

'Corresponding Territory'

Space in the Poetry and Fiction of Raymond Carver

Andrew Munzer

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Abstract

This thesis advances the case for the presentation and uses of space and place in the fiction, poetry and essays of Raymond Carver. Revisiting the literary and cultural texts connecting with his work, an investigation of a range of works across his career suggests specific modes of writing that contributed to his distinctive and influential style.

The structural elements of the short story tradition and cultural and social histories of architecture are considered together, to suggest ways in which Carver's work speaks to both a domestic experience of space, and literary tradition before him. Visual charts are suggested in the analysis of a fictional mode that suppresses chronological linearity in favour of the multi-directional forms of lived space.

In this investigation, new material from the publication of Carver's unedited second collection, *Beginners* (2009) is introduced into the critical debate. In light of this, the stories more clearly demonstrate Carver's actively collaborative mode, before and after that period. The thesis has particular focus on the explorations of self, space and form in Gordon Lish's fiction and Tess Gallagher's poetry: key intertexts for both the editing debate and Carver's writing itself.

This thesis also seeks to further the corrective rebalancing of critical attention towards Carver's poetry, as part of his cohesive body of work. It also suggests the ways in which the poems particularly demonstrate modes that are active in all of Carver's writing.

Finally, the study suggests correspondences between Carver's work and authors working in contemporary fiction, arguing for the continued relevance and importance of the stories and poetry, beyond their usual sphere of consideration. Consideration of the work of Richard Ford and David Foster Wallace illustrates this.

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Author's Declaration

Sections of this thesis in development were presented as papers at previous conferences: 'Worlds Built Out of Words: Literary Environments Conference', University of Bristol, 2010. The British Association for American Studies Conferences at University of East Anglia, 2010, University of Central Lancashire 2011 and University of Exeter, 2013. 'Everyday Cities, Ordinary Lives', University of York, 2012.

Except where stated, all of the work contained within this thesis represents the original contribution of the author.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Since Raymond Carver's stories first appeared on the literary scene, his titles have called out beyond their immediate references. The multi-line heading *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) has been repeatedly remade, in turn 'talking about' stories, running and cultural identity.¹ Titles such as these resonate and reach towards locations or objects beyond direct specification: as in *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (1985), *Where I'm Calling From* (1988), or *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989). Similarly, as a celebrated and memorable part of the cultural fabric, Carver's stories and poetry have repeatedly evoked conversation, study and personal response. A significant body of criticism has developed since the publication of Carver's early collections, and a review of this work reveals a number of distinguishable waves of development, especially regarding the fiction. During Carver's lifetime and after, William Stull's wide-ranging research brought key critical responses and edited interviews and responses into publication.² Monographs shortly following Carver's death offered detailed readings of the stories (and to a lesser extent, the verse), with thematic consideration between the collections, as in Raldolph Runyon's *Reading Raymond Carver* (1992) and Adam Meyer's *Raymond Carver* (1995).³ The 'closing of the book' on the author's life made possible a sense of survey and key terms that were claimed as established. The presence and function of 'Voyeurism', 'Minimalism', and a sense of early and late style informed the thorough book-length studies of Arthur Bethea and Kirk Nessel.⁴ Responding to these accounts, G.P. Lainsbury's *The Carver Chronotope* developed readings that demonstrate the rich textual and contextual suggestion of

¹ For a few full-length works, among innumerable shorter references: Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2009). nb. Murakami is the principal translator of Carver's work into Japanese, and their meeting became the source for a Carver poem, 'The Projectile', *All of Us: The Collected Poems* (London: Harvill Press, 2003), 146-8. Citations will be abbreviated hereafter as *AOU*. Nathan Englander, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank: Stories* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2012).

² William Stull, 'Beyond Hopelessville: Another Side of Raymond Carver' *Philological Quarterly*, 64, 1 (1985). Gentry and Stull, eds. *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. (London: Mississippi UP, 1993).

³ Adam Meyer, *Raymond Carver* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). Randolph Runyon, *Reading Raymond Carver* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

⁴ Arthur F. Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Kirk Nessel, *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1995).

the short fiction.⁵ As a theoretically-focussed reading of Carver's stories in their time and literary environment, this study was an important influence for my own approach, as a part of a broadening of thought about Carver's work in the twenty-first century.

Following these, new responses and revisitings have emerged in the last five years, to significant popular and critical attention. Carol Sklenicka's biography *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* was selected as one of *The New York Times'* best books of 2009, and Stephane Michaka has recently reimagined Carver's final decade in *Scissors: A Novel* (2013).⁶ Such re-exploration of Carver's texts has introduced a new generation of readers, as well as the many who encounter the stories as a regular selection on American Literature courses. Stories such as 'Cathedral' and 'A Small, Good Thing' are not just portable and convenient for teaching, as lyric poetry was to the New Criticism, they strike a tone that is recognisable and hospitable, inviting a range of response. In the democratic reassessment of texts that works to correct canonical exclusions, Carver's stories repeatedly rise to the surface, as buoyant and mobile as the 'bobber' of his poem.⁷ This sustained interest has also coincided with the critical reappraisals that make up the grouping of essays in the critical collection *New Paths to Raymond Carver* (2008).⁸ As in this thesis, those essays stated a commitment to connect the existing body of Carver criticism with new responses, applying theoretical and cultural developments as indicative of the continued importance and relevance of his work. There too, an effort to correct the underrepresentation of Carver's poetry in scholarship connects with my own. If there has been a sense that the short fiction is more worthy of investigation than the verse, I add my case to the work that has recently demonstrated otherwise.

The objective of this thesis will be to consider the combined suggestion of these diverse responses. My research will address both the specificity and common terms of the debate in Carver studies so far, as well as applying a spatial focus to extend and open out the dimensions of his texts. In Chapter two I introduce key terms for this exploration of Carver's spaces, connecting from the immediate places and spaces of Carver's context to less immediate (but no less important) influences. Approaching the texts in-depth in Chapter three, a mode of reading familiar Carver stories allows consideration of the fictional and architectural forms of his work side by side. Chapter four develops a reading of Carver's significant body of verse in relation to both national and international poetics of space. I apply a Deleuzian reading of Carver's poetry, highlighting his investment in a deeply signifying but materially immediate representation. In Chapter five I extend

⁵ Lainsbury, G. P., *The Carver Chronotope: Exploring the Life-World of Raymond Carver's Fiction* (New York: Routledge), 2003.

⁶ Carol Sklenicka, *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* (New York: Scribner, 2009). Stephane Michaka, *Scissors: A Novel* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

⁷ 'Bobber', *AOU*, 42.

⁸ *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Sandra Lee Kleppe, Robert Miltner (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Cited hereafter as *New Paths*.

the investigation of Carver's oeuvre to a reading of his non-fiction, examining and questioning biographical narratives that have gained currency in the past decade. In this account, the idea of a collaborative style provides a context in which Carver's writing relationships can be considered as properly productive. This chapter also gives place for the thesis to engage directly with the debate surrounding Gordon Lish's editorial relationship with Carver, and Tess Gallagher's role in publishing Carver's work since his death. As these questions have been considered at some length, this element of Carver's work will not be the primary focus of my study, but rather, I will consider it in connection with textual practices and traditions that I identify in the preceding chapters. Finally, Chapter six extends the reading of Carver in relation to writers publishing after his death, viewing the arguments of the thesis in relation to the work of Richard Ford and David Foster Wallace. As significant contemporary authors who have close correspondences with Carver's textual modes, Ford and Wallace speak to and suggest a continuation of Carver's literary forms, marking the importance of a spatial mode for American literature today.

Considering Carver's work and spatial studies after the critical developments of the last decades provides a unique opportunity. After the range of readings and responses to 'Carver Country', the original texts and their reception can be considered together. Critics of literary space have a particular interest in questioning the legitimacy of dimensions and 'borders' in their examined texts. Where such borders are productive crossing-points for ideas and narratives, the critical account can and will contribute to these conversations. Reading Carver's work in the twenty-first century offers a particularly strong case study for this kind of approach. The varieties of narrative that exist in and in connection with his texts have and continue to challenge received ideas, modelling a structure for the possibilities of fiction alongside the global reach and appeal of new media forms. By connecting Carver's work with photography and cinema in particular, this study will also explore the place of poetry and short fiction in an environment represented increasingly through visual media.

Chapter 2

Realisms, Regions, Relationships

Readers and critics experience Carver's work between strong and competing elements: they include rich contextual landscapes, and an insistent immediacy of the stories and poems themselves. As William Stull wrote, Carver's work is 'Beyond Hopelessville', they are referring to a socio-economic situation, and essentially exceeding it.¹ Likewise, Carver's stories seem compelled to present panoramic psychological and material spaces, which appear even more overflowing in their attentive details and short forms. In the second half of the twentieth century, the myth of American self-invention was coupled with the grand geographies of the Cold War's imperialistic binary.² Certainly popular media in the 1960s and 1970s became instrumental in the contest that was being fought outside of the nation's borders, for ideals that were claimed (on both sides) to be universal. Yet, in this period, those at the frontiers of thought within philosophy and literature were pushing past newly-theorised meta-narratives of nationhood, social structure and the place of the individual in relation to economic systems. The account left by literary texts through the 1980s reflects that within the academy, a response to these crises of spatial conception and representation was emerging across disciplinary boundaries. This response, from multiple fronts in the Humanities and Social Sciences, announced from the texts of Post-structuralist critics such as Michel Foucault 'a spatial turn', corresponding with the synthesis of space and history into 'heterotologies' in Foucault's own writings.³ This initial response culminated in the dissemination of the 'New Geography', which continued the development of a sociological and specific approach to urban

¹ Stull 1985, 1-15.

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1993).

³ The 'spatial turn' was announced in Foucault's 1967 lecture 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (1986), 22-27. The relative obscurity of this original lecture and its appropriation by an obscure group of Italian architects is discussed in Gwendolyn Wright, 'Cultural History: Europeans, Americans and the Meanings of Space', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 64, 4 (2005), 436-440.

Foucault's 'spatial obsession' emerged properly in *Discipline and Punish* (London: Vintage, 1979), which introduced his metaphorical use of terms such as 'field', 'territory', 'position', 'spatialisation', 'enframe' and 'placement'.

spaces from the theorisations of Henri LeFebvre (*The Production of Space*, 1974) into Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and *Thirdspace* (1991).⁴

The strength of these responses may be partially attributed to the failure of large-scale urban housing projects, constructed in the post-war 'boom years'. By the time of economic slow-down following the oil crisis of 1973, these structures were a physical reminder of the inadequacies of so many of Modernist architecture's materials and social models.⁵ The urban areas of Detroit, St Louis, New York City, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles became characterised by their spaces of decay and abandonment. In many cases, 'urban renewal projects' from the 1950s were demolished, a spectacular admission of failed structures.⁶ In turn, the urban fictional representations of the period often used the city as a metaphor for the fragmentation of the psyche in modern society, as in the tenement killing-spree of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976).⁷

Into this cross-societal confluence, prominent literary voices argued that in architecture as well as artworks, 'theory' had become a problem. In *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981), Tom Wolfe argued the inappropriateness of applying political theory to lived spaces.⁸ The opening lines set out the tone as it continues, a stylised argument:

O beautiful, for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, has there ever been another place on earth where so many people of wealth and power have paid for and put up with so much architecture they detested as within thy blessed borders today?
I doubt it seriously.⁹

Wolfe's account of modern architecture railed against the 'box-like' constructions that were appearing in New York: to his eye, totally lacking feature and ornamentation, and in thrall to the pursuit of the avant-garde. Another novelist's book-length comment on the malaises of contemporary architecture can be found in James Howard Kunstler's *The Geography of Nowhere* (1993) where he tracked 'the rise and decline of America's man-made landscape': a dream that turned out to be 'like no place in particular'.¹⁰ Frederic Jameson's influential work claimed that America's architecture and literature shared a congruent set of philosophies, which were in need of renewal. He wrote that in the development of a 'Post-modern' textual landscape, organising points

⁴ Henri LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-imagined Places* (London: Blackwell, 1996).

⁵ David Howarth, 'Space, Subjectivity, and Politics', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 31, 2 (2006), 105-134; 107.

⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 133-134.

⁷ Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (Columbia Pictures, 1976).

⁸ Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Picador, 1981).

⁹ Wolfe, 1.

¹⁰ James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

of reference would come from its lived spaces. The essential experience of space was informed by psychologies of containment, connectivity and ornamentation that attached themselves to these 'structures'.¹¹ In the first chapter of *Postmodernism* (1991):

It is in the realm of architecture, however, that modifications in aesthetic production are most dramatically visible, and that their theoretical problems have been most centrally raised and articulated; it was indeed from architectural debates that my own conception of postmodernism – as it will be outlined in the following pages – initially began to emerge.¹²

In an important sense, the difference between the conception of literary spatiality before and after Postmodern theory lies in particular connections between text and space. Ideas of text-as-'imaginative geography', and space-as-text that can be 'written on' became more than just metaphors.¹³ The spatial formulation of ideas appeared in iconic examples, such as the spray-canned graffiti of decaying urban centres, and the widespread success and financial viability of computer (game) worlds.¹⁴ Hypertext fiction projects explored the possibilities of a more flexible agency in the text, in its interaction with the reader's imaginative resources.¹⁵

Both the Postmodern theorists and those who explicitly opposed them were deeply interested in the modes of representing and inhabiting a version of America, constructed in their texts. While Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1987) tracked its narrative course through America's largest metropolis, in the same year Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* addressed New York City with grand, remade Realism: the culmination of his call for authors to take on this project.¹⁶ In Wolfe's 'literary manifesto for the new social novel', 'Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast' (1989), he called for the renewed emergence of 'the New Journalism' in fiction, following a parallel shift in the cinema of the preceding decade.¹⁷ Wolfe bemoaned what he saw as a lack of concern for realistic location in then-contemporary fiction. He writes, as a central tenet of the essay: 'It strikes me as folly that you can portray the individual in the city today without also portraying the city itself'.¹⁸ Wolfe's argument must apply more widely if it is to apply at all. Although he wrote about a specific

¹¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

¹² Jameson, 2.

¹³ The term 'imaginative geography' originates in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

¹⁴ Alex Golub, 'Being in the World (Of Warcraft): Raiding, Realism, and Knowledge Production in a Massively Multiplayer Online Game', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 83, 1, 'Anthropological Perspectives on Knowledge in the Digital Age' (2010) 17-45.

¹⁵ Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2006), 34.

¹⁶ Paul Auster, *New York Trilogy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987). Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (London: Random House, 1987).

¹⁷ Tom Wolfe, 'Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast', *Harper's Magazine*, (1989) 279, 45-56. See films such as Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969) and wider influence of the Cinéma vérité.

¹⁸ Wolfe, 51.

metropolitan space, his call for a new mode of representation drew attention to the relationship between material environments, and the psychological constructions of their inhabitants.

Region

Wolfe's 'new social novel' might as well have been called an old social novel, of course, were it not for the contest of terminology so important to such manifestoes. Despite the conceptual focus on urban centres, American writers were engaging and remaking the opposing traditions for a range of diverse spaces. The major-press publishing success of non-urban authors appears as the exception, in relation to the more prestigious background of the city-space, with its self-proclaiming nexus of cultural signifiers. Severe misallocations of power often prefigure claims for 'the real', and studies of Regionalist authors regularly include discussion of the overlapping relationship between the 'Realist' and 'Regional'. *The Portable American Realism Reader*, edited by James Nagel and Tom Quirk in 1997, brings the categories of 'regionalism', 'local color' and 'naturalism' all under the meta-category of 'realism', a popular choice.¹⁹ Beyond a dominant tradition established through a spatial centre, Fetterley and Pryse note this relation in the terms 'region' and 'the regional', and their uses:

To be ruled is to be *regional* (the word deriving from the Latin *regere*); to rule is to become king of the *realm* (also from *regere*). But he who rules is the *rex*, and the territory of the realm is the *real* (all related etymologically). Thus a region is an area ruled by a more powerful entity, earlier a king, in modern times the state or nation, and increasingly at present global economic interests. The very words "region" and "regionalism" therefore convey political relations of subordination.²⁰

From etymological bases, Regionalism is borne out of a mapping of disadvantage. Yet, as the political observation of the quotation suggests, this figure maintains that these are contested spaces. This dynamic relation is also noted by Fetterley and Pryse: 'Regions are never fully ruled. It is only from the perspective of the *rex* or the *realm*, or from cosmopolitans who have much to gain by "regionalizing" and thereby containing the power of certain groups of people, that regions seem to be both "natural" and "separate"'.²¹ Yet, these overlapping headings mark the instability and category crises of Regionalist texts, working between the terms of their contested spaces.²² Exploring the tensions in these categorisations, Nancy Glazener's *Reading for Realism* makes her

¹⁹ *The Portable American Realism Reader*, ed. James Nagel and Tom Quirk (New York: Penguin, 1997).

²⁰ Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5.

²¹ Fetterley and Pryse, 6.

²² Fetterley and Pryse, 9.

final investigative chapter a study of various 'Regional Accents', which, in her reading, depicted women's conflicted struggle to represent their domestic labour in relation the fantasy of escape from those worlds.²³ Alice Brown, Rose Terry Cooke, Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett were published in the *Atlantic* 'as part of an ensemble', thereby downplaying any critical claim or reader expectation of authorial mastery.²⁴ In particular, Jewett's stories highlight issues that affect regional authors more generally, occupying a chapter of Michael Davitt Bell's *The Problem of American Realism*.²⁵ Davitt Bell reads Jewett's texts in a 'realist' mode, while finding her incompatible with the definition of Realism as a movement.²⁶ Led at the time by Jewett's first influential mentor in the literary world, William Dean Howells, Realism was associated with 'the world of men's activities', Zola's 'world of big things' and a hierarchy of places and power that continually consolidates centres of power and excludes the peripheral.²⁷ In the persistence of these exclusionary senses through the twentieth century, the terms 'local color' and 'regionalism' were applied to texts that in every functional sense, fit the realist project and mode. Yet the ultimate qualification was expected or actual publishing success: self-fulfilled as a result of the political relationship between the author and the literary establishment.

Since its original circulation following the American Civil War (1860-1890s) and again in the 1920-1930s, authors who have been collected within Regionalist traditions have denied the suggestion of the term's limit or 'smallness', with its implied hierarchy.²⁸ Yet in the last twenty years, critical projects such as those mentioned above have worked to redefine these terms and authors, marking the developing influence of such texts. Lyotard's critique of the problem of metanarrative could be applied to this 'turn', to reveal the strength of the Regional text's close engagement: mutually producing a diverse array of distinctive fictional worlds.²⁹ However, this sense of the Regional does mark an important development from the Realism of the nineteenth-century novel. Despite engaging with the psychology of the individual subject, Realist authors also sought to

²³ Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

²⁴ Glazener, 198.

²⁵ Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²⁶ Bell, 176.

²⁷ Bell, 178-9.

²⁸ In 'smallness' the term appears similar in scope to 'minimalism', with which Carver expressed his unease in the *Paris Review* interview. Mona Simpson, Louis Buzbee, 'Raymond Carver, The Art of Fiction, No. 76', *Interviews, The Paris Review*, 88 (1983).

²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

encompass the wider social dynamics of the city and the extensive American landscape.³⁰ The realism of the Regional, while often aware of non-urban social life, also engages the ‘imaginative geographies’ of characters.³¹ Nineteenth-century Regionalists often wrote from their marginalisation, such as in the domestic sphere. Yet regional texts also ‘gave place not only to an increasing sense of national solidarity but to a keener interest in how the other half lived’.³² The task, as seen by critics even shortly afterwards, was to “acquaint or re-acquaint” the regions of a nation with each other’: a focussed representation, with much wider scope for communicating narrative.³³

This sense of writing the Region continued beyond the nineteenth century impulse: then a project for the unification of the contested and struggling members of the Union. For the mid-twentieth-century authors who have been connected under the ‘Regionalist’ banner, the fictional text could advance an argument in spatial terms, against divisions and inequalities such as racial prejudice: as in Eudora Welty’s ‘A Worn Path’ or Flannery O’Connor’s ‘Everything That Rises Must Converge’.³⁴ Writing in the political dynamism of such spatial modes, authors in non-urban regions of 1960s America identified their writings as part of a struggle under an authoritative literary tradition that had over-extended its influence into hegemony. While the academy and large-press publishing had, with a few exceptions, promoted texts that had moved away from the tradition of realist fiction and the ‘regional impulse’, small-press publications saw a surge in counter-cultural interest: such as the initially localised interest in the ‘Beats’. Authors such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti appropriated a language of class struggle and mobilised the figure of the artist-persona in order to reduce the distance of the author from the literary text, as well as from the specific places of abjection that they inhabited.³⁵ Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Bookstore became a place in San Francisco for the writers and readers of an alternative literature to establish themselves, away from the institutions they opposed. In this, even urban literary counter-cultures might be considered ‘regional’ writing. Philip Fisher summarises that Regionalism ‘is always, in America, part of a civil war within representation, ...between the representation of the nation as made up of weakly joined

³⁰ As in Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Tales of New York* (London: Penguin, 2000), or –though sometimes conceived of as a ‘Regional’ novel: Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 1966). First published, 1884.

³¹ Said’s term also refers more widely to ‘perceived’ geographies, or constructed textual mappings of various kinds.

³² *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 4 vols, ed. William Peterfield Trent, et al (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917-21), 2: 360. This work offered the first defining scholarly account of Regionalism.

³³ Fetterley and Pryse, 46.

³⁴ Eudora Welty, ‘A Worn Path’, originally published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1941. Collected in *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980). Flannery O’Connor, ‘Everything That Rises Must Converge’, *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1965).

³⁵ Elizabeth Sherman Swing, ‘Poetry and the Counter-Culture’, *The English Journal*, 61, 5 (1972), 663-669; 665.

districts and the representation of a central national order'.³⁶ In their use of (textual) spatial representation to reveal the politics of representing (material) space, Regionalist fictions emerges as more than a peripheral categorisation. Rather, its periods of success and marginalisation are expressive of the varying breadth of the U.S. national literary history.

Into this dynamic political geography, and at a time of intense exclusion and public awareness of that exclusion, another tradition of writers emerged at the edges of America's literary institutions. These writers were defined and were willing to define themselves by their authorial training in the quantitative explosion of Creative Writing programmes: most famously, the Program in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa, popularly known as the Iowa 'Writer's Workshop'.³⁷ This literary-cultural movement, which developed from the tradition of local writer's clubs as far back as the 1890s, cultivated the conception of 'creative writing' itself: taking as a foundational principle, according to Myers:

the deliberate cultivation of personal experience... For it was personal experience and not the formal qualities of poems and stories that was the object of study. Poems and stories were merely ready vehicles.³⁸

In Carver's introduction to John Gardner's *On Becoming a Novelist*, the reader can detect the energy that gave rise to this new kind of institution and 'taught course', as well as a sense for why a literature of the 'real' or the 'regional' was likely to emerge to this kind of environment.³⁹ The piece begins by declaring Carver's early financial difficulties, and his desire for education where no-one else in his family had been able to afford one.⁴⁰ The name of the course ('Creative Writing 101') and the description of Gardner as 'a new faculty member... who was already surrounded by a bit of mystery and romance' suggest Carver's sense for self-improvement towards the 'writers life' as an accessible and available possibility.⁴¹ Carver gives details of Gardner's style of teaching: emphasising formal aspects of a story's structure, in a traditional mode, and terms that bring spatial metaphors

³⁶ Philip Fisher, Introduction. *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*. ed. Fisher. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xiv, xii.

³⁷ Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 127-181.

³⁸ D. G. Myers, 'The Rise of Creative Writing', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54, 2 (1993), 277-297; 286.

³⁹ John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), xi-xix. Raymond Carver, *Call If You Need Me: The Uncollected Fiction and Prose* (London: Harvill Press, 2000), 107-114.

⁴⁰ *Call if You Need Me*, 107.

⁴¹ *Call if You Need Me*, 108. Richard Ford said of himself and Carver in interview: 'Ray and I were so typical of Americans who decide to try being writers, and were products of the environment that included college, writing workshops, sending stories to quarterlies, attending graduate school, having teachers who were writers... all of us seeking improvement in the standard postwar American way: through some sort of pedagogy' Richard Ford, 'The Good Raymond', *New Yorker*, 5 October 1998, 70.

to narrative: 'peaks, valleys, plateaus, resolution, *dénouement*, things like that'.⁴² Carver lists key authors in Gardner's syllabus, remembering that he 'talked about James Joyce and Flaubert and Isak Dinesen as if they lived just down the road, in Yuba City'.⁴³ His abiding memory of the course is that, despite the prominence of significant authors, Gardner's emphasis on 'experience' was preeminent.⁴⁴ The environment, persona and human affection that Carver felt for Gardner was, in his final judgement, the encouragement that allowed him to go on and become a writer himself.⁴⁵

Raymond Carver appeared in major-press publication on the crest of a literary shift characterised by the creative writing program 'boom' and the first signs of the academy's 'spatial turn'. This period of spatial and 'realist' sensitivity in the wider literary consciousness connected with a dynamic trajectory in Carver's own writings, from the compressed suburban spaces of his first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), to the more expansive social architectures and place-making of *Cathedral* (1983).⁴⁶ In context, then, Carver's writings were acclaimed not only because they returned to the realisms and regionalisms of the American short story, although they gain power from these forms. His fiction and poetry, I will argue, mark an important and influential point in the transition from 'Postmodernism' to a mode more frequently seen in contemporary fiction: characterised by specificity and understated description, and containing a simultaneous awareness of the critiques of traditional narrative form. As in regional and realist fictions before, Carver's writings offered a more expansive illustration of the developments in spatial theory, which often located their examples and references in urban centres such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York. More than these, however, or the High Realism of Tom Wolfe, a short story renaissance from the presses and journals of the East Coast signalled a return to a wider fictional map, writing back from America's architectural, economic and social peripheries.

Carver's Worlds

Following the publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981 Raymond Carver was commissioned to write a short piece on his writing craft for *The New York Times Book Review*.⁴⁷ Later collected as the definitively-titled 'On Writing', it has since been

⁴² *Call if You Need Me*, 110.

⁴³ *Call if You Need Me*, 111.

⁴⁴ *Call if You Need Me*, 113.

⁴⁵ *Call if You Need Me*, 114.

⁴⁶ Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). Cited hereafter as *WYPBQP*. *Cathedral* (New York: Knopf, 1983).

⁴⁷ Raymond Carver, 'A Storyteller's Shoptalk', *New York Times Book Review*, 15 February 1981, 9, 18. Collected in *Call if You Need Me*, 87-92.

recognised in criticism for its explanative contextual claim for Carver's narrative form.⁴⁸ The five-page article begins with the large but direct claim: 'Every great or even every very good writer makes the world over according to his own specifications'.⁴⁹ Having announced the 'great [and] good', the piece shows Carver's generous willingness to list authors who he considers to be recent and contemporary innovators: a road-map of Carver's interests in a period preceding his own stylistic shift. In order, he names John Irving, Flannery O'Connor, Faulkner, Hemingway, 'Cheever, Updike, Singer, Stanley Elkin, Ann Beattie, Cynthia Ozick, Donald Barthelme, Mary Robison, William Kittredge, Barry Hannah, Ursula K. Le Guin'.⁵⁰ This social grouping of realist and regional world-makers prefigures the article's larger thesis. After quoting John Barth on formal innovation, he sets out the case most emphatically:

Too often such writing gives us no news of the world, or else describes a desert landscape and that's all – a few dunes and lizards here and there, but no people; a place uninhabited by anything recognizably human, a place of interest only to a few scientific specialists.⁵¹

In his more detailed explanation of a 'world' more inhabitable, Carver quotes Ezra Pound, and relates his call to 'MAKE IT NEW' to an emphasis on processes of material and architectural representation that can 'write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and... endow those things – a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring – with immense, even startling power'.⁵² Carver's opposition to both 'the banner of experimentation' and 'clumsily rendered realism' makes clear his focus at the time, on an innovation without banners; towards a more descriptive account of the experienced world.⁵³

The identification of 'the world' as a legitimate target for the fictionist is, at once, ambitious and indicative of an awareness of postmodern concerns about a stable subject. The naming and discussion of key authors in 'On Writing' suggests the same concentration on specific personality suggested in 'John Gardner: The Writer as Teacher'. Carver focussed on the human component of writing, the personalities and relationships that surround the texts, against the thematics of literary fashion. Addressing the opposition between banners and titles, 'On Writing' set out the challenge for his self-stated project. The metaphors are spatial: to create a fiction powered by 'the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and

⁴⁸ Lionel Kelly, 'Anton Chekhov and Raymond Carver: A Writer's Strategies of Reading', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 26, 'Strategies of Reading: Dickens and After' (1996), 218-231; 223.

⁴⁹ Carver, 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 87.

⁵⁰ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 87.

⁵¹ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 89.

⁵² 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 89.

⁵³ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 89.

unsettled) surface of things'.⁵⁴ The voice of the piece progresses to a conclusion offering a visual analogy for writing, recommending the power of what he calls (from V.S. Naipaul) 'the glimpse'.⁵⁵ This liminal vision, de-emphasising forethought or intentionality in its brief moment, comes first for Carver. Then, through the author's craft, that glimpse may be developed consciously to show 'how things out there really are and how he sees those things – like no one else sees them'.⁵⁶ Carver's double-ambition is repeated: the 'real' of 'out there', and the 'see[ing]' of the author's unique glimpse.

From Carver's argument against the banners of literary criticism, I would argue that the choice of metaphors in 'On Writing' gestures towards literary traditions and impulses that I have traced up to the period of spatial and representational interest into which his texts appeared. Rejecting the common characterisation of 'realism' as a reactionary literary mode opposing 'experimentation', he argued for the fluidity and hybridity of method that his listing of authors suggests. In these diverse authors, Carver claims, an expansion of fiction as world-making can take place. In *Hicks, Tribes and Dirty Realists*, Rebein has cited critical responses to realist fictions that, similarly, claim that 'realism has proven itself far more adaptable and, paradoxically, more open to new techniques and influences than has literary postmodernism'.⁵⁷ This openness to influence is present in Carver's call for 'inhabited' worlds, drawing upon the strengths of diversity. Mary Austin's description of American Regionalist 'realism' famously imagines the fictional creation of an 'explicit, well mapped strip of country, as intensively lived in as any healthy child lives into his own neighborhood'.⁵⁸ Carver's explication of his craft has this sense of the 'lived-in' text, with both the intimate and the political dynamics of community vying, as his biographical texts record.⁵⁹

A community of 'regional' or Regionalist authors has often been difficult to define, with its contested definitions and diversity of identities and locale. However, viewed as a flexible and often implicit contributing element, the Regional may be considered as a set of relationships, corresponding through form, image and voice. The ways in which these relationships correspond in and between texts connects the spatial sense of both canonical and marginal writers with the shared fictional form in which they worked.

⁵⁴ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 92.

⁵⁵ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 92.

⁵⁶ 'Storyteller's Shoptalk', 92.

⁵⁷ Robert Rebein, *Hicks, Tribes and Dirty Realists* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 21.

⁵⁸ Mary Austin, 'Regionalism in American Fiction', *English Journal*, 21 (1932), 97-107; 102.

⁵⁹ *Call if You Need Me*, 89.

Short Form Traditions

Although critics have widely recognised the significance of Carver's short fiction in its external literary context, his innovation in the short story form also appears internally: within the borders of the text.⁶⁰ Here, Carver's distinct short story form built upon and developed the characteristics of the genre before him. As Madison Smartt Bell writes, the myth that the period preceding the 'renaissance' of the 1980s suffered from a lack of great short fiction is absurd. However, as both Bell and Rebein note, economic constriction was evident in the publishing preference for the more marketable novel, with ever less short fiction reaching publication outside of small presses.⁶¹ Carver's short fiction appeared first in small presses and periodicals, and from 1961-71 his work was published by smaller literary establishments at Chico State, the University of Iowa and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Developing his craft in these environments, his style and form matured in contact with both the prominent 'masters' of the short form, and new short fiction from writers he knew personally from college and teaching appointments.

The myth of the short fiction dearth and renaissance has its roots in a canonical view of American literature, where disproportionate influence was wielded by literary studies and creative writing programmes. Through these, the American short story in the first half of the twentieth century was shaped according to a small number of widely published writers, often primarily novelists. Yet this weight of influence had both a limiting and a cultivating effect on the short story form. For these writers, short fiction was not an apprenticeship, but a genre that stood alongside the novel in legitimacy and capacity for artistic expression. In his own account, Carver's literary education brought him into repeated contact with Chekhov, early Hemingway, and the Joyce of *Dubliners*.⁶² Rebein's account credits the contribution of these and other authors to the formation of the 'realist' short story, 'with its emphasis on a single effect (Poe), an economy of words (Hemingway), and an epiphany that registers as much with the reader and with the central character (Joyce)'.⁶³ As emphases, these are undoubtedly correctly attributed: yet to suggest that the modern short story is formed from these elements would miss the interplay of these innovations with the comprehensive narrative devices that preceded them. The 'modernising' influences from these authors' works were, however, significant advances in the representation of consciousness and its experiential account of the world. Remaining aware of Carver's insistence on relationship over influence in the development of his fictional style, I will address two focused and differently-

⁶⁰ Madison Smartt Bell, 'The Short Story Revival (Or Whatever It Was): An Impressionistic History and Diatribe', *Mississippi Review*, 21, 1 (1993), 55-66.

⁶¹ Rebein, 22-40.

⁶² Rebein, 27.

⁶³ Rebein, 27.

mediated literary connections that shaped the project of writing American space in short fiction, which was Carver's palimpsest.

Despite Carver's reluctance about naming literary-historical figures in relation to his own work, the importance of two figures in John Gardner's 'Creative Writing 101' is clear from his record: 'Hemingway and Faulkner were the reigning authors in those days. ...I remember Gardner telling me, "Read all the Faulkner you can get your hands on, and then read all of Hemingway to clean the Faulkner out of your system"'.⁶⁴ Carver's early style makes clear contact with Faulkner, whose imaginative Southern geographies identify him most clearly as a writer of 'region'.⁶⁵ However, Richard C. Moreland and Patrick O'Donnell have written on the co-presence of 'Modernist' and 'Postmodernist' tendencies in Faulkner, in both representing an extensive and coherent imaginative world and 'criticizing those same realities it represents'.⁶⁶ Moreland identifies Faulkner's progression from a 'realist' element, with its responsibilities towards a 'participation' in constructing social realities between readers, teachers and students.⁶⁷ 'This postmodern-sounding dimension of Faulkner's work grows out of the failures, impasses, and emotional dryness of modernism when it is put to a social test,' (Moreland, 25-26). In relation to these tendencies, Carver's earliest published story resulted, produced under the close guidance of John Gardner, and employing 'all the arrows in his quiver' (Sklenicka, 71): the excessive psychological landscape of 'Furious Seasons'.⁶⁸

Carver's first published short story is notable for the strength of its natural environment in relation to the understated emotional conflict of its characters. From the initial affective sky-scape, critics have readily identified a style that draws more from Faulkner than the 'no-place' suburbia of the Lish collaborations. However, the unedited manuscripts of Carver's early stories exhibit similar geographical reference-points: a telescoping from a distant natural topography, to the immediacy of the apartment (for example, the mountains in 'Gazebo': edited out in the Lish version).⁶⁹ The first paragraph of 'Furious Seasons' makes the sky a materialisation of imagination: 'If Farrell lets go his imagination he can see the clouds as black horses with flared white manes and, turning behind, slowly, inexorably, black chariots, here and there a white-plumed driver'.⁷⁰ The scene creates, in

⁶⁴ *Call if You Need Me*, 111.

⁶⁵ Michael Kowalewski, 'Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism', *American Literary History*, 6, 1 (1994), 171-183; 174.

⁶⁶ Richard C. Moreland, 'Faulkner and Modernism', *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17-30; 17. Patrick O'Donnell, 'Faulkner and Postmodernism', *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31-50.

⁶⁷ Moreland, 17.

⁶⁸ Raymond Carver, 'Furious Seasons', *Call if You Need Me*, 129-145. Originally published as 'The Furious Seasons', *Selection* (Chico State College), 2, (1960-1), 1-18.

⁶⁹ Raymond Carver, *Beginners* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), 22-30; 26. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 18-25.

⁷⁰ *Call if You Need Me*, 129.

clouds, the new cinematic innovation of Widescreen, as used in the near-contemporaneous epic *Ben Hur* (1959). Suggesting the difference between the production values and material scale of cinema and the written story, he slows the frantic chariot race from a temporal rush around a repeating circuit, into near-stasis.⁷¹ Where the cinematic epic suggested a constructed heroism in the virtual vista of the screen, Farrell sees the disjunction of 'black' and 'white' on the still, slow land. Walter J. Slatoff's study *Quest for Failure* addresses Faulkner's use of a tense stasis in the various materialisations of 'the space between' bodies, geographical points and social divisions.⁷² He writes that between 'North and South, past and present, man and nature, the human and mechanical, words and action, reality and dream, the mortal and immortal, life and print, there are chasms, rarely crossed without pain or disaster'.⁷³ As an early example of Carver's characteristic style, 'Furious Seasons' moves Farrell and his wife across divided geographical vistas, towards the inevitability of their dramatic situation.

The cinematic image that opens 'Furious Seasons' suggests Faulkner's own adaptations into film, which began with his sale of the rights to the story 'Turnabout' to MGM for \$2,250.⁷⁴ Faulkner wrote a script in five days from the story, but was subsequently asked to 'write in' a role for Joan Crawford. According to Matthews, Faulkner 'ingeniously made the problem of the woman's place in the movie the very question to be entertained... Although one can feel Hollywood conventions reshaping Faulkner's story, one can also see his imagination resisting too slick a repackaging'.⁷⁵ Whereas Faulkner's cinematic adaptation necessitated an ingenious 'writing in' and 'resistance', Carver's 'Furious Seasons' writes-in spatial and textual lines of connection: a specified geography that the characters progress along (Yakima, the Columbia River Highway), historical and cultural references (the name of the protagonist, Lew Farrell, was the alias of Louis Fratto, the Chicago labor racketeer), and textual references (Farrell's father's mention of 'bear', suggesting the Faulkner story, or the hint of incest with the description of Lew's sister, that connects with Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*).⁷⁶ Together these references make a version of Faulknerian cultural space that approaches the comprehensive realist implication of the map of Yoknapatawpha County.⁷⁷ Yet, as well as Carver's development of a 'written-in' network of cultural references, he displays the tendency to highlight the spaces within that network. In 'Furious Seasons', the moment of dramatic culmination

⁷¹ William Wyler, *Ben Hur*, (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959).

⁷² Walter J. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), 128-132.

⁷³ Slatoff, 128.

⁷⁴ John Matthews, 'Faulkner and the Culture Industry', *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51-74; 60.

⁷⁵ Matthews, 66.

⁷⁶ William Faulkner, 'The Bear', *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random House, 1942), 181-316. *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

⁷⁷ First at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Random House, 1936).

is unseen, after Farrell finally hears the rain falling, the arrival of the promise of the referential clouds:

He lays down the razor and washes his face, then picks up the razor again. At this moment he hears the first few drops of rain spatter against the roof. . .

He carries her out to the porch, turns her face to the wall, and covers her up. He goes back to the bathroom, washes his hands, and stuffs the heavy, blood-soaked towel into the clothes hamper.⁷⁸

The three dots of ellipsis demonstrate the core silences from which Carver's short fiction develops the Faulknerian imaginative geography. Where Faulkner's fiction used the relation of spaces and gaps on the map to create a highly successful narrative form, Carver's first published story functions through a parallel sense of space as anti-narrative: characteristically indifferent, where characters experience hostility.

Short Story Associations: Cheever and 'The Train'

The study of literary relationships risks the difficulty of 'influence', and nowhere more than in stories like 'Furious Seasons'. In the essay 'Fires', Carver renegotiates the term, acknowledging that he read a quantity of Hemingway, and that his writing shares elements of style.⁷⁹ Still, Carver resists labelling Hemingway as a 'literary influence', instead claiming the importance of immediate circumstances in fictional composition.⁸⁰ In his case, he describes, his children were more of a 'moon and tide' influence than any single literary source.⁸¹ The latter part of 'Fires' affirms John Gardner and Gordon Lish, specifically, as 'hold[ing] irredeemable notes' in their direct and personal effect on Carver's writing life.⁸² His references to such personal relationships are, in his inhabited style, more than details. They signify the difference between the texts and traditions into which his fiction is interpolated, and the 'fires' from which they originate: the essential material of lived experience, worthy of interpolation in his fiction.

John Cheever and Carver taught together at the Iowa 'Writer's Workshop' in the fall of 1973, drinking lots and writing little, according to his own account: 'I don't think either of us ever took the

⁷⁸ *Call if You Need Me*, 144.

⁷⁹ 'Fires', *Call if You Need Me*, 93-106.

⁸⁰ *Call if You Need Me*, 93.

⁸¹ *Call if You Need Me*, 99.

⁸² *Call if You Need Me*, 106.

covers off our typewriters'⁸³ The friendship made a significant and lasting impression on Carver, marked in references to the Pulitzer-prize winning author's stories, as well as their association. Cheever's fiction often gives a sense of geographical and communal space for characters in search of meaning: Neddy Merrill's odyssey in 'The Swimmer' begins as he sees the suburb 'with a cartographer's eye', feeling as if he has made 'a discovery, a contribution to modern geography'.⁸⁴ In 'The Angel of the Bridge', a man narrates his family's phobias, his own being a debilitating fear of crossing bridges, 'an expression of my clumsily concealed horror of what is becoming of the world'.⁸⁵ In such Cheever stories, traversing an everyday space is a significant and invested movement, drawing in and reflecting social and psychological narratives. Carver's story 'The Train' (appearing first in *Cathedral*) was inscribed 'for John Cheever', and made the two stories correspond in narrative as well as reference, by beginning the action shortly before the conclusion of Cheever's 'The Five-Forty-Eight'.⁸⁶ This direct textual response is an example of Carver demonstrating the 'lived-in' worlds of 'On Writing', connecting his texts with those of writers he knew. Between the two stories, a shared environment becomes possible. 'The Five-Forty-Eight' depicts a pursuit through an office building, and a sequence of named streets: 'Walking in the city, we seldom turn and look back'.⁸⁷ The city, for the protagonist (Blake), is an environment under pressure: formed according to dramatic necessities and the story's Noir aesthetic.

'The Train' begins with a revisiting of the final events of the 'The Five-Forty-Eight', expanding its detail. Switching from Blake as the primary character to 'Miss Dent', Carver's story highlights the function of both characters as being *in relation to* the forces, temporalities and social dynamics that surround them. Both characters exist in a story whose title and opening situation looks forward to an event that will take them away from a pressurised zone: both escapes are hampered by delays in time. In the earlier story, Blake does not need to plead for his life, nor does he pick at the leaves with his fingers. The woman does not put her foot on the back of his head, or say "Be still!".⁸⁸ Leypoldt has identified a standard of irony 'with which (neo)realists tend to mark the bias of their narrators', and the difference with which Carver uses a more subtle degree of 'unreliable unreliability'.⁸⁹ Having raised this awareness in the attentive reader of both stories from the outset, the action of Carver's story follows the woman (named insistently, where Cheever's story does only minimally) as she

⁸³ Simpson 1983, para. 42.

⁸⁴ John Cheever, *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 776-788; 777.

⁸⁵ Cheever, 635.

⁸⁶ Raymond Carver, 'The Train', *Cathedral*, 136-144. John Cheever, 'The Five-Forty-Eight' (1954), *The Stories of John Cheever*, 308-322.

⁸⁷ Cheever, 308.

⁸⁸ *Cathedral*, 136.

⁸⁹ Günter Leypoldt, 'Reconsidering Raymond Carver's "Development": The Revisions of "So Much Water so Close to Home"', *Contemporary Literature*, 43, 2 (2002), 317-341; 326.

enters a waiting room, after the scene of the confrontation. As Blake witnesses the regular and delayed temporal trajectories of others as he is arrested by Miss Dent ('All our clocks are slow'),⁹⁰ in 'The Train' she announces, early on, her dissociation and ambivalence towards time:

Miss Dent turned her eyes to the clock. There was nothing in the waiting room that announced when trains arrived and departed. But she was prepared to wait for any length of time. She knew that if she waited long enough, a train would come along, and she could board it, and it would take her away from this place.⁹¹

The opening of Carver's story coincides with Cheever's, in acknowledging temporality as a mode of escape from the psychological pressure of spaces that have seen recent confrontation. Yet, as the story progresses in the 'waiting room', her conversation with an old man and a middle-aged woman moves the focus into a different set of priorities and dynamics: the question of communication and language, in a populated fictional space. The unseen nature of events and conversations held prior to the story are the first signs of broken meaning, the reference of the old man's comment: "'So on top of everything else, no matches'".⁹² Almost every line spoken, though in disrupted conjunction with those around it, is closed with a comma, rather than a termination of the sentence, suggesting its existence within a flow of failed speech. Miss Dent then watches as the woman begins to speak in another language incomprehensible to her, but that reminds her of Sophia Loren 'in a film'.⁹³ "'I can't follow you, you know'", the old man says to her, continuing with the figurative sense of 'following' that reminds the reader of the action of Cheever's story: "'You're going too fast for me. You'll have to slow down. You'll have to speak English. I can't follow you'".⁹⁴ As the conversation between them begins to settle on a coherent subject, a story about a girl 'alone in a house' and a 'Captain Nick', between whom the man and woman are trying to assign a share of responsibility for an unseen situation.⁹⁵

The old man stands up and paces the waiting room, looking for matches, as the middle-aged woman addresses Miss Dent directly: "'You don't say much'".⁹⁶ The old man finds some matches, to which the woman muses "'Basically, you're lucky,'... 'Luck is important'".⁹⁷ She addresses Miss Dent in a culminating monologue:

⁹⁰ Cheever, 320.

⁹¹ *Cathedral*, 137.

⁹² *Cathedral*, 138.

⁹³ *Cathedral*, 138.

⁹⁴ *Cathedral*, 138.

⁹⁵ *Cathedral*, 139.

⁹⁶ *Cathedral*, 141.

⁹⁷ *Cathedral*, 142.

The woman looked over at Miss Dent and said: “Young lady, I’ll wager you’ve had your share of trial and error in this life. I know you have. The expression on your face tells me so. But you aren’t going to talk about it. Go ahead then, don’t talk. Let us do the talking. But you’ll get older. Then you’ll have something to talk about. ...But it’ll all come to you. In its own sweet time, it’ll come. You won’t have to hunt for it, either. It’ll find you”⁹⁸

The middle-aged woman’s speech is the explication of the mode and conversation of ‘The Train’, elucidating a key principle of Carver’s story technique. The keen observational capacity of the middle-aged woman, alongside her willingness to speak, and identify chance in the progress of story, identifies the location of the author between silent action, and the misunderstanding, hunting movements of the experienced. The story ends with a gesture towards other possible lives (as it began), and switches the point of view to the passengers, who look out to the platform from the arriving train. This view offers a flat, summative account of the three figures, standing in their clothing.⁹⁹ The interest is in the few selected details: the old man’s silk cravat and lack of shoes.¹⁰⁰ From the train, the spectators assume the three are a group, but in the multiplicity of images and views that a train window offers, their attention quickly moves on:

But the passengers had seen things more various than this in their lifetime. The world is filled with business of every sort, as they well knew. This still was not as bad, perhaps, as it could be. For this reason, they scarcely gave another thought to these three who moved down the aisle and took up their places.¹⁰¹

The final paragraph of the story (like Cheever’s) concludes with a physical configuration, of mechanical motion, not agency. The conductor and waiting engineer begin a process of dial-turning and lever-pushing that moves the train forward, ‘throwing light onto the roadbed’.¹⁰²

Where Cheever’s unfolding spatial narrative engages with a two-person movement and progressive temporality, Carver’s story takes place *following* the following: on the ground beyond Cheever’s narrative scene. ‘The Train’ focuses attention on a three-person social dynamic, and the instances of mishearing that were peripheral in Cheever’s story. Directed by the curiosity of an onlooker (or reader) at the end of ‘The Five-Forty-Eight’, ‘The Train’ presents Cheever’s drama as

⁹⁸ *Cathedral*, 142.

⁹⁹ *Cathedral*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ The connection with a very different ‘Minimalist’ tradition seems possible with the shoeless old man from the waiting room, and Estragon from Samuel Beckett’s dramatic abstractions in *Waiting For Godot* (1953). The mechanics of ‘The Train’ warrant the comparison, as distant as these two authors might otherwise appear. Supporting this connection, Leypoldt has identified a Beckettian tone in the long Carver story ‘So Much Water, So Close to Home’ (325).

¹⁰¹ *Cathedral*, 144.

¹⁰² *Cathedral*, 144.

without immediate material consequence. Rather, Carver's fiction explores narrative's after-effects, and the results of narrative outside the story's boundaries. 'The Glimpse', more observational and subjective than the temporal moment, still retains a sense of process. It suggests the possibility for fiction to present senses from the edge of consciousness, which remain psychologically significant. This particular glimpse has been selected for its import: activating instincts developed in common, for survival in hostile landscapes.

Media and the Immediate: 'Cathedral'

The association between 'The Five-Forty Eight' and 'The Train' is characteristic of Carver's combination of the mutual and the innovative. His fiction makes connecting references (often in represented space), generously developing in connection and relation to the short story tradition. In 1983, the expatriate American editor Bill Buford, who would later become the literary editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, put together an issue of the Cambridge literary journal *Granta*, entitled 'Dirty Realism'.¹⁰³ This edition, including stories by Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Jayne Anne Phillips, Frederick Barthelme and Angela Carter, opened with an introduction by Buford, in which he explained the title and the relationship of his proposed grouping to the project of 'realism' more widely. This fiction was, he claimed, of a 'different scope' compared to the 'ornate, even baroque' traditional realism of John Updike, and the 'consciously experimental' prose of the Postmodernists.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, he wrote, these fictions rejected the 'epic ambitions' of Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer, instead focusing on the concentrated image to represent 'a whole culture and a whole moral condition'. The 'realism' of this fiction, according to Buford, lay in its representation of a 'class' of people: the working-class, living in particular places, working in specified occupations. Buford's 'Dirty Realism' was serious about depicting such marginalised worlds, and his selections in fiction shared a pared-down form to communicate with fresh and immediate presentation.

Buford's categorisation and selection caught hold of a rising tide, expressed in John Barth's ironic but generational lament in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968).¹⁰⁵ In that landmark short story 'sequence', a range of fictional modes interpolated traditional narrative technique with experimental and formally self-conscious style. The piece entitled 'Life Story' sees these oppositional modes reach a climactic expression in the author-narrator's voice:

¹⁰³ *Granta* 8: 'Dirty Realism: New Writing From America', (Summer 1983).

¹⁰⁴ *Granta*, 1983. Rebein, 41.

¹⁰⁵ John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

Without discarding what he'd already written he began his story afresh in a somewhat different manner. Whereas his earlier version had opened in a straight-forward documentary fashion and then degenerated or at least modulated intentionally into irrealism and dissonance he decided this time to tell his tale from start to finish in a conservative, "realistic", unself-conscious way.¹⁰⁶

The first line encapsulates the problem that Barth felt compelled to respond to, in a world where access to texts, narratives and information exerted a ubiquitous and unavoidable pressure: how to 'begin the story afresh in a somewhat different manner', 'without discarding what [was] already written'. The 'New Writing' in *Dirty Realism* was assembled in this conflicted and contested fictional landscape, its UK publication marking its location beyond the publishing centres of the cities of the East Coast. A fictional document from 'hyper-real' America, the *Granta* cover's juxtaposition of a neon 'MOTEL' sign and Grant Wood's iconic painting 'American Gothic' (1930) signified a new depression era, unearthing its own artistic mode.¹⁰⁷

Connecting the 'real' with the 'hyper-real', the frequently-anthologised Carver story 'Cathedral' mobilises documentary style, and features documentary television.¹⁰⁸ Nessel's study points to biographical and extra-literary explanations for the story's composition and workings.¹⁰⁹ This story justifies these connections more than any other, being the title story for the collection which separates Carver's supposed 'early' and 'late style'. However, the ways in which it connects and mobilises his fictional modes should not be obscured by its position. 'Cathedral' brings characters together at home, creating extraordinary effect in an ordinary space. The story opens with the voice of an unnamed narrator explaining that he is about to receive a visitor, an old friend of his wife's, who has just been bereaved, and is travelling to visit family. The voice of these opening lines establishes the narrator with dialect, history, social relations, will and expressed personal annoyances.¹¹⁰ Despite not having a name, this narrator is distinctively a *subject* and subjective in his voice, as he relates the story of the visitor who, importantly, is blind. From the opening paragraph of the story:

I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, 116.

¹⁰⁷ Grant Wood, 'American Gothic' (1930), Art Institute of Chicago.

¹⁰⁸ *Cathedral*, 'Cathedral', 196-214.

¹⁰⁹ Nessel, 70-1.

¹¹⁰ *Cathedral*, 196.

¹¹¹ *Cathedral*, 196.

The narrator's acknowledged prejudice provides a problem that the story will resolve: but, typically for Carver, the unapologetic brevity of explanation is an essential part of the functionality that drives the story. In passages with this flat style, chronically short sentences, occasionally beginning with a conjunction, sound out a voice marked with the idiosyncrasies of clipped, terse speech. Woven into those sentences is a concentration on the prominence of the narrative self, along with an emphasis on that self as an assumed authority, despite the partiality and second-hand quality of that knowledge. Knowledge gained through 'the movies' could be a perfect Post-modern example of the problem of the narration, highlighting the subjective 'view' that underlies all knowledge. While the narrator is explicit in this first paragraph about his knowing about blind people only from cinematic portraits, the inclusion of this admission provides an essential marker for the mode of the whole story. From this inception, the narrative voice signals awareness of the difficulties of material representation: describing a blind man, a subject orientated in regular and tangible relation to the world outside of himself. Without explicating a manner of formal self-consciousness, Carver's fictional situation captures the tensions of representation under pressure, as ordinary and present as the furniture of the house.

The story progresses by interweaving two temporal modes: the immediate scene in the house, in which the narrator exists in a described evening, and an interjected historical back-story, through which the reader gains extra information known to the narrator about the blind man and his past.¹¹² This version-of-personal-history never supposes its objectivity, however - as in the first paragraph, the markers of voice are insistent. Never more than a few lines pass without phrases like 'lickety-split', personal asides and questions interspersed with the details, and reference back to the immediate situation of the blind man's visit.¹¹³ When the narration returns to the immediate and material, the blind visitor, Robert, arrives at the narrator's home, the two men are introduced, and they soon sit down for some dinner. Again, at the meal, the commonplace is made extraordinary, through the voice and perspective of the narrator. Yet, while it is a visual description, the account is of a shared experience, mutual and sustaining:

We dug in. We ate everything there was to eat on the table. We ate like there was no tomorrow. We didn't talk. We ate. We scarfed. We grazed that table. We were into serious eating. The blind man had right away located his foods, he knew just where everything was on his plate. I watched with admiration as he used his knife and fork on the meat. He'd cut two pieces of meat, fork the meat into his mouth, and then go all out for the scalloped potatoes, the beans next, and then he'd tear off a hunk of buttered bread and eat that. He'd follow this up with a big drink of milk. It didn't seem to bother him to use his fingers once in a while, either.

¹¹² *Cathedral*, 197.

¹¹³ *Cathedral*, 198.

We finished everything, including half a strawberry pie.
For a few moments, we sat as if stunned. Sweat beaded on our faces. Finally, we got up from the table and left the dirty plates. We didn't look back.¹¹⁴

In this scene, the prominence of the objects on the table prefigures the later role of material things and processes: here, in the location of food, the shape and heft of bread and the relationship of foods to the visitor's body. A kind of 'dirty' celebration of the physicality of eating, the meal bridges between objects and characters through the perspective and voice of the narrator. The passage is full of metaphors: they are 'diggers' and 'grazers'. The speaker is, in opinion and emotion, drawn into his observation, as much as the blind man is absorbed by his meal. At the close of the passage, the effect might be a mutual exhaustion: the reader having experienced a textual avalanche of sensation and miraculous gustatory achievement. Yet 'Cathedral' differs in tone from Carver's earlier story 'Fat', in which the entire dramatic action describes a man in a restaurant ordering a huge amount of food, and is (for most of the story) watched by a waitress whose location and role separates her.¹¹⁵ In both stories, through deceptively direct narratorial description and concentration on material objects, a sense of the 'spectacle' marks the visual in relation to the material, narrating the things that leak out from narration of the everyday.

The dinner scene in 'Cathedral' prepares the reader for stranger events later in the evening. The blind man, Robert, asks the narrator about his work, and tells about his conversations as a radio operator with fellow operators in Guam, the Philippines, Alaska and Tahiti.¹¹⁶ This kind of narrative is quickly abandoned, as the narrator lets Robert 'run down' and goes to turn on the TV. The narrator's wife asks Robert whether he has a TV, to which he replies that, yes, he has two: a colour and a black and white set, and that he always goes to turn on the colour set. "This is a color TV," Robert says, "Don't ask me how, but I can tell".¹¹⁷ Here, like at the dinner table, a sense of the mystery that emerges from everyday processes is prominent in the dialogue. This example differs from the last, where in the former, the narrator described an observed and physical overwhelming that occurred at the table. In the latter, Robert speaks his sensory ability, which exists outside of his explanation. Just as the dinner table was both a doubled description: on one hand, of the material or apparent, and on the other, the subjective or extraordinary; Robert's stated ability with televisions enacts these doublings. The impossibility of sight for him collides with his perception of colour, and the casual setting for this ability clashes with the blind man's account of it.

¹¹⁴ *Cathedral*, 204.

¹¹⁵ *WYPBQP*, 1-5.

¹¹⁶ *Cathedral*, 205.

¹¹⁷ *Cathedral*, 205.

The climactic scene of the story follows rounds of whisky and cannabis.¹¹⁸ The narrator describes a documentary showing on the TV about cathedrals in Europe. Overlapping layers of mediation, the narrator tells the reader that there's an 'Englishman' narrating the program, around which he tries to explain to Robert what is going on onscreen (209). Seamlessly, we hear this same explanation, without speech marks – a switching between directed narrative voices, initially without announcement or mimetic disturbance:

The TV showed this one cathedral. Then there was a long, slow look at another one. Finally, the picture switched to the famous one in Paris, with its flying buttresses and its spires reaching up into the clouds. The camera pulled away to show the whole of the cathedral rising above the skyline.

There were times when the Englishman who was telling the thing would shut up, would simply let the camera move around over the cathedrals. Or else the camera would tour the countryside, men in fields walking behind oxen. I waited as long as I could. Then I felt I had to say something. I said, "They're showing the outside of this cathedral now. ...".¹¹⁹

At the end of this passage, the introduction of an explanatory distinction between 'showing' and 'telling' the reader (and the blind man) cuts to the heart of the aesthetic 'realism' of the text, and its inclusion of self-awareness, without the self-conscious voice. This quality of 'showing' is found in the descriptions of the movement of the camera, named in its objectivity: 'the camera pulled away', or 'the camera move[d] around'. In deconstructing the narrative voice (the 'English' voice providing an unfamiliarity to aid this) and presenting the visual representation without the agency at work in its creation, the story again signifies the formal concerns of the representative act that underlies its own writing.

Next, the blind man (Robert) confesses that he has no idea what a cathedral really is, and the narrator of the story embarks upon another project of representation. The visual material plays a crucial role: 'I stared hard at the shot of the cathedral on the TV. How could I even begin to describe it?'.¹²⁰ The dimensions of the home are both reference points and barriers: 'I was looking around the room for clues. "They reach way up. Up and up. Toward the sky. ...".¹²¹ Finding the size and containment of the room incompatible with the extraordinary architecture of the European cathedral, the narrator struggles, until Robert has an idea. They fetch a pen and paper, and set out to draw a cathedral together, the blind man's hand over the narrator's: 'So I began. First I drew a box that looked like a house. It could have been the house I lived in. Then I put a roof on it. At either end

¹¹⁸ *Cathedral*, 206.

¹¹⁹ *Cathedral*, 209.

¹²⁰ *Cathedral*, 211.

¹²¹ *Cathedral*, 211.

of the roof, I drew spires. Crazy'.¹²² Beyond the dominance of the visual, it is Robert who confirms that the drawing has worked, telling the narrator to close his eyes as he draws the last details. The final lines communicate a movement that has taken place for the narrator during this process, again, essentially both material and beyond material specification; located and beyond bounded location:

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.
"It's really something," I said.¹²³

Between a remote represented object (the cathedral), a mode of media representation (the documentary on TV), the narrator of the story, the blind visitor, and the reader, a demonstrative model for the processes of literary production has taken shape. As in John Barth's stories, the narrating voice is an essential part of this process and the accomplishment that results from it: and the understated final line might be read as an alternative version of the Post-modernist critical abyss. Yet while Barth reaches (or reaches for) a transcendence from the paralysis resulting from proliferation of reference, Carver's story remains essentially 'in the house'. The difference, as his narrator says, is the 'feeling'.¹²⁴ This feeling of dislocation alongside specific location, like at the dinner table, contributes to a doubled writing that is capable of communicating the tensions of American suburban experience in the mid-twentieth century.¹²⁵

'Cathedral' suggests that the reader and author can construct specified representation mutually, even more than in more static and specified fictionalised spaces such as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Connecting with theories of mimesis, the text can be an imitating correspondence that, if detectable, is consensually accepted as a successful communication and artwork.¹²⁶ This consensus and community in the process of literary production is a distinctive feature in Carver's later work, but would appear to oppose the reception and popular conception of his early stories, which were known for the isolation and verbal paralysis of their characters.¹²⁷ Approaching such issues from both sides, the authors grouped in the *Dirty Realism* issue shared an engagement with fictional potential for connectivity and disconnection. Among these, Carver's

¹²² *Cathedral*, 213.

¹²³ *Cathedral*, 214.

¹²⁴ *Cathedral*, 214.

¹²⁵ On the dislocation of the suburbanite, see Kunstler 1993, 114-7.

¹²⁶ Matthew C. Strecher, 'Beyond "Pure" Literature: Mimesis, Formula, and the Postmodern in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, 2 (May 1998), 354-378, 357.

¹²⁷ Charles E. May, "'Do You See What I'm Saying?": The Inadequacy of Explanation and the Uses of Story in the Short Fiction of Raymond Carver', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 31, 'North American Short Stories and Short Fictions' (2001), 39-49.

fictions are exemplary in their essential correspondences between authors, with the author and reader as co-respondents to a shared experiential account.

A spatial literature is capable of addressing the challenges of representing the diversity of pressurised social environments. For fiction, this practical response to the 'Spatial Turn' wrote against the limiting map of publishing in the 1960s and 1970s, and by extension, against the dominant voices and interests that controlled America's physical spaces. In adapting the representative strategies of both historical and contemporary authors, Carver could establish his texts in relation to literary tradition, describing forgotten and repressed spaces. In the foreword to the photographic companion *Carver Country* (1990), Tess Gallagher writes that Raymond Carver's imaginative geography 'finds its corresponding territory in the lives of people nearly everywhere'.¹²⁸ 'Correspondence' suggests a variety of relationship that a writer can cultivate: between the spaces of the text, the diversity of characters and voices, and the recognition of the reader. Indeed, Carver's writings correspond through the common experience and details of life in the suburbs ('Where I'm Calling From') and further, in their bridging between the immediacy of Carver's material, to connect with the broadest readership enabled by publishing in the twenty-first century. Carver's writings negotiated the everyday politics of region through his innovation in short forms. In the following chapters I will investigate his fictional geographies through his own terms, and according to the sometimes radical literary and material referents of the texts themselves. This study will aim to make more than a map of 'Carver Country', as a flat inscription. Carver's works illuminate inhabited spaces beyond the page, inhabited and traceable on American literary geographies.

¹²⁸ Bob Adelman, *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver* (Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990), 9.

Chapter 3

Into the Frame

The publication of *Beginners* (2009) cast a spotlight on the conflict surrounding the authorship of 'Carver Country', and was presented as evidence for the originality and importance of Carver's second collection.¹ *Beginners* was promoted as a vindicating insight into Carver's early style, which had previously been obscured by the editorial revisions of Gordon Lish in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981).² Problematic as such claims may be, *Beginners* reveals a variety of extensive and expressive spaces which go far beyond the more condensed edits of the earlier publication. Mountain vistas, birdsong and the everyday social talk of neighbors reappear in the *Beginners* versions, expanding the spare, focussed frames of the Lish edits into extensive, allusive landscapes. 'Viewfinder' appears as the second story in both *Beginners* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, and turns the shared camera frame of a story like 'Cathedral' back onto the suburban home itself. Similarly to 'Cathedral', 'Viewfinder' enables a connective relationship of hospitality, relating through the presence of an 'outsider' with physical disability. A 'man without hands' knocks on the narrator's door, trying to sell him a photograph of the house.³ The personal narrative introduced by this visitor is withheld in the story's opening, the curiosity of reader and narrator joined when the obvious question is asked:

"How did you lose your hands?" I asked after he'd said what he wanted.
"That's another story," he said. "You want this picture or not?"
"Come in," I said. "I just made coffee".⁴

The man's prosthetic hooks foreground the active relationship between objects, the functions that allow representation (in this case, the photograph), and the human identity that makes the photographer more than this bare functionality. His interest is in selling the photograph, and yet, he

¹ Raymond Carver, *Beginners* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).

² D.T. Max, 'The Carver Chronicles', *The New York Times Magazine*, Aug 9, 1998, 35-40, 51, 56-67; 56.

³ 'Viewfinder'-W, 10. I will differentiate between references to the text edited by Gordon Lish (1981) as 'Viewfinder'-W, and the version released in *Beginners* (2009) as 'Viewfinder'-B.

⁴ 'Viewfinder'-W, 10.

uses the hooks to drink his coffee and 'pluck at his crotch', and engages in an empathic conversation with the narrator, who has offered him hospitality.

Such expressive pathways between materiality, functionality and identity recur throughout Carver's domestic spaces, as this chapter will explore. The home is, first of all, an architectural configuration with walls, floors and ceilings, and apertures through those structures. These material surfaces interact with their inhabitants, as their planes and apertures become 'screens' of a different kind. Windows, doors and even chimney flues are receptive to the projection of narratives upon them (See Fig. 1). These apertures also let certain forces in or out, and provide containment for others, generating tension to drive the narrative of the story forward. In these areas of resistance and transmission, the home becomes an expressive box of narratives: an inhabitable zoetrope, flashing images into mimesis and meaning. As suggested in its title, 'Viewfinder' is a story in search of new perspectives, to express a simultaneously coherent and multi-dimensional personal narrative. The dense opening passage describes how the photographer holds the camera, and how the camera, in turn, is strapped onto his body. The inside/outside dynamic of looking is summarised at the end of this paragraph:

He would stand on the sidewalk in front of your house, locate your house in the viewfinder, push down the level with one of his hooks, and out would pop your picture.

I'd been watching from the window, you see.⁵

Two frames originate and are directed, from inside the house and out: but also gesture to the further frame outside the story, from which the reader also watches ('you see'). As the reader is witness from outside the short story frame, the characters are shown hearing yet-more brief stories from each other, framed from the Polaroid viewfinder, the windows and doorways of the home. The increasingly rapid superimposition of these frames results in the expression of an amplified narrative tension, the reader witnessing more and more representations of the architectural frame, the singularity of the photographic task focussing the unseen signified that the Polaroid holds in brief suspension.

⁵ 'Viewfinder'-W,10.



Figure 1: *An American suburban home of mid-century design, with chimney-stack. Gregory Crewdson, 'Untitled', (Plate 52) from Dream House (2002).*

The search and discovery of 'Viewfinder' can be connected with Carver's writing on the stages of composition, often in close relation to spaces and environments familiar in his stories. One of the earliest published reflections by Carver on his own work was the 1973 untitled essay, describing the imaginative origin of the story 'Neighbors'.⁶ The two-page piece sets out from established territory, an account of how his own experience became a source for his fiction:

I found that experience of entering and leaving someone else's apartment two or three times a day, sitting for a while in other people's chairs, glancing through their books and magazines and looking out their windows, made rather a powerful impression on me. ...The real work on the story, and perhaps the art of the story, came later. Originally the manuscript was twice as long, but I kept paring it on subsequent revisions, and then pared some more, until it achieved its present length and dimensions.⁷

⁶ *Cutting Edges: Young American Fiction for the 70s*, ed. Jack Hicks (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 528-9.

⁷ *Call if You Need Me*, 103.

The piece culminates in a statement of tentative approval: that 'Neighbors' is, in Carver's reading, 'more or less, an artistic success'.⁸ This claim is qualified with perhaps the clearest and most concise articulation of his relationship with the dominant 'virtues held dear in short fiction'.⁹ This is, Carver repeats, 'a different kind of story', perhaps, by the usual standards, 'too thin, too elliptical and subtle, too inhuman', but with distinct 'internal and external truths and values'.¹⁰ Such terms suggest a way of thinking about and reading Carver stories from across his career: in the relationship between the author's experience, and his crafted text. Both Carver's fiction and non-fiction invite the reader to consider the capacity and struggle of the 'realist' text to represent spaces, in strange sitting rooms, alienating apartment halls or across expansive fields. The term 'Carver Country' has been used to underline the importance of such spaces, recurring in both popular reception and critical analyses.¹¹ In these reviews, articles and essays, the term refers beyond and between the stories, suggesting a cohesive world of Carver's work, synthesising textual topographies into shared narratives and images. Indeed, the vitality of the term highlights the central relationship between space and text that underlines both the stories and criticism on them. The relationship between Carver's distinctive short story form and the textual spaces in which his characters interact is the first stage in this correspondence, building outwards with craft, to shape 'inhabitable' worlds.

Carver's attendance at John Gardner's 'Creative Writing 101' at Chico State and work at the Iowa Workshop identify his emergence from the Creative Writing Workshop system, which expanded rapidly in the 1960s.¹² In creative writing workshops, short fiction constituted the standard source-texts, and Gardner's syllabus included Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce, Conrad, Isaac Babel, Chekhov and Robert Penn Warren: Modernist stylists, for whom the short story was a distinct art-form as much as an apprenticeship.¹³ This strengthened relationship between a distinct literary form and 'national literature' prompted, in turn, the development of new adaptations of short fiction.¹⁴ In the first decade of Carver's publication, Hemingway's reputation was preeminent as self-styled and self-reliant émigré, writing home from Paris and Spain.¹⁵ In less distant geographies, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty had crafted a short fiction of the American South, finding voice for their located characters, within the values of their communities. Situating him between the international perspective, the national and regional, *The Times'* front-page obituary hailed Carver as

⁸ *Call if You Need Me*, 104.

⁹ *Call if You Need Me*, 104.

¹⁰ *Call if You Need Me*, 104.

¹¹ Most prominently in early monographs on Carver, and Bob Adelman's *Carver Country*.

¹² Tom Grimes, *The Workshop: Seven Decades of the Iowa Writers' Workshop* (Hyperion Books, 1999).

¹³ 'Preface', Gardner, 1983.

¹⁴ Raymond Carver, Untitled contribution to 'A Symposium of Contemporary American Fiction', *Michigan Quarterly Review* (University of Michigan), 26, 4 (1987), 710-11. Collected in *No Heroics, Please*, 152-3.

¹⁵ As in *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribners, 1926).

an 'American Chekhov', a quotation that has been widely reproduced since.¹⁶ In the two parts of this title, too, 'Carver Country' hails a short fiction of national spaces: in the words of the Peter Kemp article, a communication of a heterogeneous 'state/s of the nation'. Bridging from the cultural and local to the national and historical, Carver's accomplishment was recognised as developing formal techniques and practices taught in the new Creative Writing workshops, to imagine the vast and varied territories of the West.

Spatial Stories

Carver drew upon Hemingway ('Prose is architecture...') to assert his belief in writing that has a thoroughly-crafted form and substantive structure.¹⁷ In interview he expanded the metaphor, in a specified assertion: 'Prose must stand upright from one end to the other, like a wall whose ornamentation continues down to its very base. Prose is architecture'.¹⁸ This insistence on the robust structure of prose invites a reading of Carver's texts in the immediacy of their described material configurations, focussing on the elements that exist within the text. Windows, doors, leaky ceilings and two-way chimney flues appear prominently in Carver's stories, while less permeable elements of his fictional buildings tend to appear as background, or implied presence. Yet walls, floors and roofs silently influence and constrain characters as frames for the line of sight: borders which enable voice and material to cross the cultural threshold. Criticism on these enclosing spaces to date has approached from other trajectories: Robert Miltner's consideration of Carver's 'architecture of emotion', for example, takes Homi Bhaba's spatial model as a way of following the relationships of characters in the early story 'Gazebo'.¹⁹ This approach follows the critical direction of Kirk Nessel's early monograph on the fiction, in which 'contact', 'communication' and 'intersection' offer paths forward for the previously isolated individual in *Cathedral*: in his reading (and a critical consensus), a significant development in his style.²⁰ Yet this approach to architectural form sees containment as a problem to be worked through or escaped: as if this reflected structural imposition by the 'Minimalist' trend. Nessel gestures towards something more combinative in his conclusion, where he observes that 'Cathedral's narrator 'begins to realize just how exhilarating

¹⁶ Peter Kemp, 'The American Chekhov', *The Times*, 7 Aug 1989.

¹⁷ 'Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over' Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribners, 1932).

¹⁸ Raymond Carver, 'Two Interviews With Raymond Carver', translated by William L. Stull, Claude Grimal, "L'Histoire ne descend pas des nuages," *Europe*, 733 (May 1990), 72-79. Gigliola Nocera, 'Raymond Carver's *America profunda*', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 46 (Spring) 2006, <http://jsse.revues.org/index505.html>, para. 20.

¹⁹ Robert Miltner, 'Raymond Carver and the Architecture of Emotion', *EnterText*, 7, 3 (Winter, 2007).

²⁰ Nessel, 59-61.

confinement can be, once one sees beyond the narrow enclosure of self that larger, more expansive enclosure of society'.²¹ The claimed necessity of both the 'walled-in' and the sense of 'freedom' requires its own investigation: an opportunity to focus attention on the ways they facilitate Carver's distinctive versions of epiphany.

Beyond structural analysis of Carver's stories, critical accounts have themselves been limited: Nessel summarises, that Carver's work moved past the self-conscious formal attention of the Postmodernists.²² Yet Carver's fictions are everywhere concerned with the search in his characters for terms by which they might grasp hold of their turning world, as suggested by the titles to stories and collections: the '*What We Talk About...*' and '*Where I'm Calling From*'. The structured 'step-programme' of Alcoholics Anonymous is the focus of Chad Wrigleworth's study, as an edifice that simultaneously effaces its appearance: an invisible frame.²³ In relation to such structures, then, contemporary critical consideration of Carver's texts must maintain awareness of both the material representation and the textual strategies of realist fiction after Postmodernism.

Jonathan Murdoch has argued that Levi-Straussian binaries are strategic tools for breaking myths into their articulable, constituent parts.²⁴ After the Structuralist moment, modes of reading 'across the text' distinguished the experience of the reader from the critic, to overcome the perceived slipperiness of reader response. Such critical structures frequently required a stratified consideration of texts, as in Phillip Smith's account of Levi-Straussian interpretation: 'Beneath the level of perplexing and unique events are hidden generative mechanisms'.²⁵ Yet in Roland Barthes' *S/Z* (1975), structural critical analysis developed a greater awareness of heterogeneity. In Murdoch's reading, after Barthes the 'reader is not simply configured by the codes in the story but is an active agent in the process of meaning generation'.²⁶ By applying Levi-Strauss and Barthes to the tradition of short fiction, a new synchronic analysis of Carver's short fiction becomes possible. This approach reveals how the precision of Carver's formal craft can expose and fracture mythologies acting upon his characters. Carver's fictional subject is only half-'decentred' (perhaps an even more radical contribution to heterogeneity), resisting and threatening mythologies that remain active constituents of the social landscape.

²¹ Nessel, 70.

²² Nessel, 5-6.

²³ Chad Wrigleworth, 'Raymond Carver and Alcoholics Anonymous: The Narrative Under the "Surface of Things"', *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction, and Poetry*. Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner, eds. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 132-153.

²⁴ Jonathan Murdoch, *Post-Structuralist Geography* (London: Sage, 2006), 5.

²⁵ Murdoch, 97-8.

²⁶ Murdoch, 7.

Roland Barthes' account in *L'activité structuraliste* (1964) suggested that the Structuralist text 'neither reflects the world, nor follows in its traces, but builds it'.²⁷ Franco Moretti's work on the 'geography of literature' in European novels admits its search for maps and models that append usefully to the world and its representations. His conception of a 'space-trope continuum' develops from the premise of Levi-Strauss and Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), that 'the precondition of narrative is a binary opposition. Two fields'.²⁸ Beyond this binary, Moretti draws attention to the gap between the representation and the urban space, and the emergence of a 'Third' as 'figure of social overdetermination, which intersects the narrative, and changes its course'.²⁹ The Third is so essential to the Social Realist novel, Moretti observes, that it is 'the true protagonist', giving birth to narrative structures of 'unprecedented complexity' in a specific geographical fiction.³⁰ Criticism on the spatial 'Third' has recently been developed in sociological theory, as in Doreen Massey's writing on the central 'meeting place' in the text 'where relations interweave and intersect'.³¹ Edward Soja's influential *Thirdspace* (1991) made a case for comparable generative spatial zones in a specified geographical location (Los Angeles), which exceed either the Euclidean or the representational. Soja considers American social spaces and texts in proximity, where collisions are essential to meaning-creation: a reflection of the cultural forces that both formed and resulted from the 'post-modern' city.³² Thus, in its inheritance from structural models and its implication of linguistic and spatial imagination, the 'New Geography' positioned itself on the borderlands of the fictive. Through these constructive mappings of urban and suburban spaces, the relationship between text and world could be reimaged, as sympathetic and inclusive.

In the street and the fictional suburb, then, the inadequacy of previous spatial models and narratives has been matched by out-dated and limiting architectures. Developing from these structures and beyond them, Carver's writings imagine a new spatial text as socially expressive and plural. His remodelled spatial form, I will argue, is essential to claims for a realist 'renaissance' in American short fiction to follow the experimental texts of John Barth, Donald Barthelme and William H. Gass.³³ Carver's self-described 'no tricks' writing can be traced through his study of the short story form under John Gardner: avoiding the Postmodernist focus on formal innovation in favour of the

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *L'activité structuraliste/Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 213-220. Dmitry Olshansky, 'The Birth of Structuralism from the Analysis of Fairy-Tales', *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto), para. 10.

²⁸ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 43.

²⁹ Moretti, 108.

³⁰ Moretti, 110.

³¹ Doreen Massey, 'Power-geometries and the politics of space-time', Hettner-Lecture, Department of Geography, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, 1998. *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 37.

³² Soja, 1996.

³³ Donald Barthelme, *The Dead Father* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975). William H. Gass, *Omensetter's Luck* (New York: New American Library, 1966).

more mimetic advances made by earlier practitioners.³⁴ Theories of the Modernist short story tradition have identified the regular incidence of unified temporal coordinates, a concentration on one or a small number of scenes, and a development towards an epiphany.³⁵ In this dominant model of the short story, four dimensions of space and time which operate in chronologically-active fictions such as the High Realist novels of the late nineteenth century are compressed into three-dimensional or spatial presentation, amplifying the interplay and collision between proximal objects. In this compressed chronology, represented space signifies through both content and mode: but Carver's stories go further, developing more radical spaces than the brevity of his form would necessitate. His decision to work with the short story allowed the concentration of its narrative effects into a form that could communicate between both literary and material landscapes 'with startling power'.³⁶

Contents and Containers

In the essay 'Stories', Randall Jarrell argued for an affinity between fiction and dreams, suggesting that short stories are particularly capable of expressing the compromise between narrative expression and repression in the (Freudian) Unconscious mind.³⁷ This move, to establish a basis for the dramatic structure of the story in the psyche, suggests a limitless imaginative territory, a convenient concept for the artist self-mythologised as autonomous creator. Yet Jarrell's essay situates dramatic actors in relation to a structural account of the form, the 'bones of stories' expressed in the infinite iterations of 'all kinds of beings, and all kinds of things happen[ing] to them'.³⁸ The spatial narrative mode of *Beginners* is most clear in the nine of the seventeen stories told with a strong first-person voice, and especially those which begin with establishing markers of oral narrative: relating a 'storyteller' narrator and the reader as confidante. The establishment of a centred subject is a recognisable element of the realist aesthetic in short fiction, and 'The Fling' begins with a brief paragraph that situates the narrative voice in the present tense: 'It's October, a damp day outside. From my hotel room window I can look out and see much of this gray midwestern

³⁴ Raymond Carver, 'A Storyteller's Shoptalk', 1981.

³⁵ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁶ Nicholas O'Connell, 'Raymond Carver', from *At the Field's End: Interviews with Twenty Pacific Northwest Writers* (Seattle: Madrona, 1987), 76-94, 76.

³⁷ Randall Jarrell, 'Stories', *Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (Atheneum Publishers, 1962). In *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E May (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994), 3-14, 6.

³⁸ Jarrell, 10.

city'.³⁹ Framing details, omitted in Lish's revisions, reappear in many of the stories in *Beginners*, characteristically propelling the central character from a foundational present into a significant past moment and a compulsive retelling. 'The Fling' builds from a prosaic present location: 'there isn't much to recommend the place' to narrativised past, in one step: 'I want to relate a story my father told me last year when I stopped over briefly in Sacramento'.⁴⁰ Prefacing this account, the narrator gives a lengthy expression of his anxiety about the 'business' of telling:

It contains some sordid events that he was involved in nearly two years before that, before he and my mother were divorced. It could be asked that if it is important enough to warrant the telling – my time and energy, your time and energy – then why haven't I told it before this? I'd have no answer for that. In the first place, I don't know if it is that important – at least to anyone except my father and the others involved. Secondly, and perhaps more to the point? What business is it of mine? That question is more difficult to answer.⁴¹

The compressed and concurrent relationships between expression and repression in 'The Fling' can be best illustrated visually, as Marie-Laure Ryan has demonstrated in work on frames and boundaries.⁴² Layering the three-dimensional spatial dynamics with the traditional linearity of plot as in *Figure 2*, the 'line' of narrative crosses nested frames, balancing the inertial boundaries of the narrator's anxiety. This pressurised version of traditional narrative form combines in the narrator's voice, a familiar doubling for readers of Postmodernist metafiction. The 'non-place' of the airport bar in Sacramento is a material figuration of this dynamic, too: a doubled narrative container, formally generic but particularly located.⁴³ As the narrator reassesses the significance of the events told by his father personally, the reader is invited to consider the reception of each successive 'telling'. Through the compelled progression of narration, 'The Fling' builds bridges across a traumatically repressed chronology, in locations shared by father, narrator and reader. For these three relating perspectives, the replaying of story holds the possibility of satisfying resolution: that in the connecting of narrative containers, a family relationship can be actualised.

³⁹ 'The Fling', *Beginners*, 38-53; 38.

⁴⁰ 'The Fling', 38.

⁴¹ 'The Fling', 38.

⁴² Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Stacks, Frames, and Boundaries', *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*. ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2002), 366-386.

⁴³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

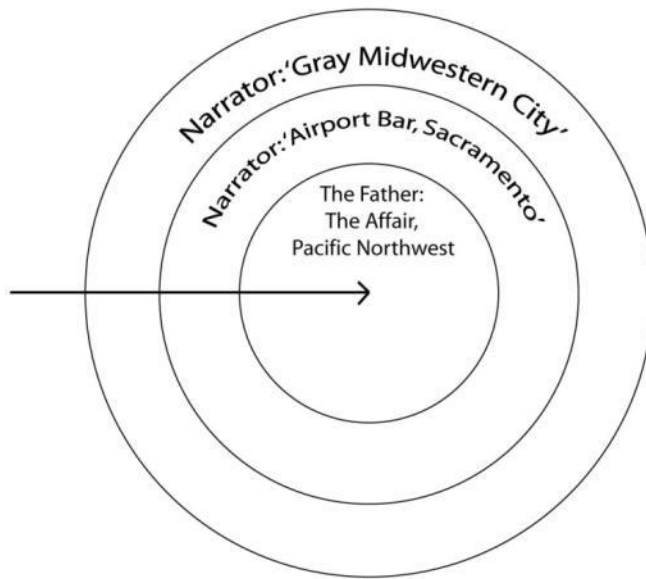


Figure 2: The narrative line of ‘The Fling’, bridging or perforating narrative frames.

Three spatial-narrative frames can be distinguished in ‘The Fling’, dividing diegesis to propel and channel narrative movement between them. Before the father’s tale is told, an eighteen-line paragraph digresses to identify the correspondent sites of narrative arrest in narrator and father:

...beyond help, beyond anything I could do for him, and... the only thing that transpired between us in those few hours was that he caused me – *forced* might be a better word – to peer into my own abyss; and nothing comes of nothing as Pearl Bailey says.⁴⁴

Crossing the threshold into the second diegesis (the narrator’s stop-over in Sacramento), geographical detail and specific location again provide a locating frame for the narrative account. The description evokes a sky, departure and arrival areas and the airport bar as environment for the crucial conversation, with (in a final perspectival gesture) the view out of a tinted window. The narrator marks their established location with a banal celebration: “Here we are, Dad. Cheers”.⁴⁵ The father then begins to tell his story, making the narrator an audience to a now-repeated and

⁴⁴ ‘The Fling’, 38.

⁴⁵ ‘The Fling’, 39.

reinforced tension. As the story of the father's fling moves towards the dramatic inevitability of disaster, he reiterates the need to tell his story, against apparently magnifying anxiety. 'I want to tell it all', he insists at the narrative precipice. He recalls the moment when he and his lover were caught by her husband, arriving home unexpectedly:

All this was happening at once. There I was, half naked with all my clothes in my hand, and Larry was opening the front door. I jumped. I jumped right into their big front-room window, right through the glass. I landed in some bushes, jumped up with the glass still falling off me, and started off running down the street.⁴⁶

With the rupture of the picture window, the narrative crosses back to the previous frame of the airport bar. The narrator's thoughts are here italicised in a gesture of emphasis to the reader, an additional audience in this concentric narration. This central action corresponds with other examples of breaking the boundaries of the suburban home in Carver's fiction: in 'So Much Water, So Close to Home' the narrator 'send[s] the dishes and glasses smashing and scattering across the floor' during an argument.⁴⁷ Later in the same story her husband breaks the lock on the front door, 'just to show me that he can, I suppose'.⁴⁸ Such events demonstrate expression against the structures of architecture, but as in 'The Fling', also orientate spaces around dramatic perforations of the house. In *Beginners* suburban domestic spaces are often a foundational 'home' ground, with other places and events measured from there. Six of the stories take place entirely within and around the suburban home, with the most developed of these ('Why Don't You Dance?' and 'Viewfinder', discussed in further detail later) imagining modified houses in more strange relation to the neighbourhood. Here, the smashed door, or 'front room window' announces the failure of that location as protective spatial container. At these thresholds and perforated spaces, the relationship between dramatic narrative and material space appears most explosively: with both destructive and creative effects.

A concentric spatial form can include frames and fields as nested sites for narrative, but within this structure, also makes space for a psychological 'abyss' as described in 'The Fling'. For the father, this is specific and traumatic, the core of the dramatic account. After relating the suicide of his lover's husband, he tells of his entrapment in compulsive narrative repetition: 'It keeps coming back to me, I mean, and I can't get it out of my head that he should be dead for something I

⁴⁶ 'The Fling', 49.

⁴⁷ 'So Much Water, So Close to Home', *Beginners*, 114-133; 115.

⁴⁸ 'So Much Water, So Close to Home', 132.

caused'.⁴⁹ The father is held in the trap of a single moment: unabsorbed, undirected and apparently unbreakable. At the close of his retelling, the father pauses at another threshold of incommunicability:

He started to say something else, but shook his head. Then he leaned forward slightly across the table, lips parted still, trying to find my eyes. He wanted something. He was trying to involve me in it somehow, alright, but it was more than that, he wanted something else. An answer, maybe, when there were no answers.⁵⁰

In the final section of 'The Fling', pressurised and fragmented chronology extends symmetrically, radiating its effect back through the story's frames to the opening. The narrator admits mislaying the sack of gifts his father brought, and his father's address. After relating the story, he too can only offer silence, figuring this narrative arrest as a condition of the physical body: 'I was all smooth surface with nothing inside except emptiness'.⁵¹ Like his father, the narrator must stop short of full explication as he faces the limits of his communication. Critics have sometimes considered such inarticulacy a thematic interest, even suggesting that it reveals the limit of the author's abilities.⁵² However, as demonstrated in 'The Fling', these hesitations and silences are functionally essential in the dramatic implication of connecting spaces in which characters meaningfully move and relate. Their lack of speech, as well as their expression, shows how the traditional linear narrative trajectory of the short story (as a vehicle for chronological, historicising voices) can be remade in the wider view of an articulated spatial form. Chronological fragments of history, memory and dream are compressed into dynamic interaction in the core interaction, and in recurrent locations. Within the framing structures of voice, the abyss remains, specified but beyond articulation: drawing together the disparate narratives of the story. Through narrative and spatial structure rather than Postmodernist epistemologies, 'The Fling' works through a spatial figuration of limitation itself: beyond the text, coexistence with other spaces, and other stories.

⁴⁹ 'The Fling', 51.

⁵⁰ 'The Fling', 51.

⁵¹ 'The Fling', 51.

⁵² William Gearhart, 'Breaking the Ties That Bind: Inarticulation in the Fiction of Raymond Carver', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 26, 4 (1989), 439.

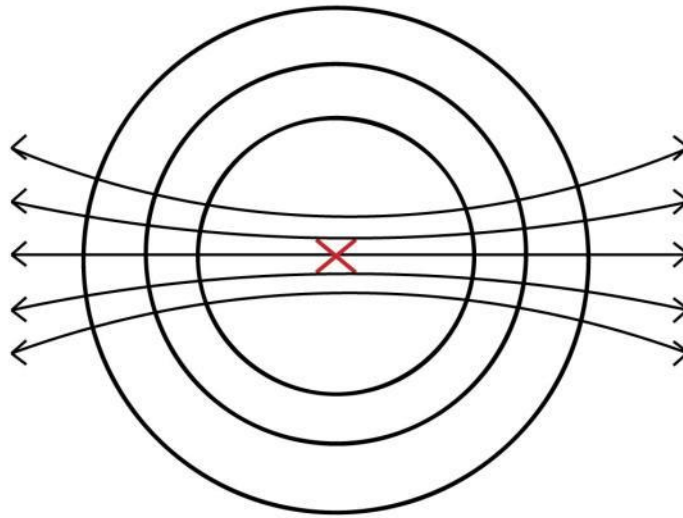


Figure 3. The ‘gravitational’ effect of the central point on linear narratives, through related framing spaces.

Reconstructing Generative Space

As in ‘The Fling’, narrative containers in *Beginners* often reveal and magnify the effect of a central point: a locus at which traditional fictional modes and cultural texts falter and give way to silence.⁵³ Like the representation of field lines in a magnetised area, linear narrative is revealed as directed by more powerful factors. Individual narratives appear as instances in a wider array, specific expressions that meet in these common grounds. The dramatic effect of ‘The Fling’ can be traced from the action at its center, through the locations described in the nesting frames of the retelling (See Fig. 3). ‘A Small, Good Thing’, ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’, ‘Distance’, and the title story ‘Beginners’ also work around a traumatic incident that threatens articulacy in its telling, focusing narrative atemporally from that point. Although without the sense of clarity or progressive dénouement associated with epiphany in the Modernist short story, these incidents are capable of a

⁵³ As observed in the Introduction to Runyon, *Reading Raymond Carver* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 1.

similar emotional effect for the characters.⁵⁴ Carver's cited influences from this tradition include the James Joyce of *Dubliners*, and it was Joyce in *Stephen Hero* who adapted the theological term to modern fiction:

...a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.⁵⁵

The 'delicate and evanescent' epiphany, to be captured and recorded by an exceptional artist-figure (a 'hero') would, for Carver, be remade in his own context, with an American cultural styling of a robust and democratic expression. Drawing upon Carver's structured craft, this adapted version of epiphany might be considered narratively 'generative', expressed first within constricting and containing materials and architectures. Like other versions of the epiphany in cultural and literary discourse, the term suggests sudden access to additional fields of knowledge or experience, rather than a process preceding. Atemporally tracing the crossing of knowledge from the unconscious into consciousness, a generative space is also the doorway from implication to explicit narration in the text.

The identification and location of the 'generative' in Carver's stories draws upon the interrelation of material and cultural narratives. Electrical generators, converting mechanical to electrical energy between metal coils and radiating magnetic fields, suggest the concentric narratives of the anti-chronological short story. These texts trace dramatic sight-lines through the apertures of architecture and across neighborhoods. Investigating the 'generative' recognises a core process in represented textual space, through which conflicting narratives in the text collapse, converge, and radiate concentrically towards the diversity of the reading audience. In the generative space, the short story can represent everyday social spaces in reciprocal and non-prescriptive ways. Many of the stories in *Beginners* work through the dramatic reconstruction of specific architectures, and within such frames, show characters themselves constructing expressive generative containers. In the *Beginners* version of 'Gazebo', interdependent physical and imaginative spaces converge around an anti-chronological generative space.

The primary narration in 'Gazebo' describes a young couple (Duane and Holly) experiencing the breakdown of their relationship following Duane's affair with a maid cleaning apartments in their motel (Juanita). The opening line shows Holly's desire to escape the motel room, as a highly unstable

⁵⁴ Arthur M. Saltzman, 'Epiphany and Its Discontents: Coover, Gangemi, Sorrentino, and Postmodern Revelation', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 15, 4 (Spring 1989), 497-518; 499.

⁵⁵ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions Press, 1944), 188.

subject from the outset: 'That morning she pours Teacher's scotch over my belly and licks it off. In the afternoon she tries to jump out the window'.⁵⁶ From the threatened rupture of this opening, 'Gazebo' combines and collides layers of narrative around the frame of the story: the narration and architecture of the apartment. The narrated present-tense action all occurs within the apartment, with reported conversations between the couple and Duane's memories and fantasies interspersed between framed memories of his affair. Even more emphatically than 'The Fling', narratives in 'Gazebo' are presented in spatial zones, variously distant from the container of the motel apartment. Holly and Duane's conversations all take place there, and Duane's affair is remembered and recurs as fantasy in the nearby locations of the motel's other rooms and Juanita's house in town. This geography locates absent 'homes' against other, inadequate domestic spaces, such as the room where Duane meets Juanita, 'a unit that faced east, towards the mountains'.⁵⁷ This fractured structure collides with domestic mythologies, when Duane and Juanita are caught by the other maid, Bobbi: 'Juanita was scared and ashamed. She dressed and drove home. I saw Bobbi outside a while later and sent her home too. I wound up putting the units in order myself that day. Holly kept to the office...'.⁵⁸ As the inevitable reckoning between Duane and Holly approaches, the motel materialises decay, falling into disrepair.

As the motel disintegrates in the direction of time's arrow, narrative planes converge towards a generative space. Memory, fantasy and sounds from outside increasingly collapse towards the central apartment-space. Here, active remaking of the domestic architecture can work against the inevitabilities felt in the story so far. Following what Duane calls 'an all-night rehashing of the situation', the couple spend a morning on their bed drinking and eating junk food.⁵⁹ Crossing a threshold into the inner spatial and narrative frame, the characters temporarily seal the apartment against the invasion of the world outside. Like the narrator of 'The Fling', Holly immediately insists that they 'talk, talk now, without interruption, no phone calls, no guests'.⁶⁰ This suspension of chronological and material progression might make way for a situated contact in immediate space and communication. Duane goes to the liquor store and locks up the motel office, 'let[ting] the phone ring away downstairs'.⁶¹ Materially barricading the apartment, Duane materialises narrative reconfiguration: a containing space, to resist time. As narrator, Duane's thoughts mark this hope, and the bridging potential of the generative:

⁵⁶ 'Gazebo', 22.

⁵⁷ 'Gazebo', 26.

⁵⁸ 'Gazebo', 26.

⁵⁹ 'Gazebo', 28.

⁶⁰ 'Gazebo', 28.

⁶¹ 'Gazebo', 28.

There was a funny sense of anything could happen now that we realized everything was lost. We knew without having to say it that something had ended, but what was about to begin and take its place, neither of us could think on yet.⁶²

Duane's thought signals the achievement of a causal 'weightlessness' at the core of the story, connecting the similarity of 'anything' with 'everything', and holding impending narratives of invasion with a silent sense of shared potential. The two characters fall asleep on the bed, and then: 'sometime later in the day Holly raised herself off my arm. ...She sat up in bed. Then she screamed and rushed away from me toward the window'.⁶³ As in the opening lines, Holly's violent reaction occurs at the point of her crossing between proximal, colliding narratives: in this case, between the narrative layers of dreaming and waking consciousness. In a spatially-figurative expression of her anxiety about the dissolution of the cultural narratives of their partnership, she speaks her unwillingness to 'go outside the marriage'.⁶⁴ With so many converging dreams, fantasies and memories, this expression is acutely painful. By contrast, Duane's attempt to diffuse the situation suggests a resumed linear narrative, a plan of action: "'No more now, honey. Let's not torture ourselves. What is it that we should do now?'"⁶⁵

Holly's response keeps the story within the psychological crucible of interrelating narrative spaces, as she relates her fantasy of a permanent domestic space emerging from a memory she recalls from early in their marriage. She recounts the memory of a drive the couple took 'to that old farm place outside of Yakima, out past Terrace Heights'.⁶⁶ In her imagination she remembers this as a hospitable place: they are invited in for cake, and talked and were shown around. Holly's fantasy space reflects her domestic and marital desires, as a spatial representation of marital and emotional comfort and stability: the farmhouse with 'those nice big rooms and their furnishings... I still remember the inside of that house', she says, 'I've dreamed about it from time to time, the inside of that house, those rooms, but I never told you those dreams'.⁶⁷ In the description of a narrativised home-space, the incommunicability of emotion is most apparent. Even as Holly recounts her dreams, the generative space with its essential, central silence, recurs.

Holly recalls the old couple who owned the house taking them out the back to show them their gazebo. She tells Duane: 'I'd never seen one before. It was in a field under some trees. It had a

⁶² 'Gazebo', 28.

⁶³ 'Gazebo', 28.

⁶⁴ 'Gazebo', 29.

⁶⁵ 'Gazebo', 29.

⁶⁶ 'Gazebo', 29.

⁶⁷ 'Gazebo', 29.

little peaked roof'.⁶⁸ This radial structure marks a point with its sheltering roof, from which all other impermanent and enclosing living spaces appear unfavourably. The gazebo also suggests the particular form of the story which takes it for a title, with its typical arrangement connecting an ornamental roof with minimally-obstructing supporting columns (See *Fig. 4*). Such a structure may offer a visual focus towards a couple or group standing within it, viewed from any point outside. Equally, the gazebo frames the surrounding view of the garden space or park from within its radial form. The crafting, function and symbolic suggestion of the gazebo suggests the core of the fantasy narrative that is invisible but present throughout Carver's story, figured in the appearance and action of architectural form more than explicated narrative line.



Figure 4. A gazebo near Carver's childhood home: Yakima, Washington State.

In Holly's dream-memory she imagines that the owners, the farmer and his wife, must be: 'dead now, they'd have to be dead. But here we are'.⁶⁹ As focus returns to the immediate and material, the fantasy makes Holly despair:

⁶⁸ 'Gazebo', 29.

⁶⁹ 'Gazebo', 30.

But now here we are in this awful town, a couple of people who drink too much, running a motel with a dirty old swimming pool in front of it. And you in love with someone else. Duane, I've been closer to you than to anyone on earth. I feel crucified.⁷⁰

Holly's lament draws together the accumulated narratives and spaces from which she attempted to escape earlier, through the window. Duane tries to connect with Holly in the fantasy space, imagining them together in old age, but fails as the world outside the apartment presses in with its temporal demands and consequentiality:

I can't say anything for a minute. Then I go, "Holly, these things, we'll look back on them someday when we're old, and we'll be old together, you'll see, and we'll go, 'Remember that motel with the cruddy swimming pool?' and then we'll laugh at the things we did crazy. You'll see. ..." ⁷¹

Holly shakes her head to Duane's clichéd suggestion, and the story ends with sensory reminders of unyielding entropy: Duane peers through the curtains to hear the rattling of the door to the motel office below, and see cars leaving. The threat of failed responsibilities and scattering consequences imply linear time's resumption at and beyond the close of the story. Duane and Holly's materially contained generative space, alienated from the world, echoes its ghostly images of lost futurity, out into the darkness outside. As in 'The Fling', chronology finally resumes, returning the reader from the influence of the generative space, into the everyday temporality: ultimately, beyond the story. Although the lack of permanent transformation in stories such as 'Gazebo' may appear to fail the characters according to regular hopes of change or reliability, these hopes are actually rarely expressed. Rather, the return from the generative space is characterised by silent acceptance, leaving the transformative function of the story's core intact. The final lines of 'Gazebo' are fatalistically knowing: a confirmation of their relationship, despite the future: "'Duane," Holly goes. In this, as in most matters, she was right'.⁷²

Against the sense in first readings that Carver's characters reside in 'Hopelessville', the tradition and dimensions of the short story suggests other ways that hegemonic chronology might be overcome. In repeated readings of stories, and reading radially-structured stories successively in a collection, a redemptive looping of time and familiar spaces emerges beyond the story in isolation. Such a cumulative effect is figured in the stories themselves, with the shared sense of interpersonal

⁷⁰ 'Gazebo', 30.

⁷¹ 'Gazebo', 30.

⁷² 'Gazebo', 30.

construction hinted at in the titles of Carver's collections (*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *Cathedral* or *Where I'm Calling From*). In 'Gazebo's central conversation Holly declares: 'It's such a good thing, isn't it, a person can't look into the future?'.⁷³ The labyrinth stands as an archetypal figure for the chronologically-unfolding narrative with past and future, dependent on a character's agency at key decision points.⁷⁴ However, in *Beginners*, Carver undercuts the directive role of agency in both past and future narrative lines, instead building his stories around geographically-framed narrative hurricanes or whirlpools. In the silent centre of these vortices, characters and readers are offered the possibility of heterotopia: spaces for mutual and cooperative narrative regeneration.⁷⁵ Rather than the 'flat' design of the labyrinth, Carver's spatial form is best conceptualised as a structure of distinct planes that stacked vertically, a topography on which gravity must be followed or resisted. This three-dimensional structuring from a formal pattern is the basis for the infinite complexity of fractals, where attention to any part of the image reveals the same structures repeated. In its complete form the fractal has no dominant directionality or chronological marker, unless expressed in a fractal set. Such a set remains an imperfect expression: a low-resolution demonstration of the complete fractal, which properly expresses all parts of the structure simultaneously, as a formula.⁷⁶ The image is 'read' in time by the observer, but the chronological element is not inherent to the function of the fractal itself, which retains a non-linear structure and the ability to yield accumulating significance through deeper, more extensive observation. A literary form of this kind opposes the hegemony of linear progression and its implication for agency: in a spatial form, characters and readers are more likely to sense things that follow, in familiar situations, repeated readings, and proximal accounts.

Whereas Carver's stories are often read in linear sequence and succession in the collections, I suggest that his spatial zones and generative space operate radially, like a fractal image: disrupting expectations of progressive resolution. The dramatic power of Carver's stories in *Beginners* emerges during and after a complete reading, reflecting back non-sequentially on their spaces, images and voices as distinct yet converging narrative axes. These axes, which express the interrelating psychologies of characters through their extension in a synchronous temporality, offer new and deeper short story connections, favouring memory over the past, fantasy over the future, and space over the present. The immediacy and contingency of these dimensions in the compressed fictional space enables the dramatic power of Carver's stories. From the constructed vortex, they attract and

⁷³ 'Gazebo', 30.

⁷⁴ Influentially for Postmodernists, especially John Barth, this was chosen as the title for the English translation of Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1962).

⁷⁵ The term 'heterotopia' originates in Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces'.

⁷⁶ For an application of fractal form in literary narrative, see Paul A. Harris, 'Fractal Faulkner: Scaling Time in *Go Down, Moses*, *Poetics Today*, 14, 4 (1993), 625-691.

connect corresponding axes in cultural, historical and personal memories: ultimately and in unique iteration, for the reader. The relationship between narrative linearity and the generative space might be charted as in 'Appendix 1', which locates the spaces and stories of 'Gazebo' between Duane and Holly's relationship (the bottom and top of the chart), and in the concentric geographic zones of the 'Beginners' text. Narratives that converge through the paragraphs of the story are here visible in their orientation towards the core space of the apartment: where the organising boundary of that architecture distorts the subjectivity of regular chronology. The circle in the centre of the chart draws all other zones towards it, exerting a gravitational effect on narrative, bringing fantasy and memory into the physical space of the apartment. Through the concentric spatiality of 'Gazebo', a narrative structure echoes back against the temporal line, expanding Freitag's triangle into focussing, multi-dimensional axes.

'Boxes', Bodies, Cigarettes

In addition to the architectural structures in Carver's stories, particular objects located in and around the generative space work in similar material-narrative ways, to reveal and intensify dramatic potential. The connecting role of 'things' in Carver's stories invites the reader to consider the commodification of suburban life in general, and their characters' repeated struggle for heterogeneous expression. The additional length of his late stories has been considered an essential aspect of the more 'generous' expression of these characters and places.⁷⁷ While *Beginners* demonstrates that the early stories are capable of expressing the emotional range of his later work, the continuity of spatial form in his late fiction shows Carver's development of these modes, and further demonstrates the sophistication and breadth of effect that they can accomplish, in a variety of lengths. However, vistas and landscapes that appeared in brief in the *What We Talk About/Beginners* cuts are expressed beyond structural function in stories such as 'Blackbird Pie', where the writer-narrator describes the 'territorial view' from where he is staying, and in 'Menudo', with its sense of 'The entire neighborhood', where a narrator can 'cross the street' in a friendly symbol of relationship.⁷⁸

'Boxes' appeared in Carver's last collections of stories, appearing in America with previously-published work in *Where I'm Calling From*, and as the first story in *Elephant* in the United Kingdom.

⁷⁷ Stull, 1985.

⁷⁸ Raymond Carver, *Elephant* (London: Vintage, 2003). First published as *Elephant and Other Stories* (London: Harvill, 1988). 'Blackbird Pie', 94. 'Menudo', 71.

Narrated in the first person by a son visiting his mother, the story recounts her regular, compulsive moving: 'Other people take vacations in the summer, but my mother moves'.⁷⁹ The title foregrounds another account of the tensioned existence between enclosure and failed containment, signalled in the opening line: 'My mother is packed and ready to move'.⁸⁰ This process involves the collection of objects into containers, and then the transportation of those packages down the spatial network of driveway, street, road, highway and then the reverse, to a similar location. Rather than unpacking boxes, or offering gifts from within them, this patterned movement brings the narrator's mother to a space correspondent with her departure: a connective circularity.

The mother-son relationship of the story appears between two home spaces, first establishing the more reflective, less emotionally concentrated zone of the narrator's house. Bridging from the second zone, the inciting incident of a phone call interpolates the mother's demands and recounted history with the narrator's immediate situation. The description describes the narrator's position, standing at the window, remaining there a moment longer, trying to 'figure this thing out'.⁸¹ Following this establishing vantage-point, a nested structure compresses history, telephone conversation and material description towards a generative interaction. Objects, places and figures recurrent within the story's narrative structure are charted in 'Appendix 2', with forward-slashes marking single-line breaks (two-line breaks in *Elephant*) that divide paragraph sequences typographically. This chart marks five such sections, with the material and spatial echoing of the first and last sections (windows, phone calls, curtains), and the plot symmetry of sections 'B' and 'b' (mother perpetually moving, mother moves). The core section ('C') is the longest and most complex, with an elaborate containing structure. Here, the narrative of neighborhood observation becomes a physical frame, as the landlord circumnavigates the house with a hosepipe. His name, Larry Hadlock, suggests the varieties of outside invasions by those who look, have the lock, and had the luck. Within the house, the narrator's actions repeat and echo to structure the generative space against this external intrusion: a space where the family move to connect against these forces.

The repeating mention of coffee and cigarettes in 'Boxes' appears to trace anxious temporality as the narrator navigates the difficult time with his mother. Yet they also appear as material figures of the connectivity of mind and the physical space. Before and after the narrator's extended back-story in section 'B', the knowledge of his 'trying to smoke', and his 'buzz [that] has worn off' provides a material handle on his reminiscence. Later, in the intention of sharing coffee, both characters move around the mother's house, approaching a generative point of contact (the

⁷⁹ 'Boxes', *Elephant*, 16.

⁸⁰ 'Boxes', 11.

⁸¹ 'Boxes', 11.

end of section 'C', and again in section 'b').⁸² Between the departing mother and the son, a connection is mediated by various familiar and useful containers.⁸³ The thermos in the passenger seat of the car holds this warm, hospitable and familiar drink in an isolating container, as if to protect it from the loss of the drive away. When the mother opens the flask, perhaps, some domestic comfort will emerge with the warm drink. Impossible to ignore in a Carver story, cups of coffee, beer or Scotch, and cigarettes (tobacco and marijuana), recur frequently and at significant points. In Carver's highly potent material landscapes, these objects are exemplary in their cultural and material connections. As richly signifying substances, they stand for the more general connections between containing and contained material, and the channelling of perception and emotion through them. The cup and cigarette are potable and portable things, held and passed between characters as they navigate social space.



Figure 5: Pall Mall advert (1956).⁸⁴

From these containing objects, drinks and smoke move between the human body and surrounding space, a nested figuration of the materiality between Carver's characters and the architectures they inhabit (see Fig. 5). As in the Carver poem 'A Forge, and a Scythe' ('My lungs are thick/with the smoke of your absence'), drinks and the fine, hot solids of smoke interact in rich signification with the vital interior of the body.⁸⁵ This useful corporeal containment contrasts with

⁸² 'Boxes', 13, 17.

⁸³ 'Boxes', 24.

⁸⁴ Sally Edelstein, 'Suburban Swan Song', *Envisioning the American Dream*, June 26, 2012.

<<http://envisioningtheamericandream.com>>.

⁸⁵ *AOU*, 97, ll.24-25.

the boundary-making of externality: the skin and sense organs, which filter and select according to prefigured narratives and functions. As in 'Boxes', this internal interface with hospitable drinks such as coffee is usually complex in Carver's stories, bringing the rich sociological and cultural rituals and communications associated with their use, into the immediate space of interaction.⁸⁶ Thus, coffee in a thermos equally draws from the promise of the flask, as the drinks consumed in the apartment suggest the narrative potency of the moving curtains and the flickering lights behind. Carver's stated craft was to invest commonplace objects with powerful meaning, and the workings of coffee and cigarettes demonstrate their capacities as generators, punctuating social rhythms in the fictional frame. In 'Whoever Was Using This Bed', the narrator unplugs the phone and goes into the bedroom, where his wife is smoking, trying to remember a dream to tell him.⁸⁷ After hearing the dream, the narrator notices the smoke under the light, and suggests they open a window. The sound of a truck is heard, on its way out of state.⁸⁸ "I guess pretty soon we're going to be the last smokers left in America," she says', before telling her husband about a vein that pulses in her forehead when she's anxious.⁸⁹ They decide they should smoke less, and agree to get coffee instead.⁹⁰

Roads

'Boxes' draws from its implication of an extensive cultural geography and personal history: roads outside of the text, on which mother's boxes move between homes. As Carver's architectures materialise narrative containment and nested emotional focus, his roads layer materially over narrative lines, mapping the rising action and dénouement of linear plot. However, unlike the narratologically-explicating car journey of John Barth's story 'Lost in the Funhouse', cars in 'Boxes' are more often static than mobile.⁹¹ The narrator's mother drives, but is disappointed by the inadequacy of the local bus service, and mentions a place she's been offered to live 'close to a bus stop'.⁹² However, on moving back to California, the hemmed-in experience of a traffic jam gives her

⁸⁶ Brian Cowan's *The Social Life of Coffee* examines the intellectual currents and discourses surrounding a spatial locus and institution for coffee and conversation (London: Yale University Press, 2005). More contemporary coffee spaces and their architectural and material significations are examined in Greg Dickson, 'Joe's Rhetoric: Finding Authenticity at Starbucks', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 32, 4 (2002), 5-27.

⁸⁷ 'Whoever Was Using This Bed', *Elephant*, 27-44; 31-2.

⁸⁸ 'Whoever Was Using This Bed', 34.

⁸⁹ 'Whoever Was Using This Bed', 34.

⁹⁰ 'Whoever Was Using This Bed', 36.

⁹¹ Barth, 1968, 72-97.

⁹² 'Boxes', 18.

another cause to complain: the ultimate synecdochic figuration of postmodern isolation and mutual entrapment.⁹³

The car on the highway materialises the narrative container as moveable on a prescribed, linear network. Its form suggests the possibility of freedom within a compressed social and economic structure that repeatedly interposes interruption, detours and (apparently crucial) decision-points. The status of the individual motor car as one of many in a restricted space means that its freedom can be exercised only in relation to the movements and active agency of others. As a symbol of the West Coast lifestyle, the multiplication of multi-lane freeways feeds the inevitable traffic jams that invert the motor vehicle's promise of productive use. In this pressurised system, physical and emotional ruptures become likely: the inevitable 'road rage'. Designed and mass-produced with its array of windows and doors, the automobile is full of thresholds, a maximally-connective container. Yet this connectivity is proportional to the restriction of its four wheels, which must follow the roads constructed and maintained by the state: according to economic and social necessities. The frame of the car is essentially (and especially before the restriction of modern safety restraints) two sofas between doors, with windows surrounding. Whereas the 'soft-top' or 'convertible' emphasises the car's capacity for expressing the paradoxical freedom of the road, the metal body remains a frame protecting from undesirable forces. In the convertible, the windscreen alone remains, and the roof as an option for bad weather, but nothing more: minimally restricting the contact with the mythologised views of the 'open road'. In the frequently anthologised Carver story 'Are These Actual Miles?' the last resort of a bankrupt couple is to sell their convertible.⁹⁴ There, the car represents freedom, access and vantage, and its sale is the loss of the promise that accompanies vehicle ownership.

The narrative suggestion of the car is at work in Carver's final story collection, more fully and expressively than in its implication in his early fiction. As the narrator watches his mother leave at the close of 'Boxes', he notes the strange interaction between her and the car, as she is now about to use it. The vehicle exhibits an unusual psychological signification, as if capable of inhibiting memory and isolating the immediacy of the departure. 'On the front seat of the car I see maps and a thermos of coffee. My mother looks at these things as if she can't recall having come outside with them just a few minutes ago'.⁹⁵ The map and coffee are isolated and alienated from their common uses, speaking to other narratives of travel and 'moving', that she has no part in. Similarly, the coffee which previously connected the narrative in social ritual, now loses its meaning for the mother who

⁹³ The traffic jam becomes the symbol of the point where one can go no further in the great American road trip westward, as in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1984).

⁹⁴ *WYPBQP*, 150-7.

⁹⁵ 'Boxes', 23.

is about to drive herself out of the narrative view and the story's meaningful space. The forward movement of the car on the highway works with the linearity of plot progression in the traditional story form, with narrative lines extending to 'the past', and 'future'. In 'Boxes' the appearance of chronology is also an acknowledgement of death, and a movement towards the disintegration of everything that is built in the movement towards the generative space. In 'Gazebo' the recollection of the elderly couple is met with the thought that they must be dead now, and in 'Boxes', the coupling of the road and death is complete. Unlike the histories that make the narrator want to avoid going over to his mother's house, the future that she drives towards stirs sadness within him.⁹⁶

Carver's characters are impelled in their departures from familiar environments and 'homes', on journeys that return them to eerily similar buildings and places. In these migrations, the processes of energy conversion within the automobile recreate the structural dynamics of containment in mobile form. Here, explosive force created by the combustion of fuel in the engine is converted into mechanical motion when engaged by human will through a clutch. As a container whose design is to provide safety and shelter to the user while reliably performing this energetic release and movement, the American car, like the American home, is a functional container and a marketable product. As Barthes wrote of the national icon of 'The New Citroen', the vehicle reinforces the driver's position as individual and citizen, in both aesthetic and function.⁹⁷ Brought to life by the material signifier of ownership (the key), the sound of the throttle has come to suggest the idiom of someone 'really going somewhere'. The fiction of the American West includes some of the most ambitious and extensive co-representations of geography and consciousness, including Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971).⁹⁸ In these novels, roads (like rivers in the fictions before them) allow the author to reach towards expression of the expanse of a continent, and the pervasiveness of the 'dream' sold to its inhabitants. Whitmanesque scope is approached in listed stop-offs, and the possibility of recreated maps that bound across material topographies.⁹⁹ Beside these vast road-journeys, Carver's automobiles appear as freeze-frames: flashes against novelistic enormity. His roads instead connect within an immediate and focused dramatic landscape, where places function in proximal relationships more often than unique specificity. The automobile provides a means for escape: a link with the possibilities of wider geography. Cars align with historical-narrative trajectories which add

⁹⁶ 'Boxes', 24.

⁹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 88-90.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (Olympia Press, Paris: 1955). Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking Press, 1957). Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1971).

⁹⁹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855, 1891-2).

implication beyond the story's opening (as in the story 'The Bridle'), and past the usual point of conclusion ('Gazebo'). They exist within a psychologically signifying landscape, connecting form and story as richly as the Hollywood epic, or later, the independent visions of J.G. Ballard and later David Cronenberg's *Crash* or David Lynch's *Lost Highway*.¹⁰⁰ As in these movies, darkened spaces draw the character and reader together: into the frame.

Architectures

Carver's stories reconfigure narratives about suppressed spaces as part of the dramatic structure of community, as investigated in the readings in the first part of this chapter. Beyond this immediate effect, he invests his fictional spaces with additional signification in correspondence with particular architectures, and the cultural and historical narratives that accompany them. The relating dynamics of suburban structures in 'Carver Country' reveals the common psychodramatics of real estate and the realist short story. A literacy of spaces and homes becomes as essential to the understanding of Carver's stories as a familiarity with the fictional form which he worked in. As the fictional text, the visible and invisible interweave and coalesce in these architectures, evading simple conceptions of ownership and design. Both ghosts and guests travel in the neighborhood, to meet in familiar rooms.

Motel

The American motel appears as a most temporally-specified and transient structure, built in rapid response to economic demand, and most often abandoned daily, according to the same market forces. Seen from the interior, it appears in 'Gazebo' with an algae-filled swimming pool, as a symbol of the decaying 'American dream'. In 'Boxes' the motel is the mother's residence of last resort, or a stop-off on her long drive to California. Lori Henderson's account of the rise and fall of the American motel traces their construction on a huge scale in the 1950s and 1960s, and widespread disrepair by the 1990s.¹⁰¹ Such roadside accommodations were created as a flexible holiday solution for aspiring American families, eager to travel beyond the cities in their newly

¹⁰⁰ J.G. Ballard, *Crash* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973). David Cronenberg, *Crash*. Recorded Picture Company, 1997. David Lynch, *Lost Highway*, October Films, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Lori Henderson, 'America's Roadside Lodging: The Rise and Fall of the Motel' *Historia* (Charleston, IL: Eastern Illinois University, 2010), 23-43; 33.

acquired automobiles. Yet, as the buildings declined in condition, they persisted as a material remnant of a lost world and the expansive cultural optimism that called for their construction. Lack of demand and low security provision inverted their status, now typically associated with the unlawful and antisocial. Sarah Treadwell's analysis describes the status of the motel as:

...both dated and persistent, an architectural form of the present that is also recognized as a historical anachronism, always about to be superseded by a smart new hotel. Away from the architecture of the metropolis, situated in suburbs and wastelands where hotels will never be sited, constructing both the margins and the marginal, the motel is a transit form that mediates between a fixed address and vagrancy, between home and the car.¹⁰²

The motel's ability to refer to this liminal historical and cultural space and status has made it a recognisable setting for cinema, with the border crossings of Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958) and the structured architecture of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960).¹⁰³ David Lynch has used the motel corridor recurrently in his films, with its suggestion of previously unconscious fantasies behind its numbered doors.¹⁰⁴ In *Lost Highway* (1997), the protagonist Fred follows his wife Renee to the 'Lost Highway Motel'. He enters to walk down a dimly-lit corridor, the camera offering the numbered doors as potential destinations: full of the horror of the unknown. Fred is incited to murder when he finds Renee with a lover, behind door '26'. Randall Teal has observed that in *Lost Highway* 'the presence of the motel focuses a general sense of alienation, showing itself to be a self-referential no-place'.¹⁰⁵ Teal's reading captures the atmospheric signification, but not the motel's specificity in the film's repeated movements, and Lynch's use of the figure across his oeuvre. In *Lost Highway* the motel shares its name with the film's title, marking its centrality for the seen and unseen 'rooms' of Fred's mind: through which we experience the film's primary narrative. Lynch demonstrates the motel's potential for containment and discovery of horror and fantasy in an audio-visual version of the sealed room in 'Gazebo'.

¹⁰² Sarah Treadwell, 'The Motel: An Image of Elsewhere' *Space and Culture* (2005), 8, 214-224; 215.

¹⁰³ Orson Welles, *Touch of Evil*. Universal, 1958. Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*. Paramount, 1960.

¹⁰⁴ The motel also figures prominently in this capacity in *Wild at Heart* and *Inland Empire*, as well as *Lost Highway*.

¹⁰⁵ Randall Teal, 'Between the Strange and the Familiar: A Journey with the Motel', *PhaenEx*, 73.



Figure 6: Sage Motel, Glendale, AZ.¹⁰⁶

Both Lynch’s film and Carver’s fiction suggest the layering of such disparate narratives, problematising the social mythology of the motel as a reliable fantasy space. Foucault suggested that his conception of ‘heterotopia’

...might perhaps be recognized in the American ‘motel’ room, which one enters with one’s own vehicle and lover and where illicit sex is totally protected and totally concealed at one and the same time, set apart and yet not under an open sky.¹⁰⁷

Randall Teal complicates Foucault’s reading by pointing out that the motel lacks the ‘inner keep’ of the hotel, but the door to the supposedly ‘private’ room opens directly onto the very public space of the courtyard, and the highway directly beside it (see Fig. 6).¹⁰⁸ The motel lives on in these spatial compromises and paradoxical mythologies, mixing a formerly marketed identity as a convenient place for family accommodation with its successive existence: sealed off from those very narratives. Due to both architecture and narrative, then, the motel becomes a space where collisions of

¹⁰⁶ ‘Vintage Chromes’, *Vintage Chrome Postcards*, <http://vintagechromes.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Of other spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, in N. Leach (Ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A reader in cultural theory*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 350-356; 356.

¹⁰⁸ Teal, 78.

expectation and function will regularly occur. Risking the opening doors and open courtyards to both fantasy and horror, the visitor walks the corridor, selects according to a number, and perhaps sleeps in a thinly-divided and predictably familiar room. The image of the motel most directly informs 'Gazebo', but also, like the car, illustrates dynamics at play in other stories, which I will explore through the related dynamics of the apartment building.

The Apartment Building

In 'Gazebo' Duane and Holly occupy the manager's apartment within a motel building, and between two transient living spaces, navigate psychological-architectural characteristics of both. The generic form of the apartment complex is a longer-term relation to the motel, culturally contrasted against the picket-fence ideal of the suburban family home. Like the motel, the regular apartment complex in the Western United States offers a fragile privacy, threatened by thin walls, shared entrances, and the crowding and exposure of car parking provision that limits or replaces the green space bordering detached family homes. Like the motel, the apartment is less often owned by the resident, and requires management, monitoring and maintenance. So too, the mythology of the suburban apartment complex relates unfavourably with traditional American narratives of prosperity and self-sufficiency, and in this sense communicate these sociological dynamics in addition to their shaping as a material structure within the narrative.

With shared walls, spaces and facilities, the apartment building is a home-space characteristically compressed, according to economic necessities. Working in these frames, 'Apartment stories' might be distinctive for their capacity to channel events, sounds and characters into proximity. Indeed, apartment stories compress narrative lines as in the stories investigated earlier in this chapter, materialising their narrative frames. As the telephone call or letter can signify the distanced connection and communication of a substitutive narrative mode, a visit to the apartment complex offers an ideal spatial setting for stories about proximity and contiguity. To enter an apartment is to see the 'part for the whole': a part that could represent any adjoining apartment, of matching design and function. The contiguity of the apartment complex enables particular kinds of connections and contact: spoken memories are heard through thin walls, and dramatic situations are overseen in the shared spaces of the swimming pool or the parking lot.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Such as in 'The Bridle', *Cathedral*, 174-195.

From Carver's first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), 'Are You a Doctor?' explores these contrasts with a journey from the delineated space of the suburban house to the contiguous zones of the apartment building. The story begins with the interruption of a telephone call, disturbing a man (Arnold) who sits at home alone: 'In slippers, pajamas, and robe, he hurried out of the study...'.¹¹⁰ As well as being in a house with enough rooms and few enough residents to have a study, Arnold is apparently quick to answer the remote call of the telephone, unlike the narrator of 'Collectors', phoneless and hiding from bailiffs at the door.¹¹¹ While expecting that his wife (away on business) would be the only person likely to call after ten o'clock, Arnold finds himself speaking with a stranger (Clara), who from her introduction brings the intrusion and confusion of mistaken identity. In the brief conversation Clara explains to Arnold that she found his phone number on a scrap of paper, perhaps left by 'the sitter': soon establishing the important detail of her children.¹¹² Arnold's initial annoyance at the misplaced phone call gives way to his realisation that Clara wants to meet in person, sparking in him an unexpected and conflicted corresponding desire.¹¹³ The story proceeds in weaving narratives and desire, the spoken and implicit, present and absent, towards an approaching meeting: the distant point that extends its effect through to the story in both directions.

Clara calls later the same evening and the next day, as Arnold arrives home. Telling Arnold to 'come to my house tonight', she reasons: 'I can't leave the house tonight because Cheryl is sick with a cold and now I'm afraid for the boy'.¹¹⁴ While his spoken reason for visiting is to offer some undefined help to the mother of sick children, the fantasy narrative is implied. Successive references to her living space as a 'house' match her insistences about the children, confirming expectations of a domestic space. Arnold prepares for the visit with the both practical and symbolic reestablishment of washing: he goes to the bathroom, takes off his hat, and scrubs his face and nails.¹¹⁵

Approaching Clara's address by taxi, the driver identifies the building, to Arnold's surprise: "You're sure this is the right street?".¹¹⁶ He instructs the driver to continue on and drop him off at the end of the block: the first marked awareness of the threat inherent to the apartment space as densely-populated and observable space. As he approaches the building, Arnold's attention is drawn to the balconies, with plants and lawn furniture in simultaneously enclosed and totally visible versions of the garden space. From one of the balconies 'a large man in a sweatshirt' leans over the

¹¹⁰ 'Are You a Doctor?', *WYPBQP*, 23-30; 23.

¹¹¹ 'Collectors', *WYPBQP*, 76-81.

¹¹² 'Are You a Doctor?', 23.

¹¹³ 'Are You a Doctor?', 24.

¹¹⁴ 'Are You a Doctor?', 25.

¹¹⁵ 'Are You a Doctor?', 26.

¹¹⁶ 'Are You a Doctor?', 26.

railing to watch him walk towards the door.¹¹⁷ Arnold struggles to climb the staircases, and feels a pain in his side, imagining the possibility of a fall. On one of the landings, the apartment building is named in the title used by Clara on the phone: 'He looked down the hall. The apartment house was very quiet'.¹¹⁸ Arnold's awareness of the visit's unspoken narrative appears in his anxiousness about being seen—highly likely in the dense human configuration of the apartment building. The presence of a lone observer on the balcony and the quiet halls increases the menacing sense of his visibility: further surveillance is likely to be direct and unseen. He is admitted to Clara's apartment by her daughter, whose presence further threatens Arnold's assumption of privacy. The child's use of his full name brings the substance of the spoken explanation for his presence, into a direct threat of observation, upon the unspoken reason for his visit. As he enters the apartment, and learns that Clara is away from the house, this collision of conflicting narratives intensifies: the child's knowledge of him further destroys the compartmentalisation of his dual reasoning. Narrative lines of causality converge, developing the apartment story into greater dramatic compression and psychological consequence.

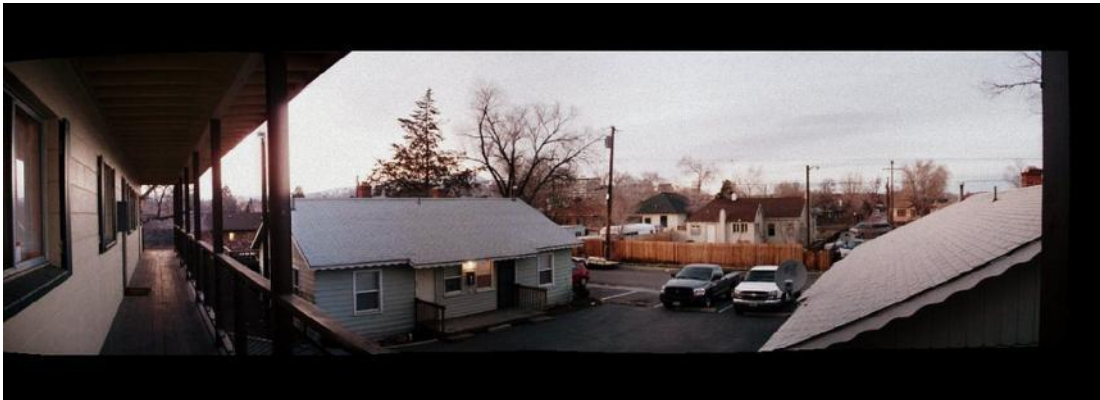


Figure 7: View from the access hall of an apartment building in Reno, NV, towards parking and the road.¹¹⁹

Arnold looks around the apartment as he waits for Clara to return, and observes material evidence for alternate narratives: a medicinal smell, and the furnace turned up, but 'hairpins and rollers on the table, a pink bathrobe lay on the couch'.¹²⁰ Arnold's progression into an inner space has intensified the threat of observation, disappointing his hopes for a private zone for interaction

¹¹⁷ 'Are You a Doctor?', 26.

¹¹⁸ 'Are You a Doctor?', 26.

¹¹⁹ Alisha Vargas, 'Panorama of the Yard', February 13, 2010, Creative Commons 2.0 license <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/alishav/4352652339/in/photostream/>>.

¹²⁰ 'Are You a Doctor?', 27.

with the still-unseen Clara. The 'television set... the picture on, the volume low' suggests the presence of Clara's other child, but with a low volume, maintains the menacing possibility of a listening presence.¹²¹ The kitchen door that opens onto the balcony is slightly ajar, again colliding against the narrative suggestion of the furnace. Arnold's reaction to this detail is metaphorical and physical: 'a little chill went through him as he recalled the large man in the sweatshirt'.¹²² After awkward minutes in the apartment with the silent daughter, Arnold prepares to leave as Clara returns, administering medicine to the child. Even this straightforward act of nurture is weirdly dissonant, however, as the child shows no sign of the reported sickness. Asking her daughter to take Arnold's coat, Clara reinforces the spoken narrative of the family house visit: "'Please forgive her. We're not used to company'".¹²³ Explanations and narratives in chaotic dislocation, the daughter is then instructed to 'go to your room', although the reader is not shown whether she obeys. Arnold follows Clara into the kitchen, moving further in search of elusive narrative stability, and a private space for their interaction.¹²⁴ When alone, Clara awkwardly repeats at greater length an unconvincing story about her acquisition of Arnold's phone number. The conversation fulfils the requirement of the spoken narrative that has allowed Arnold's visit, yet continues to include an admission of its insubstantiality:

He added sugar and stirred his tea. "You said it was urgent that I come."
 "Oh, *that*, Arnold," she said, turning away. "I don't know what made me say that. I can't imagine what I was thinking."
 "Then there's nothing?" he said.
 "No. I mean *yes*." She shook her head. "What you said, I mean. Nothing."
 "I see," he said. He went on stirring his tea. "It's unusual," he said after a time, almost to himself. "Quite unusual."¹²⁵

Clara asks Arnold not to leave, and he kisses her, bridging previous disconnections with action: an awkward version of the love story's stereotypical crescendo. Suddenly reverting to speech, he quickly thanks Clara for the tea, excuses himself, and leaves the apartment. "'Strange," he said as he started down the stairs'.¹²⁶ With only himself to speak to, misrecognition and mismatch follow him out of the apartment house.

The architecture of interpersonal collision during Arnold's visit has turned private desire and fantasy into a revelatory encounter with social identities: a failure of explanation enacted in a

¹²¹ 'Are You a Doctor?', 27.

¹²² 'Are You a Doctor?', 27.

¹²³ 'Are You a Doctor?', 27.

¹²⁴ 'Are You a Doctor?', 28.

¹²⁵ 'Are You a Doctor?', 28-9.

¹²⁶ 'Are You a Doctor?', 29.

domestic space that materialised his disconnected narratives. The story ends with Arnold arriving back at his house to receive a phone call from his wife. Nervously, he answers by stating his full name, to which his wife goads: 'Arnold? My, aren't we formal tonight!'.¹²⁷ She tells him that she has been calling for hours, and teasingly asks whether he's been 'Out living it up, Arnold?'.¹²⁸ He doesn't answer, but remains silent, as his wife provides the final response: "'Are you there, Arnold?', she said. 'You don't sound like yourself'".¹²⁹ The physical distance between Arnold and his wife has perhaps preserved marital harmony, but even in this non-contiguous communication, Arnold's stability at the beginning of the story appears as dependent on the insulation of his home-space, more than it is internal or independent in him. In the initial image Arnold seems settled in his home, as is his wife, insulated by the remote distance of her business trip. Called out of this unified space into the destabilising architecture of the apartment building, a chance for desire fulfilment emerges. As actor and agent, Arnold travels to the apartment complex: while his wife and Clara call him, to alter his narrative and material trajectory, as he might follow in a traditional dramatic fiction. From his study he answers the phone, and in conversation with Clara, continues further than he feels she should, because 'it was good to hear a voice, even his own, in the quiet room'.¹³⁰ The correspondence of Clara's phone calls with Arnold's desire is expressed architecturally again when she calls the next day: 'The next afternoon as he put the key into the lock, he could hear the telephone ringing. He dropped his briefcase and, still in hat, coat, and gloves, hurried over to the table and picked up the receiver'.¹³¹ The image of the key and lock to a domestic space representing the mind is a common one, but expresses a similar set of psychological dynamics in Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), which communicates the desires of a female figure (played by Deren herself), in an imaginatively expressive and enclosing space.¹³² The final lines of 'Are You a Doctor?' carry a similarly unsettling, dislocating effect:

When he reached home, the telephone was ringing. He stood very quietly in the middle of the room, holding the key between his fingers until the ringing stopped. Then, tenderly, he put a hand against his chest and felt, through the layers of clothes, his beating heart.¹³³

Shielded and insulated under layers of clothes and tissues, the heart is the core vital structure which restores Arnold's composure. The key corresponds with an appearance earlier in the story, when

¹²⁷ 'Are You a Doctor?', 30.

¹²⁸ 'Are You a Doctor?', 30.

¹²⁹ 'Are You a Doctor?', 30.

¹³⁰ 'Are You a Doctor?', 24.

¹³¹ 'Are You a Doctor?', 25.

¹³² Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Mystic Fire, 1943.

¹³³ 'Are You a Doctor?', 29.

Clara arrives at her apartment, with Arnold waiting in the living room: 'A key turned in the lock, the door swung open, and a small, pale, freckled woman entered carrying a paper sack'.¹³⁴ The two instances incite very different effects, however: in the second case, Arnold is not the one who holds the key to his own, detached home, translating his fantasy into action. Clara's turn of the key activates the colliding liminal space of the apartment, over the threshold that Arnold has already crossed. Her appearance is observed coldly, disorienting his fantasy-image, and the paper sack suggests the fragile anonymity that both the shopper and the apartment-dweller can afford. For Arnold, Clara's key turns the wrong lock: in a door not owned by him, and too temporarily by her.

The apparent failure of Arnold's fantasy narrative marks the failure of the apartment space to be either a family 'house' (as Clara announced it on the phone), or the proper liminal structure of the motel. As he ascends the stairs of the apartment building, Arnold remembers a hotel in Luxemburg visited with his wife on holiday, away from everyday domesticity. Arnold's unspoken fantasy requires such a space, and this apartment building may still offer enough privacy to enact his narrative journey. As architecture both for and incapable of privacy, the apartment complex implicates the socioeconomic expediency of semi-functional spaces. His memory of the hotel visited with his wife on holiday highlights the inhospitable failure of the apartment space. Arnold and his wife, both working and without children at home, share memories of a hotel on a European holiday, while Clara inhabits a space that cannot divide an imagined fantasy narrative from the complex narrative interplay of children, sickness or surveillance. More than Arnold's private home or the partitioned space of the motel or hotel room, the apartment house pits Arnold against the chronological order of the story: moving through inhabited urban spaces, and shared narratives. As we have observed in Carver's spatial form previously, the core narrative and architectural zone is amplified by and equally effects the environments around it. 'Are You a Doctor?' retains the possibility of more phone calls, further taxi rides, and most immediately, the awareness of all these proximities in Arnold's home.

Family Home

Against the promise of anonymity and privacy in the motel and apartment complex, the family home appears under the 'American dreams' of independence and self-improvement. As more permanent accommodation, houses are signifiers of social status, but with Carver's protagonists

¹³⁴ 'Are You a Doctor?', 27.

such accomplishments also provide distance for a dramatic fall: the 'gravity' of chronology and its consequentiality. The family home appears prominently in nearly half the stories, and with regular frequency through his career.¹³⁵ Yet the stories of his first two collections, which pare down to the most densely signifying details, make the spatial frames and narrative lines accomplish their dramatic effect most clearly. His second collection of short fiction, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* offers a particularly focussed view of the suburban home in the first two stories ('Why Don't You Dance?' and 'Viewfinder'), and the penultimate and longest story, from which the collection takes its title. The ground covered in and between these stories shows both the expressive ability of the family home as a narrative container, and the common function of this architectural form for Carver, as a space with generative potential.

Focussing the containing structures of the home, 'Why Don't You Dance?' opens *What We Talk About...* with one of the most memorable examples of Carver's strange architectures. Although bearing Carver's recognisable style, 'Why Don't You Dance?' is at odds with the dimensions of 'realism' as usually understood. From his earliest publications, Carver's editing process worked by cutting all but the most essential detail and description, 'to the bone'.¹³⁶ This process of selection and prioritising of the story's framework became extreme in Lish's editorial cuts. Yet as a result, the version that appeared in *What We Talk About...* is a leaner account of the objects, containers and generative forces in the story: without space for ornament or much internal reflection. In the first lines, a nameless man is seen looking out of his kitchen window to the front yard, where a surreal yard sale is set up. Like a still life, the story shows the furniture arranged in the yard, apparently just as it had been inside the house. A power cable is connected so the lamp and the TV still work, 'no different from... when they were inside'.¹³⁷ Each of the items in the yard is catalogued in related succession: 'The chiffonier stood a few feet from the foot of the bed. ...A portable heater was next to the chiffonier'.¹³⁸ Occasionally an item is revealed to be 'a gift': personal detail that offers a glimpse of character for these objects, alienated from their proper place. The first two paragraphs raise the first questions about the man's situation and history: why he is selling essential furniture, or reconstructing an interior domestic arrangement in a public environment, adjacent to the home. The relationship between objects and character is at the centre of this story, with the most evocative objects recurring most often. The lack of description about the central character ('the

¹³⁵ His first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* contains 11/22 that could be considered 'house stories': set entirely or largely in and around the suburban home. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* contains 8/17. *Cathedral* has 5/12, and *Elephant*, 5/7.

¹³⁶ Gentry and Stull, 44.

¹³⁷ (*WDYD-W*, 4). As before, I will refer to the text edited by Gordon Lish (1981) as *WDYD-W*, and the 'original' version released in *Beginners* (2009) as *WDYD-B*.

¹³⁸ *WDYD-W*, 3.

man') establishes this person as material presence among objects: a silhouette in a psychologically expressive representation of space. The other two characters in the story are introduced in the *Beginners* version as 'This girl and boy' and amplified in their immediacy and separation in the Lish edit to 'This girl and this boy'.¹³⁹ They, too, move in labelled relation with objects and containers, to play out the search for connection and meaning in the suburban space.¹⁴⁰

Both the strangely-located, too-familiar objects in the front yard, and the people who inhabit it appear in uncomfortable relation within their environment, inviting the story and the reader to find their resolving configuration. From inside the house, the man looks out at the objects, explicitly 'out of the house': ejected from their usual place.¹⁴¹ The observing neighborhood is reflected from his point of view: 'Now and then a car slowed and people stared. But no one stopped. It occurred to him that he wouldn't, either'.¹⁴² When a boy and girl want to make an enquiry about the furniture, the boy notices that 'The house was dark. "I feel funny," he said. "Better see if anybody's home"'.¹⁴³ From the displaced objects, another layer of disjunction emerges in the boy and girl's version of domestic movements in this mock-living space. Perhaps as in the other houses on the street, whose lights turn on one by one, this couple experience failed attempts at intimacy (as the girl tries to kiss the boy), and failed versions of communication with wider media and society (as the boy pretends to watch the TV).¹⁴⁴ Although objects are out of place, they are all in working order, and the boy and girl test them. The dysfunctional aspects of this space have an even greater impact on the characters in the sparse objectivity of the lawn-space. A functional but unwatched television is, in this material environment, like a young couple who cannot kiss. It raises a dramatic tension, the generative potential of material things amplified by their dislocation. Like Heideggerian tools, these things escape reducing systematisation in their uselessness.¹⁴⁵ These are objects that express in many voices, an otherwise-unspoken material and human field of relations.

¹³⁹ *WDYD-B*, 1, *WDYD-W*, 4.

¹⁴⁰ All given names are removed from the *What We Talk About...* version, with the exception of one instance of 'Jack' for the boy.

¹⁴¹ *WDYD-B*, 3.

¹⁴² *WDYD-B*, 4.

¹⁴³ *WDYD-B*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ *WDYD-B*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Macquarrie J, Robinson E, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 98.

The outdoor space of ‘Why Don’t You Dance?’ takes the exploration of material containment in Carver’s stories to an artificially constructed ‘room’: recognisable and culturally signifying, but without the sheltering and enclosing structure. In the object-rich environment of the front yard, characters designate the new values for things: records, a television, and a bed. The drinks, like other things in the yard, each have a material interactivity, and can become richly expressive through the characters that interact with them, or with the objects around them. The psychological-material dynamic, then, makes the front lawn a space for performing the fragments of their narratives, a reversed version of the materialist celebration in mid-century advertising (as in Fig. 5 and below, Fig. 8).



Figure 8. ‘Showing Off the New Kitchen’ by Douglass Crockwell (1953).¹⁴⁶

The punctuation of consumption begins at the inception of ‘Why Don’t You Dance?’, with the Lish-edited version opening with the words ‘In the kitchen, he poured another drink...’.¹⁴⁷ Next, a boy and girl arrive in the yard, and the man walks down the alley towards them with ‘a sack from the market. He had sandwiches, beer, whiskey’.¹⁴⁸ He puts down the sack, takes out the beer and

¹⁴⁶ John Faltner, ‘Vintage Beers Ads: Home Life in America “World Series”’, Sally Edelstein, *Envisioning the American Dream*, September 24, 2012. <<http://envisioningtheamericandream.com>>.

¹⁴⁷ *WDYD-W*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ *WDYD-W*, 5.

whiskey, unwraps a packed glass from its newspaper, and breaks the seal on the whiskey.¹⁴⁹ The three are then described in relation to each other, with the drink and their interactions as a material interaction asserted against the failure of former narratives: the heavily stereotyped and prescriptive images of suburban hospitality such as in Figure 8. The boy finds two glasses for the girl and him, and pours the whiskey into them. However, when he sits down, he drinks nothing from the glass. The girl requests that her drink be watered down, in answer to which the man points out the spigot, and the boy goes to dilute her drink.¹⁵⁰ The man, who is sitting on the couch, finishes one drink to start the next, dropping his cigarette between the cushions.¹⁵¹ Soon, he opens a beer, and the girl holds out her glass for more whiskey. The boy is not shown to drink anything, yet claims “It goes to your head,” the boy said. “I’m getting it in the head.” He held up his glass and jiggled it’.¹⁵² The relationship between the glass as containing object, the drink, and the body traces the path through which the identities of each character are revealed.

According to the man’s suggestion, the boy and girl dance ‘up and down the driveway’.¹⁵³ After the record finishes, the boy announces that he’s drunk, as if the record and the dancing have contributed to his intoxication.

The girl said, “You’re not drunk.”
“Well, I’m drunk,” the boy said.
The man turned the record over and the boy said, “I am.”
“Dance with me,” the girl said to the boy and then to the man, and when the man stood up, she came to him with her arms wide open.¹⁵⁴

From this point in the story, the boy is displaced by the man, with whom the girl dances, pulls closer, and then talks about repeatedly for weeks after.¹⁵⁵ The communicative connection through dislocated objects has enabled the dance, and a compelling desire for telling, as in so many Carver stories. Making the man’s implied and imminent relocation irrelevant, the narrative immediacy of the experience is kept fresh by its resistance to expression, which would satisfy the girl’s desire to

¹⁴⁹ *WDYD-W*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ *WDYD-W*, 6.

¹⁵¹ *WDYD-W*, 6.

¹⁵² *WDYD-W*, 7.

¹⁵³ *WDYD-W*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ *WDYD-W*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ *WDYD-W*, 8.

'get it talked out'.¹⁵⁶ Even when 'she quit trying', the story remains for the reader: at the opening of the collections in which it appears, as a directing first iteration.¹⁵⁷

Privacy and Escape

'Why Don't You Dance?' bears a strange relationship to the other stories of containment and generative space: its relocation separates the architectural frame of the house from the objects and domestic situation usually found within. In doing this, activities that would usually go on inside the home and be considered private, are transferred into the public view of the street. The front yard is a domain that still belongs to the homeowner (whether ownership or tenancy), but here it appears in a stronger sense of the suburb's lack of privacy. The front yard is an inter-space, a garden zone between the containing physicality of the home and the communal flow of the road network that connects this property with wider neighbourhoods. As the girl and the man dance, the girl expresses her anxiety about performing in such a space:

"Those people over there, they're watching," she said.
"It's okay," the man said. "It's my place," he said.
"Let them watch," the girl said.
"That's right," the man said. "They thought they'd seen everything over here. But they haven't seen this, have they?" he said.¹⁵⁸

Forced to set up a stage version of a home, open to the gaze of an audience seen only through the eyes and responses of the performers, the man is displaced from the range of acceptable suburban roles. The boy and girl, lying on the bed with their cold intimacy, do not explicitly perform for an audience. However, when the man and the girl dance later, the reader is aware that they are being viewed, and further, that they are acting with the same awareness.

The dance isn't a willing or prepared performance. The girl's repeated indictment of the man as 'desperate' raises the unspoken suggestion that (she supposes) caused him to assemble the yard sale. His desperation has given him no choice but to expose himself, in need, to the invasive gaze of the neighborhood. Yet, if this were the case, the events in the story do not provide the money that the girl supposes the man needs. Instead, the man's self-exposure functions as exhibition: a negative answer to his call that is received as an invasion, or accusation. The man's 'desperation' is created by

¹⁵⁶ *WDYD-W*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ *WDYD-W*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ *WDYD-W*, 8.

the capacity of the story's represented space for displaying tension between his home-ownership, the possessions in the front yard that communicate identity, and the unseen, outside pressure upon him that suggests the loss of all these things. While he can say now "It's my yard. You can dance if you want to", the implication is that sooner rather than later, he will no longer own the all-important space to license this transgressive act.¹⁵⁹ The contents of the yard, including the record player, will be gone: via the unseen roads to more distant places.

'Why Don't You Dance?' contains a question at its generative core: about the kinds of protection the family home could offer against perceived invasions of privacy. The man reassures the girl as she is dancing, "It's okay," the man said. "It's my place," he said'.¹⁶⁰ His word is enough in this pressurised moment to allow the girl to continue, but fades as soon as she leaves the generative space. The narrative frame at the close of the story provides some distance from this generative core: a recollection that reminds the reader of the strange status of the space created at the core of the story. The girl expresses embarrassment about the event and the objects, evidently present as she tells friends (witnesses from a different vantage point) about that day:

"...We got real pissed and danced. In the driveway. Oh, my God. Don't laugh. He played us these records. Look at this record-player. The old guy gave it to us. And all these crappy records. Will you look at this shit?".¹⁶¹

The girl, who is 'trying to get it talked out', repeatedly uses metaphors of excretion in colloquial expressions.¹⁶² To her, drinking is getting 'pissed', and the records and record-player are 'crappy' and 'shit'. Yet the generative power of the core of the story, as well as the hoped-for results of such compulsive 'talking it out' suggests the power of these actions. The man's removal of the furniture from his domestic space prefigures the implied loss of home ownership and related narratives of the family dwelling. Placing his living room and bedroom in view of the neighbors, the man's expulsion is enacted by himself, using his agency to 'move in' to the neighborhood, against a compelled move out. In this strange version of drinks in the living room with friends, he shares the yard with unfamiliar neighbors and (in a dramatising reversal of the television's entertainment) a wider audience of silent observers from the street and other houses. With no sign of family, the architectural frame stands empty behind him, a hollowed reminder of the values normally attached to the actions and objects in the front yard. From its generative act, 'Why Don't You Dance?' presents a space that works against unidirectional narratives of neighborhood and consumption. To

¹⁵⁹ *WDYD-W*, 8.

¹⁶⁰ *WDYD-W*, 8.

¹⁶¹ *WDYD-W*, 8-9.

¹⁶² *WDYD-W*, 9.

accomplish this, the house as an architectural frame is separated from its contents, to surround the characters with the physical cues of social pressure, ordinarily applied from its form.

As the location for the dance, the driveway is a site for hospitality and intimacy, while remaining a reminder of the man's route of escape and ultimately, replacement. To dance on the driveway is to act in the heterogeneous capacity of this space, to mark a limited triumph of connection over isolation, and community over private property. As the homecoming of the sprawling tarmac that covers suburbia, this functional surface enables the public and private transportation that moves the suburbanite between work, retail zones and the neighborhood. The driveway connects between the street and the house, usually otherwise cushioned by the lawn, or sometimes the iconic picket fence. The dance in this space between the jeopardised homeowner, and the 'stranger' from the neighborhood is an act of defiance at the threshold of suburban concept and lived experience. The unusual dynamics of the dance and the potential disapproval from onlookers may be due to the age difference - the man calls them 'kids' twice – but also, as his intervention breaks up the young couple's dance and partnership.¹⁶³ However, against the material enactment of the dance itself, the trajectories of movement in the neighborhood is secondary. The question of the story's title is a challenge to the reader from the text: that for all the reasons for not dancing, the suburban space still retains capacity for this social act. In the space-making potential of story, such connections can happen.

View from the Outside

When Carver's characters cross the threshold of domestic spaces, direction of movement is made insignificant by the generative capacity of their location near the generative space. Architectural and narrative frames can offer shielding from these pressures, as in 'Collectors' where a man hides indoors hearing a knock on the door: sheltering from the invasive interests of the world outside.¹⁶⁴ 'Gazebo' differs from 'Why Don't You Dance?' in the level of material containment that is offered in the generative space. While Holly and Duane can close their door, shut the curtains and craft an enclosure in the upstairs suite of the motel, the man in 'Why Don't You Dance?' dramatises his fragile relationship with the wider neighbourhood by setting up a version of home without walls. While the tension in 'Gazebo' emerges from the threat of 'going outside', most radically when Holly jumps out of the second-storey window, in 'Why Don't You Dance?' the threat is from the unseen

¹⁶³ *WDYD-W*, 6, 8.

¹⁶⁴ 'Collectors', *WYPBQP*, 76-81.

eyes watching from across the street.¹⁶⁵ Yet the difference between the 'inside' and 'outside' location of foreign invasion is an important question for establishing the man's coherent personal narrative, and – if possible – locating a sense of 'self' between the alienated spaces and neighbourhoods of objects.

I have described this spatial priority as anti-chronological, suppressing the traditional narrative directionality of the short story form, in favour of a more traversable, open fiction. Describing similar artistic priorities, the contemporary photographer Gregory Crewdson has cited Raymond Carver as well as John Cheever as fictional sources for his 'realist' art.¹⁶⁶ Also drawing on the weird suburban portraits of David Lynch, Stephan Berg has written that Crewdson 'create[s] suggestive pictures of an American society that is alienated from itself and looks into the abyss of its own damaged collected psyche'.¹⁶⁷ His most ambitious project, *Beneath the Roses* (2003-5) brought the production values and team usually reserved for independent cinema, to 'photography as a process of cinematic compression'.¹⁶⁸ In Crewdson's own term, 'single-frame movies' such as the final 'Untitled' plate in *Beneath the Roses* (see Fig. 9) direct the viewer much less than the form would initially suggest. The depth of detail and lighting in Crewdson's photographs maximises his form to open a rich breadth of reference and meaning, as in Carver's story. 'Untitled (Plate 81)' certainly draws upon 'Why Don't You Dance?' in concept, content and generative capacity.

¹⁶⁵ 'Gazebo', 21. *WDYD-W*, 8.

¹⁶⁶ Ali Tenenbaum, 'Gregory Crewdson: BBM Encounters', *RECAPS*, January 2013. <
<http://recapsmagazine.com/review/gregory-crewdson-bbm-encounters-by-ali-tenenbaum/> >

¹⁶⁷ Stephan Berg, 'The Dark Side of the American Dream', *Gregory Crewdson, 1985-2005* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 11-21, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Berg, 13.



Figure 9. Gregory Crewdson, 'Untitled', (Plate 81) from *Beneath the Roses* (2003-5).

The light spilling from the house to the left-edge of the shot, and 'next door', between the trees, offers alternative domestic spaces to the lit bed-space the couple inhabit in the yard. Abandoned clothes and an empty, overturned shopping cart suggest the worthlessness of both the couple's most basic possessions, and the potential for acquisition. The rectangle of the bare mattress is like a raft which the woman clings to, and onto which the man collapses. Crewdson's 'somnambulant yet highly structured picture world' earlier traced strange geometrical forms in suburbia: *Hover* (1996-7) features strange circles cut into lawns, and piles of dirt on neighborhood roads.¹⁶⁹ In 'Untitled (Plate 36)', a lone figure mows concentric circles in a field, foregrounding suburban houses and distant hills behind (see Fig. 10).

¹⁶⁹ Berg, 15. Gregory Crewdson, 1985-2005, (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 97-116; 99, 101.



Figure 10. Gregory Crewdson, 'Untitled', (Plate 36) from *Hover* (1996-7).

If Carver and Crewdson are fishing with the same bait, then the photographer's references to fiction and film are reciprocated in Carver's exploration of visual form. From the photographer of 'Viewfinder' who roams the neighborhood, to the plaster-cast teeth atop a flickering television in 'Feathers', the framed image has the potential to figure action between characters, as media that literally mediates, rather than isolates the viewer.¹⁷⁰ Rather, the inhabitant of the suburb, already isolated in many of Carver's stories, is more likely to find escape from this isolation through the framed image or narrative.

The sense of threat felt in front of the home in 'Why Don't You Dance?' recurs in 'Viewfinder', positioning them in relation to domestic stereotypes as the men tell their stories. Both the man in the house and the photographer possess personal narratives that wrestle with the core trauma of familial breakdown: 'Hey, I had kids once. Just like you'.¹⁷¹ The photographer appears to deduce this from looking at the different rooms of the house, and a few things the man says. After

¹⁷⁰ 'Feathers', *Cathedral*, 1-24; 9-10.

¹⁷¹ 'Viewfinder'-W, 12.

returning from the toilet and being offered a coffee, the photographer asks: ““You’re alone, right?” He looked hard at the living room. He shook his head. “Hard, hard,” he said’.¹⁷² Here, emotional and material divisions encircle their common situation and shared experience in the living room.

While the photographer can draw a life narrative from the rooms of the house, the man steps out of the house with connective questions. He asks the photographer about some ‘kids’ who had recently offered to paint his address on the kerb for a dollar.¹⁷³ ““You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?””, he follows up, supposing that someone who walks the streets would cross paths with others who do the same. ““What are you saying?””, the photographer replies, to which the man explains ““I was trying to make a connection,” I said’, reaching for an interaction from a house without a family.¹⁷⁴ However, the photographer isn’t from this neighborhood: he rents a room downtown, and insists that he always works alone.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, he describes his quarry as ‘the neighborhoods’: the plural signifying that there are fragmentations in the geography outside of this community, meaning that the photographer is only a temporary visitor in this locale.

‘Viewfinder’ culminates in an inward-looking representation of the domestic space, and an outward-looking expression from the roof of the house. The photographer expresses his sympathy for the man’s loss of his family, to which the man demands: ““Show me,” ... “Show me how much. Take more pictures of me and my house””.¹⁷⁶ The photographer expresses doubt at the limits of what this task can accomplish, against the permanence of past events: ““It won’t work,” ... “They’re not coming back””.¹⁷⁷ However, the man helps him on with the straps of his camera, and the photographer, now acting in his function, self-reportedly a ‘professional’, offers the man a deal: ““Three for a dollar””.¹⁷⁸ The two of them then go outside, circling the house ‘Systematic’, until they’ve moved all the way round to the front again. A 360-degree representation of the home achieved, the photographer considers the job done.

“That’s twenty. That’s enough.”
“No,” I said. “On the roof,” I said.
“Jesus,” he said. He checked up and down the block. “Sure,” he said.
“Now you’re talking.”
I said, “The whole kit and caboodle. They cleared right out.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² ‘Viewfinder’-W, 11.

¹⁷³ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 11.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 12.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 12.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 12.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 12.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 12.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Viewfinder’-W, 13.

In the material-psychological generation of Carver's stories, climbing on top of the house is another example of spatial action that can extend narrative meaning beyond the 'talk' of the second collection's title. The conversation swaps seamlessly from talking about the photographs to the underlying story of the lost families: as if they are really two ways of talking about the same thing. In this generative space, narrative lines are compressed so close as to converge. The photographer looks up and down the street, suggesting his unease at others watching the man's climbing on the roof, and reasserting the regular suburban ground-view, against which the man ascends. While the photographer is eager to move on in the *Beginners* version (perhaps to other photographing jobs or home) the man on the roof senses a breeze, crossing an expansive landscape.¹⁸⁰ More than the details of this 'found' view, the power of this space arises from its spatial dynamic: as an extensive view, from atop and above walls.

The close of 'Viewfinder' varies significantly in the two major versions. The Lish-edited version for *What We Talk About...* ends with an aggressive expression from the man, who finds stones on the roof, and throws them as far as he can. The final lines are a desperate grasping: a disconnection in the attempt for representation.

"I laid back my arm and I hollered, "Now!" I threw that son of a bitch as far as I could throw it.
"I don't know," I heard him shout. "I don't do motion shots."
"Again!" I screamed, and took up another rock.¹⁸¹

The limitations of the Polaroid camera to capture high-speed action suggest that while the home can be expressed through the frames of the twenty shots that were taken around it, this expression requires both the subject and artist, and draws upon their experience of composition. From the Lish version, it's unclear whether the photographer indeed pulls the lever to take the photo of the rock thrown, and the reader is left with an expression of defiance against those limitations. However, the *Beginners* version suggests the success of this framing. After using a chair and a crate as objects to access the roof, the man takes a moment to look around.¹⁸² The first stone is thrown 'south', the cardinal direction suggesting an expanse invisible from the ground, and certainly from indoors. In the *Beginners* version, the photographer and the man together achieve something that borders on the miraculous:

¹⁸⁰ 'Viewfinder'-B, 10.

¹⁸¹ 'Viewfinder' -W, 13.

¹⁸² 'Viewfinder'-B, 10.

“I don’t know,” I heard him say. “You moved,” he said. “We’ll see in a minute,” and in a minute he said, “By God, it’s okay.” He looked at it. He held it up. “You know,” he said, “it’s good.”
“Once more,” I called. I picked up another rock. I grinned. I felt I could lift off. Fly. “Now!” I called.¹⁸³

As it appears here, the ‘minute’ delivers on the promise of *instant photography*, on the page. As a representative and representational object, the Polaroid photograph enables the story’s generative crescendo. In the *Beginners* version the man feels and identifies the new expansiveness which the Lish version only implies with the hurled stone. The ‘call’ for another photograph, at the specified moment (“Now!”) in this version signifies the containing action of frames throughout the stories of domestic space. Like ‘Why Don’t You Dance?’, the extra-verbal achievement of ‘Viewfinder’ is made spatially, adjacent to the broken frame of the family home. In these stories, the measure of success is more hopeful and social than the external entropic threat of ‘Gazebo’. In the girl who ‘told everyone’ and the photographer capturing every visible plane of the house, the need for a bridged and reconfigured narrative space is reaffirmed against cultural mythology, invasion and the decaying directionality of time.¹⁸⁴

Writing the Neighborhood

In Carver’s first two story collections, characters and their buildings appear in particularly clear interrelation, occupying close frames onto their dramatic suburban view. An expressive relationship between people and spaces is shown to be capable of reconstruction from dominant narratives of the centred subject in the expansive, influential urban novels of the 1970s and 80s.¹⁸⁵ Populating a heterogeneous America, Carver’s people are inseparable from their built spaces: expressive through the functions and psychological potency of the materials that surround them. Unlike Kerouac’s *On the Road*, searching for identity in the mythologised American West, Carver’s American subject dwells within unsympathetic and unyielding social environments.¹⁸⁶ Yet Carver’s

¹⁸³ Viewfinder’-B, 10.

¹⁸⁴ WDYD-B, 9.

¹⁸⁵ Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), Martin Amis, *Money: A Suicide Note* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), etc. I would argue that large urban novels such as Tom Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1984, serialised) also function through an extended focus on the individual subject, against a dense social backdrop.

¹⁸⁶ This larger tradition of the road narrative extends through literature and film, from Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969) to the novels of Cormac McCarthy. It extends back to the inception of the idea of ‘the West’ in American consciousness, and further, to colonial exploration from the Thirteen Colonies. ‘Carver Country’ is

realist aesthetic also marks a 'realist' obligation to a wider community than Postmodernist fictions: to stay close to the representation of familiar American spaces, in the formal tradition of the short story. While sometimes naming specific locales for the establishing framing spaces, as Carver said himself in an interview for *The Paris Review*, 'they could take place in just about any city or urban area; here in Syracuse, but also Tucson, Sacramento, San Jose, San Francisco, Seattle, or Port Angeles, Washington'.¹⁸⁷ 'Any'-place, but named, and specified as places Carver lived and knew, as well as the immediate location of the interview: the inclusive gesture allows for a range of possibilities.

In this chapter I have explored the essential identity of each story as functional in itself, while maintaining the presence of an active contiguity between stories as they appeared in their publishing contexts. Randolph Runyon's work has championed the latter aspect of this approach, to defend against widely-published claims that Carver's writings were not his own.¹⁸⁸ After the publication of *Beginners* and the publicity surrounding the Carver-Lish editorial relationship, a new view of the relationship between the story and the story collection is even more essential now. Like apartments in a large building, Carver's fictions exist in distinct relation to each other, but cross thresholds at walls, windows and doors: lines of sound, sight, and movement. The public profile of Carver's historical and biographical narratives has too often obscured his directing decision to write in the short story form, for publication in a variety of formats. 'Why Don't You Dance?' appeared in *Quarterly West* and *Paris Review* (and was rejected by *Esquire*) before its publication in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981).¹⁸⁹ 'Gazebo' appeared once and 'Viewfinder' twice in journals, prior to their inclusion in the same collection.¹⁹⁰ Almost every story in *What We Talk About...* is published in multiple versions and formats, again raising the question of relational and portable effect across Carver's texts. Like the neighborhoods described within them, these stories exist in tension between individual form (a textual 'privacy' that insists on a focussed reading of each story) and a community identity in which they are considered together, close to authors and forms that Carver built in mutual tradition.

Carver's work to represent social and material geographies becomes, in several senses, the establishment of the 'neighborhood'.¹⁹¹ The term's familiarity suggests the relationship between its point of observation as inhabited by the individual (the suffix: '-hood'), with the proximities of

located at the end of the Oregon Trail first documented by Lewis and Clarke: it is situated at the extent of that mythologised geography, where there is no more land 'Westward' to support this American dream.

¹⁸⁷ Simpson and Buzbee, 1983.

¹⁸⁸ Runyon, 1992.

¹⁸⁹ Notes in *Beginners*, 206.

¹⁹⁰ Notes in *Beginners*, 206-7.

¹⁹¹ I adopt the American spelling to fit with Carver's usage.

population (from the root: 'one who lives near').¹⁹² 'Neighbor', from the Old English '*neahgebur*' also carries, from its culturally significant usage in the Bible, the question of social morality.¹⁹³ As suggested in these senses, the term fits Carver's depiction of people struggling with the suffering of those alienated from themselves, in dense social configurations. Carver's characters repeatedly search the neighborhood, seeking spaces for connection against the alienation and compartmentalisation of the postmodern suburb. In narrative and materiality, they live within a conflicted state of 'neighborhood': between fantasies of self-actualisation and the dense fabric of social reality.

The representations of narrative containers included earlier in the chapter might also illustrate the dynamics of neighborhood, in a wider, connective view of Carver's fictions. Concentric groupings have regularly mobilised the term 'neighbor' to suggest social in-groups and imaginatively map exclusion: from the racial suggestion of the Biblical text, to the national 'Good neighbor policy' adopted by Herbert Hoover in 1928.¹⁹⁴ The application to community is perhaps the most common, and includes the dynamic of the personal relationship to that social configuration. In a fiction that operates in all these concentric senses of 'neighborhood', the inside/outside individual subjectivity can appear most fully. In stories such as 'Gazebo', this revelation modulates and contextualises the sense of alienation of the individual: an isolation of shared walls, common spaces and formal architectures.

An Immediate Chronotope

Following the first generation of Carver monographs, G.P. Lainsbury's *The Carver Chronotope* (2003) offered a reading of the fiction that considered his short forms contextually and across his career.¹⁹⁵ His argument that the stories can be considered together as a 'life-world' hypothesises a cumulative novel which situates all of his places and characters onto a consistent social history and geography. Lainsbury's introduction applies Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' in its essential spatio-temporal relation: 'Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible;

¹⁹² *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 'neighbour', 606.

¹⁹³ In the parable of the Good Samaritan: 'Who is my neighbour?'. KJV, Luke 19:25-37.

¹⁹⁴ Fredrick B. Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 202.

¹⁹⁵ Lainsbury, 2003.

likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'.¹⁹⁶ From Bakhtin's formalist concept, Lainsbury is able to consider the spaces of Carver's stories as extensive and expressive, a connective reading that the story-by-story accounts have sometimes missed. However, in modelling a novelistic, constructed historical emphasis, this capability remains subjugated to directing chronological progression. Identifying novelistic and 'epical' modes across Carver's stories outsources what can be found within the containing structures of the stories themselves. Figuratively, the 'novelistic' reading overstates the community of the apartment building, searching for the source of dramatic power that appears inexplicable against the apologies for 'Minimalism'. Yet this reading underestimates the capacity and ability of the short story form to speak to Carver's readership. Rather than communicating historically summative scenes, Bakhtinian theory might identify the ability of Carver's scenes to communicate from their literary-historical situation. Bakhtin's 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' draws special attention to the road as a place for 'the collapse of social distances'.¹⁹⁷ While presenting the potency of collisions and connections in proximity, Carver's stories are also sites of division and separation. They scale according to the realist's obligation to a more accurate modelling of the individual and family, within the wider community.

Lainsbury's judgement of the inferiority of the short story and its capacity for worldmaking draws from the critical hierarchy of form that has also distracted from spatial structure. Identifying the alienation between Carver's geographies and his characters, Lainsbury argues that Carver Country is 'a generic place lacking in the kind of qualities that would set it apart from all others, more a placelessness, where the inhabitants feels little sense of connection or belonging'.¹⁹⁸ Yet the scope of 'neighborhood' and inside/outside connections in the stories examined in this chapter complicate this reading, and reveal that even a 'little sense' can have powerful dramatic consequence. As personal, social and cultural narratives are brought into contiguity within containing spaces, this confluence forms an immediacy of community: between characters, and beyond the frame, to the reader.

Both the *Selected Stories* and (UK published) *Elephant* bear an epigraph from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984): 'We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to

¹⁹⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-256; 84.

¹⁹⁷ Bakhtin, 86.

¹⁹⁸ Lainsbury, 100.

come'.¹⁹⁹ Against Carver's famous self-declaration that he had lived two lives, this quotation appears as an ironic expression of both mourning and restoration. Both the *Selected Stories* and *Elephant* include 'Intimacy' and 'Menudo' in sequence.²⁰⁰ These stories offer their redemptive moments as physical encounters: in 'Intimacy', the narrator kneeling before his wife until she forgives him. In 'Menudo', a friend makes a meal to comfort the narrator, which is eaten by the other guests in the house: but remains a resonant sensory and emotional memory. After both these narrated experiences, corresponding conclusions show their narrators outside the family home, surrounded by the leaves of suburban avenues littering the ground. In 'Intimacy' the narrator steps off the sidewalk into the gutter, filled with more 'piles of leaves'.²⁰¹ The story ends with an undirected sense of need: 'Somebody ought to make an effort here. Somebody ought to get a rake and take care of this'.²⁰² In 'Menudo', the narrator begins before dawn in his own yard, raking 'right down into the turf'.²⁰³ Right after, he begins on his neighbour's yard, continuing as they come out onto their porch and watch until he finishes. Tying the last of the bags, he remains on his knees, holding the rake as his neighbour starts his car, signals to him with a wave and drives off to work in the city.²⁰⁴ Rising from the lawn, the narrator concludes with a return across a now neighborly space: 'I look both ways and then cross the street'.²⁰⁵ This symbolic and material willingness to cross, against danger and lines of private ownership, is the ultimate affirmation. Its effect crosses the limits of the story, echoing back through previous visits to the architectures of Carver Country. Fuelled by the affectionate action of the dish cooked by his friend in the middle of the night, the narrator works at dawn, to gather fallen leaves: 'an event of small moment – but an event nonetheless'.²⁰⁶

From the windows of 'Gazebo's apartment, the rooftop of 'Viewfinder' and the streets of 'Intimacy' and 'Menudo', the frame of each story relates to concentric spaces close-by, and in the distance. First, the reader may travel the street in two or more directions to visit the stories which appear in various collections. With more fuel in the tank, roads branch out to the neighborhood of Carver's poetic and biographical texts. In these, the more extensive meaning of related design can signify with wider implication and access. Beyond the celebrated and contested territory of his short stories, Carver's oeuvre connects both broadly and more intimately: in yet shorter texts, and wider spaces.

¹⁹⁹ *Elephant*, 7.

²⁰⁰ *Where I'm Calling From*, 363-85. *Elephant*, 45-72.

²⁰¹ 'Intimacy', *Elephant*, 53.

²⁰² 'Intimacy', 53.

²⁰³ 'Menudo', 69.

²⁰⁴ 'Menudo', 70-1.

²⁰⁵ 'Menudo', 71.

²⁰⁶ 'Menudo', 71.

Chapter 4

The River: American Poetics

'I began as a poet, my first publication was a poem', Carver wrote, suggesting both an integrity of form, and an integration across his work: '...on my tombstone I'd be very pleased if they put "Poet and short-story writer - and occasional essayist" in that order'.¹ Compiling the *Collected Poems* eight years after his death, Tess Gallagher and editor William Stull selected a title from the poetry which highlighted the inclusive desire for any collection, but is especially resonant for Carver's poems.² *All of Us* echoes the line from the poem 'In Switzerland', which appears in expanded form as an epigraph:

All of us, all of us, all of us
trying to save
our immortal souls, some ways
seemingly more round-
about and mysterious
than others.³

Across four major-press collections and numerous small-press contributions, Carver presented his poetry as an open and generous body of work. These texts were compact and reproducible enough to explore, in hundreds of inflections, representative processes refined in his short fiction. In iterations and perspectives, the poems were able to craft, edit, revisit and correspond.⁴ This openness has led criticism on Carver's poetry to draw upon biographical writings, including the range

¹ Carver's first published collection was *Near Klamath* (Sacramento, Calif.: The English Club of Sacramento State College, 1968). The quotation first appeared on the rear dust jacket of *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Raymond Carver, *A New Path to the Waterfall* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).

² *AOU*, 268.

³ *AOU*, vii.

⁴ The four major-press collections are *Fires* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Capra Press, 1983), *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (New York: Random House, 1985), *Ultramarine* (New York, Random House, 1986) and *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989).

of dedications and explanatory notes from his widow Tess Gallagher, who has consistently included Carver's life-story as an essential supplement to his texts.⁵

The frequent move to stabilise and legitimise Carver's poetry has sometimes suggested an anxiety that has grown alongside the publicity of the 'Lish question'.⁶ Since 1998, the short fiction has been characterised as increasingly in need of interpolation beyond the scope of the texts themselves. Their essential quality, their brevity and clarity, (as with so many concise and influential works) seemed too much on its own. Thus, the original claims by Carver and then Gallagher for the inclusivity of the texts has been distorted to support an argument for the necessity of supplementation, and by implication, about the insufficiency of the works themselves. The stakes in this argument have been raised by the willingness of Carver to name and relate his work with his contemporaries in his poetry and prose.⁷ In the broad critical view, characterising Carver's writing as either context-dependent or contextually isolated is a way of arguing against the quality or wider importance of his oeuvre, presumably deflecting attention elsewhere. Recently this argument has overshadowed the close criticism from the years following Carver's death and requires the contemporary reader to keep a suspicious eye on the ghostly etchings of the editor's pen, or the sometimes-apologetic supplement of Gallagher's introductory dedications.⁸ Carver can only be read by the informed contemporary reader as divided, undercut, or shadowed by the particularities and openness of his history.

In view of this critical and popular conception, the collected poetry of *All of Us* renewed a too-often forgotten mode of reading Carver's works. Critics such as Kevin Boyle have characterised the poetry as a variety of even-more-brief short fictions.⁹ Although Carver's poems draw upon a prosaic tone and styling, they also work with hybrid forms and tradition. Like his short stories, Carver's poems work in relation to tradition and associated formal boundaries, and also bridge with his wider representative modes and their relationships of context. Specific critical attention to Carver's poetry does more than redress a critical imbalance. The poems have a distinctive mode and relation to his other works, which the narrative content (again, according to Boyle, 'as close to prose

⁵ Robert Miltner, 'In a Mature Light', *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Sandra Lee Kleppe, Robert Miltner (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 46-61; 48.

⁶ Max, 1998.

⁷ For example, poems such as 'You Don't Know What Love Is' simultaneously memorialises and characterises Charles Bukowski, a writer he admired and spent time with personally. *AOU*, 16-20. Also see 'On Writing', 'John Gardner: The Writer as Teacher' and 'Friendship', *Call if You Need Me*, 87-92, 107-122.

⁸ The investigation of Tess Gallagher and Gordon Lish's collaborative relationships with Carver's works is one of the primary subjects of Chapter 5, 'Biographical Geographies'.

⁹ Kevin Boyle, 'The Sturgeon', *Masterplots II: Poetry Series*. 5. ed. Frank N. McGill (Pasedena: Salem, 1992), 6 vols. 2087-8.

as poetry is likely to get') is only a part.¹⁰ Given the stature of Carver's short fiction, even a half-poetic form would be of significant interest, but readings in Boyle's mode imply that Carver's poems are diminished in their departures from traditional form, being 'intent on blurring [the] norms and conventions' separating prose and poetry.¹¹ Similar anxieties qualified Arthur Bethea's defence of Carver's poetry: a thorough identification of the articulacy of his verse, meter and poetics, in terms of the range of modes available to the contemporary poet.¹² As clear as the case for Carver's poetic craft is, a clearer signification can be traced in the categorisation of these texts, not as 'short short stories', but collected poems. Similarly (but separately), the name on the cover of his collections identifies Carver as author of these works, and thus *poet*, a signification that informs a difference and relationship with his collections of fiction and other prose.

While the particularity of the short fiction lies in a variety of 'realist' narrative, the poetry defies expectations of a structurally 'minimal' text or 'flat' style, substituting narrative movement with surreal and psychologically expressive geographies, as observed by Henning.¹³ In the stories, 'The Father' makes such a movement: almost as compact as an optical illusion, which comes very close to a poetic range in compressed psychological concentration.¹⁴ 'Popular Mechanics' is similarly compact, and although it functions through a moment of dynamic action, it again focuses on the singular, the immediate, and the power of material presentation over narrative expectation.¹⁵ The chronological arc is de-emphasised, and placed in service of a space and a moment: a scene, in an arresting and immediate sense. Carver's 'realist' representative mode is crucially important for his spatial forms, as explored in the previous chapter. Moving from the lines and zones of his architecture, the reader is presented with spaces that more expansively and expressively gesture to the silence of the abyss or 'generative space' at the core of Carver Country. As frequently as houses, phones and televisions relate in consequential material relation with his characters, the sounds and presences outside, on the end of the line or airwaves – though unseen – are essential to his short forms. In this larger picture, text and context work in active counterpoint for both writer and reader: a blank space on the map that invites exploration.

Responding to these commonalities found across formal mode, the critical collection *New Paths to Raymond Carver* (2008) set out to redress the imbalance with renewed close attention to Carver's texts, and five essays focussed specifically on the poetry to elucidate a range of approaches

¹⁰ Boyle, 2087.

¹¹ Boyle, 2088.

¹² Bethea, 185.

¹³ Barbara Henning, 'Minimalism and the American Dream: "Shiloh" by Bobby Ann Mason and "Preservation" by Raymond Carver, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35, 4 (1989), 689-698.

¹⁴ 'The Father', *WYPBQP*, 31-32.

¹⁵ 'Popular Mechanics', *What We Talk About...*, 103-105.

to Carver's work and influential style.¹⁶ Jo Angela Edwins and Robert Miltner addressed the 'Late Poetry' or "'Second Life" Poems' as a counterpart to the developments in Carver's fictive voice, while Randolph Runyon extended his sequential readings of Carver's stories to the 'recycling' of poetic image in the collection *Ultramarine*.¹⁷ Sandra Lee Kleppe identified the voyeuristic spectator in the involved and observing voice of the poetry, and William W. Wright offered a theoretical account of the objects in the poetry: connecting with characters and other authors in a bridge of affection.¹⁸ Wright's connective reading suggests an approach that has the capacity to rebalance between the immediacy of Carver's texts and the wider field of reference which they draw upon and correspond. Wright finds figures in the poetry sufficiently removed from the editorial and publication processes that have dominated consideration of Carver, while remaining connected with key questions of literary production in other ways. Identifying the writing implement in the poem 'The Pen', as a 'transitional object', he observes that this material thing 'allow[s] both the writer in the poem and the writer of the poem to work across the gap between silence and work, between the page and the words'.¹⁹ The crossings, Wright argues, lead to populated places, 'the celebration of life': whether of the artful or the everyday.²⁰

Beyond 'Subjectism'

Poetry is formally suited to connect from the sense of the immediate, to wider networks of active texts and voices. The poem's basic figurative mechanics, such as metaphor and description, introduce diverse references, figures and places into a combinative experience on the page.²¹ Such formal practice was heavily scrutinised and extended in the American poetry in the period preceding Carver, which saw a conscious struggle between the desire for greater representative ability and a clearer awareness of the fragmentation of the textual process.²² Photography and video documentary received a new vitality from their role in communicating America's actions in Vietnam,

¹⁶ *New Paths*, 2008.

¹⁷ Jo Angela Edwins, 'Sleeping and Waking: Raymond Carver's Late Poetry of Loss', *New Paths*, 8-19. Miltner, 2008. Randolph Paul Runyon, 'It's like, but not like, a dream: On Reading *Ultramarine*', *New Paths*, 20-34.

¹⁸ Sandra Lee Kleppe, 'Raymond Carver's Poet-Voyeur as Involved Spectator', *New Paths*, 62-74. William W. Wright, 'The Vocabulary of Affection', *New Paths*, 35-45.

¹⁹ Wright, 37. *AOU*, 198-9.

²⁰ Wright, 41.

²¹ John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse, Third Edition* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

²² Eric Mottram, "'Forget About Being Original": Recent American Poetics', *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford, 'American Literature' (London: Penguin, 1988), 595-616; 595.

and live footage of the moon landings.²³ Meanwhile, the 'American New Wave' had absorbed the avant-garde influence of the French cinema to produce an art form that was as aware of its practice, realism and social function as it was successful.²⁴ These political, social and artistic developments in turn influenced a revived emphasis on a variety of 'authenticity' in poetry and prose, as identified in the 'confessional' poetry of the 1950s and 60s.²⁵ Some of the foremost poets of the time were connected with this development, notably Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and sometimes writers of the Beat movement.²⁶ The emergence of this category was as much a marker of a particular kind of critical emphasis as any agreement on the part of these poets, yet between the author, publicists, critics and public, this connective term nevertheless gained traction. Despite the sophisticated textual operations in Sexton and Berryman in particular, David Haven Blake identifies a 'culture of confession' that grew from their popular and immediate critical reception, and the role of the author as collaborator in their own celebrity status.²⁷

Posturing against the rise of the American confessional poem, a counter-tradition was assembled in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960), as a self-proclaimed 'third generation' of American Modernism.²⁸ These poets, including Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Paul Blackburn and Denise Levertov, searched the fragmentation of poetic experimentalism for a form that could address the potentialities and urgencies of their time. Their concern was as much about the current status of the American poet as was Pound's, writing to Whitman, 'It was you who broke the new wood./ Now is a time for carving./ We have one sap and one root...'.²⁹ The project of Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* works the subjectivity of the 'confessional' through the mediation of a set of letters and poems, creating a located representation of space in text. *Maximus* was composed in parts, beginning spontaneously with 'I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You' in May 1950, publishing poems 1-10 in 1953, and poems 11-22 three years later.³⁰ The collected poems were published in

²³ Paul C. Adams, 'Television as Gathering Place', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 82, 1 (1992), 117-135.

²⁴ David Thomson, *America in the Dark: The Impact of Hollywood Films on American Culture* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1977), 238.

²⁵ The term originated in M. L. Rosenthal's review of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, M. L. Rosenthal, 'Poetry as Confession', *The Nation*, September 19, 1959.

²⁶ Craig Svonkin, 'From Robert Lowell to Frank Bidart: Becoming the Other; Suiciding the White Male "Self"', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 43 (2008), 92-118; 101.

²⁷ Jo Gill, 'Textual Confessions: Narcissism in Anne Sexton's Early Poetry', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 50, 1, Spring 2004, 59-87. David Haven Blake, 'Public Dreams: Berryman, Celebrity, and the Culture of Confession', *American Literary History*, 13, 4 (Winter 2001), 716-736; 718.

²⁸ *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960). Alan Golding, 'The New American Poetry Revisited, Again', *Contemporary Literature*, 39, 2 (Summer, 1998), 180-211; 184.

²⁹ Ezra Pound, 'The Pact', *Lustra* (1916), in *Poems and translations*, Library of America, 144, ed. Richard Sieburth (Library of America, 2003).

³⁰ George F. Butterick, *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1980), xxxii-iii.

1960, with a new third section, and the removal of previous divisions in the text.³¹ Olson worked at the Black Mountain College, North Carolina from 1951-6, from which the 'Black Mountain Poets' developed both theory and poetics.³² The synergy of those associations can be felt in *Maximus's* dramatic unity of place ('Polis/ is this'³³) and the form that Olson called 'projective verse'. This concept, set out by Olson in correspondence with Frances Boldereff and Robert Creeley, was then reworked into a frequently-reprinted piece that became the celebrated and influential account of his poetics.

Olson's account begins with the concerns of the Modernist poets, transposing Pound's demand for the 'musical phrase' into the physical: 'the *kinetics* of the thing'.³⁴ The metaphors are repeatedly spatial: the projection is into a 'field', in which the poet 'puts himself in the open' and 'can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself'.³⁵ Claiming lineage from the 'objectism' of Pound and Williams, Olson identifies the coordinates through which his poetry will navigate: 'It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature...'.³⁶ 'It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man'.³⁷ The crescendo of 'Letter 27' in *Maximus* applies this concept specifically to his national tradition and space, in a verse column, tapering to its point:

An American
is a complex of occasions
themselves a geometry
of spatial nature.
I have this sense,
that I am one
with my skin
Plus this – plus this:
that forever the geography
which leans in
on me I compell
backwards I compell Gloucester
to yield, to
change
Polis

³¹ Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, First published by Jargon/Corinth Books, 1960, New edition, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³² Anne Day Dewey, *Beyond Maximus: The Construction of Public Voice in Black Mountain Poetry* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

³³ Olson, 'Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [withheld]', *The Maximus Poems*, ll.51-2.

³⁴ Olson, Charles, 'Projective Verse' (1950), *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions, 1966, 6.

³⁵ Olson, 'Projective Verse', 7.

³⁶ Olson, 'Projective Verse', 20.

³⁷ Olson, 'Projective Verse', 20.

is this ³⁸

Olson's poetics engaged fiercely with both earlier tradition and his contemporary moment. Against the 'road narratives' of Kerouac and the urban ecstasies of Ginsberg, the maximal voice of Olson's poem hitchhiked nowhere, instead insisting and compelling (a double 'l' makes even more emphatic) the geography to yield to the immediate. Olson's sense, that Gloucester will 'yield', was the aim of his energetic text: to find out 'the poetics of such a situation', *in situ*.³⁹ Yet in the decades following, 'projective verse' was increasingly viewed as raising its own problems, curiously resembling the very subjectism Olson had opposed. In 1984 Charles Altieri wrote: 'Olson's objectivism now appears to be primarily a strategy for indulging in attributions to the self as object of all that Olson had the good sense to suppress in the position of subject'.⁴⁰ As with the metafictionists of the short story, the terms and posture of experimentalism here threatened to dominate the techniques and their usefulness.

In a review of *Ultramarine* (1986), Patricia Hampl suggested the specificity of Carver's style, as 'heir to that most appealing American poetic voice, the lyricism of Theodore Roethke and James Wright'.⁴¹ The connection with James Wright suggests a wider scope of influence: back to that poet's stated search for the 'Deep Image' between the concrete object and the stylisation connecting with the symbolism of Federico Garcia Lorca.⁴² The term 'Deep Image', also used to describe the verse of Robert Bly, Diane Wakoski, Jerome Rothenberg and Galway Kinnell, draws upon Lorca's 'cante jondo', or 'deep song'.⁴³ In Lorca, a specific geographical and temporal starting-point formed a connection with popular poetry, and a surrealistic approach to subjectivity in service of a new Andalusian poetry.⁴⁴ For American poets of the Deep Image, in Bly's polemic, an engagement with Surrealism was necessary in order to reinvigorate a national poetry in which 'the mind won over the unconscious without too much struggle – the old Puritan victory'.⁴⁵ Pound and Eliot were challenged as an 'objectivist generation' in their 'pictorialism' and 'objective correlative', a term Bly calls 'astoundingly passionless' in his essay 'A Wrong-Turning in American Poetry' (1963).⁴⁶ Bly later called for a return to the 'fertile internationalism' of Pound and Eliot's early work, against the 'elegant

³⁸ Olson, 'Letter 27...', ll.37-52.

³⁹ Charles Olson, 'A Later Note on Letter #15', *The Maximus Poems*.

⁴⁰ Charles Altieri, *Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 24.

⁴¹ Patricia Hampl, 'Surviving a Life in the Present', *New York Times Book Review*, June 7, 1987.

⁴² Richard P. Gabriel, 'Memory and Landscape in the Work of James Wright', *James Wright: The Heart of Light* ed. Peter Stitt, Frank Graziano (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 5.

⁴³ Robert Kelly, 'Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image', *Trobar*, ed. George Economou & Robert Kelly, (1961) 2.

⁴⁴ Edward F. Stanton, 'The Poetry of Federico García Lorca and "Cante Jondo"', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 39, 4, (1974), 94-103; 96-7.

⁴⁵ Robert Bly, *The Fifties*, in *The Fifties and the Sixties* (New York: Hobart and William Smith, 1982), 3, 7-9; 7.

⁴⁶ Robert Bly, 'A Wrong-Turning in American Poetry', *Choice* (1963), 3:35, 19.

isolationism' of the New Critics.⁴⁷ Committed to cross-national influence as essential to the vitality of American and regional literatures, as he said in 1966 of his first collection: 'I suppose... *Silence in the Snowy Fields* has something to do with my conviction that unless American poetry can grow naturally out of American ground, we may as well give up now and quit'.⁴⁸ The work of the Deep Image poets proved influential, including in other forms. In 1978 William Least Heat-Moon would appropriate a related term, conceiving of a 'deep map' to describe the geographic-subjective journey across America's *Blue Highways*.⁴⁹ More topographic in inflection than Lorca or his appropriators of the American 'image', Heat-Moon's projects expand the expression of spatial representative 'depth' to documentary prose. The 'deep', for all these writers, signifies a capacity to extend the range of the text without departing from the immediate, the spatial unity. It offers a path beyond the poetic range of the individual, without requiring a removal away from the immediate spaces of 'home'.

Movement

A view of Carver's texts alongside the work of the Black Mountain and Deep Image poets allows a clearer sense of the poetry as distinct from the short fiction, unfolding in parallel, independent projects. Ayala Amir's recent monograph finds in Carver a 'visual poetics', applying a range of cinematic techniques to investigate his short fiction through the recent 'visual turn' in cultural studies.⁵⁰ The devices explored in Amir's study support the trend of criticism on Carver's stories, which has often used a vocabulary of film criticism: implicating the gaze, the potency of surface and strong material detail.⁵¹ Amir's account inherits terms for her spatial-visual study from W.J.T. Mitchell, and focuses on figures and dialogue that suggest and navigate by 'the eye of the camera' in stories from each of Carver's collections.⁵² Amir's successful application of cinematic theory to the stories speaks to the affinity that resulted in Robert Altman's adaptation of ten Carver

⁴⁷ Robert Bly, 'An Interview with Robert Bly', *Tennessee Poetry Journal*, 2, 2 (Winter 1969), 29-38; 38. Robert Bly, *The Sixties*, 6, 22.

⁴⁸ Howard Nelson, *Robert Bly: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 7.

⁴⁹ William Least Heat-Moon, *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983).

⁵⁰ Ayala Amir, *The Visual Poetics of Raymond Carver* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2010).

⁵¹ William L. Magrino, 'American Voyeurism: Why Does Raymond Carver Want Us to Watch?', *New Paths*, 75-91. Abigail L. Bowers, 'Seeing Ourselves from the Outside: Voyeuristic Empathy in Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*', *New Paths*, 92-103.

⁵² W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Spatial Form in Literature: Towards a General Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 6, 3 (1980), 539-67. Amir, 3-11, 26.

stories (and a poem), *Short Cuts* (1992).⁵³ In the layered and interpolating transposition of the stories to a recognisable geography of Los Angeles County, Altman's film depicted localised but isolated life stories, bridging between them with a musical score that emphasised the narrative connection required to bring one story into process with any other. Constructing his film with a hybrid mix of narrative continuity and montage, Altman accomplished what Carver's stories implied in text: a narrative portrayal of fractured characters, in specific and compressed instances. Amir's readings represent an important advance in the study of Carver's fiction, extending the implication of the extensive research on the voyeuristic and the visual.⁵⁴ This cinematic affinity has further implication beyond the techniques and stories that most clearly demonstrate them, and demands detailed examination of Carver's poetics in and between his works. While particular stories have received significant critique and acclaim, a wider sense of a 'Carver Country' moves the reader from the shot and the camera, to the spatial conception and *sense* that emerges from such presentations. If Carver's stories are visually-driven or 'cinematic', then the poetry offers a distinct extension of that mode within a broader international tradition and cultural development.

The psychology and history of the cinematic image have been most influentially examined in Gilles Deleuze's twin accounts, *The Movement-Image* (1983) and *The Time-Image* (1985).⁵⁵ In these studies Deleuze argues that the artistic work has cultivated a capacity to present both 'affects' and 'percepts', separately or in concert.⁵⁶ The original power of the film camera, he writes, was its promise of representation without imposing concepts onto the scene: approaching the aesthetic ideal of an imaging machine. In early cinema, this 'movement-image' liberated the artistic presentation of movement itself from the organising viewpoint. Deleuze's account traces cinema's presentations of 'becoming' rather than 'being', liberating kinetics from chronology with its presupposed external observer.⁵⁷ The development from 'movement-image' to 'time-image' (which in Deleuze's reading distinguishes modern cinema) occurred at the development from Italian Neorealism to the French New Wave, which employed disconnected, prosaic images to break the progressive narrative expectation of the viewer, and leave only the image itself to be 'read'.⁵⁸

⁵³ Robert Altman, *Short Cuts*. Fine Line Features, 1994. Other cinematic adaptations of Carver's stories have followed since: *Jindabyne* (2006) is an adaptation of 'So Much Water, So Close to Home', and *Everything Must Go* (2010) made a feature-length film from the brief story 'Why Don't You Dance?'.

⁵⁴ Kleppe, 2008.

⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 225.

⁵⁶ Deleuze 1986, 73-104.

⁵⁷ Deleuze 1986, 71.

⁵⁸ Deleuze's conception of 'reading' the cinematic image includes a strong sense of the mutually constructed, subjective specificity of this practice. Deleuze 1989, 225.

In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze addresses the importance of cinema's innovative representative split, of the 'virtual' from the 'actual', through what he terms the 'irrational cut'.⁵⁹ In this device, sound is allowed to run over to unrelated images, and events and objects disconnect from directed and organising narrative, instead developing according to the immediate logic of their interplay. For Deleuze, the philosophical foundation of the irrational cut has a long history, having 'always been there' in art, but requiring the 'modern cinema to give a body to this phantom'.⁶⁰ This division accomplishes an equivalent separation to the creation of Aesthetic distance in the Brechtian theatre space, and the reflective experimental techniques of twentieth-century fiction.⁶¹ Yet in the extreme ruptures of the 'time-image', montage and related visual techniques most particularly, cinema could merge representations over and against each other, isolating time as developing in immediate localities.⁶² In Deleuze's example, the previously wide-angle scene fractures: a bird flying and a leaf falling are separate processes of 'becoming', unfolding in discrete instances.⁶³ As the time-image destroys the unchallenged dominance of diegetic time, the viewer can interpose awareness of their own temporality in relation to the artwork, as part of a network that produces a decentralised meaning in confluence.

Carver's 'visual' style depends fundamentally on an arrangement of material things in indoor and outdoor spaces, resulting in proximities that modify the 'pistol on the wall' of a Chekhovian drama.⁶⁴ In a Carver poem the reader need not wait for a determined cause to lead to an object's effect: from a single appearance, they reveal and focus the reader's sense of their psychological and material influence. Chekhov's gun depends on the chronological and narrative line of the dramatic work, but Carver's use of signifying objects isolates the dramatic device from its temporality of expectation towards resolution. Often a story or poem will leave a 'loaded gun' *in situ* at the close of the text. Learning to read Carver's texts, the reader recognises that the 'trigger' is operated by a

⁵⁹ Deleuze 1989, 266. The poetic theory of the 'irrational' includes Wallace Stevens' influential lecture in Harvard, 1936, on investing his poetic world (or, in his term, 'mundo') with an 'Irrational Element'. 'The Irrational Element in Poetry', *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Knopf, 1989), 227-8.

⁶⁰ Deleuze 1989, 41.

⁶¹ The Brechtian idea of *Verfremdungseffekt* ('making strange') or 'estrangement' was the subject of writings of Viktor Shklovsky and a topic of interest for Russian Formalist criticism more widely. Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays*, trans. Lee. T. Lemon & Marion Reis (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3-57. See also the issues of *Poetics Today* 26, 4 (2005) and 27, 1 (2006).

⁶² The politics of montage will suggest the political reading of 'Region' in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Perhaps no artistic technique has been so uniformly aligned with an ideology as cinematic montage: employed as a critique of capitalist self-sufficiency. Russian and French film-makers and activists, then American independent avant-garde cinema turned the seductive mimetic potential of the film-reel against itself, fracturing it into a counter-narrative whirlwind of once-familiar signifiers.

⁶³ 'Becoming' is, in the philosophical tradition of the term in Deleuze, 'pure process', a temporal procession without other fixed positioning. See Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 16.

⁶⁴ 'If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there' Ilia Gurlyand, 'Reminiscences of A. P. Chekhov', *Teatr i iskusstvo* 1904, 28, 11 July, 521.

hesitating, conflicted character, or else, may backfire or misfire itself. This complication of conflict loses none of the traditional representative power, but communicates a psychologically nuanced description of the present. The innovation of Carver's poetry will be found in the uncoupling of Chekhov's pistol from the three-act temporality: the structural functionality of his 'cuts'. The Deleuzian irrationality of such cuts can be established insofar as they disrupt the expectation and narrative continuity for the reader, dismantling the identification of the representation (the 'virtual') with the 'actual', or real world knowledge and experience held by the reader. Deleuze's theories suggest how the fracturing of rationality and traditional narrative progression can be generative, and thus, how Carver's poetry can accomplish a literary experience that approaches modern cinema in its progressive, combinative use of form, alongside an insistence on its capacity for emotional expression.

Approaching Carver's poetry with Deleuzian analysis connects two apparently oppositional readings identified in *Amir*: the visual surface of the Minimalist aesthetic, and the 'intuitive' or affective element that functions in another important subset of the poems.⁶⁵ John Mullarkey's research has identified this cinematic mode particularly with the literary hyper-real, citing the 'transgressive' splits of montage.⁶⁶ Carver's statement on 'no tricks' in his writing may be read as an argument against transgressive writing for its own sake, and this denial was intended to shrug off the 'Minimalist' label. In his determination to inhabit the uncategorisable, Carver suggests his transgressive difference from both the expansive mimesis of High Realism, and the experimental form of the Postmodernist short story.⁶⁷ Carver's writings demonstrate a vital and explicit engagement with the large philosophical problems addressed in the poetry of his time, which Deleuzian analysis, with its new vocabulary of materialist aesthetics, reveals in its multi-dimensional presentation.⁶⁸

The poem 'Movement' appeared as the opening piece in *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (1985), the earliest of three major-press collections produced after Carver's move to Port Angeles, Washington.⁶⁹ Through a depicted car journey, the poem presents memory against an insistent clock that urges the driver on to catch the ferry. The first signs of disconnecting cuts begin to disrupt even from the relative stability of the opening lines. Exclamation marks cut line from line

⁶⁵ *Amir*, xii.

⁶⁶ John Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image* (London: Palgrave, 1999), 103.

⁶⁷ Carver, 'On Writing' (1983). Especially, among others, Donald Barthelme and John Barth.

⁶⁸ Kennedy, 29.

⁶⁹ 'Movement', *AOU*, 57.

in exhaling emphases, as fishing-spots are passed by: ⁷⁰ ‘Snow Creek and then Dog Creek/fly by in the headlights’. ⁷¹ Yet the road and the metaphoric movement of the creeks (‘fly by’) keeps vehicle and landscape in virtual movement away from each other. The ‘hour’ of the road and the ‘sea-run trout there’ occupy different fields, the juxtaposition prefiguring a virtual-actual split of memory and material description. ⁷² Although the speaker has brief recollection of former fishing trips taken there, further imagination or actualisation of that experience is impossible: ‘But the hour’s all wrong – no time to think...’. ⁷³ Each image encountered in the opening lines is an open potentiality, a site or junction along the narrative and material road of the poem. The perspective shifts to a brief image of safety and spatial connection as the car passes through ‘the lee of the mountains’ as the story on the radio offers brief distraction from the shifting unease of the opening section. ⁷⁴

In the introduction of the next cut, however, narrative cohesion fractures more radically. Voices apparently promising a story instead introduce further divergence, from rationality towards its dissolution: new meaning in sound and idea. The speaker relates a story heard on the radio, a bizarre image of ‘an old woman/who travels round inside a kettle’. ⁷⁵ A disembodied voice in the poem cuts to assertion and directive. The source of the voice is unclear: possibly either the mental or audible voice of the speaker moralising on the radio-story, or the voice of a radio presenter, doing the same. Either way, the voice expresses as much in its fractured process as any comprehensible comment about the woman:

Indigence is at the root of our lives, yes
but this is not right.
Cut that old woman some slack,
for God’s sake.
She’s somebody’s mother. ⁷⁶

The fractures in these lines are saturating, even with the additional exclamation mark edited-out. First, the assumption of shared indigence is shaken by the supplementary affirmation of the ‘yes’ after the comma. The remote definitive of ‘that’ old woman distances the speaker and draws attention to the material separations of the poem, pointing a finger to the story as a comic sketch. Colloquial phrasing voices the clichés of everyday speech, but in this mediated soundscape,

⁷⁰ In an earlier publication an additional exclamation point joined the two extant. *Paris Review* (Flushing, NY), 26.93 (Fall 1984), 40. l.11-12: ‘Cut that old woman some slack!/For God’s sake’.

⁷¹ ‘Movement’, ll.2-3.

⁷² ‘Movement’, ll. 4, 5.

⁷³ ‘Movement’, l. 4.

⁷⁴ ‘Movement’, l. 6.

⁷⁵ ‘Movement’, ll.7-8.

⁷⁶ ‘Movement’, ll.9-13.

familiarity introduces a welcome degree of empathy. The final four lines take the poem further from the initial narrative, running the fractured mediations of the middle lines to a new mode of instruction. Again, following the disjunction of successive irrational cuts, it is unclear whether the exclamation: 'You there!' is towards the reader or the driver first.⁷⁷ The process of the irrational cut and 'time-image' leads to this speech addressing a common audience in both speaker and reader in the final lines. Here the poem arrests the reader, and reconfigures a temporality and mode of the poem's reception: 'You there! It's late. Imagine yourself...'.⁷⁸

This final diegesis is, however, specific in mode and 'movement', rather than detail. The casual phrasing for death, 'the lid coming down' also appears in the poem 'Sweet Light', a linguistic box to contain secrets in the landscape.⁷⁹ The forces of the irrational sequence abate in the final staccato sentences, which express the dynamic accomplishment of the poem, a disposition more than a song: 'The hymns and requiems. The sense of movement/ as you're borne along to the next place'.⁸⁰ These lines work against the poem's opening in their universal reference: requiems and 'the next place' flash the figure of death against being 'borne'. Here too, in place of detail, pure kinesis communicates the 'sense of movement' rather than movement itself: invoking Thom Gunn's poetic work of the same name in its formal division of perception from material actuality.⁸¹ Relative to the line of places and journey of the poem's opening, this conclusion reaches a near-total containment of distinct but intermingling sounds and images. Against the initial narrative depiction, the speaker and reader have travelled on convergent trajectories, to arrive together at the physicality of the final three words. The 'sense of movement' as the speaker is 'borne' may be the unseen transport of the ferry on a dark waterway. However, where land and the poem end, the reader cannot follow, but must move on: whether borne to the next poem, or out of the book.

Transcendental Singularities

The eeriness of the journey in 'Movement' lies, in part, in the alienation of the motor vehicle from the ordinary cultural image of its function. The poem's progressive line marks junctions on the road only as a reminder of inaccessible choices, naturalising this car's function at the conclusion, in its implied stasis on the ferry. Scheduled river-crossings, like radio-waves and trains, have a mode of

⁷⁷ 'Movement', l.14.

⁷⁸ 'Movement', l.14.

⁷⁹ 'Movement', l.15. 'Sweet Light', *AOU*, 179.

⁸⁰ 'Movement', l.16-7.

⁸¹ Thom Gunn, *The Sense of Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).

agency that suggests the importance of discrete events for Carver's poetics. One train station does not necessarily precede another, nor is there a progressive relationship between radio receivers. Instead, their trajectories are open for a variety of interactions with people and environment. The capacity for describing such non-hierarchical trajectories is the aim of Deleuze's cinematic theory, which is built upon an opposition to the traditional philosophical project as 'transcendent' in nature: invested in 'climbing' (from the Latin root of the word), or establishing a hierarchy of knowledge, including relegating prior knowledge as it is transcended.⁸² Deleuze engages with the Kantian 'transcendental' in his description of the 'singularity', which (as developed through the irrational cut in cinema) subverts the individual and organising viewpoint to reveal images and events from an impersonal, disconnected perspective. The result of this impersonal representation, for the reader or viewer, is the possibility of self-creation. From *The Logic of Sense*:

Singularities are the true transcendental events... Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distinguished in a 'potential' which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing itself... Only a theory of the singular point is capable of transcending the synthesis of the person and the analysis of the individual as these are (or are made) in consciousness.⁸³

For Deleuze, the recognition of singularities allows for a wider view of the Kantian transcendental, situated in the particularity of the 'event'. In *The Logic of Sense* he pushes away from the artificial process of synthesis towards the irrational immediacy of 'genesis'.⁸⁴ The 'self' realised in the singularity could not be produced by a hierarchical, organising consciousness, but only in the field of heterogeneous forces and process. He summarises: 'Only when the world, teeming with anonymous and nomadic, impersonal and pre-individual singularities, opens up, do we tread at last on the field of the transcendental'.⁸⁵ Deleuze's spatial metaphor is central and extended: a representative system which can be accessed, and even traversed, is the essential goal of his project.

Carver's poems contain exemplary textual expressions of the singularity and are constructed according to Deleuze's cinematic theory as it expresses this concept.⁸⁶ The political implication of the cultivation of singularities lies in its offering the reader an opportunity for individual response to the text, thereby threatening cultural mythologies of the artist as 'author' of meaning.⁸⁷ In its affinities

⁸² Jean Wahl, 'Realism, Dialectic and the Transcendent', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 4, 4 (1944), 496-506; 505.

⁸³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 102-3.

⁸⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 109.

⁸⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 103.

⁸⁶ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 33-34.

⁸⁷ Barthes 1967.

with the hierarchy of transcendent philosophical discourse, the singularity in the artistic work threatens the so-called 'American Dream', re-inscribing the anonymous and impersonal self onto an extensive landscape.⁸⁸ If such a singularity is found in Carver's poetry, then it might not only oppose the privileging and oppressions of previous literatures, but also more immediately, the ways in which his literary oeuvre avoids a self-stratification that would amount to the same. The development of a poetics of singularity also counteracts the problem targeted in Olson's most famous essay, to replace a repressive 'objectism', with a combining Deleuzian 'Subjectless subjectivity'.⁸⁹ The confessional moment in American poetry already signalled the instability of subjectivity as previously conceived. The dominant philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel, assuming the subject as an ideal (male, rational and sentient) has been superseded with a reconceptualisation of the subject as fluid and fractured.⁹⁰ Replacing the rationalist model would require parallel reconfigurations in philosophy and poetry, signified in the singularity's assault on the subject-object binary.

Streams of Meaning

People, spaces and objects in Carver's texts have often been read as functioning in a double expression, retaining both a literal (or visual) presentation at the surface, with deeper, figurative and intertextual significations gesturing out to the poetic tradition.⁹¹ Yet reading Carver's poems through the operation of their irrational cuts and developing singularities reveals operations at 'the surface' and 'depths' of the representation as, rather, proximal and heterogeneous. This offers a new critical perspective on Carver's texts, allowing the apparently 'flat' surface or narratively 'minimal' to work in multiple temporalities and points of reference. A Carver poem such as 'Movement' calls for a perception of independent 'unfoldings' in their own instances, resisting the dominance of a temporal narrative line. This decoupling of traditional organising perspective can make the poems seem in some instances (according to an almost-apologetic Tess Gallagher) 'generous' to the point of 'overreach'.⁹² Yet an overreaching generosity is only troublesome for a text whose author assumes control of the currency of meaning. In the same introduction to the *Collected Poems*, Gallagher observes that Carver's frequent 'third-person fictionalized stance places him alongside the reader,

⁸⁸ Kathryn Hume, *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction Since 1960* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁸⁹ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse' (1950), *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), 24. Kennedy, 29.

⁹⁰ Kennedy, 19.

⁹¹ Kirk Nessel, 'Foreword', *New Paths*, vii-xiv, viii.

⁹² *AOU*, xxv, xxx.

watching with conflicting feelings as events unfold'.⁹³ Carver's poetic voice is credulous at times, severe at others, in order to express the texture of his situations as a 'poet of great suppleness'. Gallagher's account describes this complex voice in a spatial sense that works in much of the poetry: where reader, speaker, writer and the poem's subject are presented in local proximity. The transcendent distance that forms the 'fourth wall' of the theatre or traditional cinematic work is reduced in many Carver poems, with either the reader, writer or both brought into the scene as a way of establishing a 'relationship... of mutuality'.⁹⁴

Carver's three-dimensional poetic space expresses the contradiction of literary representation, showing awareness of this paradox while maintaining the text's capacity for expression of subjective experience. As in his fiction, the poems instead demarcate a variety of spaces in which the reader learns to read the mix of forces and trajectories at play in the whole text. The distinction between Carver's poetics and the centripetal subject of the confessional poem should not imply that the extensive geography of unfolding singularities will lose vital presence, however. As is typical in Carver's texts, a recognisable and accessible immediacy of presentation is maintained, never moving far from a mutually communicative articulacy. The spatial figures chosen for this heterogeneous expression often suggest an irrational or uncanny dislocation: a surprising but logical proximity of locales or objects.⁹⁵ In early poems in particular, the appearance of the river in the suburban environment plays this role, bringing a stream of non-human, non-rational forces into a community built around designated and purposeful routes. In the *Fires* poem 'At Night the Salmon Move' (1977) the fish ride into town on such a stream, as tourists or discerning window-shoppers:

They avoid places with names
like Foster's Freeze, A & W, Smiley's,
but swim close to the tract
homes on Wright Avenue where sometimes
in the early morning hours
you can hear them trying doorknobs
or bumping against Cable TV lines. ⁹⁶

The strangeness of the poem is expressed in the natural delight that accompanies this phenomenon and its comic lore: 'We wait up for them./ ...and call out when we hear a splash'.⁹⁷ The dislocation of

⁹³ *AOU*, xxv-xxvi.

⁹⁴ *AOU*, xxvii.

⁹⁵ The history of this kind of spatial dislocation in Surrealist photography and art is well-documented. See Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87. See also the work of 'Situationist International' for an even more geographical application of the principles of montage.

⁹⁶ 'At Night the Salmon Move', *AOU*, 34, ll.3-9.

⁹⁷ 'At Night the Salmon Move', ll.10, 12.

the fish creates a sense of wonder separated from the usually-situated, daytime world, and despite the assertion of waking witness ('We wait up'), the suggestion of dream or fantasy is embraced.⁹⁸ Fish also swim through the suburbs in 'The Garden', at the centre of a chiasmic set of images that interpolate memory and history: 'In the Unuk River, in Ketchikan,' a river in Alaska, 'the backs of the salmon/ under the street lights as they come through town'.⁹⁹ In this longer poem, a more extensive irrational geography surrounds the moving, dislocated fish. The opening lines situate a common space between the perceived binary of home and nature, which immediately breaks temporal unity: 'In the garden, small laughter from years ago./ Lanterns burning in the willows'.¹⁰⁰ These lights, between tendrils of living material, prefigure a set of montage-like stanzas to follow: separate branches which connect back to a single trunk. As with other multivalent Carverian spaces such as the Gazebo or the airport lounge, 'The Garden' presents a space full of borders and conduits, where creative flow is figured architecturally and reflects transformatively onto surrounding structures and geographies. Here, a drama of agency plays out between distinct singularities: stanzas operate across the generative fissures of the time-image, cutting against the reassertion of rational organising principles. The first lines bring the triad of represented actors into the space: the voice of the poem in 'I', an implied subject in 'his name', and the addressee, gesturing beyond to the reader: 'you'.¹⁰¹

From the establishment of initial coordinates, the poem flashes dissociated images in the second stanza, which is cut in neatly end-stopped or exclaimed lines: horse-racing at Ruidoso, mist rising on a dawn meadow, then:

From the veranda, the blue outlines of the mountains,
 What used to be within reach, out of reach.
 And in some lesser things, just the opposite is true.¹⁰²

The elusive voice of the poem maps a half-visible and inaccessible geographical referent from the liminal architecture of the veranda. The lines acknowledge the limited access of the poem: a blockage of temporality ('used to be') as well as vision.¹⁰³ After the third stanza, the vignettes gain an internal consistency, as the 'you' is given instructions, the bar-side exclamation: 'Order anything you

⁹⁸ 'At Night the Salmon Move', l.10.

⁹⁹ 'The Garden', *AOU*, 180-1. ll.39-40.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Garden', ll.1-2.

¹⁰¹ 'The Garden', ll.3-5.

¹⁰² 'The Garden', ll.8-10.

¹⁰³ 'The Garden', l.9.

want! Then look for the man/with the limp to go by. He'll pay'.¹⁰⁴ In this location, the speaker can see through a 'break' in the architecture, to acknowledge the gap to other lives across the textual and Orientalist imaginative geography of 'the Valley of Kidron'.¹⁰⁵ This locale cuts the observing speaker from clear identity, as he merges into the doubling phantom of the subject ('he'): 'Very little sleep under strange roofs. His life far away'.¹⁰⁶

The final words of the third stanza run into the opening of the fourth, barely divided by the formal break, and suggesting the identification of the 'he' playing checkers with the 'he' who will pay for the drinks. In parallel to the final line of the third stanza, however, the lack of identified subject within the sentence leaves only the threatened possessive: 'my dad'.¹⁰⁷ Otherwise, the stanza suggests only the speaker and his father present to take the journey to the hospital. Characters appear as shadows on a memory more specific in the predilection for detail: the checker board, alliteration of 'brush and bowl' and 'the straight/ razor'.¹⁰⁸ If the silent figure is the same as the subject of the first stanza whose name is etched on an unseen stone, he remains in half-light as the poem cuts stanza, and images in a new frame: 'Drops of water in your hair', fields, and the menacing suggestion of 'black and blue rivers'.¹⁰⁹ Again, in the fifth stanza, the 'you' addressed is unclear, and depends on what can be carried over the cut that precedes it. Mention of the 'hair' suggests detail from the shaving scene that has passed, but coloured fields and rivers connect back to the veranda-view of the second stanza. As in 'Movement', a line of indeterminately-audible and emotive expression sounds at a geographical choke-point: 'Going out for a walk means you intend to return, right?'.¹¹⁰ If the question is addressed to the 'you' of the water-dropped hair, then the 'right' still seems to bring in the reader for corroboration. The shortest line of the poem then brings in the textual time-image across a one-word crush, 'Eventually'.¹¹¹ At the close of the fifth stanza, a guttering flame exclaims ('Marvelous'), hinting the identity of speaker with writer, images expressing physically against fragmented time and narrative.¹¹²

The poem then introduces a wider field of images, in historical dates and literary figures, contrasting with the part-formed memories in their specificity.¹¹³ In the first two cases, these

¹⁰⁴ 'The Garden', ll.11-12.

¹⁰⁵ 'The Garden', l.14.

¹⁰⁶ 'The Garden', l.15.

¹⁰⁷ 'The Garden', l.16

¹⁰⁸ 'The Garden', ll.17-18.

¹⁰⁹ 'The Garden', ll.21, 22.

¹¹⁰ 'The Garden', l.23.

¹¹¹ 'The Garden', l.24.

¹¹² 'The Garden', l.25.

¹¹³ The order of this section of the poem differs significantly between versions, its first publication being in the journal *Tendrill* in 1985, then as one of the additional poems included in the British collection *In a Marine Light: Selected Poems*. (London: Harvill, 1987). In the first version the fifth and sixth stanzas appear in opposite order,

precede an impressionistic visual scene as before, splitting each stanza into a stylistically disjunctive pairing. The historical accounts each express the temporality of the body, and the transcendence of legacy. First, Goethe and Beethoven discuss Lord Byron and Napoleon in Leipzig, 1812, an imaginative expansion of their historical meeting in the same year in the Bohemian spa resort of Teplitz.¹¹⁴ Although only given in outline, this image dominates the second portion of the sixth stanza, occupying the third line with grand names, end-stopped: ‘...Lord Byron and Napoleon’ (l.28). The five-line stanzas signify a whole that cannot be evenly halved: the split must preference whoever fills the majority. The final two lines of the sixth stanza show an unnamed figure (‘She got off the road’, l.29) driving on ‘hardpan’: soil compacted by agricultural overuse, or repeated tyre-tracks. Beethoven’s conviction that ‘artists were the only true aristocrats’ apparently caused his surprise at Goethe’s deference to royalty while walking in the street, according to Bettina’s account of the 1812 meeting.¹¹⁵ For associating the creative vocation with a hierarchy of person (in opposition to Goethe), Carver’s speaker half-misremembers his history, as the anonymous woman leaves the well-worn track of their argument. The next dated image, Cervantes losing a hand in the Battle of Lepanto (1571) announced in its occupation of the stanza’s majority, as ‘the last great sea battle fought/ in ships manned by galley slaves’.¹¹⁶ Again, this distinction, between glorious artist and the men ‘below’ is made in Cervantes, who made grandiose reference to his injury in the author’s preface to Part II of *Don Quixote*.¹¹⁷ ‘In ‘The Garden’, Cervantes must appear in silence against the illuminated appearance of the salmon in town, like ghosts of the unseen oarsmen. The third historical image also presents a voiceless literary figure: Tolstoy in the scene where his coffin is carried across the yard at Astapovo and loaded onto a train: his body transported as object.¹¹⁸ This third account differs in its unity: the two sections of the stanza are occupied by two linear movements of Tolstoy’s coffin, made ‘To the accompaniment of singing’.¹¹⁹ In this stanza the poem represents a mutuality of the artist with society, and the body with the physical world, resulting in

suggesting the importance of the stanza as unit of meaning in the poem, and the editing process as crucial in directing the order of presentation.

¹¹⁴ ‘The Garden’, ll.26-28. Napoleon was a major influence on the life and art of both Beethoven and Byron, and was important for some of their most celebrated works, particularly the *Eroica* (3rd Symphony, 1804) and *Don Juan* (1821). John Clubbe, ‘Beethoven, Byron and Bonaparte’, *Byron the Traveller*, ed. Reiko Aiura et al (*The Japanese Byron Society*, 2003).

¹¹⁵ Edward Walden, *Beethoven’s Immortal Beloved: Solving the Mystery* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 36-41.

¹¹⁶ ‘The Garden’, ll.37-38.

¹¹⁷ ‘What I cannot help taking amiss is that [the critic] charges me with being old and one-handed, as if it had been in my power to keep time from passing over me, or as if the loss of my hand had been brought about in some tavern, and not on the grandest occasion the past or present has seen, or the future can hope to see’. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Rev. edition, trans. John Rutherford (London: Penguin, 2003), Part II: ‘The Author’s Preface’.

¹¹⁸ ‘The Garden’, ll.40-45.

¹¹⁹ ‘The Garden’, l.44.

the movement of the train as signifying a social agency more resonant than the individual striving for artistic legacy. These silent figures create the unspeaking mutuality that defines Carver's poetics: the artistic self in a world populated with people who respond creatively.

This reading of the poem is strengthened in the difference of the collected version in which an additional stanza followed the image of the salmon under street lights. In its previous publication in *Tendril*, the removed stanza connected 'The Garden' with the poem it appeared beside (entitled 'The Fishing Pole of the Drowned Man') with the line: 'He'd fished with the rod that belonged to the deceased'.¹²⁰ Carver's decision to delete this stanza and remove this apparent metaphorical reference to his own writing, signals his commitment to the poem's signifying balance of images. The final stanza returns to the site of its title: 'A hard sail and the same stars everywhere./ But the garden is right outside my window'.¹²¹ As with the opening image of lanterns in the willows, line and light return to the speaker as possessed, empowering elements: 'We weave the thread given to us./ And Spring is with me'.¹²² As the only lines of the poem that make an extended address beyond image, this final section can be viewed as a located vignette itself: occupying the same space as any other section and thus locating the garden within the 'weave' of images before. The poem concludes with an empathic address towards the addressee, making local space for the universalising acknowledgement of the inexpressible that extends before and after the first and last stanzas: 'with you' and 'with me'.¹²³

Interpolating sensory, historical and literary images in distinctive but combinative conjunction, poems like 'The Garden' locate the interplay of conflicting accounts that constitute consciousness. Explicating these suggestions and overlapping accounts, such poems use mutually-positioned perspectives of speaker, reader and writer to return the generative power of the singularity into the poem itself. To apply Deleuze's famous quotation, in a Carver poem, 'the brain is the [page]'.¹²⁴ In other words, Carver's poetics is active in its form between specified meaning and detail, destabilising rational expectation enough to allow readings that draw in the narrative tendency in the reader. Carver's innovation contrasts with the experimental form practiced by Olson and others, as it operates without removing the subjective from the poem. Rather, by properly rendering its territory, the poem locates the subject in multiple perspectives. Similarly, without abandoning traditional form into the isolation of experimentalism, Carver acknowledges and works through a version of 'realist' representation, balancing mimetic effect with surrealistic subversion of

¹²⁰ *Tendril*, (Green Harbor, Mass.), 19-20 (1985), 411. *AOU*, 348.

¹²¹ 'The Garden', ll.46-47.

¹²² 'The Garden', ll.49-50.

¹²³ 'The Garden', ll.5, 50.

¹²⁴ Originally, 'The brain is the screen'. Gilles Deleuze, 'The Brain is the Screen', trans. Marie Therese Guirgis, *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 365-73.

one-dimensional representational hegemony. In his treatment of consciousness in distinct singularities with independent temporalities, Carver's poems are particularly receptive to the experiential and the phenomenological. As in 'The Garden', they are able to include elements and accounts which have been subsumed or forgotten in other texts, recovering the discarded.

The delineation and separation of the elements of the previously-conceived poetic subject also finds expression synecdochally in Carver's presentation of the materially immediate. The poem 'Something is Happening' explores the alienation of the speaker from his body and a version of the Deleuzian reconception of the human body as not unified, but operating in multiple 'speeds' or temporalities.¹²⁵ This conceptual deconstruction of the body involves, as with the separation of the elements of the psyche, a subverting dislocation and a counteracting affirmation: '...if I can believe my/ senses', the poem declares, 'my feet are beginning/ to tell me things about/ themselves'.¹²⁶ The word 'themselves' stands alone on a line before the poem continues: 'about their new relationship to/ my hands heart hair and eyes'.¹²⁷ Unbroken by punctuation, the listed organs run together, overcoming the sense of being 'tied up still/ in the same old skin'.¹²⁸ The speaker tries to connect the experience with his lover, the addressee, but she is 'already so far/ away tonight/ I do not think/ you would hear', perhaps materially present, but distanced in a way that brings the poem's repeated 'something' more into focus.¹²⁹ The final stanza restates the refrained first line, 'Something is happening to me' suggesting that in this place, 'in this bright/ Mediterranean sun' the lover could look across to see another person entirely: a woman or 'worse/ a strange whitehaired man' in his place, writing.¹³⁰ The threat of this substitution is present in the strange silence of the man, who, though apparently writing a poem, 'can no longer form words' and instead only moves his lips, trying to communicate the 'something' that connects him with the poem's title and rhythm.¹³¹

Another account of bodily fragmentation takes on an unusually stylised form in 'The Contact', which first appeared together with 'Something is Happening' in the small-print early book *Winter Insomnia* (1970), and later beside it in *No Heroics, Please: Uncollected Writings* (1991).¹³² A poetic version of a spy-thriller movie scene, this menacing combination of formal and violent 'cuts' begins with a foreboding announcement: 'Mark the man I am with'.¹³³ Straightforwardly, coldly, the

¹²⁵ 'Something is Happening', *AOU*, 306-7. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 40.

¹²⁶ 'Something is Happening', ll.1-2, 10-12.

¹²⁷ 'Something is Happening', ll.13-14.

¹²⁸ 'Something is Happening', ll.5-6.

¹²⁹ 'Something is Happening', ll.18-20.

¹³⁰ 'Something is Happening', ll.1, 15, 22, 24-25, 28-29.

¹³¹ 'Something is Happening', l.31.

¹³² The conjunction of these two poems is preserved in *All of Us. Winter Insomnia* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Kayak Books, 1970). *No Heroics, Please: Uncollected Writings* (London: Harvill, 1991). *AOU*, 306.

¹³³ 'The Contact', l.1.

speaker reveals 'He is soon to lose/ His left hand, his balls, his/ Nose and handsome moustache'.¹³⁴ Capitalising 'Nose' in the run-on sentence makes the gap between the unnarrativised and the implicit 'Tragedy' greater: 'everywhere' and nowhere in this otherwise descriptive, visual account.¹³⁵ 'Oh Jerusalem' does the same, 'marking' grand and sentimental narrative, while isolating it in the two-line stanza. As if dividing affect itself from its usual footholds, the poem then gives a procession of movements, figuring an assassination as a key action shot of a film, or choreographed dance.

He raises his tea cup.
Wait.
We enter the cafe.
He raises his tea cup.
We sit down together.
He raises his tea cup.
Now.¹³⁶

The sign for the attack is figured verbally, and visually with a nod, then opposing effects are laid side by side: the one word warning: 'Faces!', and the grim actualisation of the attack: 'His eyes, crossed,/ Fall slowly out of his head'.¹³⁷ The odd detail of the crossed eyes accentuates the alteration of the usual modes and alignments of the body: even in a recognisable narrative built around the expectation of violence, the mutilated body appears in shockingly unfamiliar terms.

Dreams and Forgetting

In 'The Garden', the recollection of memory appeared in half-discernible images and vignettes, overlapping with historical accounts that inflected back on them to make a space between verse elements for original meaning. This irrational organisation of layered accounts distinguishes Carver's poems of spatial singularity from the transcendence of subjectist confession. A dislocating 'cut' can allow accounts of dream or memory to unfold in their own instance, not as a supplement or dependent under the hierarchy of rationalist thought, but as part of a mutually interacting range, sometimes with destabilising effect. In 'The Road' the speaker begins by telling the trauma of last night's dream, and complains simultaneously of the absence and suggestiveness of dreams with wakefulness: 'It's either no dreams at all,/ or else a dream that may or may not be/ a dream

¹³⁴ 'The Contact', ll.2-4.

¹³⁵ 'The Contact', l.5.

¹³⁶ 'The Contact', ll.7-13.

¹³⁷ 'The Contact', ll.14, 15, 16-17.

portending loss'.¹³⁸ The poem describes the dream, in which he is dropped off on a country road at night 'without a word', sees a house in the hills but is afraid to go there, and so continues walking.¹³⁹ A stanza break is followed by a consecutive description of waking up to breakfast ('Then to wake...') where the strong sensory rushes of flowers and coffee return the reassurance of waking consciousness.¹⁴⁰ However, noticing a line of ants under the table 'moving back and forth from a crack in the floor' the menace of the dream reappears, rupturing the speaker's attention with the stream of animal hunger.¹⁴¹ A divisive asterisk follows the second stanza, signalling a stronger cut and emphasising the irrational identification of the dream with the account at the breakfast table. This overlap may suggest a version of 'false awakening'; in any case, the dream-road and the line of ants coincide in their emotional textures.¹⁴² The shorter third stanza concludes in a more clearly defined change in narrative mode, as the speaker asks the addressee (the 'lover', in outline at least) to:

...Draw the curtain and come
back to bed.
Forget the coffee. We'll pretend
we're in a foreign country, and in love.¹⁴³

The close of 'The Road' answers the 'portend[ed] loss' of confidence in accessible reality with a narrative solution.¹⁴⁴ The couple will, apparently, try to forget the coffee: the sense that previously promised to stabilise the speaker's presence in a single spatio-temporal location. After the invasion of the ants into the living space, the speaker instead suggests the development of a new singularity: a time and space that will allow the couple to combat history and dream with imagination.¹⁴⁵ In this suggestion, 'The Road' reworks John Donne's 'The Sun Rising', which makes the speaker and his lover the centre of the universe, drawn in by the poem's metaphysical geography.¹⁴⁶ Donne's poem outlines foreign geographies and time, before relegating them beneath 'Love', which 'all alike, no

¹³⁸ 'The Road', *AOU*, 59. ll.1-3.

¹³⁹ 'The Road', l.4.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Road', l.8.

¹⁴¹ 'The Road', l.14.

¹⁴² 'False awakenings' are documented phenomena which can occur in the dream, where the dreamer believes they have awoken, only to discover that they are still dreaming. This discovery may occur only when the dreamer actually awakes, thus creating a simulation of self-awareness, in fact based on an inaccurate judgement. J.M. Windt, & T. Metzinger, 'The philosophy of dreaming and self-consciousness: What happens to the experiential subject during the dream state?', in D. Barrett & P. McNamara (eds), *The New Science of Dreaming*. (Estport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 2007).

¹⁴³ 'The Road', ll.16-19.

¹⁴⁴ 'The Road', l.3.

¹⁴⁵ This narrative situation is very close to the action taken by the couple in the story 'Gazebo', *What We Talk About...*, 18-25.

¹⁴⁶ John Donne, 'The Sun Rising', *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A. J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1976), 80-1.

season knows, nor clime,/ Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time'.¹⁴⁷ Yet despite its cuts, the crowding histories and fantasies of 'The Road' can only prefigure a contingent intention of accomplishing the unified transformation of Donne's poem. Donne's demonstration of the time-stopping potential of the poetic text appears differently for the insistent materiality of Carver's speaker, who cannot erase the heterogeneous physicalities of the house or the psychology expressed in the lover's movements. While Donne's speaker assumes a hierarchical, transcendent voice for the male speaker, Carver's poem includes an immediate and active interplay between animals, material, human action and imagination. The speaker's action in this poetic geography gives 'The Road' both its specificity, and a universality of extensively rendered relations. Rather than a poetic text from a mind *about* the world, it demonstrates a text about a mind *in* a world, in the largest sense that the speaker of Donne's poem invokes.

The simultaneous impression of gain and loss is crucial in poems such as 'The Road'. To be unsure of whether one is experiencing dream or wakefulness is akin to being unsure whether one has lost something or not, or whether one is winning or losing. Expressing an interpretation within the poem (as might be important in a 'subjectist' poem) is rendered inconsequential beyond itself when these narratives are presented as transcendent to an identical material situation. Other poems begin in the same doubled denial/affirmation, such as 'All Her Life', in which the speaker interjects into an account of a nap beside the Strait with the insistence: 'You know I don't dream./ But last night I dreamt...'.¹⁴⁸ Again in *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (1985), 'Yesterday, Snow' begins with a simple report of snow the day before, followed by the familiar claim: 'I don't dream, but in the night I dreamed/a man offered me some of his whiskey'.¹⁴⁹ Here, the account of the dream is interspersed with a disjointed commentary from the waking speaker, recalling a fitful night, rising to the cold of the windows. This figure for broken temporality of consciousness concludes with the at-once physical and romanticised markers of time: 'A skewed moon hangs on until morning,/ and a brilliant sun'.¹⁵⁰ The speaker finds the trajectories displaced with the evenness of a snow-covered scene and the simultaneously singular and continuous image of an old man shovelling:

¹⁴⁷ 'The Sun Rising', ll.9-10. Donne's poem 'The Dream' also uses the suggestion of a dream that continues after waking to the lover, 'To make dreams truths, and fables histories;/ Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,/ Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest' (ll.8-10). Donne, 1976, 52-3.

¹⁴⁸ 'All Her Life', *AOU*, 115, ll.4-5. The inaugurating denial of the dream narrative is also an attempt to pre-empt preconceptions regarding dreams, in preparation for their equality in the poem. This interjection highlights a difference between the textual and cinematic versions of this kind of presentation: whereas the visual representation of a dream need not categorise itself with such a frequently-sentimentalised word, the poem explores the need for linguistic correction and clarification as an element of verbal narrative and conversation.

¹⁴⁹ 'Yesterday, Snow', *AOU*, 131-2. ll.2-3.

¹⁵⁰ 'Yesterday, Snow', ll.20-21.

All day snow flopping off roofs.
 The crunch of tires and footsteps.
 Next door, there's an old fellow shovelling.
 Every so often he stops and leans
 on his shovel, and rests, letting
 his thoughts go where they may.
 Staying his heart.
 Then he nods and grips his shovel.
 Goes on, yes. Goes on.¹⁵¹

This image reveals its physical elements in rhythmic unfolding, traceable (though not traced) in snow against the constituent parts of the man: physical, physiological, mental, emotional and narrative. The denials of 'The Road' and 'Yesterday, Snow' allow such layers of meaning to form a singularity, against a privileged explanatory rationality in the text. Yet the 'old fellow' appears as a final image and an independent affirmation: positioned in a network of relationships, but singular in presence and signifying capacity.

Carver's dream poems are exemplary of the poetic approach towards transcendent narrative more generally, both in the common misperception of physicality and temporality, and influential theories of the metaphorical linguistic structure of the dream.¹⁵² In 'Looking for Work [1]', the speaker explores streams and brooks through a dream, which plays out against the situation of the title, the temporal and consequential pressure of unemployment.¹⁵³ The dominating reality is displaced with expressions of immediate desire, 'I've always wanted brook trout/for breakfast' and the located event of discovery: 'Suddenly, I find a new path/to the waterfall'.¹⁵⁴ The middle section of the poem turns the two-line stanzas into staccato cuts where the speaker's consciousness moves between wakefulness and the dream-world, doubly figured in the speaker's imagined movements: 'I begin to hurry'.¹⁵⁵ The speaker is split more urgently on hearing his wife's voice: 'Wake up,/my wife says,/you're dreaming', experiencing an opposite shift as he attempts to rise and 'the house tilts'.¹⁵⁶ The centrality of the speaker's voice is lost and found in his question 'Who's dreaming?', and the objective material of his wife's response: 'It's noon, she says'.¹⁵⁷ As in 'Yesterday, Snow', objects with a distinct and differing temporality create a singularity of universalising relation: in this case, a pair

¹⁵¹ 'Yesterday, Snow', ll.24-32.

¹⁵² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1962).

¹⁵³ *AOU*, 13. The '[1]' appended to the title distinguishes the version of the poem in *Fires* (1983) from a later version ('[2]') in *A New Path...* (1989), which includes an extra asterisk dividing the dream and waking accounts. *AOU*, 237.

¹⁵⁴ 'Looking for Work [1]', ll.1-4.

¹⁵⁵ 'Looking for Work [1]', l.5.

¹⁵⁶ 'Looking for Work [1]', ll.6-8, 10.

¹⁵⁷ 'Looking for Work [1]', ll.11-12.

of new shoes by the door, 'gleaming'.¹⁵⁸ A Subjectist reading of the poem might identify the shoes as an objective correlative, expressive of the speaker's emotion, however 'Looking for Work' offers no such appropriative directionality. The rhyme of 'dreaming?/ gleaming' makes the objects an equal vision: yet they are empty, a sight available to any dreamer. Though 'My new shoes', the rhyme with 'Who's' supports the divided couplets in the multi-directional interplay of meaning.¹⁵⁹ The concluding two lines actualise the occupation announced in the title: both speaker and reader are engaged in the 'Looking' that drives the poem.

As with dream-narrative, memory communicates a field of meaning in the poetry that layers corresponding objects of affirmation and denial. Identifying or implying the mediation of an account through memory allows the speaker to present the account in relation to geographical coordinates and objects, locating the subjective within a wider context without destroying its claim for transformative meaning. Such poems are directed by the relationship between accounts and rhythms, rather than the claims that those accounts attempt to make on each other. A comic moment in the poem 'Shooting' recalls the speaker's aunt taking him aside to say: '*What I am going to tell you now/you will remember every day of your life?/ But that's all I can remember*'.¹⁶⁰ Following this, the speaker reflects: 'I've never been able to trust memory. My own/ or anyone else's'.¹⁶¹ Like the simultaneous affirmation and denial of dreams, memory is recalled while renouncing its reliability, giving way to the immersive experience of wading through 'wheat up to my belly', a place without expression or reason.¹⁶² Here, time can only be figured in the movement of the hunting dog, which 'inches forward' as 'Step by tiny step, the day advances'.¹⁶³ The poem reasserts a claim on sensory unity with a punctuating action: 'Suddenly/ the air explodes with birds'.¹⁶⁴ Reflecting atemporally, the shot reconnects with all prior narratives, unified in audibility across the landscape. Yet while gunshots can divide the body in 'The Contact', they cannot unite it, and the balance of the day-space is found in a return to a scene unaffected since the poem's opening stanza: 'Tess... asleep back at the ranch house', who 'sleeps through it'.¹⁶⁵ Her presence confirms the ineffectuality of time's markers in the poem. 'When she wakes', the speaker predicts, 'October will be over'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ 'Looking for Work [1]', l.14.

¹⁵⁹ 'Looking for Work [1]', ll.11, 13.

¹⁶⁰ 'Shooting', *AOU*, 210-11. ll.8-10.

¹⁶¹ 'Shooting', ll.11-12.

¹⁶² 'Shooting', l.1.

¹⁶³ 'Shooting', ll.18-21.

¹⁶⁴ 'Shooting', ll.21-22.

¹⁶⁵ 'Shooting', ll.3, 28.

¹⁶⁶ 'Shooting', ll.23-24.

In the development of a textual version of the singularity, Carver's poems depict people and objects in their own trajectories, but also demonstrate how they can be presented in a mutual and contiguous landscape. The speaker may feel an alienation from wider forces outside of his control, such as illness and ageing: but the poetry develops an aesthetic of rhythm around the constancies of these forces. The space for mutuality in Carver's poetry is a space where human action can work in concert with a wider, indifferent world. This resonant action occurs (and is presented) not through manipulation or dominance but, rather, sensitive rendering of positioning and movement in space. In this sense, the 'fundamental accuracy of statement' which is the poet's work can be an affirmative action.¹⁶⁷ Viewing the poem as a represented 'world', the three-dimensional space of a Carver text might appear as a version of the Brechtian theatre, 'making strange' the perception of environment from perspectives that allows the generation of new meaning for all actors in that space, the speaker included.

Into the River

Robert Miltner has identified the river as 'the metaphor central to Carver's mature poetry', an observation supported by the clear thematic focus on waterways across the majority of his large and small-press collections.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, rivers, streams, inlets and waterfalls approach an apotheosis of Carver's spatial practice, drawing in meaning from fields overlaid elsewhere, into a confluence of rich significance. The tradition of river poetry in this mode is extensive, and has a range of American antecedents. Indifferent to borders and social designations of space, rivers precede human habitation and use of the land, and in this mode, have come to stand for the continuity with geographies shared with vanished languages, cultures and histories.¹⁶⁹ 'No matter how deliberately we moved from the shore into the sudden violence of the river on the rise', wrote Wendell Berry, 'there would... be several uneasy minutes of transition. The river is another world, which means that one's senses and reflexes must begin to live another life'.¹⁷⁰ In this strange transition, the directly-titled poem 'The River' immediately depicts the speaker entering into the strange envelopment of the current.¹⁷¹ Although the ostensible purpose of the river encounter will eventually be given as a fishing trip, the withholding of any plan or pretext to movement make the poem an account of

¹⁶⁷ Ezra Pound, quoted in 'On Writing', *Call if You Need Me*, 88.

¹⁶⁸ Miltner 2008, 47.

¹⁶⁹ For an example from one of the great rivers of 'Carver Country', see the poems in Miles C. Moore, 'The Columbia River', *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, 6, 3 (1915), 171-176.

¹⁷⁰ Wendell Berry, *The Rise* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Library Press, 1968).

¹⁷¹ *AOU*, 190-1.

singular physicality and sense. The darkness of the evening air above the water focuses down onto the more fluid movements of fish, which retain any meaning beyond form, within themselves. As in 'At Night the Salmon Move' or 'The Garden', these fish move against the stand of the subject, holding attention and reflecting on surrounding environments from their underwater space.

In this chapter Carver's spatial singularities have been explored in their representative function, cutting against the hierarchies of rationality and the stable subject. Yet in contrast to the multivalent, open vantage point of the veranda or car front seat, the river works indifferently and with resistance. The flow, continuity and a unified directionality of river poems would appear to oppose the divisions and disjunctions of 'The Garden' or 'The Road'. Yet approaching the phenomenon of the river reveals a space similar to Carver's other singularities in pairing denial and affirmation, visibility and invisibility, as parallel expressions of a common force, divided only by the interpretation they reveal. For Carver's material and geographical texts, the river exists through its action under the influence of gravity, the inevitability of its directional flow as a negotiation of material on the landscape. An invisible chronology of forces in the landscape's pre-history have formed this topography: other rivers, but also glaciers, lava flows and wind. Yet these forces bear a different relation to the immediacy of physics that push the river on, as one of an unthinkable number of waterways that lead to a unified body of water in the unseen ocean. As with the other singularities of Carver's poems, a move to divide and delineate bodies of meaning from their hierarchical structure in representation allows a subsequent reconstruction of connections. Carver's poetics remakes the image and account through the decentralised heterogeneity of mutuality, which establishes reader, speaker, and characters in equal relation to the physical and irrational world around them.

The re-establishing effect of irrational cuts and the singularity can also work on a larger scale: connecting voices and space across his poetic collections as well as within the poem. This wider view of the poetry is suggested in Carver's chosen image of the river in flow: drawing together voices and images in larger, more powerful confluences. Though Carver has been associated with distinctly American space (a particularised 'Country' sometimes connected with the suburban West or Midwest), his poetry increasingly referenced European sources: Ted Hughes or Antonio Machado, to balance his native love of Robert Frost and Elizabeth Bishop.¹⁷² William Kittredge recalled visiting Carver near the end of his life, observing from his stacks of books that 'He was reading mostly European poets – Milosz, some others...'.¹⁷³ Tess Gallagher adds to the list 'Rainer Maria Rilke, Theodore Roethke, Paul Celan, ... Seamus Heaney, Frederico Garcia Lorca... Derek Mahon, W. B.

¹⁷² A particularly rich intertext is found in 'My Crow', *AOU*, 103.

¹⁷³ William Kittredge, 'Bulletproof', *New Paths*, 187-96; 188.

Yeats and Anna Akhmatova'.¹⁷⁴ In his final poetic collection, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Carver's poems are interpolated with regular quotations from Chekhov, Kafka, Balzac and others.¹⁷⁵ Including these poets of place within the borders of his own work, Carver shows an awareness of his contextual location at a dynamic juncture for American verse. In order to inscribe a more powerful mutuality into his poetry, Carver would approach his connection with literary tradition with the same clarity as his spatial representation. Where the disconnecting cuts of the singularity limit the subjective dominance of the local, their effect increases the capacity of his texts for wider correspondences: to inscribe on the topography of the Pacific Northwest, the universalities of its physics.

'Machado is here.'

I decide to walk
alongside the river. It's the kind of night
that brings men and rivers close.

Raymond Carver, 'Cutlery'

In poems locating the speaker in a wild landscape, such as 'Shooting', temporality is often replaced by rhythm, using verse form to displace time with poetic structure. This diminishing of clock-time against the constant presence of language directs the poem according to a sense of desire in the line: stanzas resting or breaking according to the stress or weight of their images. In the preface to *The Collected Poems*, Tess Gallagher claimed that the poems bear 'the scarred patina of words gotten down on the page however the writer could, something wrestled from the torrent'.¹⁷⁶ Following this observation to the presentation of the river in the poems reveals the capacity of Carver's poetics to express beyond the writer, a poetics of 'the torrent' itself, as a study of its immediacy, as well as the metaphor of its physics. More than expressing the individual desire of any actor in the space of the poem, the desire of the line renders the texture of the world itself. As in the poems already examined, this rendering includes and often begins with material landscape, but

¹⁷⁴ *AOU*, xxvii.

¹⁷⁵ Including the epigraph, there are 23 quotations in all, by (in order of appearance) Czeslaw Milosz (2 quotations), Jaroslav Seifert, Anton Chekhov (15 quotations), Tomas Tranströmer, Charles Wright, Stephen Oliver, James Chetham, and Robert Lowell.

¹⁷⁶ *AOU*, xxvi.

includes the phenomenological accounts of memory and dream as valid ‘unfoldings’ on the unprivileging representation. Taking a figure of a flow of physical communication across space, ‘Radio Waves’ first appeared in *Paris Review* (1984), with a dedication to the Andalusian poet Antonio Machado.¹⁷⁷ The poem opens in a world full of invisible meaning, among admissions of the speaker’s lack of understanding of topics from radio and literature, to death itself. Rather, the speaker admits a practical knowledge of the working of radio waves from Canada, accessible ‘when the air is damp’.¹⁷⁸ In a literalising presence of the poetic intertext in the representation, the speaker wakes up from a bad dream, reaching out for a book to reassure him (*‘It’s all right, Machado is here’*), an intimacy somehow bridged through the material presence of the book.¹⁷⁹

‘Radio Waves’ differs from the poems already investigated in its account of a threat to the speaker’s voice itself, which in turn endangers the existence or survival of the poem. In implied identity with the writer, the speaker describes his crisis in universalising terms from its specificity: ‘It didn’t much matter... if a man sang at all’.¹⁸⁰ This potentially terminal anxiety for the poet stands for a wider crisis of self: an accumulation of the fragmentations of Carver’s texts elsewhere. The specification of Machado’s poetry has a particular relevance for the speaker’s struggle to understand the relationship between self and space. Machado’s work addressed the landscape throughout his career: his *Campos de Castilla* (1912) is an extended expression of his love for the Castilian countryside.¹⁸¹ Later, his poetry turned to the presentation of Spain’s ordinary people, a greater lyric simplicity emerging to present their place in a divided nation.¹⁸² Within his landscapes, Machado chose most emphatically the road, and then, bodies of water, as central metaphors to which he returned and developed.¹⁸³ Elizabeth Scarlett has written on Machado’s use of the fountain to express a poetic voice in counterpoint to the speaker, investing empathy in the juncture between natural landscape, and the architecture of traditional Andalusian fountains.¹⁸⁴ In her analysis, the chain of associations built up by different objects from this architectural tradition forms a potent and layered discourse between the poet and the material environment. Carver’s inclusion of natural

¹⁷⁷ ‘Radio Waves’, *AOU*, 55-57.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Radio Waves’, l.4.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Radio Waves’, l.42.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Radio Waves’, l.26.

¹⁸¹ Antonio Machado, *Fields of Castile/ Campos de Castilla*, tr. Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

¹⁸² Antonio Machado, *Nuevas Canciones/ New Songs: De Un Cancionero Apocrifo, Poemas del la Guerra/ From an Unauthentic Songbook, War Poems*, ed. Arturo Ramoneda (Madrid: Alianza Ed, 2006).

¹⁸³ Concha Zardoya, ‘Los caminos poeticos de Antonio Machado’ (1968), in *Los espacios poeticos de Antonio Machado* (Madrid: Catedra and Juan, 1987), ed. Ricardo Gullon, 327-41.

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth Scarlett, ‘Antonio Machado’s Fountains: Archaeology of an Image’, *MLN*, 113, 2, Hispanic Issue (Mar. 1998). 305-323; 305.

springs in poems such as 'Where Water Comes Together with Other Water' connects with Machado's poetic figure, joining art and sense at a connective spatial point.¹⁸⁵

Machado's decision to write was cemented by time he spent in Paris in 1899 and 1902, coming under the influence of the principal poets of the Symbolist movement, Jean Moreas, Paul Fort and the ideas of the recently deceased Paul Verlaine.¹⁸⁶ Yet Machado's development as a poet also saw a 'late stage', where he became one of the leading voices of the 'Generation of '98' that wrote against the *modernismo qua modernismo*: a period of turbulent renegotiations of poetic tradition that suggests the oppositional stance of the Black Mountain and Deep Image poets.¹⁸⁷ Scarlett identifies the close yet contrasting intertext between Paul Verlaine's sonnet 'Après trois ans, ('After Three Years') from *Poemes saturniens* (1866) with Machado's 'Fue una clara tarde' ('It was a bright afternoon').¹⁸⁸ Both poems present a speaker in an isolated garden, flooded with light. Access to both gardens is gained through gates which are 'symbolic of decrepitude',¹⁸⁹ leading to an inner space with a fountain. Comparing these two poems, Paul Illie describes Verlaine's aesthetic philosophy, which acknowledges first the independence of the object of beauty within the poem, prior to a subjective response to that beauty. In Illie's observation, this implies 'a sacrifice of the self' which opposes Machado's 'Romantic orientation'.¹⁹⁰ Machado, he writes, 'considered the present to be subjective on the basis of a memory which he believed was objective'.¹⁹¹ The two poems differ fundamentally, then, as Verlaine's speaker is aware that the objects he sees are not affected by time, while Machado's speaker - through conversation with the fountain - insists on the reflection of his mind upon the material world.¹⁹² Against the de-hierarchical effects of the irrational cut and singularity in certain Carver poems, the practice identified in 'Fue una clara tarde', 'to objectify by memory', closely corresponds with the function of several of Carver's most prominent river poems. In ecstatic poetic voice the independent temporalities of dreams, memory and imagination are unified in described experience and on the page, with an investment back into physicality. In a reversal of Carver's delineating poetic practice, the landscape resonates with synchronised unity.

¹⁸⁵ See the exuberant singularities of the poem's exclamation: 'Can anything be more wonderful than a spring?', l.7. 'Where Water Comes Together with Other Water', *AOU*, 63-64.

¹⁸⁶ Willis Barnstone, 'Antonio Machado and Ruben Dario: A Failure of Literary Assassination, or the Persistence of Modernism in the Poetry of Antonio Machado', *Hispanic Review*, 57, 3 (Summer, 1989), 281-306.

¹⁸⁷ Barnstone, 284. It should be noted that the 'modernism' that the Generation of '98 opposed was the restricted Latin-American and Spanish movement, related to the French symbolists.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Verlaine, *Poemes saturniens/ Poems under Saturn*, tr. Karl Kirchwey (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 20-21. Antonio Machado, *Soledades/ Solitudes*, commenced in 1899, published in 1903, and second publication in 1907, in Antonio Machado, *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems*, tr. Willis Barnstone (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2004), 16-17. Cited hereafter as *BD*.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Illie, 'Verlaine and Machado: The Aesthetic Role of Time', *Comparative Literature*, 14, 3 (Summer, 1962), 261-265; 261.

¹⁹⁰ Illie, 264.

¹⁹¹ Illie, 265.

¹⁹² Illie, 262.

This synchronous drawing-together of personal response and material landscape is operational from the opening paragraph of 'Radio Waves', which presents a number of distinct thoughts in conversational tone, figuring a process of departure and subsequent discovery. Music from Canada, as well as domestic news and politics, are carried over in the radio waves to temporarily displace a 'literature' that has become oppressive for the speaker. The poem works towards the powerful communicative action of breaking across the divide of time, to send a message from the speaker to Machado. This action to overcome the speaker's crisis takes place in a geographical location, described in personal terms: 'in my place/ beside the river where I could see the mountains'.¹⁹³ Here the speaker begins to read 'Abel Martin's Last Lamentations', a Machado poem that considers a journey through time - and beyond it - to the 'Still Now/ pregnant with imminence!'.¹⁹⁴ Time, personified and addressed, becomes in Machado's poem, the 'weaver of hope and impatience'.¹⁹⁵ This consequential temporality in text, landscape and speaker in 'Radio Waves' creates a 'hope' symbolised in the sequence of rain and the moon in the first line.¹⁹⁶ Inaccessible but visible, Machado's presence in the world as picture or book, allows the creation of a particular kind of poetic text, supporting the poetic voice against the threat of its dissolution. The drawing-together of Machado's text with the narratives of 'Radio Waves' directs the combined meaning of wider, pre-existing traditions into an immediate experience at the core of the poem. The instinct to equalise and record detail has not vanished: on the speaker's walk he carries a book of Machado's poetry, hearing the poet's voice as an irrational presence, about presence: "'Pay attention!", you said'.¹⁹⁷ From the speaker's geographical locus, 'my place/beside the river', he draws out sense as the writer does in the record of the singularity: looking at the landscape and noting 'everything', then closing his eyes to listen to the sound of the water.¹⁹⁸ In these instances of the singularity, the streams of perception meet in 'confluence' to form a layered experience of place, enriched in the image of 'a flowing together; the junction and union of two or more streams or moving fluids'.¹⁹⁹ The co-presence of moving streams suggests the merging of Deleuze's cinematic images, and the achievement of his theorised singularity: that in the moving image of water, the voices of the poem can find their place.

Given that 1983 saw an English translation of *Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado* by the foremost poet of the Deep Image group, the absence of Robert Bly's name in the

¹⁹³ 'Radio Waves', ll.48-49.

¹⁹⁴ 'Radio Waves', ll.23-24. Antonio Machado, 'Abel Martin's Last Lamentations', *BD*, 426-429.

¹⁹⁵ Machado, 'Abel Martin's Last Lamentations', l.26.

¹⁹⁶ 'Radio Waves', l.57.

¹⁹⁷ 'Radio Waves', l.45.

¹⁹⁸ 'Radio Waves', ll. 47-48, 50-51.

¹⁹⁹ *OED*, 'confluence, n'.

listing of Carver's poetic influences is notable and surprising.²⁰⁰ The translation includes 'Abel Martin's Last Lamentation' (mentioned in 'Radio Waves') and is dedicated 'To James Wright', the only 'Deep Image' poet with whom Carver's work has been connected in criticism.²⁰¹ This dedication is more suggestive of the importance of Machado's verse for the common poetics of Bly and Wright, but also in turn, for Carver's inheritance from this international correspondence. Bly's translating activity was prolific in this period, producing versions of Tomas Tranströmer's selected poems, *Truth Barriers*, and a *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke* in 1981.²⁰² Rilke is mentioned several times in the stories of *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* and Carver quotes from him in interview.²⁰³ Tranströmer is also one of the poets directly quoted in *A New Path to the Waterfall*, in the prose passage 'The Name', which notes Bly as the translator.²⁰⁴ These relating texts, connected through Bly's 'Deep Image' verse, suggest the importance of this group for Carver's river poetry, in its centripetal, internally-connective dynamic.

Bly's introduction to *Times Alone* sets out his conception of Machado as a poet fundamentally opposed to the rational hierarchy of nature in representation. He recounts John Dos Passos's observation when visiting Machado, of a black-suited man 'who walked for hours in Segovia and the countryside'.²⁰⁵ 'His poetry secretes in itself the rhythm of the walker', Bly writes, 'When a person walks, he experiences objects one by one at a pace agreeable to the body' (1). Bly's reception of Machado is in his rhythm: 'The trance of ordinary life, chaotic, gives way to an ordered trance, and water goes on flowing while we are asleep'.²⁰⁶ The separation of the physical world from perceived time is an essential element of Machado's poetry, as Bly writes:

...when we write about a field, we bring the field into our study and close the door. Not all poets do, of course. But one feels that Machado doesn't ask the field to come to his poem, but he brings his poem to the bean field... and even more amazing, he leaves it there!²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ A case could be made for Machado's central importance to the Deep Image movement. One of his earliest poems is entitled 'Cante hondo' and works through the connections of mind and sense that form the core of the American poets. Antonio Machado, *Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, chosen and translated Robert Bly (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

²⁰¹ Bethea, 185-196.

²⁰² Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems*, trans. and commentary by Robert Bly (New York: Harper Perennial, 1981). Tomas Tranströmer, *Truth Barriers*, trans. Robert Bly (Sierra Club Books, 1981).

²⁰³ 'Rilke lived in one castle after another, all of his adult life' ('Collectors', 79), 'He had been reading to her from Rilke, a poet he admired...' ('The Student's Wife', 90) Both in *WYPBQP*.

²⁰⁴ This prose segment gives an account of the speaker taking a nap in his car beside a road, and, upon awaking, not being able to remember his identity. A kind of epiphany is described as he remembers his name, after which he recollects 'the fifteen-second battle in the hell of nothingness, a few feet from a major highway where the cars slip past with their lights on' 'The Name', *AOU*, 237.

²⁰⁵ Machado 1983, 1.

²⁰⁶ Bly, *Times Alone*, 2.

²⁰⁷ Bly, *Times Alone*, 3.

Bly's suggestion that a poem can be, in his terms, *left in the bean field* is radical, and not fully explicated in his introduction. 'Closing the door' of the study suggests a myopic scope avoided in Carver's wide-angle vision of poetic singularities. In addition, Carver's attention to the discrete, unfolding temporalities of the objects, spaces and consciousness in his poems corresponds with the heterogeneity praised in Bly's introduction. Yet Bly's reading identifies a tendency towards irrational divisions in Machado's poetry more than his narrativised moments of ecstasy. In Carver, this form commonly appears, as in 'Radio Waves', at a point of crisis for the poetic voice, where disjunction of memory threatens the poem itself.

Such a crisis plays out in the poem 'The White Field', which begins with a layered metaphor for the writer's page and a snow-covered landscape.²⁰⁸ In relation to Bly's theorisations, Carver's poem proposes a complicating advance: a poem that can both be '[in] the study' with a closed door, and a direct rendering of the field: albeit filled with snow rather than beans. The speaker awakes in the opening lines to face an inability to complete his work, expressing a series of negations and lost things. From the first line, the problem is expressed in mental and physical pairings: 'Woke up feeling anxious and bone-lonely', 'I felt as if I'd lost my will, and my memory'.²⁰⁹ The poem cuts to an imaginative situation in which a questioner arrives to ask the speaker about his personal history: 'How have you spent your life? What'd you do/ even two days ago?'.²¹⁰ The response, the speaker imagines, would be a blank ('I'd only have gawped'). Yet immediately, as if invoking Goethe's advice in the first lines, the poem gets to work ('Then I tried./ Remembered back a couple of days').²¹¹ This work moves the poet along the line of a road to its end, then across a snowy field to arrive at a river. Although 'will, and... memory' were lost before, both are regained as the friends track a line across this space, causing birds and rabbits, who inhabit zones above and below the surface of the field, to scatter.²¹² In this flattened space, the speaker and his companions look behind them at the 'strange tracks' caused by their snow-shoes, 'Feeling glad enough to be alive'.²¹³ Indeed, in answer to this crisis of the poetic voice, the speaker inscribes a line on the white field: a simple, geometrical division of space that, at once, solicits and resists description.

A stanza break inscribes the disjunction that occurs when the group arrive at the river. The first word situates this discovery as both part of the line of time ('Then...'), yet a rupture of the direction of this line: a collision ('Then to come upon Indians standing in the river/ in chest-high

²⁰⁸ First in *Seneca Review* (Hobart and William Smith Colleges, 1986), 15.2, 48-9, and later, *In a Marine Light*, 93-94. 'The White Field', *AOU*, 209-10.

²⁰⁹ 'The White Field', ll.1, 9.

²¹⁰ 'The White Field', ll.13-14.

²¹¹ 'The White Field', ll.15-16.

²¹² 'The White Field', l.23.

²¹³ 'The White Field', ll.21-22.

waders!').²¹⁴ In this eight-line stanza, silence and stillness displace the linearity of the narrative journey that the poet has taken to arrive in this place. At the river, the men drag their nets through a pool.²¹⁵ The next line describes the body of water as even more closed-off from the directional suggestion of the river: 'The hole just above the river's mouth'.²¹⁶ Cigarettes hang from their lips, making mouths silent holders, rather than organs of vocal expression.²¹⁷ Encapsulated by the surrounding protection of their waders and the weight of water around those, they are sealed off from even 'looking up or otherwise/ acknowledging/ our existence'.²¹⁸ After this, a stanza break is reinforced with a star in the *All of Us* text, a disjunction more jarring as the beginning of the next stanza seems to continue from the same spatial and narrative point. This gap in the text does not signify a jump in time or location, but another cut against the flow of its localised, temporal trajectory. Returning from that mode, linguistic exclamations from the characters are clichéd and insufficient: "'Christ almighty," Morris said./ "This is for the birds." And we snowshoed back'.²¹⁹ In their world of linear trajectories, there are no other destinations, and they follow the same course back across the field, to other stories and then, home.

Of course, the discovery at the river is the destination that the poem sought from its inception: it only cuts against the expectation of the characters in their temporal trajectory and interests. The final two, short stanzas of the poem return to the puzzle of the first: the speaker cannot recall the events of the day between the fishing trip and today. Just as the poem seems to straightforwardly apply a fishing metaphor to the day as the one 'that got away', the final lines change direction again in sense and immediacy: 'Yet hearing those distant voices down the road just now,/ I seem to recall everything. And I understand/ that yesterday had its own relentless logic'.²²⁰ Here, a sense of momentum energises the collisions of the poem on its several levels: the logic that acknowledges the poetic voice as necessarily existing amongst social forces. The speaker hears voices 'down the road' while wishing that those voices relent to make space needed to produce his work.²²¹ The existence of the account implies the necessary balance has been achieved: through the lines and fields of the poem's geography and language, sufficient distinction has allowed the rendering of a heterogeneous geography with its uses, populations and trajectories. In this

²¹⁴ 'The White Field', ll.24-25.

²¹⁵ 'The White Field', l.26.

²¹⁶ 'The White Field', l.27.

²¹⁷ In Chapter 3 of this thesis I have discussed the status of objects such as the cigarette as channelling material in relating frames: in this case, a tube for inhaling solids that appear and act as gas. The poem 'A Forge and a Scythe' (*AOU*, 97) expresses this uncertainty against ideas of linguistic mediation and death.

²¹⁸ 'The White Field', ll.30-31.

²¹⁹ 'The White Field', ll.32-33.

²²⁰ 'The White Field', ll.41, 43-45.

²²¹ 'The White Field', l.43.

contested space, 'recall' is re-enabled, found in the proximal sense of voices along the line of the road.²²²

In other river poems, the co-presence of singular and heterogeneous unfolding is shown to result in a more complete expression of subjective landscape, personal history and emotional response. The ecstatic voice of 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water' marks the crisis of identity in details from the speaker's history, which Miltner has identified with corresponding events in Carver's own chronology: specifically, a reflection back on the ten tumultuous years preceding the speaker's forty-fifth birthday.²²³ An apparent internal unison in this poem marks an apparent difference from the mutual and finely-balanced poetic voice elsewhere. Yet in its context, the scale of the poem's cuts and singularities adjusts to span the larger frame of its collection, of the same name. At this scale, the title poem expresses a phenomenological account of the Deleuzian singularity, in concert with nearby poems that render varied voices and modes. 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water' thus 'presides over the genesis of individuals and persons', Deleuze's theorisation of the singularity revealing the secondary importance of biographical detail in the poem.²²⁴ Similar to the shifts of scene in 'The White Field', the speaker's personal history is a counterpoint from which he moves from and immediately back to the experience of the river. The poem records the bodily unfoldings observed at the river: 'Just looking at it makes my blood run/and my skin tingle'.²²⁵ A flow of sense and consciousness marks the effect of immediate proximity to the spatial course of the waterway. At the close of the poem, the speaker accompanies his earlier praise of springs with an exclamation that almost escapes structure in exuberance: 'I almost forgot/to say something about their source!'.²²⁶ Here, against the temporal decay of forgetting, the speaker traces the streams, in two directions:

It pleases me, loving rivers.
Loving them all the way back
to their source.
Loving everything that increases me.²²⁷

The poem affirms the mutual movements of river and speaker, located in their relation and encounter. Time is split into relating 'streams', allowing the speaker to insist (at once liberated from and in contact with the reader's distant temporality) that he will take all the time he desires 'before

²²² 'The White Field', l.44.

²²³ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', l.22. Miltner 2008, 47.

²²⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 102.

²²⁵ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', ll.18-19.

²²⁶ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', ll.5-6.

²²⁷ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', ll.30-33.

leaving my place alongside this river'.²²⁸ In form and in unique experience, each tributary is affirmed: 'Not one of them like any other'.²²⁹

Carver's river poems enact this move towards material and narrative confluence by extending the relating spatial reference yet further outward to the experience of the reader. In this sense, the speaker of 'Where Water Comes Together...' invites the reader to stand in the poem's sensory flow, part of the connective plane in which Carver's poems figure mutuality. This plane operates imaginatively for the reader, who can locate memory, dream and material geographies in proximity, in his or her own spatio-temporal instance. This implicit invitation, then, is for the reader to participate in the poem's reduction of transcendent distance, identifying with and renewing the relationship between a reader and a text which echoes the connection between author and text in a parallel and corresponding sense. For the reader, to appreciate the functioning of the mind-body encounter at the core of the river poems is to participate in an immediate, mutual experience of creating meaning through the poetic text.

Survival of the Poem

'The poet is a fisherman... of fish capable of staying alive after being hauled out'

- Antonio Machado ²³⁰

As with so many of Carver's trajectories, the river in the poem 'Where Water Comes Together...' is expressed in two directions: the flow of water down the landscape, and the walk of the speaker upstream to the source. The line of mutual movement suggests other meeting-places in the poetry, and the effect of their teleological refusal on the unfolding of poetic meaning.²³¹ The poem 'For Tess' begins in an account of an apparently unsuccessful fishing trip.²³² The world of objects and memories are signalled as the speaker carries 'your dad's pocketknife'.²³³ From the physicality of this memorialising cutting tool, the speaker relates an experience in a riverside space,

²²⁸ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', l.29.

²²⁹ 'Where Water Comes Together With Other Water', l.21.

²³⁰ Antonio Machado, *Los complementarios*, II, ed. Domingo Yndurain (Madrid: Taurus, 1972), 173-174.

²³¹ See Kant's discussion of teleological judgement in *Critique of Judgement* (originally published 1790). Oxford World's Classics Ed., trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³² 'For Tess', *AOU*, 138.

²³³ 'For Tess', l.7.

a location for overflowing joy: 'At times I felt so happy I had to quit/ fishing'.²³⁴ In this moment, the speaker recounts, he 'lay on the bank with my eyes closed,/ listening' to the sound of the water, and the wind in the trees. In this sound of the wind, a distinction is perceived: 'The same wind/ that blows out on the Strait, but a different wind, too'.²³⁵ This distinction, a radical rupture between planes of perception, precedes the description of the speaker entering an imaginative field at the strange border of consciousness:

For a while I even let myself imagine that I had died –
and that was all right, at least for a couple
of minutes, until it really sank in: *Dead*.²³⁶

The central experience only continues for a short time before the speaker resumes sense perception and the earlier personal temporality: 'I opened my eyes then and got right up/ and went back to being happy again'.²³⁷ However, at the close of the poem the speaker is transformed by the experience, and leaves the river bank expressing a reconstituted sense of his selfhood, gained in the experience of its absence. The effect of the account, as in 'The White Field', is not only personal, but a poetic communication. The final line of the poem (and of the collection) claims: 'I'm grateful to you, you see. I wanted to tell you'.²³⁸ As the conclusion to *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water*, the close of 'For Tess' is the most natural expression of mutual affirmation and communication in the poetry.

As a psychically powerful recurrence in such poems, the idea of death plays a part in the displacement of temporality, to channel the cuts and divisions through which Carver's self emerges. As part of the un-hierarchical form of Carver's spatial singularities, death appears with the more regular conscious modes of imagination, dream and memory, generating combinative images and language in the spaces of the text. Ekbert Faas's study of death in Bly's poetry quotes André Breton's specification in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930):

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions.²³⁹

²³⁴ 'For Tess', l.9

²³⁵ 'For Tess', ll.10, 11-12.

²³⁶ 'For Tess', ll.13-15.

²³⁷ 'For Tess', ll.19-20.

²³⁸ 'For Tess', l.21.

²³⁹ Ekbert Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), 208. André Breton, *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism. Manifestes du surrealism* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 76-77.

As tentative as these thematic concentrations can be, this variety of conviction is expressed in the art of the Surrealists, the Deep Image poets and Carver: and especially in his river poems. Beneath its binaries, Breton's quotation describes a dynamic that connects with Blake's famous lines in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' before it: that the appearance of contraries is necessary for progression, but at 'a certain point' in the mind (and presumably, beyond it) these disintegrate against more nuanced representations and reality.²⁴⁰ The status of the human person (or poet) between opposing forces (such as the impulses of subjectivism and objectivism) is implicated in the early Carver poem 'The Current'. As the only poem that appears in all three of Carver's small-press poetry books, it appeared first in *Levee* (1967) under the title 'These Fish'.²⁴¹ There it was set entirely in capital letters, as if searching for ways to more permanently inscribe its insistent image against the dissipating and resistant forces. The first line starts with the presentation of a group of fish, in immediacy:

These fish have no eyes
these silver fish that come to me in dreams,
scattering their roe and milt
in the pockets of my brain.²⁴²

The rich interactivity between the voice of the author and the image of the fish is clear before the end of the first stanza: the image is part of a dream, and also a narrative of creativity as a process of reproduction. The poem moves from this stanza to dismantle these narratives of creativity, which if allowed to unfold alone, might simply carry out their temporal cycle, regenerating beyond their personal demise. The cuts of Carver's creative process seem visible on the body of another fish, which defies the flow of the river in its singular strength:

But there's one that comes –
heavy, scarred, silent like the rest,
that simply holds against the current²⁴³

The silence of the fish and the gap between this individual and the group is figured in the gaps around this stanza: also the object of editorial alteration. In the *Levee* version, the stanza break

²⁴⁰ 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,/ Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence./ From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil./ Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing/ from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell' William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979), 86.

²⁴¹ 'These Fish', *Levee* (Sacramento, CA.: Sacramento State Univ., 1967), 2.2: 4. *AOU*, 44.

²⁴² 'These Fish', ll.1-4.

²⁴³ 'These Fish', ll.5-7.

appeared after line 6, inserting space after silence. The first and third stanzas mirror each other in four line blocks, forming a return from the disturbing presence of the 'one' in the second stanza. Yet, in moving the break one line down, the effect of this strange fish becomes permanent, moving the poem from the equal journey-and-return of four lines, to the pause, or outlying point of the three-line stanza. The final three lines, in the later version, move away from the tension of line 7 ('holds against the current'), to the process of 'closing', 'closing and opening' of the mouth that says nothing, now 'hold[ing] to the current' (my emphasis).²⁴⁴

The title change of 'These Fish' to 'The Current' suggests a development in the focus and function of the poem. The processes of thought and creativity, unseen electrical and chemical states in the brain (two kinds of current) are now more balanced in their expression and mystery. Beyond the fish or the conceptual, organising spatial concept of the river, is the pure movement of the current which, invisible, gives life to the fish through the absorption of its substance. The poem strips away narrative by the final stanza, closing off transcending meaning with the rhythmic opening and closing of the mouth, like a lid. The view of the darkness of the mouth is a special kind of singularity, operating an irrational cut that divides and holds in reserve expectation, explication and narrative to render a living image of time and movement. In this detail the fish, viewed in close shot, differs essentially from spatial versions of the singularity. The perception of the animal in pure movement, minimising linguistic elaboration, offers the 'deep[est] image' of Carver's poetic representation. The rhythmic temporalities of the biological against the physical, in this poem and others, make any intended capture of the fish irrelevant. Ordinary patterns of desire and economics are overcome in a pure image, which in turn, becomes a concentrated and exemplary representative act. The existence of exemplary acts of representation in poems like 'The Current' is, I believe, a strong argument for the artistic value of this element of Carver's verse. Against the usual utilitarian and biographically explanative uses for the poetry, I hope to have established the value of Carver's aesthetic in the poems discussed in this chapter.

As in the material presentation of 'The Current', the poetic river operates in equalising heterogeneity when characters come into physical contact with the water itself, configuring an immediate spatial relation. In poems narrating dreamed and remembered river scenes, characters typically stand in the water to their waist as a fishing excursion takes place in a medium infused with meaning across the poems and wider tradition. While in 'For Tess', the speaker could briefly experience a material singularity in his position beside the river, in the fishing poems physical contact with the waterway extends this poetic interaction with the objects of memory: an irrational mutuality with the dead. The poem 'Bobber' operates in these terms, with the speaker first locating

²⁴⁴ 'These Fish', ll.8-10.

the characters in a spatio-temporal specificity, and the details of their fishing.²⁴⁵ Like a photograph and commentary, the poem lists who was there ('my dad, Swede - / Mr Lindgren, and me'), their equipment and positions in the river.²⁴⁶ Then, in the established space, the second stanza begins with an image of life-giving immersion of a different, nested scale: 'My dad kept his maggots alive and warm/ under his lower lip', before contrasting the two men accompanying the speaker.²⁴⁷ In the only lines of the poem that move away from the river scene, the reader is told that Mr Lindgren 'let me steer his car', and used to tease the boy about his name.²⁴⁸ The man also told the speaker that he'd 'grow into a fine man, remember/ all this, and fish with my own son', but the poem claims 'my dad was right. I mean/ he kept silent and looked into the river'.²⁴⁹ The poem presents the speaker's father, unlike Mr Lindgren, as completely immersed in his activity in the river, and closes with the image of immersion in his mouth: 'worked his tongue, like a thought, behind the bait'.²⁵⁰ The final line brings the poem back to the poem's communicative action, with his father's silent thought standing as a better version of Mr Lindgren's erroneous speech. The 'bait', in the river poem, might catch silent expressions from his father.

As with his short stories (and perhaps more), a Raymond Carver poem is not susceptible to exhaustive typologies of form or function. As in their publication histories, the poems can be perceived individually, in the network of collections and periodicals in which they were printed, or as part of ever larger confluences of texts with which they interact. Yet the movements and unfolding of his texts are distinctive, and equally, communicate sophisticated representative strategies explored by the artworks of his period. Carver's eclectic use of sources outside of the local or national actualises the ambition of the Deep Image poets, working the generative poetics of his early writings through additional contexts and situations, prioritising the capacities and capabilities of verse form, over the particularities of his own work. When questioned in 1983 on the specificity of his writing of 'place' he said:²⁵¹

Once, it was important to see myself as a writer from a particular place. It was important for me to be a writer from the West. But that's not true any longer... I've moved around too much, lived in too many places, felt dislocated and displaced, to now have any firmly rooted sense of "place."

²⁴⁵ 'Bobber', *AOU*, 42.

²⁴⁶ 'Bobber', ll.3-4.

²⁴⁷ 'Bobber', ll.10-11.

²⁴⁸ 'Bobber', l.13.

²⁴⁹ 'Bobber', ll.15-16, 17-18.

²⁵⁰ 'Bobber', l.19.

²⁵¹ Simpson and Buzbee, 1983.

Yet as a writer who moves in space, and places '[un]rooted', dislocation and displacement have been seen to act against the usual conceptions of emplacement in verse. Through rivers and other courses, Carver's poetry explores structures, frames and trajectories with enough distance from the mythologies and psychologies of the 'American Dream' to express fresh material from conscious experience. Rather than the persistent colonial idea of self-sufficiency, and the landscape as existing to be appropriated for interested enterprise, the forest, straits or waterfall can also bi-locate the poet where other writers have been before. The layering of poetic text and land, land and text also frames the referential void of the sublime. Responding to this, Carver's verse draws upon recent poetic traditions and theory to find a 'new path to the waterfall', moving upstream for a regenerative space.

Chapter 5

Biographical Geographies

All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another.

- Helene Cixous, *rootprints* ¹

Biography, as much as any other generic form and probably more, has always operated in necessarily and fiercely contested territory. The future of Raymond Carver studies still exists in connection with a contest of biographical accounts, most famously dramatised in D.T. Max's piece for the *New York Review of Books*, 'The Carver Chronicles' (1998).² Relating an expedition to examine Carver's manuscripts in the archives, a visit to talk with his friend and early editor Gordon Lish and a request to interview his second wife Tess Gallagher, Max makes his article an ostensible defence of 'the writer' (quoting Robert Gottlieb) 'that America could least afford to lose'.³ Chekhov, Fitzgerald, Hemingway and T.S. Eliot, Max notes, were all engaged in significant editorial or collaborative relationships, which shaped their most celebrated works. Yet the collaborations with Carver, he writes, exceed them all. Max quotes from 'a top editor at Knopf': "I never met an author so many people claimed a piece of".⁴ Scholarship on Carver's writing has usually side-stepped the competing claims, perhaps due to Tess Gallagher's continued willingness to litigate and enforce control of copyrights against research that she judges threatening to Carver's legacy.⁵ However, the question of Carver's authorial constructions was still relevant ten years after 'The Carver Chronicles', when

¹ Helene Cixous, *rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 1997), 177.

² Max, 1998. The importance of 'The Carver Controversy' was reiterated by the foremost scholars in the field, in William L. Stull & Maureen P. Carroll, 'Prolegomena to Any Future Carver Studies', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, Special Issue: Raymond Carver, 46 (2006), 13-17.

³ Max 1998, para. 4.

⁴ Max 1998, para. 45.

⁵ Brian Evenson's scholarship was blocked by the threat of litigation from Gallagher, and was referred to, although not by name, in Max's 1998 article.

the release of *Beginners* (2009) reignited the debate by again implying an edited/unedited dichotomy in Carver's writings: a side-by-side comparison with *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) was, evidently, the point of the publication.

As manuscript copies of the stories in *Beginners* had been available to scholars for years (those, at least, who were willing to travel to the Lilly Library, Indiana, and the library of Ohio State University), *Beginners* received a high-profile but unruffled reception.⁶ The headlines were as often concerned with Tess Gallagher's supposed motivation to set some record straight, and the ongoing management of Carver's legacy from within and beyond the bounds of his texts.⁷ Carver himself had approached his writing as a body of work that existed in essential relation to writers, estates and a physical world that the reader experienced and brought to his stories and poems, so Gallagher's case for an evolving and expanding oeuvre is appropriate. Whereas the earlier Lish-edited stories removed literary references, sentiment and the focus on drinking and sobriety, Carver's (earlier unedited and) later publications were invested in the construction of spaces that write the 'self' onto the land: the biographical onto structural and traceable geographies.

Any geography of Carver's works would include coordinates of context and form to challenge the myth of single authorship, yet these maps would be unlikely to reference Barthes's 'death of the author' and Foucault's 'author-function'.⁸ These theorisations, whose influence was strong in literary fictions against which Carver defined his own work (writings that foreground 'formal innovations') make the use and reception of biography in Carver a complex and defining element. Yet the characterisation of Carver as a writer with radically divergent 'early' and 'late' styles has its beginnings in his own claims for himself as a writer, divided by an approach to death, into 'two lives'. The first of these lives, which he called his 'bad Raymond' days, he dated as the period before June 2nd, 1977: the 'line of demarcation' from which he would annually celebrate his sobriety.⁹ Yet in the light-heartedness of the character 'bad Raymond', there is both a division and a consistency of identity, which, in the words of his wife Tess Gallagher, allowed him to 'maintain an affection for that fallible and wayward self he had preserved most indelibly in his fiction and in

⁶ In addition, Stull & Carroll set up a website prior to the publication, where sample excerpts from both versions could be seen. James Campbell, 'The Real Raymond Carver', *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 29, 2009, 3.

⁷ Sarah Churchwell, 'The final cut', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2009.

⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Aspen* 5-6, 1967. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Vintage, 1984), 101-120. See also Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁹ Raymond Carver, 'Friendship', *Call if You Need Me*, 117-125, 121. Don Swain, 'Audio Interviews with Tess Gallagher', October 20, 1986. < <http://www.wiredforbooks.org/tessgallagher/> >.

stories often recounted in the presence of his friends'.¹⁰ The accomplishments and vicissitudes of that earlier self were essential to Carver's success: Carol Sklenicka notes that the composition of roughly half of the stories date from before 1977, and half after that date.¹¹ Yet in context of Carver's recovery from alcoholism, the mid-career 'split' suggests Carver's struggle to compartmentalise his drinking from other areas of his life: and the desire to craft an authorial identity beyond the literary success of the younger self that had come to the brink of personal self-destruction.

The critical trend that divided Carver's work was strengthened in the years following his premature death from lung cancer, as various studies and tributes sought to describe his career. In 1990 the radio journalist Don Swain interviewed Tess Gallagher on the forthcoming book *Carver Country*, which connected Carver's texts with a visual and material world of real places, people and objects on facing pages.¹² According to Gallagher, the photographs arrived for Carver to view only two weeks before his death, and his approving the material helped her feel that the project was worthy of his name, which appears before Adelman's on the cover. Gallagher denied any simple or reductive identification of the places in Carver's stories and poems with 'the real world', but said of Adelman's photographs:

I think a lot [of the images] are the icons that people associated with Carver Country, which is not just a landscape, but really a lot of the interior realities of a certain segment of the country. I'm talking about the working class and the middle class, the people who had in the fifties what we used to call the 'American Dream': the two-car garage and sending the children to college and so on. Now, these are the people in Ray's stories who don't get those things, who are living on the edge.¹³

Gallagher then identifies the politics of the 'Reagan era' as allowing a generation to 'fall through the cracks', invoking again the social-geographical metaphor of a widening chasm that divides 'two Americas'.¹⁴ Thus, her comment in the 1990 interview connects the multiple significant forces that project onto a representation of materiality in Carver's fiction: topographical, psychological, sociological, economic and ideological.

¹⁰ Adelman, 13.

¹¹ Sklenicka, *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 313-4.

¹² Swain, 1990.

¹³ Swain, 1990, 3:15-3:50.

¹⁴ The phrase originates with the politician John Edwards' 2004 Presidential campaign, but is indicative of a long tradition of seeing the nation as a split, or double-America.

Gallagher repeats this interpretation of 'Carver Country' as a representative place of disadvantage and exclusion, in the introduction to *Carver Country*, 11-12.

Tess Gallagher's introduction of political and social questions into the discourse on Carver should be considered with the wariness and possibilities for insight that her proximity to the author deserves. Her 'speaking for' Carver, in various introductions and interviews projects a text that suggests its connection with his (usually unspoken) politics, and the political forces that drove her work, and therefore, their collaborative productions.¹⁵ Carver's early fiction concentrates its power in extreme brevity through its social and textual contexts, reinstating the voices and spaces that had been less present in the literary imagination before the late 1970s.¹⁶ His characters, often depicted in emotional and physical stasis, introduce with their presence the problem of a double: a counterpart literature that haunts the myth of a unified landscape. The divided landscape of America has often caused a crisis of identity: the War of Independence, the Civil War's 'Union' and 'Confederacy' (written, in geographical terms, 'North' and 'South'), to the 'Red and Blue' states of politics today.¹⁷ The largely topographically-indifferent borders with Canada and Mexico make for the neat, iconic map, but this only magnifies the symbolism of the crossing of these borders (especially in the South), threatening potential crises of identity for a nation that has defined itself with those lines. In less frequently-mapped (but certainly mappable) ways, the idea of 'East' and 'West' is another culturally resonant model that persists for those fighting political, cultural and ideological battles in the USA. At first glance, the geography of fictional 'Carver Country' would locate crucial points on this delineated, abstracted map: the frontiers of the 'Midwest', the 'Northwest', and the poems by the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which separate the top corner of Washington from Canada (See Appendix 3, 'Biographical "Carver Country"'). Yet, Carver's readership would be much less likely to recognise the localised geographical coordinates that form the majority of his spatial references and tracks, within a twenty-mile radius of his boyhood city of Yakima, Washington. In his customarily inclusive manner, Carver includes one geography to present the potency of the other: nested geographies that gesture to the human centres of memory and experience.

Gallagher insisted in interview that Ray 'hated competition and conflict of any kind',¹⁸ and from this view, his willingness to declare 'a new life, one without mistakes' would suggest a desire to recover a wholeness of self, established beyond the terms of his divided daily experience.¹⁹ The

¹⁵ Gallagher wrote the introductions to *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989), *Carver Country* (1990), *No Heroics Please: Uncollected Writings* (1991), *Call if You Need Me: The Uncollected Fiction and Prose* (2000), *All of Us: The Collected Poems* (2003) and wrote *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray* (2001).

¹⁶ See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of Carver's literary context.

¹⁷ The progress of this division as a popular myth of identity is discussed in Edward L. Glaeser and Bryce A. Ward, 'Myths and Realities of American Political Geography', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20, 2 (2006), 119-144.

¹⁸ Swain, 1990.

¹⁹ Letter to Richard Ford, 1977. Sklenicka, 330.

playful creation of his 'double' ('Bad Raymond') indicates with humour, as did his fiction, the reflective interdependence of material and mind that formed his sense of life. Characterising himself, Carver could use his narrative abilities to contain the forces that had previously threatened his existence, and displace them with a more consistent hunger for daily work and association. As I have argued in my chapter on Carver's poetry, however, the 'new path' of his 'second life' was not a transcendence from the social network of realities, relations and expectations, but instead situated a new self-identity in closer relation and connectivity with friends and literary texts. Although his biographical narratives enacted essential separations and divisions, these divisions communicate in accessible, local ways, which I will identify in his poetry. In this sense, his statement in a 1986 interview with Don Swain seems to describe well: 'Writing is... a revealing of our common secrets'.²⁰ In dividing experience and designating chosen material as 'secret', then revealing that in the text, Carver's work accomplishes the discovery that leads to a feeling of social proximity: a sense that the reader might inhabit the same ground.

Carver's texts speak to the relationships between human and natural spatialities that suggests the combinative project of the geographer, rather than either the sociologist or the cartographer. I will use the term 'biographical geographies' to explore such essential relationships between self and space, relations and nation, and unpacking the definitions and etymology of my term reveals a set of overlapping meanings that fit the fault-lines of Carver's writings. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the combining form 'bio-' is given as referring 'to the life and writings of an author' in 'bio-bibliographical', as well as a wide range of uses of 'bio-' as signifying the natural or ecological in various coinages. 'Geo-' is used in a similar set of formulations, but is present in a relatively stable and recognisable way in 'geography', defined as, first, 'a treatise on the physical features or characteristics of a region', but also a range of secondary definitions that highlight the relations between, for example, 'the physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and with human activity as it affects and is affected by those'.²¹ These relations, between physical earth and the human, the author and text, are established in Carver's and Tess Gallagher's willingness to write about his stories and poetry. The investigation of the biographical geographies of Carver Country will answer this range of forces in the poems and stories themselves, which have threatened to obscure a complex and sympathetic set of relationships inscribed in the texts. The etymology of the combining form common to 'biography' and 'geography' traces back through a history of representation: from the Greek *graphein*, 'to write', earlier 'to draw, represent by lines drawn', and

²⁰ Don Swain, 'Audio Interviews with Raymond Carver', October 9, 1986. <<http://www.wiredforbooks.org/raymondcarver/>>.

²¹ *OED*, 'geography', 2. a.

originally 'to scrape, scratch', or 'to scratch, carve'.²² In turn, connections are made in the etymology of the word 'carve' from the Old English *ceorfan*, defined as 'to cut, cut down, slay; to carve, cut out, engrave'.²³ Thus, I take the common element of my terms to signify: the 'graphical', to draw or write the self, in a 'bio-' or natural sense, and the drawing or writing of the 'geo-', or, according to the Greek root, the 'earth', as in 'ground' or 'land'.²⁴ In short, a biographical geography is concerned with the dual inscription of the historical self onto the earth, or land, and the land onto the subjective self that writes.

Biographical geography goes further than even the fictionist's traditional concern for the land as a metaphor and common reference point for the representation of consciousness. The biographical makes a particular claim, connected particularly with the project of 'realisms', to a material authenticity: an existence outside of the text.²⁵ In specific application to Carver's work, my term is used to suggest ways in which his texts are concerned with identity in writing, narrative and material lines of representation, and the processes of division and death that are inherent to these. Drawing upon, but not dependent on external referents, I will treat Carver's texts as both legible in themselves, and conversant with other texts in their contexts of publication. Following his own statements that he was living a kind of 'second life' after his near-death from alcoholism, thematic focuses on writing and drawing, cutting and death are immediate in the texts. However, since his death these elements have gained resonance, strengthened through Gallagher's hand and pen: the sense of the oeuvre growing as a cohesive body of work. Initially I will examine in Carver's own writings, his considerations of narrative and spatial divisions as metaphors for death in the mind of the living self that would be labelled the 'author'. Then, in search of the other voices in the richness of Carver's collaborative texts, I will consider analogous focuses in the writings of his closest writing relationships, with Gordon Lish and Tess Gallagher. The spatially situated selves and relationships connecting these writers offer a view of Carver's project that breaks from the always-doubtful myth of authorial isolation into a view of texts in multiple perspectives: a three-dimensional model of a writer in a dynamic geography.

²² *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, '-graphy', 410.

²³ *OED*, 'carve', 149.

²⁴ *OED*, 'geo-', 394.

²⁵ An insistence on 'de hors-texte' thus sets 'realisms' against post-structural and post-modernist philosophies. See Chapter 2 of this thesis for an extended discussion of these traditions as they apply to Carver's works.

Constructing *Carver Country*

One of Carver's final projects prior to his death was a biographical construction with multi-layered spatial focus. The three-way collaborative *Carver Country* (1990) includes a previously unpublished letter from Carver to the photographer Bob Adelman, selecting and describing the places he considered significant for a photographic tour of his homelands.²⁶ The opening of the letter clearly sets out Carver's stance toward his own biographical geography and navigates this with a particular mode of material and narrative movement. The letter stands between an informal version of the film director's instruction to the operator of the camera - a moving text meant to be visual – and a number of warm-hearted pointers, recollections and asides to a friend. He sets out:

I'm going to try and run through some places and towns and people, and this will be in no particular order or grouping, and it will be the more difficult since I don't have a map even of the state of Washington or Oregon. So I will just start off with, say, Yakima, and move around there and its environs, and then move on to another location, but may come back to Yakima if I can recall something else along the way... Not a very specific way to work, I know, but we're not scientists, and what the hell.

²⁷

Carver's anxiety at not having maps, or being a 'scientist', is quickly brushed aside with an informal tone and a declaration that memory, consciousness and the flow of the letter's composition will be prioritised, in a text produced alongside other demands. Exact addresses are given if recalled, but if not, a quick apology is followed by a description of how to find the house or feature, in relation to other recognisable or, often, indistinguishable features of the suburbs.²⁸ Memories connect poems, stories and collections with the people who feature and places in which his works are 'set'.²⁹ The tour closes with Carver's generous recommendation of Adelman's own judgement and selection to himself: 'You might see a hundred other things you want to photograph, and that's fine, I'll probably recognize them when I see them'.³⁰ With the insistence and declaration of some imprecision in stated addresses and geographical coordinates, this statement gives Adelman permission to work in extensive and liberal collaboration, to produce work in the same way as does Carver in the letter. In

²⁶ Adelman, 21-45. As 'Unpublished letter to Bob Adelman, December 13, 1987'.

²⁷ Adelman, 21.

²⁸ Adelman, 25.

²⁹ Adelman, 25, 33, 37.

³⁰ Adelman, 45.

both specification and flexibility, the letter is a set of instructions to the visual artist (and, ultimately, the reader), who is also a friend. The remembered geography functions in a particular kind of biographical text: close-quartered in specificity, as well as open and flexible. In Carver, this mode is not restricted to the biographical text, and he downplayed strict definitions of genre in his work.³¹ More important than the label, for Carver, was the communication of the observed detail, the *punctum* described in Roland Barthes' combinative work of biographical image and text, *Camera Lucida*.³²

Thematic and formal bridges of this kind link Carver's stories and poetry, especially after 1977: an expression of 'new life' that also connects and remembers the self it has survived. In his characterisation of his own life as a writer, with its peculiar economics and work schedule, Carver resolves a wider, multiple identity in his texts: as a person with a double portion of life. As his late poem 'Gravy' boiled down to unapologetically informal lines, biographical material appeared in more generous terms through the connective material basis of a historically identifiable writer-as-speaker:

...he was going
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?
After that it was *all* gravy, every minute
of it, up to and including when he was told about,
well, some things that were breaking down and
building up inside his head. ³³

Written in the final weeks of his life, this poem connects the author's most grave mortal encounters, the pun in the title adding brave humour that lifts the poem above the punctuation of death. Final images of 'breaking down' and 'building up' inside the irradiated container of the head are overcome with the flow of 'Pure gravy' that the addressee is told not to forget: a familiar, sustaining kind of river.³⁴ These lines, which were inscribed onto Carver's grave, insist that the described world of material, everyday objects was his most well-mapped route into writing, in his own words, 'where I'm calling from'.³⁵

³¹ Swain, 1986.

³² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 40.

³³ 'Gravy', *AOU*, 292. ll.6-12.

³⁴ 'Gravy', l.15.

³⁵ The line became the title of his *...New and Selected Stories* (1993), but originates in the story of the same name, describing an unnamed man in a rehabilitation centre for alcoholics. *Cathedral*, 117-135.

Carver's poems and stories often are 'told' by a first-person speaker with a located voice, whose geographical resonances emerge more clearly in relation to biographical writings, in their direct address of experience and self-conception as a writer. The short stories demonstrate both explicit awareness and implicit lineaments of the contests and struggles that both occur around them, and include, at the core of their form, a generative capability.³⁶ Carver's geographical texts locate these relations into a series of 'generative spaces', connecting narrative dynamics with built and natural landscapes. His texts reconstruct the land as an insistent presence in his memories of the past, psychologically commanding in descriptions of the present moment, and in their reliability, suggestive of an unseen future. Thus, the construction of 'generative spaces' in Carver's highly referential landscape first requires the delineation and navigation of multiple existing social, temporal and epistemological relations. A Carverian 'imaginative geography' successively disconnects and reconnects, clears and constructs in its spaces, inscribing through processes of cutting.

Carver's poetry displays some of the richest examples of this process, frequently exploring personal experience through a lyric mode that opposes the narrative movements more typically associated with his characteristic style. As his poetry prior to *Ultramarine* (1986) found publication with small presses, the relative creative freedom of the poetry allows a more extensive personal voice that is only approached in Carver's last stories.³⁷ In his account of the lyric tradition, J.A. Cuddon traces the uses and developments of literary form to express the 'feelings and thoughts of a single speaker... in a personal and subjective fashion', with subjectivity and autobiographical elements forming the core material of such works.³⁸ Carver's relationship to the lyric tradition reverses the metaphor of 'stanza' from the Italian (making the verse-paragraph a 'room' within the larger house of the poem), to express emotion and the subject in physical rooms: or more generally, in describable material spaces. Cuddon's identification of lyric brevity also suggests Carver's concision: that a piece that can be performed and received *in situ*, as on a lyre, maintains its human and geographical singularity.³⁹ Carver's stories, all of which may be read in a single sitting, take the definition further, with his claim that he would write the first draft in a single burst of composition.⁴⁰ The possibility of a spatially progressive lyric form is found in M.H. Abrams, who identifies in lyric a

³⁶ In the literary context, see Chapter 2 of this thesis. Chapter 3 explored the domestic spaces of America, in this mode, and Chapter 4 theorised this in relation to materiality and consciousness.

³⁷ Raymond Carver, *Ultramarine* (New York: Random House, 1986). By the end of his career, the security of a well-established reputation and financial well-being meant that he enjoyed freedom to write and be published in short fiction and non-fiction, in national presses. 'Errand' (*Elephant and Other Stories*, 111-124) is a good example of the divergences and explorations of voice and biography in his late short fiction.

³⁸ J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd edition (London: Penguin, 1992), 'lyric', 514-518 (515).

³⁹ Cuddon, 514.

⁴⁰ Carver 1998, xi.

'process of perception, thought or feeling', whose movement does not, as often in a 'narrative' work, depend on a temporal progression.⁴¹ This process is an unfolding of a present reality: a movement in communication, rather than in change. The spatial disconnections, divisions, boundaries and portals become the architecture through which Carver locates the speaker amongst material forces and objects. In his poetry in particular, a disruptive and disconnecting 'cut' distinguishes a zone for lyric unfolding, recovered from the narrative insistence of chronological experience. If Wordsworth's 'spots of time' escape chronological order, Carver's use of an analogous mode identifies his predecessor's moment as a *spot of ground*: yet, similarly, an accomplishment that enables the generation of the text.⁴² As in *The Prelude*, the search for a lyric moment is also essentially, a search for a lyric space.

Both social and topographic disconnections separate the myth of the 'author' from the written voice in the poem 'The Author of Her Misfortune', in which the speaker finds himself distanced from his former love, his previous selves, and the history between shared memories.⁴³ The poem begins with an explicit disruption of the stability of the speaker's (or, as the title suggests, the embattled author's) voice:

I'm not the man she claims. But
this much is true: the past is
distant, a receding coastline,
and we're all in the same boat,
a scrim of rain over the sea-lanes.⁴⁴

The opening lines list the varieties of disconnection that are occurring in paradoxical proximity, in the same boat: the imperilled self, fading history and alienated sociality. The fitting meteorological metaphor for dim memory matches his use in interviews, of a 'rainy scrim' that stood between the author and those in his past.⁴⁵ The reassuring border of the coastline recedes, and the disconnections necessary for the formation of a 'generative space' are achieved, bringing the addressee increasingly into a space that can revive the sense of identity that has been obscured. The final lines return to the opening: 'I'm not that man', this time with the voice distinguishable from the other 'self' who speaks in the past, receding with the metaphorical coastline, '*Come with me. You*

⁴¹ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edition (London: Harcourt Brace, 1981), 'Lyric', 146-7.

⁴² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* 1805: XI, l.257. Penguin Classics edition, 'The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)' ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁴³ 'The Author of Her Misfortune', *AOU*, 170.

⁴⁴ 'The Author of Her Misfortune', ll.1-5.

⁴⁵ *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver*, eds. William Stull & Maureen Carroll (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993), 117.

can trust me'.⁴⁶ As this 'self', whose words appear in italics is 'someone else', the disconnecting action of the poem makes a site for the construction of a new, seemingly 'happy' man.⁴⁷ The poem also maintains the possibility of (and the need for) this reconstruction recurring: 'But at intervals/a sweetness appears and, given a chance, prevails'.⁴⁸ In a few such poems, the disconnecting action leaves the reader with a possibility of reconstruction, but often this is finally only a hope, too brief to be more than a promise of construction elsewhere: 'The Road', 'Bobber', or 'The World Book Salesman', for example.⁴⁹ Yet, in other poems multi-faceted disconnections develop into a personal reconstruction, found in the speaker's entry into a space distinct from fractured prosaic landscapes. In one such poem, 'Sweet Light', the voice makes a radical disconnection, escaping narrative memory of material space into the imagined plane of purified language and sense.⁵⁰ In the first couplet, two consecutive seasons are described, spent in a single outdoor location. The temporal frame shrinks in the next couplet, telescoping away from the historical past: 'I pulled up/a chair. Sat for hours in front of the sea'.⁵¹ Next the speaker disconnects from the objects immediate to him, by learning 'to tell the difference between a bell,/and the sound of a bell'.⁵² This progressive sensory description leads the speaker to reveal the poem's innermost stated desire:

I wanted
everything behind me. I even wanted

to become inhuman. And I did that.
I know I did. ⁵³

The disconnection from sensory observation results in the realisation that the totality of this move is the entire loss of humanity and selfhood. The speaker tells how he 'closed the lid/on memory and turned the handle./Locking it away forever'.⁵⁴ As an imaginative version of containing space, this image stands as a potent reminder of the protecting and enclosing frames that persist in Carver's writings. Whether the locking action banishes or safeguards memory, it designates a desire to distinguish the depicted 'self' from a potent and possibly dangerous past. In this moment, and the denials of 'The Author of Her Misfortune', the erasing action necessary for the writing of biography is

⁴⁶ 'The Author of Her Misfortune', ll.25, 24.

⁴⁷ 'The Author of Her Misfortune', ll.27, 14.

⁴⁸ 'The Author of Her Misfortune', ll.12-14.

⁴⁹ 'The Road', *AOU*, 59-60; 'Bobber', *AOU*, 42; 'The World Book Salesman', *AOU*, 238.

⁵⁰ 'Sweet Light', *AOU*, 179.

⁵¹ 'Sweet Light', ll.3-4.

⁵² 'Sweet Light', ll.6-7.

⁵³ 'Sweet Light', ll.7-10.

⁵⁴ 'Sweet Light', ll.11-13.

explicated: undoing and repressing biographical tracks in order to bring into the text other narratives, grounded in described experience and spaces. The mysterious event that motivated this erasing action in 'Sweet Light' is held within the speaker's self, and textually, within the poem: 'Nobody knows what happened to me/out here, sea. Only you and I know'.⁵⁵ The 'you' could refer to the sea, but also might suggest the reader, who has been made witness to the strange time spent in the chair, and the repeated affirmation (and silent negation) of the writer's *becoming*: 'I did' at the centre of the poem.⁵⁶ From the central couplets, the speaker's survival has allowed reflection on the significance of the experience in the chair in the second half of the poem. As the poem disconnected from 'everything', moving towards a core point of linguistic gravity, new connections were rendered possible in the silences surrounding oblivion. The generative space has changed the speaker, reporting back from a human landscape of sense, beyond the myth of unified experience. Containing both a brief narrative unfolding and a functional lyric moment, 'Sweet Light' acknowledges the subjectivity through which the speaker must approach the complexities of interpersonal responsibilities and communication. In this awareness, the geography of the poem provides both frame and 'screen' upon which this event is reflected into textual perception, in a similar manner to when metaphorical space is invoked in a poem to provide a mental frame for past memories and other layers of identity that form the self.

As with the editorial processes and collaborations of authors described in the Regional tradition, intertextual interpolations in Carver's poems are essential to the construction of the speaker: a pollination that is necessary for the continuation of life, after the cut of inscription.⁵⁷ Geographies in Carver's texts provide locations for interaction, neighbourliness or intimacy, which in turn reflect back into a transformed individual voice. The reflective division and joining of these landscapes presents the appearance of reflection metaphorically, made prominent in the epigraph to the collection *Ultramarine*: a quotation from Derek Mahon's 'Mt Gabriel':

...sick
 With exile, they yearn homeward now, their eyes
 Tuned to the ultramarine, first-star-pierced dark
 Reflected on the dark, incoming waves...⁵⁸

Randolph Runyon's wide-ranging early study of Carver's works observes the effect of quoting Mahon's poem, in locating the 'Ultramarine' of Carver's title in the sky, first.⁵⁹ The same colour is

⁵⁵ 'Sweet Light', ll.14-15.

⁵⁶ 'Sweet Light', ll.9-10.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of the Regionalist tradition as it relates to Carver's writings.

⁵⁸ *AOU*, 109. Derek Mahon, *Antarctica* (Gallery P: Dublin, 1985).

reflected from the surface of the ocean, but the boundary between the two is difficult to distinguish. Runyon also footnotes the etymology of the word, dividing 'ultra beyond + mare sea... Ultramarine blue: A pigment of colouring matter of various shades of blue, originally obtained from the mineral lapis lazuli and named with reference to the foreign origin of this'.⁶⁰ Runyon suggests that the title of the collection demands that the reader 'focus full attention on "this"', that is: the made-foreign material object of poetic consideration, with the duplication of that demand calling the reader to turn their attention from one poem to the next in the sequence.⁶¹ Yet, more than referring to the prominence of materiality in the poetry, the reflected colour of *Ultramarine's* title signals the related appearance but material distinction of sea and sky, as they signify the process that writes them into text. Although the landscape appears to affect the speaker directly, additional layers of significance can be resolved by acknowledging that material objects are seen only through the reflection of a less substantive agent through which they can be perceived. Where in the poem's title image, the sea can only be perceived through light that comes from the (less substantive) sky, the biographical account depends on records and memories that the speaker can only ever resolve through layers of mediations. In 'Sweet Light' and more widely in Carver's verse, the interplay between tangible and obscured images creates a sense of liminal perception and expression, aware of the writer's hazardous task. In these meetings, the edges of 'bio-' and 'geo-' are revealed by the '-graphical': the cut of acknowledged or written form, which resolves the record of the speaker or writer in their subjective experience.

Reflections, plays of light, and tricks of materiality and representation in both 'Sweet Light' and the epigraph in *Ultramarine* bring a vision of material geography that achieves something of the effect of a cinematic work, a metaphor I have previously found active in Carver's poetry.⁶² Although the disconnection from the authorial 'self' is presented from his early stories and poetry, it is most present in his late collections, and most of all, in collections published posthumously. These exemplify and illustrate what Carver's work gestured to before: the heterogeneous lyric voice, constructed from and mapped across a populated territory that could outlast the author's life. In doing so, texts such as these poems offer a way forward for the problem of Carver's legacy: that instead of the conception of the author as in conflict and a hierarchical struggle for dominance in a market for literary publishing, Carver's writings work to establish an existence in a more densely populated and supportive productive geography.

⁵⁹ Runyon, 209.

⁶⁰ Runyon, 209.

⁶¹ Runyon, 210.

⁶² See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

'Captain Fiction'

The divisions and reconstructions in both Carver's poetry and fiction suggest that beneath the appearance of punitive or exploitative editorial relationships, affinities existed that enabled such extensive collaborations in the first place. The historical record of Carver's communicated 'instructions' to and from Gordon Lish has been much publicised in the past fifteen years since D.T. Max's article. According to Max, Lish was hesitant to speak on the matter at all, as he felt that any perspective that could be given from after Carver's death would put him in an unfavourable light.⁶³ Studies of the Lish-Carver connection have focussed on the correspondence recorded in Lish's papers in the Lilly Library, Indiana, and Carver's correspondence and manuscripts, in the Ohio State University Collection.⁶⁴ These letters from Carver alternately approved a version of the edits, then protested further, extensive cuts and changes to *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, since many of the stories had already been read in public and shared with colleagues and friends. Although Carver always insisted that he was glad to have an editor as thorough as Lish, and had encouraged him to editorially 'open the throttle... ramming speed', the modifications to Carver's texts went so far as to make him feel that the stories could no longer be considered 'his'.⁶⁵ This pressure to conform to the common expectations of single authorship, especially when some aspect of that claim allowed him to earn enough of a living to continue his work, must have fuelled Carver's poetic explorations of authorship, disconnection and authorised attribution, as discussed previously. Yet, in June 1980, as radically different versions of Carver's latest stories crossed the nation from Lish in New York to Carver, at the 'Midnight Sun' conference with Ted Hughes in Alaska, his generous collaborative instinct was tested to breaking.⁶⁶

The rejoinder to these claims for the Lish 'construction' of Carver has sometimes been to wonder, if Lish was the driving talent, why his own stories were never more successful or acclaimed themselves?⁶⁷ Yet, Lish's own work traces a complex line between the myth of the author as individual talent, and the collaborative power relations suggested in his nickname 'Captain Fiction'. Whether those he edited and promoted were 'his crew on the good ship Literature'⁶⁸, or more distant from him (perhaps grateful beneficiaries of his influence in the New York world of

⁶³ Max 1998, para. 21.

⁶⁴ Stull & Carroll, 2006.

⁶⁵ Sklenicka, 355.

⁶⁶ Sklenicka, 356.

⁶⁷ Max 1998, para. 1.

⁶⁸ Sharon Solwitz, 'The Gospel According to Gordon Lish', *Chicago Reader*, June 09 1988 <<http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-gospel-according-to-gordon-lish/Content?oid=872324>>, para. 5.

publishing), his importance is attested by dedications of works by prominent authors: Amy Hempel's *Reasons to Live*, and Don DeLillo's *Mao II*.⁶⁹ The debt owed by American contemporary literature to one man is clear in the list of titles published during his time at Knopf between 1976 and 1998. Four consecutive Don DeLillo novels were published in this period: *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978), *The Names* (1982), and his play *The Day Room* (1987). Also, Cynthia Ozick's work including the early *Bloodshed and Three Novellas* (1976), *Leviathan* (1982), *Art & Ardor* and *The Cannibal Galaxy* (1983), up to and including *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997). The list continues: Barry Hannah's *Airships* (1978) and *Ray* (1980), Mary Robison's *Days* (1979), and Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) and poetry in *Ultramarine* (1986). This first ten years at Knopf is a remarkable concentration of literary editorship, not only in volume, but in importance.⁷⁰ Lish also published his own work during his years at Knopf: the novels *Dear Mr Capote* (1983) and *Peru* (1986), and short fiction collections *What I Know So Far* (1984) and *Mourner at the Door* (1988). The author-text reciprocity is also signalled in Lish's dedications: *Mourner at the Door* (1988), *My Romance* (1991) and *Epigraph* (1996) are 'for' DeLillo. These inscriptions add recorded heft to the case for Lish's value, in a publishing system that was ruthless and demanding enough to warrant manipulation of Carver's works to the disintegration of the editorial relationship. Gordon Lish understood that books were marketed in the big-press publishing world under the name of the author, and appearing as one of Captain Fiction's 'team' was a mutual strength for these writers, in turn allowing Lish to publish his own works from his privileged location at Knopf.

Lish's first novel, *Dear Mr. Capote* (1983), appeared in the same year as *Cathedral*: the collection with which Carver broke with the editing relationship that broke down with *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981).⁷¹ Lish's novel, which takes the form of a letter addressed to Truman Capote from a serial killer, marks an epistolary mode which is dominant in his most successful work. Whether his novels address another writer, such as *Dear Mr. Capote*, or the would-be apprentice author, as in *Arcade, or, How to Write a Novel* (1998), Lish enters a zone of destabilised authorial identity, demonstrating his assertion that the writer should 'Never be sincere

⁶⁹ Amy Hempel, *Reasons to Live* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (New York: Scribner, 1991).

⁷⁰ An interesting, though less celebrated publication was Brian Evenson's first novel *Altmann's Tongue* (1994), the writer-academic who would later famously receive a copyright warning from Tess Gallagher for his attempt to publish details of the extent of the Carver-Lish editorial collaboration.

The Gordon Lish bibliography of Knopf publications was compiled by Blake Butler and Justin Taylor at 'Author Spotlight', March 17th 2011. < <http://htmlgiant.com/author-spotlight/gordon-lish-knoph-bibliography-1977-1995/>>.

The Brian Evenson scholarship and legal dispute is discussed in Max's 'The Carver Chronicles', noting Evenson's argument that *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* should be considered 'collaboration'. Max 1998, 35-40, 51, 56-67.

⁷¹ Gordon Lish, *Dear Mr. Capote* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

– sincerity is the death of writing'.⁷² On the compilation of his *Collected Fictions* (2010), Lish decried authorial intentionality in a characteristically paradoxical authorial pronouncement:

What was most astonishing was that the pieces seemed in sequence to beget one another. It seemed as if, even though these issued from four different texts, from four different collections, it seemed to me that they were sequential in a way that seemed wrought, that seemed purposive, that seemed intended. But I beg you to believe, there's never been anything in my life that I've done, apart from protect myself from others, that was intended.⁷³

The stylised voice and exhortation are doubtless hyperbolic, but the denial of the constructive self is repeated in Lish's insistence in the same interview that John Oakes took the leading role in producing the collection.⁷⁴ Carol Sklenicka reports that Lish claimed in interview that it was 'merely the raw material of Carver's stories that interested him', insisting his editorial work was a 'creative act in its own right'.⁷⁵ Despite the brashness of Lish's responses to questions on Carver (a subject he had clearly tired of speaking on), their substance makes a surprising fit with Carver's explanations of writing as collaborative enterprise. A 'creative act' of editing which does not posit the editor's intentionality over the intention of the work's 'original' author, suggests a model of writing as 'material' to be developed, in relation to social and literary contexts, rather than expressing the imagination of an individual alone. Thus, Lish's nickname 'Captain Fiction' expresses both the position of leadership, and the much larger (and possibly hostile) wind and waves in relation to which the metaphorical ship moves. It was in this affinity that Carver and Lish's long editing relationship and friendship began and continued, signalled by unflinching gratitude in Carver's letters. Although the cultural persistence of the myth of single authorship would cause him embarrassment with the edits to *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Carver authorised Lish's edits with few exceptions.⁷⁶

A fiction of correspondence also appears in the most celebrated stories of Lish's collection *What I Know So Far* (1984).⁷⁷ The title of the collection has a distinctive form also heard in the Lish-selected title of Carver's collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, and similarly,

⁷² Alexander Neubauer, 'Interview with Gordon Lish', *Conversations on Writing Fiction*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).

⁷³ Gordon Lish, 'Collected Fictions' interview, OD Productions, 15 March 2010. (3:30-4:15)

⁷⁴ Lish, 'Collected Fictions' interview, 3:22. John Oakes was one of the co-founders of Four Walls Eight Windows (4W8W) publishing house in 1987, that published several of Lish's works after the Knopf years. He later went on to found OR Books with Colin Robinson, who produced Lish's *Collected Fictions* (2010).

⁷⁵ Sklenicka, 187.

⁷⁶ Don DeLillo, Interview, OR Books website. < <http://www.orbooks.com/catalog/collected-fictions/> >. Letter from Raymond Carver to Gordon Lish, 7.10.1980. Sklenicka, 361,

⁷⁷ Gordon Lish, *What I Know So Far* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984). In the 'Collected Fictions' interview he rejected the term 'Stories' for his work, due to their lack of narrative plot.

seems to address the reader: although on less equal terms.⁷⁸ In *What I Know So Far*, the O. Henry award-winning story 'For Jeromé—with Love and Kisses' parodies J.D. Salinger's 'For Esmé—with Love and Squalor'.⁷⁹ Lish's story takes the affectionate voice of a father in a letter to his son to comic extremes as he complains of the son's cancellation of the unlisted number the father had to reach him on, for a holiday catch-up. Manner and emotion interweave in the repeating affectations of speech: 'Look Jerrychick, if God makes a miracle and you find the strength to call me, who knows, maybe you could afford to take an extra two seconds to give me the figures on what it costs you in so many dollars and cents...'.⁸⁰ The dated dialect of stereotypical American parents is presented ironically in the story, which multiplies variations on nicknames for the son, an overcompensation that thinly masks his contempt for the son's elusiveness: 'sweetie', 'Jerome', 'darling', 'Boychik' and 'cutie person' over just two pages.⁸¹ Such subject matter is appropriate for the expression of metafictional anxieties of literary lineage, and mediated modes of communication in genre. In the passive-aggressive voice of the father in 'For Jeromé—with Love and Kisses', the combative relations addressed in Postmodernist fictions are present. Justifiably, the globalised consideration of literature considered by Postmodernist writers and theorists introduces a vast range of oppressions that need to be overthrown, and misrepresentations that demand to be rectified. Thus, as 'For Jeromé—with Love and Kisses' progresses, Lish ridicules the father's voice, whose claims to authority have become farcical. Predictably, the father attempts to address his 'genius' son in linguistic games:

In words of one syllable, darling, there comes a time when you have to say to yourself enough is enough. ...Listen, just because I am the father and know from bitter experience, does that make me entitled to tell you what it's all about? Forget even that I am the elder, Jerome. Forget even that I as your father would jump off the tallest building for you. ...⁸²

Laughs at the father come easily, in part because (unlike in Carver) there is a continual sense that these characters are cogs in a fictional machine. The reader approaches a Lish story with multiple signals that the fiction is essentially and primarily written literary correspondence, while the text's committed lack of sincerity prevents the authorial voice from appearing to straightforwardly support any one party. Instead, the comic collision of voices and forces presents Lish's 'truth' as rising up from the dramatic presentation: in a world flatly and uniformly detached in its irony.

⁷⁸ Sklenicka, 355.

⁷⁹ J. D. Salinger, 'For Esmé—with Love and Squalor', *New Yorker*, April 8 1950.

⁸⁰ Gordon Lish, *Collected Fictions* (OR Books, 2010), 104-156. Cited hereafter as 'Lish'. References will be given as location number in the electronic edition. 2053.

⁸¹ Lish, 2040.

⁸² Lish, 2102.

Lish goes further in later stories to specifically set up the sincere speaker as a tragic and limited figure to be isolated and parodied. In the opening story of the final Knopf collection *Mourner at the Door* (1988), 'The Death of Me', a tragedy of thoroughly subverted sincerity is visited upon the earnest speaker. An unnamed ten-year-old boy attends a summer camp and succeeds in a set of athletics contests, winning a shield with more badges than any other boy before him.⁸³ The darkly comic tone of the story rises from the repeated insistence with which the boy wants 'to be so amazing', 'to do something which went beyond that point and which went beyond every other point and which people would look at'.⁸⁴ Soon the boy realises that as much as he is celebrated in the moment after his success, he is forgotten immediately afterwards. The story follows his struggle: purely, to come to terms with the emotional loss of this forgetting. As his parents ask if he wants to go somewhere special after the camp finishes, the idea of any action following this pre-eminent moment of recognition is abhorrent to him: 'But I did not know what they meant – do, do, do?'.⁸⁵ The paralysing effect of individual achievement, the 'me' of the title, paves the way for fictions that follow, such as 'The Merry Chase', which addresses the reader like a book: one who must accept the loss of agency and selfhood of death, after which one may only be addressed.⁸⁶ The 'fiction' takes the form of a stream-of-consciousness assault, to which no reply or response is heard:

I know you like I know myself, I know you like the back of my hand, I know you like a book, I know you inside out. I know you like you'll never know. ...You think the whole world is going to do a dance around you? No one is going to do a dance around you. No one even knows you are alive, they don't know you from Adam. Don't ask. Don't even begin to ask. ...I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to tell you what no one else would have the heart to tell you. I'm going to give you the benefit of my advice. Do you want some advice? You think the sun rises and sets on you, don't you?⁸⁷

The speaker's insistence on the addressee's (possibly the reader's) inconsequentiality appears as a thesis on the meaninglessness of the self in general. This subjugation, in order to more indelibly impress the speaker's 'advice' on the mind of the addressee, puts text above self: 'I don't know where to begin with you, I don't know where to start with you, I don't know how to impress upon you the importance of every single solitary word'.⁸⁸ As 'the word' is solitary and single, the speaker despairs more and more towards the end of the tirade, 'Who can talk to you? Can anyone talk to you? You don't want anyone to talk to you. So far as you are concerned, the whole world could drop

⁸³ Gordon Lish, 'The Death of Me', *Mourner at the Door* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 1-8.

⁸⁴ Lish, 1.

⁸⁵ Lish, 6.

⁸⁶ 'The Merry Chase', *Mourner at the Door*, 23-32.

⁸⁷ Lish 23-26.

⁸⁸ Lish, 28.

dead'.⁸⁹ The final note is one of frustrated failure for the speaker, and torment, that paradoxically, is caused by the silent addressee: 'Can't you just leave us in peace?'.⁹⁰ 'The Merry Chase' follows 'The Death of Me' in posing the problem of the fragmented voice of the speaker, which does not respond to the desire for a unified 'self' or single 'authoritative' identity. In a more direct relationship to the theoretical texts which Lish's brand of metafiction often implicitly addressed, these stories voice Barthes' 'dead' author, and in an incised, compressed cry.

One way of reading paradigmatically 'Minimalist' literary texts such as these by Gordon Lish would be to see them as the contraction of a literary tradition that had finally recognised its over-extensions, and was undergoing a period of contraction to reposition itself as one of a number of non-universal and specifically-relevant literatures. Lish's epistolary fictions and proudly 'insincere' style seem to answer the need for a vastly circumscribed territoriality in fiction. Lish's stories are notably lacking in geographical or spatial reference, and his epistolary form adds further mediation to obscured backgrounds. Rather than the intimate voice often identifiable in Carver's speaker, the problem of authorship in Lish usually finds its locations dispersed: a generative dissipation that expresses the deliberately inflatable and deflated characters he creates. But Carver's writings, which take their references, first, within a different set of local and personally-significant social and material coordinates, offer a fictional mode that differs fundamentally from Lish's intratextual anxieties. The metaphorical distance from the New York apartment where D.T. Max visited Lish, to Carver and Gallagher's 'Sky House' in Port Angeles, Washington, could not be greater. Entrenched in the literary movement that gave rise to Lish's urban, ironic style, Lish's stories respond to the demands and dynamics of his environments, but exclude these spaces from his texts. New York in the 1970s was not only a city of extremely compressed economic forces, it also struggled with a crises of law and order, urban decay, racial and gender equality in close quarters.⁹¹ After promoting the publication of *Cathedral* (1983), Carver went to the secluded house outside of Port Angeles, Washington (almost at the mirror-opposite corner of America), to find a space to return to productive writing away from the compressive demands of publicity and the city.⁹² From his own account, he recognised that the urban environment and lifestyle, epitomised in New York City and Gordon Lish's fictional preoccupations, eroded his sensitivity to psychological, emotional and textual influences which were crucial to his writing.⁹³ For an author as essentially invested in writing space and experience as Carver, it was natural to make Port Angeles a stable 'home' from which to write.

⁸⁹ Lish, 29.

⁹⁰ Lish, 32.

⁹¹ Robert J. Sampson, 'The Contribution of Homicide to the Decline of American Cities', *Bull NY. Acad. Med.*, 62, 5, June 1986, 562-592; 562.

⁹² Letter from RC to Richard Ford, 23/2/84. Sklenicka, 415.

⁹³ Letter from RC to Tobias Wolff, 5/3/85. Sklenicka, 415.

This move to Port Angeles was a relocation that made material the collaborative relationship that would influence all his later works. Rather than marry Tess (until the final months of his life), for Carver, living in her hometown was the move that mattered: characteristically for him, choosing material closeness over formality.

Common Ground: 'A New Path...'

Carver's last poems were published posthumously in *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989), though a remarkable portion of his final months were spent working on the compilation of the collection.⁹⁴ This last collaborative work demonstrates emphatically the intertextual emphasis through which Carver's authorial self appeared as a name, while supporting and interacting with a wide network of acknowledged writers.⁹⁵ The unusual format of *A New Path to the Waterfall* expresses a heterogeneous biographical geography, interspersing Carver's poetic voice with a large number of quoted passages (prose, poetry and non-fiction) from his literary influences: Chekhov, Milosz, Robert Lowell and Charles Wright. According to Gallagher's account, these texts were selected and arranged by Carver and ultimately finalised by her after his death.⁹⁶ As an arrangement deemed fitting to Carver's late style, Gallagher considered this work as completing the development of his greatest written authenticity. In light of this process of production, *A New Path to the Waterfall* is a climactic expression of Carver's poetic voice as reconstructed biography: a collaboration between Ray and his wife Tess, two poets in local and intimate partnership. These late poems draw upon his continued verse exploration of the individual consciousness, while equally extending his willingness to collaborate in stylistic and thematic ways with Gallagher. Whether the quotations of *A New Path to the Waterfall* are attributed to Carver's personal literary influences or are read through Gallagher's collaboration, they represent an intertextual relation constructed around the image of a constructed authorial 'self': the 'I' of the poems. This intertextual and social relation in the text is distinct from, yet related to the obscured social relations of memory (as in 'The Author of Her Misfortune') that preceded the evocation of the generative space.

Defining the intertextual connections in Carver's poems is a task that requires attention to the spaces in which they are often framed. The unusually direct and social intertexts of *A New Path to the Waterfall* were, appropriately, the main subject of Tess Gallagher's introduction to the volume. Focusing on Anton Chekhov, by far the most frequently quoted intertextual presence, she

⁹⁴ AOU, xxix.

⁹⁵ AOU, 227-294.

⁹⁶ AOU, 315.

wrote: 'Chekhov seemed a companion soul, as if Ray had somehow won permission through a lifetime of admiration to take up his work with the audacity of love'.⁹⁷ Gallagher explicitly presented this relation to Chekhov as a reciprocal conversation across literary history. In this introduction she writes of a sense of a constructed space for reciprocity with Chekhov, the writer and man himself:

...it was as if we'd discovered another Chekhov inside Chekhov. But because I'd been looking at the passages with Ray's poems in mind, there was the sense that Chekhov had stepped toward us, and that while he remained in his own time, he seemed also to have become our contemporary.⁹⁸

Indeed, Chekhov inhabits the spatial descriptions of *A New Path to the Waterfall*, the Russian's biographical narrative interweaving and interrelating with Carver's own biography. There are fifteen passages from Chekhov's stories, and most prominently, his lesser-known work of non-fiction, *A Journey to Sakhalin*, which describes a six thousand-mile trip by train, river, and horse-drawn carriage, to assess conditions in the penal colony on Sakhalin Island.⁹⁹ The selection of passages from this account harmonises in each case with Carver's surrounding poems, marking in the page's blank spaces, the figure of death and the remaking of biographical identity. The Chekhovian fragment 'Night Dampness' describes the 'heavy funereal silence' of the river, passing by the dark flow where 'there is no one/ to catch the fish and no tackle to catch it with'.¹⁰⁰ Immediately before, Carver's poem 'The Sturgeon' resurfaces a childhood memory of his father telling a great fish story, and afterwards, the poem 'Another Mystery' writes in fisherman's terms of the suits the speaker's grandfather and father were buried in: 'Today I reeled this clutter up from the depths./ Just an hour or so ago when I picked up my own suit'.¹⁰¹ Later, the maximally-referential 'His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed With Notes' follows a quotation from Chekhov's 'The Bird Market'.¹⁰² This short passage describes the judgement of the 'bird-fancier' who values the bird's ability to 'sing in solitude, if/ you can'.¹⁰³ In apparent answer to Chekhov's challenge, Carver's poem dances with its musical allusion, as well as fictional, pop culture and anecdotal fragments. The voice is all his own, yet is constructed from collaboration in vastly distant locations.

On the page facing 'His Bathrobe', appears a straightforwardly-titled piece 'Some Prose on Poetry', in which Carver gives an explicitly biographical description of an early generative space, a

⁹⁷ AOU, 315.

⁹⁸ AOU, 313.

⁹⁹ The Chekhov quotations are from 'Peasants', 'A Visit to Friends' and 'The Wife'. Anton Chekhov, *The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin*, trans. Luba Terpak (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967).

¹⁰⁰ 'Night Dampness', AOU, 254. ll.2, 5-6.

¹⁰¹ 'The Sturgeon', AOU, 253-4. ll.23-24. 'Another Mystery', AOU, 255.

¹⁰² 'His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed With Notes', AOU, 262-264, 'The Bird Market', 262.

¹⁰³ 'The Bird Market', ll.1, 7-8.

material counterpart to his populated textual geographies.¹⁰⁴ Locating the memory in specific time and geography (1956-7; Yakima, Washington), he relates his boyhood wonder at an old man's living room: 'There was even a little library over against one wall of the room. (I'd never seen a *personal* library before; rows and rows of books on built-in shelves in someone's private residence)'.¹⁰⁵ Carver relates this boyhood experience directly to his later publication successes, and in the final paragraph, summarises the process of reconstruction enabled by that space:

I can only say that this encounter really happened, and in much the way I've described. I was just a pup then, but nothing can explain, or explain away, such a moment: the moment when the very thing I needed most in my life – call it a polestar – was casually, generously given to me. Nothing remotely approaching that moment has happened since.¹⁰⁶

The biographical interest in establishing the authenticity and singularity of self and the moment of reconstruction connects here with a described material and purportedly 'real' space. Further, this situates the earliest image of the author in a room full of books amongst which his works would one day take their place. This piece expresses both Carver's position at the height of his popularity and success, prose by an author who had finally *arrived* – but also the need to create such an image, necessitating a lifetime's narrative construction to occupy a place that seemed tangibly close, yet 'a mystery' to a teenage delivery boy.¹⁰⁷ Approaching this late generative space: an original source for Carver's authorial-biographical self, the reader of *A New Path to the Waterfall* witnesses reconstruction enacted in repeating and increasingly resonant material sites. As a result, the biographical image of Raymond Carver has become a site for the reconstructed intertextual relations that have been written into his poetic texts.

Carver's poetic collections, most especially *A New Path to the Waterfall*, progress towards increasing disruption and remaking of social and intertextual relations, and increasingly collaborative biographical geographies. The density of referential connections in *A New Path to the Waterfall* links Carver's biographical narratives to a wider literary landscape, and in this, combines their narratives with a lyric fragmentation of temporality. In turn, poetic geographies such as in *A New Path...* offer multiple paths to generative spaces for writers who follow him, as sites where successive writerly 'selves' relate socially and intertextually. Such writers and readers may find, in the spaces and silences on the page, the image of death, and from that, a moment of creation.

¹⁰⁴ 'Some Prose on Poetry', *AOU*, 265-7.

¹⁰⁵ 'Some Prose on Poetry', para. 2.

¹⁰⁶ 'Some Prose on Poetry', para. 7.

¹⁰⁷ 'Some Prose on Poetry', para. 2.

'Instructions to the Double'

Despite the heterogeneity and equity of Carver's geographies, they are certainly not without their own special persons and sites. Among the passionately acknowledged friends and loved ones in his 'second life', Carver's relationship with Tess Gallagher was central and most essential to his work. As a Carverian version of Lish's favoured mode of acknowledgement, the dedication to *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989) reads emphatically (minimally and plurally, too): 'Tess. Tess. Tess. Tess'.¹⁰⁸ Carver's biographical texts increasingly reference and acknowledge Gallagher's influence, too. Both in her encouragement to work with a diversity of poetic material in *A New Path to the Waterfall*, and in the nuts and bolts work of editing and helping with the compilation of his collections, Gallagher's poetic modes and interests were absorbed in various ways in Carver's work. Although Carver and Gallagher first met a few months after his 'new life' began, their writings before that date show similarities, which strengthened as they worked together in later years, suggesting his metaphor for poetic creation: as 'water comes together with other water'.¹⁰⁹ Briefly considering her early work reveals the affinities that allowed for their synergistic collaboration, and illustrates how the themes and figures discussed so far play into their creation of populated fictional geographies. Tess Gallagher's first full-length collection of poetry, *Instructions to the Double* (1976), is primarily concerned with the poetic voice that, through its fissures and divisions, finds meaning in a natural and populated landscape.¹¹⁰ The collection appeared as the inaugural publication of The Graywolf Press (established in her hometown of Port Angeles, Washington), and the success of these poems resulted in her touring the same writer's conferences as Carver in the late 1970s. In *Instructions to the Double* Gallagher finds in the plants and animals of her upbringing, images that resonated with her familial experience and relationships. As in Carver's letter to Adelman, Gallagher's poems repeatedly establish the imaginative importance of 'the land', in basic, working wordings.¹¹¹ Gallagher's 'ground' is essentially populated and possessed by its people and buildings, or, occasionally, a strong sense of their absence. Her poem 'The Coats' compares the garments of the speaker's grandmother to the hiding places and geographical movements of her life.¹¹² The final lines turn, in an inversion and literalisation of the central metaphor, to the absence of the

¹⁰⁸ Carver, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, ix.

¹⁰⁹ The title of the first collection of poems Carver wrote after moving to the 'Sky House' in Port Angeles, WA, originally to write a novel.

¹¹⁰ Tess Gallagher, *Instructions to the Double* (Port Angeles, WA: Graywolf Press, 1976). Also collected in *Amplitude* (St Paul, MA: Graywolf Press, 1987).

¹¹¹ In an interview for the BBC documentary on Carver's life *Dreams Are What We Wake Up From*, dir. Daisy Goodwin (1989), author Jay McInerney recalls a conversation with Carver about McInerney's use of the word 'earth'. Carver considered it to be too grandiose in the context, and convinced him to change it to 'ground'.

¹¹² 'The Coats', ll.16-20, ll.32-33.

grandmother, who becomes part of a winter landscape, now clothed in the cold her coats once protected against:¹¹³

That year
the winter came over the ground
like a rich white pelt.
I thought of you accepting it,
something chosen, a comfort
that had sought you out
in the cold of the land.¹¹⁴

The final line suggests the indifference of death, but also opposes that sense, connecting the dead with a memorialising 'land'. The epigraph '*for Mary Kepler (1884-1966)*', twins 'The Coats' with 'Cows, a Vision', similarly inscribed '*for Porter Morris*'.¹¹⁵ The poem compares the speaker to a bird, whose flight cuts across the fields with a brief shadow, 'born that way... lifting a straw'.¹¹⁶ Against this, the addressee inhabits the land with the same gravity as these large animals, imagined as 'never born. They came/ with the land, with the bucket'.¹¹⁷ The visionary potential of the cows, however, exists in the dusk or before dawn, away from the everyday witness - 'a secret moon swells in them' - both a threat and a fantastical possibility.¹¹⁸ As in 'The Coats', the final note emerges around death: this time, in mutual futurity:

When we die, I tell you,
that moon will find its stars and nothing
will keep them down. You aren't worried.
For you there is only more good land.¹¹⁹

In poems such as these, acceptance of death is presented as a 'vision' of transformative integration into the land. The objects through which the addressee's life is expressed, whether commodities or animals, become correlatives for an acceptance of the connective origins and destinies of land and person.

Yet the distinction between land and person remains a primary component of this expression, and a thematic concentration across the poems in *Instructions to the Double*.¹²⁰ In

¹¹³ 'The Coats', *Amplitude*, 20-1.

¹¹⁴ 'The Coats', ll.43-49.

¹¹⁵ 'Cows, a Vision', *Amplitude*, 23-4.

¹¹⁶ 'Cows, a Vision', ll.10-11.

¹¹⁷ 'Cows, a Vision', ll.12-13.

¹¹⁸ 'Cows, a Vision', l.32.

¹¹⁹ 'Cows, a Vision', ll.34-37.

'Corona', a voice speaks to a 'Personable shadow', which is both able to 'follow me into this/ daylight-dream, the one even my body/ knows nothing of', and is haloed by 'This flesh... the meat you drag daily'.¹²¹ A poem of strong images that explore breakages and inverted relations, 'Corona' makes three-line stanzas overcome the logic of a simple interior and exterior, body and mind. Through these images, journeys progress with hazard and suffering: 'Let us/ navigate each pleasure, each pain/ like a doorway, its ambush: the mouth, the bouquet'.¹²² Later, a train is missed, 'everything passing through', a brother 'falls again/ from the tractor in 1957', and 'A woman's body/ flies out of the house/ like an insult'.¹²³ The movements and expulsions across the land are arrested in water, reflected in the speaker's voice:

This water is a memory
of sleep folding us
under. Your face
covers mine; the moon of your face blasted from a train

through faults of light in the trees – again and
again cut off, this water
taking up our hands.¹²⁴

Like in Carver's verse, repeated 'cuts' or 'faults' of light from the dry world separate the historical narrative of a disaster on a train, and raise the arms of the ambiguous speaker and addressee. In these final stanzas, superimpositions of memory, folding consciousness and faces fade into a final, physical raising of hands. As before, this is not transcendence, but a contingency of relations: agency is gone as the water 'takes up' the organs most representative of human action. With the dissolution of these verses, 'The Coats' and 'Cows, A Vision', there is an assertion of the necessary distinctions of the self in relation to a violent material world, and beyond that, the possibility of a poetic outgrowing from the collisions of entropy. Thus, the voice in the poems of *Instructions to the Double* often announces the primary coordinates of self and land, and follows these divided specifications with a progressive enfolding of one into another, resulting in a moment of abstraction, metaphor or image that is a memorialising inscription against death's effacement.

¹²⁰ See also, especially, 'Breasts' (*Amplitude*, 8-9), 'The Woman Who Raised Goats' (10-11), 'Black Money' (15-16), 'Clearing' (17-18), 'A Poem in Translation' (26-27), 'The Calm' (33) and 'Rhododendrons' (39-40).

¹²¹ 'Corona', *Amplitude*, 34-35. ll.1, 1-3, 4.

¹²² 'Corona', ll.8-10.

¹²³ 'Corona', ll.12-13, 15-16, 16-18.

¹²⁴ 'Corona', ll.24-30.

Highlighting Gallagher's belief in the poet's ability to accomplish this process, the first edition of *Instructions to the Double* included a frontispiece: a drawing of a woman whispering into the ear of another woman, who in turn shadows the face of the whisperer from view.¹²⁵ This picture, which interprets the image of the title poem, imagines the 'instruction' as a tender, close engagement: a tone that is confirmed in the poem's opening lines:

So now it's your turn,
little mother of silences, little
father of half-belief. Take up
this face, these daily rounds
with a cabbage under each arm
convincing the multitudes
that a well-made-anything
could save them. ...¹²⁶

The 'double', which is addressed by many names in the poem and fulfils a variety of roles in the presence of different audiences, is a generative figure, multiplying the speaker's self and extending the range of her 'mission' beyond all boundaries. The first such extension, across a division of space, occurs at the close of the first verse-paragraph, as the speaker is positioned 'in a house on the other side/ of the country./ / I'm staying here'.¹²⁷ The double, meanwhile, is instructed to continue in her movement, walking into 'some bars alone/ with a slit in your skirt'.¹²⁸ The sense of female identity is strong as this walking double must 'Let/ the men follow you on the street/ with their clumsy propositions, their/ loud hatreds of this and that'.¹²⁹ The hatred of the men is heard through the 'calling' of a list of names: mythic, prosaic and profane. Against these casual, crass labels, 'the double' is told to hold up her head, and walk on.

The journey of the double continues after verbal assaults, toward an imaginative space of combustive energy:

the temple of the poets, not
the one like a run-down country club,
but the one on fire
with so much it wants
to be done with. Say all the last words
and the first: hello, goodbye, yes,
I, no, please, always, never.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ The drawing is by Laura Battle, which was based on a Helen Morse photograph in which Gallagher herself poses as 'the double'.

¹²⁶ 'Instructions to the Double', *Amplitude*, 6-7. ll.1-8.

¹²⁷ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.11-13.

¹²⁸ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.17-21.

¹²⁹ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.21-24.

¹³⁰ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.35-41.

Like the earlier suggestion of the double's movement away from the genteel suggestion of the 'ornate piano/ in a house' to the bar and the street, the 'country club' opposes the 'temple of the poets' as spaces designated within very different social and economic systems.¹³¹ The country club, 'run-down' in its first instance is already a ruin, the call it may extend to the poet in the next stanza: necessitating supernatural and folkloric protection.¹³² In the penultimate stanza the double is instructed to 'burn' for anyone who would call her a witch, identifying the travelling poet with the temple of the poets 'on fire/ with so much it wants/ to be done with'.¹³³ In this connection of temple (designated, constructed space) and double (instructed, constructed persona), the metaphorical and literal effects of burning both seem possible. While the 'anyone' who 'calls you less or more than you are' may 'burn for you', the sense of a trial by fire persists into the final stanza: 'You/ could die out there. You/ could live forever'.¹³⁴ As the 'you' is separated from the possible results of the mission, the self has separated from its double, arriving in a room (figured formally, in a stanza) where death or immortality are possible. The prominent movements of the collection's title poem signify the poet's desires: for independence from a stifling domestic fixity, for independence from labels called by those who would appropriate her, and for distance from the cramped institutions that already show their limited place in historical memory. The walk of the double, then, is the journey prescribed generously by Carver to Adelman; it accomplishes spatially, the victory of the poet over obstructive formal divides or fissures. For the reader who revisits the poem, this walk becomes a celebration, actualising the permanence of its movements into an inexhaustible affirmation.

The comparison of Gallagher's instructions with Carver's letter to Adelman is as informative in the differences it reveals, as much as the similarities. In the Swain interviews, Gallagher argues for the distinctiveness of her writing, in its frequent explorations of very un-Carverian mythic or magical references.¹³⁵ Yet corresponding foundational dynamics and psychologies shape both Gallagher's and Carver's respective imaginative geographies. As we have seen, the first movement of these dynamics is to divide the self from a singular entity, into a more fluid and flexible duality. This 'cut' is revealed in its most resonant experiential forms: containers of life (architecture and, behind that, economic necessity), and the limits of mortality (the body and death). In all these forms, acceptance of the necessity of division reveals a subsequent outflowing of meaning and expression, from the

¹³¹ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.10-11.

¹³² 'Instructions to the Double', l.36. 'Lizzie Borden' (l.44), 'Show him your axe.../...with a silver/ blade' (ll.45-47).

¹³³ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.50, 37-39.

¹³⁴ 'Instructions to the Double', ll.51-53, 54-56.

¹³⁵ Swain 1990.

gaps and silences that emerge. Carver wrote in a letter to a 'Mr. Hallstrom', of the necessity to allow himself time to recover after achieving sobriety: '...it took me at least six months – more – after I stopped drinking before I could attempt to do any more than write a few letters'.¹³⁶ In very similar terms, Gallagher recalled in a 1993 interview:

When I've been most devastated by life I've fallen entirely silent, as I did the first six months after Ray's death. Poems could have nothing to do there in the abyss. ...In January of 1989 I did write "Red Poppy" – the first poem of any consequences after his death. ...I wrote these poems in Sky House... Like someone who names a house Sky House, I'm always looking for actual ways to extend my enclosures - my houses, my poems, my lost loves – by noticing the larger space which contains me – sky. Hard not to be hopeful with that over you, right?¹³⁷

This expression of the poetic power of 'sky' works through an insistence on local, specific 'containers', rather than the limitless dimension that might be otherwise referred to. Gallagher's 'sky' is a 'larger space which contains', rather than the transcendent possibility of the universe beyond it. Similarly, she seeks 'actual ways to extend [her] enclosures', rather than escape them: an actuality that spurns the suggestion of escapism. The architectural form that she constructed, 'Sky House' indeed, expresses both: a larger visual field of light, reflected in the local, material frame of the home.

'Red Poppy' appears as the second poem in the collection *Moon Crossing Bridge*, published in 1992 as Gallagher's tribute and account of her mourning for her husband.¹³⁸ The collection stands, as a whole, as a search for 'extend[ed] enclosures', in the joining of material and symbolic content. The poem 'Infinite Room' suggests this in its title, which combines local material relations - 'love in a room' – with expansions of mortality and temporality: 'one who extends/ the moment with its death intact'.¹³⁹ The status of *Moon Crossing Bridge* as a collection explicitly *about* Carver and her experiences so close to the loss of such a publically mourned figure gave the collection a charged signifying correspondence. As 'the double' goes out from the poem's speaker, and the Sky House represents a version of 'larger space which contains', *Moon Crossing Bridge* is a paradigmatic exploration of the memorialising potential of poetry. As part of a wider set of texts that include biography, criticism and interview, this poetry is a component of Carver's textual neighborhood that corresponds most closely to the social and collaborative instinct of his writings. In a 2009 interview

¹³⁶ Adelman, 105-7; 105.

¹³⁷ T. L. Kelly, 'Interview with Tess Gallagher', *Left Bank*, Spring 1993 (Victoria, BC: Blue Heron Publishing, 1993). < <http://www.q7.com/~terri/literati/interv2.htm> >, para. 22.

¹³⁸ Tess Gallagher, *Moon Crossing Bridge* (St Paul, MA: Graywolf Press, 1992).

¹³⁹ 'Infinite Room', *Moon Crossing Bridge*, 77. ll.10, 17-18.

conducted by the Library of America to coincide with the publication of the *Collected Stories*, Gallagher spoke to her belief in the ongoing work of Carver's texts, by publishers, critics, and, by implication, the holders of literary estates such as herself:

In commercial publishing there is an assumption that when a writer dies, the canon of his or her work is closed. But literary history, like all forms of history, is not a turnstile but a river. It is forever in motion, overflowing its banks, uprooting solid structures, uncovering old-new treasures.¹⁴⁰

Gallagher's determination to continue work for Carver's estate has been criticised, suspected and much publicised.¹⁴¹ Yet examination of her poetry predating and concurrent with Carver's own work affirms the continued flow of conversation around the texts is an essential corollary to the history of their contemporary reception. The shared territory traversed in their texts makes their dynamism and relevance a matter of continued renewal, making space outside of authorised histories, either in the indigenous symbols and myths of Gallagher's early work, or the experience from memory in Carver's poems and stories. *Moon Crossing Bridge*, as the title signifies, connects the two socialising movements in a way that Gallagher's prefatory materials do not, finding in hybrid and spatial form a correspondence that approaches the collaboration of *A New Path to the Waterfall*.

'A little story and... a moment.'

The relationships in and surrounding Carver's texts illuminate several productive modes which are essential to the reader's understanding of his populated spaces: neighborliness, collaboration, and reciprocity. Where Carver defined his own more intimate sense of 'influence' in his insistence on the 'real world' proximities of friendship (in the essay 'Fires'), through textual relationships he wrote across the line of death in ways that reflected back on the brevity of living association. Thus, the 'drawing near' to Chekhov in his late story 'Errand' and *A New Path to the Waterfall* show signs of a mode that might have continued had Carver survived longer: constructing textual geographies that expand the communicative range beyond temporality. Thus, Carver's biographical texts frequently memorialise affectionate association, as with his dedications to Tess,

¹⁴⁰ Rich Kelley, 'The Library of America Interviews Tess Gallagher, William L. Stull, and Maureen P. Carroll about Raymond Carver'. http://www.loa.org/images/pdf/LOA_interview_Gallagher_Stull_Carroll_on_Carver.pdf, 10.

¹⁴¹ Gallagher's close work with the critic William L. Stull spans many years and most prominently resulted in the publication of *Beginners* in 2009. Gallagher's work has been famous for its protection of the copyrights as well as its publications. As recently as January 2012, her name made publishing news as she filed a copyright suit against Skyhorse Publishing, which recently bought Arcade, a company which previously published *Carver Country* in 1994.

and his reviews that prioritise the documentation of authorial affinities.¹⁴² Carver wrote a short piece for the periodical *Literary Cavalcade* on 'For Tess', the final poem in *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (1985), where he identifies 'one of the few love poems' he'd written as between modes: it 'tells a little story *and* captures a moment'.¹⁴³ Carver here refers to the relationship between autobiography and 'story' in his texts, but also describes his synthesis of elements in both lyric and narrative poetry. He writes, further,

Remember that a poem is not simply an act of self-expression. A poem or a story – any literary work that presumes to call itself art – is an act of communication between the writer and reader. Anyone can express himself, or herself, but what writers and poets want to do in their work, more than simply *express* themselves, is communicate, yes?¹⁴⁴

The final inquisitive, affirmative word reflects the assertion back onto the passage itself, and yet this project is also addressed throughout Carver's works in his lyric forms: 'to capture and hold – that is to say, make permanent – a specific moment through a progression of specific details'.¹⁴⁵ The description Carver gives here is brilliant in its brevity: expressing a process that, in dynamic action and skill, accomplishes something that grows out of - but will outlast - the rise and fall of lived experience.

In his prose essays, Carver's arguments for his preferred modes of writing frequently return to the central questions of human, experiential concern. Against his criticism in 'On Writing', against fictionists who create 'a place uninhabited by anything recognizably human, a place of interest only to a few scientific specialists', I have shown Carver's forms and terms as situated in a populated literary landscape.¹⁴⁶ From these spatial and referential representations, his fictions benefit and salute the robust formal architectures of previous innovation. His own innovative contribution, which he claims in the same piece, resulted in a readiness to relate formal traditions in specific and sympathetic ways to social and material zones that had lacked these applications. As an example of this, his readiness to bridge and cross between narrative and lyric modes, firstly, allowed a range of expression in spatial terms, the narrative journey connecting Carver's fictions to the Regionalist traditions to explore and observe progression and decay on the landscape. The lyric moment, which replaces chronological progression with the singularity, uses the gained capacity to introduce memory, dream and textual relationships more readily in a generative space that offers to inscribe

¹⁴² Collected in *Call if You Need Me* (2000).

¹⁴³ Raymond Carver, Untitled essay, *Literary Cavalcade* (Scholastic, Inc: New York) 39,7, 1987: 8. Later collected as 'On "For Tess"', *Call if You Need Me*, 194-6.

¹⁴⁴ 'On "For Tess"', 195.

¹⁴⁵ 'On "For Tess"', 195.

¹⁴⁶ Carver, 'On Writing', 89.

onto the blanks of the narrative map. Bob Adelman's book is a version of this dual expression, taking Carver's characteristically liberating narrative journey, and offering visual supplements appropriate to Carver's lyric style. The combinative effect of poetry and the visual presentation of scene or face in physical immediacy, figures across Carver's collaborations: a lyric consciousness, radically located and immediately present. The constancies of texts such as these avoid the difficulty identified in Derrida's 'The Law of Genre': 'Thus, as soon as a genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity'.¹⁴⁷ In Carver's geographies, the lines of demarcation make places beyond such competing announcements and expectations.

Linda Anderson theorises autobiography as the presentation of the writer as distinct 'self' on a journey of personal progression, told by stepping outside of the flow of experience and lived time that is recorded in the account.¹⁴⁸ For an *author's* autobiography, the experience of writing that must occupy at least a proportion of the biographical text means that the account has an odd circularity: a 'stepping outside of time' in order to record analogous 'steppings outside of time'. Literary autobiographies can lose the reader's interest for precisely this reason. Yet the core references to Carver's biography in his writings escape this trap through the acknowledged affinities between experience and fiction in his work in general. As my previous chapters propose, the material experience of life in suburban and natural spaces is as essential to Carver's communicative writings, as are the relationships between writers and texts that speak across the absences at the dark boundaries of human life. As Tess Gallagher wrote, for both the remembered dead and the forgotten living, the re-inscription of lost voices in the landscape was the ethical accomplishment of Carver's writings, in both personal and national geographies. The influence of his representations of forgotten populated spaces on writers in the years following his death is evidence as much as the continued publication of biographical works on his life: 'Carver Country' is an indelible and valued territory in shared literary geography, adding and echoing beyond the material or biographical alone, into a generous representation of a generative world.

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre' *Glyph*, 7, 202-209; 203-4.

¹⁴⁸ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 8-9.

Chapter 6

Words and Actions

Articles and monographs on Carver's work have often cited the wide-ranging influence of his stories, with a proposed literary progeny emerging from the MFA programmes of the 1980s after reading his fiction.¹ Sometimes this has become a reason for writing against Carver's legacy, while allowing for the significant power of the original texts.² Yet these groupings have always appeared as contestable and a suggestive indicator, at best. However, they have demonstrated both the breadth of acknowledgement of Carver's work from other writers, and the distance to which that influence could 'travel'. Jay McInerney is a frequently quoted connection, recounting being taught by Carver at Syracuse.³ Yet his debut and most celebrated work *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) jumps generationally to a very different landscape, a whirl of yuppie drug-consumption in an urban scene.⁴ Despite what McInerney admits as a Carverian realism and sense of experience in space, his memory of Carver's editing practice is that the older author urged him to pare down his language, arguing for a closer precision than found in McInerney's early prose.⁵ He observed of Carver's innovation, that it 'completely dispensed with the romantic egotism that made the Hemingway idiom such an awkward model for other writers in the late 20th century'.⁶ The relationship between ego, self and space was at the centre of McInerney's fiction, including the experimentalist second-person narration in *Bright Lights, Big City*.

The nexus of structured space, bridging between the formal and biographical, can be traced as it appears in a range of forms after Carver's focussed texts. These works are recognisable as part of the same fictional tradition. However, beyond the aesthetic of 'realism' or 'the minimal', they have brought a generative spatial fiction to wider expression. The degree to which Carver's texts

¹ Tom Grimes, *Mentor: A Memoir*, (New York: Tin House Books, 2010), 28. Cynthia Whitney Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story: Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison*, Studies in Comparative Literature, 28, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

² D. T. Max, *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*, (London: Granta, 2012), 59-60.

³ Jay McInerney, 'Raymond Carver: A Still, Small Voice', *The New York Times*, 'Books', August 6, 1989.

⁴ Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York: Vintage, 1984).

⁵ McInerney 1989, para. 17.

⁶ McInerney 1989, quoted in Rebein, 47.

imagined these applications is the discovery of his artistic value: whether the represented geographies of his work would result in a form to correspond with lived experience in the decades after his death. My investigation will speak to the situation of fiction in the age of hypertext and the social web, too.⁷ When access to texts, images, and ideas becomes potentially limitless, the unique values of those commodities that cannot be infinitely reproduced (most emphatically, *real estate*) appears most clearly.

From the neighborhoods of Carver's texts and his collaborative relationships, roads lead outwards to some of the foremost names in literary publishing after his death. While his influence is felt in contemporary American 'realism', his work also connects with writers who might usually be considered part of more experimental traditions.⁸ As McInerney's prose is to Carver's, so do these authors demonstrate the application of Carver's work beyond the terms in which it has been considered thus far. In the combination of structured form and spatial presentation, as well as the visual and fragmentary poetics of Carver's spaces, contemporary American space challenges the writer to maintain a democratic and inclusive accessibility, while exercising the sophisticated linguistic forms to achieve Ezra Pound's moral imperative: 'fundamental accuracy of statement'.⁹ For this task, a spatial form is ascendant, and is transferrable into genres suitable for a range of environments and communities.

Writer as Realtor: Richard Ford

Of the literary friendships recorded in Carver's prose, none is as frequently or as enthusiastically documented as his association with the novelist and story writer, Richard Ford.¹⁰ Carver's affinity with his fellow 'Dirty Realist' is attested in his review of *The Ultimate Good Luck* (1981), which praises the novel's search across the American South for a 'clear frame of reference' against a 'vision of loss [and] ...healing redemption'.¹¹ However, in comparison with Carver's work, Ford's use of longer forms connects the grouping of the 1980s 'renaissance' with the tradition of High Realism, which typically concerned itself with the representation of social spaces as a kind of fictional documentation of 'the world'. When Realism appeared in greatest prominence, it was in the large novels of the late nineteenth century: in France, with the avant-gardism of Zola and Balzac, and

⁷ Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*, Second Edition (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001). See Chapter 7: 'Interactive Fiction', 121-160.

⁸ Richard Pearce, 'The Limits of Realism', *College English*, 31, 4, Jan. 1970, 335-343.

⁹ Quoted in Kelly 1996, 228.

¹⁰ 'On Writing', and 'Friendship', *Call if You Need Me*, 87-92, 117-122.

¹¹ 'Richard Ford's Stark Vision of Loss, Healing', *Call if You Need Me*, 253-5; 255.

in America, Mark Twain, Jack London and Henry James.¹² These works invested in the expression of place, historical moment, class, the values of civilisation and a sense of its chronological progression. In his synthesis of this Realist tradition with an engagement with the literary and philosophical tides of his own time, Ford's novels, like Carver's stories, connect across disparate geographical and cultural referents. A fictional work with an expansive geographical mode (whether a 'neighborhood' of shorter texts, or undivided), can record the 'state of the nation', while retaining a focus on the material, immediate and the 'local'. As the best example of this dual capacity, Ford's 1500-page 'Bascombe trilogy' begins with *The Sportswriter* (1986), and progresses with one novel midway in each decade: *Independence Day* (1995) and *The Lay of the Land* (2006).¹³ Across these novels, dramatic action is narrated by a developing and essentially mobile protagonist, Frank Bascombe. In the first novel, Frank is, as the title suggests, a journalist for sports stories, and in each novel, the events of a few days are compressed into a close documentary focus, bringing the particular authorial voice of its narrator to express a continuous, visible landscape.

The term 'landscape' is appropriate for both the scale and presentation of Ford's novels, in relation to his significant body of short fiction.¹⁴ In the long form, his writing can mobilise an extended rhythm of movement while maintaining a 'realist' line of reference from the protagonist's directing consciousness. While Carver's narratives never allow a single view or voice to settle or establish for long (at least, without being challenged or contextualised within a milieu of competing forces), Ford's Bascombe, as a sustained presence, offers the closest thing possible to a 'still point in the turning world'.¹⁵ As social and family interactions, travel, death and disaster occur, he is changed but not muted. His reliability is linked to the long form, when the world he inhabits is revealed to be less stable with the unfolding of its temporal arc. Like the recurrence of the authorial-biographical 'Raymond Carver' in Carver's texts, Frank Bascombe is, as a subject of a long, chronologically progressive and realist novel, both a writer, and written. Employed at 'a New York sports magazine you have all heard of', Frank made his money writing short stories, then 'wrote half a short novel soon after... and then put it in the drawer, where it has been ever since'.¹⁶ Fitting the style of a journalist, the novel's first lines of self-narration suggest the long fiction of a previous era in a 'straight' assertion of the protagonist's coordinates:

¹² Bernard R. Bowron, Jr., 'Realism in America', *Comparative Literature*, 3, 3 (Summer, 1951), 268-285; 277.

¹³ The trilogy appeared as a combined edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

¹⁴ Ford's short stories were published in *Rock Springs* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), *Women With Men: Three Stories* (New York: Knopf, 1997), and *A Multitude of Sins* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

¹⁵ The line from Eliot's *Four Quartets* was appropriated for the title of a documentary film about the life and political career of Ronald Reagan. Stephen K. Bannon, *Still Point in a Turning World: Ronald Reagan and His Ranch*, Young America's Foundation, 2011.

¹⁶ *The Sportswriter*, 3.

CHAPTER 1

My name is Frank Bascombe. I am a sportswriter.

For the past fourteen years I have lived here at 19 Hoving Road, Haddam, New Jersey, in a large Tudor house bought when a book of short stories I wrote sold to a movie producer for a lot of money...¹⁷

In its listing of name, occupation, address and access to means, this opening passage marks a primary concern with individual identity and personhood as recognised within the institutions of society ('Christian' and last names given), and in conjunction, the importance of those features to the traditional treatment of the subject in this Western literary form. In addition, beginning at the point of Frank's current status and memory within 'the past fourteen years' maintains focus on the tractable, and (one could argue) the particularly American middle-class virtue of cohesive appearance. The economics of this large book come first: Frank sells real estate within the novel, and 'realism' to the reader.

This primary accounting of facts and surfaces contrasts with a continual struggle that Frank Bascombe faces in *The Sportswriter*, which he describes as his tendency towards 'dreaminess'. Characterised by himself as an immature longing for transcendental escape and validation, he first identifies this impulse as he stares up at the stars while his wife rages in the house after finding letters from another woman. The necessity of movement beyond 'dreaminess', Frank discovers, can best be accomplished through a return to the material landscape. By his own account, Ford's trilogy is geographically specific in its vital functionality. In a 2007 interview with Allan Gregg, he described the conception of the project, beginning with his wife's suggestion that he write a novel about somebody 'happy'. On asking himself how he'd write such a novel, Ford decided to concentrate on the land:

I knew about New Jersey. We were living in New Jersey. So I thought – okay - I'll write a novel about somebody who lives in New Jersey, and is happy, or wants to try to be it. What would be the arc of such a book, and one of the things I decided was that he would write a paean to New Jersey. He would write a book that celebrated New Jersey... and it has served me relatively well for fifteen hundred pages.¹⁸

Beside Ford's claims for the novel's inception, Frank Bascombe appears as a directing presence, narrating, and finding solutions in the clearly described locale. At the 'sad end of a sad day' in *The Sportswriter*, after Frank's friend Walter has been discovered dead by local police, having shot

¹⁷ *The Sportswriter*, 3.

¹⁸ Allan Gregg, *Allan Gregg in Conversation*, TV Ontario. 21 January 2007.

himself with his duck gun, Frank stands on a suburban front lawn asking: 'Where, in fact, do you go if you're me?', and more generally, 'Where do sportswriters go when the day is, in every way, done, and the possibilities so limited that neither good nor bad seems a threat?'.¹⁹ His thoughts identify this as 'not, though, a genuine empty moment... I'm beyond all hopes, much as I was on the night X burned her hope chest while I watched the stars'.²⁰ This memory of another moment of 'dreaminess' standing on a lawn and disconnecting from loss, propels his thoughts to a spiralling reflection on the 1933 film *The Invisible Man* and beyond it, soaring off towards 'God himself, who does not let us stay invisible long, since that is a state he reserves for himself'.²¹ Deflected back into a determination towards recovered visibility, in the next paragraph he regains mobility through the landscape in the most culturally establishing of material movements: 'I drive...'.²²

Frank's drive through Haddam, 'a first-class place for invisibility', makes a map of places that both invite and resist representation, like the cemetery where his son Ralph rests: 'where the invisible virtually screams at you, cries out for quiet, quiet and more quiet'.²³ Next, Frank's 'X's house, where he knows 'my children are', but, like Ralph, they can't be seen. Soon, the suburban streets yield up friendly shapes: 'a red glow warms the side bar window', and 'at Village Hall a light still burns in the glass lobby'.²⁴ He hears 'the soft spring monotone of all hometown suburbs' and narrates that 'Someone might say there's nothing quite so lonely as a suburban street at night when you are all alone. But he would be dead wrong'.²⁵ The question of subjective invisibility seems to rise with the convergence of this 'place' with a sense of 'placelessness', as a train arrives at the station, and 'Within the yellow-lit coaches, pale dreamy faces stare out into the Easter night. *Where are we now*, they seem to ask. *Who lives here? Is this a safe place? Or what?* Their features are glassy and smooth with drowse'.²⁶ Watching people disembark from the train, Frank is approached by a woman who he recognises could be his dead friend's sister. Avoiding the conversation, Frank boards a train to 'Gotham', that ultra-mythologised city-as-place, and leaves Haddam behind.²⁷

If *The Sportswriter* is, as Ford claims, originally and in composition, 'a paean to New Jersey', then its conclusion is a returning assertion of the importance of material reality in the geography: a statement of intent, as much as a declaration of value after the losses suffered in Haddam. The final

¹⁹ *The Sportswriter*, 308.

²⁰ *The Sportswriter*, 308.

²¹ *The Sportswriter*, 308.

²² *The Sportswriter*, 309.

²³ *The Sportswriter*, 309.

²⁴ *The Sportswriter*, 309.

²⁵ *The Sportswriter*, 309.

²⁶ *The Sportswriter*, 311.

²⁷ *The Sportswriter*, 314.

two paragraphs play with a homonym that suggests both mediation of representation, and a material buffer from the world:

And I thought that one natural effect of life is to cover you in a thin layer of... what? A film? A residue or skin of all the things you've done and been and said and erred at? I'm not sure. But you *are* under it, and for a long time, and only rarely do you know it...²⁸

The walk on the beach is a temporary triumph over 'dreaminess' and antecedent loss and absence, providing the concluding tone of optimism in a moment of contact with the land. In this described experience, the instructive second-person voice cuts another narrative line to counteract mediated isolation: 'And in truth, of course, this may be the last time that you will ever feel this way again'.²⁹ In Ford's long form, however, the loss of the 'film' of 'dreaminess' is only the first movement towards reconstruction of a coherent social geography, a process of place-making through which Frank Bascombe as-subject both constructs, and is constructed.

As well as narrating movements across the landscape, Frank Bascombe fits with a more traditional Realist expression of class-conscious progression with his appropriation of land and property.³⁰ When Bascombe hears of his ex-wife's plans to remarry in the second book of the trilogy, *Independence Day*, he pours himself a 'just cold-enough gin', and immediately decides to buy her old house.³¹ The move, he explains, is almost automatic. 'Houses can have this almost authorial power over us,' he muses, 'seeming to ruin or make perfect our lives just by persisting in one place longer than we can'.³² Ford's novels also demonstrate the converse: that the authorial (and more widely, the 'authorised') narratives that circulate about communities may persist longer than the physical edifices they document, memorialise or condemn. Ford's detailed account of the ordinary neighbourhood at the end of the twentieth century depicts a necessarily evolving American spatial imagination, with what he calls a writer's 'optimism'.³³

Stability is a necessary precursor for a reliable progression, and in owning his property, Bascombe matches the textual reassurances of Realism. Like Carver's prose, *The Sportswriter* was celebrated for its unironic voice, published in the decade where much of literary fiction was oriented

²⁸ *The Sportswriter*, 341.

²⁹ *The Sportswriter*, 341.

³⁰ In this aspect, Bascombe contrasts with the characters who reside in short-term tenancies in Carver's stories. 'Chef's House', *Cathedral*, 25-30.

³¹ *Independence Day*, 448-451.

³² *Independence Day*, 451.

³³ Richard Ford, 'Writing is an act of optimism', Interview, *The Economist*, Jun 26, 2012. para. 3.

toward portraits of America through the simultaneously fragmentary and knowing reflections of the funhouse mirrors.³⁴ A 'straight story' was, however, what *The Sportswriter* appeared to offer, and Ford's own account tells in interview of the importance of this shift of voice in his fiction, from the dark, unexplained violence of his earlier stories and novels.³⁵ Bascombe is a journalist, but of a particular kind: never afraid of the 'telling' that the writer's dictum warns against ('Show, don't tell'). Instead, his frequent asides and 'insider's' insights tint the lens through which the reader sees the small fictional town of Haddam, New Jersey.

Befitting a novel of boundary lines and subdivisions, Bascombe conceptualises his life in three phases: a progressive ladder of self-improvement from the 'dreaminess' he observed in the time after the death of his son and divorce, to a rebound into an 'Existence period' in which he energetically constructed the appearances of a productive, materially comfortable life.³⁶ Whereas 'dreaminess' for Frank is characterised as 'having no idea about how the world works, but plenty of ideas about how it should', the 'Existence Period' is recognisable in part by an ongoing 'not trusting your judgement – and, worse, *knowing* you shouldn't trust it for some damn substantial reasons'.³⁷ Those reasons, as Frank explains his theory of individual development, are found in the houses and streets that threaten and encroach on the resident's realty, or reality. Frank's career change between *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*, from journalism into a career as a real estate broker, offers a way of swapping work 'on the page' for what he considers to be the more located brokering that the 'Existence Period' inspires in him. Yet selling houses to people 'in the throes of a price decline', he quickly realises, equally necessitates a daily struggle with all the 'dreaminess' that accompanies writing sports.³⁸ His philosophy is to try to cut through this sentimentalism, as he tells a client: "You might think I'd wonder about whether he or she gets their dream house, or if they get the house they originally wanted. Getting your money's worth, though, getting value, is frankly more important – particularly in the current economy. When the correction comes, value will be what things stand on".³⁹ Frank's emphasis on 'value' communicates the tension between a house made of timber and plaster, with local amenities and transport links that offers the necessities of living – and the opposing sense in which the expected market 'correction' will promise the trading-in of that real estate for another house that would fit the owners needs and desires more fully. Such senses are all

³⁴ Bruce Weber, *New York Times Book Review*, April 10, 1988, 59.

³⁵ Jennifer Levasseur, Kevin Rabalais and Richard Ford, 'Invitation to the Story: An Interview with Richard Ford', *The Kenyon Review*, 23, ¾, Summer 2001, 123-143, 124.

³⁶ *Independence Day*, 393.

³⁷ *Independence Day*, 409. Gregg 2007.

³⁸ *Independence Day*, 377.

³⁹ *Independence Day*, 417.

in the balance as Frank shows a couple around 'a remodelled gable-roofed American farmhouse', musing while staring at his female client's posterior (his word) that:

...we know little and can find out precious little more about others, even though we stand in their presence, hear their complaints, ride the roller coaster with them, sell them houses, consider the happiness of their children – only in a flash or a gasp or the slam of a car door to see them disappear and be gone forever. Perfect strangers. And yet, it is one of the themes of the Existence Period that interest can mingle successfully with uninterest in this way, intimacy with transience, caring with unobdurate uncaring.⁴⁰

In this characterisation of mutual 'existence', Haddam's spaces of community are an essential meeting-place of people and stories. The 'interest' that mingles with its lack ties the individual to their market value: a metaphor for the rise and fall of economic cycles that could cause any family to fade into nothing more than disconnected invisibility, 'a potentially calamitous careen down a slippery socio-emotio-economic slope'.⁴¹

In their individually-marked value, then, the properties of Haddam are delineated with boundaries, hedges, fences and strategically-placed trees, establishing the glimpse as the regular mode of interaction between neighbors: a control that allows 'perfect strangers' to remain perfectly so. The brief 'flash' or sound of a car door is a sensory experience orchestrated through the preeminent ideal of privacy that dictates almost every feature of suburban architecture. This dynamic of Haddam's houses and streets make Frank's 'telling' a narrative entirely appropriate to the environment. In word and world, he mediates between the dreams of his clients, idealised in television and movies, and the wider forces of the market that pits the economic destiny of the ordinary homeowner against a wider world of competing interests.

Frank's situation within this environment-for-privacy motivates action on his part to overcome the isolation and alienation that he sees resulting from it on all sides. 'Most Americans will eventually transact at least some portion of their important lives in the presence of realtors or as a result of something a realtor has done or said', he observes, and his vocation offers him both an unequalled view, and the responsibility of influence.⁴² His qualification as writer is unflinchingly transferred into the monthly task of composing the editorial for his firm's 'Buyer v Seller' newsletter, in which he considers the implications of politics on house prices, peppering with folksy slogans and literary references from Emerson.⁴³ As well as his work for the firm, in *Independence Day* Frank

⁴⁰ *Independence Day*, 419.

⁴¹ *Independence Day*, 387.

⁴² *Independence Day*, 389.

⁴³ *Independence Day*, 348.

engages in even more direct responsibility for realty with his impulsive purchase of two 'identical next-door houses' in Haddam, which he intends to invest back into at no cost to the tenants.⁴⁴ Frank's rather dreamy vision is, he says, to 'assure [tenants] a comfortable existence in the face of housing costs going sky-high', 'bestow[ing] upon me the satisfaction of reinvesting in my community ...maintaining a neighborhood integrity I admired, while ...establishing a greater sense of connectedness'.⁴⁵ 'I would be the perfect modern landlord', he opines, 'a man of superior sympathies and sound investments.... Everybody on the street would be happy to see my car come cruising by...'.⁴⁶ When he explains his intention to the current tenants, one couple invites Frank in for coffee and carrot cake, but soon move away leaving the house vacant. At the other house, the father of the family comes to the door wearing 'a tight red tee-shirt that had *Keep on shooting 'til the last mother-fucker be dead* stencilled across the front' and 'a big automatic pistol... lying just inside the door on a table'.⁴⁷ When Frank goes to collect the rent (a task he has to do monthly, in person), the neighbors call the police on him, assuming that by walking around the side of the house, he is trying to break in. Comically, the resistance of such residents to conform to Frank's dream of good-sense real estate ownership keep his supposedly 'superior sympathies' in constant reappraisal, his powers as a writer established in his willingness to walk into the delineated plots of Haddam as well as he can, and communicate through the fears and suspicions of those who have lived there before his 'investment'.

As a writer-realtor, Frank highlights the narrative self-identification that must encounter dynamic human interests in real estate, and in the 'telling' of the novels he superimposes these psychologies onto the communicative process of writing. In the specific relationship of property ownership to the so-called 'American dream', Frank recognises a narrative insufficiency in his clients' anxious 'realty dreads', which he explains as 'the cold, unwelcome, built-in-America realization that we're just like any other schmo, wishing his wishes, lusting his stunted lusts, quaking over his idiot frights and fantasies, all of us popped out from the same unchinkable mold'.⁴⁸ Despite being one of Frank's less generous realisations, a version of this may be indeed, if not uniquely, 'built in America'. The dramatisation of Thatcher's infamous assertion that 'There is no such thing as society!' was built into a literary landscape that represented suburban sprawl as an expression of the 'freedom' offered by America's competing institutions, businesses and the ubiquitous cars purchased to travel between them. Thus, the search for 'society' in the Bascombe novels requires more than a glimpse

⁴⁴ *Independence Day*, 369.

⁴⁵ *Independence Day*, 369.

⁴⁶ *Independence Day*, 369.

⁴⁷ *Independence Day*, 371.

⁴⁸ *Independence Day*, 400.

between houses: in all three novels, this search sets him on the road, against the flow of capital, to find and inscribe narrative in between market appraisals of space and self.

Such journeys move the writer-realtor from the 'Existence Period' toward the 'Permanent Period', which Frank looks forward to at the close of *Independence Day* as 'that long, stretching-out time when my dreams would have mystery like any ordinary person's; when whatever I do or say, who I marry, how my kids turn out, becomes what the world – if it makes note at all – knows of me...'.⁴⁹ This distinction takes Frank from a life driven by the anxiety of market value and competition, into a state and set of places where the subjective moment can be reasserted into a personal and social identification on the land. Questioned in interview on the concept of the 'Permanent Period', Ford described it as, for Frank, a time when he has 'detached somewhat from the past, when he doesn't fear the future', or when 'life becomes a destination, rather than a journey'.⁵⁰ This move is, of course, expressed in material terms: Frank reveals that he 'had always been with the ancient Greeks, that the most important events in life are physical events'.⁵¹ Like the closing image of *The Sportswriter*, in which Frank walks alone on the beach, in the final scene of *Independence Day*, Bascombe escapes the usual temporalities of existence in the streets of Haddam, caught up in a crowd watching a parade. The epiphany is both material, and full of life, populated: 'The trumpets go again. My heartbeat quickens. I feel the push, pull, the weave and sway of others'.⁵² Rather than embracing or responding to the flag-waving patriotism soon mobilised to fuel new wars, Frank the writer moves as a physical body among others. Equally an observer and participant in a sea of social forces and movements, an epiphanic moment resonates in a sea of people: bodies moving together in the streets.⁵³

Beyond 'Permanence': Post-'9/11'

Houses may persist in one place longer than people, but as mapped in Ford's novels, dreams of continually escalating property value are as insecure as their distance from the next crisis of market confidence. The value of Richard Ford's trilogy, in no small degree, lies in the historical stride between its landscapes, Ford insisting that he needed enough time to feel that he had developed a distinct new concept (or his word, 'conceit') for each sequel. The historical development between the first two novels spans the global market crash of 1987, which hit New York's financial district,

⁴⁹ *Independence Day*, 799.

⁵⁰ Gregg 2007.

⁵¹ *Independence Day*, 441.

⁵² *Independence Day*, 800.

⁵³ *Independence Day*, 800.

causing ‘falling property values [to] ride through the trees [of Haddam] like an odourless, colorless mist’.⁵⁴ The next gap between publications - from 1995 to 2006 – straddles cataclysmic events that threatened to make novels like Ford’s fictions of American existence relics of a prior, vanished world. The attacks on New York’s Twin Towers took more lives from New Jersey than any other area after Manhattan itself, hitting Ford’s depiction of the dreamy or striving small-town streets of Haddam at their core. His decision, however, to write a third time from the locale of his New Jersey streets figuratively marks the response of the everyday city, where lives after 9/11 were indelibly marked but (in most cases) unbroken. The continuance of jobs, family responsibilities and real estate all remained as reminders, a bridge between changed worlds on a persistent topography. Frank’s writing as ‘realtor’ invokes, more in his final novel than before, the etymology that brings into its legal usage, the distinction between ‘real’ property (the land and things affixed to it), and ‘moveable property’: the consumable goods that generally decreased in value with use.⁵⁵ In rapidly changing American communities, the continuity of the land would offer its inhabitants value and identity: and set the stakes for their creation of new narratives affixed to it.

Ford set *The Lay of the Land* in the fall of 2000, keeping with the retrospective view of the previous two novels, while allowing him to address the traumas of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina with the sensitivity of indirect reference. Ford said in interview on this: ‘It seemed to me that the events of 9/11 had to go out into the populace, settle into the ground, and in some ways, come back up through our feet before we begin to know their full sense of consequence’.⁵⁶ In a physical metaphor that fits with this explanation, in *The Lay of the Land* Frank holds the lineaments of disaster within his body: despite middle-age sit-ups, push-ups and healthy breakfast, his mortality is figured in especially specific and immediate terms through the novel, whose final scene has him descending on an aeroplane, on a trip to see specialists about his prostate cancer.⁵⁷ ‘Northwest Flight 1724’ carries thirty such passengers to the Mayo clinic in Minnesota, a real-life not-for-profit facility that specialises in innovative treatments for difficult cases.⁵⁸

The changing demographics of America’s neighborhoods is visible in Frank’s relocation in *The Lay of the Land* from Haddam to another fictional town, Sea-Clift, New Jersey: ‘a townlette... with Filipinos, Somalians and hard-working Hondurans... a tranquil towny heterogeneity’.⁵⁹ From his new location, Frank prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving dinner at his home with his wife, son and

⁵⁴ *Independence Day*, 346.

⁵⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ‘real’, ‘realm’, 743.

⁵⁶ Gregg 2007.

⁵⁷ *The Lay of the Land*, 1322.

⁵⁸ *The Lay of the Land*, 1304.

⁵⁹ Kathy Knapp, ‘Richard Ford’s Frank Bascombe Trilogy and the Post-9/11 Suburban Novel’, *American Literary History*, 23, 3 (2011), 500-528; 516. *The Lay of the Land*, 267.

daughter. Yet from this situated opening, Frank launches into a new series of purposively-documented drives, willing himself towards dramatic events of more fatal risk than in earlier works. In the new dynamics and neighbourhoods of *The Lay of the Land*, Frank reflects, 'violence, that imposter, foreshortens our expectancies, our logics, our next days... our whole story'.⁶⁰ Finally, disaster strikes at his home, as Frank hears a car and the sound of a gun outside.⁶¹ Stepping toward the danger, he lacks a plan, 'merely impelled to walk across the driveway and the tiny bit of scratchy lawn separating our two houses to do something productive'.⁶² Without having time to think or speak, Frank sees his neighbour shot through the head with an automatic weapon at close range, by a boy who then casually turns and puts a bullet in Frank's chest.⁶³

Frank's survivor story turns the violence into narrative, half-joking later that 'being shot with a machine pistol by a fourteen-year-old assassin and living to tell about it gives me a good, unconventional story'.⁶⁴ Airborne on his way to the Mayo clinic, Frank's retelling of his reasons for travel presents a variety of acceptances and continuations: a tender moment with his daughter, the quiet passing of an old flame's father he knew, and his real estate business taking on his old partner as 'co-broker'.⁶⁵ Promise of continuation accompanies the dark figure of the descending plane in the rushing of 'farms and farmettes and farm-equipment corrals' on the snow-whited landscape below'.⁶⁶ As the aircraft shudders on its way down, Frank's wife clutches his hand, as people, cars and square buildings come into focus. Bascombe's humanistic optimism infuses the description of touchdown, that metaphorical return: 'A bump, a roar, a heavy thrust forward into life again, and we resume our human scale upon the land'.⁶⁷

In 2002 Richard Ford was selected by the Bush administration to contribute one of fifteen essays to the 'Writers on America' project, commissioned to represent the strengths and values of the American literary tradition in a handy publication for foreign consumption.⁶⁸ In his essay, Ford went some way to complicate the orchestrated politics of the commission, quoting a letter from Milan Kundera to Philip Roth: 'the novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question'.⁶⁹ Such an approach offers a way of bridging between Carver's suspicion of the novel as a

⁶⁰ *The Lay of the Land*, 1304.

⁶¹ *The Lay of the Land*, 1295.

⁶² *The Lay of the Land*, 1296.

⁶³ *The Lay of the Land*, 1296.

⁶⁴ *The Lay of the Land*, 1312.

⁶⁵ *The Lay of the Land*, 1316, 1319.

⁶⁶ *The Lay of the Land*, 1320.

⁶⁷ *The Lay of the Land*, 1322.

⁶⁸ Richard Ford, 'How Does Being an American Inform What I Write?', *Writers on America*, U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs, 2002.

⁶⁹ Knapp, 519.

totalising form: rather, keeping the reader mobile, bearing them (in the words of a Carver poem) 'along to the next place'.⁷⁰ Richard Ford's novel trilogy does just this: writing a detailed yet expansive geographical world that extends the reader's view to America's ordinary landscapes. The historical and cultural context of his trilogy is still vitally present: America's suburbs 'post- 9/11' are in various stages of transition from their mid-twentieth century inception.⁷¹ Yet Ford's novels provide a narrative that offers a hope between the driveways and lawns. While lying by his neighbour's house with a bullet in his chest, and again at 23,000 feet with his thoughts on the stories of his friend's lives, the idea of a 'Next Level' glimmers in the distance for Frank: a hope to overcome the static mythologies of the 'Permanent Period'. The journey of *The Lay of the Land* does not situate an American future in transcendent escape, but brings the progressive narrative to a final 'realist' image: of meaningful contact with an extensive landscape, populated with diverse and persistent human life.

David Foster Wallace

The shape of the American short story in the middle of the twentieth century was, as explored previously in this thesis, affected by the location of many of its most influential authors at university and college campuses.⁷² In these culturally-infused spaces, the development of literary form was influenced as much by the teaching of creative writing courses, which so many short fictionists were engaged in: John Barth, Ann Beattie, Don DeLillo and Bernard Malamud used these spaces as settings for 'campus novels'.⁷³ Like Carver's suburban and natural settings, however, they were also presented in a wider implication: as environments for the exploration of experience, as part of a useful education. From this type of environment, recent and contemporary fictionists encountered, in turn, Carver's stories and acknowledged the role of his work as part of a dominant mode in American short fiction. David Foster Wallace responded that 'Raymond Carver's best stuff' was among a small number of books that made him feel 'human and unalone'.⁷⁴ As Ford's use of the novel demonstrates possibilities for a spatial form in a changing suburban environment, Wallace's explicated engagement with both metafictional and 'realist' fiction includes the ambitious range of reference that I have identified in Carver's work. Arguing for both form and function, the reader and

⁷⁰ Gentry and Stull, 100. 'Movement', ll.16-17.

⁷¹ David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts*, Chapter 5: 'Renegotiating the National Past after 9/11', (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 156-187.

⁷² Robert F. Scott, 'It's a Small World, after All: Assessing the Contemporary Campus Novel', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 37, 1, (2004), 71-87. McGurl, 2011.

⁷³ Scott, 86.

⁷⁴ Laura Miller, 'David Foster Wallace', *Salon*, March 9, 1996.

the critic, Wallace's American spaces are containers and representations of lived space, and like Carver, their success is attested to by his significant influence.

As with Carver, writings on Wallace's fiction and criticism have often appealed to biographical narratives. The reasons for this suggest a further correspondence with the biographical geographies of Carver's work. Spaces that are both narratively functional and always 'inhabited' are the province of both authors. D.T. Max's *Every Loves Story is a Ghost Story* is a biography caught between a mass of textual material – a hefty body of drafts, as well as interviews, correspondence, and criticism – and the immediacy of Wallace's presence and narrative appropriation by his readers.⁷⁵ Max was equipped with extensive material to qualify his project: papers and public appearances supported the idea that for Wallace, self and text were both essential, both co-informing. A visible and visual aspect of literary 'biography' was an essential part of Wallace's reception – investing in the authorial presence as did Hemingway and Carver, more than Salinger and Pynchon. Max's title is drawn from a letter sent to Wallace by Alice Elman, whom he studied with at the Arizona MFA program.⁷⁶ Wallace used the phrase repeatedly in his writing, adding it in at the end of correspondence, one time attributing it to Virginia Woolf. The 'ghost' maintains a reminder of the dramatic persona, Hamlet: the crisis of the individual in the universal implication of the artwork: caught between death, and so many words.

Max's biography provides a timely contribution in Wallace studies, not least because the presence of his biographical narrative in relation to his texts (as with Carver) has been so sustained. Internet fan-pages have, since original publication, constructed an extensive hypertext on Wallace and his works - especially in the case of *Infinite Jest*.⁷⁷ As has been the case with Sklenicka's 2009 first biography of Carver, the production of the first Wallace biography offers an occasion in which Wallace studies can be reconsidered in relation to this approach. Certainly, the discourse in and surrounding Wallace's fictions makes far-reaching and suggestive literary and wider textual reference. In addition, essays including 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction' (1990) have been identified as essential not only as important for reading his fiction, but also for its cultural argument and wider influence.⁷⁸ The typically long but emphatically readable and incisive argument of 'E Unibus Pluram' targets 'irony, poker-faced silence, and fear of ridicule'.⁷⁹ The foremost of the

⁷⁵ Max, 2012.

⁷⁶ D. T. Max, 'D.F.W.: Tracing the Ghostly Origins of a Phrase', *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2012, para. 1.

⁷⁷ One of the most extensive fan-sites is 'The Howling Fantods', < <http://www.thehowlingfantods.com/dfw/> >.

⁷⁸ David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 1998), 21-82. Adam Kelly, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*, ed. David Hering (Los Angeles: Slideshow Media Group Press, 2010), 131-146; 133.

⁷⁹ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', 49.

trio, 'irony', is most emphatically employed in U.S. culture to alienate the individual from and through the mediation of the artwork or mass broadcasting. He goes on,

I'm going to argue that irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and at the same time they are agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture, and that for aspiring fiction writers they pose especially terrible problems.⁸⁰

The advance that his generation made on the Postmodernists, Wallace claims, is to locate the media-watcher as a subject in a 'real' world.⁸¹ For the contemporary fiction writer, 'reality' (as much as the reality of Dostoyevsky or Zola), was shaped by a common experience, in their case an audio-visual serving of six hours of television daily. Against criticisms of the novel as a form, Wallace's texts out-do the metafictionists, resurrecting the author to make an appeal, as an essential and generative function of the text.⁸²

As in Carver, this authorial persona and connecting voice makes for a prominent correspondence between Wallace's long novels, short fiction collections and essays: as well as multi-media content. Like the belletristes he referred to and engaged with, Wallace's writings imply consideration as part of an oeuvre, always gravitating 'inward' to the marginalia and fragments that constitute biography (a looping metaphor that fits the metafictionist reference, at least). *Infinite Jest* was composed, and is properly considered as the interweaving of various fictional projects that Wallace was working on from the time of 'E Unibus Pluram's composition.⁸³ For Wallace, the short story collection offered a relation of formal tradition and publishable format that enabled his work: a diverse and divided text, which invites and continually considers its internal relations: the investigation of proximities and strange juxtapositions.

Three short story collections appeared between Wallace's three novels, the second of which, *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* (1999), followed *Infinite Jest*, bearing markers of his development of a hybrid style in that long work.⁸⁴ Interspersing a dizzying range of story forms with recurrent sets of short material, *Brief Interviews* features a set of fictional transcripts from the 'Brief Interviews' of the title, for which the reader only sees the answers. Questions are marked simply with a 'Q.', offering a compelling challenge for the reader, as if hearing someone speaking on the phone in a room. Each interview, dated, with location and a coded number (out of sequence) suggests a clinical

⁸⁰ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', 49.

⁸¹ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', 50.

⁸² John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', *The Friday Book and Other Non-Fiction*, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984, 62-76. First published 1967.

⁸³ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York: Little Brown, 1996).

⁸⁴ David Foster Wallace, *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* (New York: Little Brown, 1999).

precision in their communication. Yet this aesthetic of reliability is necessitated by the extreme subjectivities at work in each of the interviews: in one, a man tries to explain his track record for ditching girlfriends, and explains why his bags are packed to leave.⁸⁵ In another interview, the questioned tells of his father's lifelong occupation as an attendant in a men's toilet, and the ways in which this strange job affected his own psychology.⁸⁶ In this interview, catalogued number '42', the reader shares in a linguistic approximation of the sounds of the bathroom, finding themselves, as the interviewee's father, 'in the sonic center... In the crafted space between the end of the sinks and the start of the stalls. The space designed for him to stand. The vortex'.⁸⁷ This location, in the human reality of the sounds and odours, however, is an exercise in torturous architecture, and through the text, echoes in effect to the son, and the reader.

As a generic form, the Interview offers the interviewee, especially on television, a lone 'space designed for [the interviewee] to stand'. Max's biography documents the extent to which Wallace was himself the subject of a quantity of interviews: publicity that was required of him from an early stage in his career in order to continue to support his writing. Beyond this correlation with Wallace's persona, some of the 'Brief Interviews' appear as accounts of therapy, a turning of the spectre of psychoanalysis in literary criticism for humour and violence. Towards the end of the collection, a dramatic account brings the reader into immediate contact with a monologuing 'hideous man', a piece entitled: 'ON HIS DEATHBED, HOLDING YOUR HAND, THE ACCLAIMED NEW YOUNG OFF-BROADWAY PLAYWRIGHT'S FATHER BEGS A BOON'.⁸⁸ As in the interviews, the 'hideousness' is medicalised: a condition, in this case, the severely decomposing body of the father. This position of the paternal figure between death and speech suggests Donald Barthelme's 'The Dead Father' (1975), here as there, the explicated and insistently material presence of this figure allowing for a dramatic outflow.

The dying father's account waxes lyrical on his inability to love his messy, 'thoughtless' child, interrupted only by periodic swabbings and repositioning of tubes on his body. Irony is everywhere: the obvious fabric of the account. Yet, again, beyond these initial features, the language of sickness and medical equipment alters the reception of the father's rhetoric entirely. Mid-way through an emotive account of his failed attempts to help his child with homework, the father's body reasserts its deconstructing decay, merging metanarrative and materiality. Through this terminal fragmentation, the father voices his regrets: 'THE FATHER: That she died without knowing my

⁸⁵ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 76.

⁸⁷ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 73.

⁸⁸ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 218.

heart'.⁸⁹ The final pages cut the grisly physical detail with Beckettian black humour, as the father declares his motto: that men keep their fingernails short and clean, and begs that 'you' (the reader, and the reader *as writer*), carry the hatred of the son, to expose him for the cost of his childhood.⁹⁰ The concluding words invoke the great psychoanalysed of the Western canon, Hamlet: 'Such silence'.⁹¹ Yet before them, the appeal from the text remains, against the inevitability of the environment: 'Not consign me... *Not* to die in this appalling silence. This charged and pregnant vacuum all around'. The 'pregnant vacuum', one of Wallace's 'geometric' forms, highlights the capabilities of the gap between the textual form and emotional capacity: both represented and in the reader.⁹² In bringing these elements into proximity in the short fictional form as did Carver, Wallace addresses key challenges of representation, suggesting (albeit with dark humour) the high stakes for a form that aims to connect through these.

Brief Interviews is a collection that converses intensely and specifically with the innovations of form and experimental style in the short story tradition. Yet in an introduction to a collection of stories by Wallace and others, Zadie Smith wrote that these authors were 'attempting to make something happen off the page, outside words, a curious thing for a piece of writing to want to do'.⁹³ The 'curiosity' of this humanistic ambition perhaps only appears as odd after the apparent distancing of literary deconstructionism and experimentalism, and for those who see those theoretical moves as part of a one-way progression. Authors from the novelistic tradition of social realism provided a way forward from earlier traditions, as Wallace wrote in a piece on Dostoyevsky (1996): 'His concern was always what it is to be a human being – that is, how to be an actual person, someone whose life is informed by values and principles, instead of just an especially shrewd kind of self-preserving animal'.⁹⁴ Such modes of address in contemporary fiction are vitally alive for writers such as Dave Eggers: each in their own expressions, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), *Zeitoun* (2009) and *McSweeney's* (both online and in print forms), assert the autobiographical and biographical.⁹⁵ Such texts make an investment (even economically, in these cases) in '[making]

⁸⁹ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 237.

⁹⁰ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 239.

⁹¹ *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, 240.

⁹² David Foster Wallace, 'Tennis, Trigonometry, Tornadoes: A Midwestern boyhood', *Harper's Magazine*, December 1991, 68-78; 68.

⁹³ Zadie Smith, 'Introduction', *The Burned Children of America*, ed. Marco Cassini and Martina Testa (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003). Quoted in James Friel, 'Review', *Cercles*, 2003, para. 23.

⁹⁴ David Foster Wallace, 'Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky', *Consider the Lobster* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005), 244-257.

⁹⁵ Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), *Zeitoun* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2009), *McSweeney's Books*, San Francisco.

something happen off the page', in relation to words.⁹⁶ The resulting texts take a chance at developing a more radical fictional possibility of new literary traditions, within the sound of widely-accepted voices that would discount such a development.

Brought to Witness

Between their work and the cultural reception of their untimely deaths, both Raymond Carver and David Foster Wallace have provided sites for conversation and connection in their respective readers. Like the iconic images of John Lennon or Kurt Cobain, their texts have been read retrospectively, infusing layers of meaning with their biographical clashes between culture and experience.⁹⁷ In this sense, Carver's work draws upon the vital differences between 'lived' spaces, and the sometimes-mythologised inner geographies in cultural circulation and the mind of the reader. The disjunction offers an opportunity, however: in greater discrepancy between the social reality and the experienced narratives of space, a more energised and effective dramatic conflict is possible. The contemporary opportunity for examining this capacity in material geographies is rich and pressing. With the reassertion of multiple traditions or 'canons' to replace the dominant interests of previous literary surveys, the early Carver texts of Bill Buford's 'Dirty Realism' *Granta* issue (1983) have acquired a cultural importance as 'working class' fictions, occasionally considered in connection with the marginalised poetry of Charles Bukowski.⁹⁸ Bukowski's work also works between form, genre and performance, taking the homeland of Los Angeles as a stage for stories that are in turn, repulsive and comic.⁹⁹ Adam Meyer's study described the population of 'Carver Country' as similarly distinguishable by its mobility, or 'rootlessness': characters who 'drive... to search for something better... a hope that their lives will be different in a different environment'.¹⁰⁰ Yet Tobias Wolff (another of the Buford grouping) wrote that Carver's work was, at its core, 'about the endless losing war our good intentions wage against our circumstances and our nature'.¹⁰¹ As

⁹⁶ Amy Hungerford, 'McSweeney's and the School of Life', *Contemporary Literature*, 53, 4, Winter 2012, 646-680.

⁹⁷ Gentry and Stull, 1993. Jessica L. Wood, 'Pained Expression: Metaphors of Sickness and Signs of 'Authenticity' in Kurt Cobain's "Journals"', *Popular Music*, 30, 3 (2011), 331-349.

⁹⁸ Bukowski was not collected in the *Granta* issue, but has been drafted in as a 'Godfather' to the tradition in critical and journalistic pieces since. Tamas Dobozy, 'In the Country of Contradiction the Hypocrite is King: Defining Dirty Realism in Charles Bukowski's *Factotum*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47, 1 (2001), 43-68. Michael Hemmingson, *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver* (Rockville, Maryland: Borgo Press, 2008).

⁹⁹ As in novels such as *Post Office* (Santa Rosa, CA.: Black Sparrow Books, 1971) and poems such as 'Crucifix in a Deathhand', *The Pleasures of the Damned: Poems 1951-1993* (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2010), 98.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer, 20.

¹⁰¹ Tobias Wolff, 'A Tribute to Raymond Carver', *Poets & Writers*, March/April 1989. para. 4.

seen in both the fiction and poetry, Carver's short forms are more interested in the dynamic capacity of the text than delineating its consequence. Thus, in the recurring and restorative energy of dramatic inception, as in Wallace's 'pregnant vacuum', his works retain their potential.

In fictions depicting such 'charged' spaces, the works of Raymond Carver and others offer a response and trajectory in which literary fiction can move beyond the crisis set out by Postmodernism: so in a time following the decline of 'grand narratives', strong strands of fictional representation might draw from literary technique and tradition, with powers intact. Carver's writings, like the work of Richard Ford and David Foster Wallace in particular, invite the reader to consider how fiction resists characterisation as a game or exercise: essentially connecting the text back to personal and social experience. His stories, poetry and prose stand with the geographically inclusive texts with which his stories and poems corresponded, as well as marginalised Postcolonial, Queer and Feminist literatures. These texts also claim that a text *can* depict a world through and against materially dominant interests, and from there, might move the reader to reconsider their own material worlds through a clearer observational eye. Their words remain in the spaces inhabited by the silenced, and those whose voices have been muted or forgotten. From these parts of the world, lines and paragraphs have the power to haunt us, and remind us of the diverse textures of lived America. In an introduction to *American Short Story Masterpieces* (1987) co-edited with Tom Jenks, Carver wrote that the stories collected there had "a bright destination"¹⁰² Their concluding hope, that after all, the readers would 'be affected... find occasion to laugh, shudder, marvel – in short, be *moved*'.¹⁰³

The moving spaces of Carver's work resist directional hegemonies such as historicising chronology, but tend towards meeting places where intimacy and human contact can occur. In the title story of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, the narrator and his wife visit a friend, the cardiologist Mel McGinnis, and spend the evening 'sitting around his kitchen table drinking gin'.¹⁰⁴ As a place for conversation, the sunlight-filled room brings the two couples together, from their former spaces and lives: 'We lived in Albuquerque then. But we were all from somewhere else'.¹⁰⁵ In the focused scenes in their home, detailed descriptions of Mel and his wife Terri are interspersed with dialogue. After talking about Terri's ex-lover and his suicide, and an occasion

¹⁰² Raymond Carver and Tom Jenks, 'Fiction of Occurrence and Consequence', "Introduction" to *American Short Story Masterpieces* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1987), xiii-xvi. *Call if You Need Me*, 220-4; 224.

¹⁰³ *Call if You Need Me*, 224.

¹⁰⁴ 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love', *What We Talk About...*, 114-129; 114.

¹⁰⁵ *WWTA-W*, 114.

where an old couple are brought to the hospital after a car accident, Mel shares a fantasy against the predictable chronology of the evening with its drinks and trip to a restaurant later:

If I could come back in a different life, a different time and all, you know what? I'd like to come back as a knight. You were pretty safe wearing all that armor.¹⁰⁶

Mel confuses the word 'Vessels' for 'Vassals', shrugging the mistake off: 'I'm a heart surgeon, sure, but I'm just a mechanic'.¹⁰⁷ The narrator responds, telling Mel that knights sometimes would 'have heart attacks if they got too hot and they were too tired and worn out', falling from their horses.¹⁰⁸ Deciding whether to call his kids and go for a meal, the narrator makes the image of horseback riding a figure of time: "It means I could just keep going. That's all it means".¹⁰⁹ Defeating the wordplay with action, Mel upturns his glass on the table. Left with no immediate plans or cues for movement, Terri asks "Now what?": a peculiarly Carverian question at the arrest of narrative time and its physical markers.¹¹⁰

Although Gordon Lish cut the *Beginners* text of 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' by fifty percent for the edited version, both versions conclude with this temporal arrest in the final lines, leaving the four friends in a pulsing, pregnant space. In *Beginners*, the narrator looks out into the darkened yard, waiting and watching the field where his friends no longer keep horses.¹¹¹ In *What We Talk About...*, the sounds of 'human noise' echoes in the room, otherwise silent, in the darkness.¹¹² The conversations of the evening remain in the reader's mind, with Terri's final words matching the silent conclusion in immediacy and the question of action: in the 'now', there remains a 'what?'.¹¹³ The *Beginners* version of the story lacks this line, specifying the 'human noise' of the final page as 'Terri... still crying', and the narrator's wife talking 'tenderly' to her, 'her lips against Terri's hair'.¹¹⁴ Sitting close by, her human touch and kindness exists with her last words: "It'll be okay".¹¹⁵ This moment of contact, like the material meeting of the river and person in Carver's verse, connects the represented space with the people within it

¹⁰⁶ WWTA-W, 124.

¹⁰⁷ WWTA-W, 124.

¹⁰⁸ WWTA-W, 124.

¹⁰⁹ WWTA-W, 128.

¹¹⁰ WWTA-W, 128.

¹¹¹ WWTA-B, 198.

¹¹² WWTA-W, 129. Whereas the Lish version has the couples sitting together at this final situation, the increased spatial interaction in the *Beginners* version makes this a shared void, too, accomplished in a longer form. Both versions maintain social and individual consciousness in the space.

¹¹³ WWTA-W, 128.

¹¹⁴ WWTA-B, 198.

¹¹⁵ WWTA-B, 198.

As with David Foster Wallace's much-circulated and subsequently published *This Is Water*, the commencement speech delivered by Raymond Carver to the University of Hartford is resonant for being the last published non-fiction before the author's death, less than three months later.¹¹⁶ In the collection *Call if You Need Me*, the piece appears at the end of a section subtitled 'Five Essays and a Meditation', underscoring the difference of this piece from the conventionalities of those preceding it. Appropriately for a commencement address, the 'meditation' is concerned with questions of liminality: words in the 'Line from Saint Theresa' like 'tenderness' which Carver uses apologetically, marking their unusual 'territory'.¹¹⁷ Carver relates a portion of Chekhov's story 'Ward No. 6', where a character named Moiseika, consigned to the 'madhouse wing of the hospital', acts in tenderness, promising to make a cap for his companion, as he 'feeds with a spoon his neighbor on the left, who is paralyzed'.¹¹⁸ His action, Chekhov writes, is through "imitation, unconsciously dominated by Gromov, his neighbor on the right hand".¹¹⁹ From this fictional fragment, Carver asked his audience of the 'origin and nature of tenderness. Where does it come from? As a deed, does it still move the heart, even when abstracted from humane motives?'.¹²⁰ The retold story of 'the isolate man, performing gentle acts without expectation or even self-knowledge', Carver suggests, 'may even reflect back on our lives with a questioning gaze'.¹²¹ The final words of the 'Meditation' ('No more words') might remind the reader of the close of 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love', or the central character in the story 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?' moving around his house, searching in silence.¹²² In the effect of a shared literary experience, Carver's speech calls for memory: that fiction reflects in reciprocity with the reader, an image that binds an audience to the space of telling, as it 'stays before us as an odd beauty we have been brought to witness'.¹²³ From within the house and the fabric of words and images, a powerful dramatic force remains, echoing through the text and beyond it, alive.

¹¹⁶ David Foster Wallace, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*, (New York: Little Brown, 2009). Carver, 'Meditation on a Line From Saint Theresa', *Call if You Need Me*, 123-5.

¹¹⁷ *Call If You Need Me*, 123, 125.

¹¹⁸ *Call If You Need Me*, 124.

¹¹⁹ *Call If You Need Me*, 124.

¹²⁰ *Call If You Need Me*, 124.

¹²¹ *Call If You Need Me*, 124.

¹²² 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?', *WYPBQP*, 164-181.

¹²³ *Call If You Need Me*, 124.

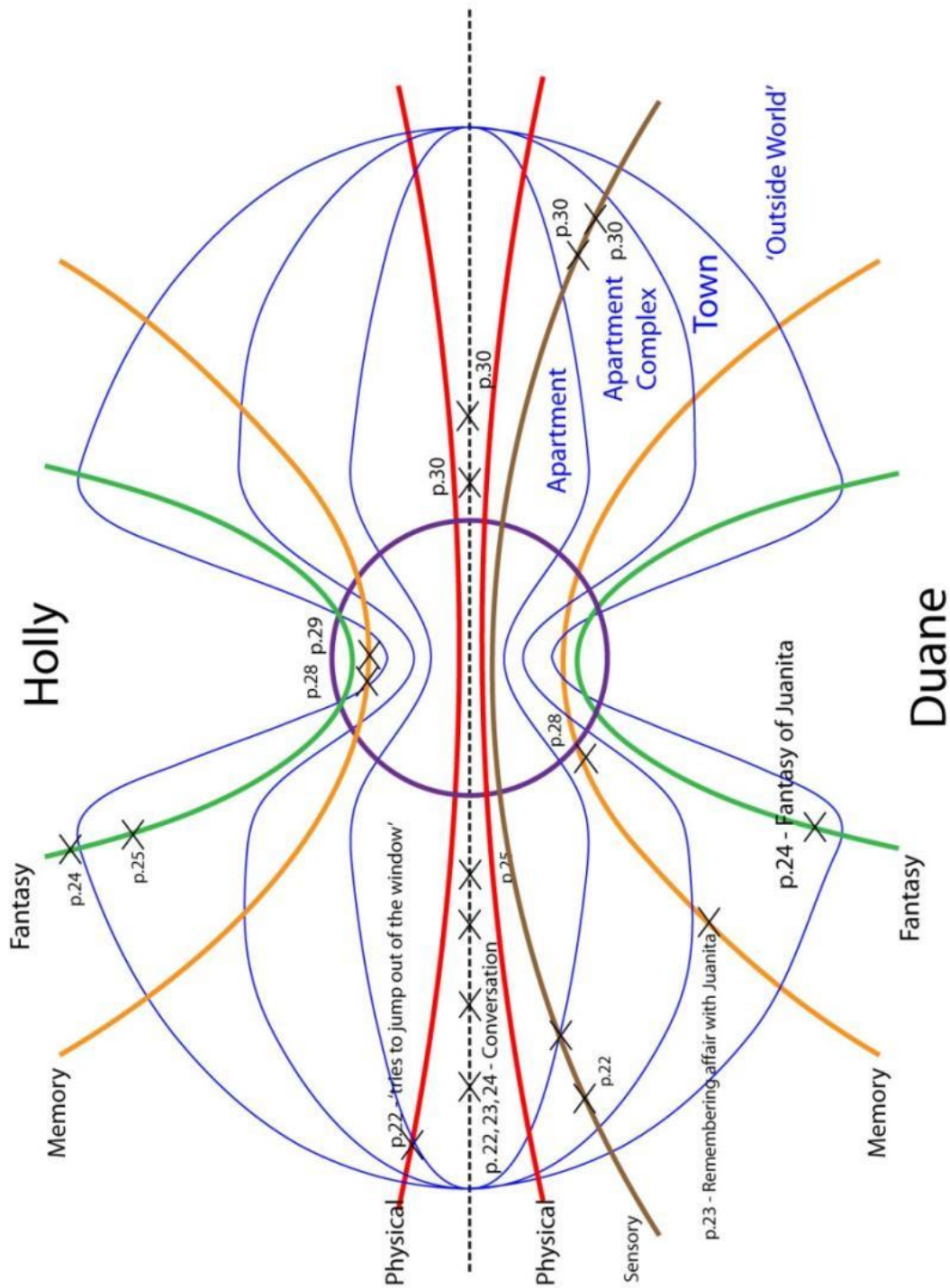
Conclusion

Carver's corresponding relationships have been the focus of this thesis: not only authorial, but also spatial, formal and cultural connections. His texts are reciprocal, inviting and signifying an open discourse between the contributive layers of a work of fiction or poetry. Across his oeuvre, I have shown that Carver prioritised and remained essentially interested in generous and generative interpolations and collaborations. I have considered this thesis to be a contribution to this literary-critical conversation. My readings have focussed on a selection of stories, poems and non-fictional texts from across his career, and authors connected personally and stylistically with Carver. This approach has enabled me to identify crossroads and meeting places at which both I and future readers and studies might extend the deep suggestion of these works.

These connecting places are the repeated referents of Carver's own work, which began in the material expression of the unspoken, and moved in the search for hidden springs of literary meaning. My thesis has identified connections more widely than had previously been considered: international and across a considerable historical scope of American letters. The distance, for Carver, was not an impediment, anywhere his writing could draw upon shared human intimacy. Twenty-five years has passed since Carver's last publication, *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989), the culmination of his collaborative style. Today Carver's texts warrant literary investigation, not only because of the depth of formal and narrative sophistication I have explored in this thesis. The cultural conversation surrounding has implication for the future of American fiction and poetry. Spatial criticism and literature is made more relevant by the development of ways of reading and institutions less dependent on material construction: most recently, ebooks and online education. These developments turn the reader and critic again to investigate and challenge our spatial imaginations, and their representation in our literature. Across the borders, between the formal boundaries of American and literary spaces further afield, new paths emerge: to places we recognise as our own.

Appendix 1: Narrative trajectories in 'Gazebo'

The following charts owe much to Marie Laure Ryan ('Stacks, Frames, and Boundaries', *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*. ed. Brian Richardson. Columbus, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2002, 366-386). As the development of the charts in Chapter 3, they demonstrate a spatial conception of Carver's fiction.



Appendix 2: Narrative chart of 'Boxes'.

In this chart, forward-slashes signify a line break in the American edition (two-line breaks in *Elephant*) which divides sequences of paragraphs into more clearly separated sections. Correspondent elements are marked in capital text, underlined or italics, to highlight the concentric structure of the story.

/ A

LOCATION: Narrator's house

PHONE CALL from mother

Narrator stands at the WINDOW, thinking.

Jill browses catalogue, curtain shopping

Jill's history

roach

/ B

Narrator recalls MOVING IN, mother MOVING IN

PHONE CALL, before Christmas

Failed proximity conversation: 'You're never at home'

The weather

Mother's history of moving, 'losing her mind'

/ C

LOCATION: Mother's house

Hugs

Buzz worn off

Mother struggles with 'Worst icebox'

Alcoholic woman/ice crunching story

Larry Hadlock arrives

coffee

Reconfiguration of table,

Move to living room

Mother's declaration (house, town)

God

Larry's circumnavigation, sprinkler

Head in hands

cigarette

coffee

/ b

LOCATION: Mother's house

The goodbye

The move

coffee

/ a

LOCATION: Narrator's house

PHONE CALL from Mother.

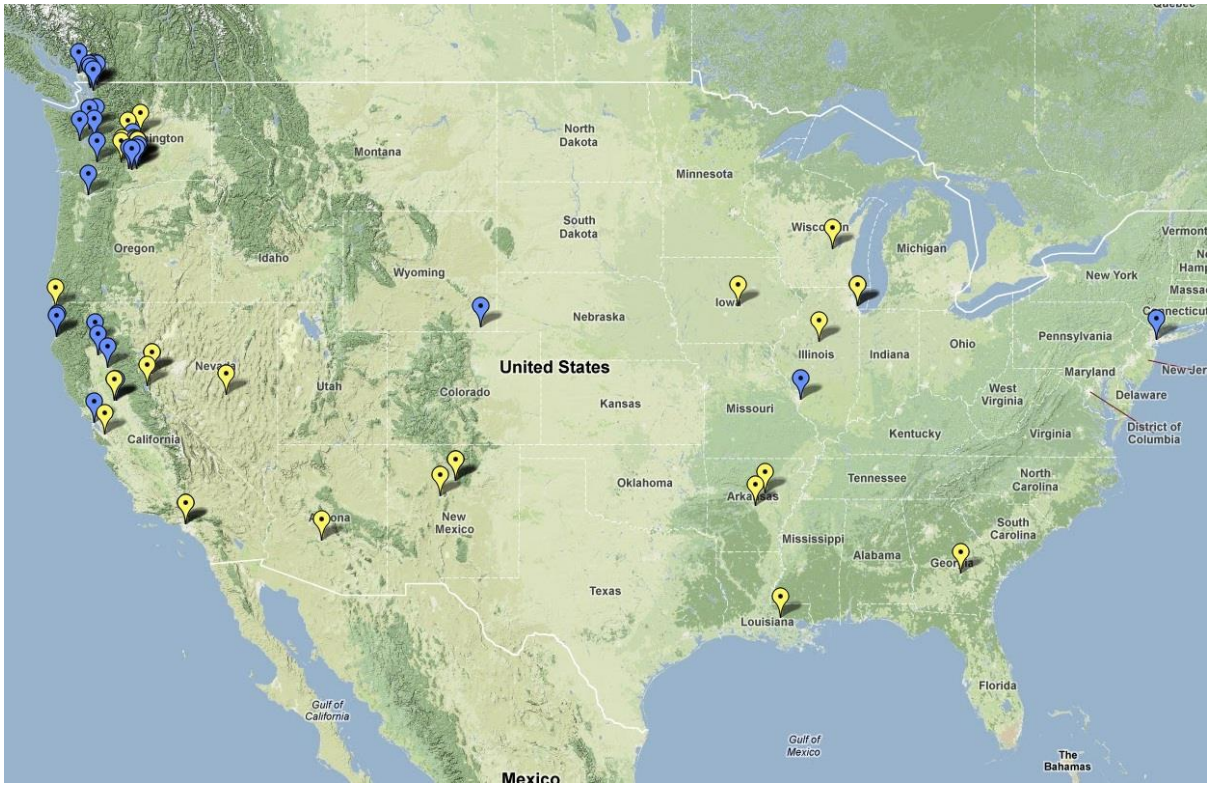
The power of the word: 'dear'

Neighbors waiting at the porch

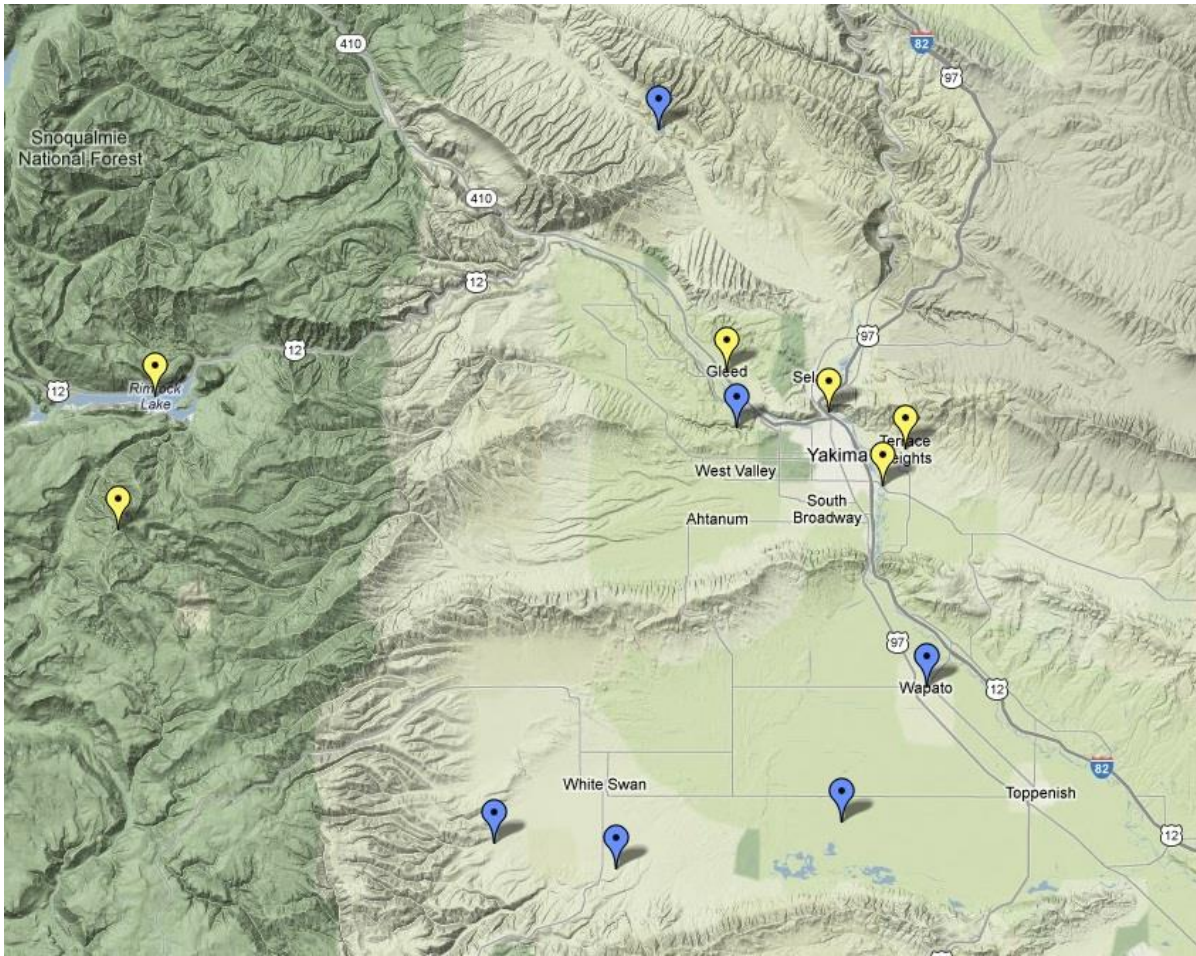
Jill turning the pages of the catalogue, for curtains

Looking out the WINDOW at neighbors

Appendix 3: 'Biographical "Carver Country"'



Map 1. Specific geographical references in Carver's first two collections of short fiction, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976, blue pins), and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981, yellow pins).



Map 2. A close-up on the sites of specific geographical reference around Yakima, WA, in Carver's first two collections of short fiction: *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976, blue pins), and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981, yellow pins).

An interactive version of these maps with clickable pins listing each reference can be found at <http://goo.gl/maps/j872>.

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