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Narrating Space: Historiographical Representations of Body and Landscape in

*Waterland* by Graham Swift and *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels

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Signature

Date

2003.02.12.

Signed by candidate

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Waterland* by Graham Swift and *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels are both characteristically postmodern novels about history or, rather, they are both about the concept of history and how to deal with it in a novel about the past. Both of these novels have characteristics of what Linda Hutcheon, in *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, calls the Historiographic Metafictional novel. While they approach history in a typically postmodern way, problematising the textualised nature of the past and our relationship to it, using parody, irony and dealing with the problems of narrative and subjectivity, I wish to explore one particular issue in more detail. And that is the use of the landscape and body and, more generally, the way that the spatial aspect of these novels asserts itself so strongly in their historicism. These novels each deal with the spatial (especially the landscape) in very different ways. They both, however, deal with the way that the landscape and bodies are entwined in the interrogation of history staged within the novel.

History in the postmodern era has come to be understood as “an act of language” (Brink, 32). The fact that our access to the past is in every way constituted of the textual must alter our whole relationship with it. André Brink goes so far as to say that “narrative lies at the very heart of what we call history” (32) and “what the reader is left with, in the reading of any narrative text ... is the irreducible fact of textuality” (41). Hutcheon, Elias, Soja, Greenblatt & Gallagher, and Hayden White are all in agreement on this point.

Hutcheon discusses in detail the way postmodern historiography differs from traditional historiography. She focuses on the textualised nature of historical evidence and documents and the way that history is always an act of language, always already

interpreted by the implicit values of the narrative conventions through which it finds expression. Our access to the past is mediated through previous interpretation and the nature of our relation to the past is primarily textual. Historians such as Hayden White find it necessary to acknowledge the historian's position as interpreter and the nature of historical writing as an act of interpretation, or imposing a shape on 'raw events.' As Hutcheon argues, under such circumstances, rather than undermine the validity of historical endeavour, the concept of historicism needs to be reinvented to assimilate and renew its understanding of historiography as implicated in language (particularly narrative conventions).

Brink argues further that fiction writers "have to tune into the new perception of what constitutes history" (33) and re-envision history beyond "the model that informed the original narrative ... bringing to it the procedures and mechanics and mind-sets that originally produced our very perception of the past" (33). Because the past is only available to us in the form of textual traces and discourses and history is defined first by its narrative characteristics, fiction about the past must engage with the problematic overlap between the previously separate categories of fact and fiction.

Francesca Benedict in "From story to history and back" outlines the implications of such a reconceptualisation of history. She says:

Reality is no longer a series of facts, a given ... As a result, historical contexts, issues of time and space, become of prime importance. Such notions of space and time, however, must be questioned as well for, as Stratton pointed out (1990, 303):

The realism of history or geography, as claimed representation, is dispersed in favour of notions of time and space which are excessive in that they do not describe, limit, but continually illustrate the problem of their own claims to structure the world. (Benedict, 125)

The representations of landscape and body in both of the novels I examine show that they too are subject to the same problems of representation as history. These novels acknowledge that landscape and body are first textual and cultural constructs, not pre-

existing, “natural” entities. Seeing them as linguistic or cultural constructs made up of conventions of seeing and representation – rather than a natural phenomenon – and seeing both landscape, body and history reduced to the realm of signifiers, makes the relationship between language and the landscape/body/history particularly interesting. I wish to focus on the way that the postmodern historiography of these two novels, through its interrogation of history, landscape and body, structures the world, acts as an organizing principle for narrative, and deals with its own textual nature and the limits of its claims.

Swift’s second epigraph to *Waterland* is particularly significant in this respect. The citation from *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens: “Ours was the marsh country...” not only signals a concern with the geographical as it articulates with the historical, but also establishes that the Fens are primarily a fictional landscape found in another novel. The reference to another text also suggests that the imaginary landscape is naturalised and the fiction upon which it is founded is elaborated over time. The Fens, like history, are primarily a textual and narrative construct rather than a pre-existing material landscape; not a material place, but an imaginary one.

Tom Crick, the narrator and central character in Swift’s novel, talks of getting picture books as a child: “in which the sun bounces over mountain tops and the road of life winds through heaps of green cushions, and is taught nursery rhymes in which persons go up and down hills” (13). The incongruity of these images and the scenery around them, Tom suggests, causes children to ask their elders why the Fens are flat. The answer is, “So that God has a clear view ...” (14) and I would suggest that it is precisely this flatness and featurelessness that enables Swift to highlight the constructed nature of the representations in general, whether geographical or historical. They are located in picture books, in a land of fiction. Our relationship with

the material world is mediated through the constructed or textual nature of the landscape, and the textual nature of historical 'facts'.

Pamela Cooper comments on the words near the beginning of the novel, "we lived in a fairy-tale place. In a lock-keeper's cottage, by a river, in the middle of the Fens" (1). These words introduce us simultaneously to the "story-teller's realm of free imaginative play ("a fairy-tale place") and the site of the historian's exact, disciplined investigations" (371). This she interprets as setting up "the fictional interplay of fiction and fact as intellectual and linguistic constructs [which] is deeply imbricated in a specific landscape" (371). The fact/fiction binary is "not so much identified as located" (371). The landscape, for Cooper, beyond signalling that it is a fictional construct, uses its textual nature to play out the overlap of the fictional and the historical and, in doing so, disrupts the binary oppositions upon which the spatial projections of historiography rest. The landscape in *Waterland* rather than allowing its material and artificial aspects, as well as fact and fiction, to be opposites, emphasizes the constructed nature of both. Nature and artifice are thus revealed to be more similar than different and no longer in a binary opposition. The notion of an untouched natural landscape allows Imperial history to treat such a landscape as a ground of emergence or an origin. Swift's landscape reveals that the projection of such origins, upon which linear, progressive history is predicated, rest on the binary opposition of artificial and natural and disrupting it, upsets the notion of origins and linearity.

The way in which landscape reveals itself as a fictional construct also finds expression in Anne Michaels' novel, *Fugitive Pieces*. In the section entitled "Phosphorus", which is primarily about the central character, Jakob's, relationship with his first wife, Alex, there is an example of how language and the landscape interact. Alex is a character ruled by and obsessed with language. This entire section

of the novel is studded with word play, puns, puzzles and anagrams. The self-referential nature of the language that is associated with Alex, and which defines her relationship with Jakob, is eventually what alienates Jakob and proves destructive to his ability to witness the past and deal with the events of the war both historically and in his memory because it is too ludic and does not address trauma adequately.

Associated with Alex, though, is a story about “a British intelligence agent Jasper Maskelyne who ... helped win the war with magic” (129). Maskelyne is a master of illusion. He concocts ruses:

false road signs, exploding sheep, artificial forests disguising landing fields, and mock battalions created with shadows – Maskelyne also staged wizard japes, large scale strategic illusions. He hid the entire Suez Canal with reflectors and searchlights. He moved Alexandria harbour a mile up the coast; each night a papier-mâché city was bombed in its stead, complete with fake rubble and canvas craters. (129)

These illusions operate on the level of signs, making the enemy mistake fake features for real ones and Michaels thus points to how the landscape in these illusions is read or understood. The disruption of rules of recognition or practices of reading familiar signs demonstrates that landscape is a textual construct constituted of signifiers.

Again, just as in *Waterland*, a historicism that is driven primarily by the textual is shown too easily to overlap with the fictional or illusory and this is demonstrated through the use of landscape. Although this is an isolated example in the text, it reflects on the use of landscape and historicism of the rest of the novel as well. The use of landscape in the rest of the novel serves not only to reconfigure the temporal in its relationship to the spatial, but to subvert, with the materiality of the landscape, the abstract rule of language in historicism, and in representation of landscape. Whereas *Waterland*, as Cooper argues, highlights the constructed nature of the “natural” to show how both the real and fictive are equally fictional, and thus interrupts the binary spatial projections of Empire, *Fugitive Pieces*, while displaying the same awareness

of the landscape as textual, shows evidence of a deeper faith in the material as counterpoint to the purely textual.

In an interview, Michaels explains further about the novel's use of the material:

the earth can help carry some of [Jakob's] grief, can be a repository for things that he can't carry himself, things that are too big to carry. ...And so the practical physical world is actually alive with faith and memory.  
([www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html](http://www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html).)

*Fugitive Pieces* is deeply concerned with lost memories and histories that are obscured or silenced by the grand narrative of official history. Michaels is responding to the specific history of the Jewish tradition, including the Shoah, an attempted genocide. The diasporic movements between Poland, Greece and Toronto are not only recent phenomena; this entire tradition is one of the scattering of peoples about the globe. A history based on linearity and mere idealism cannot be relied upon to take account of these pasts, especially those that the Nazis, for example, have tried to erase. The reclamation of that which is lost is important, but is also a daunting responsibility. As Jakob asks, "How can one man take on the memories of even one other man, let alone ten thousand; how can they be sanctified each?" (52). The novel's idea that the material world also carries memory releases written history and individual people from this responsibility, while providing an idea that memory is not lost, but can be retrieved through the material world.

Still, the self-reflexive aspect of language is not denied. Michaels, in a passage that has baffled many readers writes:

it is no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer, the Geiger counter amplifying the faint breathing of rock, fifty thousand years old. (Like the faint thump from behind the womb wall.) It is no metaphor to witness the astonishing fidelity of minerals magnetized, even after hundreds of millions of years, pointing to the magnetic pole, minerals who have never forgotten magma whose cooling off has ever left them desirous. We long for place, but

place itself longs. Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediments. (53)

A contradiction seems apparent. The desire and longing of rock and place *is* overtly metaphoric because the reader must encounter them through language. That these ideas have found their way into language means that they are utterly transformed into language. Perhaps an answer of sorts lies in the idea that these physical characteristics (the physical and the material being what is ultimately denied to the textual) are given the ability to measure time and hold meaning outside of language, beyond words.

That “stones acquire the power ‘to hold human time’ (32)” (Rosochaki, 11) means that time has been reimagined as something located and embedded in the material and ultimately independent of language. The type of time in rocks can be brought to bear in writing and memory itself is understood as undergoing archaeological and geological processes that are commonly understood as functions of the landscape. Memory can be preserved in the material rather than the merely linguistic traces of the past. Michaels, referring to meteorology and geology among other physical sciences that are referred to in the novel, explains,

There’s a sense of time, of consequence, of accumulation that all these sciences hold. They’re physical. They’re real. They’re not metaphors of abstraction. They’re metaphors of reality, taken from reality. And that’s important for me. ([www3.telus.net/ccho/michaels.html](http://www3.telus.net/ccho/michaels.html))

The distinction between a metaphor of abstraction and a metaphor of reality seems key to understanding the passage from the novel and the relationship between the physical and textual worlds. Michaels is suspicious of language that does not strive to connect with reality, or draw its metaphorical power from a rootedness in real, especially material things.

Michaels writes, “Nazi policy was beyond racism, it was anti-matter, for Jews were not considered human. An old trick of language, used often in the course of

history” (165). Michaels opposes this anti-material historicism ruled by abstract ideals. Those, like Athos, “who chose to do good at great personal risk; those who never confused objects with humans, who knew the difference between naming and being named” (167) reject the rule of ideas. According to Annick Hillger, Athos is the quintessential Historical Materialist in the novel. He recovers a history of matter from the fabrications of Nazi historicism which ensure that “every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future. Eventually the idea will hit someone in the back of the head. This is the duplicity of history: an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected” (161). The terms in which history is recorded dictate the manner in which it will be resurrected. Written history that merely records ideas, and is predicated upon ideals is, according to this novel, a destructive kind of historicism. Like Nazism it disregards the material and through this detachment from the physical can perform atrocities in the name of high ideals. This is why Michaels can be regarded as a materialist. *Waterland* explores a similar concept in the idea of the sexuality of the Fens and curiosity that “weds us to the world” (206), that subverts historicism and does not conform to the rules of historical time either. Although it is suspicious of inscriptions of the natural, this novel also proposes that, while the landscape, like history, is constructed, and is only accessible through language, it also has an effect on the representation of history.

The material, and the body particularly, in recent theory are seen as an area of resistance to language and the meanings that it imposes. Gallagher and Greenblatt in *Practicing New Historicism* argue that, “The body functions as a kind of ‘spoiler’, always baffling or exceeding the ways in which it is represented” (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 15). There is a certain incorruptibility of the material that refuses to allow itself to be caught up in games of signification. Brian May, writing on J M Coetzee,

notes the way that the body is implicated in a resistance to historical recovery and thus “frustrate[s] both imperial and revisionist history” (392). He quotes Coetzee speaking of “the body and its undeniable life” (392) as well as its “undeniable ... power” (392). Its presence in narrative has the effect of “unsettling the relation between ... representation and bodily reality” (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 15). The body, although written on, is a point of breakdown for language.

Michaels uses the body precisely to this end. She refers to the “faith of the body” (168) and the “hope of human cells” (168) returning the abstract ideas of faith and hope to the biological body. She aims to break down the binary of matter and idea, not merely opposing language and the body, but relocating something abstract, like memory which is usually associated with thought, in the body. Thus she uses the body to subvert the meanings which historical writings impose on it by making the body, rather than writing, the location of abstractions like memory and hope. This subverts the abstract rule of language and creates a space for an alternative, materialist historicism. The presence of the body unsettles signification and through it we can become suspicious of written history.

*Waterland* presents a body that is outside of language but which language tries to retrieve. Brooks argues that “we are forever trying to make the body into a text” (7). He elaborates that “narrative desire, as the subtending dynamic of stories and their telling, becomes oriented toward knowledge and possession of the body.

Narrative seeks to make such a body semiotic, to mark or imprint it as a narrative sign” (8). Much of the narrative around the body of Freddie Parr, found drowned in the sluice, is involved in trying to interpret the bruises left on his face, thus making them a sign in the narrative. Narrative tries to appropriate his body by giving it meaning. As with the landscape, particularly in the case of Dick, Tom’s mentally

retarded brother, the body is inscribed as natural from within language. Particularly in Dick's case, the representation of the body often highlights its own inscription with reference to the Fens and thus interrogates and upsets the nature/culture binary.

*Waterland*, in seeing language as an attempt to retrieve the body, breaks this binary by employing the body as that which engenders language and motivates narrative. While it is always excluded from language, language is no longer seen as the opposite of the body, but rather language is of the body.

Soja, Berger and others who, though admitting that the insights of historicism have been perhaps the most important emancipatory insights since the nineteenth century, allowing oppressed and exploited classes to resist those in power, are adamant that the geographical or spatial has been obscured by historicism's hegemony. History has monopolised time and blinded us to the consequences of space. Berger, in *Another Way of Telling*, writes about ways of opposing the dogmatic nature of historicist thought:

An opposition to history may be partly an opposition to what happens in it. But not only that. Every revolutionary protest is also a project against people being the objects of history. And as soon as people feel, as a result of their desperate protest, that they are no longer such objects, *history ceases to have the monopoly of time*. (Berger, 104)

He argues that before industrialization, and the height of historicist thought in the nineteenth century, time and history were not necessarily conflated (106) and "the rate of historical change was slow enough for an individual's awareness of time passing to remain quite distinct from her or his awareness of historical change" (106). In relation to a narrative form for photographic narrative, he notes ways that "can be used in order to break the monopoly which history today has over time" (109). He explores ideas about narrative in general in this essay, and much of what he says is relevant for my exploration of spatial forms in ordinary narrative.

He argues that in many ways people, especially in their private lives, oppose the historical: "People's opposition to history is a reaction ... against a violence done to them. The violence consists in conflating time and history so that the two become indivisible, so that people can no longer read their experience of either of them separately." (105). Thus by representing time in a way that defies history's monopoly on time, there is an attempt to prevent the tendency of historicist narrative to make people the objects of history. I believe that Tom Crick of *Waterland* and Jakob Beer of *Fugitive Pieces* both struggle against this tendency in narrative conventions. Furthermore, each of these novels employs the use of space to represent a conception of time that unifies different types of time in a field like that of memory or consciousness, while also allowing them to exist in their own right, rather than conflating them.

The use of the spatial, especially in the case of the landscape, as an organizing principle and a very influential part of the narrative structures of *Fugitive Pieces* and *Waterland* is deeply implicated in the way that time is figured. Time in these novels is not the historical time of the traditional historical novel, which may be viewed as having a progressive, unilinear, causal logic. The field of time is imagined in many different permutations and the use of landscape has as much to do with time as it does with space. The historicism of these novels does not use the primacy of the historical to obscure geography, but rather shows the importance of the spatial in historical thought, representations and conceptualizations of history. The landscapes in these novels are filled with time.

Rawdon Wilson notes:

As Gaston Bachelard observes (and Proust demonstrates) memory is, in its structures, highly spatial. It seems to work through visual images of space. ... Georges Poulet makes a similar point: memories and places, changes in time and changes in space, spatial image and temporal phase, all intersect in Proust

such that the recapturing of lost time is possible only under the form of the rediscovery of lost places. (Wilson, 216)

Swift and Michaels, like Proust before them, demonstrate that time and space affect each other in complex ways in representations of the past, and particularly with regard to memory. Memory has, in recent criticism, become an important aspect of subverting the hegemony of historicism, and creating new ways of dealing with the past. While, as I will discuss later, it has its critical shortcomings, it is nevertheless an influential aspect of the way that the novels I deal with engage with the past. Its effect on the use of space is a critical part of this.

Wilson argues later, with reference to *The Garden of Forking Paths* by Borges, that

all spatial arrangements are labyrinthine, not simply because the narrative concerns a mysterious labyrinth and the *mise en abyme* effect is powerful, but because the central narrative concept is that time bifurcates, that time is labyrinthine, not directly linear, and that *fictional space mirrors what is true of time*. (219, my emphasis)

Referring to Borges and Edmund Spenser he comments that, “both write narratives in which space is extremely plastic, given to unpredictable shapes and deformations, and both link this plasticity to the experience of time” (219). In fictional representations of both time and space, the representation of the other is involved. Cook argues that “space and time are intimately joined” and “even Heidegger, giving preponderance to time in *Being and Time*, cannot avoid putting space at the heart of his dialectic. ‘Before’ and ‘behind’ transpose easily from space to time” (553). Both of the novels I have chosen use the spatial to comment on time – especially in relation to historicism. Edward J. Soja argues that the “encompassing perspective” (14) of the historical imagination involves “an already-made geography [that] sets the stage, while the wilful making of history dictates the action that defines the story line” (14). Space is conventionally seen as a setting for the action of the narrative. Soja argues:

The discipline imprinted in a sequentially unfolding narrative predisposes the reader to think historically, making it difficult to see the text as a map, a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial rather than a temporal logic. (1)

The historicism of the novels that I will examine interrupts the conventions of the “sequentially unfolding narrative”, creating a narrative shape that resembles a “geography of simultaneous...meanings” (Soja, 1).

*Waterland*, for instance, explores the idea of history as exhibiting the simultaneous drive to progress away from and preserve the past. Tom reorientates the notion of progress when he proposes that, “As progress progresses, the world can slip away. It’s progress if you can stop the world slipping away” (336). Preservation is figured as a process of constant recovery, a pumping and excavating to reclaim history or civilization from the erosive force of progressive time. This process is figured in the novel as the reclamation of the Fens from water as the sea constantly threatens to wash away the land. The contradictory field of history is figured as an entity that is maintained and eroded, rather than a line progressing into the future. It finds its first and most important expression in the representation of the landscape.

Thomas Crick, the protagonist narrator of *Waterland*, makes frequent reference to the spatial dimensions of his conception of history. He talks about Natural History, which he sets in opposition to “the artificial stuff” (205) and subverts historicism’s progress because it “doesn’t go anywhere” (205). It “perpetually travels back to where it came from” (205). Perhaps the most definitive statement he makes in this regard is that “there are no compasses for journeying in time. As far as our sense of direction in this unchartable dimension is concerned, we are like lost travellers in a desert” (135). The clear association in this metaphor between geography and the dimension of the temporal is unmistakable. Sean P. Murphy, in a psychoanalytic reading of the novel observes that Swift also combines temporal and spatial indicators

in his description of the Fens as “the middle of nowhere” (3) as “middle” can be considered both a spatial or temporal indicator. He argues, “thus, *Waterland* commences with a fascinating reference to stories that combine the spatial and temporal narrative paradigms, both of which critics traditionally regard as discrete threads of the narrative cloth” (76). In this novel the spatial and temporal interact very differently to the way that they interact in the traditional historical novel in which the history is perceived as dialectic and vital, and the spatial is perceived as a neutral backdrop.

Amy J. Elias makes the following central point:

To the postmodernists, history traditionally has been misunderstood as teleological (hence cultural notions of “progress”): a two-dimensional figure, a line was used to represent history’s directed course. History, in other words, was conceived as linear, purposeful time. Postmodernist historical novels break up the teleological line of history and present history in different spatial terms. (111)

This is a key point which will inform my argument. Although Elias’s argument is brief and does not discuss these rather broad claims substantially, or reveal in any great detail beyond preliminary suggestions what these “different spatial terms” might be, I hope to show their relevance by connecting her ideas to those of Edward J. Soja and John Berger, and further to a discussion of the “Postmodernist Historical Novel”. Linda Hutcheon has called this the Historiographic Metafictional text. Understanding the spatial projections of the texts that I have chosen is essential to an exploration of their interrogations of historicism.

*Fugitive Pieces* also complicates the relation between the spatial and temporal, starting with the words, “Time is a blind guide” (1). Time is a guide: it gives us direction and has a spatial quality. Later, Jakob, the narrator of Part I writes: “The present, like a landscape, is only a small part of a mysterious narrative” (48). Michaels’ making the present and the landscape analogous introduces her tendency, in

the rest of the novel, to demonstrate how the usually disparate concepts of space and time impact on one another. The section heading, “Vertical Time” once more challenges the linear progressive nature of time by reinventing it as vertical, which is utterly different to historicism’s usual horizontal spatial configuration. Time is seen as layered rather than progressive.

In an interview with Peter Oliva, when asked to comment on the idea that her narration is linear, Michaels says that, “It is linear, but I also say that time meets itself in pleats and folds, it’s linear but it’s deep” and “The present is just the focus of a huge amount of time. You can press down anywhere and reach profound depths of time, from any present moment” ([www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html](http://www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html)). Time is “focused”, you can “press down” on it, it is “deep” and has “pleats and folds”. Many of these shapes have attributes of the geological and the landscape in *Fugitive Pieces* is quintessentially geological. Athos, the archeologist and geologist “often applied the geologic to the human, analyzing social change as he would a landscape. Explosions, seizures, floods, glaciation. He constructed his own historical topography” (119). His idea of a “historical topography” is one that is born out in the rest of the novel. It is important to this conceptualization that the geological shapes are seen as temporal. When in England Athos “described flowstone, dripstone and other marvellous cave formations; spasms in time” (36). The shapes of the landscape embody the temporal patterns that the novel explores. But more importantly, they reveal how time is imagined in terms of various complex formations that subvert the linear. Later Michaels comments on “the fluidity of time through memory” being “compelling but also very beautiful” ([www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html](http://www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html)). Memory’s effect on the use of space in this novel, even in the narrative arrangement, can be seen in this fluidity, and I will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

Commenting on the process of writing novels, in an interview with Wordsworth Publishers, Michaels says, “Thought requires time and a novel allows you to be with the reader long enough to let time and thought enter the equation. The concept of communicating over time and moving with the reader through time is very intriguing to me” ([www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels](http://www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels)). This assertion is born out in her response to a question about the structure of the novel and her reasons for including Part II, rather than simply concluding the novel with Jakob’s story:

The book would have been entirely different and the meaning entirely different if the story had ended after the first half. It is important that both Jakob and Ben are profoundly influenced by events they did not live through or actually experience. The book explores the effect of memory and history. The second part needed to be there.  
([www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels](http://www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels))

In all of these comments there is a preoccupation with the use of time. The last statement that I have quoted accurately describes the idea of ‘Remote Causes’ in *Fugitive Pieces*. The fact that causality in this novel is not linear, in the typical historicist fashion, is born out in the narrative structure.

What affects the characters, and other events in the novel as well, is often remote, mysterious or connected in ways to which normal notions of causality would be blind. One character, Naomi, believes that “the inner mechanisms of civic power” (239) can be understood in terms of such unlikely causalities. Ben, her husband, explains her claims that

Cities are built on compromising encounters, on shared affections for certain foods, on chance meeting in indoor pools. By the third week she could tell me, with a meaningful look, of a certain politician’s penchant for antique glass and I’d understand the new parking bylaws. (239)

The way that this is programmed into the narrative structure reveals a subversion of linear historicist thought and a more complex manner of dealing with time in the novel.

Elias argues that

Postmodernist historical novels reformulate history by countering historical linearity with other, more disjunctive, spatial metaphors. They disrupt linearity much the way cubism disrupted “mimetic” representation in the plastic arts... Certain novels can be considered “spatial forms” rather than “temporal narratives” because they disrupted the linear reading flow, juxtaposed sections of text, suspended time progression, and repeated image patterns. (110)

Edward J. Soja, in his book *Postmodern Geographies*, deals extensively with the spatial or geographical aspect of historicism and historical thought. He deals with historicism’s claim to structure the world, and finds it lacking, or at least espousing a bias towards a temporal focus at the expense of the spatial. His aim is rather to create “a more flexible and balanced critical theory that re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies” (11).

He asserts: “My intent is not to erase the historical hermeneutic but to open up and recompose the territory of the historical imagination through a critical spatialization” (12) and to create “possibilities for a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism” (12). I believe it is important to emphasize that the intention in spatial thought is not to do away with historicism. Soja calls on us to recognize that this perspective does not involve a “simplistic anti-history” (23), but a more comprehensive balancing of space, time and social being. It is to bring to historicism a more complex way of dealing with time, and this involves bringing a more complex spatial aspect to temporal representations. The novels with which I will deal, as well as the theorists that I draw on, *are* concerned with the past and with historicism. It is part of a process, not of rejecting historicism, but of changing our concept of what historicism is.

Soja’s aim is to “deconstruct and recompose the rigidly historical narrative, to break from the temporal prisonhouse of language and similarly carceral historicism of

conventional critical theory to make room for the insights of an interpretative human geography, a spatial hermeneutic” (1). He aims for the “reasserti[on of] the significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary thought” (11).

This can be seen at work in Michaels’ concept of “The Gradual Instant” (171), closely related to the notion of “Remote Causes” in *Fugitive Pieces*. It is another key concept and driving principle of the novel’s logic. Jakob, the narrator of Part I and main protagonist of the novel, writes,

For years after the war, even the smallest decision was an agony. I examined my steps before I took them, even before the most trivial excursion...

Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion – planned, timed, wired carefully – not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so *history is the gradual instant*. (77, my emphasis)

In the first half of this extract the notion of causality is questioned. What can be said to cause an event to take place? What leads up to it? Jakob, weighted by the awareness that every minute historical detail contributes to each and every outcome, that causality is not linear but enveloping, comes to the conclusion that history is the gradual instant. Jakob explains this further when he says, “Though the contradictions of war seem sudden and simultaneous, history stalks before it strikes. Something tolerated soon becomes something good” (159). This can be combined with Athos’ comment that

It’s a mistake to think it’s the small things we control and not the large, it’s the other way around! We can’t stop the small accident, the tiny detail that conspires to fate: the extra moment you run back for something forgotten, a moment that saves you from an accident – or causes one. But we can assert the largest order, the large human values daily, the only order large enough to see. (22)

These passages insist that causality is elusive and complex. Details build up to result in an outcome, and Athos’ point is that linear narrative cannot trace the delicate structures of causality. It becomes a larger ethical decision. Further, the paradox of the

gradual instant reconfigures time in accordance with the notion of “Remote Causes”. Time is made into a new shape, and the paradox reveals the inadequacy of a traditional notion of the temporal to deal with this way of understanding the relationships between events. Causality is not a line, but a web. It is a simultaneous, spreading shape, and moments or instants cannot be isolated. The gradual and the instantaneous can no longer be said to be mutually exclusive categories. Thus the linear rule of grammar is also interrupted and to take this into account, narrative must connect in new and different ways.

Narrative typically moves in a temporal dimension. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes that “our civilisation tends to think of time as an uni-directional and irreversible flow, a sort of one-way street. Such a conception was given by Heraclitus early in Western history: ‘You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet other waters go ever flowing on’” (44). Rimmon-Kenan defines time in narrative fiction as “the relations of chronology between story and text” (44). By this she means that there is a distinction between ‘story-time’ and ‘text-time’. Story time refers to the succession of events in the story, text time to the “linear(spatial) disposition of linguistic segments in the continuum of the text” (44). By the latter she means simply the succession of words, sentences and chapters in the text, which tends to be linear and successive. Through Rimmon-Kenan’s argument that this is “strictly speaking... a spatial, not a temporal dimension” (44), we can already see how the spatial and temporal in narrative are entangled. Cook argues that

Literature generally, Bakhtin asserts, is intrinsically chronotopic: it fuses space and time, with time predominant, as Lessing had long ago argued in distinguishing the verbal arts from the visual. And yet the spatial does not recede in literature, first because its words, thought inescapably time-sequenced, are laid out in a syntactic pattern that correlates to spatial organization ... Space thus retains its place in the chronotopic. (554)

He argues that literature thus has the potential to engage the spatial dimensions of time and “exhibit them with such saliency and fluidity that even the visual arts cannot fully match” (554). Visual arts are more traditionally associated with the spatial, but the often neglected overlap of the temporal and spatial in literature creates new possibilities for representations of fictional space.

Rimmon-Kenan argues that unless one encounters the unusual case which has a very simple story with only one character and one story-line, “events may become simultaneous and the story is often multilinear rather than unilinear” (17). The impulse in creating historicism’s Grand Narrative has been to marginalise or ignore any narrative not generated by those in power. The narrative of history tends toward the unilinear and homogenous and the teleological linearity of historicism, in the view of both Soja and Berger, is implicated in the narrative structure of the traditional historical narrative.

Rimmon-Kenan concludes that the relation between the order of events and their succession in the text is, then, what defines time in the novel: the relation between the spatial and the temporal. She argues that these need not, and seldom do, correspond and the most interesting part of the analysis of time in the narrative is thus the discordance between the two. The “shape” of the narratives of the novels I examine are influenced by the type of time in their landscapes. This allows the historical narrative to deal with the “simultaneity and extension of events” (Berger in Soja, 22) in a more complex manner than linear narrative. These narratives are geographically influenced in their historicism and their dealing with the past, memory and time.

John Berger, in *The Look of Things*, writes on the crisis of the modern novel:

What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the *mode of narration*. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in

time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline *laterally*. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines. Such awareness is the result of our constantly having to take into account the *simultaneity and extension* of events and possibilities. (Berger, cited by Soja, 22)

He argues that this is so because of various social conditions including the state of communication and the scale of modern power. Soja emphasizes Berger's point:

*"Prophecy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space, not time that hides consequences from us ... Any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of this dimension is incomplete and acquires the oversimplified character of a fable."* (in Soja, 22 – original italics).

Soja writes,

Simultaneities intervene, extending our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances, complicating the temporal flow of meaning, short-circuiting the fabulous stringing-out of 'one damned thing after another'. The new, the novel, must now involve an explicitly geographical as well as historical configuration and projection. (Soja, 23)

In both *Waterland* and *Fugitive Pieces*, the story line is implicated in the landscape; the narrative unfolding has a spatial dimension. The story does not simply involve straight lines and a static setting in space. In both novels the landscape is imbued with a kind of time and is treated in relation to history, rather than as a static or neutral backdrop to the unfolding of events in time. This signals a kind of post-historicism, a geographical insistence on simultaneous events. In *Waterland* the posthistorical void finds a metaphor in the landscape of the Fens, and in *Fugitive Pieces* the archaeological and geological timescales in the landscape and rock subvert historicism's dogged monopoly on time. The reassertion of the geographical in the "historical" novel certainly signals that these novels deal explicitly with the typical

blindness to space in both historicity and narrative. The story-line is as much geographical as it is historical.

*Waterland's* Tom Crick says of history, "It goes in two directions at once. It goes backward as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours. Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future" (135). Using the same example as Rimmon-Kenan, he cites Heraclitus' river to describe time:

So that while the Ouse flows to the sea, it flows, in reality, like all rivers, only back to itself, to its own source; and that impression that a river moves only one way is an illusion. And it is also an illusion that whatever you throw (or push) into a river will be carried away, and never return. Because it will return. And that remark first put about, two and a half thousand years ago, by Heraclitus of Ephesus, that we cannot step twice into the same river, is not to be trusted. Because we are always stepping into the same river. (145-6)

This river Ouse in the Fenlands, with "the secret capacity to move yet remain" (143) is used to subvert the traditional mythology of time as progress, and the narrative flow of this novel is similar to the river in this way.

Sean P. Murphy's reading of the novel involves tenuously equating the spatial with feminine sexuality, and the temporal with the male sexuality (78). He thus calls *Waterland's* narrative structure "polysexual/spatial" (78) in order to illustrate that it obfuscates these binary oppositions and undermines the paradigm that creates such binaries, which, he argues, is the particular aim of the spatial narrative.

In critical accounts of *Waterland* there exist a number of interpretations of the spatiality of the text. Sean P. Murphy, George P. Landow, and Pamela Cooper give the most complex readings of this aspect of the novel. Murphy and Landow both draw on Roland Barthes' notion in *S/Z* of a text as a "network with a thousand entrances" (6) and as "a galaxy of significations, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning;

it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances...” (5). Murphy says that this plurality disrupts “the linear unfolding of meanings” (75):

The narrative of *Waterland* effectively embraces all narrative paradigms and refuses to privilege one model over another. The marriage of temporality and spatiality frees the narrative from the bondage of labels and leaves readers and critics interpellated into a symbolic network located “in the middle of nowhere” (*W* 3). (Murphy, 75)

For Murphy the text’s spatiality is created by a more egalitarian approach to the discourses of which it is constituted. It is a galaxy rather than a hierarchy, its “chains of signification ... transgress the laws of binary and blur the lines between the various meanings structuralists could map” (76). The narrative structure of *Waterland* is distinctly non-linear because “Swift depicts Tom actively opposing the strictures of linearity via his discourse, a discourse which he patterns according to a model of disruption, of spatiality” (77). This narrative structure does not necessarily involve a succession of events, but one where the parts exist simultaneously, like the river, not going anywhere.

Berger argues that the “waiting for the end” (285) in narrative is a modern invention and that the

essential tension of a story must live elsewhere. Not so much in the destination as in the mystery of the spaces between its steps toward that destination. All stories are discontinuous and based on a tacit agreement about what is not said, about what connects the discontinuities” (Berger, 285).

The field of memory, with its discontinuities and the particular logic that connects events, is directly addressed in the narrative relations that Berger discusses. The photographic narrative, Berger says, situates the “narrative subject” (which is an amalgam of protagonists, listener and teller that become fused in the telling of a story, to whom it is addressed (Berger, 286)) “before the task of memory: the task of continually *resuming* a life being lived in the world” (Berger, 287). This differs from film, for example, where the movement is always forward to the next moment,

looking forward, not backwards. The montage of attractions – the way that individual images connect to make a pattern, the drive of time forward or backward, both ways, or stronger in one direction – Berger argues “in a sequence of still photographs destroys the very notion of *sequences*.... The sequence becomes a field of coexistence like the field of memory” (Berger, 288).

Thomas W. Laqueur, the historian, in his introduction to the Winter 2000 (69) edition of the journal, *Representations*, notes how space seems to demand memory (Laqueur, 1). This issue of the journal links space to monuments, historic locations and memorial practices. It refers to space as a static element, while time, in flux, moves over it. The way that space is used in memorial practices to subvert traditional historicism is certainly one way in which recent thought has employed space in the criticism of history. Laqueur makes explicit the conception of spacio-temporal relations assumed by such memorial practices: “The spatial is set in contrast to the temporal: a place that at one moment was the venue for something—horrible, magnificent, world-historical—that cries out to be remembered, exists in time, which inexorably washes it of the marks it bore” (Laqueur, 1). This conception keeps in place the view of the spatial or geographical that Soja subverts in his argument for a new, comprehensive re-entwining of the spatial and temporal in critical social thought. He refers to “Foucault’s summative observation: ‘Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic’” (Soja, 4). This statement is still applicable in this conception of memorial practices. Despite its opposition to the historical – “memory was claimed by the heretofore silenced and oppressed as a gateway to the past that history has closed” (Laqueur, 1) – it still brings to bear the mechanics of the old conceptualisation of history, without considering the spatial, on its dealings. Laqueur,

with other authors of this journal's articles, laments the quasi-religious, uncritical nature of memory as opposed to critical history. Memory is more mythical, and as "fictional" or fabricated, as historicism ever was, but at least academic history attempts some sort of verification and secular critical approach to its material. This allegiance of the spatial to the uncritical use of memory, for Laqueur, is the danger of the re-assertion of space in our relationship to the past.

But there are other ways, beyond space's demand for memory, in which the spatial and temporal interact in historicism. Postmodern historiography – contradiction that it might be – sees the spatial and the landscape interacting with memory in ways that seem to provide a complex response to the critical suspicion of memory.

In *Fugitive Pieces*' "Acknowledgements", Michaels writes, "My resolve was also strengthened by the work of John Berger". Berger himself, in a review for the *Observer* writes, "Monumental ... *Fugitive Pieces* is the most important book I have read for forty years". In the correlation of their ideas, as in the above extract, it is clear that Berger has been consciously influential in Michaels' formulation of her own attitude to memory in *Fugitive Pieces*. Berger's privileging "ubiquity" over "identity" corresponds to Michaels' "Remote Causes" and "The Gradual Instant". Such notions of simultaneity constitute an opposition to history. The types of connections that exist between events in memory have to do with a kind of logic of resemblance, rather than causal or linear logic. They have to do with a similarity in which one event or image in memory might "contain" another, or lead to another by a type of attraction of resemblance.

*Fugitive Pieces*, particularly, deals with the landscape in relation to the processes of memory as well as history and how they interact. The first narrator,

Jakob, writes, “history and memory share events; that is, they share time and space” (138) and of “the bond of memory and history when they share space and time” (161). This view of time allows “the event [to be] meaningful only if the coordination of time and place is witnessed” (162). This seems to suggest that meaning is challenged or confounded by the conception of time that does not separate moments, but in which each discrete moment is multiplied. But in this novel the straight lines of history are split: “Irony is scissors, a divining rod, always pointing in two directions” (162). The repetition of the phrase, “every moment is two moments” (138, 141, 161) suggests memory insists on a more simultaneous relationship. Jakob illustrates the way that one event triggers another, “Alex’s hairbrush propped up on the sink: Bella’s brush. Alex’s bobby pins: Bella’s hairclips ... Bella writing on my back: Alex’s touch during the night” (140). Halfway through this passage the hierarchy of what comes first, memory or present event, becomes inverted. They take on an equal value.

John Berger writes, “Memory is a field where different times co-exist. The field is continuous in terms of the subjectivity that creates and extends it, but temporarily it is discontinuous” (279-80). Memory, he argues, opposes the passing of time, but proposes its “own form of simultaneity, in which all their images can co-exist. It stimulates and is stimulated by the interconnectedness of events” (280). By this he means the way in which events resemble each other, rather than being different or separate; the way that the memory of one thing may trigger another. Memories stimulate each other and connect with a logic that is governed by “the unstated but assumed connections between events” (Berger, 284). Events in the field of memory interpenetrate and this is exactly what we can see happening in the representation of Jakob and his memories, especially of Bella.

Berger in another essay, *Once Upon a Time*, argues that “consciousness cannot be reduced to the laws of uni-linear time. It is always, at any given moment, trying to come to terms with a whole” (23). In this argument about consciousness, a “whole” constitutes a spatial projection. He meditates on the implications of contemplative thought:

Yet what is contemplation if it is not the acknowledgement, the celebration, of the spatial and the forgetting of the temporal?... Within the act of contemplation the spatial does not exclude time, but it emphasises simultaneity instead of sequence, presence instead of cause and effect, ubiquity instead of identity. (Berger b, 25)

In *Fugitive Pieces* this relation is expressed in the landscape. Different types of time configure memory: “Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediments” (53). Memory is not merely dependent on the spatial as a static entity opposing the flux of time, and thus bearing a mark of memory through it. The patterns of the spatial, of the material, become the patterns of memory.

This is apparent in many of the images that Michaels uses. Maurice Salman, Jakob’s friend, works in a museum. He teaches a course at the university called, “Ancient Weather: Predicting the past” (173). He says that it is, ““Almost as tricky ... as knowing what the weather will be next week”” (173). In order to understand events, it is not necessary organise them in a linear chronology. The paradox in “predicting the past” asserts that one’s orientation in time for some events is negligible, or at least its importance is less clearly defined than historicism would consider necessary. Ben, narrator of Part II, also subverts the importance of forward, progressive orientation when understanding the past in biography: “The hindsight of biography is as elusive and deductive as long-range forecasting” (222). At the very end of Jakob’s narrative, he reflects on his past, remembering fleeing his home after his parents are murdered. He addresses these final words to the children he imagines having, “I grasped the two

syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name” (195). When he was in the forest, fleeing, we know that the syllables, “Bella”, are actually his sister’s name. But he collapses the time of the past and the future together, allowing the past to be filled with the future too, and confounding linearity.

In the photographic narrative, the process of “reading” is the same in its workings as the process of remembering. It subverts historicist time, and creates a new way, or another way, of telling stories about the past, or about a life. The images or events of the narrative attract each other by their own ordering principles, based on resemblance, and the direction of the narrative can move differently according to these attractions. Berger details a type of narrative that destroys sequences and historicist narrative conventions, and shows the spatial implications that this might have. The novels I will examine allow different times to exist in a spatial field, and I believe that the motivation behind this is similar to that which Berger describes in relation to the photo-narrative. By using the time of the landscapes, or the spatial as a method of narrative ordering, the story takes on a different shape and different values in its approach to the past. The spatial aspect of narrative allows different types of time to exist simultaneously in a field like consciousness or memory, without necessarily privileging one type of time or event.

Towards the end of his essay, *Once Upon a Time*, Berger deals with a question about how his thought might be categorized. He writes, “I have been labelled a Marxist. ...Within the world historical arena the fighting is mostly as he [Marx] foresaw. The questions to which I give voice here come from outside that arena” (Berger, 28). It is important that these issues come from beyond the historical arena, because postmodern historical novels, while concerned with history in a way that modernist text typically are not, also include influences that are usually considered

outside of history. And the most important of these for me is the spatial. It is not that it debunks historicism, but that historicism has changed to include its influence.

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## CHAPTER TWO: *FUGITIVE PIECES* BY ANNE MICHAELS

The epigraph to *Fugitive Pieces* begins:

During the Second World War, countless manuscripts – diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts – were lost or destroyed. Some of these narratives were deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors – by those who did not live to retrieve them.

Other stories are concealed in memory, neither written nor spoken. Still others are recovered by circumstance alone. (page not numbered)

The allusion to lost histories, memories that are silenced, records that are buried, and events that remain unwitnessed, raises a central concern of the novel: how do we witness the past, redeem the past? How do we remember and what do we remember of what is lost? When Jakob asks, “How can one man take on the memories of even one other man, let alone five or ten thousand; how can they be sanctified each?” (52), this highlights a concern with both witnessing and preserving events, and it reveals anxiety and guilt at the apparent impossibility of sanctifying all that is lost. But it also begins a process to discover how to create ways of living with the past that are not debilitating or destructive and do not involve being trapped in the past. It points to the novel’s concern with the ability to live with that which is *not* witnessed.

Jakob says, “I did not witness the most important events in my life” (17) and refers to “The events we lived through without knowing” (110). He was hidden away in a cottage on the Greek island of Zakynthos for the duration of the Second World War. Although he lived through the war, he was unable to witness the events taking place in the world around him. When his parents are murdered, Jakob is hidden in a gap in the wall and thus escapes detection and the fate of his family. Jakob is like one of the buried manuscripts in the epigraph. He is present but somehow hidden. His whole life is a simultaneous presence and absence. Because he is hidden he does not actually witness his sister Bella’s death. Without having witnessed her death, how is

he to live with the spectre of his sister, not knowing whether she is dead or alive? How is he to know whether to let go or to continue searching? How is he to create a life and identity for himself now that his life and identity have been erased, indeed the very essence of his world is changed and unrecognisable? These questions place new and unusual demands on traditional historicism, through its associations with historical novels and narratives, that it can't necessarily address adequately. Jakob's circumstances raise central questions about the specific history of diasporic scattering and attempted genocide of the Jews, and Michaels is responding at least in part to the spatial dispersion and potential erasure that these circumstances have engendered. As Bentley argues, "the ageing and death of survivors of the Holocaust" (5) brings a need to examine how these events in the past will be remembered after those who lived through them are gone.

The novel's preface in *Canadian Poetry* reads, "Acutely aware though she doubtless is of the problems of historical imagination and literary representation, Michaels nevertheless attempts in *Fugitive Pieces* 'to speak of events ... that one has not witnessed, that one has not lived through personally but has absorbed through culture, through the family, through the home'" (Bentley, 7). What kind of historicism will enable Jakob to narrate the life that he must live after the war, utterly changed, and still allow him to remember and redeem his family and past life? What historicism can deal with memories that are kept by others, or are lost? These issues confront Ben when he finds about his siblings that are killed in the war (251). And what literary techniques will be required to express the demands that this historicism might place on language?

The theme of invisibility as that which cannot be seen and witnessed is important throughout Michaels' work. Historicist conventions of representation which

focus on depicting that which is present and observable, however, obscure as much as they reveal. Jakob, referring to dreams and the ways in which biography cannot know the dreams of its subject, says, “Never trust biographies. Too many events of a man’s life are invisible” (141). To avoid the possibility of being easily followed or traced, or risking detection after the war, Ben’s father avoids bureaucratic records and civil documents, the typical facts that history relies on, thus rendering himself historically invisible: “My father was a man who had erased himself as much as possible within the legal limits of citizenship” (232). That which does not conform to historical conventions is simply ignored, or becomes impossible to represent and is rendered invisible. Athos offers Jakob what he calls “a second history” as his “blood-past [is] drained from [him]” (20). He calls it a “shadow past” (17) and “a biography of longing” (17). But in her poems, Michaels writes, “I learned about invisibility” (*Miner’s Pond*, 63) and describes ways in which science makes it possible to witness the invisible<sup>1</sup>. Also in the novel, Jakob writes, “Athos confirmed that there was an invisible world, just as real as what’s evident” (49). The techniques and tools available for looking determine what remains invisible or is revealed. Ben, on the subject of biography, emphasises the importance of “assessing the influence of all the information we’ll never have, that has never been recorded. The importance not of what’s extant, but of what’s disappeared” (222). Michaels wishes to find a type of historicist and biographical representation that allows presence to that which would

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<sup>1</sup> The poem, dealing with thematically similar issues to the novel, follows:

I learned about invisibility:  
 The sudden disappearance of Röntgen’s skin—  
 his hand gone to bones—and the discovery of X-rays.  
 Pasteur’s germs, milk souring on the doorsteps of Arbois,  
 and microbe-laden wine—“what kind of wine?”— (63)

The reference to the ways in which science makes an exploration of the codes of the natural world is consistent with the idea of the fidelity of the natural and material world in *Fugitive Pieces*.

otherwise be absent. She attempts to find a type of representation that can accommodate that which has disappeared without negating it.

The way that Lyotard deals with the postmodern is useful in elucidating what I think *Fugitive Pieces* tries to achieve with absence and silence. In *Heidegger et 'les Juifs'* he writes:

What really preoccupies us, whether historians or non-historians, is this 'past' which is not over, which doesn't haunt the present in the sense that it is lacking, missing. It neither occupies the present as a solid reality nor haunts the present in the sense that it might indicate itself even as an absence, a spectre. This 'past' is not an object of memory in the sense of something which may have been forgotten and must be remembered (in the interest of 'happy endings' and good understanding). This 'past' is therefore not even there as a blank, an absence, *terra incognita*, but it is still there. (27)

Bill Readings, writing about Lyotard's understanding of the task of postmodern historicism and the representation of the Holocaust, explains and elaborates on this as follows:

The task of historical writing is not to give voice to the silenced and oppressed, which would only betray that silence.... [O]nce we claim to represent the Holocaust as part of history, then it becomes just one atrocity among others in the long history of man's inhumanity to man, as West German revisionist historians have argued. In order to respect the impossibility of atonement, of coming to terms with horror by representing it, we have to write a history that will testify to the unrepresentable horror without representing it. We must not give voice to the millions of murdered Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and communists, but find a way of writing history that will testify to the *horror* of their having been silenced. This amounts to a deconstruction of the binary opposition between voice and silence, history and the unhistorical, remembering and forgetting. It's a history directed towards the immemorial, to that which cannot be either remembered (represented) or forgotten (obliterated), a history which evokes the figures that haunt the claims of historical representation, haunt in the sense that they are neither present to them nor absent from them...History, like literature, becomes the site of the recognition that there is something that cannot be said. (61-2)

The silence of the rabbi in the story where he dresses as a peasant is an example of the way silence in the novel operates in terms of Lyotard's argument. The rabbi is insulted by well-to-do members of the community who, upon realizing their mistake, ask him for forgiveness but are answered only with silence. He says that they cannot

ask his forgiveness, but need to ask the peasant for whom they mistook him – “When the one who can forgive can no longer speak, there is only silence” (160). Jakob says that the rabbi’s point is that “nothing erases the immoral act. Not forgiveness. Not confession” (160) and more generally, “no one could bear the responsibility of forgiveness on behalf of the dead” (160-1). To speak for the insulted peasant, and his kind, as Lyotard also argues, would be a betrayal. Such a silence does not mark absence, but that which cannot be said.

The recognition of the unrepresentable is important because both Jakob and Ben identify themselves with silence and absence. Ben says, “I was born into absence” and recounts the meaning behind his name: “Naomi explained something else I’d never known. My parents prayed that the birth of their third child would go unnoticed. They hoped that if they did not name me, the angel of death might pass by. Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely ‘ben’ – the Hebrew word for son.” (253). Because history is so entwined with issues of language and writing itself, silences and negations in narrative are implicated in the theme of invisibility. There are many stories within stories that illustrate the way that language and stories take their meaning from the silences behind words rather than the words themselves. We recall Ben’s anecdote of the Japanese sword-makers who told stories while they folded the metal. The stories were “timed to accompany the tempering process” (193), making a “precise recipe” (193) for the process of making the swords.

We recall the other silences in the novel as well: Henry James’ biography (Ben says, “He knew what to leave out” (222)), Naomi’s silences that are generous (208), countless silent and secret ceremonies, Jakob writes about “love that closes its

mouth before calling a name” (17)<sup>2</sup>, Ben and his father’s complex “code of silence” (223). Ben’s wife, Naomi, recounts an example of lullabies that a mother makes up using a child’s name in a unique composition.

“...In the ghettos, when a child died, the mother sang a lullaby. Because there was nothing else she could offer of herself, of her body. She made it up, a song of comfort, mentioning all the child’s favourite toys. And these lullabies were overheard and passed along and, generations later, that little song is all that’s left to us of that child...” (241)

The significance of the song, its original intention, fades or is erased. Brink, in his article referring to *100 Years of Solitude*, refers to an example directly analogous to one in *Fugitive Pieces*. It involves “old Fanscisco the Man who transforms the news and history of the outside world into song”. Although the words are forgotten “...the songs persist in the performance of ‘an accordion group’ (p.333).” (Brink, 252)

Brink understands the example as follows:

Language has finally dissolved into music, into songs without words. Which is another form of obliteration, and of new creation; and at the same time, in the persistence of a memory reduced to the mere outline of a tune from which all traces of language have faded away, we discover, perhaps that language has always been, ‘essentially’, empty and meaningless—except when its power is harnessed in the form of narrative, of story-telling. (252)

I believe that this statement can be applied again and again to the stories within stories in Michaels’ work. Repeatedly the invisible connection behind the words is revealed as the most important part of their meaning. The context in which we find the words defines their meaning. The words themselves are empty but the way that they link

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<sup>2</sup>The following extract from the poem, *What The Light Teaches*, contextualises this silence referred to in the novel:

Theirs are voices we hear  
but can’t hear, like the silence  
of parents rounded up in a town square,  
who stopped their tongues in time,  
saving children by not  
calling out to them in the street. (125)

together creates their meaning. This has implications for the historicism of the novel and the relationship between history and language.

When Jakob asks the questions, “How many centuries before the spirit forgets the body?” (53) and “How many years pass before the difference between murder and death erodes?”(54), he is raising a question of what happens to that which is overlooked or obscured, remaining invisible to historical detection. These are rhetorical questions and the answer, of course, is that the difference never erodes. As with the parable of the rabbi, “nothing erases the immoral act” (160). Although, as Michaels writes elsewhere, “all change is permanent” (*What the Light Teaches*, 126) and events cannot be reversed, this poem, thematically very similar to the novel, implies that there are ways in which memory is kept in the world. The question becomes, how do we find what we thought was lost, how is it kept?

Jakob writes,

Alone on the roof those nights, its not surprising that, of all of the characters in Athos’s tales of geologists and explorers, cartographers and navigators, I felt compassion for the stars themselves. Aching towards us for millennia though we are blind to their signals until it’s too late, starlight only the white breath of an old cry. Sending their white messages millions of years, only to be crumpled up by the waves. (54)

This passage deals with the past that is not witnessed and Jakob’s compassion that stems from an identification with messages from the past that cannot be read. It is

partly concerned with a particular notion of time that the stars embody<sup>3</sup> and the way that the past is preserved in the material. Just before the last passage Jakob writes the following:

Grief requires time. If a chip of stone radiates its self, its breath, so long, how stubborn might be the soul. If sound waves carry on to infinity, where are their screams now? I imagine they are somewhere in the galaxy, moving forever towards the psalms. (54)

The time required for grief also includes the time in a different view of history that is more in keeping with this novel's concern with witnessing the absent or invisible.

Jakob remembers buildings while walking through the city when he is at university in Canada. He says,

I listened to these dark shapes as if they were black spaces in music, a musician learning the silences of a piece. I felt this was my truth. That my life could not be stored in any language but only in silence; the moment I looked into the room and took in only what was visible, not vanished...*But I did not know how to seek by way of silence.* (111 – my italics)

Jakob characterises his own poetry at this point as a failure of sorts – “awkward shrieking” (112) – because, perhaps, it negates that which has vanished or does not take into account silence. This passage invokes both a musical and a spatial metaphor that I will discuss in more detail later.

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<sup>3</sup> Michaels uses a similar image of stars in her poem, *Miner's Pond*. The speaker of the poem says:

When my brothers told me  
I'd never seen the stars, that light's too slow,  
that looking up is looking back,  
there was no holding on. (62)

The spatial (up) is implicated in the reconfiguration of the temporal. Here this reconfiguration involves a complication of the time of witnessing and the event being witnessed. The time at which the event is witnessed cannot be conflated with its occurrence. It also suggests that, like Jakob's experience of the war, witnessing events at the time is not sufficient to understand them, and thus not adequate to deal with them. When we look at something that appears instantaneous, like the stars, we need to understand that there is a depth of time involved in seeing them. Witnessing requires a gradual or more complicated temporal process and an instant of recognition is not necessarily the same as that of occurrence. That which appears to belong to the spatial, like seeing the stars, is also a temporal issue. Things that are usually labelled spatial need to be reconsidered as temporal too. Michaels uses the nature of this phenomenon in the visual to extrapolate to the issue of witnessing.

Hillger argues that this novel's conception of history involves a reconfiguration of time and that it is the "aim of [her] paper to examine the moral implications of this reconfiguration of time, and particularly the notion of history as 'a second history'" (Hillger, 1). This is expressed in the novel's conception and use of language and its relation to the material.

Hillger argues further that, "In fact, both Athos and Jakob represent the historian as earth-scientist who investigates the materiality of time in the process of digging." (Hillger, 1)<sup>4</sup>. "The materiality of time" and the way in which it works in this novel disrupts traditional conceptions of historicism and the types of time that it involves and "teaches us a view of history that does not distinguish between the past and present as two distinct realms, one following the other in temporal sequentiality." (Hillger, 1). What Hillger calls "reconfigurations of time" are particularly evident in the subsection *Vertical Time*. It deals with the spatiality inherent in any given model of time, and involves a spatial reconfiguration to accompany the temporal ones that the novel embodies. It undermines the notion of the instantaneous as isolated. As I noted in my introduction, Michaels sees time as layered when she says, "the present is just the focus of a huge amount of time. You can press down anywhere and reach profound depths of time, from any present moment" ([www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html](http://www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html)).

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<sup>4</sup> In her Poem, *Miner's Pond*, from the collection of the same name, Michaels writes:

Even now, I wrap what's most fragile  
in the long gauze of science.  
The more elusive the truth,  
the more carefully it must be carried.

The material or the scientific can carry memory and this is particularly important to a character like Athos who is an archaeologist and geologist, intent on discovering the truth about the past from material artefacts, and, in his book, *Bearing False Witness*, subverting fabricated histories by investigating the way that the material carries memory.

The work of novelist, art critic and theorist John Berger has been very influential on Michaels' work. Berger analyses the instantaneous as well as the temporal and spatial configurations at work in representations of landscape and body. He also discusses the impact and consequences that such analysis has for narrative structure and technique. In the western history of art (particularly photography and oil painting) of landscape and body, the conventions of which are typically at work in written representations, the image is an instantaneous one. It assumes a particular relationship between the looker and looked at (subject and object). The point of reference is an individual looking from a particular place. The viewer is thus placed in a certain relationship with the landscape that is particular in both place and time. The place is individual and the time is an isolated moment. This perspective is undone in Michaels' work. The point of reference becomes mobile and shifting in time and place, in keeping with the idea that the instant is not actually isolated, but takes its meaning from its context. This also releases the past into the present, so that instead of viewing it from a distance as frozen and remote, the past is shaped by relating it to the present (Hillger, 1). Importantly for both Berger and Michaels, this involves an opposition to historicism and a historicist vision. Historicist narrative, as I argued in my introduction, relies on a strictly linear unfolding of events and freezes events in the past.

In the poem *A Lesson from the Earth*, Michaels writes,

I used to think we escape time  
by disappearing into beauty.  
Now I see it's the opposite.  
Beauty reveals time. (79-80)

This is directly analogous to the way Jakob was writing when he first returned to Idhra. After Athos' death Jakob says he writes, "as if one could honour every inch of flesh with words; and so, suspend time." (163). He continues later, "No station is

more full of solitude than desire which keeps the world poised, poisoned with beauty, whose only permanence is loss.” (163). Initially Jakob writes to freeze time, and the type of beauty that he strives for is intended as an escape from time. It is about stasis and preservation. It is predicated on the linear chronology of historical time.

Michaels’ writing, and Jakob’s attitude once he has met and is living with Michaela, is more about flux, and revealing time’s patterns and dimensions. I believe that the beauty that Michaels wishes to achieve in this novel has to do with revealing the ways that time influences witnessing and representations, not freezing it and disappearing inside it.

Hillger reasons that Michaels makes certain places embody certain conceptions of time, for example,

the bog is a site where attempts are being made to solidify the past, to impose one reading on it: that of the victors of history, who are erecting monuments to themselves. It is a well silting up and turning into the ‘poisoned well’ of history. (9)

She continues later, saying that “she [Michaels] presents history as a process of siltation and sedimentation by using images of swamps, bogs and rocks to depict the discontinuous and often static nature of historical process” (9). The implied movement in history, its “silting up”, “static” nature, or “progress”, is included in the spatiality and spatial representations in this novel. This tension between being caught and swallowed up in the past, or a revolutionary wiping of the slate and beginning again, thus negating the past, has to be overcome in the novel. And I think that it is achieved through the spatial reconfigurations. As I argued in my introduction, space is not static and immovable but an integral part of the temporal process. The material signals the limits of language and its powers of representation. Through its associations with silence, it is an important part of representing the absent and negated, as well as being at the heart of a different narrative temporality.

In focussing on a materialist historicism, *Fugitive Pieces*, in its revisionary project, also embodies a focus on what Hillger calls “the materiality of time” (Hillger, 1). Models of time that have more in common with the material, or that exist in the material, for example geological time, are used in favour of other ideal/abstract notions of time. Rather than making monuments, which mark the land (the solid/material) with time or inscribe the past on a place (thus making an event only recognizable by the coincidence of a place and a time), time is to be recognized differently in the material. Geology, the way that years are compressed in the rings in tree trunks (“We think of weather as transient, changeable and above all, ephemeral; but everywhere nature remembers. Trees... carry the memory of rainfall, in their rings we read ancient weather” (211)), the way that time exists in the reading of the weather (as in Ben’s book on biography and weather), biological time (In *Miner’s Pond* she writes, “Our blood is time” (Poems, 67), the way time is measured for example in the seasons and the instinctual migrations of geese or the way that caged birds at a certain time of year all face the same direction (169), the way generations find their way in the genes and characteristics of bodies, the time in rocks and plants (“truth speaks from the ground” (143)); all these material things have a certain type of time in them, and by seeing time in these terms, rather than an abstract and limited model of time that treats the material as static and time as a medium in flux moving over it and imposing order on it, historicism can be reconfigured through the material. By filling the material with time (different time, its own time) it can no longer be seen as a stable, solid surface that can be inscribed with historical events and made to render meaning from these impositions. This is what I mean by monuments. The material is not a passive surface awaiting inscription, but is filled with its own meaning and thus subverts or undermines a system of values imposed from above.

It also, perhaps most importantly, provides an answer to the question of how the past that is lost or negated is to be remembered and the history of a culture retrieved from the ruins of history. Written history is already a distortion, but the material world bears witness to the past in its own way. The “history of matter” has “guileless knowledge” (119). Though manuscripts and records of experience and people’s lives are buried and lost, the world itself carries memories. This both enables living with the past and provides a way of understanding how the past manifests itself in the *present*, rather than remaining remote and unconnected with the present. The passage beginning, “It is no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world, just as it is no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer, the Geiger counter amplifying the faint breathing of rock, fifty thousand years old” (53) shows the way that the scientific and material world can carry memory. The comparison between memory and the landscape (erosion) signals the geographical or geological processes that memory too undergoes. Michaels envisions memory as material: “Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment” (53).

The body is also associated with memory: “To praise memory is to praise the body” (Poems, 50). It is a specific type of memory that subverts conscious thought; Jakob says “for it is my body that remembers them, and though I have tried to erase Alex from my senses, tried to will my parents and Bella from my sleep, this will amounts to nothing, for my body betrays me in a second” (170). Jakob used to worry about the silence of the body and “long for memory to be spirit” (170), but progresses from believing that the only place that he can find expression is in a language of loss, or in silence, to one where he says, “What does the body make us believe? ... For years corporeality made me believe in death. Now ... death for the first time makes me believe in the body” (189).

The section, “Terra Nullius”, when Jakob goes to Idhra, contains what is probably the novel’s most complex and powerful statement on the body. This, significantly, is also a section in which the memory of Bella and especially her associations with music are particularly significant. As I noted in my introduction, Jakob considers “Nazi policy [which] was beyond racism for it was anti-matter, for Jews were not considered human. An old trick of language, used often in the course of history” (165). The body is set in opposition to this. Imagining what might have happened to Bella, Jakob recalls the Nazi concentration camps and mass exterminations:

When they opened the doors, the bodies were always in the same position. Compressed against one wall, a pyramid of flesh. Still hope. The climb to air, to the last disappearing pocket of breath near the ceiling. The terrifying hope of human cells.

The bare automatic faith of the body.

Some gave birth while dying in the chamber. Mothers were dragged from the chamber with new life half-emerged from their bodies. Forgive me, you who were born and died without being given names. Forgive this blasphemy, of choosing philosophy over the brutalism of fact. (168)

Bodily reality subverts hegemonic uses and traditional conceptions of language and history. Philosophy or abstract thought is undermined by “the body” and “human cells”. As Hillger argues, this involves “an attempt to recuperate what idealism has overshadowed in the course of time” (15); such materialism “survives at times when ideological superstructures have failed to provide a ground for existence” (13). When all else is stripped away, the body is undeniable. It exists beyond and outside of historicism. Brooks explains this conception of the body as follows:

If the sociocultural body clearly is a construct, an ideological product, nonetheless we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic: sensations of pleasure and especially of pain, for instance, are generally held to be experiences outside language; and the body’s end, in death, is not simply a discursive construct. (7)

Michaels takes the body to the brink of death to affirm its undeniable life, and with this, breaks down the binary opposition between thought and matter, body and spirit. Faith is reborn in human cells and the soul in the flesh. She does not allow the body to be “simply a generator for the soul, a factory of longing” (194). Through this a materialist philosophy of history is born.

The body is outside both of history and language. The body is not made to signify anything but itself. In her poem, *Words for the Body*, Michaels writes,

No words mean as much as a life.  
Only the body pronounces perfectly  
the name of another. (49)

The body confirms a unique identity, but it is not made to mean anything other than itself, to pronounce a name. According to the new historicist approach, while history in its traditional conception may try to determine and define the limits of the sayable and the thinkable at any given time (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 16), the “individual instance” inevitably transgresses these limits and boundaries. Jakob is an example of such a transgressive individual instance. His position is negated both in history and in language, but his presence nevertheless is undeniable.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the body also becomes associated with silence, and through the novel’s exploration of silence in a musical context, with music. This can also be seen in the poem, *Words for the Body*, which places the body in opposition to the search for “the perfect word” (48). It describes a silent communication:

In that swathing twilight  
I knew you’d had a lover.  
... Sudden as my sense of your body,  
I knew you were attempting silence. (46)

Silence, particularly the silences in music, are associated with the body and its silence.

Witnessing, closely related to history and memory, in *Fugitive Pieces* is primarily associated with listening or hearing rather than the more conventional

connotations of seeing. Throughout the novel there are many references to music and sound. Jakob is most terrified when he cannot hear, rather than when he cannot see. He associates loss or absence with silence. Michaels performs a complex procedure by recasting witnessing as primarily an aural rather than a visual concept.

A child doesn't know much about a man's face but feels what most of us believe all our lives, that he can tell a good face from a bad.... There's the possibility that if one can't see it in the face, then there's no conscience to arouse. But that explanation is obviously false, for some laughed as they poked out eyes with sticks, as they smashed infant's skulls against the good brick of good houses. For a long time I believed one learns nothing from a man's face. When Athos held me by the shoulders, when he said, "Look at me, look at me" to convince me of his goodness, he couldn't know how he terrified me, how meaningless the words. If truth is not in the face, then where is it? In the hands! In the hands. (93)

Jakob does not and cannot see the visual as a trustworthy way of knowing. For him it is not a medium that can carry the truth or provide insight. He writes, "My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound" (17).

Music is also associated with time in *Fugitive Pieces*. Ben talks about, "Music, where time is an instruction." (255). Both Bella and Ben's father are associated with music. Jakob writes, "I have nothing that belonged to my parents, barely any knowledge of their lives. Of Bella's belongings, I have the intermezzos, "The Moonlight," other pianoworks that suddenly recover me" (141). The time associated with music through intersecting images and metaphor is also closely associated with the concept of history, witnessing and memory. The reason that Michaels associates witnessing with hearing is precisely because of the time associated with hearing. The instantaneous nature of the visual, and the type of historicism associated with looking is not adequate for the type of witnessing that Michaels is evincing. The type of witnessing, memory and representation that this text performs (in relation to the Second World War, as well as more individual and personal memory, such as Jakob's

memory of Bella) requires an aspect of time that involves witnessing over time, and the temporal and spatial aspects of sound best fits memory.

Understanding an experience is an ongoing process. Neither the experience nor witnessing is ever completed. The time that it takes to witness is more extended and complex than the instantaneous. Memory and witnessing are associated with sound (and its relation to the way music is represented) rather than vision, and the construction of landscape (and weather: “Like a musical score, when you read a weather map, you are reading time” (222) says Ben) is also influenced by both the spatial and temporal aspects of music. Michaels shows us how to listen to the landscape, not simply to look at it.

While Hillger analyses the influence of Walter Benjamin and others’ philosophies of history, and suggests the reconfiguration of time in terms of the coincidence of the past present and future, I would take this further and suggest that this reconfiguration is more radical on Michaels’ part. The instantaneous is no longer possible. History is no longer pictured, as Walter Benjamin describes it in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, as empty stretches of time punctuated with isolated instants of present, significant time<sup>5</sup>. Every instant is reinvented as a process of accumulation, accretion, interconnectedness, revealed with the complexity of time in all its simultaneity, foldedness, depth and density.

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<sup>5</sup> In part XIII of his *Theses*, Benjamin critiques notions of historical progress when he writes, “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time” (261). In XIV he writes, “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now...” (261). The time of the now is a particular kind of historical presence that is validated by traditional historicism. This involves treating all other time as empty and devoid of significance, thus demanding a revolution or return to a time that is more historically present. Michaels’ concern with giving significance to the silent or empty time in history makes it clear that she, with Benjamin, opposes such a conception of historical progress.

Again *The Gradual Instant* (171) finds expression in the following statement in the novel: “History only goes into remission, while it continues to grow into you until you’re silted up and can’t move” (243). It is like Jacob’s description of happiness: “We think that change occurs suddenly, but even I have learned better. Happiness is wild and arbitrary, but it is not sudden” (185) and “Complicity is not sudden, though it occurs in an instant” (162). This idea finds expression in relation to bodies and the function that they perform in the novel. “After years, at any moment, our bodies are ready to remember us” (181) combines the apparently conflicting ideas of, “after years” and “at any moment” and seems to resolve them, or let them co-exist in relation to bodily memory. Further, this connects with representations of music: “Truth grows gradually ... like a musician who plays a piece again and again until suddenly he hears it for the first time”(251). The gradual instant and the imagery of music and silence intersect and come to fruition. The instantaneous is undone in many different aspects of the novel. It permeates the representations and can be seen as an overarching project regarding time. It is significant that this is connected with the material as well.

Michaels, in her poem, *On the Terrace* writes,

A still life isn’t about fruit, but about  
time. (108)

Through this temporal aspect of the visual, the connection between ways of looking and historicism is made explicit. A still life attempts to freeze time in order to preserve something but Michaels’ work declares a need to complicate this kind of preservation. She wishes to reveal the temporal aspects of the static. She writes of

a stillness inside things  
as they move (108)

and a “stillness in motion” (109) and through this paradox illustrates the painter’s dilemma in representing the temporal aspects of the static. That there is both stillness in motion and motion in stillness suggests a concern with the kind of preservation inherent in historical representations. The historicism that Michaels attempts to formulate has a similar dilemma regarding the paradoxes of preserving the past and moving into the future. Hillger formulates this as a question of “How to progress while the weight of the past is holding you back; how to affirm what has been negated long ago. And yet there seems to be a will not to surrender to the paralysis, but to undo processes of sedimentation” (9). Later in the same poem the speaker, a painter, says,

That’s why I can’t agree with Zola—  
so concerned to describe the surface,  
he forgets the spaces between things,  
forgets that touching isn’t holding.

and later,

It was my mistake too, forgetting space.  
When I was a student of the Seine  
with Monet at Bougival,  
we learned how colours vibrate.  
But space vibrates too.  
That’s what musicians know. (108)

The spatiality implied in the way music and colours vibrate connects to a predominantly temporal form (or at least one that is conventionally understood as such), music, and alludes to its spatiality. I believe that Michaels endeavours to recreate the time implied in the “static” in her own work. She wishes to find a way for writing to hold time as music does. Narrative is also traditionally considered dominantly temporal, but also as Elias (discussed in my introduction) argues, can be considered spatially, more like sculpture than music. She cites the work of Joseph Frank saying that certain works of fiction could be called spatial because, “they

disrupted the linear reading flow, juxtaposed sections of text, suspended time progression, and repeated image patterns” (110). Michaels does not privilege static art over music as a model for narrative in her work, rather combing the spatial and temporal aspects of both in her attempt to create new narrative spatialities. The simple fact, as Rimmon-Kenan claims, is that “text time is ... inescapably linear”(45) because “language prescribes a linear figuration of signs and hence a linear figuration of information about things” (45). Forster, although he laments the restriction in his admission, “Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story” (29), also claims that one cannot free narrative from time “without abolishing the sequence between sentences” (28) and words and letters. He comes to the conclusion that, “the time-sequence cannot be destroyed without carrying in its ruin all that should have taken place; the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless” (29). Neither Rimmon-Kenan nor Forster discounts the influence of the spatial in the temporal narrative, though. They simply insist that there are parts of it that are inescapably linear.<sup>6</sup> The example of painting in Michaels’ poem suggests that even a static art can be compared to music and have implications for historical representation. She wishes to emphasize the spatial and, despite the impossibility of abandoning a linear sequence, create ways of narrating a simultaneous stasis and flux, silence as well as sound. Michaels’ use of the spatial aspect of music in the narrative of *Fugitive Pieces* is her attempt to overcome, as far as possible, the tyranny of narrative (and historical) time.

The section of the novel entitled “Phosphorus” juxtaposes Alex and her linguistic preoccupations and Bella, who is figured principally in terms of music and

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<sup>6</sup> Referring to *War and Peace*, Forster writes, “Probably because it has extended over space as well as over time, and the sense of time until it terrifies us is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music. After one has read *War and Peace* for a bit, great chords begin to sound, and we cannot say exactly what struck them” (26). The spatial aspect of narrative finds expression in a musical analogy.

the body. Throughout the section dealing with Bella, there are italicized phrases inserted, showing the simultaneous nature of Jakob's memories. This also shows the musical structure of the narrative itself. The music is figured as a silence in the narrative, but "melts" through the narrative of presence. It is a memory of Jakob's and works like the "map of history" that Jakob describes:

Maps of history have always been less honest. Terra cognita and terra incognita inhabit exactly the same co-ordinates of time and space. The closest we come to knowing the location of what's unknown is when it melts through the map like a watermark, a stain transparent as a drop of rain.

On the map of history, perhaps the water stain is memory. (137)

The memory of Bella informs Jakob's life as if she were present. In *Words for the Body* Michaels writes,

You described the blackness where music waits,  
tormenting until you draw it out,  
a redemption.  
Then the fear of forgetting notes  
disappears, the fingers have a memory of their own. (47)

This blackness, a kind of present absence, is also associated with the body's memory.

I believe that this is what Michaels illustrates with her narrative technique. John Cage, the musician, writes, on the subject of silence and musical composition,

What happens, for instance, to silence? That is, how does the mind's perception of it change? Formerly, silence was the time lapse between sounds, useful toward a variety of ends, among them that of tasteful arrangement, where by separating two sounds or two groups of sounds their differences or relationships might receive emphasis; or that of expressivity, where silences in a musical discourse might provide pause or punctuation; or again, that of architecture, where the introduction or interruption of silence might give definition either to a predetermined structure or to an organically developing one. Where none of these goals is present, silence becomes something else—not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. The nature of these is unpredictable and changing. These sounds (which are called silence only because they do not form part of the musical intention) may be depended upon to exist. (22-23)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> My transcription conventionalizes Cage's prose which itself is experimenting with the space of typography. He uses a particular arrangement of words on the page in an attempt to introduce their musicality to the reader's experience.

I believe that Michaels finds a way, both in narrative and through her use of music, to make silence into an ambient sound, a significant contributing factor to meaning that cannot be negated.

After Jakob's death, Ben travels to Idhra to search for his manuscripts and reads one of his poems:

*Is there a woman who will slowly undress*

Far below, salt pulls the heavy scent of lilacs into the sea, the fragrance drowns, sweet purple, in piercing blue. The sweetness drowns without a sound. Ecstatic.

The leaves, a million hands greener than energy, soundless past the closed window. The hot room, the smell of wooden sills and floors baking in the sun. Looking out at the dry hills, so bright, the eye manufactures shadows.

*Is there a woman who will slowly undress*

*my spirit*

If I could draw, I'd hold a square of paper up to this view from your window and let the landscape burn into it... The hills dissolve as I look; but the loss I feel is that of one who has already passed the point of apprehension. Like writing to a man who no longer wishes to be found.

*Is there a woman who will slowly undress*

*my spirit, bring my body*

Until the lemon bending the branch, the weight of the shadow separating one leaf from another, presses that place in you. Until the hills burn your eyes, until you give in. Until *the seam of density that separates leaf from air/is not a gap but a seal.*

*Is there a woman who will slowly undress*

*my spirit, bring my body to belief*

Until the beautiful buzzing of flies wakes me. (268)

The way that the poem is revealed, added incrementally, part by part, interspersed with Ben's narrative, shows how each segment is interpreted separately. As each new phrase is added to the poem, we understand it anew. It does not mean the same as it did before, and yet it maintains the previous meaning. In each new context the words mean something different. Its meaning grows and changes as additions force us to re-read it. This demonstrates that words do not contain their meanings, but gather them from their contexts and the ways in which they connect with other words. It illustrates the process of reading that Michaels favours. Ben's thoughts and impressions of his surroundings mix with his reading of the poem and Michaels, in this passage, describes the materiality of reading and how this affects the meaning of a poem. It

acknowledges how, despite the fact that we are still reading a text, the life of the reader mixes with what is read. In an interview Michaels says, “In terms of form, I wanted somehow to have what’s between the lines not said, made so precise that the reader has to bring themselves to the book in a certain way... I wanted the reader to enter the story” ([www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html](http://www.pages.ab.ca/michaels.html)). As with Ben’s separate observations in his reading of Jakob’s poem, Michaels tries to write in such a way as to open gaps for the reader to enter the story. This is testimony to her faith in the material, her conviction that “No words mean as much as a life” (Poems, 49). The significance of silence is revealed as an important part of articulating meaning, and the materiality of the word, its changing context, is a key to this. The material context of a reading cannot be known, but its silence, like the silence in music, defines how it will be read. There is an implicit acknowledgement of the reader and of the materiality of the text in these silences.

Through a discussion of Walter Benjamin, Hillger illustrates how parts of the past that are obscured by linearity are revealed differently with a temporality that conceives of the past, present and future as co-existing<sup>8</sup>. Michaels, through Jakob,

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<sup>8</sup> Hillger illustrates the influence that Walter Benjamin has on Michaels’ work with a description from Benjamin’s *A Childhood in Berlin*. Hillger says, “The room in Benjamin’s story is described as a place where past, present and future do not follow one another in temporal sequentiality but are presented as one in a momentary conjunction...” (2). Rather than the dialectic of progress and forward movement away from the past, with a focus on a liberated future, as some forms of Marxist materialism would have it, Benjamin focuses on redemption. Rather than each moment as a transition on a path toward an end, Benjamin sees each moment as a time where history can come to a standstill. Rather than leaving the past behind, Benjamin’s theory involves continual re-examination of the past.

Rather than conceiving of the historian as someone who merely gathers facts about the past—as certain versions of historicism would have it—Benjamin envisages the historian as someone who finds traces of hope in the past in order to achieve a redemption in the present. Peter Szondi phrases this wonderfully when he speaks of ‘Benjamin’s search for lost time, which is a search for a lost future’. (7)

She explains further, “Both [Ernst] Bloch and Benjamin revise the Marxist dialectical conception of history by departing from a linear, continuous concept of time and introducing a notion of the present which brings the dialectics of historical materialism to a standstill” (7).

envisions a way of talking and of living with history that “collapses time” (159). She writes, “It’s a Hebrew tradition that forefathers are referred to as “we” and not “they.” “When we were delivered from Egypt...” This encourages empathy and responsibility to the past but, more importantly, it collapses time. The Jew is forever leaving Egypt. A good way to teach ethics” (159). I believe that the question of representing the past and the impact that this must have on language goes even further than Hillger suggests. As I began to argue in relation to Lyotard’s notions of representation and historicism, language needs to take on a different role.

Lyotard argues that to conceive of history as a representation of the past sets up a binary opposition between presence and absence that negates or represses that which cannot be represented. His project both for historicism and representation is to make it possible to present the unrepresentable without compromising its status as impossible to represent. For him it is not enough for a new historicism to give voice to silent and lost histories, but rather it is necessary to acknowledge that, in representation, there is something that cannot be represented. He writes, “let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable” (81). He desires a historicism that can take into account that the experience of an event is not immediately understood and cannot be understood from a position in a detached future.

The event for Lyotard occurs in a gap that cannot be represented and hence representation of the event needs to take into account this quality. The event is a singular occurrence that cannot be understood when it actually happens. Writing about the event is impossible, as Jakob finds after the war and after the murder of his family. There are no words for his experience and after these events history can never be the same again. This opens up a gap in representation. Language is inadequate to deal with the event when it actually happens. Thus, it only can happen when language

can begin to give account of the event. Thus the temporal structure of the event is paradoxical. It cannot be represented because it cannot be understood at the time, and when it is understood, it cannot be recovered.

After the war when Jakob emerges from being cloistered in Athos' cottage, and also when he moves from Greece to Canada and has to learn English, we see Jakob grapple with issues of language. He is struck by how language has lost its power to name things. He says, "I thought that nothing would ever be familiar again" (59) and later observes, "How suddenly everything familiar is inexpressible" (52). The world seems different and somehow the language that Jakob has at his disposal is inadequate to articulate the changes that he finds or what he feels. And, even though he is probably speaking Greek at this point, and not his native Polish, his relationship to the words that he is familiar with, has changed. Words do not have naming power any more. They seem separated from the things that they represent.

The world has changed and the words that Jakob had at his disposal before are not adequate to represent what has happened. The difference in the world before and after the war, the parts of the world that are missing, like Jakob's family and especially Bella, defy articulation. Perhaps this is part of the silence that Jakob feels. "If one could isolate that space, that damaged chromosome in words...then perhaps one could restore order by naming" (111), says Jakob. The way that Jakob lives with words at this stage cannot facilitate his witnessing and remembering the past because a new language is required. Jakob finds himself creating a language of loss, or finding himself in silence or in the undefined gaps. He describes "A touch typist who holds his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place... I thought of writing poems in this way, in code, every letter askew, so that loss would wreck the language, become

the language” (111). Only such a language could express the gap that he now finds between words and the world.

Later, when he goes back to Idhra, rather than trying to encode the loss that he finds in the language, he tries to bring what is lost back into the world: “I become obsessed by the palpable edge of sound. The moment when language at last surrenders to what it is describing.” (162). Maurice says to Jakob, “you want to be like Zeuxis, master of light, who painted his grapes so realistically, the birds tried to eat them!” (163). There is a moment in the novel where Jakob sees photographs of a pile of shoes and imagines that if the owner of each pair of shoes could be named, he or she could be brought back (50). This is what Jakob strains to do with his poetry before he meets Michaela. He tries to make the words *into* what they are representing. That is why Maurice calls them “ghost stories” (163).

Jakob presupposes a connection between the language and the thing that it describes, between signifier and signified. This relationship supposes that somehow they are connected, somehow the words contain or touch reality. He writes, “A poem is as neural as love; the rut of rhythm that veers the mind” (163). In his search for a reality that words can somehow touch, he is once again baffled by the materiality of the body. He tries to find the rhythm that connects words and the material, but only finds the borders at the limits of language emphasized. This is how the feeling that words have a “damaged chromosome” makes sense. The words are not working, the language feels damaged because it does not correspond with reality. Jakob is trying to establish order by naming. He is trying to bring lost things into existence by writing about them.

This writing of Jakob’s corresponds to what Lyotard defines as modernist representation. He says it is nostalgic: “It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward

only as the missing contents” (81). Lyotard maintains that modernist representation aims “to make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible” (78). As with Jakob’s language of loss, it will “‘present’ something through negativity; it will therefore avoid figuration or representation” (78). This allows only the absent to be conceived of as negative or missing from representation. For Lyotard though, postmodernism “would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself...that searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (81) and “to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (81). That which is invisible is not absent, but merely unrepresentable.

For Lyotard, the postmodern cannot follow the modern as in a typically historicist progression. Rather, he argues, the postmodern must be an “event” in itself and as such, unrepresentable. The event must be what he calls “figural”, which basically means that the gap between the event and its representation must be acknowledged. This involves a particular conception of time that does not conform to linearity.

This explains to some extent the difficulties that Jakob experiences with language, and that the novel itself, through its re-envisioning of history, attempts to resolve. Readings describes the relationship between modernist historicism and language:

Modernism bases its claims to legitimacy on the distancing of the knowing subject from the paratactic succession of historical phrases (‘and then ...and then ...and then’). The event appears for this historicity as a figure marking the time it takes to arrest time and make it an object of knowledge, the noise of the distance that establishes the observer’s silent detachment. The event is constitutively invisible to the modernist History that it renders opaque; the event is a figure, not a momentary or incidental lapse on the part of modernism. (Readings, 59)

There is no way that Jakob can be the detached, silent observer that modernist historicism requires. There is no stable foundation, removed from the events, on which he can base his judgments and claim knowledge of what happened. There are no familiar viewpoints, temporally sequential narratives or conventions of language to provide him with the type of witnessing that his situation requires. He needs to find a way of reading and writing that is more in keeping with what critics term a new historicism that postmodernism, according to Lyotard, makes possible. This requires a notion of time that is conceived figurally in which the event cannot be represented, but that the writing becomes another event in itself. Lyotard writes “the fact that [art]work and text have the character of an *event*; [means] also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon” (81). This paradox of ‘too late’ and ‘too soon’ defines figural temporality. There are two simultaneous times at work, the time of the event and the time of writing, and they overlap. In Lyotard’s thinking, they occur at the same time, thus constituting what he calls an anachronism. The figural is, for modernism, the time between the event and writing it. The event is thus never completely written or understood, but continually being rewritten. The epigraph to *Fugitive Pieces* ends,

Shortly before his death, Beer had begun to write his memoirs. “A man’s experience of the war,” he once wrote, “never ends with the war. A man’s work, like his life, is never completed.” (page not numbered)

Jakob inhabits this historical temporality and it has implications for his, and the novel’s, relationship with language.

Salman Rushdie, discussing immigrant identity and new ways of relating to the world in *Imaginary Homelands*, writes about translation and stubbornly clings to the notion that something can be gained in translation (17). He writes of the dilemmas

of taking on a new language: “Having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (17). Jakob makes a similar comparison between the poet, the translator and an immigrant, saying that they all “try to identify the invisible, what’s between the lines, the mysterious implications” (109). We recall that Jakob is a translator and we can see the importance of this in relation to the novel’s theory of language. Translation involves transferring a meaning from one language to another. Translation is important to Jakob because of the silent spaces behind words. He says, “Translation becomes a kind of transubstantiation; one poem becomes another.” (109). Jakob, like Rushdie’s immigrant, is a translated person. Walter Benjamin in *The Task of the Translator*, writes, “If ... languages continue to grow ... until the end of time, it is translation which catches fire on the eternal life of the works and the perpetual renewal of language” (74). For Benjamin, although translations always refer to the original work, “translation marks [the artwork’s] stage of continued life” (71). He insists that translation is “one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes” (73) because it shows the way, better than any other medium, in which an artwork changes as it moves through time. This is what he means by the translation “catching fire” and explains why it is important that Jakob is a translator. He, like a piece of writing that is translated, is continually transformed and renewed as he changes contexts. In translation, the original always “undergoes a change” (73), but this guarantees that it has an afterlife, that it is still living. The original, like Jakob’s identity and the language he uses, is not lost, but continually translated.

In her poetry Michaels deals with the fact that changing words and names can cause things to be erased. In *What the Light Teaches* she writes,

Whole cities were razed with a word.  
 Petersburg vanished into Leningrad, became  
 an invisible city where poets promised to meet  
 so they could pronounce again

“the blessed word with no meaning.” (Poems, 129-30)

Why would poets wish to have a word with no meaning? Why would such a word be blessed? Simply because giving language the power to name things, to contain the names of things, also gives them the power to change what they are by what we call them. This gives too much power to language and so destroys its capacity for memory. The poem, *What the Light Teaches*, expresses this approach to language beautifully:

Words are powerless as love ,  
transforming only by taking us as we are. (130)

The suggestion here is that words are transformed by the user. We make a word mean what we want it to mean. There is no solid reality in words unmediated by the subjective, but the possibility remains of their moulding to the meanings that we give them. This is why we need to trust a certain amount of memory to the material world, and why we need the material world to remind us of language’s limits. The power of words can only be harnessed when they connect in narrative.

Words do not really destroy the city of the poets. We give language its meaning. It must take us as we are. This is why the novel emphasizes not only the capacity of language to give, but also its capacity to take away. The idea at the beginning of Part II, that Jakob’s manuscript may be lost, plays with the possibility of its absence in the novel itself. Where would the story be? What would Jakob’s life be, but for the telling? Can we afford to rely on words to this extent? How should we live with words? What kind of memory does language have? These are the questions that this novel raises, and that are enacted in the structure of this novel. We need to remember, but we need to free ourselves from reliance on other people’s words. We

need to make words carry our own meanings<sup>9</sup>.

When Jakob says that language in Toronto is “a kind of farewell” (89), perhaps he means something similar to this idea that language is forever in flux, moulding to new possibilities. Rushdie refers to the same phenomenon in his essay, “The Location of *Brazil*”. In this essay Rushdie argues

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as material things... The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several different ways of being, he understands their illusory nature.” (124-5).

In his conclusion he argues, “Migrants must, of necessity, make a new imaginative relationship with the world” (125). He concludes,

the location of *Brazil* is the cinema itself, because in the cinema the dream is the norm ... this cinematic *Brazil* is a land of make-believe of which all of us who have, for whatever reason, lost a country and ended up elsewhere, are the true citizens. (125).

Living in language is a key part of a new relationship with the world. There is an implicit acknowledgement that language is illusory, that one’s relationship to a place is based on the alchemy of words. And this knowledge to an extent, voids language of its authority. The migrant is aware of the way that words work, and this means that s/he has to exist with words in a different way. This awareness engenders a mistrust of words. It means less of a dependence on them. It means realizing that there is

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<sup>9</sup> This theme is also dealt with extensively in the poem, *What the Light Teaches*.

Language is a house with lamplight in its windows,  
visible across fields. Approaching, you can hear  
music; closer, smell  
soups, bay leaves, bread- a meal for anyone  
who has only his tongue left.  
It’s a country; home; family:  
abandoned; burned down; whole lines dead, unmarried.  
For those who can’t read their way in the streets,  
or in the gestures and faces of strangers,  
language is the house to run to;  
in wild nights chased by dogs and other wild sounds,  
when you’ve been lost a long time,  
when you have no other place. (Poems, 132-3)

something beyond the words, and we do not have to rely on words to preserve us, to make a home for us.<sup>10</sup> And perhaps for this reason, language is a type of farewell.

When Jakob moves to Canada and begins to learn English, I believe he has a taste of the freedom that an escape from this old view of language, this realistic conception of things, can bring. He describes language as nutrition: “The English language was food.... A gush of warmth spread throughout my body, but also panic, for with each mouthful the past was further silenced.” (92). He talks about English as “an alphabet without memory” (101).

But Jakob will have a difficult and, at times, destructive relationship with Alex, who becomes his first wife. She has a very particular relationship with language. She is associated with puns and puzzles and anagrams, with palindromes and slang. Her energy infuses Jacob with the freedom of language without memory, but this ultimately proves destructive. What Alex tries to do is to revolutionise

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<sup>10</sup>I would like to quote further from the same poem to illustrate the resonance between Michaels’ novel and her poetry.

It was a suicide mission, to smuggle language  
 from the mouths of the dying  
 and the dead; last words of murdered mothers-  
 Germany, Poland, Russia.  
 They found that what they’d rescued  
 wasn’t the old language at all;  
 only the alphabet the same.  
 Because language of a victim only reveals  
 the one who named him.

...  
 The truth is why words fail.  
 We can only reveal by outline,  
 by circling absence.  
 But that’s why language  
 can remember truth when its not spoken.  
 Words in us that deafen,  
 that wait, even when their spell seems  
 wasted;  
 even while silence accumulates to fate.

Prayer is the effort of wresting words  
 not from silence,  
 but from the noise of other words.  
 To penetrate heaven, we must reach  
 what breaks in us. (Poems, 128-9)

Jakob's life. She tries to wipe the slate clean and create a new beginning. The problem with this is that it involves forgetting the past. Despite the longing for a worldly sophistication in her language, Jakob still says, "I ached with tenderness for all the frustrated innocence of her tongue" (132). Her words refer only to themselves, unable to carry experience, thus leaving her ignorant and frustrated.

Jakob is haunted by a context where one letter of graffiti can mean death if the painter is caught, or the letter "J" on a passport carries with it the whole weight of meaning that can mean life or death (207). Alex uses language as if it were a game, she plays with its sounds and patterns and it loses its meaning. Alex is too shy to "reveal her innocence" (133) and "seductively dangle[s] her leftist ideas like high heels" (132). She plays games with these ideals. She flirts with them but does not really feel that she shares an understanding of them. Her desire for Jakob is motivated by her recognition of "his obvious, painful inexperience" (132). Her love for him is an admission of her own alienation that she recognises more clearly in him. Perhaps she identifies with this feeling of inexperience and exclusion from the meaning at the centre of things that those around her seem to assume.

Puns are what Jakob and Athos share when they are trying to learn adeptness and comfort among the tricks of the English language. This for them, though, is about learning the medium, its quirks and idiosyncrasies. Learning puns is a way for Jakob to learn about the language itself and its strange workings. Alex, to some degree, gets lost in this level of the language. A pun is a moment when language becomes opaque and self-referential. It loses its power to work without being seen working.

Jakob says,

When we were married I hoped that if I let Alex in, if I let in a finger of light, it would flood the clearing. And at first, this is exactly what happened. But gradually, through no fault of Alex's, the finger of light poked down, cold as bone, illuminating nothing...

And then the world fell silent. Again I was standing under water, my boots locked in mud. (139)

Jakob tries to make Alex “flood the clearing”, and bring all her newness and vitality to him. But this has no depth for Jakob, it doesn’t include a space for his experience. And we notice two things. First, “the world fell silent” because he could no longer witness it. The world went silent when Jakob was fleeing the site of his family’s murder and he feared this silence and its association with the inability to witness. Alex does not provide a witness for Jakob’s experience and instead of affirming him, makes him feel alien and out of place, wired for the wrong socket (132). He becomes trapped in the past. The fact that he describes his boots “locked in mud” reminds us of the swamps or bogs where the past is sedimented up and buried. He cannot progress.

Jakob himself describes his own transformation in terms of release from the past: “This is where I become irrevocably unmoored. The river floods. I slip free the knot and float, suspended in the present.” (188). Jakob’s relationship with Michaela, significantly a curator of a museum, who

moves through history with the fluency of a spirit, mourns the burning of the library at Alexandria as if it happened yesterday. [And] discusses the influence of trade routes on European architecture, while still noticing the pattern of light across a table (176)

has implications for the type of historicism that the novel evinces. It is this type of history that rescues Jakob and allows him to find peace with the memory of Bella. Michaela witnesses Bella for him, with him, and so unburdens him of bearing that responsibility alone.

Alex is anathema to this. Being with her makes him say,

all of it is making me forget. Athos replaced parts of me slowly, as if he were preserving wood. But Alex, Alex wants to explode me, set fire to everything. She wants me to begin again.

Love must change you, it can only change you. Though now it seems I don't want Alex's understanding. Now her lack of understanding seems proof of something. (144)

Her view of language, of its playfulness, of the way that it does not necessarily connect with a reality beyond it, but is inward looking and totally self referential, leaves language impotent to carry the reality that Jakob has experienced and needs to be able to witness.

Jakob writes, "On Idhra I finally began to feel my English strong enough to carry experience" (162). Even though Jakob at this stage is still trying to preserve the past in his writing, the point here is that he feels a new language can carry his experience. He can express himself, not just the language's preconceived ideas, but also his own experience translated into a different medium. The language highlights its own limits, thus confirming that there is something beyond it where it wishes its authority to rest.

As with *Waterland*, the spatial and temporal aspects of *Fugitive Pieces* can be elucidated with reference to cases where such idiosyncrasy is more usual: in magical realist novels. (*Waterland* has in various instances been classed as a magical realist text. I don't think that this novel falls into the same category, but I do believe that there are certain similarities in the way that it deals with language and landscape). André Brink's analysis of language as it works in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is pertinent in the case of this novel as well. Brink notes that "One of the most visible strategies of the narrative construction in *One Hundred Years* ... is, its construction of 'loops' (Wood, 1993, 67), through which it becomes possible to look both forward and back in the same moment" (Brink, 245). Brink also recalls an example of a history in the novel "written, not 'in the order of man's conventional time ... but ... concentrated in such a way that they [the moments] coexisted in one

instant' (p.355)" (245). Thus this history moves "from a chronological/causal relationship ... towards commensuration and co-existence." (Brink, 245). Michaels, through the use of a narrative loop, creates a story with a type of history that is not linear or causal, but also moves towards "commensuration and co-existence".

The loop in *Fugitive Pieces* occurs in the transition from Part I to Part II. The first half of the novel is narrated by Jakob, the second part by Ben. In this transition, a number of things happen. First, there is a change of narrator. We are introduced to Jakob, the narrator for the previous part, from a different perspective, and in this transition he is placed in another context. Ben's section partly precedes the ending of the first part, only to catch up in time. When Ben meets Jakob he is already an old man and is married to Michaela. Ben has read Jakob's poems and finally meets Jakob at a mutual friend, Irena's, birthday party (206). Ben's narrative starts and runs simultaneously, but parallel to Jakob's, at least for the first part until, with a shock, we hear of Jakob's death (209). From the beginning Jakob's narrative is subsumed in Ben's, but they run parallel until this point. We then realize that, although Ben's narrative is addressed to Jakob, it is narrated from a time after Jakob's death.

This is the loop. In this loop, though, the first part is subsumed. Part II reaches back and gathers up Part I. To complicate the matter, in the section entitled "Vertical Time" we realize that on the level of Ben's narrative, Part I has been transformed from a narrative of a life (how the reader would most likely have been reading it up to this point) into a manuscript, and furthermore, does not yet exist in the world of the story. Although we have clues that Jakob's story exists as a manuscript when his narrative eventually catches up with itself and he writes of "Athos's family house, where I now sit and write this" (155) and near the end of his section, "Each morning I write these words for you all ... Here on Idhra, in the summer of 1992" (191), it is not

until Ben and Naomi decide to separate that the reader must consider Part I as Jakob's posthumous notebooks. Naomi suggests that Ben help Maurice Salman and "offer to retrieve your [Jakob's] notebooks from Idhra" (255). Jakob's life is now a the manuscript of a memoir – his life has been transformed into language. The effect is cataclysmic. The reader must completely re-evaluate and translate all that s/he has read so far as Jakob's story and interpret it in the new context of Ben's narrative.

Also, the overlap of history, memory and language is dramatically emphasized. There is a disjunction between what we treated as real (albeit part of the past – Jakob's life) and its devaluation in its rebirth as mere language (a memoir) in the present. Many readers find this an uncomfortable change. Michaels is adamant, though, that the novel would be utterly different without the transition. She says, "The book would have been entirely different and the meaning entirely different if the story had ended after the first half ... I wouldn't have written the book without the second part ... It would have changed the whole meaning of the book"

([www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels/](http://www.wordsworth.com/www/present/michaels/)). This refigured context allows language to be seen taking on new meaning as its context changes, and facilitates the complex temporality in the overlap between Part I and Part II.

For the first part of Part II, Part I is not yet real. After Jakob dies, no one knows where his manuscript is and Ben goes to Idhra, where Jakob and Michaela lived until their deaths, to find it. On one level (that we've just read it) the manuscript has already happened. On another (the level of the narrative) it has not yet come into existence. It is only released materially into the world of Ben's narrative at the very end of the novel. Ben describes finding the books: "It was when I was replacing the books in the room next to your study that I found them ... There were two books. Both bashed at the corners" (283-4). This is complicated because it means that it is

realistically impossible on the level of chronological narrative, that we have read Part I. What is disturbing about this is that the novel thus *performs* or *enacts* for the reader the fate of the manuscripts that are mentioned in the prologue. Will Jakob's manuscript, which, by some trick of the novel form, we have read and been moved by, share the fate of these other lost testimonies? This device is a way of explaining to us the loss that occurred in the loss of all the manuscripts, diaries and memoirs that were buried during the war and never found. Just as Part II threatens to erase Jakob's story, so the lives of people were erased. We are left to contemplate what difference this makes. What can we do about these lives and stories, despite their loss?

In a way Michaels has folded the text in on itself so that we can discover the text in the text itself. The past invades the future and the future invades the past. Recontextualizing the first part in this way performs what Brink calls the coincidence of life and text. What we thought was a life is now *only* language. To a certain extent, this voids it of meaning. But more importantly, it forces us to consider how language comes to make meaning in the first place. And the answer has to be that it is from its context. Words themselves are essentially meaningless, but the way that they combine, in narrative for example, is what gives them their meaning.

I wish to return to the issue of the narrative loop for a moment. Brink argues that the effect of this is "to dislodge the time of the narrative from ordinary time, by subverting the possibility of a fixed point of reference: is the episode narrated in a present from which a glimpse of the future is offered, or a present *already* viewed from a narrative future, with the advantages or disadvantages of hindsight?" (Brink, 246). He continues, "The compounded result is an impression of drifting in time, of past and future simultaneously invading the present; or, phrased differently, of a

present constantly, and precariously, exposed to invasions by past and future” (Brink, 246).

Brink emphasizes that these loops should primarily be read as “flexions of *linguistic muscles*” (Brink, 247). More than anything it emphasizes both the power and the weakness of language. The way that Jakob’s manuscript exists in the second part shows us the nature of language at work. And it reveals a necessity to treat language in its relation to history, differently. As the work of John Berger argues, much modern representation not only deals with frozen moments in time, but through the existence of perspective, the point of view of a single viewer is assumed. Most typical romantic relations to the landscape also enact an individual looker as their point of reference. The fact that in relation to the text as well as the landscape this fixed or static point of view, in time and space, is undone in *Fugitive Pieces* is of key importance in understanding the significance of these narrative tricks.

That the assumed receptor of historical information, or viewer of a landscape (because the same historical relation is implicated in this way of looking) is not fixed allows the transformation and flux necessary for the complexity of letting the past exist in the present. It is fitting, then, that when the manuscript is found, it is through Petra’s (the woman with whom Ben has an affair) disregard for freezing time in Jakob’s room, and preserving it as it was. Ben does not want to disturb the rooms as if to create memorial that stands as a bastion against time. Petra’s approach does not sanctify freezing time, and as a result, releases the past, Jakob’s manuscript (albeit in a new form) into the narrative present.

The materialist philosophy of this novel interrupts the linearity of traditional narrative and opens up a space for that which is absent, not to be represented, but to be allowed a certain kind of presence, without forcing it into the binary of presence or

absence. The use of the body reveals the limits of language and subverts idealist historicism and the type of representation associated with it. The narrative structure creates a temporality that allows language to change its meaning as the perspective of the reader or historical viewpoint changes. In allowing for silence and absence and acknowledging these as an important part of representing the past, the spatiality of the novel can no longer be seen as linear, but becomes similar to what Lyotard calls “figural”.

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### CHAPTER THREE: WATERLAND BY GRAHAM SWIFT

*Waterland*, like many historiographic metafictional texts, deals with the textualisation and narrativisation of the past. Its self-reflexivity continually emphasises the problems of writing about the past and the transformation of event into language as the original referent is lost. Many of the problems of representation with which the novel engages are investigated at the sites of landscapes and bodies. Frequent transpositions between tropes of the body, of landscape and of history reveal that both the landscape and the representation of the body in *Waterland* are channels through which the novel interrogates the nature of history and narrative.

Like *Fugitive Pieces*, *Waterland* continues to struggle with the idea of a ‘reality’ exterior to language and the relationship with or influence that this reality has on language. *Fugitive Pieces* gestures towards a materialism that is akin to an organicism, suggesting that nature inscribes meaning more truthfully than human impositions of meaning and that we have to learn these codes more effectively. *Waterland*, however, directs its interrogation towards an exploration of that nature/culture binary opposition through the representation of the organic, especially the landscape of the Fens and the body. Whereas *Fugitive Pieces* pursues its interrogation of this binary and how it operates in history in order to come to terms with and respond to the holocaust, *Waterland* responds more to the treat of a nuclear holocaust in the 1980’s and the crisis that this brings to history. Tom’s students all suffer from “nuclear nightmares” (195) and they “dream about the end of the world” (153). What is the place of history if there is no future? *Waterland* depicts what Schad calls the post-historical void. The world has evolved to a point where postmodern capitalism has resulted in such a preponderance of signs that language no longer

connects with the world. The Fens, representing absence or void, are a metaphor for this condition where the world is totally textualised and language refers to nothing at all. With very real political problems, such as a nuclear threat, how is writing to respond? History is reduced to a story. The problems of representing the landscape and body articulate with the interplay of fact and fiction in historical representations. In both the representation of landscape and body in *Waterland*, a tension is apparent between their material nature and their linguistic inscription. Is nature, in the form of the landscape or bodies in the novel, a passive surface, awaiting inscription, or is it a presence outside and beyond language that signals its limits or even undermines it? Whereas *Fugitive Pieces* uses the materiality of both landscape and body to show the limits of language and to subvert the meanings that idealistic historiography can inscribe on them, *Waterland's* approach is different. *Fugitive Pieces* suggests that the material world has both a memory that can be read and which contains a truer version of history that other writings impose, and that this materialism engenders a more ethical historicism through a closer connection with the living world. Life, rather than the abstract idea, is the highest value in this novel. *Waterland* interrogates, through its representations, the idea that language is allied to the cultural or social and that nature is its opposite, situated outside of language. Nature (represented by both landscape and the body) is that which language both tries to force meaning upon and which stubbornly resists the cultural. The novel explores the problematic paradox that nature can only ever represent the opposite of language from within a linguistic domain. In other words, nature is given the property of the opposite of language only by a social inscription. The paradoxical nature of the materiality of the landscape and body also applies to reality or the actual event in historiography. The textual self-reflexivity of this novel indicates a comprehensive awareness of the narrativisation of historical

“facts” and the loss of “what really happened” in the process of writing about them, as writing inevitably bows first to the demands of writing itself and thus fabricates or reinvents events as stories. In the process, ‘reality’ is lost. While most criticism recognises this self reflexivity and sees the relationship between the material and the linguistic as a paradox that the novel stages but cannot overcome, as is typical of much postmodern fiction, I believe that *Waterland* engages with this question in greater depth than this. I will argue that this novel presents the material and the linguistic as affecting and influencing each other in a more palpable way than the postmodern notion that the text and the world are totally unconnected. My analysis is indebted to a psychoanalytic understanding, and, in order to demonstrate that the relationship between the material world and the textual is deeply complex, draws mainly on Peter Brooks and his readings via Freud, Lacan and Klein. The body, while it is always missing from language, does have an influence on it. I will make the analogy between the way that historical events affect historiography (if not always historically accurately) and the multiple transformations between events and fiction. This also includes an exploration of the materiality of the body and its relationship with language.

Turning first to the textualisation of the past as evidenced in *Waterland* and then to the representation of landscape and body in this novel, I will explain the influence that the problematic relationship between materiality and language exerts on the representation of the spatial aspects of the novel (landscape and body). I will then consider the way that this relationship influences the spatial aspects of the text itself (its narrative structure). The looping, meandering and often circular narrative structure of the novel reflects the tension in historical thought between trying to progress and simultaneously retrieve the past. Language’s project to be at once the opposite of the

material and to try to appropriate and inscribe the body and landscape leads to a similar urge both to move away from and retrieve them. Thus the relationship between the material and language, and history's complex temporality are both implicated in the narrative structure.

The novel's self-reflexivity is such that both its structure, as well as the narrative and theories of Tom the narrator, signal to the reader an acute awareness of the discursive nature of history which becomes a controlling thematic focus of the text. There are many instances where language is shown to distance the experience of an event from its telling and this reveals much about the novel's understanding of textualisation. When Tom recounts the last public appearance of Ernest Atkinson in Gildsey, the event is first described as an authoritative account but subsequently highlighted as only one telling of the tale among numerous others. Tom, after relating the event, says, "My mother told it differently" (218) and later, "And just a few, amongst the older sectors of the community ... had yet another version" (219). Finally Tom admits that all tellings are merely "variants upon the same incident" (219). Moreover the original incident is irretrievably lost, which is ironically highlighted by his claim that "this is no supposition. Not wild invention, I have my grandfather's own authority: a journal" (219) because the textual nature of such documentary evidence does not signal a final authority, but a further telling among many. The repetition of many aspects of Tom's tales emphasises the longing for pattern that makes Tom's histories appear more and more fictive. The Atkinson men are all described in such a similar fashion as to be almost indistinguishable. The women are all endowed with a mythic, superhuman potential, which also highlights the mythic quality that the past takes on. Tom addresses his school children as version of himself and Mary when they were both still school children. The list is almost endless. This

longing for pattern reveals the purpose of narrative as both a fashioning of events into shapes that engender meaning and thus allaying the fear that all is meaningless or “everything might amount to nothing” (269). It also highlights the way that every story is already inscribed with other stories to the point that one cannot help recognising that one is in the realm of fiction.

Furthermore, Tom’s frequent ellipses and unfinished sentences are testimony to the way that he abandons his own attempts at telling his story. They often function as a rhetorical technique that allows the reader to complete his thoughts for him without Tom’s actually having articulated them. This is a demonstration of the trajectory of language itself exerting a palpable influence on the shape of the story. The repetitions within the story, each new part bearing traces of the others, show Tom struggling with the gap that the demands of language and narrative causes between him and the world, as well as moments that he at times considers authentic experience. The novel itself combines different genres. It has aspects of myth, fairy-tale, historiography (especially in the sections pertaining to the French Revolution and the World Wars), detective fiction, family saga, regional history and others. This self-conscious display of novelistic convention confirms history’s status as a fictional construct.

However, appearing frequently in the text are other examples that also acknowledge the textual nature of the past, while revealing a more complicated relationship between the textual and the “real” or material world. The loss of the original referent in these examples begins to necessitate an increasingly complex investigation of the relationship between embodiment and language. A typical exploration of the novel’s self consciousness is evident when Price, the student who questions Tom most often, emphasises the way that history does not bring one any

closer to events of the past, nor does it really engage with them. Price says, “history is a way of avoiding the facts while you pretend to get near them” (167). For Price, any endeavour to explain the past involves a wilful act of self-delusion which serves to distance one even further from reality. In a class confrontation with him, Tom, who pursues a more sustained interrogation of history and considers a greater variety of perspectives, says:

‘It’s a curious thing, Price, but the more you try to dissect events, the more you lose hold of them – the more they seem to have occurred largely in people’s imaginations...’

Teacher pauses. Price’s response to all this suddenly seems important.

He hesitates a moment. Then boldly, almost insolently: ‘Should we be writing this down, sir? The French revolution never really happened. It only happened in the imagination. (139-40).

Tom’s private response to this mockery from the student is,

But actually I do believe that. I believe it more and more. History: a lucky dip of meanings. Events elude meaning, but we look for meanings. Another definition of Man: the animal who craves meaning –but knows—(140)

History, as in this case he is quick to admit, like any form of narrative, is an artifice that makes the original event impossible to retrieve. Despite this understanding, by defining humans as the “story-telling animal” (62-3) Tom continues to problematise the relationship between nature and artifice by combining both in his definition of humanity. The unfinished sentence in the passage quoted above shows Tom’s awareness of language’s artificiality. He abandons his linguistic attempts at explanation precisely because of his awareness of the artificiality of language. Part of being human, as opposed to animal (or natural) is an unavoidable awareness of the artificiality that comes with consciousness and language. Rather than making a clear distinction between nature and artifice, as may seem to be the case in his adjacent chapters, “About Natural History” (205) and “And Artificial History” (207), Tom

insists upon a much more complicated exploration of the relationship between these terms.

Another telling example of Tom's awareness of the problematic relationship of nature and artifice is when Tom describes his early meetings on the train with Mary. He asks, referring to his "fledgling adolescent" (47) shyness, "Why this gap between him and the world (which, for better or worse, he attempts to fill with books)?" (47). He suggests that an explanation might be that his mother has recently died, and he is seeking a substitute and that he "has turned Mary – in spite if the facts – into an untouchable madonna" (48). "The facts" (48) are that Mary is sexually curious and far from untouchable and the gap between him and the world has to do with his understanding Mary through various layers of representation that distance him from her. The world is at a remove from him, not despite the books with which he tries to fill the gap, but because of them. But this example shows a more dynamic relationship between facts and Tom's fiction when he has to pass through the process where the "evidence" (48) of Mary's sexual curiosity "gradually (and not unpainfully) dissolve[s]" (48) his fictional construction of her. This transition illustrates a clear interaction between fact and fiction.

Also, in the scene entitled *Longitude 0°* Tom describes everything that happens between the adult Mary and himself as if it is being witnessed from a dramatic remove or seen by passers by. He describes them "striking intense attitudes" (146) playing out a "familiar drama" (147) or a "much repeated scene" (147) and emphasises that their interaction would be interpreted in terms of these familiar frames of reference. One can never know what really happened or was said in this scene because it is mediated though the interpretations of others and filtered through representational expectations that are defined more by the expectations of making

narratives than by the event itself. However, by using the metaphor of the theatre, Tom still raises questions of embodiment that are inherent to this art form. The relationship between live bodies on a stage and their performance shows that the relationship between embodiment and various claims for a textualised universe are far from settled. The theatre is a medium that relies on embodiment, on the performance of real people on a stage and the utterance of the human voice to give the text life. In an article precisely about the relationship between the bodies of actors on stage and the textual nature of their utterances, David Schalkwyk writes, “As much as the body has always already been appropriated by discourse, staged bodies are at the same time peculiarly resistant to such appropriations” (285). He argues that “in performance the talking body of the actor can through its palpable visibility” (284) highlight the overdetermination of the scripts that it speaks. The question of embodiment in this example of staged bodies reveals a tension between a script existing independently of the world and the necessity of human embodiment which it needs to exist in the first place. The scripted element of much human interaction is not denied, but the idea that the textual must interact with the physical world is inherent to performance. In the case of embodiment in the theatre, Schalkwyk argues that it is not the body as “a reified object of intellectual abstraction, to which different bodies may be reduced, and from whose structure they are derived” (278) that is presented, but rather “the moment to moment interaction of individual bodies as it is registered in this poem or that play, between this woman and that man, or these men, or these women” (278-9). The example of a staged interaction must raise the question of the tension between a general, abstract idea and a specific instance. In the staged aspect of life, there must be interaction between the scripted and the ‘real’, individual enactment.

The opposition of reality to textuality is shown to be problematic also by Tom's reaction when faced with Mary's delusion (already a narrative repetition of the characteristics of other Atkinson women which alerts us to the representation of her as inscribed with previous representations). Tom strains to believe in a simple, clear reality – "He believes: this is Mary; this is a bench; this is a dog" (148) – but his method of relating the incident first demonstrates the layers of fabrication that events undergo in their transformation into narrative. Despite his unwillingness to believe it, he still confirms his dual position as both invested in a solid reality and in "fairy-land" (148) unavoidably having his experience taken over by narrative.

There is yet another aspect of Tom's narrative that shows that he remains deeply invested in the existence of a material reality and the occurrence of actual events in the past. This relationship between the real and artificial is evident in the very earliest of Tom's digressions when he mimics his students' mockery: "old Cricky was trying to put himself into history, old Cricky was trying to show you that he himself was part of the stuff he taught" (6). He considers himself real yet still excluded from the mainstream narrative of history. His desire to show himself to be part of history is also an expression of a certain faith that life and writing *are* implicated in each other. His long overdue ambition to write a book, *A History of the Fens* (6), is a testament to his will to include his own narrative and that of the Fens, a typical example of a marginal place excluded by mainstream historical texts, with the events of history's Grand Narrative. His wish to include himself in history has also to do with his ambivalent attempts to make history (or narrative or language) contain a life and is it closely tied to the implications that the geographic region of the Fens has for historicism. He seems to think that the Fens can be made to signify in terms of the history of the "wide world" (33, 158, 176 among others) or some sort of public

version of history. This impulse is directed through the question of whether, even if they can never be the same thing, artifice and reality nevertheless do affect each other.

Despite his sophisticated awareness of the falsifying aspects of stories, Tom still ventures that “in every myth there is a grain of truth” (215). This suggests that humans have a dual nature. Referring to an episode in his childhood, the swimming competition at Hockwell Lode, Tom sees an instance of the Here and Now as a root cause of many of the events that followed and altered the course of his life. He says:

There’s something about this scene. It’s tense with the present tense. Its fraught with the here and now... It affects your history teacher in the pit of the stomach. It gives him a feeling in the guts... It’s too much for your history teacher’s unpracticed objectivity, or for his short-lived pubescent boldness. He escapes to his history books.

Because he can still do that. Jump from one realm to the other, as if they shut each other out. He hasn’t begun yet to put the two together. To live an amphibious life. He hasn’t begun to ask yet where stories end and reality begins. But he will, he will. (207-8)

The question of where language has its limits and how this interacts with ‘reality’ is a great concern of Tom’s digressions. In this instance, he attributes to his adolescent naïveté the idea that the ‘realm’ of books and that of reality are mutually exclusive. Linking these ideas to the ambiguity of the Fens, he calls his position “amphibious,” which suggests that he is far more invested in the way that stories and reality are mutually implicated than in separating them. This is also, for him, linked to physicality. The “feeling in the guts” here is at the origin or cause of Tom’s escape to language. Although at the time he sets the physical feeling in contrast with the recreation of the event in language, in the narrative present he presents the physical as the cause of his will to escape and thus, in a way, a source of language.

Tom approaches this relationship from other angles as well. Envisioning the end of the world, what might be called the post historical or postmodern void where

all is textualised (and for critics such as Schad, the Fens and the novel as a whole represents) Tom still equivocates on the relationship between events and language. He says,

But all the stories were once real. And all the events of history, the battles and costume pieces, once really happened. All the stories were once a feeling in the guts...

But when the world is about to end there'll be no more reality, only stories. And all that will be left to us will be stories. We'll sit down in our shelter, and tell stories, like poor Sheherazade, hoping it will never... (297-8)

The reference to physical, lived experience, characterised again as “a feeling in the guts,” (297) and stories is revealed in some complexity in this passage. The nature of the Here and Now in *Waterland* functions in the same way that the body does and is closely associated with it. The Here and Now is described as “a feeling in the guts” (297). This phrase carries multiple associations of corporeality through both its proverbial meaning as an intuition, or a hunch that originates from non-reason (the opposite of thought or ‘the head’), the physical reaction to fear or nervousness as a turning of the stomach and lastly, its association with Mary’s pregnancy and, through this, female bodies. The Here and Now is that which launches us into the future yet remains indefinable. It begins language but remains outside of it. The problems of representing the present tense and the body, as I shall go on to elaborate, are remarkably similar in this novel, and in fact overlap.

This passage also suggests that the end of the world is a false necessity that historical discourse creates. Tom observes, “if the end of the world didn’t exist it would be necessary to invent it” (336). Stories simultaneously rely on the notion of an ending and defer it endlessly, as the reference to Sheherazade suggests. Schad, in his allegorical reading of *Waterland*, argues that any post-historical narrative cannot logically offer the possibility of an ending because endings are “embedded in a linear view of history” (Kellner, 173 quoted in Schad, 912). But he continues to argue that

the post-historical void contains traces of other master narratives (particularly Christian and Marxist narratives) and through them is paradoxically invested in these narratives even as it declares them obsolete. The “desert or nothing of pure signs beyond history” (Schad, 913) cannot be apolitical or totally uninvested in the world. He argues that *Waterland*, like the postmodern Marxist thought of Eagleton and Jameson, *combines* “the postmodern conviction that one cannot in any sense know the world with a continuing and paradoxical commitment to it” (917). This correlates with Tom’s statement that even as it declares the end of history narrative perpetuates its existence. Once reality has been translated into narrative and lost to us, there is another, different drive to continue telling stories. Once the world has completely been transformed into narrative, there is no longer a life outside of language or the sign. Paradoxically, as in the case of Sheherazade, the story is also told in order to *preserve* life, to put off the end of the world. Stories are thus simultaneously a way of preserving life and a sign that it has already been lost. This is similar to the way that language, while absolutely different from the body, is perpetually trying to retrieve it (Brooks, 1). These stories at the end of the world confirm reality, even as they declare it lost, in the same paradoxical way.

There are further ways that the relationship between language and reality is shown to be more complicated than one of simple mutual exclusivity. There are a number of instances that refer to the multiple transformations that take place between reality and fabrication. Referring to Mary’s psychiatric condition after the kidnapping, Tom suggests a way in which the events of the past go on happening. He says, “First there is nothing; then there is happening. And after the happening, only the telling of it. But sometimes the happening won’t stop and let itself be turned into memory”(329). Tom, far from resolved and narrating from a condition of crisis

himself, suggests that Mary's insanity is a consequence of being unable to reach a sufficient narrative distance, a stable vantage-point from which to interpret events. He says that the fact that for her events haven't ceased, is "why she can't cross into the safe, sane realm of hindsight" (329). Tom describes the sequence of these transformations between fact and fiction: "First it was a story – what our parents told us, at bedtime. Then it becomes real, then it becomes here and now. Then it becomes story again" (328). This observation suggests a clear influence of stories on reality. Although reality is always transformed back into story, Tom says that it was *first* a story. He envisions that the world both begins and ends as language. But he does not deny the idea that between these two states of narrative, something actually does happen. Stories influence reality as much as reality influences stories.

While Tom uses language to try and retrieve the past and tells stories in an attempt to redeem certain events, he discovers the difficulties of historical investigation in the process, and also cites an opposite use of language: to instantiate forgetfulness. Helen Atkinson, who will be Tom's mother, nurses traumatized and shell-shocked soldiers after the First World War. Tom says,

she believes in stories. She believes that they're a way of bearing what won't go away, a way of making sense of madness ... No, don't forget. Don't erase it. You can't erase it. But make it into a story. Just a story. Yes, everything's crazy. What's real? All a story. Only a story ... (225)

Events become easier to deal with when they are stabilised in a narrative form that admits that the event is a fabrication. Knowing that the terrible past, as we tell it to ourselves, is only a story makes it easier to forget. Language can do this but the workings of language do more than simply fictionalising the past. There are also instances when language remembers when we would rather have it create distance and enable us to forget certain events. When leaving the mental hospital after visiting Mary, Tom notes, looking at a statue that honours a benefactor of the hospital, "the

word which modern preference of plain ‘Hospital’ or, begrudgingly, ‘Mental Hospital’, cannot, in justice to this worthy’s memory, erase: ‘...Asylum’” (329). This monument shows an inscription of the past that he would rather forget. Similarly the letter that Dick’s father left for him that “unlocked the past” (320) is also a written document that uncovers or displays what Henry would be happier to have buried by time. Perhaps this can be compared to Jakob’s manuscripts in *Fugitive Pieces*. They are both examples of writing that may be lost, yet bring us the past. We are, through them, forced to consider the place of writing in historicism and consider its influence. Whereas *Fugitive Pieces* sees redemption in the idea that, despite the untrustworthiness of words, events exist on a material level and can thus be retrieved, *Waterland* explores the indelible nature of events more in terms of the way that these events influence writing.

Tamas Benyei argues that Tom uses narrative to bury the past as much as to retrieve it, and caught between these contradictory urges, ends up telling and retelling the events of the past endlessly (110). He observes,

while the story solidifies the past, reducing it to something manageable, it is opening up as it goes along gaps where the past, non-narratable, is seeping back. The solidifying process (Crick’s narrative) is thus forced to return to the leakage either to stop it or to do some more dredging. (112)

Benyei argues that the repetition mimics a compulsive rehearsing of the loss of the original event, and thus actually remembers or reconstitutes it. Much like the bruise upon a bruise, “it reclaims the past, reiterating the infliction of the wound while covering the original wound” (111). This repetition, he argues, results in Tom’s life being “defined by two moments, two intrusions of what Crick calls the Here-and-Now” (114). He argues that returning the baby after Mary has kidnapped it, and the abortion administered by Martha Clay are actually one event. In terms of narrative

ordering, the chapter that narrates Mary and Tom returning the baby is “wedged between” (114) two chapters describing the abortion scene. He argues, “the two moments ... are one. Repetition abolishes the time between” (114). They are both moments in which time has stopped and yet continues. Although Benjei says that Tom wills himself into an inauthentic position that is beyond events, after the end, to comfort himself that they are over, this distribution of events in these chapters reveals the way that events are not so easily buried. Narrative actually reveals how the ‘real,’ even though it is exterior to language, cannot be erased even when it is recast in the more manageable form of narrative. Despite the distance or remove that language brings, it cannot always make events go away. Temporally, events go on happening and Tom’s narrative idiosyncrasies and contradictions reveal this. The novel stages a tension between the desire to put events securely in ‘the past’ and the realization that narrativisation does not change the external ‘reality’ of events, but only the way that we have ‘historicised’ them, and therefore respond to them.

This tension can be seen at work in the representation of the Fens. The Fens are often characterised as that which falls outside of history. This can be seen specifically in the abortion scene when Tom and Mary go to visit Martha Clay, who, through her status as a witch in a fairy-tale, her ancient customs and her name, which is a synonym for silt, seems herself to be an extension of the Fens. Tom says, “Children, have you ever stepped into another world? Have you ever turned a corner to where Now and Long Ago are the same and time seems to be going on in some other place?” (303). The Fens, like nature, the eels and the geese (“from time immemorial” (299) come to stand for that which is excluded by history and discourse. The ancient lifestyle of these traditional Fen-dwellers is unchanged. Time, which is created by historical events, does not exist here. The Fens, like the event above, exist

in a simultaneous present and past. The definition between present and past in a linear continuum is collapsed. Even in this scene we are alerted by the bombers to the presence and influence of history. And we find language coming into play when we find that they are also called geese, which shows how language slips and the imagery of nature is impinged upon by historical events. We are reminded how language itself is historical and is influenced by events and is caught between the natural and the artificial.

The Fens are also, as I discussed in my introduction, featureless. This is connected to the fact that they exist outside of historical time, like a typical construction of nature as that which is outside of culture. Judith Butler critiques the nature/culture divide, saying that such a conception ends up “degrading the natural as that which is ‘before’ intelligibility, in need of the mark, if not mar, of the social to signify, to be known, to have value” (4). We see that it is precisely their blankness that allows the Atkinsons to see the Fens as “a drawing board for [their] plans” (17). They impose a shape or development on the Fens. Seeing the Fens as unmarked or prediscursive actually enables the process of writing or inscribing them. But this also reveals the interaction between the myth of history and real outcomes. In terms of the Fens, which are also a model for history, we see how history was “little by little, changing the map of England” (13). Myths of progress result in changes not only in the lives and nature of the Fens dwellers, whose way of life is gradually destroyed, but material change in the land itself. It is worth noting that it is the *map* that changes, which again reminds us that the land cannot be accessed except through representations, even though these changes affect the ‘real’ world. The emptiness of the Fens, although it is resistant and contrary to the meanings that history tries to make it embody, also means that these myths will affect people’s actions and have

real consequences. History involves real actions when the myths are enacted in actual events. There is an interplay between the mythology of history and reality. The Fens change their shape, they submit, albeit only ever temporarily, to the demands of history.

The dual nature of the Fens, however, has been explored by critics in some detail. The Fens in *Waterland* are represented by Tom as “both palpable and unreal” (8). They simultaneously have a material quality and they are constituted of discourse. Del Ivan Janik claims that *Waterland* emphasizes the dual nature of the representation of place by giving the landscape both a “physical presence and potential for mythical status” (74). Pamela Cooper writes that the Fens “emphasize[] simultaneously the density of the organic and its constructedness; at once accentuating and denying the artificiality of the natural” (379). Ronald H. McKinney’s environmentalist reading of the novel which claims that “the central reality in the lives of Fenlanders becomes the primary metaphor Crick uses to explain the nature and function of storytelling” (823) also betrays this contradiction. Although it does not question its assumption of a clear distinction between story-telling and reality, McKinney’s understanding still reveals the complex nature of the Fens as both outside and made entirely of language. George P. Landow argues that “Fen lands and waters represent the reality that won’t fit into our stories (one can’t call it nature or the natural because those terms refer to a reality that has already been placed in a story)” (208). Here he refers to the already constructed nature of the natural. He says that these terms cannot actually be set in opposition to each other because they are both revealed by the novel to be constructions or representational conventions. This suggests that as much as one might long for innocence or a pre-linguistic, unhistorical and untainted existence, this is a myth in itself. In Tom’s example (discussed in my introduction) of children raised

in the Fenlands being unable to identify with picture books depicting featured landscapes (Swift, 13) we see how the blankness and featurelessness of the Fens highlights the gap between representation and reality. The fact that “every Fenman suffers now and then the illusion that the land he walks over is *not there*, is floating...” (13) shows that the landscape is only ever accessed through its constructions and then is *not* actually accessed at all. For *Waterland* the real is impossible to represent. The event, the actual happening, the Here and Now, material reality, the body and the landscape themselves are impossible to access. While this novel has a vested interest in the existence of a reality outside of the discursive, it is perpetually beyond our, and language’s, reach. The comments of all of these critics reveal a tension in the novel’s understanding of the binaries of the ‘natural’ or ‘real’ landscape and its contrary mythic, artificial or representational characteristics. Cooper claims that the representation of the novel’s geography “signals a struggle with notions of naturalness” (379) and that in this struggle “‘natural and ‘artificial’ constitute the most difficult term in *Waterland*’s repertoire of interchanging binaries” (379). These critical accounts as well as the narrator, Tom Crick (although this is less of ten examined), battle to resolve the contradiction between the simultaneous insistence on both the material reality of the landscape and its inscribed and purely constructed or linguistic nature.

Cooper, gives the most comprehensive analysis of the impact on the novel’s account of spatiality of the nature/culture binary, as evidenced in the representation of landscape and body. She argues that Tom sets nature and civilization in opposition to each other. However, this binary conception, as Murphy also notes in respect of the illusion of stable origins that linear narrative creates, “inscribes within itself the terms of its own evacuation” (Cooper, 379). The exchange of binaries is a circulating

rhythm moving between moments when it emphasizes its material density and then its artificiality. By arguing that the notion of a literal unmediated nature exists, it compromises itself. One cannot have a ‘natural’ that is simultaneously available to interpretation but outside of discourse. This novel emphasizes *both* the density of the organic world *and* its constructedness. Cooper argues that this dual nature of the Fens in the novel “permits it to actively interrogate its own certainties” (380). Referring to Baudrillard, she argues that *Waterland*’s representations of the physical world vacillate between plenitude and emptiness, fullness and vacancy. The constructed nature of the landscape, its inscription is *so* excessive that it voids *itself* of validity. It is “a highly problematic portrayal of organicism and the organic world. Densely literal but embedded in the multiple transformations of metaphor; obtrusively material yet (like history) always already mediated by prior inscription” (376). She argues that the dynamic relationship between landscape and map, ostensibly presents the “blunt facticity” (376) of the material in the text as non-transferable and then presents it as abstraction. It thus presents the paradox of an “impersonation of the ‘natural world’ at a levitated remove from itself” (376) which reveals an oscillation “between superfluity and deficit” (387). Multiple recognition paradoxically circumvents recognition. The problematic status of the ‘natural’ as already inscribed, but beyond the reach of discourse, defines the novel’s attitude to historical events as well.

Although I agree that the representation of landscape does stage or enact a self-reflexive display of its own multiple inscription and the loss of the original referent, I am not convinced that, in dislodging the search for origins in favour of replication, the idea of a physical presence or ‘reality’ outside of language is not still in place. Although it is shown to be impossible to represent, the material or the actual event in Cooper’s argument is still situated outside of language and acts as a kind of

limit function or an absolute boundary. Despite her notion that the relationship between a dense material reality and the spectacle of a pure signifier is a dynamic one, and that it draws attention to the limits of language, it still suggests that what is outside of language is impossible to represent. My second reservation is that, while writing most often attempts to make the physical world signify, to make it body forth meaning, the problem with embodiment is that it always resists inscription. All representations are problematic and although *Waterland* deals with representations in a self-reflexive way, it is in the nature of bodily representations to be unstable. Brooks claims that the body “is always a restless captive of culture, including language” (Brooks, 6). I do agree that this novel draws attention to this, but it seems to me that, despite the simulacra that Cooper argues for, there is still a relationship of difference (if not opposites) between the real or material and the artificial or linguistic. Lastly, I would like to argue that Tom is himself not unaware of a more problematic relationship between the real and the artificial. Although the novel’s intention and that of the narrator cannot be conflated, I do not think that in this case they can be quite so clearly distinguished either.

The complications of nature and artifice, seen in the relationship between the event and its representation, and also at work in representations of the Fens, are also evidenced in representations of body. The overlap of these three domains (history, landscape and body) can be seen in the representation of Dick, Tom’s mentally retarded brother. I will examine instances of embodiment and then the workings of embodiment in relation to the narrative structure of the novel. Dick, for the most part, inhabits a zone that is outside of time and language, but also, in a naïve way, is subject to a human susceptibility to the difficulties of story telling. The representation of Dick explores further the idea of humanity as a complicated mixture of nature and

artifice, living a physical existence yet always distanced from this aspect of ourselves by language. His narrative, like that of Tom and Mary pertaining to the abortion, shows his transition from an innocent and pre-historical consciousness to one where he shifts into the domain of language and linear temporality. The way that he is described and understood also reveals much about the way that the novel figures the relationship between representation and reality. He is almost pre-linguistic in that he speaks “in a sort of baby-language” (27) and he cannot read or write. He is associated, like the Fens, with a blankness or expressionlessness that renders his thoughts unreadable. Tom says, “although they [his eyes] registered emotion it was impossible to tell merely from their movement what emotion was being signalled” (27) as well as calling him “inscrutable, [and] uncommunicative” (182). Dick’s memory resembles the Fens as an “amnesiac mire” (245) and his mind is “irreclaimable” (37). In keeping with his inarticulate and unyielding blankness is his dominant characteristic of bodiliness and its associations with the natural. His excessive corporeality, however, is described in contradictory terms that emphasize it as both natural and artificial. His sexual characteristics are exaggerated by his very large penis, which seems simultaneously to add to his associations with the sexual and natural, and also, because his name, Dick, is synonymous with penis, to the fact that his identity is a linguistic construction. His body is animal-like (he has “fish eyes” (33), he is “bovine” (324) and his penis is associated with eels) as well as mechanical (“a sort of machine” (38) and he has a close kinship with both the dredger and, it is suggested, a sexual relationship with his motorcycle) and vegetable (he is a potato-head and his penis is described as “marrow” (50)). His body also blends with the Fens in the way that it “smells of silt” (33). Dick, like the Fens, because he does not yield articulation, is excessively inscribed with meaning but cannot be known. This is a typical problem

in representations of nature that simultaneously posit a 'natural' outside of language but assume that nature yields meaning in terms of a discourse on nature.

In the chapter, "A Bruise upon a Bruise," when Freddie Parr's body is found drowned in the sluice outside the Cricks' cottage, the Here and Now, embodiment, the representation of time and the Fens all intersect. The body is represented in historical terms and we can begin to see how history (and language) is figured as the retrieval of a body. Referring to Dick's job as a dredger, Tom compares the body of Freddie Parr to the Fens: "For him, this removal of a body – even a familiar body – from the river is perhaps not essentially different from his daily task ... of removing silt, by means of a bucket-dredging apparatus from the bottom of the Ouse" (32). The Fens shares the material nature of the body and, the fact that that both are dredged, refers to historicism and the attempt to reclaim the past. Both history and the landscape are described here in the same terms as the body. They become metaphors for each other, but more importantly, they become a consequence of the same historical drive to reclaim, to understand and to make sense. I intend to show how the retrieval of the body not only motivates narrative and language, but also is responsible for some of the contradictory and difficult elements of the temporality of history. This temporality, which is far from the linearity of traditional historicism, is also expressed in the complex narrative structure of the novel. The representation of the material body thus has direct consequences for the novel's narrative structure.

Tom says of his father when he finds Freddie's drowned body, "He was hoping that all this was not happening. He was hoping that if he turned his back ... it would go away. But it didn't" (28). When Henry Crick goes through the motions of resuscitating Freddie, Tom says, comparing this attempt at retrieval to an attempt to reclaim the past and change irreversible events, "there is such a thing as human

drainage too, such a thing as human pumping” (31). History is also a type of “human drainage”. Like the drainage of the Fens in order to reclaim the land, which is a metaphor for history, so is the “human pumping” of Freddie’s body to reclaim his life. This resuscitation is a historical process; it is an attempt at reclamation or turning back time. In the same way that Henry attempts to resuscitate Freddie, Tom Crick’s attempt to narrate his history is motivated by his longing to reclaim the past. The fact that both Tom and Henry encounter is that events like this cannot be reversed; “whereas they [the Atkinsons] reclaimed land, my father could not reclaim a life...” (32) and in trying to explain, Tom cannot reclaim the past. On the other hand, Henry’s attempts at resuscitation are also characterized as a refutation of reality and “labour[ing] against the laws of nature” (32). In the same way that Price characterises history as a way of avoiding reality, so “this ritual pretence at resuscitation staved off the moment when he [Henry] must face the indictment of truth” (31). Henry’s attempts at resuscitation, like history, both try and reclaim the past and simultaneously put off having to face it.

The body in this scene becomes synonymous with the “reality of things ... [that] only visits us for a brief while” (33). It is both transient and “endless and indelible” (34). Like the River Ouse, bodies and such events exhibit what Tom calls “the secret capacity to move yet remain” (143). Corporeality, physical experience, and matter are associated with reality and the Here and Now. They are associated with that which cannot be represented, which remains perpetually beyond the reach of language. And they do not obey the temporal laws of linearity that stories impose. Events are both lost and contradictorily, indelible. They only happen for a moment, and continue happening forever. They exist in a simultaneous stasis and flux. This means that while they can never be reclaimed, they cannot be left behind in the past

either. Physical existence haunts language as it is what language wishes to reclaim but has lost and can never include.

Despite the fact that it is lost to language, we endeavour to bring the body back into language, to give the body meaning. Henry's attempts to bring Freddie back to life can be read as a metaphor for the attempt at reclamation that takes place in narrative itself. In both cases, the body is that which is beyond reach. Language tries to retrieve bodies in its own way and evidence of this process can be identified in this scene as well. Narratives that are preoccupied with bodies tend to try to "bring the body in to the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of the body's entrance into meaning ... they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifying factor in the text..." (Brooks, 8) and the marks on Freddie Parr's body are an instance of this.

Both the mark from the boat-hook and the bruise from the blow that killed Freddie Parr are inscriptions on the body that will be used to read events. This is Tom's way, not dissimilar to his father's, of trying to bring the body back. Brooks argues that "narrative seeks to make such a body semiotic, to mark or imprint it as a narrative sign" (8). This can be seen by the way that the coroner, by reading the marks in a certain way, is satisfied that the cause of Freddie's death is drowning. Tom tries to pretend he can make narrative appropriate the body, because he seems to believe that the text of the coroner's report constitutes reality. If the official story is that Freddie's death was accidental, then that makes him guilt free. It means that "nothing's changed" (131). But the fact is that despite the text, the official version, as Mary insists, "It's not alright. Because it wasn't an accident. Everything's changed" (131). And Tom is forced to agree, observing that "he knows for certain that the fear he felt by the river-bank and in his own locked room four days ago can't be allayed by

two official words” (132). As much as it is a motivation for beginning narratives, they cannot ever fully retrieve the body. Whether it is the mark that reveals Tom’s guilt, or the mark that obscures it, that is read is immaterial; the body beneath it remains. The replications of signs (the original bruise is obscured by the second one) ensure that, as Cooper argues, the spatial inscriptions on the Fens and on bodies mark “the absconding of any original anatomical referent and replace[] the teleological myth of emergence with the perpetual cycles of replication” (389). I agree that the replications, which are evident in the example of a bruise upon a bruise, do reveal the unavoidable loss of reality in *Waterland*, but I also believe that it is the material that remains and continues to affect language. Although narrative attempts to bring the body into the realm of meaning, the body itself is always that which does not remain a captive of language but, rather, engenders it.

The question that we are left with is: how, then, is narrative to deal with the complex temporality of this relationship between events of the past and the present? Images of entrapment, solidity and stasis often characterise *Waterland*’s descriptions of a historicist consciousness. Referring to the Here and Now, which Tom characterises as a kind of unmediated, authentic experience, he says

And so often it is precisely these attacks of the Here and Now which, far from launching us into the present tense, which they do, it is true for a brief and giddy interval, announce that time has taken us prisoner. (61)

Not only does language only ever signal the loss of reality, as it points to the impossibility of actual representation, but reality itself only ever signals our transition into a state of loss or remove from reality. The Here and Now or present tense is indefinable and unrepresentable. Tom asks, “but what is this much-adduced Here and Now? What is this indefinable zone between what is past and what is to come; this free airy present tense in which we are always longing to take flight into a boundless

future?” (60). Representation itself can only be the loss of the present and represent a transition into language and its temporal aspects. The Here and Now inevitably leads to its own loss. It forces us into language and into attempts at explanation. Although history creates a nostalgic “longing to revert” (136) or “return to that time before history claimed us” (136) or more frustrated attempts to throw off or “jettison the impedimenta of history” (136), it is precisely this presence or unmediated experience which precipitates a transition into language. The drives in history are contradictory.

Historical narrative, in whatever form, is caught between trying to reach a genuine experience, like the Here and Now, and the fact that the Here and Now only ever ends itself and propels us into language and history. This very issue is also evident in the problematic binary relationship between the natural and artificial. Dick, walks the fine and tortured line that distinguishes and blends the natural and artificial, and suggests that they, just as the past and present, are not altogether separable.

This instability is reflected in the representation of landscape in *Waterland* where the paradoxes and contradictions of history are played out. The Fens are figured as a geography where, Cooper claims, the dialectical opposition between fiction and fact, narrative and history, plays itself out. She says that “the marshes project and orchestrate the problems of representation which obsess Tom” (372). The chapter, “De la Revolution”, which makes frequent references to the spatial aspects of history, is juxtaposed with “About the Ouse” which describes the river in very similar terms. Like history, the River Ouse erodes as it builds (the landscape “shapes and undermines”, “demolishes as it builds” and follows the pattern of “neither progress nor decay” (9)). The river meanders, loops back and returns on itself (as we find is true of the temporality of revolutions that are created by an “insidious longing to revert” (136)) when, like history, according to the likes of Lewis, the school principal,

it should be progressing into the future. Also, in the same way that rivers are falsely represented as flowing from an origin to an end when in fact they are cyclical, so history is built on myths that fabricate its own end so that it can continue being made.

Landow observes, “Tom Crick argues [that] story-telling comes with time, with living in time” (201). Narrative and time are consequences of each other. The demands and falsifying constructs of narrative are defined, as I argued with reference to Soja in my introduction, by the linear temporality of history. Landow argues, though, that this novel has a “deep suspicion of chronology and sequence” (203). This suspicion is expressed, because it cannot be overcome, in a tension between the inevitable nature of narrative as linear and attempts to overcome this constraint. Landow explains that *Waterland* dramatizes this by staging an opposition between that which lies outside of language and the illusion of order that narrative strives to create:

the material of stories often refuses to be shaped by them, just as nature, unmediated, refuses to be shaped by the convenient story of progress... (And, one must note in passing, this fact might cast into doubt all story-telling, particularly that of this novel, since narrative always involves some kind of progress.) Thus, Graham Swift’s emphasis throughout the novel on two matters—the Fens and sexuality—that resist all ideological, narrative control, that refuse to be shaped by stories we tell. (202)

Landow suggests that narrative cannot adequately keep reality under control (208) and that it continually undermines our attempts to do so. There is something in reality, in events or in the material world that resists attempts to represent them. The Fens and sexuality both exist, like the body, out of time, and yet narrative continually tries to appropriate them. Dick is associated both with the Fens and sexuality. Like them he resists narrative control, thus giving him a unique relationship with the past. But, because he too has to deal with language, especially since he has a dramatic transition from a pre-historical consciousness to an historical one, he cannot escape the temporal

aspects of narrative and language. When Dick is endowed with self-awareness, it is the awareness that events cannot be reclaimed. With time comes the idea that events are irreversible. Although the novel can stage its suspicions of chronology by emphasizing things that resist the shapes that stories impose on their material, it cannot overcome its reliance on linear chronology.

As Lyotard argues, and I discussed in my chapter on *Fugitive Pieces*, the writing of the event becomes another separate event in itself. The “indefinable zone” (60) of the present has to remain unknown because there is always a gap between the event and its representation. Tom’s narration from a position of crisis, rather than a safe distance after the events are over (which, Lyotard argues, characterises modernist historicism) suggests that events do not end. They cannot be left behind at a safe distance. They exist outside of historical time and thus can return and pierce it despite being left behind by chronological time. When Tom says that “history is a thin garment, easily punctured by a knife blade called Now” (36) he does not only mean that the layers of fabrication through which we live are occasionally ruptured by an event that issues in consequence, he means that events carry on happening. Murphy alludes to the complex temporality of historicism and events when he quotes Lacan: “[h]istory is not the past. History is the past insofar as it is historicised in the present—historicised in the present because it was lived in the past” (Lacan in Murphy, 79). There is a mixing of present and past here that is difficult to reconcile. The present, as we write, is always becoming the past. Murphy understands this as meaning that “history depends on the dynamic relationship between present and past for meaning” (79). Tom narrates from a position of crisis because his difficulty with history is that he does not find that events stay in the past. He finds the past intruding into the present and the present changing the way that he understands the past. The

instability of his narrative guarantees that the desire that writing history has to stabilise events in the past and make them objects of knowledge is never possible.

Critics have made a number of suggestions of ways to interpret the manner in which this narrative deals with the tension between the complex temporality of events and the linear characteristics of language. Murphy suggests that “perhaps the crucial question is: Can language be structured in a non-linear manner?” (80) and argues that *Waterland* is a successful example of a fully spatial rather than linear text. The different parts of *Waterland*'s narrative do not relate in a linear, chronological order. The future and past are not necessarily consecutive. Our orientation in time, reading this novel, is spatial as well as temporal because time's forms resemble the landscape more than time's arrow. Landow and Murphy both offer theories that Tom's narrative is a dispersed network without any particularly privileged order or sequence for reading. Landow refers to Tom's “textualised, intertextualised self” (207) being “composed of many texts and dispersed into them” (207). He makes this spatial analogy to illustrate the composition of a self and a narrative as anti-historicist and non-linear. He argues that in order to narrate his own history “Tom must also record so many other histories, for they all intertwine, echo and reverberate; causes, responsibilities, limits become difficult to locate” (207). Tom's textualised self and the novel itself become indistinguishable. Landow argues for a sense of simultaneity that undermines linear chronology and forces him to “spread[] them [his narratives] out and or weave[] them in a non-sequential way” (204). In the same way that Berger argues that “consciousness cannot be reduced to the laws of uni-linear time. It is always, at any given moment, trying to come to terms with a whole” (23), so Tom's narrative illustrates that his consciousness cannot deal with his recollections in a linear fashion. Murphy particularly argues that this in fact leads to the creation of a

healthier type of narrative that, unlike traditional linear narrative, does not distance the reading subject from his or her own anxieties and desires by providing false notions of stability based on origins and endings. These notions, as Cooper also argues, are based on a reference to a signifier that the reader assumes refers to reality. The fact that signifiers only ever refer to other signifiers renders this claim, as well as language itself, extremely unstable. Acknowledging the falsifying nature of narrative, Murphy claims, allows readers, like Tom, to engage with the difficulties of language and thus their own desires, in a way that clinging to linearity and binary logic cannot, thus distancing them from experience by assuming a position after the event.

My understanding of the relationship between the narrative structure of *Waterland* and the representation and influence of bodies on language is informed by Peter Brooks's conception of the relationship between the somatic and the semiotic. Brooks, working within a psychoanalytic paradigm, argues that "the question of the body in literature is particularly interesting because of the apparent distance ... [and] ... an irreducible tension between 'nature' and 'culture,' that coexists with the sense that the two are interdependent" (Brooks, 1). The tension between nature and culture in *Waterland* is evident throughout my analysis thus far. The body inhabits an equivocal position in that it is "at once the distinct other of the signifying project ... and in some sense its vehicle" (Brooks, 1). Language is by definition without a body. The very fact that we use language, the need to use a word, suggests the absence of the thing itself. I hope to have shown so far that, much as the writing of history is triggered by an event that takes place and it is regretted, one of the functions of language itself is an attempted recovery. History tries to retrieve an event and language tries to recover a body.

Psychoanalytic thought takes into account this dual character of bodies and I believe that *Waterland* posits the body as implicated in language in this capacity rather than being opposed to language. Cartesian thought posits a body that is not ‘in’ or of language, but is rather a separate entity outside of discourse and available to it as an object of knowledge. Although Cooper also argues that *Waterland* does not present such a body, she does not take into account the ways that the body influences language in terms of where language and body meet at the origin of language. The body (and matter more generally), according to psychoanalytic thought, is ‘of language.’ Despite its obvious difference to language or the symbolic, in a way the body is also its source:

following Freud, Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan, [] the body furnishes the building blocks of symbolization, and eventually of language itself, which then takes us away from the body, but always in a tension that reminds us that mind and language need to recover the body, as an otherness that is somehow primary to their very definition. (Brooks, xii-xiii)

It engenders and is engendered by language. Murphy contends that “the symbolic maps itself onto the body” (74) and Brooks also argues that the body is perhaps even the place of language’s inscription (1). While the body is always outside of language, there are crucial moments in the development of an infant that are the very foundation

for the development of language<sup>1</sup>. Brooks observes,

Bodily parts, sensations and perceptions (including the notorious recognition of the difference between the sexes) are the first building block in the construction of a symbolic order, including speech, play and the whole system of human language, within which the child finds a libidinally invested place.  
(7)

He also refers to Barthes, noting his intimation “that the body is at least our primary source of symbolism—an intimation which anyone sympathetic to psychoanalysis will readily accept” (6). Brooks also claims that the foundational principle of psychoanalysis is that “the most highly elaborated symbolic structures and discursive systems no doubt ultimately derive from bodily sensations” (7). The body is an inextricable part of knowledge and of language. Although they remain problematic, the ‘real,’ the silent and the material in Swift are *not* simply represented as the opposite of language. Tom explores the nature of the body and the material in *Waterland* and emphasizes that both are implicated in language. The physical world, Tom suggests, does not merely signal its own loss in relation to language, but is involved in its creation, even if it can never be captured.

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<sup>1</sup>The process of development from an infantile pre-symbolic state through various stages of separation from the mother’s body is known as the Oedipal complex. Terry Eagleton explains that the loss of the body is both the loss of the infant’s access to its own body as well as the loss of the mother’s body (though these two things in infancy are synonymous: “In the pre-Oedipal state, the child lives a ‘symbiotic’ relation with its mother’s body which blurs any sharp boundary between the two” (164)). He explains further that in passing through the Oedipal complex “the appearance of the father divides the child from its mother’s body” (165) and through the child’s recognition of the difference between the sexes, comes to understand the concept of difference central to language. According to Lacan, the child’s understanding of sexual difference and difference in language occur simultaneously.

Eagleton explains Lacan’s argument as follows:

To enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the ‘real’, that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification, always outside of the symbolic order. In particular we are severed from the mother’s body: after the Oedipus crisis, we will never again be able to attain this precious object, even though we will spend all our lives hunting for it ... We move among substitutes for substitutes, metaphors for metaphors, never able to recover the pure (if fictive) self-identity and self-completion we knew in the imaginary. (168)

Language begins with a sense of the body and then the loss of that body. Language develops as a substitute for the loss of direct access to objects (the body in particular), and thus always reminds us of that loss. The loss of the Here and Now and the body in *Waterland* operate in a very similar manner.

I would like to offer another theory of the narrative structure in *Waterland*, not intended as an alternative, but as a supplement to the ideas of recovery and language's problems with this process. The contradictions of the nature and culture binary opposition certainly are at the root of the temporal and thus narrative complexity of the novel. Without challenging this contention, I would like to show another way in which this binary, also expressed by way of reference to the representation of body and the Fens, affects the use of language and narrative structure. Whereas the passage describing Freddie's body suggested that a primary motivation for the creation of narrative is to dispel fear and try to reclaim the past, Tom also identifies another, different drive. He considers the possibility that it is not only fear that drives people to tell stories, to quell the fear that "everything might amount to nothing" (269), but also desire. It is possible that contradictory drives motivate the impulse to narrate and this might account for the complicated and disruptive nature of the narrative of this novel. Tom explains that,

the Here and Now has more than one face. It was the Here and Now which by the banks of the Hockwell Lode with Mary Metcalf unlocked for me the realms of candour and rapture. But it was the Here and Now also which pinioned me with fear when livid-tinted blood, drawn by a boat-hook (61).

When not dispelling fear, narrative can be created by its opposite, curiosity. Curiosity is also closely related to sexuality and its associations with physicality. This is where Tom suggests another theory of story telling. He suggests that, "curiosity, which bogs us down in arduous meditations ... can lead to the writing of history books" (51). He also speculates, "supposing it is our curiosity – which inspires our sexual explorations and feeds our desire to hear and tell stories – which is our natural and fundamental condition" (194). The major difference that this theory makes to an analysis of bodies and landscape in this novel is that critics such as Cooper focus on the parts of Tom's narrative where he uses "essentializing categories" (379) such as 'natural' and

‘artificial’ and (she makes the distinction) the novel itself undermines. I think that calling stories “our natural and fundamental condition” (194) quite clearly shows Tom representing the natural as artificial. Tom, as well as the structure of the novel, suggests the possibility that the natural can be made of language. The body will always occupy a contradictory position in this dynamic because, as Brooks argues,

The body appears alien to the very constructs derived from it. However much it may belong to the process of socialization, and preside at the birth of intellectual curiosity, it nonetheless often appears to be on the far side of the divide between nature and culture, where culture ultimately has no control. (7-8)

Brooks also argues that it is with a certain repression of sexual interest and its expression in other objects that temporality is born. The primal innocence of Tom and Mary’s sexuality before Mary’s abortion is ungoverned by time. The loss of this state signals their transition into temporality, as does Dick’s discovery of consequence and his origins, with which he cannot cope and will eventually drives him to suicide.

Brooks argues that,

Narrative is interested not only in points of arrival, but also in all the dilatory moments along the way: suspension or turning back, the perversions of temporality (as of desire) that allow us to take pleasure and to grasp meaning in passing time. (19)

This description of temporality is almost allegorically true for the representations of the Fens and the meanderings of the River Ouse. The Fens (and Cooper argues that they are a *mise en abyme* of the novel itself (375)) are associated with this sexuality. When describing the Fens in the war years, Tom says, “it was said that the land girls brought to our Fenland byways an atmosphere of subversion and simmering sexuality. But simmering sexuality – as you may well know, children – is always there” (45). This last phrase suggests that, even if it does not seem evident, sexuality is present but repressed. This is borne out when Tom offers his own theory on the influence of sexuality on artifice and vice versa. He says,

Not to mince matters, and to offer you, in passing, an impromptu theory, sexuality perhaps reveals itself more readily in a flat land, in a land of watery prostration, than in, say, a mountainous or forested terrain, where nature's own phallic thrustings inhibit man's, or in towns and cities where a thousand artificial erections (a brewery chimney, a tower block) detract from our animal urges. (182)

This passage shows how Tom deals with the sexuality of the Fens. He describes them as a place where there is less repression because there is less artifice. There are fewer symbolic representations so that sexual awareness is less repressed and complicated by its relationship with language. The implication of this of course is that sexuality is at the root of symbolic representation. The Fens are clearly associated with this sexuality, and through it with the body, as well as with the deficit of artifice and representation that would help to repress or sublimate sexual drives. Although Cooper would differ with this suggestion and argue that the Fens are also a site of multiple inscription, this explanation takes into account both the alien quality of the body in relation language as well as its position at its source. She is correct that Tom makes a point of representing the Fens as being outside of language. My argument is that the body's influence on language has to do with the narrative shape of the novel. The sexuality of the Fens reveals drives that would otherwise be repressed. The repression of sexuality leads to narrative and temporality. The Fens, in their similarity to and by analogy with the body in psychoanalytic theory, are an important factor at the heart of narrative. The novel interrogates history and finds it, as Cooper argues, inscribed with the terms of its own evacuation. Rather than keeping the body separate from language, though, it actually explores the effects of the body in narrative and in language itself. The body is not simply to be represented or inscribed with meaning, as Brooks argues the modern narrative traditionally does, but also interrogates its own process of doing this as it tells the story. The body and the Fens – the primary spatial elements of the novel – are a complex part of the language.

Brooks argues to this end that,

The 'eroticization of time,' as a factor of human sexuality, also presides at the creation of narrative temporality. This temporality, like a force-field of desire, impels both fictive persons and real readers forward in a search for possession and truth, which tend to coincide in the body of the object that finally stands in the place to which desire tends. The greater reticence and indirection of the narrative text in depicting the body, as compared to painterly representation, has to do with the dynamic temporality of desire in narrative, the way in which narrative desire simultaneously seeks to put off the erotic denouement that signifies both its fulfillment and its end: the death of desiring and the silence of the text. (20)

In Tom's contradictory desire to uncover an explanation, and his constant diversion into other tangential narratives, we see the body at work in his storytelling. Tom's attention, although he desires an answer to his questions, desires to be able to tell "the complete and final version" (8) or "History itself: the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears in the dark" (62) is also diverted along the way by other questions, other stories and digressions. Brooks says that "the desire to reach the end is the desire to see 'truth' unveiled" (19). It is undeniable that the desire to uncover truth is one of Tom's motivations for his narrative. But he is also diverted by the opposite drive, which is to obscure the truth, to escape reality. Benjei's explanation of the repetitions on the narrative, the simultaneous drive to remember and forget, can be coupled with Tom's relationship with the truth, which can also be likened to the erotic uncovering of a body. The meandering and looping narrative of *Waterland* is governed also by the sexuality of the Fens. Narrative desire simultaneously seeks and seeks to put off its end.

Thus the end of *Waterland*, the mysterious disappearance of Dick underwater, has implications in terms of narrative and embodiment too. Dick's disembodiment at the end of the novel signals both the postponement of the revelation of the body and the loss of the body which signals the beginning of the symbolic, the start of story-

telling<sup>2</sup>. The painless flux of his life has been pierced by his fall into knowledge and language. We recall that Henry Crick does not want Dick to learn to read because of the letter that will reveal the truth about Dick to himself, and that Tom reveals this truth to him. Dick becomes trapped in time and language. His suicide symbolically reenacts the loss of his body. Critics have argued that Dick's suicide signals the past-orientation of *Waterland* and thus reveals its investment in a kind of historicism that seeks its answers in the attempt to understand the past, rather than treating the past as a mere passage to a better future. I would also argue that this end signals a return to language in the sense that the loss of the body is the source of its attempted recovery. It is an attempt to tell a story that recovers the past, but also to recover Dick's missing body. Ending once again with the loss of the body shows a return to language, and the promise that although the body can never be reached, although the past can never be recovered in language, there are still the perpetually renewed attempts. The end of the novel returns us to the source of story telling.

By way of conclusion, I would turn to Spivak's consideration of the relationship between theory and practice in fiction as articulated in her reading of another historiographic metafictional novel, *Foe*, by J M Coetzee. She discusses the voice which is marginalised and does not yield articulation, the wholly other. In a passage that describes the margins in terms that bear an uncanny resemblance to the way that Swift characterizes the Fens, Spivak considers how best to approach the

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<sup>2</sup> Eagleton refers to the famous *fort-da* game noting that in it Freud recognised "the first glimmerings of narrative" (185). Traditional narrative typically rehearses a disruption or the loss of an object and then the return of the object or the restoration order. Eagleton explains that "something must be lost or absent in any narrative for it to unfold ... this loss is distressing but it is exciting as well: desire is stimulated by what we cannot quite possess" (185). Traditional narratives release our excitation, after we endure "suspenses and repetitions" (186) which prepare us for the return of the object and our release. The loss of Dick's body is the beginning of our narrative desire, but it occurs at the end of the novel, which returns us to a beginning. We are not released from our desire, but returned to crisis. The missing body at the end reminds us of the presence of the body at the root of story-telling.

problem of getting “something done” (175), perhaps in the same way that Tom tries to get his narrative ‘done’. She writes:

if we want to start something, we must ignore that our starting point is shaky. If we want to get something done, we must ignore that the end will be inconclusive. But this ignoring is not an act of forgetfulness. It is an active *marginalizing* of the marshiness, the swampiness, the lack of firm grounding at the margins, at the beginning and end. Yet those of us who ‘know’ this also know that it is in those margins that philosophy hangs out. These necessarily and actively marginalized margins haunt what we start and get done, as curious guardians. Paradoxically, if you do not marginalize them but make them the centre of your attention, you sabotage their guardianship. (Spivak, 159)

I would argue that the inarticulate Dick is perhaps an example of such a guardian at the margin. Dick represents that which withholds articulation or is the ‘wholly other.’ Narratives, as *Waterland* frequently demonstrates, perpetually limit each other and prevent one account from becoming more authoritative than another. They need to be judged in relation to each other. The various different types of narrative that Tom employs in his attempt to narrate cannot occupy what Spivak calls a “continuous (narrative) space” (168). There need to be aporias that mark their difference. But their relativity, too, needs an absolute boundary. Tom, in ending as he does, with the disappearance and silence of Dick, is actively marginalizing him. He is putting that silence in place as a guardian at the margin, as a counterpoint to all his narrative renderings. Dick occupies what Spivak identifies in the context of *Foe* as the “space of withholding, marked by a secret that may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked” (Spivak, 172). What happens in Dick’s mind cannot be known and Tom acknowledges this saying, after the murder of Freddie Parr:

And is it possible that for Dick this is just another day? Home after six? That he has forgotten—? That for him the present eclipses the past? That he possesses those amnesiac, those time-erasing qualities so craved by all guilty parties—? (134)

Tom, in trying as a boy to educate Dick, to reclaim him and make him articulate is trying to make the marginal yield its voice. The same can be said for his attempts to

write a history of the Fens; even to speak for Martha and Bill Clay, who remain anachronistic and strange to Tom and who share a certain siltiness of body with Dick. But in the end, he seems to institute the contradictory marginalisation to which Spivak refers. He knows that although his attempts are ‘marshy’ and ‘shaky,’ by giving his narrative the absolute boundary, the unreachable border of Dick’s unyielding silence, that he has prevented any of his own articulations from attempting to assume the position of a grand narrative, that gives explanations to all the others.

Spivak writes,

Theory itself has no *con*-sequence. It is autosequential rather than automatic. Theory is the production of theory, in presupposition, method and end. It is always withdrawn from that which it seeks to theorize, however insubstantial that object might be ... It is always off the mark, yet it is what we undo. Without it, nothing but the wished-for inarticulation of the natural body: ‘a slow stream, without breath, without interruption,’ betrayed by the spacing of the words that wish it [*F* 157]. (175)

This last body (that of Friday in *Foe*) echoes the ‘natural’ in *Waterland*. It is that which purports to be inarticulate, raw, undifferentiated material, like the body but is actually inscribed as such by a particular linguistic construction. Nature is constructed as such in language, and thus is lost and simultaneously undone as ‘natural.’ Spivak seems to admit that reality cannot be reached in language, but with that enforces a claim that we have no choice but to do what we can do in theory or in language, which is always off the mark, removed from that which it purports to speak about. It is impossible to engage with the world except through theory and theory always operates, like language as characterised in *Waterland*, at a remove from the world. Tom also suggests that “the study of history is the very opposite, is the counter-action of making it” (194). He admits that his theorizing takes place apart from history itself. But he is also suspicious of the idea that his theories can lead to a better rendering of

his history. He seems to admit that he must engage with it, but cannot expect it to change his ability to tell his tale.

Tom, at times desires the anti-rational primitivism, the inarticulacy of the body. He longs for a return to innocence, before regret and nostalgia, before language and theory. But he cannot, like a revolutionary, like Mary, act on his theory and turn it into action. He, despite the complication of his position, puts the guardian in place, keeps the mystery in place, and with that acknowledgement of the difficulty of his position, theorizes. He acknowledges that he is off the mark, but by actively marginalizing Dick and the Fens, admits that there is no other option but to do what he has to do in language. He theorizes but keeps theory, or language, separate from reality. Thus the difference between the two, despite his occasional longing for a pure, innocent concept of the natural, is purposefully kept in place by his marginalization of Dick, as a necessity of his narrative position despite the complicated relationship between the two.

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