

## Place Exploration #1: For the Love of Place

This exploration is an attempt to untangle the knot of *place*. Place is a topic that spans many disciplines from urban studies and human geography to media studies and philosophy. The word invokes a human sense above and beyond mere physical space or mere social space for that matter. However, physicality is important to the idea of place; place represents a union of a material surface with an immaterial essence.

Each place is unitary and unique. Its emergences, disappearances, and functions in human life, have been the topics of many commentaries going back many decades. However, its high degree of contextuality and complexity has made it difficult to offer much more than “sketches of the same landscape”<sup>1</sup>. Owing to the interdisciplinarity and broad scope place has taken on as a topic of discourse, it is doubtful that anything more than “sketches” can be offered. In many ways, the puzzle of place is the puzzle of human *being*.

Despite the magnitude of this challenge, this essay will attempt to create a more formal theory of place. This is an admittedly bold project which can only be partially completed within the scope of this exploration. The hope is that the struggle to understand place in such a way can provoke others to clarify their own understandings of place.

The theory of place starts with the philosophical notion of place as “integral to the very structure and possibility of experience”<sup>2</sup>. From this kernel of an idea, Jeff Malpas allows his understanding of place to flower compellingly, in his influential book *Place and Experience*. The ideas of other great thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (New York: Routledge, 2018), 212.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 31.

Arendt, Peter Sloterdijk, Sigmund Freud, and others are ever-present and recognizable in this exploration. However, as much as they have inspired what follows, the attempt to synthesize these ideas necessarily requires deviations from their original contexts and, therefore, from their original meanings.

## The Structure of Place

“The world begins in place, but so too do we”<sup>3</sup>. Place is the structure within which Identity and World open up to each other. Place exists in *immanent* and *particular* varieties. *Place-of-immanence* is the ground of awareness, and a *place-in-particular* is a specific locality that accommodates and constitutes continuity of identity across generations. They represent two poles, or directions, of a nested, or fractal, structure, with the superstructure of place-in-particular appearing to proceed, and supervene on, the substructure of place-of-immanence. The commonly referred to ‘*sense of place*’ pertains predominantly to the ‘disclosedness’ of place-in-particular.

On the outer dimensions of the platial structure is the Identity–World interaction, and on inner–most dimension of the platial structure is the I–Existence interaction. That is to say that the Identity–World interaction supervenes on the I–Existence interaction: at the very least I exist; it is even better when I am a person who belongs to a World with others. Place is the dynamic structure within which the former can produce the latter, and the latter permits access to the former. This is what it means to say that place is the structure within which Identity and World open up to each other.

As we traverse the structure from place-of-immanence to place-in-particular, place becomes more material and involves the participation of a greater number of people. Malpas writes that “Places can be objects of experience (...) but place is also that within which and out of which experience arises”<sup>4</sup>. This is why we have conveniently separated the two ideas of place into place-in-particular and place-of-immanence, respectively. As we will discuss, *the platial structure is a cognitive system of reference which produces interiors and*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 203

*exteriors to manage cognitive load, and ‘sets’ (as in ‘setting’) human memory.*

Although place, at any level, is a place in the awareness of a single individual, the further out one traverses the structure of place the more people are involved in its creation and maintenance. As such, whereas a sense of ‘I’ is always at the very centre of a place-of-immanence, an individual’s identity may find itself on the periphery of a place-in-particular which it co-constitutes. What this means is that the Identity of a place-in-particular is the emergent process-structure of the differentiation and integration of more than one individual’s identity. In other words, that Identity is intersubjective.

Hopefully, this structure will become increasingly clear in the following sections. Note, however, that even when alone one is with others; an integrated individual is always ‘someplace’. “No human life”, wrote Arendt, “not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 38.

## The Trialectic of Place

“This is our constant problem – how to live with people and remain free, how to live with things and remain independent”  
– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

The three primary aspects of the ‘human situation’ are: *Self*, *Other*, and *Object*.

Self refers to those aspects of awareness that are internal to the individual, including ideas, representations, and impressions. Other refers to those aspects that are transcendent to immediate awareness yet are approachable by the individual through that awareness, such as is recognized in the confrontation with another individual – who can never fully be known or internally represented<sup>6</sup>. Object refers to those aspects of awareness that are independent of individual intentions, such as furniture, walls, rocks, markings, smells, sounds, and other fixed or dynamic features of the environment.

Self and Identity are often used interchangeably, but here Identity refers to something that Self continually negotiates with Others and Objects. Identity can be understood as the memory of Self’s interactions with Others and Objects. Or we might say that, in the hierarchy of place, each preceding instance of Identity is the proceeding condition of Self.

The three aspects are distinct yet inseparable: Other is that which calls Self into question in a constitutive way (the Other makes one more than just Self-aware); Self cannot exist without the Object of the

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<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969)

body; and Self can only access Other through the Object of expressed language.

The three core sense modalities, or intentional dimensions, are: *experience*, *subjectivity*, and *objectivity*. The former two are often used interchangeably but are here differentiated for the purposes of disambiguating the concept of place.

Experience is the recognition of phenomena appearing in a field of awareness. Experience is that which is immanent to Self. Experience represents the relation of Self to Object.

Subjectivity is the recognition that ‘my’ field of awareness (perspective) is a unique one, distinct from possible others. ‘Distinct from’ implies ‘in relation to’, therefore, subjectivity is always already an *intersubjectivity*. Samuel Ijessling suggests that “Subjectivities come about in one’s being spoken to by others and in speaking to others”<sup>7</sup>. As such, “individuals are subjects only to the extent that they are partners in a divided and assigned subjectivity”<sup>8</sup>, to borrow Sloterdijk’s words. Subjectivity represents the relation of Self to Other.

Objectivity is the recognition that a particular range of phenomena that appear in ‘my’ field of awareness may also appear within those of others, and thus is independent to Self. Objectivity represents the relation of Other to Object.

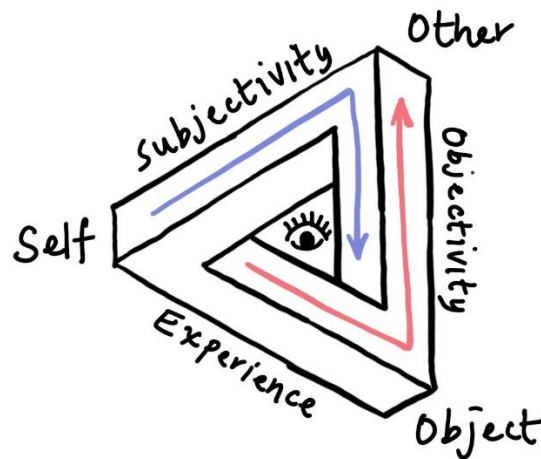
The three core sense modalities, representing three relations among the three primary aspects of the human situation, form the *mobius triangle of place* or *trialectic of place* (see Figure 1). Place is described as a ‘mobius triangle’ owing to its irreducible complexity which stems from what seems a paradox: the sense that one cannotprehend Other

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Ijessling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Contact: An Historical Survey*, trans. Paul Dunphy (Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 132.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres Volume I: Microspherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: The MIT Press, 2011) 85.

without Object *and* that one cannotprehend Object without Other. To elaborate: I must first sense that there are phenomena external to Self to sense that there are other perspectives, yet it also seems that I must first sense that there are perspectives other than Self to sense that there is an external world<sup>9</sup>. Place (including the spatiotemporal unfolding thereof) involves this complex “triangulation”<sup>10</sup> of Reality into a World, which is a process of both creation and discovery.



*Figure 1: The Trialectic of Place*

To put the triad into familiar context: consider that no hometown can persist in identity without its familiar rhythms featuring familiar people and familiar environments, even as those things inevitably change with time.

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<sup>9</sup> This question of which comes first, Ontology or Ethics, is highly contested in Philosophy and is also explored in Developmental Psychology.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001)

## The Co-Inspiration of Place

‘Non-place’ or ‘placelessness’ can be properly understood in relation to place-in-particular. A non-place is ‘no place in particular’, it is a space that cannot be defined as being “concerned with identity”<sup>11</sup>. A non-place is a locality where the process by which place-of-immanence becomes place-in-particular is disrupted or precluded.

This process – whereby place-of-immanence becomes place-in-particular – is called *co-inspiration*. It represents the spatiotemporal unfolding of place. An ‘authentic’ place can be understood as a place-in-particular which has matured (been co-inspired) without succumbing to major disruption (discontinuity). Co-inspiration describes the fact that place-in-particular emerges within an *embodied, material, intersubjective* context, requiring the rhythmic interplay of all three modalities and all three aspects. Co-inspiration is a metapsychology which produces ontologies, a process which produces dwellings, an ontogenesis.

Object is not passive in this trialectical process. Different environments have different social affordances, i.e., they influence how and when Self has access to Other. These environments and the technologies in them conceal and reveal, permit and restrict, include and exclude, in dynamic and decisive ways. Nor is a place-in-particular simply its material affordances. The presence of others is fundamental to the sense of place. The social possibilities arising merely from our copresence and colocation are inexhaustible in their combinatorial and choral reach, as our endless histories and stories will attest. Hence, Malpas describes place as broadly as “the very medium of our lives; that which supports us, that within which we

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<sup>11</sup> Marc Auge, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995) 84.



encounter one another, and that which gives us space in which to move and time for such movement”<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 132.

## Place as the Extension of Life

“It was but yesterday I thought myself a fragment quivering without  
rhythm in the sphere of life.

Now I know that I am the sphere, and all life in rhythmic fragments  
moves within me”

– Kahlil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*

Places-in-particular are often described as having “agentic qualities”<sup>13</sup>. “Places serve not merely as the settings for our lives”, writes Janet Donohoe, “but as participants, as vibrant living aspects of memory, traditions, history, and meaning”<sup>14</sup>. The extent to which ‘life’ is acknowledged as always having been a metaphor is the extent to which any place-in-particular can be considered as ‘living’.

A place-in-particular is a *living symbol*: ‘living’ in the sense that it features vital rhythms which help identify and sustain it, and a ‘symbol’ in the sense that only its initiates (active constituents) can understand its deepest meaning. The necessary semi-exclusiveness of place is a feature of much ambivalence of opinion, especially in a society that emphasizes both ‘inclusion’ *and* ‘community empowerment’ in its discourse (see Figure 2). A place-in-particular must be continuously re-membered, re-collected, re-inspired, that is, reproduced, even as it changes with each reproduction. It features some limited capacity to absorb changes before it denatures or alters its identifiable meanings and affordances.

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<sup>13</sup> Joan Ferrante-Wallace, *Places That Matter: Knowing Your Neighborhood Through Data* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship Between Memory and Place* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 5.



*Figure 2: “People who live here can work here… Dufferin and Bloor is for everyone”. This poster found in the Dufferin Grove neighbourhood, Toronto, seems to express the owner's desire to have their cake and eat it too. Perhaps you can have it all in the big city.*

As giving birth to a ‘living’ entity, the co-inspiration of place, therefore, occurs within a bounded context within which complexification (differentiation and integration) can occur. Note that this *boundedness* of place acts as an ‘enabling constraint’ which “allows the entry into the *unboundedness* of the world”<sup>15</sup>. It is a semi-permeable boundary that ‘gathers up’ social space, giving it its semiotic verticality, whether that boundary is physical or mostly symbolic. The unboundedness of the world – represented by *Infinity* – is irreducible within any one system or Self; it is only approached via the vital triad of Self, Other, and Object. No life can exist without a semi-permeable boundary which contains and supports its vital cycles, and through which it processes the ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ of the vast exterior world.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 209.

## Places as Semi-Virtual Reality Machines

To understand the seeming paradox of boundedness giving access to boundlessness, consider the following analogy, greatly inspired by Sloterdijk's Spherology.

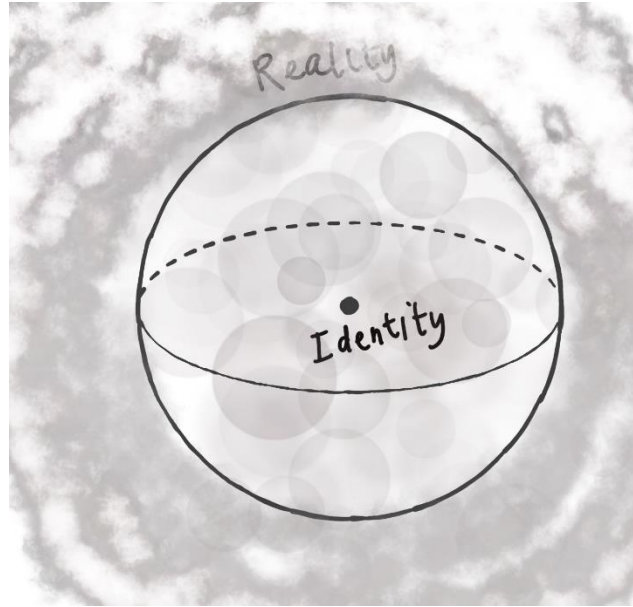
A place is a translucent sphere with an Identity at its centre, and Reality outside it (see Figure 3). The holographic projection of Reality onto the surface of the sphere is a World. This World is like a 'reality horizon'. In this way, place is the interface between the finite and the infinite; it is in-finite. It constitutes an interface for that which cannot be completely grasped from any perspective. The finite interior 'opens up' to an infinite exterior. The membrane of place acts as a surface for the semiotic capture which place performs, thereby preventing semiotic overload or starvation (meaninglessness). Signifiers and signals are emplaced into *constellations of meaning*. To alter the metaphor just a bit: we might say that the process of place constantly writes and edits a World on the interior, using some ink from the exterior.

The sphere of our analogy is inflated and maintained through various types of social activity featuring the trialectic. The interior of this sphere is not static but is itself a dynamic, 'foamy' interior, as people continue to cycle and alter their social situations. In fact, Reality is not necessarily Reality but simply a map of places beyond, as viewed from place.

Although I create this sphere with others, the aspect of the absolute Other always lies outside this abstract sphere, because, like Reality, the absolute Other is never fully reducible only approachable. Place is, therefore, also an interface with the absolute Other which helps inspire it, even if that absolute Other is an imagined being.

*The interface of place thus enables choice despite the overwhelming irreducibility of Reality.* As Sloterdijk summarizes it: "there is more space than be taken possession of, shaped, wished away or denied.

Because this is the case, humans are condemned to the production of interiors”<sup>16</sup>.



*Figure 3: Visual representation of the 'world interior' of place*

If co-inspiration of place sounds like some form of pre-Enlightenment folk religiosity, consider that, without this ‘opium of the people’, literal opiates are often used as a substitute. Place offers neither a womb (Latin ‘matrix’) nor a vacuum, but an organic medium of agency relating interior with exterior. The figure of Jean-Michel Basquiat epitomizes this struggle to create a membrane in the delirious metropolis. The “human soul”, writes Byung-Chul Han, “claims a certain impermeability. Total illumination would scorch it and cause a kind of *spiritual burnout*”<sup>17</sup>. Place is translucent for this reason. In one interpretation of the life of Basquiat: unable to weather the semiotic and sensory overload of New York City, Basquiat turned to heroin

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Foams: Spheres Volume III: Plural Spherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: The MIT Press, 2016) 365.

<sup>17</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3.

which ultimately killed him. The people he depicts in his art are often stripped bare of skin or flesh, defenseless against the chaos of the city. His work *Jesse* (1983) clearly depicts a failed membrane. In the 1986 piece entitled *Nod*, dedicated to the author William Burroughs, the membrane is filled in with white; it is opaque. “Nod probably refers to the semi-conscious state of a user after taking heroin” writes Eric Fretz<sup>18</sup>, an understanding shared by others, especially considering that the two artists openly struggled with heroin addiction.

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Fretz, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 166.

## The Shimmer of Place

As we suggested, place gives a sense of *extended interiority*. At any level of the platial structure, at any given time, there is a sense in which what is interior is felt to be occurring in serial while what is exterior is felt to be occurring in parallel. The so-called ‘stream of consciousness’ within a place-of-immanence most attests to this experience, where phenomena sequentially arise in awareness. *Interior is associated with serial, and exteriors are associated with parallel*. As such, places-in-particular develop their own memories or histories in relation to each other.

In many ways, by peering deeper into the workings of the cosmos, physicists simultaneously peer deeper the workings of the human mind. Physics takes mind to one of its extremes. Can this explain the effectiveness with which the ‘Many Worlds’ hypothesis has captured the human imagination, newly resurgent but going back thousands of years? Here too, exterior Worlds run in parallel to our own World ‘simulation’.

The *sense of place* may partially refer to what Walter Benjamin calls an “aura”. From this aura stems its “cult value”<sup>19</sup>. We previously discussed this cult value as the private and vital meanings a place-in-particular takes on for its initiates, and which evokes a sense authenticity and belonging. The aura of a place-in-particular is internal, or *essential*, to it. When that aura finds external representation, it is called “buzz”<sup>20</sup>. From this buzz stems a place-in-particular’s “exhibition value”<sup>21</sup>. Attempts to reterritorialize that which produces aura often fail. This is because place is highly contextual,

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> “Buzz” is a term used by Daniel Silver and Terry Clark (see note 24). They define it as “the symbols and signals circulating around a scene [place-in-particular], the message that something is happening here”. The term, as used above, is adapted to the platial structure discussed in this paper, to represent the exteriorization of aura.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*.

relational, and contingent. Therefore, to “pry [its components] from its shell” is “to destroy its aura”<sup>22</sup>, is to kill it.

Buzz may attract unwanted attention, such as excessive influx of tourists, capital, or new inhabitants. As previously suggested, any place-in-particular has a limited absorptive capacity before it ‘denatures’. As such, Sloterdijk suggests that the “primary risk encountered by the most flourishing commune [place-in-particular] is that of falling prey to its own prosperity”<sup>23</sup>. Daniel Silver and Terry Clark describe how, “as the value of buzz has generally increased, conflicts over controlling its production, distribution, and consumption are reshaping city politics”<sup>24</sup>. In the ‘Age of Digital Reproducibility’, places-in-particular are more vulnerable than ever before. Yet, there are also more opportunities for their self-inspiration; that is, for the buzz of a place-in-particular to reverberate back from external places and give it continued flourishing. Either way, all places must sustain themselves within a larger ecosystem.

The complexity of place – the dynamic interdependence of its aspects, out of which an Identity and World emerge – represents an “indeterminacy”. Malpas refers to this indeterminacy as its “iridescence”; the “character of place” is “multiple” and “shifting”, akin to the shimmering facets of a cut gem<sup>25</sup>. Only one of its faces is illuminated at any given time, from any given perspective. What was foregrounded is now backgrounded and vice versa. He attributes this insight – that revealing re-veils – to Martin Heidegger.

This iridescence is the aurora borealis on the boundary of place where aura and buzz transmute. Aura, iridescence, and buzz refer to the sense that *each part points to an emergent whole which always*

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 229.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 249.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Aaron Silver and Terry Clark, *Scenescapes: How Qualities of Place Shape Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 311.

<sup>25</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 56.



*escapes complete representation.* The ‘marginal figure’ is best poised to appreciate this iridescence, as they are a kind of ‘loose part’, they are involved but not so involved that they cannot appreciate a place-in-particular’s greater significance or its ungraspable mystery. Hence, they are well-poised to *exploit* or *imploit* the aura of a place-in-particular, depending on their temperament and disposition.

The difficulty with places is that the closer they are to the place-of-immanence the more they have a sought of Heisenbergian uncertainty about them. When someone asks you what you are *currently thinking* (or experiencing) the only meaningful answer is to try to explain what you *were thinking before* they asked. In a sense, something essential is lost in foregrounding the background in this way, in disrupting the continuity. It is often the case that a third party’s mere presence changes the dynamic between two people, and so on. Ethnographers are trained to navigate this difficulty, others not so much. If the iridescence of place represents the superposition of possible states, then the presence of one-too-many ‘outsiders’ is like Schrodinger opening the box to collapse the wave function on his cat. What made the box interesting in the first place – its shimmering indeterminacy – is no more; the cat is either found alive or dead.

Tourists, for example, have this effect in their not ‘fitting in’; the sight of their gaze foregrounds what was backgrounded by habit, or does so in a manner that is out of rhythm with its traditional schedule or mode of foregrounding. As such, they threaten to ‘turn the place inside-out’, leaving all exposed (they are unintentional *positivists*). In Heisenbergian terms, this means finding the cat dead. In the best of cases, tourists are integrated into the place-in-particular’s vital rhythms. In Heisenbergian terms, this means finding the cat alive. Either way, like the team that enters the Shimmer in the 2018 movie *Annihilation*, they become tangled in it, altering both it and them. What is the shimmer other than the dancing translucence of place?

## Places as Spaces of Ensoulment

“Place is not simply the setting for our lives, it is constructive of the character of our lives”<sup>26</sup>, writes Donohoe. The co-inspiration of place is a path-dependent process featuring material-symbolic manipulations, and, thereby, the enculturation or *ensoulment* of individuals in relation to each other and their environments. Places are *spaces of ensoulment*. A *soul* can be understood as a habit of mind, or a mental life, i.e., an Identity. Places-in-particular (which are themselves dynamic) orchestrate, and are constituted by, all forms of social activity. The orchestration of social activities is a form of soulcraft. As such, places-in-particular are often described as “humanized and humanizing”<sup>27</sup>, as long as they appreciate the ‘human scale’.

A place-in-particular is a space ‘carved out’ of its surroundings by the interactions and cultivation of the people who in-habit it. Thereby, it becomes something akin to a metaphysically enclosed, communal mind-body. In the best of cases, its rhythm of life brings its members into relation while preserving, or even enabling, their innermost autonomy as individuals. However, remember that “place is always intersubjective”<sup>28</sup>, and that everything humans “come into contact with turns immediately into a condition of human existence”<sup>29</sup>. Each human is entangled with existence, but this need not preclude human choice.

Contemplate the two meanings of the word ‘temple’, which comes from the Greek *templum* meaning “sacred enclosure”, related to *temnien* meaning “to cut”. The ‘carved out’ spatial enclosure which is the place-in-particular ‘thinks’ its members: places-in-particular “influence and canalize behaviour and remind people of learned

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<sup>26</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 133.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 195.

<sup>28</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27.

interpretations”<sup>30</sup>. Thus is the power of architectural forms and emplaced symbols. “Architecture has never been idle”, reminds Benjamin; it is a “living force”<sup>31</sup>. Donohoe notes that “the more memory of place, the more our body can move through the place without our attentiveness”<sup>32</sup>. As such, a place-in-particular reduces the cognitive loads of its members by representing a relatively stable part of existence within which to act.

There are various ways to express and explore the ways in which humans are entangled in, or extended into, the rest of existence. What is generally agreed on is that humans form meaningful attachments to other people, environments, and things – shaping them into symbolic assemblages that are named and cherished. These assemblages we call places are where biographies meet histories, allowing individuals to ‘locate’ themselves and their roles in the “World Theatre which opens up to heaven”<sup>33</sup>. A place-in-particular is the ‘village’ it takes to raise (ensoul) a child. Separation from these places can be anything from liberating to traumatic.

‘Haunted’ places dramatically attest to the process by which place and Identity imply each other. Daphne Du Maurier’s most famous novel *Rebecca* (1938) is named after a character who never actually appears in the novel; she is never present, yet she is a constant presence in the novel. Nothing supernatural is involved, but her ‘soul’ is kept alive in the mind-body of Manderley, a fictional estate inspired by the author’s Cornish home named Menabilly. In an afterword to the novel, Sally Beaman describes how the novel reflects Du Maurier’s struggle to create her own identity, and that this existential project was tied to

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<sup>30</sup> Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 80.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 246.

<sup>32</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 125.

the place-in-particular of Menabilly – which “lit her imagination and obsessed her”<sup>34</sup>.

At the beginning of the novel the nameless protagonist reminisces over her life at Manderley, a story which will be told in the following chapters: “hushed and still, I could swear that the house was not an empty shell but lived and breathed as it has lived before”<sup>35</sup>. The protagonist is the new, young wife of the recently widowed owner of Manderley. She remains nameless for the entire novel. In contradistinction, Rebecca, the deceased, former wife, is strongly present, her name sounding from lips, appearing on letterheads, and her initials embroidered on handkerchiefs. Rebecca is a novel about a woman who lived so fully, making her indelible mark on the people (and dogs) and environments of Manderley, that, even in death, she continues to overwhelm the protagonist – who struggles to adapt to an *alienworld* of British aristocracy in the Cornish countryside, and Manderley in particular.

Rebecca was “such a personality”<sup>36</sup>, revered for how effectively and distinctly she transformed and orchestrated social life at Manderley and its surrounding domain. Rebecca becomes like a local deity of the place-in-particular of Manderley, so powerful is her association with its Identity. “In the morning room, in the hall, even in the little flower room. I feel her everywhere. You do too, don’t you?”<sup>37</sup>, asks Rebecca’s loyal lady’s maid to the new mistress of the house. “She’s still the mistress here, even if she is dead”<sup>38</sup>. To become someone, to earn a name, the protagonist must reckon with the living traditions of this place-in-particular and the deceased woman who helped set them into motion. She must fight for a soul of her own.

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<sup>34</sup> Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, afterword Sally Beauman (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002 [1938]), 490.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

The elementary insight of the alchemists is soulcraft through the manipulation of materials. The creation of soul happens through soul's creation of social goods, faithful to its desires and abilities. The shimmer of the artwork is the recognition of the mysterious artist behind the object. Ancient artefacts fascinate because they immediately presence the indeterminate Other who created it, in a way that mechanical reproduction and familiarity do not. The artefact bears an iridescence when it alludes to the life of which it was a meaningful part or product. The soul's irreducible alterity is glimpsed in its features and setting.

In *Rebecca*, the nameless protagonist becomes obsessed with Rebecca because she (protagonist) lacks knowledge about her (Rebecca's) and because of her (Rebecca's) strong influence on almost every being and everything she encountered. The protagonist recognizes a shimmer about Rebecca's arrangements, for example, in her bedroom:

*“This was a woman's room, graceful, fragile, the room of someone who had chosen every particle of furniture with great care, so that each chair, each vase, each small, infinitesimal thing should be **in harmony with one another, and with her own personality** (...) There was no intermingling of style, no confusion of period, and the result was perfection in a strange and startling way, not coldly formal like the drawing room shown to the public, but **vividly alive**, having something of the same **glow and brilliance** that the rhododendrons had, massed there, beneath the window”*<sup>39</sup> [emphasis added].

The protagonist would later learn that these rhododendrons were cultivated by Rebecca herself, bearing the distinctive red that reflected the passion with which she lived. The semantic unity of the room described bears 'Rebecca's' iridescence as witnessed by a woman burning with curiosity about who and what took place here. It

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 100.

is only when she satisfies this curiosity that Rebecca's "power (···) dissolved into air"<sup>40</sup>, and she could go about making changes to Manderley in her image, albeit with some resistance from the people who remained loyal to Rebecca.

In Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1921 novel *We*, the totalitarian One State, of our distant future, rules over a city literally made of glass. Other than on Sex Days, when the blinds are lowered for a short period of time, "we live in full view, permanently awash in light, among our transparent walls (···) We have nothing to hide from one another"<sup>41</sup>. Thus writes the protagonist D-503, who, throughout the novel, exhibits signs of autism. The novel depicts *The Transparency Society*<sup>42</sup> in its horrifying totalitarian form. The "ciphers" (people) of this society consider "souls" to be absurd phenomena of a bygone era. Contemplating what we 'Ancients' would call apartments, D-503 writes: "It's possible that it was exactly those strange nontransparent habitations of the Ancients that gave rise to that sorry cellular mentality of theirs"<sup>43</sup>.

Souls, imagination, dreams and the like are repeatedly referred to as incurable illnesses or symptoms thereof. The glass architecture – the social medium of transparency with the minimal semblance of interior and exterior – is simply not conducive to ensoulment, and even hostile to it. As Hannah Arendt remarked, "there are a great many things which cannot withstand the implacable, bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene"<sup>44</sup>. It is only when D-503 has an intimate moment with a dissident femme fatale named I-330, in a 'nontransparent habitation' outside the city which was preserved as a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>41</sup> Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Natasha S. Randall (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*,

<sup>43</sup> Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 64.

museum, that he “developed a soul”. This soul is a thing that causes him great suffering and ambivalence but which he ultimately considers precious. A human without a soul is a fragile being; it just takes one encounter with the seductive I-330 (Other) in the ancient apartment (Object) for D-503 to stumble onto one. The novel follows the struggle for that soul’s determination and existence in an artifice and socio-political order hostile to souls.

## The Desire for Place

“Where are we really going? Always home.”

– Novalis

The *desire for place* is an insatiable, human-existential desire for a stable but developing sense of Identity, along with its mutually interdependent sense of belonging to an open and enduring World. Place-in-particular allows Worlds to endure by “providing pathways of transference across generations”<sup>45</sup> thereby transcending a single human life. “Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible”<sup>46</sup>. The enduring, intersubjective Identity of place-in-particular imbues worldly pursuits with meaning. We can call this desire for place *Eros*.

Sigmund Freud defined Eros as “the drive to preserve the living substance and bring it together in ever larger units”<sup>47</sup>. It is the ‘life instinct’ which transcends the merely biological into the psychosocial. Because Eros represents a longing, it also represents a lack. It is “sweetbitter” in that it seduces one to no destination<sup>48</sup>. Eros is like an upward spiral perpetually seeking ever greater closure.

The “never-ceasing flux around us” means that meaning must constantly be pursued, by ‘freezing’ the fleeting forms of space and time<sup>49</sup>. Although insatiable, this journey can ultimately be humanizing, as, with these ‘frozen’ forms, we can practice the most basic and most

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<sup>45</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 50.

<sup>48</sup> Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)

<sup>49</sup> Barbara Tversky, *Mind In Motion: How Action Shapes Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 5.



satisfyingly human function of *collective intentionality*<sup>50</sup>. We ‘collectively effervesce’ and bond when we join in common purpose. We become discontented to the extent that we end up in a situation where the frozen forms have overstayed their welcome and we begin serving them rather than the other way around.

Eros is a “triangular desire”<sup>51</sup> or “triangular circuit”<sup>52</sup> or “triangular provocation”<sup>53</sup>, as various authors have described it. The ‘drive’ of Eros is instantiated by traversing the mobius triangle of place. Even if, on the micro level, all interactions between Self and Other must seem to pass through Object (experiences of face, body, language, etc.), at least on the macro level, Self-Other interactions can be considered more, or less, direct. That is, the orientation of Eros toward either Other (or Object) can be more, or less, direct.

If only for notational purposes, we can consider the Self-Other-Object direction of traversal the *feminine erotic drive* and the Self-Object-Other direction of traversal the *masculine erotic drive*<sup>54</sup>. The feminine erotic drive gives place much of its sense of *spatiality* while the masculine erotic drive gives place much of its sense of *temporality*. The former ‘creates space’ and the latter ‘drives time’. If the masculine is the drive to *transcend*, then the feminine is the drive to *include*. The two represent orthogonal movements in the upward spiral of Eros and, thus, the co-inspiration of place. We can call the masculine drive *Object-oriented* and the feminine drive *Other-oriented*.

Complexification involves *differentiation* and *integration*. If, as Malpas suggests, “Places are internally differentiated and interconnected in

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Tomasello, *Becoming Human: A Theory of Ontogeny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019)

<sup>51</sup> René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965).

<sup>52</sup> Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 127.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 379.

<sup>54</sup> It goes without saying that, although this notation is inspired by sexual correlates which cannot be discussed here, neither drive is exclusive to any particular gender expression.

terms of the elements that appear within them”<sup>55</sup>, it is because, as Freud suggests, “Eros pursues the goal of maximizing the complexity of life”<sup>56</sup>. In the life of place, the masculine effects *variation* or *differentiation* while the feminine effects *memory* or *integration*. Together, they effect evolution or vital development. Note, however, that memory is not passive, but a relatively active process of manipulation toward synthesis. As such, Martina Löw suggests that the generation of place requires two processes: the first involves “building, deploying, positioning”, while the second involves “perception, imagination, or remembering in which social goods and people are integrated”<sup>57</sup>. We can describe the former as *action* or *doing*, and the latter as *perception* or *being*, both pairs of which are *expressive* in their own ways, and which together effect *living* and *becoming*, respectively. The dual processes recognizes that changes must be socially-functionally integrated to maintain the ‘unity of place’. For example, after a house is built, it is ‘warmed’ through ceremony (e.g., ‘housewarming’) until it becomes a home, and this ‘warming’ must generally continue over time with various social rituals.

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<sup>55</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 130.

<sup>57</sup> Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 258. She refers to the first as “spacing” and the second as “synthesis”.

## The Dimensions of Place

The sense of spatiality is the *perception of the possibility of action* (embodied), while the sense of temporality is the *change in perception through action* (mental). The two are functionally linked within the Identity–World (and I–Existence) interaction, and often seem to represent a trade-off within awareness. The most basic perception requires action, and the most basic action produces changes in perception. Barbara Tversky offers that the “continuum from perception to action is really a spiral, an upward one”<sup>58</sup>.

We have already suggested that, as Malpas put it, “The capacity for agency and the grasp of space are mutually dependent – to lack one is to lack the other”<sup>59</sup>. For example, by ‘destroying space’, solitary confinement produces time; that is, the prisoner in solitary confinement feels time more intensely, hence the notion of ‘doing time’. Threatening someone’s space tends to have this effect. Other examples include confinement to tight spaces, looming objects, and heights – all of which speed up the internal clock by threatening the capacity for agency or invading personal space.

Note that spatiality does not simply refer to physical space, but rather, all ‘spaces’ of expression. *Being present* for, and with, another person produces possibilities, and hence spaces of expression, that neither person can explore alone. Games, dialogue, dance, sexuality, and other spaces of expression ‘create time’ to the extent that time is no longer felt when they are enjoyed. Engagement obliterates the sense of time. Sloterdijk writes that “intimacy is time regained”<sup>60</sup>. Intimacy is one kind of modality by which we ‘create space’ for instinctual expression to ‘take place’. In this space we lose track of time by using it well. Malpas shows how Proust *In Search of Lost Time* is Proust

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<sup>58</sup> Barbara Tversky, *Mind In Motion*, 103.

<sup>59</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 222.

attempting to reconstruct the places-in-particular through which he arranged events in time into narrative memory<sup>61</sup>.

At the other extreme of intimacy is a phenomenon like agoraphobia ('fear of public places') where the person's internal time compresses and intensifies when they feel they are in a situation where escape might be difficult, or help isn't available. This phenomenon is influenced by both the social and physical environments. Hence agoraphobia is often partially alleviated when the sufferer is accompanied by a person whom they hold dear.

Martina Löw describes space as a "relational arrangement of living beings and social goods"<sup>62</sup>, emphasizing its relationality and sociality. Space is a domain of social encounter and possibility. Human "space is (...) related to action"<sup>63</sup>, but "we are programmed to internalize the actions of other people"<sup>64</sup>, writes Tversky. Even at the lower levels of the platial structure we can consider that the sense of space is also, to some extent, Other-oriented in this way. To sense a space external to Self is to consider Object from an allocentric point of view. Space is triangulated from another perspective. Hence, Malpas suggests that "allocentricity underpins the inter-subjectivity of spatial representation"<sup>65</sup>. Henri Lefevre also suggested in *The Production of Space* that "the relationship to space is reflected in the relationship to the other, to the other's body and other's consciousness"<sup>66</sup>.

What fashions space and time into place is a dialectic exchange between the two which produces (via ceremony) and reinvigorates (via ritual) *symbols*. Consider that a symbol the nexus where the *imaginary* and the *signifier* meet. While the imaginary pertains to the

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<sup>61</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*.

<sup>62</sup> Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 257.

<sup>63</sup> Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990[1969]), 115.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Tversky, *Mind In Motion*, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Henri Lefevre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 204

intersubjective (Self-Other), the signifier pertains to the objectified representation (Self-Object). On a very basic level, the former pertains to perception, while the latter pertains to action. Place is a living symbol to the extent that it continuously unites being and doing, dwelling and building, perceiving and conceiving (acting) – in extended units of Identity.

The table below features common triads that can be associated with the unity with place, some of which have already been discussed. These triad will be explored in future explorations.

*Table 1: Dimensions of Place*

Feminine	Masculine	Unity
Space	Time	Place
Cyclical	Linear	Spiraled ('Spirited')
Body	Mind	Organism
Earth	Sky	World
Opaque	Transparent	Iridescent
Imaginary	Signifier	Symbol
Perception	Action	Living
Other-oriented	Object-oriented	Trialectic
Integration	Differentiation	Complexity
Memory	Variation	Evolution
Dwelling	Building	Being
Being	Doing	Becoming
Eternity	Progress	Living Tradition
Include	Transcend	Grow

## The Domination of Place

A rhythmic balance of feminine and masculine drives is critical to the humanizing co-inspiration of place. An excess of masculine drive disorients and liquifies place-in-particular and disperses co-inspiration, while an excess of feminine drive suppresses co-inspiration and calcifies place-in-particular.

Modernity is often characterized as having excessive masculine drive and, therefore, as representing the systematic unfurling, and speeding up, of temporarily<sup>67</sup>, as well as the destruction of existing places-in-particular<sup>68</sup>. Hypermodernity features variation against memory, signifiers untethered from imaginaries<sup>69</sup>, building ill-prepared for dwelling<sup>70</sup>, the desecration of the Earth and an acceleration toward the *Open Sky*<sup>71</sup> of virtual space, a worship of progress, and the fetishization of objects. It represents the uncoiling of the vital cycles of living traditions, and their channeling into the turbulent flows<sup>72</sup> of information, redevelopment, gentrification, and migration, beyond the 'human scale'. Note, however, that this phenomenon is uneven across time and geography.

Relative to conditioning, the main maladies of excessive masculine drive are anxiety and shock (excessive change in perception), while the main maladies of excessive feminine drive are depression and despair (inactivity despite the possibility of expression). Hence, it has been said and repeated that we are well into the Age of Anxiety, if not under the threat of nuclear war then under the barrage of 'disruptive

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E Smith, *Domicide: The Global Destruction Of Home* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> John David Ebert and Brian Francis Culkin, *Hypermodernity and The End of The World* (Independently published, 2019).

<sup>70</sup> Richard Sennet, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Economic Restructuring and Urban Development* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).

technologies', 'shock tactics', economic obsolescences, and environmental catastrophes. The complexity of place requires that its co-inspiration be a relatively (to hypermodernity) slow and gradual process. Place-in-particular cannot be built in a day, just as a person cannot be formed and filled-in in a day; relationship is slow and persistent. Yet live and grow they both must.

The domination of place involves the absorption, or short circuiting, of the *local organic* into the *spreading machinic*. Rather, the machinic can be described as *fungus* as it favours an ever-expanding *fungibility*, examples of which include currencies, bits, commodities, views, engagements, professionals, condos – exchange valuables in general. The fungus devours the organic and spreads. A crowding of fungibles produces alienation by overloading the frame, equalizing diverse qualities into quantities, and thus precluding semantic differentiation and integration through community.

The individual of hypermodernity's non-place is a "passenger" who "has the simultaneous experiences of the perpetual present and an encounter with the self"<sup>73</sup>. Robert Nozick's Experience Machine (rightly not named 'Subjectivity Machine') is uncanny because it includes no Other, only an illusory Self-Object. The irony is that we leave the semi-matrix of place only to find ourselves in the quasi-Experience Machine of placeless mass media. Some even suggest that we should become accustomed to our alienation.

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<sup>73</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places*, 105.



*Figure 4: Poster of advertising agency in a Toronto Transit Commission subway station. Public transportation is known to be the bane of agoraphobes. In one phrase, this poster sums up the tactic, intentional or not, of overload and capture: overcrowd people and then feed them false refuge, twice a weekday. Apparently, it works.*

Without the ability to both “relate and separate” people effectively, the human artifice collapses Self and Other into the Same, “mass man”<sup>74</sup>. Recall Basquiat’s graffiti tag SAMO (‘same old, same old’)

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<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.



inspired by the metropolis of signifiers running rampant. As such, identity crises abound, as ‘aliens’ pine for discernable qualities, through tentative engagements with ‘humanity’.

Further, the alien who has been continuously fed false identities (identities untethered from place) is the zombie, as the zombie never actually finds the sustenance it is looking for; it is looking for the Other with which it can distinguish a Self but is constantly fed the Object-illusion of Other. Instead of belonging, it is conditioned on the constantly failing illusion thereof. It is looking for mind (Other) but instead feeds on brains (Object), and so do hypermodern *consumers*, through various *media feeds* and *consumer digests*. The absorption of the human into the Object of audiovisual media shallows the mind<sup>75</sup>, furthering the zombification process. A society in desperate search of ‘mindfulness’ is a society whose people recognize themselves to be lacking in mind despite constantly being ‘in their heads’. The process of ‘mind absorption’ culminates in the next popular media trope of digital upload.

Whereas the unknown condo resident next door is the alien, the gaming addict who ignores his vital signals is the zombie. In a disenchanted world, both seek the shimmer and aura of place, but are distracted by fabricated buzz. One of the few things keeping the body alive today, against these dominating forces, is the body-image’s exchange value in the growing attention economy of mass visual media.

One may well wonder if the phenomenon of the ‘zombie fungus’ (*Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*) will not best analogize the story of earthly civilization: the social body is increasingly disintegrated and re-mobilized, and the human condition increasingly transformed, towards the colonization of other planets by machines and

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<sup>75</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

posthumans. A general anxiety to abandon both the Earth and ‘humanism’ is increasingly palpable, as scientists, technologists, and big-picture thinkers tell us why we must leave Earth and “Why Space Migration Must Be Posthuman”<sup>76</sup>. But these questions are not to be pondered here.

Under the storm of ‘nudges’ and under heteronomous forces within the various mass media, the Gnostic desire for *ekstasis* takes hold. Ekstasis is the sense of being removed from oneself, and the corollary, from one’s World. The desire for this state is a desire to be freed from the system of dominating forces. Ekstasis can also be an agonizing state where one feels oneself to be ‘out of place’ for too long. It can be *cathartic* to return to place, or to simply succumb to heteronomous forces, in spiritual exhaustion.

We can call the drive for ekstasis *Thanatos*. Eros and Thanatos, here described, are not necessarily meant to represent concepts with opposite normative, or even necessarily conceptual, charge. The two are inextricably bound in the sense that an excess of Eros can be ultimately thanatic. This is because they refer to highly contextual situations, and because place is hierarchical in structure. Consider that not every place is a ‘good’ place. So, while we describe the feminine and masculine drives as being, at core, erotic, we can understand that this Eros can be in service of Thanatos at another level of analysis.

In different contexts, and at different levels of the platial structure, both Eros and Thanatos can have more, or less, ‘healthy’ variants of expression. Consider that the two have a complex relationship in producing platial ‘texts’ (an analogy being writing and erasing, respectively, neither of which is inherently good or bad).

Relatively healthy examples of Thanatos include: *neti neti* meditation, where Identity is deconstructed in order to re-center the individual;

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<sup>76</sup> Francesca Ferrando, “Why Space Migration Must Be Posthuman,” in *The Ethics of Space Exploration*, ed. James S.J. Schwartz and Tony Milligan (Cham: Springer 2016), 137–152.

and comedy where traditions and norms, which may sometimes be felt to be oppressive, are deconstructed or dispelled for temporary relief. The seemingly strange relationship between Eros and Thanatos is represented in the symbol of *yin and yang* where a spot of yin appears yang and vice versa. It is also somewhat represented in the term ‘creative destruction’: What is constructive to one place can be destructive to another; and what is creative to the machinic is often destructive to the organic. We call these situations predatory or parasitic depending on the nature of the relationship.

However, the extent to which Thanatos overwhelms (enslaves) Eros is the extent to which place, World, and Identity are systematically destroyed. The beginning of the domination of place was the beginning of the posthuman era – a topic of a future place exploration.

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