared feeling of a good or an evil.[309]

These passages could be rubbed against each other and applied to the consideration of fictional adolescent museum visitation in the following way: the ordering systems of the architecture and the collecting and history expressing methodologies of the institution create channels through which the demos can trickle, pour, flow and flee. They configure their own space within the arkhê of the museum in an ongoing process of dissensus that aims to make new things, new realities, visible, sensible; and therefore, aesthetic. Their line of flight got them an opening.

The way in which Rancière describes the arkhê, or the police order, and the flows of the delinquent working a way through by taking delirium as a drug, is indexed well in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938). A tale of a young man who is on a slippery slope to destitution as he insists on following his calling as a writer, engaged in a long and arcane and probably fairly useless (professionally) research project. He is acting out, as it would be termed these days, the errant life of a 'creative' and experiencing a nauseated relationship with a sense of existence that seems superfluous, absurd. The absurdity lying at his feet like a "long dead snake." Except for the brief moments when he feels as if he is "piercing the darkness," "as happy as the hero of a novel."[310] His subject is a local establishment figure – although why he is fixated on this man is obscure. (It is possible he thinks there is a joke in there if he looks hard enough. He does discover that the man was only five feet tall, but this is the only comic relief he receives – humidity rather than cleansing rain.) As part of his research he goes to the local museum to look at the picture gallery that contains, banked up, many portraits of the local establishment. The kinds of people roads are named after – it was them that received their share as if by divine right: "they were entitled to everything: to life, to wealth, to authority, to respect, and finally to immortality." It is clear that it is not a simple matter, taking one's share. As our young man finds, the problem is their gaze rattles him; their eyes, staring, horribly, *en masse*. Blévigne, his subject, seems to look at him with judgment, an exclusionary force; a reminder that traditionally social institutions are designed to keep out the 'bad' and celebrate the 'good', however that is constituted:

> I realized what separated us: what I might think about him would not touch him; it was just psychology, the sort you find in novels. But his judgment pierced me like a sword and called in question my very right to exist. And it was true, I had always realized that: I hadn't any right to exist. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. My life grew in a haphazard way and in all directions. Sometimes it sent me vague signals; at other times I could feel nothing but inconsequential buzzing.[311]

[309] Ibid., p.38.
[310] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* [1938], London, UK: Penguin, 1975, p.82.
[311] Ibid., pp.123-24.

He musters his spirits and leaves, laughing at the collected dull faces whose conservatism could be made laughable by thinking of their coded narrowness. He bids them goodbye, those who tried to conceal their absurdity, a farce – "bastards!" His struggle is a greater one – that all matter has at its heart a terrible superfluity. That existence is not necessary, merely contingent.[312] He has bigger existential fish to fry – how can anyone with this gratuitousness have any rights at all? On the outer, the struggle is intense and unsupported, but there is something revolutionary in laughter, derision, even if it is laughing from the ground with a black eye. A dissenting process can look childish, but we must remember the pairing of the idea of an open structure with adolescence before we reject the ways of the young from the point of view of the establishment ideas. One must stop and remember, or fabulate one's own narrative as a matter of urgency, of survival, or generation. It is the new land that can support our existence.

In re-reading *Nausea*, I found that I had written in pencil at the top of a page, "a taste for ashes," but the reason why now escapes me. (Was I reading Rimbaud or Patti Smith in proximity?) It is on the page where our man is feeling an adventure-happening moment, like a divine visitation: "I see that *it happens that I am myself and that I am here*: it is *I* who am piercing the darkness, I am as happy as the hero of a novel."[313] Perhaps these are the ashes left after a rite of transfiguration?

Sheets of the past and a bullseye

Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) declares itself a photo-roman at its outset, and this quasi-novel involves a complex and important image of the museum as site of delinquency, vertigo and overcoming the self. A product of the 1960s, a jewel of French Left Bank filmmaking, *La Jetée* fed off contemporaneous pulp novels. It is made up entirely of still black-and-white images, blown in the wind, photographs as memory or surveillance of post-apocalyptic series of oneiric events, in a style reminiscent of the romantic photo-novels popular at the time. It also seems to riff off the epistemological instability of the Série Noir detective aesthetic, a popular novel form at the time. The main character even wears a t-shirt on which appears a graphic depiction of the Mexican wrestler-hero El Santo – the saint, a saviour. This film, and the work of other filmmakers similarly concerned, as their new wave contemporary Truffaut put it, aimed to reject *le cinéma de papa*, and create alternative visions, new possibilities, new ways of liberating themselves from oppressive customs in ways of seeing and making visible, sensible.

La Jetée may have adopted an unusual method in the way it shows us a series of stills, but this difference is intensified by the narrator's explanation of events being substituted for standard character dialogue. When Marker calls it a photo-roman, he is pointing to the film's affinity with literary work, and as such draws on the potential of the literature to enact delirium, to become delirium in poetry. Indeed, the plot itself is about delirium, but before I discuss this, I

[312] Ibid., pp.187-88.
[313] Ibid., p.82.

will explain that the reason I have included this work in my study is that in the series of events it portrays – and they are events in the philosophical sense – the main protagonists, a man and a woman, like an Adam and Eve, visit a Parisian natural history museum (IRL the Galerie de Paléontologie et d'Anatomie Comparée du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle). And we are visited by a very concentrated image of deterritorialisation in the space of the image of the museum. It is as though we have entered a movie partway through and have no commitment to staying, or have snuck in without paying so there is no obligation to 'attend' in a conventional way. It is set in a time after a devastating war that has poisoned the earth. There are some people left, deep in the earth below Paris, trying to work out, by experimenting on some lower orders of survivors, prisoners, how they might find their way to sources of food and air when space is out of the question. Time becomes the frontier – how they might cross into other times through loopholes.

The problem is that most human subjects are destroyed by these experiments. Only one man, discovered by the image police, who surveille dreams to find those "given to strong mental images," can make the leap to the past, first, and then the future. Over a series of experiments, he travels out of his time, at first meeting again and again with a woman who haunts him, draws him back. The place of these experiments is a subterranean world like a catacomb beneath the Chaillot hill, which, in real life, has the Passy cemetery on it. In the muttering of the experimenters I hear the word for police, "flicks." (Also an old word for cinema in English.) In the caves are fragments of statuary, and twice the camera settles on a rock on which is written "TÊTE D'APÔTRE", or apostle's head, which appears like a grim joke. Here they seek to "summon the past and the future to the aid of the present." He is masked and injected with a substance while lying in a hammock as if he is a sailor in the bowels of a terrible ship in an awful sea.

His first actual meeting with the woman, some 30 days in, could be the product of creative memory, or has he remembered an aporic traumatised past? We are not clear. It is in a department store (which makes me think of Benjamin's fascination with arcades and his image of modernity, or Warhol's quip that in the future museums will be department stores). The second is in a public park, and, in an ode to *Vertigo*, which, as explored in the previous chapter, was an important influence on Marker, the two examine a large cross-section of a huge felled tree. Here, "She calls him her ghost." Next, he watches her sleep in the sun, at once an image of youth and health, and of a corpse (the death-effect of photography if we are to follow Barthes' idea):

> At around the fiftieth day, they meet in a museum filled with ageless animals. They have now hit the bullseye. Thrown at the right moment, he may stay here and move without trouble. The girl seems also to be tamed. She welcomes as a natural phenomenon the ways of this visitor who comes and goes, who exists, talks, laughs with her, stops talking, listens to her and then vanishes.

All this time he looks like a proto-Travis Bickle – Scorsese's cracked and homicidal Vietnam-vet lead in *Taxi Driver* – with his fatigues and his combat necklace. But now they want to propel him into the future. Those he meets reject "this slag of another time." They help him out, giving him "a power unit strong enough to put all human history back into motion, and again the gates of the future were closed." These futurians eventually offer him a place among them – for they can travel back to him more easily than the other way around. He does not want go to this "pacified future": he just wants to go back to "the world of his childhood, and to this woman who was perhaps waiting for him." Curiously, he realises that the moment he had watched as a child was actually, somehow, the moment of his own death. Past, present and future appear folded, stacked, coexistent in this narrative; and it is perhaps in this aspect that it is most museum-like.

It seems logical that a character in the business of remembering would go to a museum. The museum is a mnemotechnical site in that it gathers the remains of the past and displays them so we might make sense of what has happened from these ruins. And that the man and the woman are so happy there, laughing with each other lovingly, playing like kids among the literally thousands and thousands of stuffed animals, taxonomic taxidermy, some behind glass, others they can reach out and touch. To them in the amorality of a dream it is not grotesque but like a fairy-story – they are together, free, answering to no one. A new reality is possible, gained; the aim is right and they hit the bulls-eye, the sweet spot at centre of the concentric circles that make a tree's self-representing history into a vortex. But this whole film is a demonstration of the derangement of an individual, made to go to other places and times and deal with it, risking a complete breakdown. And the museum is a place that appears in the literary imaginary as a labyrinth where there is the potential to disorganise self and reality. The loophole in time that the future-scientist has manufactured is like an opening to aesthetic-mythic space, the door to the museum pictured in literature. Its segmentarity inviting rushing and lines of flight.

Unwanted spiritual experience

Deleuze's essay 'Literature and Life' contains an idea that suggests Marker's film might be an analogy for literature as the philosopher describes it. Literature is explained as a form of delirium, or investment of intensities, between its two poles – the delirium of the dominant and the delirium of the bastards – destiny is played out.[314] "Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience … to a vision that carries them off into an indefinite…"[315] "There is no literature without fabulation but … fabulation does not consist in imagining of inventing an ego. Rather it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers."[316] He has

[314] Gilles Deleuze, 'Literature and Life' [1993], trans. Daniel Smith and Michael Greco, *Critical Enquiry*, (Winter, 1997), p.229.
[315] Ibid., pp.225, 227.
[316] Ibid., pp.227-28.

achieved, briefly, control over time. He has found an opening to a heavenly place where magically he gets what he wants *this time*.

In this cluster of thought, and relating to Marker's museum dream, we are given a possible image of literature and the museum, its analogue, as a site of *success* – something attained. They exist happily there in the museum, although the life the scientist is seeking for humanity is right there. "The ultimate aim of literature is to release this creation of health of this invention of a people – that is a possibility of life – in the delirium. To write for this people that is missing…"[317] It is interesting to me that I initially misread the subject's t-shirt as not saying El Santo, but El Sante. But the life the scientist wants for the remaining people is not to be in the past, but in the future-assisted present. Narratives based on the lives of bastard minors, 'immigrants' in another's place, are the only way their collective enunciation can be formed. But doomed? The film ends with the man's death and his conclusion that one can never escape time.

The premise of the film, emphasised in the near forgetting of the gaps that fall between Marker's montage of still images, is that the only hope of the ruined society is to find an opening in time. And through that opening they will find something ideal, even infinite. This is also the contended function of the museum in literature – the characters take a running jump and sometimes find something they want, but often they do not. All the time the modern museum ostensibly, via its rational staff, is promoting a secular idea of reality. Is this what Dylan, singing "Inside the museums / Infinity goes up on trial," might mean? The sea of glass in Marker's museum implies that what we are looking for is separated from us – we can look, but we can't have it. We are, in essence, being shown something we cannot have. Unless we are just happy to see our desire behind glass.

Who knows where a museum-labyrinth will throw you – especially if you are not sure what (or whose) fantasy it is that you are stepping into. It is a powerful destabilising force, capable of transcending time and place. In Nabokov's 'A Visit to the Museum' we have a man, a Russian émigré in France who, because he is travelling on business, offers to indulge a friend to make an enquiry about a family portrait by Leroy that was supposedly in a local museum, hoping he might be able to find if it's possible to buy it back. He believes his friend to be prone to flights of fantasy and regrets agreeing. (Oddly, IRL, the painter Louis Leroy was the also the journalist who derisively coined the term 'impressionism' unable to countenance its loose 'unfinished' brushwork.)

A downpour sees him rushing to the entrance of the museum, which, under a columned pediment seems like a dark hole. He reluctantly enters the provincial museum, and is received by a custodian who not without trouble directs his enquiry to a M. Godard, the museum's director. He agrees to discuss the sale of the portrait, which he at first denies the existence of, but at a great delay. First he insists on taking our man on a tour of the galleries, which are legion, containing dispersed crowds of hooligan youths making noisy fun of the exhibits –

[317] Ibid., p.229.

rowdy, lewd, drunken scuffles are happening around them, and the youths are trying to climb and break into exhibits.

The expanse of the "unnecessarily spreading museum" gives rise to a panic in our narrator.[318] There are sarcophagi, stuffed birds, Chinese vases, minerals, paintings, military costumes and weapons, massive ancient fragments of sculpture, oriental fabrics, the skeleton of a whale, chandeliers, aquaria. Grey-haired people with umbrellas examining a mock-up of the universe in a landing and a vast hall of trains and models of stations are the last straw, and he hurriedly takes his leave from the director. In a panic he tries to find his way out but finds himself trapped in an apparently infinite regress of galleries – a passage with scurrying people and office cabinets, grand pianos, other musical instruments, a statue of Orpheus on top of a pond, and entire section of fountains and brooks, a greenhouse with hydrangeas, an empty laboratory. Now terrified, he passes by stairwells from which sounds emanate – typewriters, hammers, dishes, vast coatracks hung with astrakhan coats. The sound of applause issues from a door, beyond which there is not a theatre but "a splendidly counterfeit fog with the perfectly convincing blotches of indistinct streetlights."[319] But wait, it is "more than convincing." His deranging passage through the museum-labyrinth and its disorienting artificiality are over – but not without the half-life of its drug:

> I advanced, and immediately a joyous and unmistakable sensation of reality at last replaced all the unreal trash amid which I had just been dashing to and fro. The stone beneath my feet was real sidewalk, powdered with wonderfully fragrant, newly fallen snow, in which the infrequent pedestrians had already left fresh black tracks. At first the quiet and the snowy coolness of the night, somehow strikingly familiar, gave me a pleasant feeling after my feverish wanderings. … I felt how lightly, how naïvely I was clothed, but the distinct realization that I had escaped form the museum's maze was still so strong that, for the first two or three minutes, I experienced neither surprise nor fear.[320]

But then he remembers, dread flowing back in, as he reads a sign – in modern Soviet Russian, not that of the Czarist Russia he has fled – that he is in enemy territory. Without papers, an illegal. He begins to shred the contents of his pockets and curses his obviously out-of-place summer suit. He is arrested, he reports, and it takes him ages to get back to foreign soil. He advises the reader to not service the insane commissions of others, even in the name of friendship.[321]

Delinquent histories

Ruth Hoberman's *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism* draws

[318] Vladimir Nabokov, 'A Visit to the Museum,' in *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, London: Penguin, 1973, p.77.
[319] Ibid., p.79.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid., p.81.

together elements of Edwardian fiction and examines what they are doing when they represent the museum – "an oppressive presence against and within which characters define their desires; for others … the museum offers a kind of conversation about the relation of the self to the past, to materiality, and to the nation."[322] Hoberman pushes further to explore the disorder that seems to emanate from the museum, and what this might mean for the literary imaginary. She raises the number of movies and books that feature tales of people invading the space of museums in heists or horror tales or mysteries, murder fiction:

> From its earliest incarnation, the museum seems inseparable from the imagination of disorder: its evocation of extreme order brings with it an impish vision of havoc. … A Foucauldian reading of this drama would suggest that the museum disciplines its visitors and that the resistance created by that discipline is itself part of that system of power.[323]

Hoberman's argument gets interesting when, in conjunction with her consideration of Adorno's 'Valéry Proust museum,' she utilises an idea raised by Andreas Huyssen in his *Twilight Memories* (1995). Adorno contends that the best way to think about museums is in between the positions of Valéry and Proust – that they are both disordered, constraining spaces "where dead visions are entombed" and an invitation to dream in rooms that "symbolize the inner spaces into which the artist withdraws to create the work."[324] Huyssen writes, "No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory."[325] This is an interesting complexity into which to lean, for it suggests a surplus. If so, how would this surplus accumulate, generate? I believe it has something to do with the idea of the ruin. And I wonder this again when she opens a chapter in the book called 'Museum Dreams,' with this, from James Putnam: "The history of modernism is strewn with the ruins of the museum."[326] Hoberman raised this to illustrate a discussion of anti-museum sentiment, but this is not how I read these words and their significance. There does seem to be a necessary link with the museum and the ruin in modernity.

De Certeau gives an evocative discussion of ruins and their aesthetic–political role in *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking.* He had imagined this series continuing beyond this second part to deal with other subjects, one of which was, interestingly, the museum. In this second volume, there is a chapter entitled 'The Ghost of the City' in which he considers people's attractions to dilapidated quarters of cities, and their spiritual value:

---

[322] Ruth Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*: *Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism*, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011, p.25.
[323] Ibid., p.3.
[324] Adorno's 'Valéry Proust Museum' (1955) quoted in Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*, p.166.
[325] Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*, p.4. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, p.15.
[326] James Putnam's *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (1995) quoted in Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*, p.165.

> These seemingly sleepy, old-fashioned things, defaced houses, closed-down factories, the debris of shipwrecked histories still today raise up the ruins of an unknown, strange city. They burst forth within the modernist, massive, homogeneous city like slips of the tongue from an unknown, perhaps unconscious, language. … They impose themselves. They are there, closed in on themselves, silent forces. They have character. Or, even better, they are 'characters' on the urban stage. Secret personas. The docks on the Seine, Paleolithic monsters washed up on the river banks. The Saint Martin canal, a misty quotation of a Nordic landscape. The derelict houses [in 1982] of the rue Vercingétorix or the rue de l'Ouest, teeming with the survivors of an invisible catastrophe… By eluding the law of the present these inanimate objects acquire a certain autonomy. They are actors, legendary heroes. They organize around them the city saga. The pointed stem of a corner house, a roof open-worked with windows like a Gothic cathedral, the elegance of a well in the shadow of a seedy-looking courtyard; these personas lead their own lives. They take responsibility for the mysterious role that traditional societies accorded to great age, which comes from regions exceeding knowledge. They are witnesses to a history that, unlike that of museums or books, no longer has a language. Actually, they function as history, which consists in opening a certain depth within the present, but they no longer have the contents that tame the strangeness of the past with meaning. Their histories cease to be pedagogical; they are no longer 'pacified,' nor colonized by semantics – as if returned to their existence, wild, delinquent.[327]

De Certeau's idea is that historical material that has been left alone, or preserved, even if we can extend his idea, carries with it this ability to let in a rush of something infinite, heterotopic: "Whatever the framework in which this 'salvational' will is inscribed, it is true that restored buildings, mixed habitats belonging to several worlds, already deliver the city from its imprisonment in an imperialistic univocity. However enamel-painted they may be, they maintain there the Ghosts in the City, the heterodoxies of the past. They safeguard an essential aspect of the city: its multiplicity."[328]

This could be the mechanism or surplus that was raised by Huyssen as the potential and effect of the museum, and accounts for its magnetic pull to the delinquent. Its very being as an institution could be, by De Certeau's reckoning, delinquent. It is interesting too that the Louvre is next to a square built on the ruins of the Carrousel area, as the Pompidou is on the market of Les Halles. Baudelaire wrote about it, as Calasso reported. The Carrousel was a neighbourhood of shacks and small businesses that occupied that area between the Louvre and the Tuileries. It was here that a crack opened in the city's present through which its fecund past and thoughts of Troy burst through; and this poem 'The Swan' began to be written.[329] Calasso points out that Baudelaire saw Paris as the centre of the universe in the way that an earlier bourgeois Frenchman might have thought of Versailles and the king; and being the centre from which everything else unfolded like reality in a videogame. Paris was the frame, "this artifice that delimits and separates" containing a "chaos, of the pullulating forces

[327] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking* (*L'Invention du quotidien, II, habiter, cuisiner*) [1994], trans. Timothy Tomasik, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp.133, 135.
[328] Ibid., pp.137-38.
[329] Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, London: Penguin, 2014, p.51.

and forms, of the hospitality accorded to all variations of the monstrous."[330] The way the art historian describes Paris is the way one might describe the image of the museum in fiction – a place that delimits and separates, artificial, aesthetic, that contains the chaos of history. And it makes sense that a character would want to visit a museum in order to experience these multiple perspectives, this monstrous bursting in of histories. To resist an unacceptable reality by invoking the chaos of all that has been and could be.

Breaking the law

The characters in *Hippos*, *Nausea*, and 'A Visit to the Museum' all make passages through the museums they visit that are transforming, and they experience varieties of deterritorialising and reterritorialising. They are delinquents of different orders. In *Hippos*, they pass from gallery to gallery, in active avoidance of heat, arrest and straightness. Phil only leaves because he has to, and could have stayed forever in its limbo, I imagine, like camping out in an airport. In Nabokov's story, the architecture is immense ("in front of me stretched an infinitely long passage") and our visitor gets transportation he doesn't seek or want, in a bad trip, and runs screaming.[331] In *Nausea*, our non-hero's encounter is more compact, but a crowd bears down on him with the force of the police regime, and he exiles himself. All characters have, to various extents, moved beyond themselves as a result of their passages, and their narratives show their becoming in an assemblage with the museum and its heterogeneous duration.

When I think of a passage through a museum, there is a variety of speeds, and intensities, but they are all lines of flight. An example of high-speed passage is a scene in Godard's *Band of Outsiders* (*Band à part*) (1964) where three youths run as fast as they can through the Louvre for a lark, in the lead-up to a robbery. They rip through the galleries in a gleeful rush, rending a tear in its space like a Fontana painting. They beat the record by two seconds, running past David's *Oath of the Horatii* (three people raising swords in a death pact) and the gesticulating guard, over the marble floors, sometimes skidding on purpose, holding hands when it pleases them, under vaulted glass ceilings, their feet making a hell of a noise and echoing through the spaces lined with paintings or sculptures on pedestals. But no matter the speed or scale, the museum's passage, as set in in the novels, provides a physical, enterable image of order, the kind of definitions and conclusions and rules that the subject bucks against in the demos. This involves a constant push and pull between aesthetic and police regimes, dissent being the way the apportionment of the sensible is continually contested. When Godard's youths move through the museum they act as open structures, flowing along the channels of the museum's segmentarity, and in doing so make lines of flight; the constriction necessary for the breach.

Our errant visitors can be seen to make lines of flight; to leave a territory, which is to not so much to leave as to extend and constitute territory itself. Territory is in a constant state of flux, elements deterritorialising and reterritorialising, and these coexistent processes working

[330] Ibid., p.49.
[331] Nabokov, 'A Visit to the Museum,' p.78.

in a variety of ways – some positive, some negative, some yielding freedoms, production of the new, other lines of flight being blocked, exploding into chaos, or being reterritorialised back into a prevailing order. I see the museum as such an ordered system, perhaps akin to what Deleuze and Guattari theorise as strata – articulations, coded milieus, types of organisation – between which things flow:[332]

> …between two strata … there are *interstratic* phenomena: transcodings and passages between milieus, intermixings… Stratification is like the creation of the world from chaos, a continual, renewed creation. And the strata constitute the judgement of God. Classical artists are like God, they make the world by organizing forms and substances, codes and milieus, and rhythms.[333]

I have images of petty criminals, young women led astray, recalcitrants, critics, losers, black sheep moving through museum spaces at whatever speed – slow, fast, the spaces, big or small – as tearing through hallowed space, denying its religion, instead improvising pagan rites, their sun worship. Together, for strength: complicity has its own power. They demonstrate that "one never deterritorialises alone; there are always at least two terms, hand-use-object, mouth-breast-face-landscape. And each of the two terms reterritorializes on the other."[334] And I hear the philosophers whisper, how "rigid segmentarities and compartmentalisation" function to give rise to this kind of rushing and bursting and rebellion.[335] They discuss the phenomenon of large structures in thought and the way nations or geographical areas may seem solid, definite, but, as strata, are still mobile and subject to lines of flight along ruptures between segments:

> …molar aggregates … are perpetually being undermined by molecular segmentation causing a zigzag crack, making it difficult for them to keep their own segments in line. It is as if a line of flight, perhaps only a tiny trickle to begin with, leaked between the segments, escaping their centralization, eluding their totalization. … From the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by is lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a 'change in values,' the youth, the women the mad, etc.[336]

The segments and the flow need each other. They are clear on this point: "A molecular flow was escaping, minuscule at first, then swelling, without, however, ceasing to be unassignable. The reverse is also true: molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distribution of the sexes, classes and parties."[337] Their theories constantly press us to think about the interrelationship of all things, forming, unforming, reforming, becoming, fluid. And of the interrelationship between writing and the 'real': "writing functions on the same level as the

[332] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.502.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid., p.174.
[335] Ibid., p.214.
[336] Ibid., p.216.
[337] Ibid., pp.216-17.

real, and the real materially writes."[338] Changing the speed of something makes it proliferate, so perhaps two, three, four can become a crowd, multiple, multiplicities, something uncontrollable, revolutionary. When they run through these galleries, they are speaking to "the ears of the future" – a performative monument made in solitude speaking to a coming community brought forth by these acts of deterritorialisation.[339] Diagramatically, inside the museum the delinquents are in a territory, outside is chaos – outside strata, or in their absence, "we are disarticulated," without rhythm: "we no longer have forms or substances, organization or development, content or expression."[340]

> Every undertaking of destratification (for example, going beyond the organism, plunging into a becoming) must therefore observe concrete rules of extreme caution: a too sudden destratification may be suicidal, or turn cancerous. In other words, it will sometimes end in chaos, the void and destruction, and will sometimes lock us back into the strata, which become more rigid still, losing their degrees of diversity, differentiation and mobility.[341]

This passage comes over like a working definition of teenage rebellion complete with accounts of risk and the consequences of so-called failure – the failures evident in the Wharton and Salinger tales for example. But I say so-called as what may appear a failure against common-sense criteria may be a misunderstood victory – or, with equanimity, be unjudged, conditions to just be considered changeable, the concepts of winning and losing melting. As Clarice Lispector explains, "I immediately figure that the hardest thing my vanity will face is the judgment of myself: I'll have every appearance of a failure, and only I will know if that was the failure I needed."[342]

It is interesting to note at this point that all the museums visited in the narratives in this study are art museums. Ideally, Deleuze and Guattari argue, art offers us access, its lines of flight working directly on territory to "open it to a land that is eccentric, immemorial, or yet to come."[343] It models to us how to imagine the new – to become revolutionary. By being near it, being open to it may, by osmosis, be a cure. And by emulating its methods, or better, spawning new ones, the right questions are asked – questions that do not block flows, of visitors down corridors. Adolescence is deterritorialising, an engagement with the constant reorganising, transcoding that happens between strata, with the nature of being, neither tragedy nor victory but process, and being a groundless mutant:

---

[338] Ibid., p.141.
[339] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (*Logique du sens*) [1969], trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp.176-77.
[340] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.503.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, p.24.
[343] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.505.

...something always escapes.[344]

...a flow is always of belief and of desire.[345]

...it is always *on* the most deterritorialized element that the reterritorialization takes place.[346]

[344] Ibid., p.217.
[345] Ibid., p.219.
[346] Ibid., p.221.

5.
Dissensus and literature

Education in reverse

I am re-reading Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, but trying from the outset to only be aware of what is self-evident in the text. It opens. There is an opening. So I crawl in. It is a tunnel of text with long paragraphs that break apart after about ten pages like cracks letting in light. When I read like this the text seems uninterruptable and, in the grip of the writing, I am so consumed that I cannot start to re-read the writing again. I must be careful as this can be a way of avoiding darker emotion, open impressions, and I must not let the words lead into unproductive definition and remembering. The author provides elements that are set against dark space, and at first all we are made aware of is sculpture. A consciousness is raking its eyes over fragments of relief sculpture, the figures rising out of the stone. They are in pieces and, as the description continues, it is clear there is a vast expanse of fragments. And that this sea is of figures that are broken because they are ancient, and that they are fighting, struggling, dying, exacting violence on each other. There are weapons, the gestures of war, and entwined figures acting out a story that is broken by delay and elisions. The way the figures and their sense have been exploded, and then reassembled, keeps the experience of them open to an extent. In the way we watch something intended to be private, we are not obliged to go along with the ideas of those involved. It becomes our vision, even if this lack of sympathy is amoral, or not-yet-moral; the observational bit before ethics kick in. The clandestine does not have to be instantly comprehending or choose sides. There is a suspension of engagement that can be aesthetic, distanced, freely dark and ugly. Or elated.

The description of the experience of the viewer is slow, and time is stretched over the contorted body parts – torsos, faces, costumes, muscles, gripping hands. It is still and the weapons – spears, shields – can be studied as they impact, or as they are swung. There are stumps of limbs, and because the reliefs are broken, this contributes to the effect of carnage so deeply. It is not surprising to start to read of wings, claws, horns, sharp teeth and beasts and many serpents after a page. These are people fighting, men and women, with beasts, and they have odd expressions. There are the faces of humans dying, and of agony and rage, but there are also expressions that are too calm, too transcendent. We can assume this material is Greek or Roman from the mention of tunics, but what else is self-evident? There is a disparity of scale. It seems that some figures might be giants.

On the second page of the book there is the mention of lightning bolts and there is the feeling of a sea of effort, the rising and falling of raised and collapsing weight, and a ceaseless strain to pull out of the stone. The eye travels over the figures, the fragments, feeling that this battle is perpetual in its rebellion and endurance, and that its impact is extreme. There is a threat to be

subdued and a decision to be provoked, it is noted. And that the skin that shimmers so is "ready for caresses yet exposed to the relentless rivalry, to slaughter and annihilation."[347] It is only then that the word Olympic is included to qualify an aloof quality of expression in some of the assailants, and there is a gentle specificity, as something is shared in confidence, between trusted servants in the same cause.

The use of words is so measured, aware of its lack of credit against the wild visual field taken in by the eye. There is mention of griffins, centaurs, an ocean monster, all of them "woven into a metamorphosis of torture, shuddering, persisting, waiting for an awakening."[348] The world grows out from the moment of the text like a video game grows around the position of the first person with its stupendously complex algorithms. At this mid-point of the second page, it is made explicit that there are interruptions to the concentration of the subject. And that there is more than one set of eyes working together in some way. A collective: "A soft ringing and murmuring resounded now and again, the echoes of footfalls and voices surrounded us for moments at a time; and then once more, only this battle was near, our gazes glided over the toes in the sandals, bouncing over the skull of a falling man, over the dying man whose stiffening hand lay tenderly on the arm of the goddess who held him by the hair."[349]

The assembled fragments, and the echoes and hushed tones of others present, imply a large architectural space, a cavern, and – logically – a collection of classical statuary.
We are told of a figure, the demoness of the earth, this Gaia's massive breasted torso is thrusting one damaged hand upwards to grasp something, the other hand raised "asking for a standstill."[350] Perhaps her wish was granted in the arrest of this concrete instant being studied? But it is too broken and dense in detail to be static – the eye must travel, and even a team of eyes cannot rest. The word demoness implies a dark force, but in this wide and sprawling conflict, this bloody battle, it is not clear who is a force of good, and who is a force of evil. Such a dichotomy seems simplistic. These eyes are not locked into such an immature or clumsy binary, these eyes that are looking. The consciousness that is reporting does not tend to try to simplify or make singularities out of plurals. The gods, the beasts, the giants, the people, the terms of engagement, the stakes, the ideology, the advantages, the consequences – none are clear, and no immediate clarity is sought. The clues must be studied, and judgment suspended for a long duration if sense is to emerge. And a dark shape is becoming apparent by implication, yet what it is to be applied is just as convoluted.

Their determination in the length and deliberate attention seems to have a horrific element to it. How can they spend so much time in observation, and what are they trying to find? Now, more is confided, and the voice intoning is gentle and trusting, intimate. They, we are told, are walking along under the cornice. So, there is a structure supporting these fragments. And then there is a name. Coppi. And another: Heilmann. Like watching a play, they act, and speak and have ages and characteristics. We are introduced. They are looking at traces of script as they

[347] Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (*Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*)*, Volume 1* [1975], trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. p.4.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.

proceed along under the cornice. That they are walking under it implies a scale vast enough to provide shelter, to dominate even. Together they are trying to decipher these images from a book they have brought along for the purpose. They are young. They have been here before, and are trying to release some secret, some sense. On their own terms.

Then we are told, in a dense cloud of words – the descriptive register is thicker – that there are three young men. One is 15, the other two about 20. The older two have been out of school since 16 or so, submerged in the world of exploitative factory work, and Coppi has even been to prison for sharing subversive writings. They identify as proletarian. What time is this? Not now, surely. From this point it is clear that we are entering a historical novel. But why are they here looking at this tangle of combatants, circumnavigating this architectural erection? How can it be indoors – echoing, when it is so large? They are erudite and self-educating, focused, discussing possible identities of the participants and the reasons for the battle. What is it for? Words start to make it clear that the sculptural drawing relates to their own struggle, and that they are there for the very reason that their own battle is just as murky. And undetermined.

We are not left hanging. We are among allies who will share what they have. The youngest of the three explains to his compatriots, and to us, that they are regarding a battle between the full register of gods, led by Zeus and the race of earthbound giants, whose power is based in their physical contact with Gaia, the earth mother.[351] The gods have laid waste to the rebelling giants and the host of fantastic creatures that have fought with them as allies of the terrestrials. As they stand in front of Gaia's massive torso, her face viciously bashed from the eyes down, he names the work. It is – or, more correctly was – the altar of the acropolis at Pergamon, the seat of the Attalid empire of Asia Minor. It had been ordered, he says, to celebrate a military victory as appeasement to the gods that had shown them such fortune. And was as such a form of state propaganda. A worldly event had been given mythological form to arouse awe and terror in all who saw it, and to make it perfectly clear that the few at the top were in charge and had direct access to the favours of the gods. Or at least a crushing state power and an established hierarchy of priests, philosophers, government officials and landowners over the workers who would have had to fight this war then make this ædifice in the first place. "The initiates, the specialists talked about art, praising the harmony of movement, the coordination of gestures; the others, however, who were not even familiar with the concept of 'cultured,' stared furtively into the gaping maws, felt the swoop of the paw into their own flesh."[352]

The altar was built on top of a large plateau in the massive acropolis complex, a temple to Athena it is thought, to which the general population would not have had access. One of the older boys, Heilmann, offers his understanding, growing as he speaks, that the temple "for the ignorant, lay in magical darkness." It was "for the informed, a handicraft to be soberly assessed. … The work gave pleasure to the privileged; the others sensed a segregation under a draconian law of hierarchy."[353] He explains that those in power knew the gods did not exist, having worn the masks of the gods themselves. His thought, the narrator hears, is settled on a

[351] Ibid., p.5.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.

point of time that was the dawn after this battle, as the sun shines through the glass ceiling, and shoes clack on the marble steps of this massive structure inside an even more massive one. A museum, as the luminous evidence seems to be indicating, and one being used to scavenge knowledge that they might need to make decisions about what to do next, to survive in a hostile climate.

The 'Pergamon Altar' had been brought in parts to Berlin in 1886 from modern-day Turkey in the same spirit that fed the competitive museum-filling in 19th-century France and Britain. It is the showpiece of the Pergamon Museum, one of the institutions on Berlin's Museum Island, and it houses a massive collection of antiquities, including this altar, its showpiece. The fragments of the frieze have been reassembled onto a replica of the temple that measures 35 metres wide and deep, and 20 metres high. It has a U shape, and the gigantomachy, the war between the giants and gods, is depicted in the frieze that runs around the base of the altar. There are massive wide steps that go up between the two jutting-out sides, and on top of the whole is a colonnaded walkway that houses a relief that tells of the life of Telephus, the supposed founder of Pergamon/Pergamum, and son of Heracles.

The adolescent autodidact is described by the narrating subject as one "who rejected any uncertainty, who tolerated no undocumented interpretation, but occasionally also adhered to the poetic demand for a conscious deregulation of the senses."[354] And there, so close to the opening of the book, is an awareness of aesthetic experience in the sense of an encounter, a productive risk, that deranges the senses and enacts a dialectic in the place of an ordinary singularity of thought. The subject talking to us so intimately, so trustingly, in this opening passage, is clearly no stranger to this way of seeing and thinking, to this weirding of experience that reaches to the edges of sensibility:

> We turned back towards the relief, which throughout its bands demonstrated the instant when tremendous change was about to take place, the moment when the concentrated strength portends the ineluctable consequence. By seeing the lance immediately before its throw, the club before its whizzing plunge, the run before the jump, the hauling-back before the clash, our eyes were driven from figure to figure, from one situation to the next, and the stone began to quiver all around us.[355]

This ability to turn ideas inside out, to view ideas, like sculpture, or architecture, in the round, is being practised by these three youths who have paused in their study to look for Heracles, the only mortal involved in this grisly battle. He had allied himself to the gods, this mortal son of Zeus, and it is terribly significant to these young men that his figure is all but absent from the reconstructed relief. All that is visible of Heracles the hero is a paw of the cloak he wears, fashioned from a vanquished lion. They have suspended any easy, hasty judgment of good and evil, of Heracles' allegiances – both with and against the Gods at different times in his life story – as questionable or righteous, in their intuitive identification with him as a fellow mortal, an equal in struggle, failure, and in sometimes prevailing. They are curious about this

[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid., p.7.

man, and his effective absence, and feel that they have to come up with their own figure of Heracles, "this advocate of action."[356]

The relief has become to the three an image of tipping fate, of wild consequence, and Heracles is the figure of decisive action, of the potential to act victoriously against terrible odds in the midst of vast contradictions and opposing forces. And from here the vista of the narrative opens as we are told they begin to move together towards the vast neoclassical museum's exit, their heads filled with questions about the fragmentary bashed battle, and about Heracles. We will find that these are questions that follow them throughout this volume. It is at this point that we are told about something that sets this narrative into a terrible temporal and situational context, something spelled out in words – it is nineteen-thirty-seven in Berlin. And as the young men leave the altar, we are told that they are aware of men in the crowds inside the museum in brown and black uniforms. Their red armbands bear "an emblem, rotating and chopping in the white, round field, it became a venomous spider, ruggedly hairy, hatched in with pencil, ink or India ink, under Coppi's hand, as I knew it from the class at the Scharfenberg Institute, where Coppi had sat at the next desk, doodling on small pictures, cards from cigarette packets, of illustrations clipped from newspapers, disfiguring the symbol of the new rulers, adding warts, tusks, nasty creases, and rivulets of blood to the plump faces looming from the uniformed collars."[357]

Weiss's narrative voice reveals vulnerability but also great trust in the reader to continue reading. This requires an acceptance of the reader's uncomfortable powerlessness. For in this book, as Fredric Jameson expressed in his attuned and very detailed accompaniment to the volume, we are reading a "pedagogy of the subaltern."[358] This is literature that follows the consciousness of youths in a position without power but who are valiantly persevering with a process of independent education – a demonstration of fervent Marxist dialectics – designed to set a course through and out of the oppression and exploitation of the worker. This is its primary narrative function. Or perhaps concern is a better word. Nothing else happens in the book. One begins to speak, and we are given a history lesson, and an orientation of location, subject matter and critical methodology.

It is painful to read, as Jameson points out, for we must accompany them in their struggle. It is not sterile historical revision, "but rather a machine for reliving that sheerly corporeal agony."[359] He explains that by regarding the past, Weiss is not trying to help us come to terms with the past, or to learn from past errors, or to make up for failings. He is not trying to avoid the "the palpable shoddiness of much of what is truly contemporary" but to be brave enough to engage in an "unflinching contemplation of the past" in its horrific immensity.[360] And with it, "the intimacy of distress," as Blanchot worded it in *The Space of Literature*, which is the absence of time, of gods, of exile, when art is justified.[361] For in this space of intimacy,

[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid., p.x.
[359] Ibid., p.ix.
[360] Ibid., p.viii.
[361] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p.83.

"language is itself 'luminous evidence' within it"; the 'it' being both language and the work, inseparable.[362]

My paraphrasing does not convey the swift progression of detail that describes what our friends are going through. I use the word 'friends' because the tone and gesture of the narration draws the reader into emotional and temporal complicity. For the duration of the book, their struggle against the National Socialist government, the rise of the Nazi Party, is a struggle that we are to experience with them. We must accompany them in their uncertain fates, terrible tensions, hideous confusions and fear. And pain. We are to travel – for we agree, by continuing to read, to follow this politicised voice that does not protect us from reality – with the three youths, up to their uncertain necks, and accompany them in their search, unknowing, agonised. Their response is to confront history and art with everything their intellects, their dialectic commitment, and clandestine pre-internet research can muster.

Heilmann is described as being still at the school the other two had been able to leave, wearing the brown shirt of the state institute there in the museum – his sleeves rolled up, his epaulets, whistle on a string and small knife on the belt – and this acts as camouflage for the older boys, Coppi who has just come from illegal work, and the other unnamed one whom we are told is days away from leaving for Spain to fight in the Civil War. And they (we) have listened to Coppi say that "this mass of stone … which served the cult of princely and religious masters of ceremony, who glorified the victory of the aristocrats over an earthbound mix of nations – has this mass of stone become a value in its own right, *belonging to anyone who stood in front of it*?"[363] The italics are mine. They are there for it is in the sheer license of the protagonists that I see their dissent. In the anthologisation I undertook, initially with blunt words such as delinquency and desire, I was feeling out what the commonalities were between the museum narratives. I had slowly collected them over two decades of reading literature in my own time, accumulating like layers of sediment. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* stood out to me, prone, as I read the opening scene, agape with a form of reader's gratitude. I saw the elements I had been noticing time and time again – adolescence, the function of literature, poetry, dissensus, the museum as aesthetic space, openings – but here, so stridently and densely stuck.

The opening pages of this book are devoted to establishing three politicised characters, youths in the fullest sense of the word, in a museum visitation scene that is more particularly a radical act of repurposing an institution and a massive work of Hellenistic religio-state art. They are privatising – as an artist privatises space when she intervenes with her own work, taking place – what is ostensibly a thanks to the gods for victory into a prayer of their own for their research and intellectual straining and endurance to bear the fruit of understanding. For strength to fight and to continue to think that positive change is possible. While the narrative is set in 1937, it was written in 1975. And as readers we look back upon both periods from the vantage point of an English translation not made until 2005, and then to be re-read in subsequent presents. There are two more volumes of this book, neither yet translated from the

[362] Ibid., p.44.
[363] Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, p.8.

original German. From the position of each new present, the book is, as Jameson words it, called to take on a new "historically modified role," a new confrontation with Weiss's text, one that is necessarily "in this post-Cold War period, so different from the still feverishly political situation of the early German 1980s."[364]

Paragraphs when they are short are like clouds, but in Weiss's book, there are so few breaks that the text is as enveloping as a fog, or psychoactive atmosphere. We have adolescents, the very analogues of subjects in transition, directly and consciously assailing the partition of the sensible in an aesthetic regime. Their intervention is an attempt to take what was not intended to be theirs, and to overcome speechlessness.

They are the children of politicised workers, their parents engaged in political struggle against the rising right, and losing their battle, tired and disillusioned. The museum could be seen as for and by the bourgeoisie, an instrument of bettering the population with access to education – seeing the population as a problem was and is a hallmark of liberalism – but the youths are still able to use it outside of this educational complex.

Their parents are coming from a catastrophic defeat, a slowly unfolding one, but they hold onto a brave sense of possibility that there is an opening, and that the way to gain sensible ground is to derange present sense. This is their passage to the act, their dialectical intervention into a narrative of hierarchy: "We debated what Pergamum had represented, and how it emerged, the way it crumbled and passed to new phases, and every sentence involved learning how to think, learning how to speak, the gulf between knowledge and speechlessness, which had to be bridged."[365]

The museum and the visitor are not separate in that there needs to be something about the museum that attracts the dissenting visitor for it to be fully the machine, the assemblage, that Deleuze describes in 'Instincts and institutions': "In other words, every individual experience presupposes, as an a priori, the existence of a milieu in which that experience is conducted, a species-specific milieu or an institutional milieu. Instinct and institution are the two organized forms of a possible satisfaction."[366] To Coppi, Heilmann and their unnamed companion, the museum is the place where they can clearly see what they are told they do not have, and take it as their own. The space of the museum is seen as something to be repurposed, instrumentalised in the same way that a radical-left position understands the taking of space more generally. All space is open to being occupied and inhabited as by a sea of squatters. As Josephine Berry explains in *Art and (Bare) Life*:

> ...the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens (1789) falsely founds rights within the bodily life of a fictitious universal subject since, contrary to what these rights claim, they are neither guaranteed by the simple fact of being born, nor by citizenship; a danger revealed by the plight of refugees. Against the conception of the false logic of rights, Rancière argues that

[364] Ibid., p.ix.
[365] Ibid., p.30.
[366] Ibid., p.18.

> the space of rights carved out by law, whose subject is indeed non-existent, is there to be filled out by our demands. The Declaration of Rights acts as a placeholder that can be filled with the content it ipso facto excludes.[367]

In this novel we see youths taking the space of the museum, and making use of the work and the meaning they can produce in terms of their own ambitious conceptual schema – not just despite its apparent hostility towards them, but because of it:

> We needed these exclusive, demanding achievements of art, of literature, to complement what we were familiar with on the other side, which has no monuments, the side of poverty and deprivation. The reaction could be hostile. But in regards to things that were unfriendly, indifferent toward us, we felt a greater urge to treat them as if they existed solely to provide us with study materials.[368]

The contents of a museum, literature, philosophy, to the youths, all was to be assessed for its political use-value, which may only be apparent in an initial capacity to disturb.[369] Culture is identified as vital in their journey out from under their oppressors: "This was a groping, we did not yet know what our discoveries would be, all that we understood was that in order to make sense it had to come out of us."[370] All must be read, according to Weiss "against the grain" and reoriented to serve the concerns of the marginalised, and with a commitment to a vision that "distrusted anything that was definite and solid":[371]

> Since our goal was to eliminate social injustice, to wipe out poverty, he said, and since this country is going through a period of transition, we could imagine that this site would some day demonstrate the expanded and mutual ownership intrinsic in the monumentality of the formed work. And so, in the dimmed light, we looked at the beaten and the dying. … We looked back at a prehistoric past, and for an instant the prospect of a future likewise filled up with a massacre impenetrable to the thought of liberation. Heracles would have to help them, the subjugated, and note those who had enough armour and weapons.[372]

The museum is a palace to be broken into, dismissing the idea that as an institution it is a closed shop. "There is no doubt that tendencies find satisfaction in the institution," says Deleuze in 'Instincts and Institutions.'[373] Rather than rejecting the museum as part of the dressings of class exploitation, the propaganda of the powerful, it is subjected to a series of reversals intended to appropriate materials from which alternate realities can be constructed.

---

[367] Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019, p.32.
[368] Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, p.72.
[369] Ibid., p.47.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid., pp.33, 48.
[372] Ibid., p.9.
[373] Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, p.18.

They will make worlds together with an innocence that is not impeded by what Weiss referred to as a petty bourgeois frugality. Putting the brakes on impulse and impatience, this refers not just to economic resources but to those of time, energy and volition.[374] Our adolescents are, in contrast, not reserved with what they feel entitled to or capable of – as the narrator declares, "Literature was a necessity."[375] Art and philosophy are part of a facility for thinking harboured in each psyche despite having, as Coppi's father blackly jokes, hands that dragged on the ground at the day's end.[376] Their engagement with art history is at night, in a workers' night school from which students are ejected if they fail to attend no matter how legitimate their reasons. Their interpretations are not recreational or vocational in a middle-class sense, but a matter of survival. There are many decisions to make, and there are, as in the frieze, snakes everywhere.

From the museum, the three go to the flat where Coppi lives with his parents. And in its kitchen, the boys encounter the stolid presence of Coppi's mother, a figure who seems as rooted to the earth as Gaia is in the relief, but in the mother's case the ground is the bowl of hot water she uses nightly to soak her varicosed lower limbs. Her counsel is a cut and thrust that pushes the young men further, challenging their thinking, asking them to consider unavoidable realities like discouragement, fatigue, and the gap between knowledge and action that has not, in her opinion, been successfully bridged in 2000 years.[377] But as the novel progresses, we can see parents driven into mental illness – a father detached, a mother developing psychoses from disappointment and defeat. The doubt is irresistible and comes in like the tide, with its own special kind of exhaustion, leaving workers wrung out and vulnerable to a loss of hope. She is there to remind them that the time of waiting has dragged on year after year after year. She goads her son and his friends about the works of art they are discussing – her sphere is limited in the narrative to the domus, not the domain of the production of the self in the museum – that they are evidence of the slavery of the workers, of burden and hardship. She is not youthful enough, too disillusioned, to see possibility in the museum, to see it as anything more than the strength of the tyrannical over the weak who are armed only with paving stones, forced to make barricades in their streets to protect themselves, but "After a lengthy silence, Heilmann said that works like those stemming from Pergamum had to be constantly reinterpreted until a reversal was gained and the earth-bound awoke from darkness and slavery to show themselves in their true appearance."[378]

I can see in the way the youths in Weiss's book value literature, art, film, and philosophy as technologies of the self to be taken possession of, employed, regarded by an appropriating eye. Even if "the altar that is in our museum" effectively belongs to the victors, it is theirs for the taking in a process of dialectical transformation.[379] Their work is not done from a position of strength or possession, but rather from one of weakness and poverty. They are, as Rancière put it in 'The Politics of Fiction,' contesting "the world of Bourgeois riches as a stable

[374] Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, p.297.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid., p.47.
[377] Ibid., p.62.
[378] Ibid., p.44.
[379] Ibid., p.29.

world."[380] Here he was writing about the way modern literature introduces those traditionally excluded from the space of literature; whereas Weiss shows the adolescents enacting a purposeful analogue of this operation in the space of the museum. The working-class adolescents in the museum and democratising literature are doing the same thing – redistributing the sensible.

Poetry and financialisation

Douglas Crimp, in his benchmark essay 'On the Museum's Ruins' (1980), analyses the museum in terms of a critique of archaeological practice (arche/arkhê meaning origins or beginnings), and the museum's "pretension to anything we could possibly call knowledge."[381] To do so, he, in turn, quotes Eugene Donato's more obscure essay, 'The Museum's Furnace,'[382] a work that examines the great satirical novella by Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*:

> The set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe. The fiction is that a repeated metonymic displacement of fragment for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels, can still produce a representation which is somehow adequate to a nonlinguistic universe. Such a fiction is the result of an uncritical belief in the notion that ordering and classifying, that is to say, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments, can produce a representational understanding of the world. Should the fiction disappear, there is nothing left of the Museum but "bric-a-brac," a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments of objects which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for the original objects or metaphorically for their representations.[383]

Crimp comments that, "Nothing could speak more eloquently of the fragility of the museum's claims to represent anything coherent at all."[384] He explains that the post-modern project could be characterised as proceeding from a belief in "the foreclosure of what Foucault would call the episteme, or archive, of modernism … Foucault's project involves the replacement of those unities of humanist historical discourse such as tradition, influence, development, evolution, source, and origin with concepts like discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation."[385] Returning to the narrative of *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, I am mindful that although this book was set in the 1930s and 40s, it was written in the 1970s. The youths are drawn to the museum not in a blissful enjoyment of taxonomy – as were the

[380] Jacques Rancière, 'The Politics of Fiction,' lecture given at the Jackman Humanities Institute, University of Toronto, September 27, 2013, p.2.
[381] Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins,' *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), p.43.
[382] Eugene Donato, 'The Museum's Furnace: Notes Toward a Contextual Reading of Bouvard and Pécuchet,' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josui V. Harari, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979.
[383] Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins,' p.50.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid., p.44.

ridiculous Bouvard and Pécuchet. They came to study the fragments, and to study them not as fact, but to fiction them into poetry, as myth. The museum may be as useless as a coherent account of history or conditions, but in a heavenly light it gives access to fragments that can be viewed creatively, raw materials for their own becoming.

What is the function of poetry and poetic methodologies for youth? Franco Berardi's *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* is a detailed discussion of the way language and subjection have been subsumed by the gross financialisation of present-day capitalism, and how this can be corrected with poetry.[386] Biopolitical oppression can be undone, he argues, by enacting poetry – loosening language, writing oneself freely upon free observation and the exercise of creative intellect, in the face of a crisis in the social imaginary. Insurrection via reclaiming "self-perception and self-consciousness" is what Berardi prescribes: "Only the conscious mobilization of the erotic body of the general intellect, only the poetic revitalization of language, will open the way to the emergence of a new form of social autonomy."[387]

Weiss's revolutionary youths are engaging in this process of desiring or constructing autonomy in language and meaning from which they might fabricate social agency – leave their status as minor and attain some measure of emancipation or opportunity to live. Berardi explains that there needs to be negative feedback in a system in order for the system to stabilise. When a society honours a multitude of consciousnesses, these can act as a swarm and self-correct and balance. This is the kind of potential that Berardi believes can be achieved through poetic praxis.[388] The way the youths use what they see to advance their intelligence, their health, relates strongly to what Berardi describes as poetic praxis. To them, "every detail was ambiguous, like the building blocks of poetry."[389] "The picture challenged us to use the first impression merely as an impetus to take the givens apart and examine them from different directions, then fit them back together, thereby making them our own."[390] This is what they did in the museum with the fragments they took and thought for themselves.

Berardi recommends embracing an insolvency in language that refuses to pay the cost demanded by the financialisation of everything. Poetry, he contends, is "an insolvent enunciation in the face of the symbolic debt."[391] "While the functionality of the operational word implies a reduction of the act of enunciation to connective recombinability, poetry is the excess of sensuousness exploding into the circuitry of social communication and opening again the dynamic of the infinite game of interpretation: desire."[392] The young people here are suspicious of the museum as a support for the general intellect – their use of it is covert. They are working out their own reterritorialisations in the face of the massive deterritorialising effect of 20th-century capital and the damage it has wrought to the intelligence of the collective.[393]

---

[386] Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.13.
[387] Ibid., p.8.
[388] Ibid., pp.12-14.
[389] Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, p.293.
[390] Ibid., p.295.
[391] Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, p.35.
[392] Ibid., p.21.
[393] Ibid., p.51.

It is possible to read the actions of our youths as trying to introduce negative feedback into a system so that it might change its course away from imminent disaster. And the method they have chosen is patently poetic, aesthetic, in method. But Berardi is cautionary about the category of youth. Modern culture and political imagination have emphasised the virtues of youth – of young passion, and of energy, aggressiveness, and growth. "Capitalism is based on the exploitation of physical energy of youth … The fascism that triumphed in Italy after 1922 can be seen as an *energolatreia* (energy worship) of the young."[394]

It is so very hard to win. In the face of a terrible complexity, "Attention cannot be infinitely accelerated."[395] One cannot rest comfortably on what seems to be real, or what we are told is real. Or what is presented to us as real by social institutions when they are organs of what Rancière might call the bourgeois order's "reality effect": "The self-affirmation of the real as real is the artistic translation of the Bourgeois view of the world of Bourgeois riches as a stable world."[396] To make anything for themselves, our youths must believe in a tear in the episteme, and walk through it, no matter how effective the opposing forces might be.

The horror unfolds, and we are still to track the youths' progress through Spain to fight, only to be told they are no longer needed. And the truly terrible thing about this book is that it is made from the bones of perished mortals. Actual people. At the end of Weiss's work, in 1942, Heilman and Coppi and countless others of the Red Orchestra brigade they have joined are executed in prison. Our nameless narrator survives, and years later he finds himself back looking at the same marbles that he implored to help him in the beginning "in rebuilt Berlin. Heracles' place is still empty. There is no leader, no conceivable presence that can replace this absence. There is no hope for a messiah. No one other than the narrator himself and those like him can bring about their liberation. It is with this thought that the novel ends."[397]

Literature and the possibility of rights

> An image is a stop a mind makes between uncertainties.
> — Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, 1936[398]

Writing has a direct relationship to suffering, as Bataille pointed out in a segment on French television in 1958, discussing his book *Literature and Evil*: "Literature allows us to perceive the worst and learn how to confront it." And this is what the young people in *The Aesthetics of*

[394] Ibid., pp.66-67.
[395] Ibid., p.97.
[396] Rancière, 'The Politics of Fiction,' p.2.
[397] Robert Cohen, 'Nonrational Discourse in a Work of Reason: Peter Weiss's Antifascist Novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*,' in *European Memories of the Second World War*, Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara (eds.), Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 1999, pp.272-75.
[398] Djuna Barnes, *Selected Works*, London: Faber and Faber, 1998, p.320.

Resistance are doing in their appropriation of the space of the museum. Literature, and para-literature (writing your own life) is about game: "A man who plays finds in the game the force to overcome what the game contains of horror."[399] And I find in the analysis of these museum visitation narratives, time and time again, that they read as analogues for the function of literature; or, to say it another way, the function of literature as expressed in the behaviour of the characters. Perhaps this is the purpose of these narratives, these visitation narratives of museum delinquency, to express something about literature; to dig into what it is trying to do politically, the basis of its need, describing it, drawing it in fiction like a map for action.

Considering Weiss's narrative, and its relation to other adolescent museum visitation narratives, was somewhat of a process of stumbling from room to room; it became apparent that Rancière's figuring of dissensus connects strongly with narratives of youthful resistance. The way he described the push and pull of dissent, the conventional apportioning of the sensible against that which would redistribute it, speaks directly to the complexity of museum space and the protagonists' use of it in the narratives I gathered. It became, in the lights and shadows cast by his work, very important to see the museum space and the fictional entities in it as behaving in an aesthetic-political field. In *Aisthesis*, Rancière describes this immanence whereby art, narrative and politics are not separate:

> The term *Aisthesis* has designated the mode of experience according to which, for two centuries, we perceive very diverse things whether in their techniques of production or their designation, as all belonging to art. This is not a matter of the 'reception' of works of art. Rather it concerns the sensible fabric of experience in which they are produced. These are entirely material conditions – performance and exhibition spaces, forms of circulation and reproduction – but also modes of perception and regimes of emotion, categories that identify them, thought patterns that categorize and interpret them. These conditions make it possible for words, shapes, movements and rhythms to be felt of and thought as art.[400]

This aspect of his theory relates strongly to Weiss's work, and is emblematic perhaps of all I have been trying to identify as a common thread of adolescent dissent and contestation of the real in this group of novels. Rancière has carefully explained the function of literature in aesthetic-political terms, and how, in turn, these terms are clearly mirrored in the articulation of these delinquent fictional museum visitations: modern literature works to explode convention, and the young/open characters seek to disturb the distribution of what is perceptible, and what is apportioned to whom – the narratives, the theories, becoming images of each other.

Rancière wrote the paper 'Time, Narrative, and Politics' to be like a plait with the three strands present in that title as the necessary components of the dissensual process of functional democracy. He lays out that he has been working as a theorist for the last four decades "from

[399] Georges Bataille, 'Bataille: Literature and evil' (TV appearance, French television), interviewer: Pierre Dumayet, 1958. Translation: Vidar Vikingsson. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCnGuK8CVc
[400] Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, p.x.

the forms of workers' emancipation to the regimes of identification of art; from the principles of democracy to the transformations of literary fiction; from the presuppositions of historical science to the forms of consensus built by the dominant apparatuses…"[401] Within this field, there is a predominant concern: "attention to the way in which those various practices and knowledges imply a certain cartography of a common world":

> …of the forms of visibility and invisibility that structure it, the way in which subjects occupy it according to forms of co-existence and exclusion, wherein events and forms of events are identified, wherein the possible and the impossible are determined according to all these varying elements. I have chosen to name this system of relations between ways of being, doing, seeing, and thinking that determine at once the common world and the ways in which everyone takes part within it the 'distribution of the sensible.' [402]

Rancière is clear that temporality is inseparable from distribution functionally. "A narrative of time" underpins what we share with each other: "that which is now present, the way in which this present is linked to a past or detaches itself from it, whereby it allows or forbids certain futures."[403] A narrative of time draws a line between what is possible and impossible, but it also dictates who is in tune with or outside of time. Such a narrative lays the way for some things to be possible, and the capacity with which those involved in it have to grasp this potentiality. The relationship between possibility and capacity is the fiction at the basis of this, any, *paysage du sensible*:

> A fiction is not the invention of an imaginary world. Instead it is the construction of a framework within which subjects, things, situations can be perceived as coexisting in a common world and events can be identified and linked in a way that makes sense. Fiction is at work whenever a sense of reality must be produced. This is why politics and social sciences use fictions as well as novels or films. And the narrative of time is at the heart of the fictions that make situations intelligible, which also means acceptable. A narrative of time always is a fiction about the justice of time.[404]

Rancière is talking not just about the function of literature, but about our changing world. As a paper, 'Time, Narrative, and Politics' develops on works such as *Disagreement*, 1995, and *Hatred of Democracy* of ten years later, which tell the story of the intensification of the breakdown of the processes of subjectivisation, aiestheis and dissensus upon which democracy depends.[405] He makes a concerted critique of consensual democracy, and the horribly desiccated version of democracy being exported by the US. In this version, citizens are told

[401] Jacques Rancière 'Skopje: Time, Narrative, and Politics.' p.8.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.
[405] See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (*La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie*) [1995], trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999; and *Hatred of Democracy* (*La Haine de la démocratie*) [2005], trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Verso. 2009.

that there are few ways forward and that the state's hands are tied – it is merely a matter of following historical necessity – even though this advantages some over others to the level of outrage.

He then explains that these inequities are based in savage hierarchies of temporalities, which must be resisted, even though the act of doing so is a risk, and the means that people have by which to act are so slight. And when I think of Weiss's youths in this light, I see that they are acting out. They are attracted, it seems, to this redefinition of relationships of seeing and doing that the museum symbolises, this space that makes *aisthesis* visible. Are they attracted to the surplus that Bataille reminds is the stuff of life; are they sensing that the museum is this excess, with its surplus of meaning, reacting then with an ebullience that blasts open the policing borders of standard economic concerns?[406]

When I initially considered these novels, the crises that the youths were experiencing seemed like something that was to be solved. I sympathised with their positions, but was thinking teleologically towards a peaceful solution, or to a point where the conflict would end. However, for democracy to function, violence may be avoided, but not conflict, as it is the rebalancing of power needed for things to remain unfixed, generative, open. Conflict is an ideal, a spiritual good even, something perpetually natural to democracy, and the more I consider these narratives, the more entirely understandable it is that the museum should be a setting for such an *agon*, a battle, as we see in Weiss's novel:

> A 'common' world is never simply an ethos, a shared abode, that results from the sedimentation of a certain number of intertwined acts. It is always a polemical distribution of modes of being, an 'occupation' in a space of possibilities.[407]

What is being worked through in *The Aesthetics of Resistance* narrative are subjects undergoing an aesthetic education in a space of possibilities. Henri Lefebvre wrote 'Le droit à la ville' ('The Right to the City') in 1967 to mark 100 years having passed since Marx's *Capital*. He explains that we all have needs, but that cities are based around the needs of those privileged in "a bureaucratic society of managed consumption" not those of the whole demos:

> Social needs have an anthropological foundation. Opposed and complementary, they include the need for security and opening, the need for certainty and adventure, that of organization of work and of play, the needs for the predictable and the unpredictable, of similarity and difference, of isolation and encounter, exchange and investments, of independence (even solitude) and communication, of immediate and long-term prospects. The human being has

[406] See Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
[407] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature* (*Politique de la littérature*) [2006], trans. Julie Rose, Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity, 2011, p.39.

> the need to accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them in play. He has a need to see, to hear, to touch, to taste and the need to gather these perceptions in a 'world'.[408]

The city is no longer lived, in the sense that it has become a ruin and must be rehabilitated so that people's wider needs are met. The museum is implicated in this description, as an image of a representational entity that deals with barely understood fragments. The city is already like a museum, so it makes sense that confused characters would visit museums as they puzzle over the shifting ground of the socius:

> ...the object of the city, as consummate reality, is falling apart. Knowledge holds in front of itself the historic city already modified, to cut it up and put it together again from fragments. As social text, this historic city no longer has a coherent set of prescriptions, of use of time linked to symbols and to a style. This text is moving away. It takes the form of a document, or an exhibition, or a museum. The city, historically constructed is no longer lived and is no longer understood practically.[409]

And how could cities be lived in once again? Lefebvre is clear that this is no cosmetic undertaking. It is not a matter of renovating a decrepit building – it is a matter of building things anew in a way that actually works. It would involve a systematic breaking down of the centralisation of decision-making, and the reimagining of the city so that it can once again live – "an act and oeuvre of complex thought."[410] He argues "That imagination be deployed, not the imaginary of escape and evasion which conveys ideologies, but the imaginary which invests itself in *appropriation* (of time, space, physiological life and desire). ... All audacities can be premised."[411] "The *right to the city* is like a cry and a demand," which is right the right to visit, but the right to live an urban life as an inhabitant.[412] Lefebvre's plea for the city is a cry, a desire that opens a labyrinth in which one can become disorganised in an act and oeuvre of complex thought. My curiosity grew over the course of this study into the links between writers' conceptualisations of the space of the museum, the space of literature, and of politics, and how these are only separate in the way they are discretely worded in modernity.

Literary and/or political dissensus

Andrea Fraser's *Museum Highlights* raises an interesting point, and one that might explain why the youths at the opening of Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance* went to the museum when things were going so dangerously badly for them. She writes that museums, following an

[408] Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (eds. and trans.), *Henri Lefebvre: Writings on Cities*, Oxford, UK, and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000, p.145.
[409] Ibid., p.148.
[410] Ibid., p.194.
[411] Ibid., p.155.
[412] Ibid., p.157.

idea of Freud's, are a place where people can act *in effigie* – that is, where you can't be killed. ("No one can be slain *in absentia* or *in effigie*."[413]) *In effigie* means 'in (the form of) an image'; 'in effigy' as opposed to 'in the flesh' or 'in person'; but, also, *in effigie* = as image. Literature gives us images of characters who seem to think it is possible to act *in effigie* in the museum. It is possible that Weiss's youths are (in their perpetual present) drawn to the Pergamon with a sense that they are safe to act there; and an explanation for this could be found in the museum providing a potent embodiment of 'the literarity of the modern'. This is a term Rancière uses to disturb conventional hierarchical arrangements in the logic of history and poetry, fact and fiction. He explains in *The Politics of Aesthetics* that, "The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought. … Writing history and writing stories comes under the same regime of truth."[414] He claims that the work of authors such as Balzac working in a new political atmosphere "establishes a regime of equivalence between the signs of the new novel and the description or interpretation of the phenomena of civilization."[415]

It is possible to consider the function of the museum as making material arrangements, and in so doing understand the charm of the museum as a place where the signs of the phenomena of civilisation are brought forth, put into relationships, described, interpreted – and contested. As a place where aesthetic education takes place, it can be where minors or would-be citizens can gain strength and change their conditions. Here, all is on the level of fiction, everything being open to new realities being produced: "Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* arrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done."[416] The democratic subject can produce new realities by engaging in fiction as a method, and be safe from harm in attempts to mitigate crises. The museum in literature reveals itself to be a place where history and fiction elide (history being a fiction) and is therefore a place that can be repurposed (treated like a delinquent with no regard for the proper) to produce new realities and new effects. To Rancière, literature and politics are inseparable, and the literary foundational: "Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his 'natural' purpose by the power of words."[417] Literature has long been studied by philosophy to understand the inner reality of the democratic subject – the subject, our society, as exhibiting, performing literarity:

> Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images.

[413] Alexander Alberro (ed.), *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005, p.4.
[414] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p.34.
[415] Ibid., p.33.
[416] Ibid., p.35.
[417] Ibid., p.36.

> They reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission.[418]

Literature introduces "lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies" and can "produce disorder in the established system of classification" by modifying perception of what is common to a people, to the sensible distribution of what we do it and where we do it.[419] For this reason literature is a revolutionary substance – so it is an intensification when literature itself images individuals and collectives enacting ruptures into the time and space and distribution of a museum itself a site of the contestation of the distribution of the sensible. When people act against rigid distributions, taking things into their own hands, as Weiss's youths do, they are acting as open structures, for fiction is the register proper to disorganisation and becoming, to undoing. "Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality," and it is for this reason that the quasi-bodies circulating in literature and political thought are considered by those in power to be dangerous:[420]

> They form, in this way, uncertain communities that contribute to the formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages. In short, they contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible. A political collective is not, in actual fact, an organism or a communal body. The channels for political subjectivization are not those of imaginary identification but those of 'literary' disincorporation.[421]

As part of his developing theory of the political function of literature, Rancière explains his understanding of the difference between political dissensus and literary dissensus. In *The Politics of Literature* he explains that literature's function is to dissolve:

> Literary dissensus works on changes in the scale and nature of individualities, on deconstruction of the relationships between things and meanings. In this, it differentiates itself from the work of political subjectification which configures new collectives by means of words. Political dissensus operates in the form of subjectification by the anonymous that they are a collective, an *us*, with reconfiguration of the field of political objects and actors. Literature goes in the opposite direction to this organization of the perceptual field around a subject or utterance. It dissolves the subjects of utterance in the fabric of the percepts and affects of anonymous life.[422]

The part of the book in which this discussion takes place is evocatively titled 'Literary Misunderstandings' and raises very important points about staging. Literature's staging – the

[418] Ibid., p.35.
[419] Ibid., pp.35-36.
[420] Ibid., p.35.
[421] Ibid., p.36.
[422] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, p.43.

spaces in which it is played out – has the requirement that "other relationships between meanings and states of things" can be deployed "to invalidate the markers of political subjectivisation" in order to allow for new formations.[423] Literature has its own politics – concerned with imaging the common world and the world of mute meaningless objects beneath it. As such, it might not serve political disagreement, but rather, as Rancière explains, it has "its own meta-politics."[424] So settings are vital and, correspondingly, the museum appears in literature as an image of this required setting – a place of things and of meanings, of safe withdrawal, of exploded, mythic temporality.

By my reasoning, adolescent characters can be seen as the figure of the dissolving dissensus of literature. The characters in Weiss's novel are seeking to transform their way out of crisis in the space of the museum, which, as an institution of a potent order, affords them this becoming. The characters are involved, in the narrative, in political dissensus, but also appear as an image of literary dissensus – they dissolve in the museum, changing their constitution, and flow out, focused politically and with a geographical momentum to explode into the crowd, to attempt political subjectivisation. They are brought into the museum by the author and expand the image of the museum and visitation beyond passivity and into emancipated fictioning. Education is reversed as they take up space and their molecules transcode together with the institution's sensitised surfaces. The museum is a space in literature to stage a redistribution of the sensible to admit the subjectivity of the minor, to produce it, to study it, to make it perceptible. The adolescent uses the machine of the museum to produce the self, to reorganise, to find a way through the crisis they find themselves in. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is a potent expression of dissensus of both orders, literary and political: in it the museum visit is a plan of action, an imperative to enter all space as an agent of the aesthetic regime.

Threshold experiences

The museum has its own delinquency. In its assemblage of architecture and collections, it can be, sometimes, if the museum is strange enough, an unlicensed trip. Its own errancy can be considered by looking at a fragment of a novel that is presented by an author who is the one, perhaps, most charmed by the museum – Henry James. (Indeed, it is hardly possible to pick up one of his novels and to not find a museum scene.) In his later books he seems, as an author, to have given up on the museum, preferring single encounters with works in private collections. It is alleged that he took a lead from the impressionists and in the 1880s stopped copying paintings in the Louvre and went outside to write *en plein air*, on the street, in gardens. Or that he wanted to progress from the Baedeker guidebook tourism of wealthy Americans to imagine more psychological encounters with works in the temporality of the private, sinister, interior life of the European aristocracy.[425] In *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), a young man, Hyacinth, the illegitimate son of an English Lord, and raised by a humble

[423] Ibid., pp.43-44.
[424] Ibid., p.44.
[425] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986, pp.3-4.

seamstress, travels to Paris where he by chance becomes involved with revolutionaries, one of whom is a disaffected princess. He agrees to carry out an assassination, but in the meantime is so charmed by her beautiful world that his plans change.

When we are told of his first encounter with the city, and enamored he is with the Louvre, James slips in a disorienting device: "Our young man took almost the same sort of satisfaction in the Louvre as if he had erected it; he haunted the museum during all the first days, couldn't look enough at certain pictures nor sufficiently admire the high polish of the great floors in which the golden frescoed ceilings repeated themselves."[426] The slippage between up and down, ground and sky, terrestrial and celestial, gives rise to a disturbance to his consciousness of the present, and he enjoys the effect, the intoxication of it. I see this narrative in a light cast by Bergson who, in *Time and Free Will*, offers that consciousness that generally only allows things that contribute to an orderly, plannable present – one in which there are no flights of fancy, deviations, breaches, unforeseen memory triggers, or unexpected encounters with the uncanny – has no way to allow for anomalies and the new to emerge.[427] Deliriums, hallucinations and dreams are such unlicensed reorganisers of the present, or experience.

They are the kind of friends that lead us astray, and that conservative presents/parents wished we did not have. Or if it is us that is the disturbance, we are not welcome in a home in which the project is reproducing the code. In novels the museums have many unlicensed effects on their youthful visitors – it is as delinquent as they are if we follow Bergson's line of thought. In *Hippos*, *Nausea* and in Nabokov's story, and with Hyacinth, the museum throws up deranging encounters with paintings, architecture, trippy expanses of confounding displays that are consciousness altering for the visitors. They are courting these threshold experiences, and the museum is complicit, a deviant friend, when it supplies the means to get out of it. This means is always there. If we allow a way of being that loosens our narrow focus on a neatly-attended-to present, we see that the past spirals around us all the time. The past, our sense of duration, is wild, delinquent, and the forerunner of becoming. Duration, the interior part of the composite, which with exterior space ("material objects and conscious states") makes up lived experience, "is a case of a 'transition,' of a 'change,' a becoming, but it is a becoming that endures, a change that is substance itself."[428]

[426] Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*, Volume 2, London and New York: Macmillan, 1886, p.209.
[427] See Bergson, *Time and Free Will*.
[428] Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Reality of the Virtual: Bergson and Deleuze,' *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 120, No. 5 (December, 2005), p.37.

6.
Hopelessness in the contemporary novel

> To perceive in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot – this is what it means to be contemporary. As such, contemporaries are rare. And for this reason, to be contemporary is, first and foremost, a question of courage, because it means being able not only to firmly fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us. In other words, it is like being on time for an appointment that one cannot but miss.
> — Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*[429]

How to live together

This chapter will focus on three museum stories written since the mid-1970s – 'Lost in the Louvre' (c.2000) by Lucia Berlin, Lydia Davis's Bibliography (1995) and Thomas Bernhard's *Old Masters* (1985) – and the way they show a despondency that is not generally present in earlier novels. To understand what is different about them in narrative and tone, and the characterisation of subjectivities and museums, it is necessary to register what has been leaking into the conditions of museum visitation in fiction that affects the institution's potential to liberate subjectivities. Since the 1970s there has been significant intensification of neoliberal economic policies, characterised by minimisation of taxes, cuts in state spending, deregulation of financial markets and interventions in money supply and interest rates. A resulting effect of such governmental behaviour has been a demand that everything has to have a financial return, and that everything can be ascribed an economic value. This has affected institutions such as museums in particular ways – but most noticeably and broadly in a fixation on visitor numbers, considering visitors to be consumers, and being compelled to compete for audiences with other 'experience' providers in the market. To do this, the product is simplified into marketable terms, successes are measured by income and number targets, and dependent upon research that quantifies levels of visitor satisfaction.

The effect that such seismic shifts have had on the way museum visitation is represented in literature is perceptible. Museum visitation, as an umbrella term, should be considered not as representing writing from a particular time-period, but showing certain methodological characteristics. It pertains to writing that, according to Rancière, in *Dissensus*, departed from the regime of representation that preceded it, and continued to exist in parallel.[430] Modern literature is marked by a different way of generating meaning – there no longer being a belief in an organic or necessary connection between the common world it frames and a meaning

[429] Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, p.46.
[430] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p.151.

that emerges in the text. This unshackling makes the sayable and the visible relate differently in the present. The abandonment of the old regime introduced also the democratising of resistance to a conservative tradition, or what was considered and supported to be 'appropriate' hegemonic subject matter and associated authors deemed to be 'worthy.'

So, in the same way that adolescence as a state is not necessarily to do with age, but with an orientation towards becoming, the term 'modern literature' can be used to refer to a set of concerns and tendencies rather than a definite epoch. Agamben also employs similar thinking in his consideration of the contemporary, which he does not think pertains to the 'now' as an homogenous fecundity, but to those who are out of synch with the now, to those situated in an untimely encounter with the 'now.' So when we consider the contemporary novel – its characteristics and conditions – we must think of it more broadly than a set time-period, but rooted in a continuum of sorts that exists in parallel with other tendencies and realities. It is characterised by resistance, and shows the attempts of subjects struggling in modernity for their share of space, power and freedom. In the contemporary novel, museum visitation is differently inflected, no doubt as a result of the changing and increasingly oppressive economic conditions that public museums now encounter. In the earlier novels studied here, the characters visit museums with a certain and clear hope. They enter the museum with the expectation that the crises they are experiencing will somehow be mitigated. They may leave unsure if it has helped, and their struggle may continue, but the sense of possibility, passage and subjective development is there.

In the contemporary novels selected here, however, there is seemingly less hope. Characters visit the museum, crossing its threshold, but the expectation that they will be transported to a different state seems to be lower, dialled back, even absent. It is as though they are visiting out of a physical–emotional reflex rather than because of any focused desire or confidence in the actualisation of possibility. In this way, as a reflexive inverting of earlier fictioning desires, the contemporary museum visitation narratives are, therefore, not a separate category but, rather, a continuation of older novels as inverted desire.

This inverted desire is something that can be explored through Roland Barthes' published seminar, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*. Barthes writes of the perpetual efforts made through writing and novels to make a passage out of crisis, and how to achieve this: we need a setting – the novel, in this work, being a structure in which a situation is let loose.[431] The novel provides a setting but, in modernity, it also breaks open something else. To explain, Barthes quotes Nietzsche via Klossowski: "We are nothing more than a succession of discontinuous states in relation to the code of everyday signs, and about which the fixity of language deceives us. While we depend on this code we imagine our continuity, but in fact, we only live discontinuously."[432] This allows for a different method, one that is free to fall apart and back together again fluidly, together, finding a new rhythm. Idiorrhythmy is how Barthes turned fantasy into a field of knowledge – the fictive form of living together is the phantasmic force of literature. "Let's be clear that a fantasy requires a

[431] Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, p.12.
[432] Ibid., p.19.

setting (a scenario) and therefore a place."[433] Through such words–gates, we gain access to a thing that can be learned.

Barthes' text reads as a series of traits – "shuffling the cards and dealing them in the order in which they appear"[434] – that chart an on-going desire to come out of depression and a loss of hope, out of crisis, into the gift of sympathetic space, connection. A series of Greek words. An alphabetised arcana. A dream, a fantasy, of together finding a complicit rhythm – a reflection of the narratives I have gathered – of individuals going forth to solve their crisis with the tools or methodologies at hand in the museum that seem ghostlier in the present day:

Akedia – a dis-investment in faith, or a "feeling of being blocked, trapped, at an impasse."[435]

Anachoresis – "separateness from the world that's effected by going back up to some isolated, private, secret, distant place."[436] / "any fantasy involving a mild form of retreat." / "an individual's response to the crisis of power."[437]

Kellion, *cella* – "Enclosed personal space"/ "foundation of idiorrhythmy."[438]

Xeniteia – "a kind of experience of dereality" that has "an affinity with mystical and psychotic experiences" / the impulse, when something starts to solidify, to go "elsewhere, to live thus, in a state of intellectual wandering."[439]

These adolescents, or quasi-adolescents (adolescence as method or tactic) take space, act with dissent against what they are told is their share, to take up subjecthood, to find minor power through acting, through writing new realities: "Only writing is capable of picking out extreme subjectivity because only in writing is there a concord between the indirectness of the expression and the truth of the subject – concord that is impossible on the level of speech … because, whatever our intentions, speech is always both direct and theatrical."[440] Reading Barthes' text makes the novel seem like a logical place, *in theory*, an encounter, a visit to a museum in which narratives of dissent or trial can be produced. The museum provides the shape of an aspirational gate in literature, a phantasmic or fictive setting – an ideal space to access others, to register new significances, train attention and modify ourselves or our conditions or understandings. In literature it can be seen to provide components and conditions in which we can transform, or become, more freely. There is a logic to the proposition that if you keep doing the same thing, the same thing will happen; and the reverse is also true – if you do something differently, make a break or a breach, things can change. This could be a way to explain the motivation for authors to have set a museum visitation loose in the space of a novel. But something is different in the treatment of museum visitation in contemporary literature. The desire for things to be different, better, transformed is there, but the hope that this is possible is hollowed out. Lucia Berlin's story shows us a character

[433] Ibid., p.7.
[434] Ibid., p.20.
[435] Ibid., p.21.
[436] Ibid., p 24.
[437] Ibid., p 26.
[438] Ibid., p 49.
[439] Ibid., pp.127-28.
[440] Ibid., p. 131.

who is sliding towards her own death, weakened by too many deaths around her already. The museum here is not a place to gain strength or to transform productively. Rather, it is a place in which to be broken down by teeming digestive insects, to become compost. Her subjectivity seems suicidal, disappearing, the only way left by which she can experience her world is through the tropes of the literature she is soaked in. A new reality is impossible for her any other way.

A new regime of writing and meaning

'Lost in the Louvre' (c.2000) is a late story by Lucia Berlin that shows us a literary American woman visiting Paris in a literary present. She is in the city, grieving the loss of people close to her, and engaged in specific literary tourism – house museums of authors, grave sites, cafés, streets written about in novels and biographies, seeing what she has read, in Proust, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Balzac, De Beauvoir, Stein, Camus… a catalogue of the classics of modern French literature. "Everything I saw seemed vividly déjà-vu, but I was seeing what I read. I took the train to Illiers, to see the aunt's house and the village Proust used for much of Combray."[441] The next day she goes to the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris to find Proust's grave. Chopin, Bernhardt, Hugo, Artaud, Wilde, Colette, but the rain becomes heavier, making her so cold, and the wind blows away her map. The Jim Morrison fans make scary noises in the rain, and she imagines catching her death of cold. She only knows where she is because she recognises Colette's grave and remembers it was by a gate. The next day she heads to the Louvre, and its vastness, its inside "as elegant and grand as I had ever imagined."[442] This visit appears in the writing as a story within a story:

> I had seen beautiful photographs of the Victory of Samothrace. And of course I love her because of Mrs Bridge. But nothing prepared me for the enormity of the hall. For the way she stands, so regal, so, well, victorious, above the crowds in that space.[443]

Mrs Bridge (1959), by Evan S. Conhell, is an American novel about a conservative middle-class, Midwestern woman in changing times – civil rights, women's rights, youth, a new category. She and her husband travel to Europe, a *de rigueur* rite of passage for successful middle-class Americans, and they, of course, go to the Louvre. Her husband tires and says he will wait for her outside. She feels she should not make him wait too long, worried about annoying him, and sets about seeing what she had wanted to see:

> She looked around, intending to inquire where it was, but for the moment there seemed to be no English-speaking people in the corridor, so she decided to continue to the exit where there

[441] Lucia Berlin, 'Lost in the Louvre,' in *Evenings in Paradise*, London: Picador, 2018, p.212.
[442] Ibid., p.217.
[443] Ibid.

> should be an information desk, or at least a guard who would understand. She turned the corner and there, all of a sudden, was the Winged Victory. Mrs. Bridge gasped and took a step backward, for the great statue seemed to be bearing down on her and it was the very image of Lois Montgomery in a nightgown.[444]

Following Mrs Bridge, Berlin's character visits the museum, there imagining being James and Baudelaire. Later, in a café, a wave of sadness passes over her as she misses her sons and thinks of her dead parents, and the museum means something different to her as she considers her life: "It seemed l had passed through it as I had the Louvre, watching and invisible."[445] Again, I see Mrs Bridge. Berlin's character's understanding is also through books. Is literature our way through, our passage, as Barthes describes – is it all we have left? Mrs Bridge says that she isn't in the habit of going to the art museum in her hometown because it ignores her, and this is unpleasant for her:

> Once inside it was very nice and of course remarkably interesting; it was just that getting there was so difficult, not that it was out of the way, it was not far from the Plaza, and there was plenty of parking space, but somehow she could not bring herself to go there. Each time the idea came to her she began to feel uncomfortably cool and depressed, and would hear once again her footsteps echoing from the marble. The few visitors she had encountered had ignored her, or at best seemed distantly courteous. It was all so impersonal, a trifle ghostly.[446]

Like Mrs Bridge, the museum doesn't kindly present Berlin's character with an opportunity to deterritorialise in its passages, but for different reasons. Mrs Bridge is not in the zone for her subjectivity to reorganise – she is not yet open to such a process. Berlin's woman, on the other hand, seems through the wall with transformational methodologies – she has lost tension, elasticity, potential. She is drawn back to the museum where, unlike the relatively empty public spaces outside the Louvre, there are teeming crowds inside: "But inside the Louvre there were hordes of people. Thousands and thousands, going upstairs downstairs, streaming past the pharaohs and the Apollos and Napoleon's salon."[447] After a while she finds herself as lost as she had been in the cemetery among the subsumed minions:

> Perhaps we are all caught inside a microcosm, what a laughable word to use about the Louvre. Perhaps we were all part of a performance piece that had been placed lovingly in someone's tomb, along with jewelry and slaves, all of us mummified but moving cleverly upstairs and downstairs past all the works of art whose creators were long dead. Past the Rembrandts and Fragonard's *The Bolt*, whose poor lovers were long dead too. Probably they were only models, having to earn their wages for days and days in that uncomfortable position. Stuck in that way for eternity! I had no idea where the staircase was going to lead me. Oh good, Etruscans. Since no one spoke to me or even looked at me, it added to the illusion that we were all performers

[444] Evan S. Conhell, *Mrs Bridge*, New York: Viking Press, 1959, p.164-65.
[445] Ibid., p.218.
[446] Ibid., p.163.
[447] Berlin, 'Lost in the Louvre,' p.218.

> for eternity in the Immortality piece, so I ignored them also as I took my random turns and stairways until I was in a near hypnotic trance and, it felt, at one with the goddess of Hathor, with the Odalisque.[448]

In this swarm, she can affect a subjective deletion rather than production as though it is collectively digesting her after her burial – disappearance can take place as solitude and alienation merge, unobserved, proving her lack of connection with others in the self-assured correctness of the suicidal. She reports that she returned three or four times – enough to not be sure of the count – "seeing new sculptures or tapestries or jewelry" each time "losing myself until I felt like I was flying out of time":

> An interesting phenomenon was that if I took a wrong turn and came upon the Nike herself I was immediately restored to reality. The last day I was in the Louvre, I suspected that a staircase would lead me to her, so to avoid that I crossed the room and went through a narrow hall, down some unfamiliar stairs.
>
> My heart was beating, I was excited, but I was not sure why. I came upon a new hall. A wing entirely unknown to me. I had read nothing about it, seen no photographs. It was an odd assortment of everyday artefacts from different periods. Tapestries and teasets, knives and forks. Chamber pots and dishes! Snuffboxes and clocks and writing desks and candelabras. Each little room contained lovely mundane objects. A footstool. A watch. Scissors. Like death, this section was not extraordinary. It was so unexpected.[449]

She has come to an area of the museum that is as yet unwritten for her, and here she reaches an understanding of her own death – which will be not extraordinary, a surprise in its banality as much as in its occurrence. She is feeling part of a microcosm, so this discovery that her death will be like all others seems informed by her understanding of the space, the seeming impersonality, the financialised inertness of the museum reflecting an impression she has that her life has been a lot of watching and a good degree of invisibility. The teeming insects can crawl all over her body unwitnessed and break it down, rather than undergo the performance of cremation. Oblivion is what she seeks – this is palpable when she describes the Mona Lisa, behind a window in front of which people line up, as being like an Oakland liquor store.

It is in the spaces of greater clutter, the less famous or coherent parts, that she can achieve the erasure she is looking for – and this literary device stands out to me in its connection with a passage in Rancière's *Dissensus*. In the chapter titled 'The Politics of Literature' he calls on us to consider a break in the "specific link between a system of meaning of words and a system of the visibility of things" that saw the modern regime of writing, literature, emerge from the "old world or representation and *belles lettres*" that preceded it.[450] This contrast "is the opposition between two ways of linking meaning and action, of framing the relation between the sayable

[448] Ibid., pp.218-9.
[449] Ibid., p.219.
[450] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p.155.

and the visible, or enabling words with the power of framing a common world."[451] Modern literature recognises the disorderly relationship between meaning and action – they are not necessarily linked – and gives rise not to universals, but to the third person, and new realities that are multiple. Modern literature – there is no other kind, for literature, he writes, is a phenomenon or category that has its origins in the early 19th century – makes possible "a way of writing without 'meaning' anything, a way of reading this writing as a symptom that has to be interpreted…."[452] This is what he calls the "'indifference' of writing" with which "the practice of symptomatic reading and the political ambiguity of that reading are woven in the same fabric." It is this ambiguity that new relationships "between the sayable and the visible" can take place most fluidly – it is freed and now subjectivities can emerge and come into perceptibility.[453] And clutter, accretions of elements, is equated with this de-linking of words and a common world.

As Rancière might understand it, Berlin carefully constructs a third person in her writing that corresponds to some degree with her life as a writer, but does not equal it – it is writing, after all, not living.[454] Berlin's work makes visible as a fictional entity the subjectivity of a loser daughter, a former drunk, a single mother of three boys, a cleaning woman turned agent of literature. She makes this alterity up-front in the title of her most famous book, *A Manual for Cleaning Ladies* (1997) and in doing so puts a stick in the ground for those who are supposedly too ignoble or lowly to read, write, or have a voice, or, as Rancière puts it, "those who do nothing but 'live', who are enclosed in the sphere of reproductive and meaningless life."[455] She victoriously writes of the struggle to survive on the thin ice of the margins, inhabited by those who do not join in with convention, and are told that failure is their own fault. The new democratising regime of literary modernity (literature as a product of modernity, like the museum and photography) gives voice to the lowly, to those who merely live: "Literature is this new regime of writing in which the writer is anybody and the reader is anybody."[456] Hers are the letters with no father to guide them.[457] Modern fiction, literature's "'mute letter' was a letter that spoke too much and endowed anyone at all with the power to speak".[458]

> Literature discovers at its core this link with the democratic disorder of literariness. Literature is the art of writing that specifically addresses those who *should not read.* This paradoxical relationship is the subject of many nineteenth-century works.[459]

Rancière studies Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* (*The Skin of Sadness*) (1831) and identifies in its figure of a curiosity shop, with its jumble of fragments of life, the image of the way modern literature works and, further, the new way that meaning now takes place. By the time of the

[451] Ibid.
[452] Ibid., p.153.
[453] Ibid., p.155.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Ibid., p.156.
[456] Ibid., p.157.
[457] Ibid.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid., p.158.

Revolution, he contends, "the age of rhetoric was over. Meaning was and is no more a relationship between one will and another – a relationship between signs and other signs."[460] Writing is "displaying and deciphering the symptoms of a state of things. It is revealing the signs of history, delving as the geologist does, into the seams and strata under the stage of the orators and politicians – the seams and strata that underlie its foundation."[461] This image corresponds enticingly to the form of the modern museum in its jumble of history, and the way it is entered by the 'adolescent' of any age – the delinquent who will not work, who desires reorganisation. The delinquent, at a basic level, wants to find an alternative to life as *homo economicus* – the governable, the manageable, those who accept reality and its demands. (The gendered nature of this term adds further violence to the threat of what happens to those who are delinquent – they suffer a withdrawal of society's life-support.)[462] In Berlin's museum visitation narrative, and others, we see the subaltern visitor and their intersection with the composition of fragments without beginning, middle, end. But she writes of the minor's visit as failed if the goal was to transform *bios* – she shows the suicidal elation of one wanting to fly out of time, right out of life.

The myriad details of the museum can dissolve us like stomach acid in its corridors, which are like intestines. What is left of her character is the empty husk of the insect after the spider has finished with it. Relieved of our responsibilities to live, to keep trying, there is a peace of sorts. The reason I think I end up with a digestive image from the image of teeming organisms in a microcosm is that once I was taken on a museum staff tour behind the scenes of the natural history stores of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. There are two ways that a dead animal can be broken down to a skeleton – and they involve two types of tanks – mastication and maceration; insects and bacteria respectively. I am also mindful that the day I bought *Evening in Paradise*. I went to the bookstore after failing for the third time to get into the British Museum. There were queues around the block in late summer, and I didn't want to use my ICOM card to jump ahead. The crowds put me off entirely. It was not what I wanted to do there – I wanted to go to the Reading Room and anachronistically commune with Virginia Woolf.

Technical horror stories

Stiegler warns that it is possible that things have marched beyond the capacity of the subject to attend, care, or have functional technologies of the self – or to produce the self at all.[463] But he also hopes that "the pharmakon be reinvested" as "a remedy, a cure, as a transitional mediation understood as transindividuation."[464] In the film *The Ister* (2004), we are taken to The Iron Gates Region Museum in Romania – the museum as a place of remains and constructed significance on the river. We are told that a man cuts a flint. He does not seem to

[460] Ibid., p.160.
[461] Ibid., p.161-62
[462] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.270.
[463] Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living*, p.76.
[464] Ibid., p.84.

realise that, with each cut, he is preserving his memory in it. His preserved gesture constitutes a new memory-support. Until then, two kinds of memory have existed – genetic and the memory of a person. When technics appears (a third form of memory, tertiary retention), transmission is possible and a vast dimension of memory develops.

The Ister is a film about philosophy that follows the Danube from its wellspring in the Black Forest out to the sea,[465] intended as a supplement to Heidegger's 1942 lecture, 'Holderlin's hymn "The Ister".' It starts with images of the river and of human use of it – large-scale industry and slow, wide flow. Bernard Stiegler appears and offers us a parable of technics, the human as a technical being through the legend of Prometheus, the figure of knowledge, the bearer of absolute memory, and his brother, Titan Epimethus (our substantive forebear), the god of the fault of forgetting. It is this capacity for loss that has induced in people the need to appropriate the fire of Hephaestus to be able to carry and share retentions between generations. My notes offer this transcribed narrative (feeling as ever that the habitual use of the male pronoun in continental philosophy is a betrayal):

Technics developed more or less harmoniously until the industrial revolution. Man lived in a technically stable environment until then – transformed from time to time – periodic ruptures, far apart. … The industrial revolution brought great and frequent change. The duration of technical systems becomes shorter and shorter. They become contracted so there is almost no stability in technical systems. This upsets the philosophical order established by Plato and Aristotle that sees being and technics as distinct – technics as artificial – to distinguish artifice and ontology from being. Appearance must be isolated from being. In the 18th century this changes. There is a dynamism to technics – permanent innovation – whereby it transforms itself continually. Competition in industry led to globalisation, transport innovation and market development. Nations fight through technological innovation: techno-scientific war and a divorce between the social and the spiritual, linguistic and political, economic and religious, religious and epistemological, judicial and metaphysical, biological even…. They are systems, spheres, that in one fell swoop are struck, overturned, exploded by the technical system. The dynamism of electronics and the internet, this process that began in the 19th century we now experience with an extraordinary brutal force. It was not until this time that historical consciousness developed. Before this, people believed they were in a stable world, a world of being. They did not realise they lived in historic time. Man is a technical living being: this phenomenon is disjointedness – time out of joint. Sometimes time comes off its hinges because of a process of technical becoming. A great problem for thought: man is technical but technics keep upsetting man. Man seeks to conserve himself as he is. Life is fundamentally conservative. At the same time as negentropic – transformation and becoming. To survive man must fabricate prostheses – apparatuses of attack and defence.

Through technics thought becomes transmissible from generation to generation, allowing life to preserve the trace of individual experience and transmit that index to other generations. The camera pans over displays of weapons, tools, guns, costumes held in the Iron Gates

[465] David Barison and Daniel Ross (dirs.), *The Ister,* Black Box, Australia, 2004.

Museum, before cutting to the philosopher who crosses his legs, like a junkie for relief, used to talking while waiting out durations. A child opens a cupboard in the next room. Technics is memory support – it is the condition of the constitution of the relation to the past. Museum objects on Perspex stands – rocks, a carved head. Children looking at a galaxy exhibit. The story thickens as we hear that with the birth of democracy in Greece, there was a new foundation with no myth behind it. *I, myself, must perform the act of founding.* There is no going back to the sacred and therefore the impossibility of fixing origins. The vanishing of the mythological foundation means that we substitute logos for mythos, a promotion of techne and all the techniques of commerce – bookkeeping, economics, calculation, trade, navigation, transport. Techne means knowledge, know-how. Knowing how to obtain from nature what nature does not offer of itself. (A form of stealing, then? If so, we are all thieves in the museum – breaking into the palace – a locus of nostalgia for mythos, or a place of reckoning what know-how must be produced.) Technics is essentially that which has no end. It is know-how directed at a goal, but that goal is not given. It must be produced. In the mythical world, one's own is a given. This is a world of the production of one's own. But the production of one's own is a production with an aporia of violence behind it. *There appears an institution that is the search, the infinite demand, for one's own, which only ever presents itself through a foreignness to itself.* The image of the museum, of museum visitation, shimmers here in the space of a tragedy – and I think of Billie Holiday singing "God bless the child who has his own" with its even more depressing male pronoun. Fragments, knowledge, attention, significances, withdrawal, contemplative retreat, are all in play in this scenario. This is a horror from which we seek freedom – the requirement that we save ourselves with no goal, with an undertow of violence and a hole in the middle.

Neoliberalism and the intensification of crisis

Given that the contemporary is not a time period but a tendency, a relation, I am brought back to Henry James's novel *The American* (1876-1877), which shows a dissenting female despair that is generally more perceptible in later literature. Written by an author who embraced then rejected the museum as a setting in his books, it bears the contemporary image of museum visitation as a response to the terrible condition of not knowing how and having no mythic parents. Christopher Newman is drawn back to the Louvre, not to see painting, but to find the young lady copyist he is attracted to. He wants to 'show' her to his aristocratic, drifter friend, Valentin, as though she is an exhibit. He does not desire her as a wife, but as something to become with – he is impressed with her resolve to do whatever it takes to be something other. She is all but destitute, and has spent the entire summer in the Louvre – the only place she can breathe she says – sitting in front of her easel, not painting, waiting for something, anything, to happen that will take her from this reality to another. The museum seems to her the place where this transition from one person, one subjectivity, to another can take place. Christopher explains his understanding of her charm to Valentin, "Nobody, my dear man, can ever have *had* such a love of the right. … I am sure she has an

exceptional number of ideas."[466] Mlle Nioche, however, resists their charms, their compliments, and strikes out (Stiegler's voice intrudes here, "The production of one's own is a production with an aporia of violence behind it"):

> 'Ah, I don't want any compliments,' the girl protested, 'I only want the cruel truth. But if I didn't know it by this time—!'
>
> 'I utter no truth more cruel,' Valentin returned, 'than that there are probably many things you *can* do very well.'
>
> 'Oh, I can at least do this!' And dipping a brush into a clot of red paint she drew a great horizontal daub across her unfinished picture.
>
> 'What are you making that mark for?' Newman asked with his impartial interest.
>
> Without answering, she drew another long crimson daub, in a vertical direction, down the middle of her canvas and so in a moment completed the rough indication of a cross.
>
> 'It's the sign of the cruel truth.'
>
> The two men looked at each other, Valentin as with vivid intelligence. 'You've spoiled my picture,' said his friend.
>
> 'I know that very well. It was the only thing to do with it, I had begun to hate it, it seemed to me something was going to happen.'[467]

She has made something happen in the museum – the institution that is, for her, site of a search for solutions to the cruel truth. She has exercised her infinite demand to transcend the cruel truth in another form, foreign to herself. "She had taken the measure of life. … She wishes to launch herself."[468] It is fitting that this visitation happens in the Louvre, given that the revolution that gave us this new regime of literature also gave us the museum itself. Over and over again, the museum in literature has the air of being a place where we will find what we are looking for. *Maybe. But not really.* It is a tragedy, the elusiveness of solutions, that seems to get clearer as the years draw on, and the world changes. Rancière explains this through the work of Rimbaud, in whose poetry he sees a logic that draws a rhythm from the material remains of the day, the traces of life, in combination with the gestures of people: "Poetry as rhythm of a living body and poetry as archaeology of mute signs sleeping on the body of ordinary things."[469] But the sadness of the work, of museum visitations in literature more generally I venture, is that "the living body writing the collective hymn had to remain the utopia of writing."[470] We see subjectivities wanting, looking, trying to add things up, make deductions, understand, experiment with courses of action to mitigate crises, but it seems a dream, a horizon that can't be reached. In the contemporary novel, the museum may present a threshold, but is it an entirely utopic (unreachable) one? In the now, what do we have access to?

This unreachable horizon expressed through reference to the museum makes a fleeting appearance in Lydia Davis's novel *The End of the Story* (1995) in which a woman recounts

---

[466] James, *The American*, p.150.
[467] Ibid., pp.148-49.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p.167.
[470] Ibid.

discontinuously in a series of episodes the aftermath of an affair, of a disturbance. It has none of the beginning middle or end of the mainstream plot-driven novel, but Davis is clear on this – her oeuvre turns on the accretion of fragments, rather than linear plot development or the sonata-like structures of the short story as accepted form. At one point there is a museum visit in which she reaches towards a desire:

> When I moved to this town five years ago I stopped imagining that he would appear suddenly in front of me, because it was too unlikely. It had not been so unlikely in other places I lived. In at least three cities and two towns I kept expecting him: if I was walking down the street, I imagined him coming toward me. If I was walking through a museum, I was sure he would be in the next room. Yet I never saw him. He might have been there, in the same street or even in the same room. Watching me from a short distance. He might have slipped away before I noticed him.[471]

Why Davis chose the museum as a setting to see him remains unclear, but it appears as a place of indeterminate and weak promise. But it has been levelled with the street as a predictable site for chance encounters outside of the house or workplace, a generic place of leisure – a sense perhaps inflected by cinematic typologies. The museum offers a threshold to something other, where, perhaps, we can be freed of time or conventional sense. Or should I say, offered and could (past tense)? For the museum is changing too, as neoliberalism intensifies and, with it, its destruction of public space, institutions, democracy, agency and community. There is a sense of possibility in the literature that in the museum they, the subjectivities, will find what they are looking for – but do they find it? Or does it slip away like Davis's spectral ex? Is it even less likely to present us with a possibility, in the contemporary, for a rupture or crack to be less likely to appear? We can answer this by tracing the trajectory of neoliberalism and its effect on the institution that is charged with the task of representing society to itself.

According to David Harvey, a preeminent chronicler of neoliberalism, it is relatively easy to define its goals, but in practice it is a highly contradictory and fraught project that departs from its theoretical template significantly.[472] Neoliberal policy purports to increase individual freedom and reduce impoverishment by strengthening individual property rights, deregulating markets and disempowering the state's control over many aspects of life. However, it does so by strengthening the rule of law and by prioritising a supportive environment for business – and in the process, free trade becomes less free by the introduction of tariffs, and protectionist market behaviour. "Private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are seen as keys to innovation and wealth creation" – and it is factors such as these that dramatically affect museums.[473] State museums become business units of the governmental bodies that fund them, and are now explicitly competing for a slice of the experience commodity market: "Competition is held to be a primary virtue."[474] Audiences are

[471] Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*, New York and London: High Risk Books, 1995, pp.11-12.
[472] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p.64.
[473] Ibid., p.64.
[474] Ibid., p.65.

broken up into segments in order to be able to be more effectively marketed to as consumers, and programmes are geared to appeal to identifiable mass-market demographics to further increase market share. This is coupled with a reduction of public spending, so budgets are focused on audience-yield programme 'offerings.'

An outcome of neoliberalism has been a profound mistrust of the ideals of democracy – "a strong preference exists for government by executive order and by judicial decision rather than democratic and parliamentary decision making."[475] The unfortunate effect of deregulation and the desire to support business is an increase in monopoly and oligarchic entities, and a degradation of working conditions as a result of the interventionist, laissez-faire state.

There is simply not the level playing field that was promised, and the pressure to stimulate markets by perpetual innovation causes a myriad of crises for the general population: "There is an inner connection … between technological dynamism, instability, dissolution of social solidarities, environmental degradation."[476] These realities affect the institution and visitor assemblage dramatically – a changed institution, and individuals dragged down by sub-prime living conditions. Crisis is generated at every turn: "At the heart of the problem lies a burgeoning disparity between the declared public aims of neoliberalism – the well-being of all – and its actual consequences – the restoration of class power."[477] The institution appears different, its promise and possibility is altered, and people themselves have multiplying crises and withering time–energy–hope–financial resources to act, and experience a general drop in the sense of agency, care or participation in the socius. Patterns of museum visitation in 'real life' are paralleled with the image of the museum and visitors crossing into its spaces. The way the museum and the visitor appear, in conjunction, in the literary imaginary are starved of oxygen by a system that has diminished the conditions for trans-individuation to take place: "A contradiction arises between a seductive but alienating possessive individualism on the one hand and the desire for a meaningful collective life on the other."[478] It is far more than market failure being absorbed by a population, or the erosion of democracy, or the rise of authoritarianism, it is neoliberalism's very effect on our way of being that is at stake. What and who is seen and heard is still very much at stake, and literature and cultural organisations reflect this crisis in personal freedom – undercut by neoconservative realities, and direct policy against democratic collectivisation – by the novel expressing the weakening of hope to discover spaces conducive to subjective production, and by the prevailing atmosphere of emptiness in museums and the chillingly-named GLAM sector more broadly.

In its neoliberalised and neoliberalising form, the museum – controlling the visitor, stopping her errant flows as best it can with orientation devices and traffic plans, visitor experiences, content management, narrative and interpretation schema, and audience development, and ticketed blockbuster shows – becomes a boring, improvised, pseudo-participatory theatre. And uninteresting, perhaps, to novelists unless they are looking for an example of something

[475] Ibid., p.66.
[476] Ibid., p.69.
[477] Ibid., p.79.
[478] Ibid., p.69.

desolate with too many windows, guards, relentless promotion and crowds – the idea to visit no longer has the semblance of anyone's own. They are not prepared to offer fragments with which meaning can be made by visitors. The meaning is made for people, pre-digested, who are treated as a problem, measured and classified, divided into absurd and homogenising 'culture segments,'[479] underestimated, then given what we probably want, and asked for feedback. Representation of the museum in the Deleuzian sense – of imagination and experimentation – is taken over by spectacle from which meaning and possibility are emptied out. Where there was once a belief in something recuperative in the museum within the institution and from without, there is now a significant seepage evident in the novels of those adolescent desires – they are harder to get in the museum today, but people may still go with these in mind, like ghosts. And those operating the museums are under the sway of being popular, spectacular, above all else, precipitating their own vacancy.

Towards the end of his life, Foucault delivered a seminar called 'The State Must Be Defended' as part of a series of lectures at the Collège de France in the winter of 1975-76. Throughout the series, he explored the biopolitical shift of neoliberal economics and its effect on institutions. He argued that with "a striving towards the universality of the state," there was a grid of intelligibility established in the 18th century in which "institutions were merely the instruments of a domination … of the warlike kind, like an invasion."[480] It is a struggle, "a war, a battle, an invasion, a conquest" in which there are "two peoples: a victorious people and a vanquished people."[481] But this is nothing new. He writes of centuries upon centuries of struggle between "debt and wealth" that have resulted in a shift in our times from the power of the sovereign to kill whomever it wishes to a new way of controlling populations, involving "the right to make live and to let die."[482] "A new technology of power," biopolitics – "power's hold over life" – is overlaid onto the mechanisms of the preceding disciplinary society whose object was bodies:[483]

> From the eighteenth century onwards … we have, then, two technologies of power which were established at different time and which were superimposed. One technique is disciplinary: it centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile. And we also have a second technology which is centered not on the body but on life: a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the random events that can occur in a large living mass, a technique which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects.[484]

[479] Enrichment, entertainment, expression, perspective, stimulation, release, affirmation and essence are the segments used by major marketing consultants Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, for example. See https://mhminsight.com/culture-segments.
[480] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, p.225.
[481] Ibid., p.226.
[482] Ibid., pp.234, 241.
[483] Ibid., pp.242, 239.
[484] Ibid., p.249.

Probability working against possibility, there are a myriad of regulatory mechanisms inflecting the texture of the museum, and our changing relation to it. Consider the well-publicised use of psychographic profiles among 'leading' museums like the Tate, who proudly employ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's audience segmentation analysis. It reads, unfortunately, like a horoscope in its attempts to put people into one of eight groups.[485] In such ways, in the real-world museum, and following neoliberal patterns, subjectivities are generalised, considered to be symptoms of errant randomnesses of populations and are pulled into line as human resources, as *homo economicus*, in the behaviour of the institution. And what is worse, this attitude, this abuse, is internalised, becoming our grid of intelligibility through which things are understood and decisions are made. This does not bode well for the delinquent, the uncompliant, those who would not earn the means for survival in an unmodified state – their own fault for shirking, it is declared – and would fall into destitution, disowned by the state.

Living on the line

On the Line is a slight volume containing a text, simply called 'Politics,' written between Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, that discusses deterritorialisation, and the crossing of thresholds. It is a useful frame with which to consider adolescent museum visitation narratives that picture the museum as a threshold between one sensible regime and another. They write that we are made up of lines, some rigid, some more supple, that form segments, carving us up, making us veritable "bundles of segmented lines."[486] These more supple lines indicate flows with thresholds that can be crossed: "Many things happen along this second type of line – becomings, micro-becomings – that don't have the same rhythm as our 'history'." But there is a third kind of line, "as if something were carrying us away, through our segments but also across our thresholds, towards an unknown destination":[487]

> In some ways, these lines, these movements of flight, are what appear first in a society. Far from being outside the social or from being utopian or even ideological, these lines actually constitute the social field, tracing its shapes and its borders, its entire state of becoming. … We say rather that in a society everything flees, and that a society is defined by its lines of flight…[488]

This is the essence of the museum visitation narratives studied here, adolescents living on the line and taking place. The museum is as attractive as a suggested threshold: "The marginal are not the ones who create the lines, but they install themselves on them, and make of them

[485] Viz. Minnie Scott and Renate Miller, 'Tools to Understand: An Evaluation of the Interpretation Material Used in Tate Modern's Rothko Exhibition,' *Tate Papers*, No. 11 (Spring, 2009). https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/11/tools-to-understand-an-evaluation-of-the-interpretation-material-used-in-tate-moderns-rothko-exhibition
[486] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *On the Line*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, p.69.
[487] Ibid., pp.70-71.
[488] Ibid., p.91.

their property."[489] In its spaces, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation take place at once – for in any territory we are all in a constant state of becoming, meaning being made from the pieces. There is no conclusion or discovery – the museum gives us an answer with a diagram or a question (the solution is in the question, the process is the end in itself) of operation, not a narrative conclusion or an outcome. We never reach the horizon of a conclusion – that is the utopia of writing, of literariness. The authors end their discussion with a meditation on tectonic shifts that correlate with the organisation, the strata of museums: "At the same time, the means of exploitation, control and surveillance are becoming more subtle."[490]

But it is still possible, inevitable even, for breaches to occur. There might be a war-like operating system in society, but beneath it is the war machine that in *On the Line* Deleuze and Parnet identify as predating this, and being the basis of human becoming, which will always be trans-human. We bring our war machine with us always, it is there when we write, take space, take flight, make love, when we join with other reactive substances, entities, conditions:

> The war machine, on the contrary, is traversed by the warrior's states of 'becoming': becoming animal, becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible. (Think of the secret as the invention of the war machine, in opposition to the 'publicity' of the despot or the statesman.)[491]

The war machine may be fascist or liberating, and the delinquent is necessarily a covert agent. The philosophers pose a question as an answer to "all sorts of questions – minority, linguistic, ethnic, regional, sexual, and juvenile" on the subject of how to have a "'quality of life' instead of a 'standard of living'":

> Instead of betting on the eternal impossibility of the revolution, and on the fascist return of the war machine in general, why not think that a new type of revolution is becoming possible, and that all kinds of mutant machines are alive, engaged in warfare, joining one another, and tracing a plane of consistency that undermines the organizational plan of the World State?[492]

We are warned that if we ask the wrong question the possibility will disappear – we must not question the future of the revolution lest we fall in with those who would stifle it and who seek "to prevent the becoming-revolutionary of people everywhere and at every level."[493] This is where their thin volume ends – printed at A6, it is designed to fit into a jacket pocket to read as we flee. In territory, assemblages, strata, along lines, lines that cross this or that axis, with machines, cracks always open:

---

[489] Ibid., p.98.
[490] Ibid., p.112.
[491] Deleuze and Guattari, *On the Line*, p.102.
[492] Ibid., p.113.
[493] Ibid., p.114.

> It is when everything is going well, or everything is going better on the other line that the crack occurs on this new line; secretly, imperceptibly, it marks a threshold of diminishing resistance, or a rising threshold of demand. We can no longer put up with things the way we used to, even as we did yesterday. The distribution of desire within us has changed, our relationships of speed and slowness have been modified; a new kind of anguish but also a new serenity, have come upon us.[494]

In Berlin's story, even in Davis's paragraph-territory, the museum marks such a threshold that can be crossed. Inside, there are strata, lines into which they/we can insert ourselves, and ease open cracks that will inevitably form – open to "the path of the dancer's soul."[495] Or so we hoped. But in contemporary museum visitation narratives, although we see Foucault's struggle played out in the museum – the contestation between power and those who would be subject to it – there is the sense that we have gone past a point of no return; that we will not achieve a living line of flight. In the next novel we will consider, an old man repeatedly visits the museum as though stuck in a soul's limbo, paralysed with grief for the passing of love and hope, and polishing his resentful theories about the failure of his society, of art, education, humanity. He claims to go there because it has an even temperature, and uses it as his office in which to compose music reviews.

More problems with today

Thomas Bernhard's *Old Masters* (1985) is the story of an old man, a music critic, who feels he does his best work when he sits on the same bench in front of the same painting in the same museum at least three times a week at regular intervals. He is the very image of recalcitrance and dyspepsia. He is disgusted with the world, and has developed a theory of art and museums that works for him, and has organised a commitment from a guard who allows him the exclusive use of this seat during these times exclusively. He likens the guard to a warden, and maintains that in the museum he finds what he cannot get anywhere else – it is "a mental production shop" where he feels exposed.[496] He rants about how art must be left open, and how education seeks to do the opposite – to explain: "Teachers are preventers of life and existence" and the only education we should have is how to contemplate freely.[497] Our greatest pleasure is in fragments, he says, as "our age has become unbearable as a whole."[498] He sees all the old masters as manifest failures and studies them to better identify their mistakes. To him, "perfection threatens our ruin" – and I am not sure if he means that perfection ruins us, or threatens to disturb being settled with the idea of life or being as ruin, or both.[499] He sits in front of Tintoretto's *White-Bearded Man*, "gazing into my childhood" in a

[494] Ibid., p.73.
[495] Ibid., p.71.
[496] Thomas Bernhard, *Old Masters,* (*Alte Meister*) [1989], trans. Ewald Osers, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp.10-11.
[497] Ibid., p.24.
[498] Ibid., p.18.
[499] Ibid., p.19.

state of suspended adolescent rebellion, attempting to protect himself from being ploughed into the State paddock:

> I myself had these appalling, narrow-minded degraded teachers who have a thoroughly low opinion of human beings and the human world, the lowest opinion decreed by the state, namely that nature must always and regardlessly be suppressed in the new young people and eventually killed for the purposes of the state.[500]

All about him he sees "people who have fallen victim to the state."[501] He, on the other hand, will not submit. His disgust protects him from world that makes him sick, that he thinks is much worse than the hell Dostoyevsky had to contend with. But the museum is the only refuge he has left, for in it is an index of all the failure and bungling of the world. Here, as the paintings dissolve under his thorough studying eye, abhorrent as they are to him, they keep him alive. He raves, "Everything in this world is dull-witted … such a degree of public danger and base brutality … full of baseness and full of malice, lies and brutality … when we dare to walk out onto the street … we walk into baseness…"[502] He is clear that the museum is a different from outside, a zone with which he has significant problems. Outside is a place where there is a rising tide. In his mind, it is not just him against the state, or him making a case against the mistreatment of youth of any age, but an entire subsumption of the self into the state he wants to resist: "Humanity today is only an *in*humanity which is the state. … Humanity is a gigantic state which, if we are honest, makes us sick every time we wake up."[503] It is as if he is describing the shift that Foucault identified, that is, the overlay of biopolitics as a technology of control over disciplinary society – the state absorbing everything, making us one with it.

This novel was first published in 1985, making his repeated visiting, his long-durational regard of paintings, fragments, his disgust for postmodernity, and his problems with today seem of a biopolitical, neoliberal order. "At the Kunsthistorisches Museum Reger finds what he cannot find anywhere else," surrounded by everything he hates about Austria in its degraded, mendacious anti-intellectual meanness.[504] He wants to be "made once more into a thinking and feeling individual, but that "listening to music has become a trivial everyday affair as a result of technological progress."[505] We find ourselves, he rails, in a situation of turning art, literature, philosophy, music into prescriptions for survival, which they are not:

> All our lives we rely on the great minds, and the so-called great masters, Reger said, and then we are mortally disappointed by them because they do not fulfil their purpose at the crucial moment. We hoard the great minds and the old masters and we believe that at the crucial

[500] Ibid., p.25.
[501] Ibid., p.27.
[502] Ibid., pp.104-105.
[503] Ibid., p.28.
[504] Ibid., p.8.
[505] Ibid., pp.121, 139.

> moment of survival we can use them for our purposes, which means nothing other than *mis*using them for our purposes, which turns out to be a fatal mistake. We fill our mental strong-room with these great minds and old masters and resort to them at the crucial moments in our lives; but when we unlock our mental strong-room it is empty, that is the truth, we stand before that empty mental strong-room and find that we are alone and in fact totally destitute.[506]

But with the petulance of the adolescent – nihilism and suicidal thought coming in too early, not seeing the plane ahead as productive, or not recognising more abstract or less dramatic possibilities – our protagonist misses something in his analysis if not in his actions. He continues to visit, repeatedly, purposefully, rationalising that he needs somewhere to cool down – late in the book he claims that the real reason he goes to the Kunsthistorisches Museum is that it is always a standard 18 degrees.[507] And that the trick is to repeat the action, the visitation – a refrain in the novels studied here: "*You will realize that one single attempt at survival was not enough, I had to make several hundred such survival attempts*."[508] His misanthropy is not so opaque that he discards his means of survival: "we hate people and yet we want to be with them because only with people and among people do we stand a chance of carrying on without going insane. … Without people we have not the slightest hope of survival."[509]

This character presents as a figure trying to wring the last drips of solace from an institution that is teetering on the brink of the neoliberal reform that makes such museums – enclosed, unpopular, peaceful, unmediated – rare; even museums of museums. He is trying to hold on to something that is gone or going in the museum by sheer force of will or stubbornness, holding a line. His romantic version or vision of the museum is one that also speaks of the time of crisis of art in neoliberal space. For the neoliberalised museum is also neoliberalising, and art is changed by its accommodation – it is drawn into its climate, breathing its air, performing its ideological work. It is subsumed – the very corrupt swamping that Reger rails against. Just what is possible, fucked, left of an earlier shape, an aesthetic, of the muses in the museum? Of art? Of social sanity? These are questions this novel ponders – questions of society and its potential, its constitution and destiny – and this questioning is laid down by an author who publicly and vehemently criticised the Austria he was born into in 1931.

He states the importance of the museum to him as a place to be among people (like the immigrant described in the Pompidou study) with certainty, as he does earlier with the assertion that in the museum he feels exposed. Together, these two certainties – that we need others and that he feels exposed – lead me to believe that what he is describing might be, if we follow Deleuze's prescription in 'Literature and Life,' a process, or the preconditions for a becoming, or at least its possibility. The ingredients are there: there is a zone of proximity – the museum is a framed zone which is populated with elements cut loose from their contexts with which an individual activated by shame can become indiscernible, undifferentiated with,

[506] Ibid., p.144.
[507] Ibid., p.153-54.
[508] Ibid., p.145.
[509] Ibid., p.146.

dissolve into. The museum is full of things to become -animal, -other, -mineral, -ancient: it is a place where "something passes between the sexes, the genera, or the kingdoms."[510] This might feel like an emptiness, as it is a condition of being entirely "unforeseen and non-preexistent."[511] He is also certain that not being alone is important to this long-durational repeated refrain of survival attempt: he is not alone there, and there can be no deterritoralisation alone.

That he is a writer, our hero, is also very important to this interpretation of the narrative: "One can institute a zone of proximity with anything on the condition that one creates the literary means for doing so."[512] I read this as a key point in considering these collected narratives of museum visitation. The adolescents can be seen to be writing their own subjective production, and in this novel, the protagonist is explicitly a writer, a critic, who is looking for a way through, a way out, a passage through which to flee, littered with significances, retentions, reagents, matter to combine with to become something other. For this reason I have come to think that this novel pictures literature's own function – to become – in the space of the museum of art as zone of proximity. He is the image of the essayist – he who tries:

> The world is one big sinister place where no one can find shelter any more, no one… … Art is altogether nothing but a survival skill, we should never lose sight of this fact, it is, time and time again, just an attempt – an attempt that even feels touching to our intellect – to cope with this world and its revolting aspects, which, as we know, is invariably possible only by resorting to lies and to falsehoods, to hypocrisy and self-deception…[513]

Again, he is the image of adolescent dismissal, missing that this could be a description of the writing of fiction – the producer of new, much-needed realities for those cringing with their own inadequacies. Deleuze contended that, "The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write?"[514] Shame only comes from a situation in which one finds oneself insufficient, flawed, defective. When wondering about his problems with today, what makes it so shameful, and thinking of ways to describe the kind of fucked-ness our old man, the world's oldest teenager, is drawing for us on his notebook cover, I am drawn to a section in Franco Berardi's *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. In it, he describes a point in the mid-1970s when a perceptible shift occurred from industrial capitalism to what he terms semio-capitalism.[515] It is a new age of total violence – "financial globalization, deregulation, total competition, infinite war":[516]

> We are tracing here the dynamic of a disaster, the disaster that capitalism is inserting into hyper-modern subjectivity, the disaster of acceleration and panic. But simultaneously we have

[510] Gilles Deleuze, 'Literature and Life,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23 (Winter, 1997), p.226.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Bernhard, *Old Masters*, pp.150, 151.
[514] Deleuze, 'Literature and Life,' p.225.
[515] Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.85.
[516] Ibid., p.94.

> to look for a rhythm which may open a further landscape, a landscape beyond panic and beyond the precarious effects of loneliness and despair.[517]

Berardi writes that, "We do this with poetry, which is an excess of language – a hidden resource which enables us to shift from one paradigm to another."[518] "Poetry is what in language cannot be reduced to information."[519] When a character visits a museum in a novel, an adolescent, a delinquent, are they writing their becoming, as poet, generating a sufficiency? If we see the visitor as deterritorialising in the order presented of the museum, acting in excess of its arrangement or organisation, the character is making "a non-codified enunciation." Collectively, they are doing so in "acts of language to create new human conditions."[520] "Poetry is the reopening of the indefinite, the ironic act of exceeding the established meaning of words."[521] And their delinquency is implicated, a necessary part of their superpowers, because any new reality they make, or seek to make, involves a "semiotic insolvency as a mechanism of disentangling language, behaviour and action from the limits of symbolic debt."[522] It is a reasonable response to the state of the world to look for ways to fly out of time.

In the contemporary novel, it becomes less likely that we will find an adolescent entering the institution to find a way through – today, rebellion has been subsumed into a look, a commodity, punks hug, agency fizzles into documentable experiences. It is more likely that resistance, delinquency, will take place in sites that have not been marketed to us as creative, cultural, gateway destinations. What spaces are there outside of this when even the derelict is a harbinger of gentrification?

The horse has bolted

> …their faith in modernization no longer rings quite true in art, or economics, or politics, or science, or technology. In art galleries and concert halls, along the façades of apartment buildings and inside international organizations, you can feel that the heart is gone. The will to be modern seems hesitant, sometimes even outmoded.
> — Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*[523]

Foucault described heterotopias – institutions of transit, theatres of culture – as having "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect,

[517] Ibid., p.154.
[518] Ibid., p.140.
[519] Ibid., p.147.
[520] Ibid., p.157.
[521] Ibid., p.158.
[522] Ibid., p.159.
[523] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Never Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, p.9.

neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[524] It has come to pass that the heterotopic nature of the museum has shifted, yielding dullness, flat spots, vacancies, stoppages, a breakdown in our semiotic environment. In Foucault's typology, the 'heterotopias of infinitely accumulating time' are where the philosopher suggests museums fit into his schematic range of heterotopic spaces:

> Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time … The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of break with their traditional time. … there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example, museums and libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit.[525]

He wrote of "the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity." Foucault specifically offered that, "The museum and the library are heterotopias that are proper to western culture of the nineteenth century."[526] But Foucault's description of what he termed a 'crisis heterotopia' seems to fit the modern museum in this context more aptly – a space that those in transition visit (he includes adolescents in his list) to work things through, away from everyone else.[527] He notes that these are being replaced in our society by "heterotopias of deviance" – prisons, hospitals, etc. – and that the idleness so treasured by the delinquent is widely considered a form of deviance. This makes the open time required for deterritorialisation in the museum the subject of pathologisation, to be blocked, flooded, diagnosed and treated.

This blockage is depicted interestingly in Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013), the most recent novel among those examined here. Here, we meet the character of the mother, a repeat visitor to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, at the opening of the story. She has a thirteen-year-old son who has been suspended from school – neither knows why yet; they will find out at a school conference at 11am. To pass some time beforehand, they go to the museum, close to home, a place to get out of the rain, to be alone together, to get lost: to her, "the museum always felt like a holiday":

> For me – a city kid, always confined by apartment walls – the museum was interesting mainly because of its immense size, a palace where the rooms went on forever and grew more and more deserted the farther in you went. Some of the neglected bedchambers and roped-off drawing rooms in the depths of European Decorating felt bound-up in deep enchantment, as if no one had set foot in them for hundreds of years. Ever since I'd started riding the train by

[524] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' p.23.
[525] Ibid., p26.
[526] Ibid.
[527] Ibid., p.24.

> myself I'd loved to go there alone and roam around until I got lost, wandering deeper and deeper in the maze of galleries until sometimes I found myself in forgotten halls of armour and porcelain that I'd never seen before (and, occasionally, was unable to find again).[528]

The novel sets up the museum as a place of succour, but in the present, access to this simple possibility is denied in a very blunt way. During their visit, the museum literally explodes – it is blown apart by a massive bomb – and mother and son's line of flight is shot down entirely. A fraught or blocked line of flight is common to the contemporary novels brought together here, as the characters cannot find escape or play or reorganisation in the museum.[529] Where a visitor may have once found sympathetic space to mitigate a crisis, in contemporary fiction the museum is less likely to provide a sense of possibility. It is more likely to be the site of a corporate event (viz. Dan Brown's *Origins*, featuring an overblown tech launch set at the Guggenheim Bilbao, and Gerry Bibby's *The Drumhead* in which a glass pyramid appears menacingly), a gala, or be a place to exercise commodity-fetishism (experience shopping).

The reality of the Met itself wobbled – its tectonic plates shifting away from heterotopic efficacy and towards commodity spectacle – when the first museum blockbuster exhibition took place there in the mid-1970s. The *Treasures of Tutankhamun* show, which toured several US and European museums, was developed by the National Gallery in Washington and the Met. But it was in New York that its iteration was the most radical, and as a result has come to be considered the first exhibition of this spectacular new order. The Met's then director, Thomas Hoving, kept a photocopied page from *The Age of Innocence* in a file marked 'speech material,' according to an article on the King Tut phenomenon in *Vanity Fair*.[530] He underlined the passage where the lovers arrange to meet at the Met – because there they can be alone. He must have decided this was a bad thing, as he set about establishing a new way of working in the museum that aimed to draw in massive crowds, and to borrow from the lighting aesthetic of the retail empire which his father led: Tiffany & Co. Hoving's competitor, J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery in Washington, had the exhibition installed there in an evocatively underground manner. Hoving took a different line:

> Brown, predictably, was dismissive of the Metropolitan's anti-tomb approach. The Met visitor, he said, "came out onto a mezzanine overlooking the Temple of Dendur space, which you'd think would be logical because it was Egyptian, but the whole point of the Tut show was that this stuff came from underground. You got into this dark atmosphere, and the spookiness of it was part of the appeal. Suddenly, at the Met, when you were two-thirds through, you turned a corner and you were out in that blaze of gray New York north light looking out onto Central Park. It just changed the whole mood and took away the whole sense of concentration on an imaginative, fictive experience."[531]

---

[528] Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013, p.20.
[529] There are two further contemporary novels in which museums are abutted with explosions: Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), in which the anonymous narrator psychopathically dreams of exploding the Louvre as part of his accelerating, possibly psychotic, spree of violence; and Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* that cuts from a visit to the Met to the destruction of the Twin Towers.
[530] Kamp, 'The King of New York,' n.p.
[531] Ibid.

From that point on, the museum was less likely to be a lonely place, as the marketing spectacle we are familiar with soon became commonplace in the practice of major museums. But the aspect of Brown's analysis I find most interesting is his use of the word *fictive*. The atmosphere the museum had been supporting was a theatrical fictionalising space – but Hoving had swapped it up for the glitter of luxury retail experience, museum as entertainment commodity, less about darkness than light or metamorphosing fiction. This shift in the culture of the museum *in real life* has no doubt mangled the form and potential of the museum in the literary imaginary, for in the contemporary novel it is like a perfume bottle marked 'factice,' or fake. It is just the dummy bottle, not containing perfume, part of the display to sell product and to frustrate the work of the shoplifter. It does not engage deeper senses, emotions or spirits, and does nothing to transport any adolescent to any less-shitty realm. Is dreaming all we have left?

There is a sad scene in a desolate first novel, Rachel Cusk's *Saving Agnes* (1993) in which a young woman visits a Science Museum with a young man with whom she is trying out a relationship. It seems another in a series of unsuccessful, clumsy liaisons that are blurring into an indistinct lump, some hers, some acted out by her circle of girlfriends, all students in flats. The book is written in an early '90s present, a time when phones are attached to the wall, and the piece we speak into is attached to the dialling part with a stretchy spiral cord. One goes to the phone when it rings, and the phone is rooted in the places where people sleep. Agnes uses museums and art galleries and cinemas as customary places to carry out the negotiations of dating, and the polishing of self-doubt: "Had it been left to her, she thought glumly, Adam and Eve would even now remain absorbed in the round of art galleries and cinema trips which her romantic protocol judged the fit testing ground for love."[532] Here, trying and failing to be noticed, understood, considered, she remains an object in another's process of picking young women off the establishment conveyor belt and absorbing them into a male-centred narrative. The museum offers a horrible semblance of becoming, a terrible subsumption of our very capacity to dream and fabulate, to make love and emancipated lives:

> They had gone to the Science Museum once. Exhibition Road on a rainy Sunday afternoon evoked childhoods not spent there, a sort of displaced nostalgia for tea and cakes and nanny in the schoolroom. At times like these, wet leaves from Kensington Park clinging to her shoes like beggars' hands, the smell of bonfires besieging her nostrils, Agnes felt the force of a cultural memory take hold of her that was not her own. They had had tea and cakes in the small East Anglian town where she had grown up, but they had come from Sainsbury's in packages and had made her feel sick in a way she was sure the steaming scone of yore wouldn't have. Such disappointments were the fault of the Victorians, she thought, looking at diminutive knickerbockers in the V&A. Her strange regressive longings were always firmly rooted in that age, while other historical daydreams were enacted via the persona of an adult male in doublet and hose.
>
> Some time later, John suggested they move on to Science and Technology. Although just across the road, this edifice of concrete and plate glass was a world apart. Wandering the pale-floored forecourt studded with sculptural confections of plastic and steel like invaders from

[532] Rachel Cusk, *Saving Agnes* [1993], London: Faber and Faber, 2019, p.68.

another planet, Agnes felt somewhat alien herself. The room was packed with self-possessed children dressed in primary colours.

'This is crap,' said one small blond specimen, pressing buttons and twiddling knobs with expert indifference while lights flashed and vast plastic molecules spun. Agnes was relieved they had not visited Natural History, where similar lights flashed in ominous patterns of invasion over diagrams of prostrate female thighs and pubic jungles.

'Agnes!'

John was examining a dimly lit booth on the far side of the room. As she approached, she saw he was seated in front of a large pane of glass and he motioned with his hand for her to sit in the vacant chair on the other side. She sat down opposite him. In the dark glass she could see her own reflection.

'Watch this,' he said softly.

Her own reflection suddenly melted, to be replaced by his face grinning at her through the glass.

'How did you do that?' she queried.

'Light,' he replied. 'The button on your right adjusts the light.'

He turned it again and her own face reappeared. It was odd to see them occupying the same space, their heads floating disembodied in and out of the dark, under and over each other like symbiotic beings, like split personalities.

'Now watch this.'

He loved to surprise her, to entertain her with his mastery. She would, he knew, never think to press the buttons herself. That was one of the reasons why he loved her. She let him show her things.

'What are you doing?' she said.

All at once, she saw there was something wrong with her face. The eyes weren't hers. John began to laugh behind the glass. Her mouth seemed to be laughing with him. Her jaw suddenly appeared to have become unusually square.

'Stop it!'

Her mouth moved again. Part of her was still there, but altered, like the face of a long-lost relative. The other part was John. He was in her eyes, across her forehead, around her chin. He was sitting in her head, rubbing his hands together gleefully. He had somehow found the space between them and he had rented it out like an apartment.

'You see?' he said. 'Do you see how wonderful this is? This is what our children would look like.'[533]

Has the museum, as a time-space sequence, an autonomous series of spaces, fallen out of currency? Has it lost its efficacy, its form been altered, homogenized, so to ignore or abandon its sequential nature? Has it, like literature, been outmoded, like Carrión prophesised in the mid-1970s, by new ways to communicate, by new ways to become?[534]

[533] Ibid., pp.41-43.

[534] "There is not and will not be new literature any more. There will be, perhaps, new ways to communicate that will include language or will use language as a basis. As a medium of communication, literature will always be old literature." (Carrión, op. cit. n.p.)

The end of the story

> Inside the museums, infinity goes up on trial
> Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while
> — Bob Dylan, 'Visions of Johanna'[535]

I am reading a chapter in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Inhuman* called 'Can Thought go on Without a Body?' which is ostensibly about mindfulness of the fact that the sun will explode in four and a half billion years' time. And what consequences this has for presenting an end-point to thought, which necessarily retains a sense of the infinite.[536] Thought that is closed off, rounded off, is controllable, and can be commodified, rendered into units of information, data. Perhaps our only salvation will be by behaving in ways that cannot be observed and defined, rendered comprehensible or drawn into the knowledge economy. To work in opposite ways to the reduction into audience segments – to assert our multiplicity, and to still push for something collective against the horror of the freedoms that neoliberalism creepily promises the individual – isolating her entirely in the process. The idea that we are approaching an end-point by our own hands – fires, environmental degradation, starvation, survival war, plague, pandemic, drought – sooner than this is astonishing, implosive, a colossal act of self-harm. It is like trying to clean up the feathers of a bird that a cat has killed. The downier ones cannot be swept as they are too light and blow around in the draught made by the attempt to use a broom. They are as difficult to remove as spilled polystyrene beads, as the shame of our inhumanity.

I am on a train, going to the university, to Monash. To Caulfield. People get on and get off. A man gets on who is making noises with his mouth. I look up from my book as he continues to utter round vocal sounds that sound like vocal warm-ups. An African gentleman in his 60s, slight, with prominent cheekbones. He is dressed carefully and moves gracefully. Nothing around him seems to bear on what he is projecting as a performer. He is aware that others are there, but is not looking for a response. Once people realise this, they settle back and stop worrying about this maker of sounds, and just continue their commute. He begins to speak. His voice is warm and purposeful and thick with a faintly French accent. He appears to have none of the stress of psychosis, and I listen in a way that trusts the low risk of aggression he seems to be presenting. He speaks slowly with long gaps between phrases, most of which I can hear, some of which disappear. He is like a very relaxed Céline, but softer, as dark, with the same love of ellipsis and a burning fuse of language that sparks and flares unevenly but keeps a momentum just ahead of sense. No sadness, no narcissism, just sharing bright urgencies. Summoned. This is what he put forth before I got off the train – retention was left to us:

---

[535] Dylan, 'Visions of Johanna,' *Blonde on Blonde*.
[536] Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, pp.8-9.

They teach negativity
Why not the stuff within this station?
The time
Respect the time
The time is valuable
Poetry breaks out
We stop
reading
Divide the poet
One should not
[eating sounds]
with time
Truth & fact
Not
1+1 equally
If you complain
in mathematics
rage
The poet asks
why + 0 and complain
They think it is very economic
but they abuse them
uselessly
Until death arrives

This encounter stayed with me in a way that helped shape my thoughts, and then it entered my research in faintly perceptible ways, informing my ideas on delinquency and becoming, and clarifying what spaces may still open and which spaces have closed around consumerism and spectacle. The train was not over-coded in the way that museum as institution seems to have become. This space may have closed in the museum, but it has opened, still opens, in other delinquent places. We can still lie around stoned on the train, be ourselves on the train, on its lines between points, between stations, that make no-one's land. We can still find spaces for encounter, performance, eruptions (into joy, nastiness, whatever), transport, waiting, flight. We could observe each other here, in this time before the separation of masks.

This year, we cannot concentrate, or, rather, we can concentrate even less. The effect of the pandemic on focus has been so acute that it is only palpable in a foggy way, like trying to recall a dream. How to write, make anything (of ourselves) in a state where the ability to attend is dwindling? And cruelly, we are not able to register this loss clearly because we need attention to do so. I feel forced to set myself short, observational briefs to find focus in the face of this astigmatism. Bernard Stiegler died this month. He had had enough of physical pain. I valued that he held a space open to consider urgently what is happening to us, to attend, care and register significance. He wrote from a present that he did not fully grasp, but made himself think, analyse, speculate, articulate, and keep moving. He showed endurance and courage and I am shocked and dispirited that there will be no more writing coming from him, no more counter-horror essays. He had hoped that this "current confinement should be

the occasion for a very large-scale reflection on the possibility and the need to change our lives."[537] But I am not sure that we are able to and that terrifies me. And what of this terrible need to be constantly trying to discover or invent new ways to live?

We have come to the end of the story, to the end of this study, with an image of the museum that no longer holds liberatory possibility. It is a quasi-conclusion that continues to open up, to go through openings and down passages. A circus of groupings of novels as acts, it traces a trajectory from novels in which visitors find heterotopias and lines of flight, transforming, to later ones in which they tend to be diminished by their visitations. We move through novelistic simulations from hopefulness to resignation and fearfulness. The story eventually dissolves into ficto-criticism, a solution I am more comfortable with as a researcher then a finely wrought conclusion that subordinates the narratives to a too narrow over-arching concept – superimposed fictions can be read differently on different days, and may be arranged and rearranged. Another day, at another time, there will be another turn of the kaleidoscope; and each day is a new dawn for any subjectivity, character, writer and reader of literature alike. For it to remain a circus seems methodologically more sound, for the buried circus next to the front doors of the closed neoclassical art museum in my home town has seeped into the formal logic of this study.

In this quasi-ending, there is a summing up by way of three contemporary novels that move between hope and disappointment in what could be thought of as a hollowing out of the museum's generative potential. In the museum's transitional space, the characters exhibit a madness, subjective derangement, a will to rearrange pieces of a puzzle with no hope of a solution, but a drive to continue into, if not unconsciousness, reverie. Jim Carroll's *The Petting Zoo* starts with a famous artist bolting from the opening of an art history blockbuster and into a hallucinatory encounter with an ancient bird. Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* involves a male visitor drawn to take in a long-duration video installation as the attenuation of visual experience to its limit. Murray Bail's *Homesickness* recounts the travelling of a group of Australian tourists through a multitude of museums that become indistinguishable from the world they are passing through, and that passes through them like a psycho-chemical trip. Museums seem, in this artificial light, to offer nothing but a drugged solution to subjectivities that are fading and have lost their moorings. Their visitation seems based in a sad attraction to something that cannot fix the basic problem. With nowhere to go, and nothing to connect with, the fictions the contemporary museum deals in provide images of connection that are perhaps fictions of the level of daydream. Fictional visitors are engaging in what Franco Berardi refers to in *Futurability* as "mutating," attempting "to adapt to a changing environment," but at their peril, for in slowing, attending, processing signs sensibly, visually, materially, they also risk losing their ability to survive in a capitalist economy:

> Sensibility slows interpretation procedures, making decodification aleatory, ambiguous, and uncertain, and thus reducing the competitive efficiency of the semiotic agent. The ethical dimension is involved in this process; a sort of ethical insensibility seems to mark the behavior of the humans of the last generation. But if we want to understand the disturbance in the

[537] Bernard Stiegler, 'Retourner le confinement en liberté de faire une experience,' *Le Monde*, April 19, 2020.

> ethical sphere, we should displace our attention toward the aesthetic field. The ethical disorder, the inability to ethically manage individual and collective life, seems to follow from a disturbance of the aesthesia, the perception of the other and of the self.[538]

There is a shift in books, even within a writer's oeuvre, from hopefulness to a loss of possibility, an impotence. The shift is important, and visible in the work of writers such as Jim Carroll, whose early work in poetry and prose in the 1960s and '70s is a lesson in license and risk, in freedom and self-determination, in mitigation of damage via experimentation. However, by *The Petting Zoo* (2010), Jim Carroll's last novel, written while he was dying, our artist-protagonist is disappearing, dying, ghostly, detached from people and human concerns. He has given up, failed in his ability to connect – he is too damaged to be salvaged, is the inference. Changes are just a series of fixes that just make the existence thinner, less elastic, sticky, worn out. *The Petting Zoo* does, however, link to *The Book of Nods* (1986) in which, among its fragmentary components, is a poem called 'Stepping out of M.O.M.A.' Both works open with a character leaving the dim enclosure of a New York museum, both men, one young, the other young in the sense that he is in an intense eruption of subjective change-energy.

The Petting Zoo is a tale about an artist, Billy, who has enjoyed every success, but is wobbling at the prospect of making work for a forthcoming solo show. He goes to an opening of a Velázquez exhibition at the Met, and navigates directly to the paintings to avoid the glittery function. But in the presence of the works, he is undone in a way that resembles the experience of the protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea*. The eyes of the paintings taunt him with a "spiritual arrogance." He realises that he has existed in his life and work "sealed … off from any concept of the divine. … safe from the disturbing and frustrating questions that true artists, sooner or later, must ask."[539] In front of the third painting, he recounts:

> I watched it break down into its separate elements. The canvas was reduced to its flux, flow and vibration, and the movement was too fast, leaving me in this swirling haze.[540]

Billy runs from the museum, taking the steps outside three at a time into the night, into Central Park, where he takes refuge at a tired, out-of-date petting zoo that is being remodelled. Here he is visited by a raven who claims he is the original bird on Noah's ark and has since been a pan-cultural shape-shifter – or he has an episode, depending on how we want to read his experience. He identifies that no such upheaval – in museum or park – would have taken place in daylight.[541] Night-time may be a characteristic of the museum, and of writing as a process, a space in which things are deranged, where we are more vulnerable, where the

[538] Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, pp.126-27.
[539] Jim Carroll, *The Petting Zoo*, New York: Viking, 2010, p.33.
[540] Ibid., p.32.
[541] Ibid., p.36.

system is more open. ("Night-time is the right time," as Will Oldham sings.[542]) He is arrested and committed for several days, for what was classed by the authorities as a psychotic break.

Weeks later, talking over his experience with a childhood friend, a musician, also successful, he asserts that "Art must remain an open system – like a salt marsh, an infant, or an array or spider-webs – unrestrained by the passivity of formal 'beliefs'." He argues, using the past tense, that, "It was only then that art could liberate."[543] He hopes for art's ability to participate in a becoming of any sort, for art and its house in the museum to make things flow, for agency, for something to penetrate the surface, for connection with others and other realms and realities. It is a part, he thinks, of how humans connect with their "inner register," and he fears that contemporary works of art, his or anyone else's, no longer have the capacity to "pierce any veils." "In the end, they only revealed a mirror, which, when obliterated, led to another mirror – and on and on until they'd finally encountered a vertiginous void."[544] His friend reflects that encountering the spiritual is like approaching "a very intimidating dance partner." He adds, in direct reference to his unhinging museum experience at The Met, that "There are many dance floors in the Father's ballroom."[545] After his friend leaves, Billy is drawn back to remembering, nostalgically, mournfully, that the neighbourhood in Manhattan where they grew up, a hillside by their apartment blocks, was the only place in the country where there occurred a certain kind of milky quartz.[546] This crystal mountain image is conflated with that of the museum by proximity, supercharging the potential of both in the narrative to effect transformation, shape-shifting. He considers the "enchanted logic" that they share in their attempts to deepen and understand their practices and existences. He considers how listener and music and viewer and artwork, "the subject and object become one."[547] But he is relating to this enchantment as something that used to be possible, but is no longer, like someone who depends on medication just to feel OK.

Carroll's earlier poem lives in the aftermath of an undescribed museum visit, about which nothing is said other than that he wanted to be pure. He comes out of the museum and starts to hustle women, eventually drifting down 5th Avenue to hang out on the cathedral stairs. He wants women to reveal themselves to him, but says they will only do so if they want him, so he tries to seduce them, the clever and well dressed, as they pass in the late afternoon. He talks about it being too late to get to the chemist – a pharmacological trope is established – and about a necklace of pearls, which is broken, the little round white things poured down his and a woman's throats. I read it as him wanting to become-other, to become-woman, and of the museum as pharmakon – a place where a youth can transform, a place on a quartz hill, something that can be taken. That both novel and poem are in the aftermath of the visit speaks to me. It speaks of the time after a person who has ingested a psychotropic drug waits to see what will happen, how it will work, how it will change the way they feel. In both novel

[542] "Night-time's the right time to pull all the dimes from your pocket / Night-time's the right time to climb on the rocket / Night-time's the right time to pull your shoulder out of its socket / Night-time's the right time to learn a new language." Palace Brothers, '(Thou Without) Partner,' *Days in the Wake*, Drag City, 1994.
[543] Carroll, *The Petting Zoo*, p.114.
[544] Ibid., pp.176-77.
[545] Ibid., p.206.
[546] Ibid., p.210.
[547] Ibid., p.214.

and poem Carroll talks of the "hollow flux" of madness, and what it takes to outrun it, or to transform it with some "exalted flow."[548] The museum is implicated in this psychotropic economy as a part in the chemical equation that describes the transformation of a substance, a being, an existence. But it is an experiment that is flawed, or has elements missing, or that have lost their previous potency. The museum does not give shelter, nor does it deliver them from harm or ignorance – its ecstasies are weak in comparison to the original hit. More like drug replacement than a drug – it fits the receptors but gives no pleasure, just passivity.

I am left thinking again of the man I described at the beginning of this investigation / exploration who would enter the provincial museum in my home town dressed in a ball-gown to dance circles of the arcades of galleries in perfect transporting solitude. The museum is cast by his description as a spiritual ballroom, giving it a portal-like power. Is such hope, such gleeful, creative delinquency in the museum possible anymore? The museum sits closed like a monument to lost possibility, apricot marble recessed and domed foyer atrium and all. Today it would be let out for corporate functions so there would be no nice furniture because it'd just have to be moved in and out all the time. I am thinking of the Lucia Berlin story and how she commented that the Louvre pyramid was being built as she visited. It seems to stand now as a sign that the museum was about to take a leap into stratospheric crowds and massive advertising reach. There would be no time to dance through spaces or no way to experimentally use our voices to test echoes out of the sight of indulgent dreamy shoe-gazey guards.[549]

Don DeLillo's 2010 novel *Point Omega* is sandwiched by a start and a finish that trace a man's stifled visit to an art museum near an American desert. The man is there to stand and watch Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) in its entirety, an installed video work that projects Hitchcock's *Psycho* so slowed that it will take 24 hours (so-called real-time) to fully elapse.[550] As the other visitors keep walking, as the planned traffic-flow suggests, to inevitably browse in the gallery shop, he is static in the space, wishing he was freed from the visual pollution of the passive wandering audience. The screen is installed so that he can walk around it to see on the other side as a mirror image. "He played with the idea that the gallery was like a preserved site, a dead poet's cottage or hushed tomb, a medieval chapel."[551] He wonders what would happen if he came all day, week after week – would he know the world and who he was in it? – "…would it be possible for him to live in the world? Did he want to? Where was it, the world?"[552] This video work slows time to the point that sees "cause and effect drawn apart" and meaning change so that it seems real to him, "the way all things do in the physical world that

[548] Ibid., p.321.
[549] There is a further layer of horror in the public face of the museum if we consider a shift from the image of the Tate Modern as a popular date destination, to the place where Brexit was planned (see the 2019 TV series *Brexit: The Uncivil War)*. Or where a disaffected teen in state care throws a six-year-old off a balcony to draw attention to his unhappiness and low level of care.
[550] In an advance on *24 Hour Psycho*, in 2001 Douglas Gordon installed a work in the Californian desert (alongside the road) at Twenty-Nine Palms, a single-screen projection of his 1995 work *5-Year Drive By*, a slowed-down version of John Ford's *Searchers*. This time the work was on a five-year loop, aligning with the time the *Searchers*' narrative would take to unfold in lived time. When it was first shown in the 1995 Lyon Biennale it was for three months, meaning that only twenty five percent of the total work was screened.
[551] Don DeLillo, *Point Omega*, London: Picador, 2010, p.16.
[552] Ibid.

we don't understand are said to be real."[553] In the museum or in the movies, he is disassociated, beautifully, away from the "strange, bright fact" of the world outside.[554]

To him, the dull parts of the original movie are not dull any more. They are like everything else, outside all categories, open to entry. This is what he wants to believe, and he yields to the screen more readily at certain times.[555] It is slowed to the point where "there was a clear discrepancy between action and visible effect."[556] And this is the magic point, and the museum-effect – everything broken up into elements that are divorced from economies of action, cause and effect; things lose their thread and reveal what is otherwise obscured. But the heterotopia ultimately fails him – dragging tempo back to its intelligible limits may draw cause and effect apart, but nothing non-stereotypical or non-type-cast really enters into the space that is made. And because the museum is only open from 10am until 5pm, he cannot watch the work continuously, as it is intended to be seen. He must return at least three times to take all 24 hours in, and then, with everyone else, exit through the museum store.

This shift in the representation of museums from places open to a process of becoming to failed heterotopias can be explained by deranging biopolitical shifts in society, in the very qualities of the now. The present we are left with, in its unfolding, is compromised by its corrupted character – it is hardened around spectacle, entertainment, a false, unproductive, barren positive. Museums have indeed been places in fiction where idleness is a method for adolescents of all ages; and the open system of youth necessitated taking to a heterotopia in the sense that it, as heterogeneous space, reorganised the individual. But if literature is an indication, like a litmus test, it seems that this is a lost art, or an operating system has been made redundant. Foucault could well be describing what the museum now channels and offers when he offers the following:

> We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.[557]

Living in these conditions – maddening, shallow – we are all made tourists, minors, those effectively without *le droit à la ville*, tasked, helplessly, with making meaning from changing arrangements of signs in a moving present. The subjectivity of tourists, idlers of the globe, those who roam the surface, migrating from point to point in this new regime of intelligibility, are the figures of Murray Bail's *Homesickness* (1980). In this novel, there is a group of Australians travelling to other continents, visiting more museums than in any other book I have read. Museums in this novel are sites of staged things, in which the bland attempts of the characters to experience something meaningful accrete as if aping the commonly understood

[553] Ibid., p.18.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Ibid., p.129.
[556] Ibid., p.130.
[557] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' p.22.

function of these institutions to accumulate significances. It is itself, this work from 1980, a portrait of a forgotten 'postmodernity' from a now questionable post-colonial point of view. It shows that there is no home for the roaming descendants of colonialism with confused and problematic senses of belonging, place and roots. The remains of the efforts of empire litter the globe, and museum compositions are there in the narrative to provide pre-constructed summary meanings, but no validity for a group of couples wedded to televisual summary and constantly outmoded models of unjustifiable being. They seek monuments in a time of ephemerality and emergence – museums are what one 'does' when one travels. They act this proposition out, as did Lucia Berlin's grieving woman, but they do it in a much more stupid way. And the novel parodies at once their tourism and the museum's hollowed project.

They begin in Africa, visiting a museum of handcrafts built in an off-register Palladian style, shoved into a barren trading town. Crumbling, it contains remains of the colonists that had since abandoned the place – the Masai and Kikuyu attendants start a motorbike inside for them and show them things that they might have ignored in a jumble sale. They decide it is a "Fledgling museum, an attempt. The Assemblage…"[558] Once they have left, reaching for their sunglasses in the dusty square of the museum, we are told that the museum has altered its way of seeing by attending only to signs: "The walls of the museum had reduced their field of vision to small portable objects all within arm's reach."[559] Then, in a blur, they are in a hotel in a converted wing of the British Museum, which like the rest of the place "was well known for the quality of its echo, its long avenues of linoleum."[560] At the Science Museum, where two men lament the way tourism has ruined tourist destinations, "A system of holograms litter the black air with the century's most far-reaching equations, giving a distinct impression of the elegance and excitement of discovery":

> 'Written' as if with chalk in mid-air the equations were three-dimensional and suspended like stars; the room, a kind of cloud-chamber, represented illimitable universes of signs and knowledge. They could pass through the accumulated, human knowledge; or rather, the knowledge could pass through them. Indeed that was the whole idea. … It had become suddenly like standing on the edge of space; there were no walls; only endless and shifting relativity; a rebuilding in nothingness. … There was then a shrinking sensation of smallness, accompanied by a pride, faint hope, a glimmer 'whoops!' Was he leaning forward? Vertigo.[561]

They realise – in the post-material, informational museum they are temporarily inhabiting – that "Science raised a myriad questions, no answers."[562] By an exhibit involving an AI chess game between Bobby Fischer and Leonardo da Vinci, one man rails against the contemporary populist mutation of reality as he recognises it: "This is a vulgar specious age. Look at it: the

[558] Murray Bail, *Homesickness* [1980], Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998, p.34.
[559] Ibid., p.39.
[560] Ibid., p.65.
[561] Ibid., pp.104-105.
[562] Ibid., p.108.

great leveller, mob-generator, the lowerer of values. I'm sorry," he says from a point by the cafeteria. "You stay if you want to. It makes me sick."[563]

Theirs is a time that corresponds to the heterotopia-of-time model that Foucault offers: "We, ah, travellers, operate in a condensed unreal time. For us, even time is summarised."[564] There is a corrugated-iron museum, but before long they are in South America in a Museum of Legs in Quito (celebrating homo sapiens and the fact that we at some point stood up) that can only be reached on foot. One of their party mansplains to the others that "A lot of these museums become the same," and the tourist is said to embody the human condition, always on their feet, searching for a grand sight.[565] In New York there are small corner museums designed to show visitors what the neighbourhoods used to look like. And there is The Institution of Marriage, chosen over the Police Museum, an exhibition of uniforms at the Met and a ballistic missile display in the IBM foyer, etc. Back in London for some reason, there is the Hair Salon opposite their hotel, and a side visit to an English county village where there is a man whose nose performs imitations of Uluru in different lights. And the narrator ups the ante: "The world itself is a museum; and within its circumference the many small museums, the natural and the man-built, represent the whole." "Museums are a microcosm," members of the group agree, "The spectator is forced back onto himself."[566] But one of the group, more searchingly, offers the following on their museum-experience, the museum-habit:

> Isn't it interesting how the normality … or the actuality of things goes on without our descriptions? Our time is spent cataloguing the description of objects and animals, and explaining, even though they exist solidly in the first place. I find that increasingly odd. We like to classify and describe. We want to understand; I certainly do. But it only adds to the nature of things, it doesn't alter.' … 'You see what I am saying. Everything continues without descriptions, and yet descriptions are all that we are doing – it seems to me. I find it strange. Museums, for example –'[567]

They find themselves, at the mercy of their predetermined itinerary, in Moscow and The Centre of Gravity, the essence of meaning, heaviness, significance. "They soon forgot about the outside world."[568] A woman in the party, considering an affair with another fool, turns to their Russian tour-guide Anna, who has their passports, and says that they are from a country that has nothing substantial to it yet: "… even before we travel we are wandering in circles." Heartless, not understanding much, with empty feelings and struggling even with love, and when they travel demanding "even the confusions be simple," she muses on being-Australian-in the-world.[569] After Lenin's tomb, another reflects:

[563] Ibid., p.109.
[564] Ibid., p.131.
[565] Ibid., pp.226, 232.
[566] Ibid., p.328.
[567] Ibid., p.340-41.
[568] Ibid., p.375.
[569] Ibid., p.393.

> …nothing much happens to us. It's all happened before, at some other time. We can see it in the museums or libraries. It's been stored for us to see. There are almost too many things."[570]

A Sheila muses, "I think everything can be interesting"; after she gets rid of an amorous party-member drunk from vodka at Lenin's tomb, and drifts off to sleep. The very end of the book sees the group – or is it a dream of one of the group? – visiting a museum that appears, except for rows of fluorescent lights that come on in lines towards them, to be empty. Dan Flavin? No. Their forms cast strange shadows on the walls that are bare except for some words – nouns, names of body-parts and miscellaneous technical objects and natural phenomena – found on a wall by the entrance, possibly an abandoned mural:

> By watching, by contemplating, they could fill in and fit the details. Gradually and quietly they began to see themselves. Possibilities included the past and the near future: it was possible to consider a sense of place, of their shape and long time.[571]

There is something very sad about this ending, in how for them a sense of possibility is only there if someone has laid it out for them as a barren matrix of stock narratives and culturally conditioned concepts: "The horizon of possibility is perceived as an infinite sprawl of connecting flashing points."[572]

It all ends up in a blur, a delirium of semio-crisis, in which the museum has no power, and neither do we. Berardi's cautionary *Futurability* explains this horrific "inertia of possibilities" as based on "the effect of the impotence of subjectivity"; it is "an effect of the potency of power when it becomes independent from human will, decision and government – when it is inscribed in the automated texture of technique and of language."[573] He writes that we have entered into a new phase of crisis whereby the conditions for democracy have been dismantled, a process that, he writes, dates back to the mid-1970s.[574] He describes "the psychotic deterritorialisation of attention"[575] and "panic, depression, precariousness and humiliation" as symptoms of the global war in which we are engaged – a hyper-exploitative intensification of capitalist economy that allows for the death of populations as part of its mechanism: "Neo-liberal deregulation has given birth to a world-wide regime of necro-economy: moral prescriptions and legal regulations have been annulled by the all-encompassing law of competition."[576] Everything is financialised, rendered informational: "Social life was then subjected to financial semiotization. … We can exchange everything with money, as we can exchange everything with words."[577] This semio-crisis leads to a complex of

[570] Ibid., p.411.
[571] Ibid., p.421.
[572] Berardi, *Futurability*, p.27.
[573] Ibid., p21.
[574] Ibid., pp.42-43.
[575] Ibid., p.131.
[576] Ibid., p.136.
[577] Ibid., p.152.

effects in the contemporary, giving us a horizon of possibility that elicits a compound of promise and dread, scattering of thought and new refrains:

> When society enters a phrase of crisis or approaches collapse, we can glimpse the horizon of possibility. This horizon is itself hard to distinguish, and the territory that borders this horizon is hard to describe or to map.
>
> The horizon of possibility can be best described by the words of Ignacio Matte Blanco in defining the unconscious: 'The unconscious deals with infinite sets that have not only the power of the enumerable but also that of the continuum'.
>
> The explosion of the semiotic sphere, the utter intensification of semiotic stimulation, has provoked simultaneously an enhancement of the horizon of possibility and a panic effect in the social neuro-system.
>
> In this condition of panic, reason becomes unable to master the flow of events or to process the semio-stimulations released into the infosphere. A schizophrenic more spreads across the social mind, but this distress is double edged: it is painfully chaotic, but can also be seen as the vibration that precedes the emergence of a new cognitive rhythm.[578]

Berardi speaks to the condition of our group of tourists as they find "the concrete world of experience is depleted."[579] The protagonists of *Homesickness* are our most impotent visitors in this index of museum visitation narratives, our most vague. Others visit in more determined or driven ways, with more strength. There are those, as we have seen, even in contemporary novels, that are less weak, blunted, limp. Aware of their misery, youth, the adolescents, even elderly ones, can still take a leap in the space of the museum, but it requires greater courage and education-in-reverse to do so in the now.[580] The museum can show fictional visitors a collection of signs in a framed space, a heterotopia of one sort or another, or several at once, and the more open-structured or adolescent among them can do what Berardi urges us all to undertake – to break in and transform what we encounter with our very selves. This invokes a sense of the concept of pharmakon that Derrida described – as not just a drug to be taken, but also the adolescent taker themselves:

> The pharmakon is that dangerous supplement that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it yet lets itself at once be breached, roughed up, fulfilled, and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present increases itself in the act of disappearing.[581]

[578] Ibid., p.28.
[579] Ibid., p.164.
[580] Ibid., p.109.
[581] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (*La Dissémination*) [1972], trans. Barbara Johnson, London: Athlone Press, 1981, p.110.

In our new phase of crisis, with beautiful hope, Berardi chooses to believe that from chaotic hyper-intensity, "a new cosmos is poised to emerge."[582] What is required is what Berardi terms 'creative morphogenesis':

> …the emergence of forms that are not inscribed in the present constitution of the world. … In order to actualise a possibility, a disentangling potency is needed. Potency enables the subject to deploy the possibility inscribed in its composition…"[583]

Old forms of resistance will no longer work for us, but "What we can do is create concepts and aesthetic forms for the self-deployment of possibility."[584] Berardi's focus is on the work of subjectivities as forms of becoming in the hyper-semiotised present – a time in which aisthesis (and, tragically, the need for liberated aesthetic institutions) has come to the fore. In the museum visitation narratives examined here, we follow adolescents in crisis who are in processes of subjective production, and conceivably mourning how frustrated this project is. They cross from everyday life in modernity – treacherous waters – over a threshold into a framed space. The museum offers a place of opened time and the composition of signs in which they sense possibility. Here they might be able to change the outcome, make a new reality come forth via fiction. And this is the thread that runs all the way through the novels in this study, just with less hope in the present. The way I have come to understand these museum visitation narratives is that they exhibit a drive to what David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan have called fictioning in their book of the same name, subtitled *The Myth-functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*: the creation of new realities. And in so doing, they mirror the function of literature as Deleuze described:

> To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. Literature rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete … Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal, or -vegetable, becomes-molecule, to the point of becoming-imperceptible.[585]

"There is no literature without fabulation," Deleuze stated in 'Literature and Life'. It "does not consist in imagining or projecting an ego. Rather it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers."[586] It is an act of making health, "inventing a people that it missing."[587] Literature is a delirium that makes a third person, "a witch's line that escapes the dominant

[582] Berardi, *Futurability*, p.29.
[583] Ibid., p.193.
[584] Ibid., p.235.
[585] Gilles Deleuze, 'Literature and Life,' p.225.
[586] Ibid., pp.227-28
[587] Ibid., p.228.

system."[588] What more beautiful (and feminist) way is there to describe delinquency in its most positive aspect? This ties the function of the novel and the actions of the museum-visiting-characters together – both seek to make a new reality, an entity via fiction and destabilisation.[589]

Sullivan and Burrows propose the verb fictioning to "refer to the writing, imaging, performing or other instantiation of worlds or social bodies that mark out trajectories different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence."[590] It could also describe the practice of museum visitation and museum-making: mythopoesis, a subset of fictioning, "is proposed as productive of worlds, people and communities to come, often drawing upon residual and emergent cultures."[591] And furthermore, a fictioning practice "… involves performing, diagramming or assembling new and different modes of existence through open-ended experimentation."[592] By this understanding, it is plausible that museums and visitors in literature are doing exactly this as an assemblage – making a diagram and deterritorialising it, seeking to pursue human agency and actualise potential.[593] Fictioning as operation, and the assemblage of fictional visitor and museum, can be seen "both to map out alternatives to the dominant forms of fictions of reality, and to contribute to questions concerning the kinds of human, part-human and non-human bodies and societies to come."[594]

The visitor takes them as such, heterotopias, fictioning openings, as pharmakon, like a drug or remedy, to find a cure for the malady of the soul. Experiencing the lack of safety, the powerlessness and frustrations of the minor, visitors try to change things for themselves with a quality of thinking that is witch-like. In the literature surveyed here, the museum is engaged by borderline subjects, minors of all ages, open structures – as labyrinth, *museoin*, territory ruin, palace – to become. Crisis has driven them to seek new realities, new peoples. The act of studying these narratives is like going through many rooms in an endless building – characters are acting out attempts at moving through and out of crisis. They find their conditions in one way or another intolerable, and they want to transform the elements of their existences alchemically. They enter a space of a different order to dissolve the perpetuation of their place in a dominant order, this constitution or distribution of the sensible. They are engaging in the dissensual democracy for which Rancière continues to argue, but acknowledges is slipping from us.[595]

---

[588] Ibid., p.229.
[589] A further passage speculates on the instability of my ground as a female reader, which is a simultaneously suppressed and privileged position – we are not the subject, the dominant form of expression, rather what man becomes *with*. But we have an element that runs ahead, takes to the air: "Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization." (Ibid., p.225). Perhaps a better (non-binary) reading of this passage is achieved by substituting the word patriarchy for Man and man?
[590] David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning*: *The Myth-functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p.1.
[591] Ibid.
[592] Ibid., p.6.
[593] Ibid., p.8.
[594] Ibid., p.10.
[595] See Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (*La Haine de la démocratie*) [2005], trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Verso. 2009.

For it is, as Berardi explains, harder to access a sense of potency generally, with which we can actualise possibility.[596] The possible is always there, is immanent, he maintains, but it cannot actualise due to the "inertia of possibilities inscribed in the present composition of the social body," which is articulated as an "impotence of subjectivity."[597] He attributes this to a change in the social order that has eroded forms of solidarity that undermine the intellect, welfare and freedom of the worker, and therefore the "emancipation of social time from the obligation of salaried work."[598] This is what he wants to see mobilised but is constantly pulled back by an impotence "inscribed in the automated texture of technique and of language" – a veritable entropic horror show of the human spirit.[599] The adolescent is, therefore, hampered in her ability to reorganise herself through writing, literal writing, or figurative writing, as in-the-world subjective development. What can the museum in/and literature be taken for if not crisis heterotopias both? I am using words from Rancière's 'Politics of Literature' to supply and answer: ideally, aspirationally, a pipe dream of a specific sphere of experience for politics, a "cluster of perceptions and practices that shape this world":

> Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world.[600]

Is fiction the only way we can have politics now? In reverie? In that madness where sleep is the only good part of life? The various threads of this study have ended up indicating, or indexing, practices that improvise new modes of existence, meeting unmet needs, sailing out of crises, the claiming of agency. The museum can be still taken by the visiting subjectivity, as modern literature suggests, as an agent of subjective reorganisation, albeit of weakening strength. When it presents the museum as an image of its own project of subjective development, of the forming of new realities, literature demonstrates accumulations of details, and loses attachment to beginning, middle, end. It is where, as ever, "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."[601] In literature, I am left with the impression that the future of the museum in fiction is slight, and possibly only in dream imagery. In some ways, we are left with very little, or the entrance is small, but mercifully the only one, or one of very few available. Dreams – parents of all literature, fabulations, becomings – are respite for the world-weary. As one of Bail's tourists points out, dreams are the only place where we are not subject to gravity:

---

[596] Berardi, *Futurability*, p.9.
[597] Ibid., p.21.
[598] Ibid.
[599] Ibid.
[600] Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p.152.
[601] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, Chapter 1. Retrieved from https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm

> 'Our present theory,' the Russian rasped, 'is that we dream in order to break away from reality. In every dream, gravity is defied. Without such relief the pressure would be intolerable, I' – he added in a queer personal note – 'sleep badly.'[602]

Rancière reports that dreams were, to Baudelaire, "the enduring formula of an aesthetic republicanism" whereby inside and outside are confounded and territories expand:[603]

> Reverie is not the withdrawal into the inner world of one who no longer wants to act because reality has disappointed him. It is not the contrary of action but another mode of thought, another mode of the rationality of things. It is not the refusal of external reality but the mode of thought that calls into question the very boundary that the organic model imposed between the 'inner' reality, where thought decided, and 'external' reality, in which it produced its effects.[604]

The visitor is the flow that dissolves this, dreams new realities, prayers for a people to come. An adolescent looking for her people, rearranging the elements, trying to fuck back her virginity, or solve the abandonment or abuse with more of the same (but this time, she is in control). There is a passage in Lydia Davis's *The End of the Story* where she is considering, in the only novel she has ever written, some objects left in her possession after a brief relationship. In this aftermath, she finds that she resists looking at them with recourse to habitual chronological thought. She prefers to unshackle them from a linear conception of time, to experience them a-chronologically, freed from the need to think of them in date-order (de-chronologically as a term seems less useful as it implies that there is a solid chronology in existence, rather than chronology just being an optional mode of thought):

> …today I am feeling like chronological order is not a good thing, even if it is easier, and that I should break it up. It is that when these events are in chronological order they are not propelled forward by cause and effect, by need and satisfaction, they do not spring ahead with their own energy but are simply dragged forward by the passage of time.[605]

In her temporary home, she is like an emancipated visitor in a microcosmic museum, considering these objects and particular trips she and he took together, psychically reorganising. And in the stories I have gathered together, the museum is a place where objects, works, decontextualised, cut free and composed, are set in a contemplative space, in slowed silence, where energy might rise; where the character choses to not be compliant or conservative, rather to live radically and in uncharted waters. It is their willfulness to disturb the assemblage of which they are an element that makes them delinquent. This is the energy

[602] Bail, *Homesickness*, p.386.
[603] Rancière, *The Lost Thread: The Democracy of Modern Fiction* (*Le Fil perdu: Essais sur la fiction modern*) [2014], trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, p.96.
[604] Ibid., p.105.
[605] Davis, *The End of the Story*, p.99.

that leads to productive becoming: there is something in the museum that the subjectivity of the young (those in crisis) are drawn to as a potential space for deterritorialising, but failing in the now in its mnemo-technical circuitry, episteme, ecology.

The museum has been, in these works of fiction, cast convincingly, hopefully, but ultimately waning in strength, as labyrinth, disorganiser, aesthetic space, a vertigo of time, heterotopia, redistributor of the sensible, temple–shrine, trapdoor and escape passage, pharmakon, casino–crystal palace, hallucination, idiorrhythmic solution to crises, writers' night, indeterminate waiting room, segmentary dissensus magnet, a spooky milieu where youth can act, risk, *in effigie*, a silent place to play again, to 'waste' time in research, to square off with an enemy, to self-exile, to overcome inadequacy as someone else in another time, to learn and unlearn, a place of fictioning, of subjective experience, production, qualia with objects in the present's architectural aspic. In the contemporary novels considered here, there is the undertow of horror to the phantasm – the disaster of semio-crisis is basically insurmountable, and drains energy from minor subjects who have not the emotional resources or cultural resources to be able to overcome it. 'We will overcome' is a revolutionary mode from the past. Today's revolutions are not effected by the multitude in the streets, but by the dreamer in fantastic or virtual space. The desire is still there, but the hope and means and sites with which to attempt flight have shifted away from the museum in literature.[606]

The novelist takes elements from the world, and puts them in sharp relief – each "a mental object for contemplation or manipulation" – and things are brought into being by hope.[607] The museum, thought of in this way, becomes a place where the supernatural and attention are the same thing. The way in which parts of the world are taken from their contexts and put on display creates hesitations, and the opportunity for consciousness to recognise itself in the act of looking. Just as smoking a cigarette on the steps of the museum allows a young woman who feels like she is disappearing, becoming spectral, to see her breath and know that she exists. The impotence of subjectivity is suspended momentarily in the encounter between person and external object set in sharp relief, in a slow place where extraneous detail is removed, and the air of significance.

At the outset, this study was motivated by an attraction to the way that the subjectivity of museum visitors was explored – their desires, motivations, courage, delinquencies, attempts, becomings, small victories and failures. At the very end of the last book that Guattari wrote, *Chaosmosis* (1992), he asks us a very important question – one that our fictional, desiring youths are acting out – and offers an answer, a fantasy:

---

[606] Todorov's book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) considers fiction in which characters encounter the inexplicable, and argues that in the space of this encounter we experience the fantastic as hesitation. To Todorov, "The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty"[606] – in essence, is what we are seeing something supernatural, or the product of our imagination or error? The fantastic gives us a particular order of "ambiguous vision",[606] but do not art museums also trade in such visions, in providing causes to hesitate with the works it isolates and presents as if holes from which new arrangements of the sensible crawl? It seems that they court hesitation, invite it, stage it; it appears as visitation. The ambiguity of the conventional modern exhibition format and of the works themselves supports the uncertainty that makes genuine hesitation possible, a focus for the interest our shame propels us towards. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, pp.25, 33.

[607] Dillard, *Living by Fiction*, p.59.

> Among the fogs and miasmas which obscure our *fin de milIenaire*, the question of subjectivity is now returning as a leitmotiv. It is not a natural given any more than air or water. How do we produce it, capture it, enrich it, and permanently reinvent it in a way that renders it compatible with Universes of mutant value? How do we work for its liberation, that is, for its resingularisation? Psychoanalysis, institutional analysis, film, literature, poetry, innovative pedagogies, town planning and architecture – all the disciplines will have to combine their creativity to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaosmic spasms looming on the horizon, and transform them into riches and unforeseen pleasures, the promises of which, for all that, are all too tangible.[608]

The museum is a place in fiction that pertains to the chaosmosis Guattari theorises. If our task is to ride a line between chaos and order to produce subjectivity that give us life and freedom, our own moving unfolding cosmos, this can take place in an encounter between youth wishing to become, and the museum, the very image of old age. Berardi explains that, in Guattari's offered cosmos, "Old age opens the doors to chaosmotic wisdom, one capable of elaborating, with all the necessary slowness, the infinite speed of fluxes." He contends that if we are to avoid "the effect of disaggregation caused by panic" it is through "concepts, artistic forms, friendships (that) are the operators of speed that allow us to understand what is infinitely rapid in slowness, without listing infinite complexity, without falling back on the banality of opinion, of communication, of redundancy."[609] This theoretical framing shows us why the museum in literature is a palace sought out by the young – it is the arena in which subjectivity can be produced, their own singular, provisional chaosmosis. But they, we, must do this in a world that is in terrible disarray. It as if we have woken up into a bad dream, or onto the empty set of a terrifying, merciless science fiction film that is still being written. Negri is right, the young, the delinquent, must find new places to write themselves, to produce subjectivities: "Consequently the monuments erected by the Powerful to the divinity of measure must be destroyed, just as the museums, veritable temples fashioned by the measure of Power, must be deserted. What is beautiful is the generation of subjectivity."[610]

Nearly 14, my son, he brings me a line from *Dracula*, which he has decided to read for high-school English; school, like work, now being conducted at home, has boiled down to reading this novel about a monster. Except we are not working from home, and this is not home-schooling, it is being told to go home and trying to stay afloat in a free-fall and dangerous state of exception. He comes out and reads to me, thinking I will likely be interested, "for it is wonderful how small a matter will interest and amuse a man when he is a prisoner." Later, I think of how Stiegler wrote that his incarceration allowed him the conditions with which to become a philosopher – the removal of almost everything, from his milieu, and the sharp focus that came into play. And still later, of the art museum – does it make a prison for us all,

---

[608] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (*Chaosmose*), trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, New York: Semiotext(e), 1992, p.135.
[609] Franco Berardi, 'Repression, Expression, Depression,' in *The Guattari Effect*, ed. Éric Alliez and Andrew Goffey, London: Continuum, 2011, p195.
[610] Antoni Negri, *Time for Revolution* (*La consituzione del tempo*), trans. Matteo Mandarini, London: Continuum, 2004, p.203.

by removing, as Proust writes in *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Love*, "all unnecessary detail," in which to fine-tune our sensibilities and become artist–philosopher–subjectivity?

I hear him say to his girlfriend, who is also his dear friend, on a video call, "Do you remember at the art gallery? Do you remember that boy and his shoes that squeaked as he walked? The sound of it? How could his parents have done this to him? Every step a squeak. The poor kid." Before this, they would spend time in the art museum waiting for me to finish work. In the low afternoon light coming in through the glassed foyer, they would make themselves tea in the kitchenette by the gallery's classroom, and wander through the galleries, using the place to build a laughing complicity, to just be in the light of each other's energy and affection. Then, as now, at home, they wait, as we all do, "suspended between belief and doubt, waiting"[611] in the space given over to hesitation, open to whatever happens next. Their feet in my recollection pass lightly and happily over the long floor in a way that resembles the flitting energy of the sparrows who come into the space through the adjoining restaurant. Their movement stirs the air, the sheer expanse of innocent life in front of them is as beautiful as any fine thing in the building. Their laughter and the birds' calling to each other correspond and make the black-clad Visitor Hosts at the front desk look up and wonder if there is anything to be done, and then decide there is not, and sometimes smile at how nature and youth take things over, and rightly so. I remember them in the summer, walking across the gallery forecourt traversing the space, hand in hand, to my great surprise that he would be holding hands with anyone, but happy that it is her. Like drawing a private line across a private page, a diagram or statement of intent. But now, in autumn, he asks me, unable to sleep, how can I trust that people like me, or tell me the truth? In the dream he has afterwards, the three of us are blowing up an amusement park piece by piece. Following the ferris wheel, the police come, and I am caught, but they escape. Now, on the way out of pandemic lockdown, they wonder if the gallery is open again yet, and if, when it does, many people will come. "Nobody is ever there anyway," he offers. Days ago, I heard a fragment of their conversation: "We are not really part of society."

The museum as a failing heterotopic site is summoned, albeit spectrally, only offering delirium, in a passage at the very end of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992), a story of college youths in the 1980s, written, apocalyptically, at the end of the 20th century. An index of errant agency of the young, of attempts to metamorphose, some ending in death, others yielding flight, much damage, it is the story of a group of classics scholars who together enact ritual magic that ends in the suicide of their ringleader, Julian. Like the novel falling asleep, it gives us an image of the museum in dream – it is the only way one of the characters, the narrator at the time, can be with their dead friend. The presentation of the museum in a dream offers that maybe it is too, as an institution, in some ways from or of the other side. It is as if it describes the passing of the possibility of the museum as heterotopia, and perhaps also the passing of the possibility of dissensual democracy. The politics of literature – how we might redistribute the balance of the sensible – is weakened, and in an oneiric museum, a dead friend appears, raising again the ceiling, the threshold of possibility from the inside–

[611] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p.9.

outside, the sea–island assemblage. The present is always a moment of potential rupture achieved through fiction by adolescent dreamers:

> What are the dead, anyway, but waves and energy? Light shining from a dead star?
>
> That, by the way, is a phrase of Julian's. I remember it from a lecture of his on the Iliad, when Patroklos appears to Achilles in a dream. There is a very moving passage where Achilles – overjoyed at the sight of the apparition – tries to throw his arms around the ghost of his old friend, and it vanishes. The dead appear to us in dreams, said Julian, because that's the only way they can make us see them; what we see is only a projection, beamed from a great distance, light shining at us from a dead star…
>
> Which reminds me, by the way, of a dream I had a couple of weeks ago.
>
> I found myself in a strange deserted city – an old city, like London – underpopulated by war or disease. It was night; the streets were dark, bombed-out, abandoned. For a long time, I wandered aimlessly – past ruined parks, blasted statuary, vacant lots overgrown with weeds and collapsed apartment houses with rusted girders poking out of their sides like ribs. But here and there, interspersed among the desolate shells of the heavy old public buildings, I began to see new buildings, too, which were connected by futuristic walkways lit from beneath. Long, cool perspectives of modern architecture, rising phosphorescent and eerie from the rubble.
>
> I went inside one of these new buildings. It was like a laboratory, maybe, or a museum. My footsteps echoed on the tile floors. There was a cluster of men, all smoking pipes, gathered around an exhibit in a glass case that gleamed in the dim light and lit their faces ghoulishly from below.
>
> I drew nearer. In the case was a machine revolving slowly on a turntable, a machine with metal parts that slid in and out and collapsed in upon themselves to form new images. An Inca temple… click click click… the Pyramids… the Parthenon.
>
> History passing beneath my very eyes, changing every moment.
>
> 'I thought I'd find you here,' said a voice at my elbow.
>
> It was Henry. His gaze was steady and impassive in the dim light. Above his ear, beneath the wire stem of his spectacles, I could just make out the powder burn and the dark hole in his right temple.
>
> I was glad to see him, though not exactly surprised. 'You know,' I said to him, 'everybody is saying that you're dead.'
>
> He stared down at the machine. The Colosseum… click click click… the Pantheon. 'I'm not dead,' he said. 'I'm only having a bit of trouble with my passport.'
>
> 'What?'
>
> He cleared his throat. 'My movements are restricted,' he said.
>
> 'I no longer have the ability to travel as freely as I would like.'
>
> Hagia Sophia. St. Mark's, in Venice. 'What is this place?' I asked him.
>
> 'That information is classified, I'm afraid.'
>
> I looked around curiously. It seemed that I was the only visitor.
>
> 'Is it open to the public?' I said.

'Not generally, no.'

I looked at him. There was so much I wanted to ask him, so much I wanted to say; but somehow I knew there wasn't time and even if there was, that it was all, somehow, beside the point.

'Are you happy here?' I said at last.

He considered this for a moment. 'Not particularly,' he said.

'But you're not very happy where you are, either.'

St. Basil's, in Moscow. Chartres. Salisbury and Amiens. He glanced at his watch.

'I hope you'll excuse me,' he said, 'but I'm late for an appointment.'

He turned from me and walked away. I watched his back receding down the long, gleaming hall.[612]

[612] Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* [1992], Melbourne: Penguin, 2008, pp.627-29.

I.

We would go the National Gallery together at times, my friend and I, during this study. We would approach the gallery, which has a large semi-circular opening at the front of the bunker structure. But it is not a door. It is a window down which water pours in a thin veil that at times of the day, the beginning and end, catches the light and a rainbow forms on it. But nobody seems to stop and look or remark on it. In this place it just drops my anxiety somehow. Maybe as nobody expects or even wants you to talk. We don't check what is on as we are not there to see any show. Nor do we want public programmes of any sort or wish to engage with anyone else. Mercifully people still know to not approach others cold here, to respect their disassociation.

We walk purposefully and out of time up a narrow escalator to a first-floor corridor that opens up onto a large gallery with miscellaneous 20th-century paintings Our arrows are shot towards a small gold-framed work, a Manet painting of a picked melon that is segmented like a pumpkin. In licks of mottled green the melon is made as real as anything ever was, which is, as the painting shows us, nothing other than a matter of accumulated details in the time of death or dying. Each moment is unshackled from any cause-and-effect relation to any other moment – and, our being understood in this way, historically, we are free.

'Tout arrive' – 'everything happens' – was written at the top of Manet's letter-paper. Hovering above his correspondence, the phrase reminds all concerned that experience is at once merely, ecstatically, horrifically, *a succession of facts as they arrive*. We talk about Manet's still lifes – asparagus, peonies, roses, lilac, peaches, a lemon, grapes, greengages, strawberries, a fish with an eel, a loaf, brioche, apples and pears, oysters with a cut lemon, mandarins, a pumpkin. A erotic bunch of violets with a fan and a note to Berthe Morisot. I am sure I can smell their dark leaf earth sweet powder medicine aniseed-centred joy velvet cool perfume, a visitation.

We talk about what Clarice Lispector said about the sadness of flowers in *Água Viva*. Says she, of our common purple shade-weed treasure, "The violet is introverted and its introspection is profound. They say it hides away out of modesty. Not true. It hides away in order to capture its own secret. Its almost-not-perfume is a smothered glory but demands that people seek it. It never shouts its perfume. Violet says frivolous things that cannot be said." I will never tire of the way their smell pools in the air from both petal and dark green leaf, in the cool of the morning and evening.

Manet is reported to have said that a painter can say all they want to with fruits or flowers, or even clouds. And that he would like to be the Saint Francis of still life. Zola, in turn, admired his treatment of inanimate objects – but I misread this as intimate objects. A picked flower, a dead fish. Crystal vases, small, with narrow bunches of minor garden flowers, sitting by themselves on tables, was his last body of work. In 1883 he was dying, and the paintwork is harsh and visceral. They are not for the faint-hearted, but neither is peace. His still life subjects are the kinds of things one has around the house for nobody else, and they are observed with what could be seen as a terrible detachment, and likewise perfect love. The work burns like a lit fuse when the artist or author writes with the awareness of death closing in, finally without concern for outcomes or the desire to control anything. Terrestrial motives are no longer, and anything becomes the work of terrible angels and minor deities. These still lifes are stark, hardcore, literary, filmic. Filled with longing, devotion, admiration for, if not

beauty, their soon-to-be forgotten miracle. Honour for flowers and traces of existence. Spell-casting. Site-spells. Counter-sorcery, if the world of work and responsibility is already an enchantment. Repetitive, ritual use of vases. Close, domestic gestures Interest against shame.

My paternal grandmother appeared once to a psychic – she whose dressing table always smelled of violets – to say, through her to me, that you will know it is me because I can remind you that I would always say, when you brought flowers inside for me from my garden once my legs had gone, that I always admired the way you would put the handful of flowers straight into a vase in one go, like so (the motion of dropping something held in two hands) and how it always worked. How I said I could never do that, and you would say that you didn't think you ever gave it much thought.

In the summer, after my son and I were talking about someone getting told off about something, he asked, "Can you tell someone on?" Cares recede, fears too, and shame dissolves in so much interest. We, the committed to the smell of ornaments and floor-polish. The NGV's bluestone walls block mobile phone signal, which suits me very well. You do not want to know the time either. I would never dream of going if I had to be anywhere else soon after. I go there for as long as it takes to become bored. You never know how long that takes to happen. Then you know. After passing over this threshold, and only then, can things become other.

After the trance, we discuss how funny it is that we had not noticed earlier the oddness of people saying, when they are looking for something, that it is always in the last place you look. Of course it is – you have found it, so you stop looking, ergo that is the last place you would look. Why would you continue looking once you had found it?

I ask my friend if she would tell me about all the jobs she has had that she has been fired from – supermarket, shop, bar, office. A boy from the nearby art school's high-school division that I recognise passes wearing trainers made from the same material as tennis balls. Complex trainers are commonplace, but his are good and weird.

I tell her about my son's guitar teacher – who hardly wears shoes, likes baroque and Balkan music, and also plays the oud – and how one very hot day we turned up at his house and the front door was open, and we could see right along the central hall to the grass and trees of the back yard. He came in, beaming, saying that he had been writing songs under a tree. He said he had become tired of writing as himself, about himself, of his voice, and had instead been writing from the subject position of a loyal dog. She suggests we try writing whatever we write for a while, as middle-aged women, from the subject position of ghosts, and see if anyone notices. Like becoming a parent, not being young any more is a migration of sorts, and being incrementally less sensible to the young goes with it. It is as much a kind of bliss as it is a loss of attention. It becomes clear, the connection between attention and care, and in the void of its withdrawal, mountains, the snow, and birds seem more relevant. I never remember leaving but we must have done it many times.

II.

Upstairs, in the recently built provincial art gallery where I now work, there is still a large horizontal painting of a funeral procession moving over a frozen body of water. It is large enough to fill my visual field. I have looked at it for decades, snared in its massive gold frame. It is so big that rather than move it, the gallery preparators used to wall it in and hang other things on the new wall in front of it if they wanted to change the arrangement. There is an area in the bottom right-hand corner that I had not been aware of until recently. It shocks me that I did not register it from the start, and I wonder what else I have not been seeing. It is an area of bent stems from a plant that has died off in the winter. It is painted more roughly, gesturally, than the section of the mournful, slow-moving figures with their rudimentary coffin on a sled in Holland. I take photographs of it on my phone, just that part, cropping out the rest. I take it in landscape, and then in square, and I think of LPs – drone, doom, minor key heavy, pagan.

Under the marble stairs there is a section of the floor that feels uneven beneath an area of grey carpet. There is a rectangle within it that is about an inch lower, which I am told is a filled-in pond. After some older people tripped over it, and some ducks came inside with their ducklings, it was decided to remove the feature and make it an area for a large table.

For a few days last week there was a sparrow in the huge, high, glassy adjacent foyer space. Its voice could be heard in upstairs galleries that are quite far back from this day-lit space. I am told they come in through the restaurant, and they can leave again when the automatic doors briefly open. If necessary, the doors can be put open for long enough to flush out an avian friend – such as the fantail that found its way in during the winter. I started to wonder if it had anything to eat, and considered for a moment bringing it food and nesting material, but dropped the idea. It could pull pieces of grass from the bottom right-hand corner of the funeral painting and make a messy pile in a high corner to nest in. Food is not necessary on this plane, so it will be fine in that regard.

Unlike the temple building it replaced, there is no obvious entrance to this museum. It is a long curving glassed face made of wider than tall panels. Not having a door makes entering confusing, but I think the problem this causes is a deeper one. There is no threshold to pass through, no entrance, no opening, gateway, waharoa, from one realm to another. Instead, people come in uncertainly, without a clear sense of passage, into a desolate open space that they don't realise is left bare to more easily set up for corporate events.

III.

I dreamed I was in a colonnaded courtyard swimming in a brackish pool. It was the Wintergardens pool in the Auckland Domain near the War Memorial Museum, except rotated 90 degrees so the length of it went north to south rather than east to west. I was not at all bothered by the water quality and became aware that beneath the surface of the water were growing lotuses in bloom, their pink flowers about four feet below the surface. The water was warm and had the thick feeling of the heavily salted and somewhat soupy Mediterranean. I got out and sat on the side and as I chased away mosquitoes someone tried to tell me that if we drained the water we would see that the plants were planted in plastic containers, but I really didn't want to know how it worked.

I was not aware of my dream when I woke. It had slipped into the shadows without me even glimpsing its slippery tail. My son was two and I packed a bag and he and I went to the Wintergardens in the Auckland Domain. We went there because it was my first day as a single parent and I wanted to go somewhere peaceful and improbable, and maybe close to a hospital. It wasn't until I was there that I made the connection with the dream I'd had, and it made it feel like a sort of weak and tender prophecy.

The Wintergardens have a central pond in which lotuses and papyrus grow in concrete containers surrounded by peaceful orange fish, and it has a colonnade around it, either side of which are two hot-houses and a dim damp cool-aired fernery. There are tropical fish and enormous Amazonian waterlilies in the hotter of the two houses.

I worked once with a woman who used to be the head gardener at Auckland's Domain. She said she had stopped because she did not like people enough. She told me that the Wintergardens are kept by a team of odd people, and that two of them are identical twins. She told me that when the two young men started work there they had to be separated, because they talked this odd twin language that others could not follow.

My son and I had been looking at the cocoa tree, as the pods were large and yellow and we were always interested in how chocolate comes so directly from a tree. And because the tree was by the waterlily pond, we met one of the twins, an oddly chatty long haired, petite young man, who told me everything he knew about the Amazonian waterlilies. He was really excited because one was in flower, and this apparently happens seldom. On the first day the flower comes up white, and on the second day it reopens pink. It has something to do with attracting insects. He also told me the reason particular breeds of aubergine couldn't be grown there is because they attract rats.

The chatty man asked if we would like to meet the catfish. We had only ever seen the little tropical fish that wriggle near the surface of the edge of the pool below the heated pipes that warm the water and the hanging carnivorous pitcher plants attached to a frame above. The man passed us a small box of cat biscuits and said that if we put a few on the surface and waited they would come. Then he went away. It took a minute or two but there was the strangest break in the water's surface as a tiny monster slowly raised its oily head gently through. It quietly took a biscuit then sank down to a lower layer, only just visible. As our eyes adjusted to its form and colour we could suddenly see many more of the fish, some a foot long, slowly ascending, their heads and bodies emerging through the water like eels, calmly taking biscuits and sinking down again. After a time, none were visible, as they had all returned to their lower levels of the pool, the smaller quickly flicking tropical fish still fizzing

about the edges. A sign implored us to not touch fish or plant, but it was so hard not to try to be one with it somehow, even just with the fingertips.

There is a song that goes "no one is cold at the Wintergardens / no one is old at the museum." When the outside temperature reaches blood heat, the body produces the minimum of cortisol – a stress hormone released in response to adverse conditions of any sort, but also in proportion to extremes of temperature. I am as sure of this as I am of what Joan Didion said about the tendency of the emotional field of names to weaken as one leaves the temperate zones.

In the most tropical of the Wintergardens grows an incredibly large bird of paradise. It is a veritable giant, its top leaves butting against its crystal palace ceiling. I have not seen it flower (the small one in my garden does so like a chiming clock, once in July, September and October every year), and I believe its flowers are storm cloud grey, but I look at the great clumps of birds of paradise about Albert Park and the university a lot.

I can forget that my first impression of the city was of those plants, and of volcanoes, of which Albert Park is one, on the other side of the university from Pukekawa, the volcano on which the museum stands. Here I imagined a subterranean room beneath a vast outside clump that could house me – and why not one for each of my friends? A hut to hibernate in, in which to take warm naps, that would be somehow lit non-electrically and be dry like the burrow of an animal in a sandbank beneath a tree. I claimed the shape of place beyond work, beyond even the need or desire to be awake, like the inside of a genie's bottle.

We had a small container with us, and we took it to the pond beside the Wintergardens, outside its brick walls, beyond its colonnaded zone. In it was a pair of young frogs that we wanted to release. We had raised them from tadpoles, and it was time for them to fend for themselves. It is too sad and abject to keep them in a tank and feed them flies. As they swam away from us, shocked by the efficacy of their legs to propel them through the biggest body of water they had ever had to contend with, I felt a wave of pain, of loss of a shared language.

The museum on the top of the small hill is a place full of the confiscated weapons of Indigenous peoples of the Pacific, and some whole buildings from pā sites on Te Ika-a-Māui. There is never anyone in the room lined with old European musical instruments. There are matching brutalist bunkers that each contain a single fighter plane in which we can still smell their engine oil, metal and violence – spitfire, zero. I like how someone puts fresh kawakawa leaves on the narrow flat surfaces above the handrails on the stairwells that line the entrance atrium.

In Pukekawa's crater there is a cricket pitch, and there is a consecrated cenotaph out front of the museum which makes it a deco monument to soldiers lost in the first world war. We watch for darkening clouds, and go inside if there is the drop in air pressure that signals coming rain. In the taxidermy section we wonder without speaking who the animals are, them or us. I don't see animals behaving as we do, with such murderousness. We don't have to be anywhere and no one cares when we come home from this waiting room. Waiting as a condition is the attenuation of a perfect hope, a dilated state in time, out of time, as time passes, if that is what it does. I am told time is both a fourth dimension and a vital impulse, the source of creativity, and I feel the thrill of its width and depth.

I am in a corrugated-iron hut high in the Southern Alps on a flat plateau, grassy, with a warm sun and thin breeze, up close by summer peaks that surround from the west and north and south. Each room has a high wooden-framed window that open to peaks from wherever

you sit, stand or lie. The interior is dry and well lit, and smells a little like warm wood. My friends and I want to find out who owns it, as it is apparently disused, and arrange to rent it as a group, as a sort of club. We think the superfluous architectural cladding on the outside of the building should be popped off to leave the original vernacular green iron. I see two large, wide rooms at front and back, open with bare floors and walls, at a 90-degree angle to each other. The grasses are green around the house with spring growth.

I told my father, a climber in his youth, about this dream and he said that being up that close to the peaks is like flying. When you lie in the tussock above the bush-line the sound of the wind rushing over the ridge of the mountain range is like the sea. The world would be a very different place of the wild phenomeno-spiritual chemistry of the dream played more of a part on decisions of state or governance. If we made more time to pause and consider, de-form and transform, on that basis.

Early that Wintergarden museum morning, in the dim quiet, my little son told me about a dream for the first time. “Big horses. I’m riding a big brown one fast. Daddy is riding a big white one. Mummy is riding a big purple one.” As I walked down the stairs, desolate, hovering, I looked at a branch I had set up in a high window in the stairwell with small paper flowers tied to it as a site spell to call good things to enter the space I had opened. Some caught the first light and moved slightly with the air like a web, and I felt like if I stared at it hard enough it would burst into flames.

Bibliography

Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* [1994], New York: Grove Press, 2018.
--- *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, New York: Grove Press, 1996.

Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' in *Notes to Literature* (*Noten zur Literatur*) [1958], Rolf Tiedmann (ed), trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen, New York: Columbia University, 1991.

Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Alexander Alberro (ed.), *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of the Museum*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978.

Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* [1971], trans. Philip Boehm, Teaneck, NJ: Holmes and Meier, 1990.

Murray Bail, *Homesickness* [1980], Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998.

David Barison and Daniel Ross (dirs.), *The Ister,* Black Box, 2004.

Djuna Barnes, *Selected Works*, London: Faber and Faber, 1998.

Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, (*Comment vivre ensemble: Simulations romanesque de quelques espaces quotidiens*) [2002], trans. Kate Briggs, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Georges Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, trans. Iain White, London: Atlas Press, 1995.
--- *Inner Experience* (*L'expérience intérieure*) [1943], trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988.
--- *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
--- 'Literature and Evil,' TV appearance, French television, interviewer: Pierre Dumayet, 1958. Translation: Vidar Vikingsson. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCnGuK8CVc
--- 'La conjuration sacrée,' in *Acéphale*, G. Bataille, P. Klossowski, and A. Masson, Vol. 1 (June 24, 1926).

Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* [1967], trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill, New York: Universe Books, 1967.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*) [1927-40], trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, London, and Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995.

Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, London and New York: Verso, 2017.
--- *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012.
--- 'Repression, Expression, Depression,' in *The Guattari Effect*, ed. Éric Alliez and Andrew Goffey, London: Continuum, 2011, pp.186-202.

Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*) [1889], Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.

Lucia Berlin, *Evening in Paradise*, London: Picador, 2018.

Thomas Bernhard, *Old Masters* (*Alte Meister*) [1989], trans. Ewald Osers, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (*L'Espace littéreaire*) [1955], trans. Ann Smock, London and Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933-1969*, trans J. L. Borges and Norman Thomas di Giovanni, New York: Dutton, 1978.

Jan Bryant, Jan Bryant, 'Play and Transformation (Constant Nieuwenhuys and the Situationists),' *Drain Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006). http://drainmag.com/ContentPLAY/Essay/Bryant.html
---*Art Making in the Age of Global Capitalism: Visual Practices, Philosophy, Politics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*, New York: Viking Press, 1978.

William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks* [1945], New York: Grove Press, 2008.

David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning*: *The Myth-functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

James Campbell, *This is the Beat Generation*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht*) [1960], trans. Carol Stewart, London: Gollancz, 1962.

Ulises Carrión, 'The New Art of Making Books,' *Kontexts*, No. 6-7, 1975. http://www.reflexionesmarginales.com/biblioteca/15/Documentos/Ulises_Carrion:The_New_Art_of_Making_Books.pdf

Jim Carroll, *The Petting Zoo*, New York: Viking, 2010.
--- *Fear of Dreaming*, New York, Penguin: 1993.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking* (*L'Invention du quotidien, II, habiter, cuisiner*) [1994], trans. Timothy Tomasik, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
--- *The Practice of Everyday Life* (*L'Invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire*) [1980], trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

Robert Cohen, 'Nonrational Discourse in a Work of Reason: Peter Weiss's Antifascist Novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*,' in *European Memories of the Second World War*, ed. Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara, Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 1999, pp.272-75.

Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire* [2008], trans. Alastair McEwen, London: Penguin, 2013.

Evan S. Conhell, *Mrs Bridge*, New York: Viking Press, 1959.

Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins,' *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), pp.41-57.

Rachel Cusk, *Saving Agnes* [1993], London: Faber and Faber, 2019.

Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*, New York and London: High Risk Books, 1995.

Guy Debord, 'Definitions,' *Internationale Situationniste*, Vol. 1 (June 1958). Translated by Ken Knabb. https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html

Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, trans. Mike Taormina, Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004.
--- *Proust and Signs* (*Proust et les signes*) [1964], trans. Richard Howard, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
--- 'Literature and Life' [1993], translated by Daniel Smith and Michael Greco, in *Critical Enquiry* (Winter, 1997), pp.225-230.
--- 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), pp.3-7.
--- *Bergosnism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York: Zone Books, 1991.
--- *The Logic of Sense* (*Logique du sens*) [1969], trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
--- *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (*Cinéma 2, L'Image-temps*) [1985], Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Capitalisme et schizophrénie: L'anti-Œdipe*) [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, London and New York: Continuum, 2004.
---*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Mille plateaux*) [1980], trans. Brian Massumi,

London and New York: Continuum, 2003.
---*What is Philosophy?* (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*) [1991], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
---*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (*Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*) [1975], trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
---*On the Line*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
---'What is a Minor Literature?' *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter/Spring, 1983), pp.13-33.

Don DeLillo, *Point Omega*, London: Picador, 2010.

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (*La Dissémination*) [1972], trans. Barbara Johnson, London: Athlone, 1981.

Annie Dillard, *Living by Fiction*, New York, Harper and Row, 1982.

Eugene Donato, 'The Museum's Furnace: Notes Toward a Contextual Reading of Bouvard and Pécuchet,' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josui V. Harari, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979, pp. 213-238.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], trans. Jessie Coulson, London: Penguin, 1972.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, New York: Vintage Classics, 1993.

Bob Dylan, *Blonde on Blonde*, Columbia, 1966.

Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Cinta Esmel-Pamies, 'Into the Politics of Museum Audience Research,' *[E]dition 5: Tate Encounters*. http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-5/Cinta-Esmel-Pamies-Into-the-Politics-of-Museum-Research.pdf

Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1985.

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell, Houndsmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
--- *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey, New York: Picador, 2003.
---'Of Other Spaces' ('Des Espace autres') [1967], trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, 1986, pp.22-7.
--- 'The Confession of the Flesh,' interview [1977], in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al., London: Pantheon, 1980.

Janet Frame, *Intensive Care* [1970], Auckland: Vintage, 2008.
--- *The Goose Bath: Poems*, Auckland: Random House, 2006.
--- *The Edge of the Alphabet*, Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1962.

R. W. Franklin (ed.), *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999.

Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

Jean-Luc Godard (dir.), *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à parte*), Columbia Pictures, 1964.

Patricia Grace, *Waiariki*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1975.

Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrommel*) [1959], trans. Ralph Manheim, London: Pantheon, 1989.

Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1995.
--- *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (*Chaosmose*), trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, New York, Semiotext(e), 1992.

David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Mary Hawthorne, 'Remembering Updike: The Gospel According to St John,' *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2009. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-the-gospel-according-to-john

Allen Hibbard (ed.), *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

Nathalie Heinich, 'The Pompidou Centre and its Public: The Limits of a Utopian Site,' in *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. Robert Lumley, London: Routledge, 1988, pp.199-212.

Dagmar Herzog, 'Desire's Politics: Félix Guattari and the Renewal of the Psychoanalytic Left,' *Psychoanalysis and History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp.7-36.

Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Vertigo*, Paramount, 1958.

Ruth Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*: *Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism*, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.

Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994.

John Hughes (dir.), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Paramount, 1988.

Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Henry James, *The Ambassadors* [1903]. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/432/432-h/432-h.htm
--- *The American* [1877], Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999.
--- *The Princess Casamassima*, *Volume 2*, London and New York: Macmillan, 1886.

Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005.
---*Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005.

James Joyce, *Ulysses* [1922], New York: Vintage 1986.

David Kamp, 'The King of New York,' *Vanity Fair*, March 19, 2013. https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2013/04/king-tut-exhibit-new-york

Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Volume 1*, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Jutta Koether, *f* [1987], Berlin: Sternberg, 2014.

Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (eds. and trans.), *Henri Lefebvre: Writings on Cities*, Oxford, UK, and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (*Nouvelles maladies de l'ame*) [1993], trans. Ross Mitchell Guberman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Olivia Laing, *Crudo*, London: Picador, 2018.

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Never Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Ursula Le Guin, *Rocannon's World*, New York: Ace Books, 1966.
---'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' [1986] in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, New York: Grove Press, 1989.

Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.* (*A paixão Segundo G. H.*) [1964], New York: New Directions, 2012.

Sylvère Lotringer and David Morris (eds.), *Schizo-culture: The Event*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2013.

Robert Lumley (ed.), *The Museum Time Machine*, London: Routledge, 1988.

Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (*Economie libidinale*) [1974], trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Athlone Press, 1993.
--- *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (*L'Inhuman: Causeries sur le temps*) [1988], trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, Oxford: Polity, 1991.

Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, London: Polity, 2012.

Thomas Mann, *Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (*Bekenntuisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*) [1954], London: Penguin, 1958.

Robyn Marasco, 'It's all About the Benjamins: Considerations on the Gambler as a Political Type,' *New German Critique* Vol. 133, Col. 45, No. 1 (February, 2018), pp.1-22.

Chris Marker, 'A Free Replay: Notes on Vertigo.' https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker/a-free-replay-notes-on-vertigo/
--- (dir.), *Sans Soleil*, Argos Films, 1983.
--- (dir.), *La Jetée*, Argos Films, 1962.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, Chapter 1. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm

Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, New York: Random House, 2018.

Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* [1958], London: Vintage, 1999.

Vladimir Nabokov, 'The Visit to the Museum,' in *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, London: Penguin, 1973.

Antoni Negri, *Time for Revolution* (*La consituzione del tempo*), trans. Matteo Mandarini, London: Continuum, 2004.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *Abattoir Blues / The Lyre of Orpheus*, Mute, 2004.

Constant Nieuwenhuys, *New Babylon*, 1972, n.p. http://www.notbored.org/new-babylon.html

Palace Brothers, *Days in the Wake*, Drag City, 1994.

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Reality of the Virtual: Bergson and Deleuze,' *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 120, No. 5 (December, 2005), 1112-1127.

Robert Phelps (ed.), *The Collected Stories of Colette*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982.

John Puhiatau Pule, *The Bond of Time: An Epic Love Poem* (1985), Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2014.

Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (*Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique d'art*) [2011], trans. Zakir Paul, London: Verso, 2019.
--- *The Lost Thread: The Democracy of Modern Fiction* (*Le Fil perdu: Essais sur la fiction modern*) [2014], trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
--- 'Skopje: Time, Narrative, and Politics,' trans. Drew S. Burk, *Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2015), pp.7-18.
--- 'The Politics of Fiction,' lecture given at the Jackman Humanities Institute, University of Toronto, September 27, 2013.
--- *The Emancipated Spectator* (*Le Spectateur émancipé*) [2008], trans. Gregory Elliot, London: Verso, 2011.
--- *The Politics of Literature* (*Politique de la littérature*) [2006], trans. Julie Rose, Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity, 2011.
--- *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Continuum, 2010.
--- *Hatred of Democracy* (*La Haine de la démocratie*) [2005], trans. Stephen Corcoran, London: Verso, 2009.
--- *The Politics of Aesthetics* (*Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*) [2000], trans. Gabriel

Rockhill, London: Continuum, 2006.
--- *Flesh of the Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
--- 'Ten Theses on Politics,' in *Theory and Event*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2001). Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/tae.2001.0028.
--- *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (*La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie*) [1995], trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Albert Refiti, 'Woven Flesh,' *Interstices Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, No. 6, 2005, p.53-39.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies: The Sonnets to Orpheus*, ed., trans. Stephen Mitchell, New York: Vintage, 2009.

Irit Rogoff, unpublished lecture, Monash University, Melbourne, March 1, 2018.

Avital Ronell, *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

Michael A. Rosenthal, 'Benjamin's Wager on Modernity: Gambling and the *Arcades Project*,' *New German Review*, Vol. 87 (2012), pp.261-78.

Ken Russell (dir.), *Savage Messiah*, Russ-Arts, 1972.

J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, London: Penguin, 1958.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* [1938], London: Penguin, 1975.

Martin Scorsese (dir.), *Taxi Driver*, Columbia Pictures, 1976.

Minnie Scott and Renate Miller, 'Tools to Understand: An Evaluation of the Interpretation Material Used in Tate Modern's Rothko Exhibition,' *Tate Papers*, No.11 (Spring, 2009). https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/11/tools-to-understand-an-evaluation-of-the-interpretation-material-used-in-tate-moderns-rothko-exhibition

W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001.

Michel Serres, *Genesis* (*Genèse*) [1982], trans. Geneviève James and James Nelson, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1995.

Belamohan Shingade, 'Gulabi,' *Hamster*, Issue Ono, 2020, pp.4-7.

Howard Slater, *Anomie/Bonhomie and Other Writings*, London: Mute, 2012.

The Smiths, *Hatful of Hollow*, Rough Trade, 1984.
---*The Queen is Dead*, Rough Trade, 1986.

Robert Smithson (dir.), *The Spiral Jetty*, 28 minutes, colour, 1970.

Bernard Stiegler, 'Retourner le confinement en liberté de faire une experience,' *Le Monde*, April 19, 2020.
--- *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century* (*États de choc: Betise et savoir au XXIé siècle*) [2012], trans. Daniel Ross, London: Polity, 2015.
--- *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* (*Ce qui fait la vie vaut la peine d'être vécue*) [2010], trans. Daniel Ross, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
--- *Acting Out* (*Passer à l'acte*) [2003], trans. David Bariston, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2009.
--- *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (*La Technique et le temps: Tome 1, La faute d'Epiméthée*) [1994], trans. George Collins and Richard Beardsworth, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, 'Transindividuation,' *e-flux journal*, Vol. 14 (March, 2010). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/

Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013.
--- *The Secret History* [1992], Melbourne: Penguin, 2008.

Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (*Introduction à la literature fantastique*) [1970], trans. Richard Howard, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975.

James Tuttleton, 'Edith Wharton: The Archaeological Motive,' in *Vital Signs: Essays on American Literature and Criticism*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2008.

Leonid Tsypkin, *Summer in Baden Baden* [1981], London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005.

John Updike, *Picked Up Pieces*, New York: Knopf, 1976.
--- 'Museums and Women,' in *Museums and Women and Other Stories*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1973.

Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion, 1989.

Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (*Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*), *Volume 1* [1975], trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* [1920], New York: Macmillan, 1986.

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Harmondsworth, UK, and New York: Penguin, 1945.

W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats, Vol. 8: Discoveries, Edmund Spenser, Poetry and Tradition, and Other Essays*, London: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1908.