

**Black Bodies in the Open City:  
Precarity and Belonging in the work of Teju Cole**

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## Abstract

This dissertation attempts to read Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole's fiction and essays as sustained demonstrations of precarity, as theorised by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004). Though never directly cited by Cole, Butler's articulation of a shared condition of bodily vulnerability and interdependency offers a generative critical framework through which to read Cole's representations of black bodies as they move across space. By presenting the 'black body', rather than 'black man', as the preferred metonym for black people, Cole's work, which I argue can be read as peculiar travel narratives, foregrounds the bodily dimension of black life, and develops an ambivalent storytelling mode to narrate the experiences of characters who encompass multiple spatialities and subjectivities.

Through close analysis of the novels *Open City* (2011) and *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007), and essays from the collection *Known and Strange Things* (2016), principally "Black Body" and "Unmournable Bodies", I argue that Cole's work subverts certain tropes in the tradition of black literary cosmopolitanism, as exemplified by James Baldwin, at the same time as Cole self-consciously situates himself within that tradition. It is the insistence on the black body as site of publicity at once desirable and vulnerable, to paraphrase Butler, that allows Cole to make these interventions. A tentative critical consensus on Cole's work has begun to emerge: his oeuvre is read alongside a cohort of contemporary African and black diasporic writers whose works navigate the tenuous boundary between Western centers and peripheral Africa. It is not my intention in this dissertation to argue against those readings, but rather to offer the concept of precarity as productive framework that allows for readings that other spatio-temporal frameworks may occlude.

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## **Black Bodies in the Open City: Precarity and Belonging in the work of Teju Cole**

The site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten (...) Generations rushed through the eye of a needle, and I, one of the still legible crowd, entered the subway. I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories.

Teju Cole, *Open City*

I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must.

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

### **I**

## **Introduction: Precarious Poetics**

Teju Cole's fiction and essays establish a poetics of precarity. Cole writes vulnerable spaces and subjects, cities and citizens, revealing the ambivalent processes through which identities, cultural affiliations, and political solidarities are wrought and articulated in the neoliberal metropolis.

Judith Butler's theorisation of precarious bodies, i.e. the recognition of mutual corporeal vulnerability as the basis for an ethical encounter with the Other, offers an effective critical framework through which to view Cole's literary project. Butler is never directly cited in Cole's work, yet Butlerian language and ideas proliferate in his novels, criticism, and journalism, thus Butler can be read as one of his primary theoretical interlocutors.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), a collection of five essays reflecting on the legacies of the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America,

Butler offers a stinging rebuke of the calls to violent retribution that emerged in response to that trauma. Butler proposes that the vulnerability exposed by the 9/11 attacks be recapitulated as an opportunity to reflect on the destruction wrought by US policies elsewhere in the world. The rare moment in which the United States of America is cast as victim rather than agent of violence should cause Americans to hesitate before recasting themselves as perpetrators of violence in the guise of retributive justice. Of particular relevance to my reading of Cole is the second of the five essays, “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, in which Butler argues that grief and the act of mourning reveal irrevocable ties between the self and the Other by foregrounding the interdependency that follows from possessing a body. That some people, some *bodies*, are more readily grievable than others is only possible because the humanity of those bodies has not been recognised. In this formulation, grievability is a precondition of entry to the category of human, and humanity is distinct from the biological reality of the human body: humanity is a narrative, and it is contingent. In Cole’s work, the cityscape is the surface across which these contingent narratives of selfhood and collective identities are written, erased, and rewritten.

Cole’s most sustained demonstration of precarity, and the primary focus of this dissertation, is *Open City* (2011), his second novel, and the first published outside of Nigeria. Like Butler, Cole writes from The United States of America in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. An elusive, allusive first-person narrative, *Open City* is told from the perspective of a young Nigerian-American psychiatrist in New York City – and briefly, significantly, Brussels – who bears more than a passing resemblance to the author. Julius, the novel’s faltering narrator, was raised in Lagos and lives in the United States of America; he is a citizen of the metropole and of the periphery. He is serious, articulate, and scholarly, offering erudite reflections on and critiques of music, literatures, visual arts, theologies, and critical theories. Dialogue and narration are written in the same measured voice(s) and raised register, direct speech is not demarcated by quotation marks, and there is no attempt to render the accents and patterns of speech of the diverse people Julius encounters with any degree of accuracy. The many voices of the novel are indistinct and filtered through the singular voice of its narrator. This is the case even when the content of their speech and their characterisation are placed in direct contrast or opposition to that of Julius. An ailing Japanese-American academic, an aspiring theorist from Morocco, an undocumented

West African immigrant in detention, a Haitian shoeshine, and a retired Belgian surgeon – a cacophony rendered in dubious accord. The effect of this is not simply a narrative disruption of rigid boundaries between the self and the Other, as they are represented; the effect, I will argue, is an ambivalent storytelling mode that constructs a narrative of coherent, reflexive self-hood, then subtly unravels that narrative, revealing it to be illusory. His inability or unwillingness to render and reckon the voices of the Others he encounters disrupts the integrity of the narrative self that Julius constructs.

In “Violence, Mourning, Politics” Butler, following Emmanuel Levinas, argues that the “face” of the Other makes a demand of us: you shall not kill. Here the face should not be understood literally but as a metonym for our apprehension of the Other as a distinct, human, entity. Nor should the demand uttered by the face, “you shall not kill”, be taken literally to be speech utterance, but rather an ethical imperative revealed upon our apprehension of the Other. Butler’s significant contribution to the Levinasian concept of the “face” of the Other is to foreground its bodily dimension: it is our recognition of a human body, exposed and vulnerable like our own, that ought to bring an awareness of our duty to do no harm. It is this notion of a shared condition of vulnerable and exposed bodily life that Butler calls “precarious”.

In the opening chapters of *Open City*, the apprehension of the face of the Other and its utterances are literalised. The first chapter of this dissertation, “And yet they were quiet: the face and voice of the Other”, will offer a close reading of conversations and reflections on the sounds of human voices in those chapters to demonstrate the many ways Julius, the novel’s protagonist, fails to meet the ethical demands made of him in his encounters with the Other.

Much of the scholarship around Teju Cole’s work, particularly his fiction, attempts to situate it within specific traditions of African and diasporic literature. He is often read alongside a cohort of contemporary Nigerian writers, particularly those who, like Cole, live and write entirely or in part from North America or Western Europe. Louis Chude-Sokei situates *Open City* in a tradition of black literature that explores and negotiates the tensions between African Americans and African immigrants in America. In “What is Africa to me now?” (2014) Chude-Sokei argues that the novel complicates and problematizes tropes of inter-racial solidarity by representing diverse and often oppositional experiences of blackness. In “Cosmopolitan Dilemma” (2017),

Delphine Fongang engages with discourses of displacement and the politics of relocation as they affect the African migrant characters in the novel. Fongang argues that Cole and other diasporic writers capture the subjectivities and positionalities of Africans in the West, presenting them as liminal subjects whose struggle for agency in a newly globalised world is a recurring trope of a nascent African diasporic literature.

This grouping of Cole with other contemporary Nigerian writers and texts on the basis of age and nationality has been rigorously challenged. In “The Idea of ‘Third Generation Nigerian Literature’” (2013), Hamish Dalley critiques the concept by pointing to its reliance on spatio-temporal frameworks that do not fully account for the complexity of the texts they attempt to classify. He argues that Cole's novel cannot be easily situated within a canon of contemporary Nigerian fiction, as that categorization occludes more nuanced methods of historicisation. In my reading of his work I have not attempted to situate Cole in any tradition of contemporary Nigerian fiction, but rather more broadly within a tradition of black diasporic travel narratives. The second chapter of this dissertation, “You are a black body first: writing the black body across space”, will offer comparative readings of James Baldwin's seminal essay “Stranger in the Village” (1953) and Teju Cole's response “Black Body” (2015) in order to situate Cole, or rather to show that Cole situates himself, within a particular tradition of writing about black life in the metropole, and also to demonstrate his interventions in that tradition. I will argue that Cole diverges from Baldwin by insisting on the black “body”, rather than the black “man”, as the preferred metonym for the representations of black life. In this way, Cole reinscribes a tradition of writing about the black experience in the metropolis, particularly as it moves across space, by introducing the concept of precarity.

Cole's position as a writer straddling the centre and the periphery, the West and the global South, is a commonly observed characteristic of his work. His fiction has been read as part of a tradition of literary cosmopolitanism, with particular scrutiny of its subversions of certain tropes in that tradition. In “Literary Cosmopolitanisms in Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* and *Open City*” (2013), Katherine Hallemeier argues that Cole's fiction disrupts the dominant metropolitan literary aesthetic by highlighting the limits of “literary cosmopolitan sensibilities” that characterises contemporary fiction written or published in Western metropolises. Hallemeier argues



that Cole's work offers a more linguistically and geographically diverse literary cosmopolitanism as an alternative. My analysis of Cole's novels and selected essays as peculiar kinds of travel narratives similarly foreground his interventions in this tradition; I read his protagonists – Julius in *Open City*, and the unnamed narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007) – as travellers, a deliberately broad categorisation, but one that affirms the universal experience of bodies moving across space. Critics of Cole's literary cosmopolitanism, including Pieter Vermeulen, have categorised his protagonists more specifically by pointing to his appropriation of the trope of the flâneur. In "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism" (2013), Vermeulen argues that Cole subverts the cosmopolitan aesthetic by substituting the figure of the flâneur for the fugueur – a figure borrowed from the history of psychiatry, who is marked by "unwanted restlessness and ambulatory automatism".

The third chapter, "In the grip of rage and rhetoric: The work of violence and anger", traces the development of Cole's "faltering narration" in *Open City* through close readings of five conversations between its protagonist Julius and several characters who can be read as "fugueurs". The primary focus of this section is Julius's brief detour in Brussels and his interactions with the Moroccan migrant Farouq, an aspiring theorist deeply invested in radical leftist politics, who I will read as Julius's counterpart.

The influence of psychoanalytic theory on *Open City* is clear, and not only because the protagonist is himself a psychiatrist. In "How to get to 9/11" (2015), Ariela Freedman situates *Open City* in the tradition of post 9/11 narratives, exploring the novel's engagement with the political, cultural and psychological aftereffects of that event. There is direct reference to Sigmund Freud's theorisation of the work of grief in "Mourning and Melancholia" as Julius attempts to make sense of New York City in the aftermath of 9/11. Freud's work offers a theoretical framework through which Cole's characters, and by extension his readers, attempt to reckon with the trauma they are living through, and living in. Judith Butler's theorisation of precarity in "Violence, Mourning, Politics" draws critically on Freud in order to argue for the generative political possibilities that the act of mourning allows; my own reading of the ties of spatiality and subjectivity revealed through the shared condition of precarity in Cole's work is thus indebted to Butler's reading of Freud.

In “Postcoloniality, spatiality, and cosmopolitanism in the Open City” (2015) Madhu Krishnan argues that the novel’s representations of postcolonial spatialities complicates dominant neoliberal visions of cosmopolitanism that posit the emergence of postcolonial spaces as inherently liberatory. Krishnan suggests that the study of “literary space” remains undertheorised in postcolonial studies and through their spatial reading of *Open City* attempts an enquiry into the ambivalences and contradictions of cosmopolitanism. Krishnan’s reading of Cole’s subtle critique of liberal and neoliberal discourses diverges from my own in its rigorous attention to the novel’s representations of space and spaciality, rather than subjectivity, but the representations of precarious spaces is nevertheless central to my analysis. The final chapter, “A moving spot of sun: The city as palimpsest”, considers the representations of cities, namely New York City and Lagos, as sites of violence and mourning in Cole’s fiction. The primary focus is the immolation of a young boy, *Every Day is for the Thief’s* (2007) titular thief, by an angry crowd in a Lagos market: here Cole describes scenes of “unspeakable violence” and adjusts his faltering narration accordingly.

I hope to demonstrate that reading Teju Cole’s fiction and essays as sustained engagements with the concept of precarity, as articulated by Judith Butler, allows for novel and generative critiques of his literary project. By foregrounding the bodily dimension of the lives of the people they attempt to represent, particularly black African migrants in the West, these texts illustrate the fundamental vulnerability of black people – black *bodies*. This vulnerability is inherent, perhaps inarguable, but it is not complete, and does not strip black bodies of agency. Black bodies in Cole’s fiction are active and agentic; they are threatened, and they are a threat. It is this attentiveness to ambivalence, and the narrative techniques employed to represent it, that opens new narrative possibilities from within a tradition of writing about black people as they negotiate a precarious world.

## II

### **And yet they were quiet: The face and voice of the Other**

...a book suggests a conversation: one person is speaking to another, and audible sound is, or should be, natural to that exchange.

- Teju Cole, *Open City*

It is telling that this book about solitude should begin with conjunction. If *Open City* is a conversation between Teju Cole and his reader, then we arrive mid-sentence, *in medias res*, with no recollection of, or recourse to, what came before. The “And so...” with which the novel begins implies an addition to, or modification of, an earlier thought, but we do not know and are not told what the thought was, and to whom it was addressed. This opening passage establishes an immediate intimacy between the book and the reader, but as the novel proceeds along its slow and deliberate pace, it becomes clear that narrative momentum is not the most pressing of its concerns. The elusiveness of the opening is in keeping with elegiac tone of the novel and its aloof, often inscrutable protagonist. Julius deliberately, perhaps ostentatiously, displays his intellectual gifts and wields language with seductive eloquence, but he is nevertheless a reluctant interlocutor. He is rapt in the imaginative fecundity of his solitude at the same time as he despairs of loneliness and searches for the rapture of human connection. The quiet drama of the opening chapters is driven by this tension between loneliness and solitude, a tension that emerges with clarity in Julius’s reactions and responses to the sounds of human voices.

Teju Cole’s photographic eye and visual acuity is a much-commented on feature of his writing, but in *Open City* human sounds are no less vital than images. Julius, its protagonist, spends much of his time, whether alone or in a crowd, preoccupied by music: listening to it, thinking about it, being overwhelmed by the experience of it. Listening to music is different in important ways to conversation; it is, or at least implies, a kind of communication, but of a different order to that of engaging reciprocally with another person. It is no coincidence that in the music Julius favours, the human voice is entirely absent, or at least subordinate to the instrument. Which is

not to say Julius finds the human voice repellent: he is an accomplished conversationalist, actively seeking out and engaging in lively and learned exchanges with several characters over the course of the novel, most notably the ageing professor Saito, and later, in Brussels, the studious Moroccan migrant Farouq. That his most extensive dialogues involve these two men, both intellectuals, both othered in The West, is notable – we are invited to read them as counterparts. These exchanges, and others, are moments in which the human voice is presented as something valuable, generative, even desirable. More often, though, intimate human contact in the novel is fraught with discomfort and trauma. In the opening chapter Julius attempts conversation with his next-door neighbour, but the attempt falters when he discovers that the man's wife had recently died of cancer. He had known the couple, and had spoken with them occasionally, but had not noticed the widower's new solitude. This revelation reveals Julius's obliviousness to himself and the reader. Acknowledging the bereavement in any meaningful way requires a level of intimacy that Julius is incapable or unwilling to meet. This brief encounter, like so many in the novel, does not disrupt Julius's solitude so much as it sharpens his awareness of it:

I hadn't known him well enough to ask him how Carla was, and I had not noticed not seeing her around. That was the worst of it. I had noticed neither her absence nor the change – there must have been a change – in his spirit. It was not possible, even then, to go knock on his door and embrace him, or to speak to him at length. It would have been false intimacy. (Cole 21)

In this moment the tension between loneliness and solitude seems irrevocable. The human voice, which is to say language, cannot forge a connection between these two solitary men. Having avoided conversation with the neighbour in the past forecloses the possibility of conversation now; the silence that has existed between them cannot be permeated by sound.

In *Open City*, Cole is sensitive to the ambivalences of silence. Julius, remembering St Augustine's astonishment at discovering St Ambrose's ability to read silently, offers a telling insight: silent, or inaudible, communication is not simply a straightforward leap in human knowledge and intellectual capacity, it also signals an encroaching loss – the loss of our ability to reckon the sounds of our own voices, and, by extension, the voices of others:

In that sonic fugue, I recalled St Augustine, and his astonishment at St Ambrose, who was reputed to have found a way to read without sounding out the words. It does seem an odd thing – it strikes me now as it did then – that we can comprehend words without voicing them. For Augustine, the weight and inner life of sentences were best experienced out loud, but much has changed in our idea of reading since then. We have for too long been taught that the sight of a man speaking to himself is a sign of eccentricity or madness; we are no longer at all habituated to our own voices, except in conversation or from within the safety of a crowd. (Cole 5)

A crucial distinction emerges between embodied and disembodied voices. The sounds of classical radio DJs emanating from electronic devices, or indeed the music itself, are disembodied; they are human sounds so heavily mediated that it becomes a purely sonic experience. And yet, for Julius, those faraway voices allow a kind of intimacy:

I liked the murmur of the announcers, the sounds of the voices speaking calmly from thousands of miles away. I turned the computer speakers low and looked outside, nestled in the comfort provided by those voices, and it wasn't at all difficult to draw the comparison between myself, in my sparse apartment, and the radio host in his or her booth, during what must have been the middle of the night somewhere in Europe. Those disembodied voices remain connected in my mind, even now, with the apparition of migrating geese. (Cole 4)

What is revealing in this passage, aside from the on-the-nose symbolism of migratory birds in this novel about immigration, is Julius's ability to forge community, or at least solidarity, through a shared experience of solitude. This ability is apparently less strong when he is in close proximity to the person by whom he is addressed. When he finds himself amidst other people, he experiences it as "incessant loudness, a shock after the day's focus and relative tranquillity, as though someone had shattered the calm of a private chapel with a blaring TV set" (Cole 6). The embodied voices of people in close proximity cannot be separated from the Other from which it emerges; it disturbs and disrupts, and it compels us, when heard, to acknowledge the presence of the Other. It is not an experience that Julius can embrace:

Walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people, hundreds more, thousands even, than I was accustomed to seeing in the course of a day, but the impress of these faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them. (Cole 6)

That he should refer to the ‘faces’ of the many people he encounters, and who impress something upon him, is significant. Here Emmanuel Levinas’s theorisation of the “face” of the Other in “Ethics and Infinity” (1984) is instructive:

...The face is not in front of me (en face de moi), but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. (Levinas 86)

Turning his face from the face of the Other, remaining silent, and thus ignoring or denying the demand it makes of him, Julius has neglected his ethical responsibility to the Other. In this way, the sounds of the human voice and of human activity are presented as proof of the presence of the Other, and Julius’s inability or unwillingness to engage with the Other by whom he is addressed is laid bare. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler, beginning with Levinas but departing from him in important ways, argues that our apprehension of the Other can, or should, initiate a recognition of our ethical responsibilities towards the Other: to first do no harm, to protect from harm, and to mourn whatever harm is done. Butler, like Levinas, locates this recognition in the human body. The Levinasian ‘face’ of the Other does not necessarily refer to the actual face, comprised of eyes, a nose, and mouth (though one wonders if it is possible to be recognisably human without those features). Butler names it a catachresis for those things that are recognisably human, but perhaps it is more accurate to call it a metonym. Either way, in this formulation any recognition of the ethical imperative disclosed by the existence of the Other is initiated upon our apprehension of their bodies:

So the face, strictly speaking, does not speak, but what the face means is nevertheless conveyed by the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”. It conveys this commandment without precisely speaking it. It would seem that we can use this biblical command to understand something of the face’s meaning, but something is missing here, since the “face” does not speak in the sense that the mouth does; the face is neither reducible to the mouth nor, indeed, to anything the mouth has to utter. Someone or something else speaks when the face is likened to a certain kind of speech; it is a speech that does not come from a mouth or, if it does, has no ultimate origin or meaning there. (Butler 132)

The body of the Other says something to us, it addresses us, but that address is not necessarily linguistic, or even audible. In fact it may be that which cannot be captured in language:

The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound, the sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalisation that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense. (Butler 134)

The embodied voice, the voice or sound emanating from the face of the Other, exceeds language. Julius is attentive to this fact. When he visits Professor Saito (whose eyesight is failing but whose hearing remains sharp), one of the occasions in which he does seek out intimate contact, face-to-face, he acknowledges that their communication exists in language and outside of it, in silence – “In the conversations, as I now recall them, he did almost all of the talking. I learned the art of listening from him, and the ability to trace out a story from what was omitted” (Cole 9). Sound and silence, audibility and inaudibility, cannot be considered as distinct sensory experiences – the one implies, and perhaps necessitates, the other. Sound, any sound, whether it be the sound of a human voice or the noises of nature and human activity, signals the absence and effacement of other sounds. When Julius embarks on his evening walks he remarks the “...traffic makes the river on the other side of the trees inaudible (Cole 3)”. In the same way, conversation can often obfuscate another kind of transaction, a kind of communicable silence that can exist in place of language, when language is insufficient, unnecessary, or elusive. Julius remembers with fondness one such occasion, with his grandmother, in the Nigeria of his childhood:

That day I treasured the silence I shared with Oma (her hand on my shoulder, kneading it); and in that hour we two communicated almost wordlessly, simply waiting, sensitive to the wind in the trees nearby, watching the lizards scuttle over the smaller rock formations that pushed through the earth like prehistoric eggs, listening to the thrum of motorcycles on the narrow road some two hundred yards away. When my mother and father came back down, winded, flushed, pleased, they marvelled about their experiences. About ours, Oma and I could say nothing, because what it was had been without words. (Cole 35)

In that moment it is silence that is generative, valuable, desirable, and its interruption by the sound of the human voice is lamented.

What does silence render inaudible? An old friend accuses Julius of a grievous crime, but the precise nature of that crime is never revealed to the reader. He does not accept guilt, nor is he absolved. Instead he apologises and wonders along with the reader whether he has forgotten, and if such a thing can be forgotten. The crime of which he is accused is sexual assault. His accuser does not utter those words, or the word 'rape'. Or, if she does, the reader is not made aware. If the novel is a conversation, and meaning can be found by tracing what is omitted as much as what is told, then it is surely a significant omission, with implications for our reading of the narrator-protagonist and the novel from which he emerges. It may go some way to explain Julius's resistance to the embodied voice of the Other, a voice that serves as a reminder of the ethical command "you shalt not kill". Though the crime of which he is accused is not murder, it surely constitutes a failure to adhere to that command. Read in this way, the novel gently foreshadows this violent revelation from its beginning by presenting Julius as someone who cannot meet the ethical demand presented by the face and voice of the Other.

The second chapter begins with Julius recalling a phone conversation with his former partner, Nadege, which is interrupted by the sounds of a protest-march progressing through the streets below. He notes that the crowd of protestors is almost or entirely female. Their call-and-response chants sound a call for bodily autonomy and safety from violence. Julius watches and listens to the protestors but at no point does he attempt to find meaning or ascribe intent to what he sees and hears, a notable departure for a character usually so attentive to even the most banal incidents of urban life. The sight of a solitary bird, no more than a faraway speck from his window, attains the heft of the miraculous and stirs thoughts on the absurdity of human life, but immediate visible and audible evidence of collective human action directly below his window passes without significant comment. The women call for justice and Julius is unmoved – "*Women's bodies, women's lives, we will not be terrorized. I shut the window.*" (Cole 23)



Speaking and listening are facilities that follow from possession of a body, and are for that reason precarious. Butler reminds us that to be in possession of a body is to be in thrall to the Other, dependent upon them for safety and companionship, vulnerable to the violence they might inflict, but also responsible for the violence our body might inflict upon theirs:

This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (Butler 20)

There is hate speech, of course, which is a kind of violence, as is not listening to and heeding calls for justice, or speaking over those voices so that they cannot be heard. Silence, too, can be violent, when it masks suffering and shields perpetrators of violence from scrutiny. The ears and the mouth, the body itself, are vulnerable to a touch from the Other that would remove from us of the ability to see and to hear. This final vulnerability is most pressing, as the loss of those abilities are inevitable, whether through violence done to us by the Other or, what is more likely, the ravages of age, or illness, or genetics. Professor Saito with his failing eyesight is a reminder of this fact. Blindness is integral to Cole's work as a subject and as a symbol. Shortly after the publication of *Open City* he underwent a period of temporary blindness, which he writes about in "Blind Spot", the closing essay of his collection *Known and Strange Things* (2016), which is also the title of his fourth book, *Blind Spot* (2017), a showcase for his photographic eye.

In *Open City* Julius contemplates blindness alongside deafness. Both are a loss, or a lack, that allow for or necessitate new possibilities. At the American Folk Art Museum he comes across an exhibition of the paintings of John Brewster, the 19<sup>th</sup> century American painter famous for his portraits of deaf children, who was himself deaf. Brewster, like Milton and other visually impaired artists, is often attributed special sensitivities of memory and imagination as a result of their sensory limitations. Julius observes a particular silence in the faces of Brewster's subjects:

Standing before Brewster's portraits, my mind quiet, I saw the paintings as records of a silent transaction between artist and subject. A laden brush, in depositing paint on the panel or canvas, hardly registers a sound, and how great is the peace palpable in those artists of stillness: Vermeer, Chardin, Hammershoi. The silence was even more profound, I thought, as I stood alone in that gallery, when the private world of the artist was total in its quietness. Unlike those other painters, Brewster had not resorted to indirect gazes or chiaroscuro to communicate the silence of his world. The faces were well lit and frontal, and yet they were quiet. (Cole 38)

And yet they were quiet: whereas in Julius's formulation a book is an audible conversation between author and reader, the portrait is an exchange between the painter and the subject, and the exchange is silent. In this exchange the viewer is rendered passive and the absence of human noise is perceived as peacefulness. How do we reconcile these accounts of implicit transactions, between artist, text, subject, and reader, with our own encounter with Julius, the novel from which he emerges, and the author of both? When eulogising the French theorist in an essay eponymously titled "Jacques Derrida" (2004), Butler reflected on the work Derrida had himself undertaken to remember writers who had influenced his work:

He writes only because he reads, and he reads only because there are these authors to read time and again. He 'owes' them something or, perhaps, everything, if only because he could not write without them: their writing exists as the precondition of his own; their writing constitutes the means through which his own writing voice is animated and secured, a voice that emerges, importantly, as an address. (Butler "Jacques Derrida")

Voice as a gift: in this way, perhaps, writing (or painting, as the case may be) can be a way of reckoning the voice – the face – of the Other. And so too is reading.

Throughout the novel Julius encounters and engages the material world with sensitivity and intelligence – he reads, listens, observes. He is transformed in his encounters with music, literature, and architecture – they say something to him, and he responds in kind with the gift of his attention and appreciation. They enter a transaction, sometimes silent, as in the case of the Brewster portraits, and other times audible, as when he reads aloud from Roland Barthes or Tahar Ben Jelloun. Whether audible or inaudible, these transactions are evidence of an engagement with the face and voice of the Other, in the absence of the presence of the Other – the absence of the body of the Other.

The opening chapters of *Open City* offers several insights and poses searching questions about what it means to reckon with the voices of Others. Julius experiences the sounds of human voices as an assault, but also as the promise of connection. In this way, the fundamental interdependency of self and Other, which is to say the shared condition of precarity, is revealed through Cole's representations of conversations, sounds, and silences. By reading these exchanges as literal demonstrations of the Levinasian face of the other that commands "you shall not kill", the narrator-protagonist's ambivalent and often hostile relation to human noises subtly foreshadow the later revelation of his sexual violence, a revelation that surely complicates any reading of the character, and of the novel itself.

Finally, any discussion of the face of the Other must consider race and racism: the black face – the black body – is perceived differently, and also surely addressed differently. That Julius is intelligent and eloquent in ways celebrated by dominant Western, white, societies, does not detract significance from the fact that his is a voice in the English language, emanating from a black face. The following chapter of this thesis, "You are a black body first: Writing the black body across space", will engage more closely the complexity of proceeding through the world in possession of a black body, and speaking in, or with, or to, a black voice.

### III

## **You are a black body first:**

### **Writing the black body across space**

I got the idea that some of the things I was seeing around me were under the aegis of Obatala, the demiurge charged by Olodumare with the formation of humans from clay. Obatala did well at the task until he started drinking. As he drank more and more, he became inebriated, and began to fashion broken human beings. The Yoruba believe that in this drunken state he made dwarfs, cripples, people missing limbs, and those burdened by debilitating illness. Olodumare had to reclaim the role he had delegated and finish the creation of humankind himself and, as a result, people who suffer infirmities identify themselves as worshippers of Obatala. This is an interesting relationship with a God, one not of affection or praise but antagonism. They worship Obatala in accusation; it is he who has made them as they are.

– Teju Cole, *Open City* (25)

How to write about the black body? It is a question that has, perhaps, long since been answered. In fact there are many answers, given that there are many ways to write about the black body. And there are many black bodies: blackness is embodied in different ways, and is experienced differently according to the intersections of a black persons positionalities', including gender, sexuality, nationality, and socio-economic class. Perhaps the better question, then, and the more pertinent one, is what does it mean to write about the black body? This, again, is not a provocative or entirely new line of enquiry. It is a question that has occupied the thoughts and the work of black thinkers across a wide range of fields. But as the idea of blackness as a category of human experience emerges, or re-emerges with new urgency, and is redefined in ways that are appropriate to our contemporary contexts and political discourses, the question becomes almost inexhaustible.

Any survey of writing about the black body must surely return several times to the work of James Baldwin. His work is sophisticated, metropolitan, and erudite in ways that are familiar to a white Western audience, but Baldwin also draws from the vast reserves of pain, anger, joy, and spiritual reverie that are hallmarks of black culture. Baldwin's style summons the revelatory power of black gospel oration and wields it

with the elegance and precision of the best traditions in European and American literature.

What do we mean when we speak and write about the ‘black body’, and why has this particularly vague and inelegant phrase come to define the ways we think and write about the lives and experiences of black people? It is not Baldwin’s own language. He wrote about the American Negro, a specific category of black experience. Implicit in this invocation of the American Negro is *The Black Man*, the phrase and the figure that has for so long dominated discourses on black experience. In fiction, the language of protest, and popular culture, *The Black Man* is the supreme embodiment of blackness, and all of his triumphs and woes were taken to be the universal condition of all black people. Even sympathetic feminist readings of Baldwin’s literary project highlight this privileging of the black man, i.e. black masculinity, in his work. In “Beneath the Black Aesthetic: James Baldwin’s Primer of Black American Masculinity”, Barbara Judson and Andre Shin (1998) argue that Baldwin’s experiences of homophobia shaped his literary project to the extent that grappling with masculinity became a primary concern in all of his work, to the exclusion of other black identities. Though Judson and Shin argue that Baldwin’s critiques of black masculinity align him with black feminism, this is nevertheless a telling insight, one that perhaps unintentionally highlights the glaring absence of women in his conception of black life in America:

Baldwin, who challenged this orthodoxy, became the whipping boy of a cultural establishment that understood the black man as, in Baldwin's words, "a kind of walking phallic symbol" (Price 290). Thus the question "What does it mean to be a man in America?" became Baldwin's *donnée*, inflecting virtually all of his literary production. (Judson and Shin 248)

Even as he critiques and problematizes black American masculinity, in part by narrating his exclusion from it, Baldwin unwittingly places himself within a tradition of writing about blackness in ways that marginalise or erase black women. This is not simply a critique of a black man undertaking an autobiographical project, in which the dominant perspective will necessarily be his own. Such a critique would surely be misplaced, particularly when the context in which Baldwin lived, wrote, and published is considered. In that context, perhaps in any context, Baldwin’s work ought to be considered progressive, even radical. But in those moments when he

attempts to move from his own experiences to general comment on black life in America, the language he chooses betrays that project; he remains mired in patriarchal tropes that posit black identity as male and black solidarity as fraternal:

Indeed, for Baldwin, personal and familial redemption is political; but the rhetoric of family and the inherited view of a body politic organized around paternal privilege and masculine autonomy give way to the more egalitarian ideal of brotherhood-of a society founded upon the love between men. Baldwin thus redefines the discourse of family grounded in biology and posits alternative social structures in its place. Throughout Baldwin's oeuvre, the ideal of brotherhood displaces the idea of redemption through the restored centrality of the father: Horizontal equity supplants verticality. Brotherhood in this instance, however, is not exclusive but all-encompassing, suggesting egalitarian relations between men and women as well. (Judson and Shin 248)

As black feminist and queer thinkers began disrupting both the ideological construction of blackness, and the language used to describe the experiences that accompany it, *The Black Man* became insufficient. It does not account for the varied and stratified experiences of blackness as it intersects with gender, sex, sexuality, class, nationality, religion, and disability. Baldwin's work does not do enough to bridge the gap between his own experiences as a queer black man, which is the subject of much of his writing, and the lived experience of other black bodies. The British feminist scholar Cora Kaplan (1986) levels this critique in explicit terms:

Although Baldwin is one of the first and major analysts of the intimate relationship between dominant notions of masculinity and oppression within the Black family, his view of women as somehow inevitably confined to heterosexual relations is one of the historical limitations of his writing (Kaplan 185)

Black feminists, including Audre Lorde, levelled this criticism to Baldwin in his lifetime, and have continued to do so. In a dialogue published in *Essence Magazine* in 1984, Lorde and Baldwin discuss the ways black men and women experience oppression differently. The exchange becomes a debate when Lorde challenges Baldwin to account more fully for black women when writing and thinking about black suffering:

Lorde: ...I do not blame Black men; what I'm saying is, we have to take a new look at the ways in which we fight our joint oppression because if we don't, we're gonna be blowing each other up. We have to begin to redefine the terms of what woman is, what man is, how we relate to each other.

Baldwin: But that demands redefining the terms of the western world...

Lorde: And both of us have to do it; both of us have to do it...

Baldwin: But you don't realize that in this republic the only real crime is to be a Black man?

Lorde: No, I don't realize that. I realize the only crime is to be Black. I realize the only crime is to be Black, and that includes me too. (Baldwin, Lorde)

“Black body” is one way of circumventing a range of assumptions about black experiences implicit in the avowal of The Black Man as metonym for Black People. It posits blackness as a shared experience of being embodied in particular ways, but does not set arbitrary limits to what may constitute that body. But it also raises several tensions that ought to be addressed.

For one, in its linguistic singularity, ‘body’ presupposes a universal condition of Man, rather than disrupting language further by insisting on plurality as a starting point.

Black bodies, then, would bring us closer to a decolonised vocabulary.

Another problem that arises when “the black body” becomes the preferred metonym for black people is that it literally objectifies the black person. “Body” implies corporeality stripped of humanity. It involves a level of abstraction that phrases like “the black person” or “black humans” do not. Yet it is that very abstraction that is most valuable, and why the “Black body” is the most precise language we have to speak about blackness and black experiences in contexts of white supremacy. Black people are objectified because they are embodied in particular ways. That is a formal condition of racism, and the diminishment of humanity that follows from possession of a black body creates the communal experience of racism that allows us to speak of blackness as a category that encompasses billions of people across time, space, and innumerable identity positions. When we speak of the black body we acknowledge that while blackness as we know it is a construct of white supremacy and racism,

blackness is also that which we have to combat white supremacy. Baldwin, on some level, knew this. In “Stranger in the Village”, he writes,

...the American Negro problem is not merely shameful, it is also something of an achievement. For even when the worst has been said, it must also be added that the perpetual challenge posed by this problem was always, somehow, perpetually met. It is precisely this black-white experience which may prove of indispensable value to us in the world we face today. This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again. (Baldwin 179)

Baldwin’s fiction and essays do not by any means offer a definitive answer to my initial question – In Baldwin’s work the black body is almost without exception a black man, and often a queer black man. But it is instructive, and exemplary. Not least for the ways in which he charts the black body as it moves across space. Baldwin was, in his own way, and in addition to the many other things he also was, a travel writer. Travel for Baldwin is not a reprieve from the racism in his native America. At least not entirely. But it is a relief. The black body is always precarious, and the black person is always othered, but as he moves across space he is recontextualised:

From all available evidence no black man had ever set foot in this tiny Swiss village before I came. I was told before arriving that I would probably be a "sight" for the village; I took this to mean that people of my complexion were rarely seen in Switzerland, and also that city people are always something of a "sight" outside of the city. (Baldwin 163)

The wide-eyed bewilderment with which he is received in a village in the Swiss Alps is without question an experience of racism, but it is of a different order to what he experiences in America. And it is the sight of the Other, the sight of his black body, which initiates the experience. The villagers do not turn from the face of the Other, they gaze upon him directly, with wonderment that reduces the black body to a spectacle:

This smile-and-the-world-smiles-with-you routine worked about as well in this situation as it had in the situation for which it was designed, which is to say it did not work at all. No one, after all, can be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be, or has not been, admitted. My smile was simply another unheard-of phenomenon which allowed them to see my teeth - they did not, really, see my smile and I began to think that, should I take to snarling, no one would notice any difference. All of the physical characteristics of the Negro



which had caused me, in America, a very different and almost forgotten pain were nothing less than miraculous - or infernal - in the eyes of the village people. (Baldwin 165)

Here it is imperative to recall that the face of the Other is not necessarily the actual face, atop the body, that addresses us, and makes a demand of us; the face is that which we recognise as human, and those villagers, even as they observe the texture of his hair, the colour of his skin, and the shape of his features, do not observe the black body's humanity. "Stranger in the Village", written by Baldwin in the 1950's after a visit with his partner Lucien Happersberger to Leukerbad, the titular village in the Swiss Alps, is the text that most explicitly establishes the connection between Baldwin and the writer who I argue is his most faithful literary heir as a chronicler of the black body as it moves across space – Teju Cole.

Cole has been compared to writers such as W.G Sebald and John Berger, for the allusiveness and theoretical seriousness of his fiction. He has himself claimed kinship with the likes of Michael Ondaatje and the poet Tomas Tranströmer. But to my mind Baldwin is his proper precursor. Cole professes this lineage in the essay "Black Body", the first essay in his collection *Known and Strange Things* (2016). He visits Leukerbad in 2014, six decades after Baldwin first arrived, acutely aware of the path he is following, acknowledging the debt of influence he owes to the older writer, and declaring the intergenerational solidarity afforded by their shared experience of proceeding through (and across) the world in possession of a black body:

I am black like him; and I am slender; and have a gap in my front teeth; and am not especially tall (no, write it: short)... and I call New York home even when not living there; and feel myself in all places, from New York City to rural Switzerland, the custodian of a black body, and have to find the language for all of what that means to me and to the people who look at me. The ancestor had briefly taken possession of the descendant. It was a moment of identification, and in the days that followed that moment was a guide. (Cole 5)

Like Baldwin he is a black American in a foreign country, but his black body does not render him fundamentally *strange* to the locals of the village in the way that Baldwin was. In fact Cole, while acknowledging his debt to Baldwin, does much to differentiate his account of the black body, and relationship with his own blackness, to Baldwin's. Even as they move through the same spaces, their experiences are very

different – sixty years is a long time. What Cole and Baldwin share, above all, is a style. And even then, what's most fascinating is the radically different ways they employ that style.

Baldwin found that one way to write about the black body was to inhabit the forms of the dominant white culture and bend them to your will. Those aspects of Baldwin's style that are unmistakably black confound the forms he inherits – the novel and the essay – and transform them into something new. And yet there is always in Baldwin's work a tinge of despair. He is acutely aware of his position as the Other in the West, the Other from whom the West has turned its face, whose inner-life and bodily integrity is counted for nothing. The very fact of his blackness alienates Baldwin from those things that most inspire him – the European traditions of art, enlightenment, and progress:

These people cannot be, from the point of view of power, strangers anywhere in the world; they have made the modern world, in effect, even if they do not know it. The most illiterate among them is related, in a way that I am not, to Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Aeschylus, Da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Racine; the cathedral at Chartres says something to them which it cannot say to me, as indeed would New York's Empire State Building, should anyone here ever see it. Out of their hymns and dances come Beethoven and Bach. Go back a few centuries and they are in their full glory - but I am in Africa, watching the conquerors arrive. (Baldwin 169)

Of course Cole detects the great irony in this self-abnegation, and perhaps Baldwin himself did too:

It remains for him to fashion out of his experience that which will give him sustenance, and a voice. The cathedral at Chartres, I have said, says something to the people of this village which it cannot say to me; but it is important to understand that, this cathedral says something to me which it cannot say to them. (Baldwin 177)

Cole, like Baldwin, knows that to possess a black body is always to be burdened by history. But, emboldened by the style he inherits from the older writer, Cole claims the great artistic achievements of European and American civilization as his own cultural heritage, along with the towering artistic achievements of African cultures:

There's no world in which I would surrender the intimidating beauty of Yoruba-language poetry for, say, Shakespeare's sonnets, nor one in which I'd prefer the chamber orchestras of Brandenburg to the koras of Mali. I'm happy to own all of it. This carefree confidence is, in part, the gift of time. It is a dividend of the struggle of people from earlier generations. I feel no alienation in museums. But this question of filiation tormented Baldwin considerably. He was sensitive to what was great in world art, and sensitive to his own sense of exclusion from it (Cole 10).

One of the gifts of time Cole writes about is surely Baldwin's work, and style. The crystalline precision of the prose, the accounts of intelligent and restless young black men, the sudden moments of revelation. The lingering influence of the black church, so strongly felt in Baldwin's searing testimonies, less so in Cole's more measured approach, but still there, most often when describing a profound experience of art. The influence of the Christianity on his prose, and particularly the music and oration of the black church, has long been established in Baldwin scholarship. In *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), Cornel West describes Baldwin's prose as possessing "the rhythm, syncopation, and appeal of a sermon" (85). Melvin Dixon describes Baldwin's Christian aesthetic as a "religious expression as a structural device for theme" (124). In "Pentacostalism and All That Jazz: Tracing James Baldwin's Religion" (2008), Douglas Field goes further, claiming that the influence of Christianity is central to Baldwin's work not merely as an aesthetic but as a theme and a critical framework:

Whilst few critics would deny the continued influence of the black church on Baldwin's cadenced language, this is most often explained as simply a matter of style... Amidst the critical silence surrounding the question of whether he was a religious writer or not, Baldwin's own voice, like at his funeral, punctuates and disturbs the established critical corpus. Often the moment is brief and unexpected, diluted and lost amidst Baldwin's own attacks on Christianity and yet it challenges claims that he merely exchanged the pulpit for the pen (Field 437-438)

In "Black Body", Teju Cole declares his debt to Baldwin and the black histories and aesthetic traditions they share. He outlines the similarities in their profiles and identities, but also where his sensibilities diverge from Baldwin's. When acknowledging their shared experience of a black body, Cole also professes the influence of Christian oratory:

...[I] am cool on the page and animated in person, except when it is the way around; and I was once a fervid teen-age preacher (Baldwin: “Nothing that has happened to me since equals the power and the glory that I sometimes felt when, in the middle of a sermon, I knew that I was somehow, by some miracle, really carrying, as they said, ‘the Word’—when the church and I were one”); and I, too, left the church... (Cole 5)

The influence of jazz and the blues on Baldwin’s prose and oration are much commented on features of his work. Douglas, citing James Campbell, emphasizes Baldwin’s “pioneering use of the blues and jazz in language and his repeated references to himself, not as a writer, but as a blues singer.” (448) Many critics have argued that the incorporation of these forms is another example of the lingering influence of the black church. In his biography of Baldwin, *Talking and the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (2002), Campbell writes that whilst Baldwin “was not a believer in the sense of subscribing to a particular faith, or belonging to a specific church, his life was based on a faith that can only be called religious.... His scripture was old black gospel music”. Baldwin himself acknowledged this musical aspect of his prose style, drawn from gospel and spirituals, in an interview with *The Paris Review*: “I would improvise from the texts like a jazz musician improvises from a theme”. In “James Baldwin’s Blues” (1982), Marlene Mosher attributes Baldwin’s affinity for blues music to the ways the tropes of the genre aligned with his own experiences and sensibilities:

For James Baldwin, the black American blues may have seemed a natural vehicle in which to express his ideas. For incidents in his own life bore many similarities to the content many blues lyrics: early abandonment by the " man " in his life (his father) - in fact, Baldwin was an " illegitimate " child continued questing for love - the love of his mother (and, later, of his stepfather and his eight half-brothers and half-sisters); extreme poverty; frequent hunger; and incessant subjection to white American racism. Baldwin's own nature, too, seems like that of a blues: he honestly looks at the horribleness of a situation, but he does not give up. (Mosher 112)

Both Baldwin and Cole write in the high style: their prose is grammatical, their tone measured, and their diction pristine, never vulgar, and rarely colloquial. Baldwin’s approach, and Cole’s, is rarely profane; when writing about racism their style is grave as an elegy, or solemnly lyrical, so that one imagines they are reciting passages from the Bible – “I am not a stranger in America and the same syllable riding on the

American air expresses the war my presence has occasioned in the American soul” (Baldwin 172). Yes, recitation: their prose is rarely if ever conversational but always, in the rhythm and cadence, evokes the sounds of human voices. Cole notes approvingly, “If Leukerbad was his mountain pulpit, the United States was his audience” (15). The tone is biblical but it is not the word of a Christian God we trace in his prose, it is that word as told by a preacher in the black Church, possessing a musicality that is unmistakably black and American.

To write about the black body, then, is to acknowledge a shared history of oppression. It is also, for Baldwin and Cole, the appropriation and disruption of received literary genres and forms in order to describe the experiences that emerge from that history. And it is also, crucially, the deployment of a style that emerges from black aesthetics and personal sensibilities deeply informed by Christianity, the black church, and black musical traditions.

Baldwin wrote about his own experience as a black man in exile, and a black visitor to places where black bodies had rarely, if ever, been before. In doing so, he shed new light on what it meant (and in some instances still means) to be black in America. *In Harlem is Nowhere: A journey to the Mecca of Black America* (2011) Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, cited by Cole in “Black Body”, notes Baldwin’s capacity to move from the particular to the general, to locate America and the world in microcosm in even the most idiosyncratic local detail:

In almost every essay James Baldwin wrote about Harlem, there is a moment when he commits a literary sleight-of-hand so particular that, if he’d been an athlete, sportscasters would have codified the maneuver and named it ‘the Jimmy.’ I think of it in cinematic terms, because its effect reminds me of a technique wherein camera operators pan out by starting with a tight shot and then zoom out to a wide view while the lens remains focused on a point in the distance. (Rhodes-Pitts)

Her analysis is grounded in Baldwin’s writing about Harlem, but it is applicable to all of his writing; it is observable in “Stranger in the Village”, and much of his work set outside of the United States. Baldwin the travel writer did much to subvert the tropes of that genre and establish a tradition for those writers, like Cole, who followed. In the literary traditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that narrate the experiences of

black people, the black body is conceptualised in myriad ways, many of them problematic and diminishing. The work of white travel writers has often been condemned for the ways black characters are reduced to foils against which the development of white characters is traced. In “An Image of Africa” (1977), Chinua Achebe critiques Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a seminal work of European modernism and a foundational classic in the travel narrative genre, as fundamentally racist. The black body in Western travel narratives is deprived of humanity and positioned as the inscrutable Other – the noble (and sometimes ignoble) savage:

Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Of course, there is a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind. But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. (Achebe 8)

In a perverse and delightful reversal of that old literary convention, white bodies in Baldwin’s work become the foils against which the inner life and conflict of the black body, which is to say Baldwin himself, is traced. He does not diminish the humanity of his white subjects in the way Achebe accuses Conrad of doing – the humanity of white subjects is so heavily documented and corroborated in Western culture that attempts to diminish them summarily would surely fail. But Baldwin’s subversion of the trope is nevertheless effective. He begins “Stranger in the Village” with a description of the ailing white bodies that populate Leukerbad:

The village’s only real attraction, which explains the tourist season, is the hot spring water. A disquietingly high proportion of these tourists are cripples, or semi-cripples, who come year after year-from other parts of Switzerland, usually-to take the waters. This lends the village, at the height of the season, a rather terrifying air of sanctity, as though it were a lesser Lourdes. There is often something beautiful, there is always something awful, in the spectacle of a person who has lost one of his faculties, a faculty he never questioned until it was gone, and who struggles to recover it. Yet people remain people, on crutches or indeed on deathbeds; and wherever I passed, the first summer I was here, among the native villagers or among the lame, a wind passed with me - of astonishment, curiosity, amusement and outrage. (Baldwin 164)

This appraisal of physically disabled bodies brings to mind several moments in *Open City*, particularly the passages in which Julius visits the Brewster exhibition at the American Folk Art museum, but also, for different reasons, his visits to the aged and ailing Professor Saito, with his catheter, wheelchair, and failing eyesight. Physical deformity both fascinates and disturbs Julius: his ex-girlfriend Nadege walks with a limp, an affliction she shares with an old crush from his childhood whose limbs were twisted by polio (Cole 59). The shared attentiveness to the human body and its frailties is perhaps sullied, from the point-of-view of a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, in the work of both writers by their use of the word “cripple”. Baldwin uses it as a descriptor for those seeking comfort in Leukerbad’s hot spring waters, and Cole when reflecting on a Yoruba creation myth involving the demiurge Obatala – “The Yoruba believe that in this drunken state he made dwarfs, cripples, people missing limbs, and those burdened by debilitating illness” (25). That Baldwin should use that particular word is unremarkable, considering the context in which he lived and wrote, a time when awareness of and sensitivity to potentially harmful language was rare. Yet it does not absolve him entirely – as a black writer painfully aware of the semantic freight words imbued with a history of violence can carry, it is not unreasonable to expect greater sensitivity from Baldwin, especially when in the very same text he outlines the violence attached to the word ‘nigger’. Cole, writing from the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, will have been aware of the negative connotations of the word, and its rejection by the people it is so often used to describe and demean. And yet he uses it anyway, without disclaimer or apology. I will try to avoid the tedium of ascribing authorial intent, and also the tedium of liberal respectability politics, but the appearance of that potentially provocative word in the work of both writers, six decades apart, is notable for the effect it generates in Cole’s work, and the resonance that has when rereading Baldwin.

In “Black Body” Cole reflects on the black American music he takes with him to Switzerland, particularly the music he and Baldwin shared: Bessie Smith, John Coltrane, Fats Waller, and other seminal figures of black music:

Baldwin had to bring his records with him in the fifties, like a secret stash of medicine, and he had to haul his phonograph up to Leukerbad, so that the sound of the American blues could

keep him connected to a Harlem of the spirit. I listened to some of the same music while I was there, as a way of being with him: Bessie Smith singing “I Need A Little Sugar In My Bowl” (“I need a little sugar in my bowl / I need a little hot dog on my roll”), Fats Waller singing “Your Feet’s Too Big.” I listened to my own playlist as well: Bettye Swann, Billie Holiday, Jean Wells, “Coltrane Plays the Blues,” the Physics, Childish Gambino. The music you travel with helps you to create your own internal weather. But the world participates, too: when I sat down to lunch at the Römerhof restaurant one afternoon—that day, all the customers and staff were white—the music playing overhead was Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance With Somebody.” History is now black and America. (Cole 6)

Once again, the sounds of human voices are a comfort, a tether to the familiar. Here Butler’s words on Derrida’s indebtedness to his interlocutors takes on new resonance: he writes with them: their music – their voices – exist as the precondition of his writing, the voices through which his own voice emerges. Cole calls Bessie Smith’s song “a masterpiece of plausible deniability”, and in that blues standard there is something of the style he and Baldwin share, in its suggestiveness, its gestures towards the profane without resorting to profanity. But Cole and Baldwin are not averse to profanity, at least not in the usual way, out of fear of censorship or a desire to be thought respectable. Their high style allows the moments of profanity to pierce the text, stripped of banality, so that the reader experiences it as a shock, as it should be. “Shock” is operative – both writers attempt to strip racism of its familiarity so that its horror is can be confronted. Cole notes this aspect of Baldwin’s style:

Baldwin was astonished that anyone anywhere should question these fundamentals, thereby burdening him with the supreme waste of time that is racism, let alone so many people in so many places. This unflagging ability to be shocked rises like steam off his written pages. (Cole 12)

Astonishment, more often than profanity, is the means by which Baldwin conveys his anger. But profanity is not entirely absent or inimical to his style. The profane word in Baldwin’s work, of course, is ‘nigger’:

The children who shout *Neger!* have no way of knowing the echoes this sound raises in me. They are brimming with good humor and the more daring swell with pride when I stop to speak with them. Just the same, there are days when I cannot pause and smile, when I have no heart to play with them; when, indeed, I mutter sourly to myself, exactly as I muttered on the



streets of a city these children have never seen, when I was no bigger than these children are now: *Your mother was a nigger.* (Baldwin 166)

Here the voice of the Other is an affront, an assault, a violation of the ethical imperative inscribed in the face of the other. Levinas, in his theorisation of the face, posited the other as a Judeo-Christian subject; in this Eurocentric formulation the face of the black Other – the black face of the Other – is not accounted for, or counted for nothing. Butler critiques that limit in the Levinasian formulation and goes some way to redeeming the face of the Other, and the concept of precarity Butler formulates in response to it, as an intersectional framework that centralises the Other who is unlike us, the unknowable Other, the subject reduced to “nigger” under the white supremacist purview. Crucially, the Swiss children, unaware of the cache that word and its equivalents in the Romance and Germanic languages carry in America and the Anglo-Saxon world, hurl the insult without perceiving it as such. It is Baldwin himself who hurls it deliberately as an insult, turning his face from the Other that has turned its face from him:

...I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a people whose culture controls me, has even, in a sense, created me, people who have cost me more in anguish and rage than they will ever know, who yet do not even know of my existence. The astonishment, with which I might have greeted them, should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine. (Baldwin 168)

In his attempts to find the precise language to articulate black American life, Baldwin makes sparing but effective use of black vernaculars and black American speech patterns. Vernaculars are not inherently profane, of course, and not every colloquialism is a slur, but parallels can be drawn between Baldwin’s use of black vernaculars and profane language. In “Vernaculars of Home” (2015), John E. Drabinski outlines Baldwin’s defences of what he (and Baldwin) calls “black English”. Drabinski does not directly address Baldwin’s relationship to the word ‘nigger’, a glaring and surely deliberate omission, but his reading is nevertheless valuable for its insights into how Baldwin conceived of disesteemed modes of expression as potentially generative:

Baldwin's rhetorical intensity around the question of vernacular speech is located in a smaller and more localized, yet also just as enormous and transhistorical, problem: how is a sense of home, that sense of belonging and being in a place and culture, possible inside of a multi-century history of unrepresentable violence? How does language remember what we might otherwise forget? (Drabinski 205)

Black English, Drabinski argues, offers Baldwin a linguistic mode through which to articulate the full range of black anger and despair. Profane language offers a similar emotive and literary effect.

Returning to Cole and his use of the word cripple: the analogy is tenuous, and easily problematized, but readily available. It is difficult to think of a word that carries a semantic freight comparable to that of "nigger" under white supremacy, but one cannot dismiss ableism and the violence done to nor the trauma experienced by disabled and differently abled bodies under that regime. From that point of view, though some readers may not immediately read it as a slur, the appearance of "cripple" in *Open City* can perhaps be read as a moment in which the profane pierces the surface of the text. It is not the only such moment in his work, or even the most shocking. In *Open City*, when the protagonist Julius visits Belgium, he meets an elegant retired surgeon who casually refers to homosexuals as "faggots" (90). Shortly thereafter, still in Brussels, when recounting anti-immigrant sentiment that had flourished in the wake of an attack wrongly attributed to young Arab men, Julius recalls public speculation about whether the perpetrators were "Roma, gypsies" (99). He includes the preferred nomenclature and the slur. It is telling that each moment of profanity in Cole's work, like Baldwin's, is never merely an expression of anger or frustration. In each instance it is a slur explicitly and directly addressed to an oppressed individual or group. A gesture, perhaps, towards understanding precarity as not merely individuated suffering, but a communal experience of oppression that opens possibilities for political affiliations and solidarities.

The most incisive intervention Cole makes in his response to Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" is the insistence that the true subject of the essay is not Baldwin himself, or the American Negro, or the Black Man, but the black body. Both identify the experience of being othered in white Western societies as an experience of white

supremacy – “an idea which, whether or not one likes to think so, is the very warp and woof of the heritage of the West, the idea of white supremacy” (Baldwin 176) – but by speaking, writing, and thinking about the black body, rather than the black man, Cole redefines the black subject in the way Lorde challenged Baldwin to do in his own work. By retracing Baldwin’s steps, almost literally, Cole rewrites the movement of a black body across space, and concedes that sixty years on it can no longer be considered fundamentally strange anywhere in the world. But also, in employing Baldwin’s trademark panoramic shifting perspective, pivoting from the village across the Atlantic to America, where black people are still subject to systemic inequality and violence, Cole is forced to acknowledge that the black body is still precarious:

They object to the presence of the black body (an unarmed boy in a street, a man buying a toy, a dancer in the subway, a bystander) as much as they object to the presence of the black mind. (Cole 14)

Here I am again using Judith Butler’s concept of precarity, as articulated in *Precarious Life*, her meditation on the ethical responsibility we have to the Other, written in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and the midst of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Butler proposes the recognition of mutual corporeal vulnerability as the beginning of an ethical relationship with the Other. If we can acknowledge that the Other is embodied as we are, possesses a body much like ours, and that body is vulnerable to injury and death just as we are, and often much more so, we would be less likely to commit or sanction violence. The process of mourning is crucial – if the violence done to the body of the Other is not in some way mourned, it is because the body was not recognised as a life, and is thus disposable:

Many people think that grief is privatising, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticising. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorising fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. (Butler 22)

It becomes necessary, then, to declare that those bodies most vulnerable to violence and death are not just objects but human lives, and their loss is worthy of mourning. It becomes a matter of urgency to say that those lives matter. Sixty years and more since

Baldwin visited Leukerbad, black humanity is still diminished and black bodies still subject to violence:

...the black body comes pre-judged, and as a result it is placed in needless jeopardy. To be black is to bear the brunt of selective enforcement of the law, and to inhabit a psychic unsteadiness in which there is no guarantee of personal safety. You are a black body first, before you are a kid walking down the street or a Harvard professor who has misplaced his keys. (Cole "Black Body")

Cole's most sustained and explicit engagement with the subject of violence is "Unmournable Bodies", an essay first published in the *New Yorker* magazine in the aftermath of the 2015 murders of journalists and cartoonists at French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Cole argues that victims of violence in the West are mourned because they are recognised as human, a recognition not afforded to victims of violence outside of the West, or indeed the West's internal Others:

The scale, intensity, and manner of the solidarity that we are seeing for the victims of the Paris killings, encouraging as it may be, indicates how easy it is in Western societies to focus on radical Islamism as the real, or the only, enemy. This focus is part of the consensus about mournable bodies, and it often keeps us from paying proper attention to other, ongoing, instances of horrific carnage around the world: abductions and killings in Mexico, hundreds of children (and more than a dozen journalists) killed in Gaza by Israel last year, internecine massacres in the Central African Republic, and so on. And, even when we rightly condemn criminals who claim to act in the name of Islam, little of our grief is extended to the numerous Muslim victims of their attacks. (Cole "Unmournable Bodies")

Cole goes further, levelling an accusation of hypocrisy at those who condemn violence inflicted on bodies in the West but allow the routine and almost ritualised violence experienced by people in non-Western countries at the hands of Western armed forces, nominally in 'defence' of Western lives and values, to unfold unabated and largely uncommented upon:

We may not be able to attend to each outrage in every corner of the world, but we should at least pause to consider how it is that mainstream opinion so quickly decides that certain violent deaths are more meaningful, and more worthy of commemoration, than others (Cole "Unmournable Bodies").

The framing of the attacks in Paris as an attack on the right to freedom of speech is of particular interest to Cole. When the international literary organisation PEN organised a tribute to *Charlie Hebdo*, Cole was one of a number of notable writers who dissented, sending a letter to the organisation indicating their intention to boycott the gala at which the tribute would be given. They accused the magazine of publishing language and images that diminished the lives of the Other. While reiterating condemnation of the murders, Cole and his co-signatories refused to endorse the ideological underpinnings of *Charlie Hebdo's* satire:

In the aftermath of the attacks, Charlie Hebdo's cartoons were characterized as satire and "equal opportunity offense," and the magazine seems to be entirely sincere in its anarchic expressions of disdain toward organized religion. But in an unequal society, equal opportunity offense does not have an equal effect... To the section of the French population that is already marginalized, embattled, and victimized, a population that is shaped by the legacy of France's various colonial enterprises, and that contains a large percentage of devout Muslims, Charlie Hebdo's cartoons of the Prophet must be seen as being intended to cause further humiliation and suffering. (Cole "Unmournable Bodies")

The influence of Butler's work on Cole's, particularly her theorisation of precarity and the work of mourning, is most clear in this essay. "Unmournable Bodies" and *Precarious Life* share several similarities in their content and the contexts in which they were written and published. Both are written in response to terror attacks in Western metropolises, New York and Paris, and both address the problem of Islamophobic sentiment arising with new force in response to those tragedies. Cole, like Butler a decade earlier, implores Western nations to approach moments of national trauma as an opportunity for self-reflection, rather than a moment to bolster jingoistic nationalism and violence under the guise of self-defence.

Cole uses Butlerian language to argue that some lives are more grievable than others. Which is to say, some deaths are not grieved, because they were never, from the point of view of Western culture, recognised as a life worth grieving. The precarity of black bodies in Cole's fiction is laid bare in moments of grief and mourning. Butler, again, offers a lens through which the fleeting moments of interpersonal connection in his fiction and essays, so often mediated by violence, grief, and the spectre of death, can be understood.

Cole's refusal to align himself with Charlie Hebdo's brand of satire is notable for several reasons. For one, it sharply illustrates his ambivalent relationship with the West. Here again he follows the example of Baldwin, a writer deeply invested and versed in Western culture, who was also always ferocious in his critiques of those societies. Cole recognises the violence wrought by Western nations as inherent to the cultures from which they emerge:

Western societies are not, even now, the paradise of scepticism and rationalism that they believe themselves to be. The West is a variegated space, in which both freedom of thought and tightly regulated speech exist, and in which disavowals of deadly violence happen at the same time as clandestine torture...European and American history are so strongly marked by efforts to control speech that the persecution of rebellious thought must be considered among the foundational buttresses of these societies. (Cole "Unmournable Bodies")

It is also notable for the urgency Cole places on narrative accounts of the embodied self and the embodied Other, and the relationalities they imply. The lives of journalists in Paris are relatable and thus mournable because they embody values and identity positions that most people in the West recognise as their own, or at least as familiar. "Those of us who are writers", he claims, do not consider the violence wrought on the bodies of the Other an affront to their lives and bodies. In that moment Cole reveals an important part of his ambition as a writer, and what it means, to him, to write about the black body – to insist on the grievability of black lives. Which is to say, to insist on the humanity of black bodies.

This, ultimately, is what both Baldwin and Cole undertake when they write about black bodies – they insist that they are not just bodies subject to violence and death, but human lives with complexity and imaginative freedom, worthy of protection and mourning. There is no one way to write about the black body, but if the writing is to be of any value it must declare that black lives matter. This can be done explicitly, as Cole does in "Black Body", and Baldwin does in "Stranger in the Village", and throughout his body of work. It is also always implicit in Cole's fiction. Cole and Baldwin: black men, travel writers, chroniclers of the black body as it traverses time and space, embody Fanon's dictum from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952):

There are in every part of the world men who search.

I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.

I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. (Fanon 179)

This Fanonian ethic will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis, through close analysis of conversations between Julius and fellow travellers he encounters in *Open City*, as they seek meaning, bring invention into existence, and endeavour to recreate themselves.

Teju Cole owes a debt of influence to James Baldwin, the writer who I have argued is his most notable precursor as a chronicler of black bodies as they traverse space. Reading Cole and Baldwin's non-fiction in concert with each other offers a broad overview of a tradition in black diasporic literature that narrates the experiences of black people as they move across the West, or between the West and the global south – the metropole and the periphery. Baldwin is the exemplary, if not foundational, writer in that tradition, but his work has been critiqued by black feminist and queer scholars for the primacy it places on black masculinity and the experiences of black men. By pointing to both the similarities and divergences in their work on the level of style and content, I have argued that Cole deliberately situates himself within a Baldwinian tradition, but also carefully subverts prominent tropes in that tradition. The two essays by Cole addressed in this chapter, "Black Body" and "Unmournable Bodies" foreground the bodily aspect of black life. In this way, Cole reinscribes the tradition of black travel narratives by insisting on the black body, rather than the black man, as the preferred metonym for black experiences.

## IV

### **In the grip of rage and rhetoric: The work of violence and anger**

He, too, was in the grip of rage and rhetoric. I saw that, attractive though his side of the political spectrum was. A cancerous violence had eaten into every political idea, had taken over the ideas themselves, and for so many, all that mattered was the willingness to do something. Action led to action, free of any moorings, and the way to be someone, the way to catch the attention of the young and to recruit them to one's cause, was to be enraged. It seemed as if the only way this lure of violence could be avoided was by having no causes, by being magnificently isolated from all loyalties. But was that not an ethical lapse graver than rage itself?

– Teju Cole, *Open City* (107)

For Cole, like Baldwin before him, anger is a response to violence, and also an incitement to violence. Not just the righteous anger of the oppressed in the face of violent injustice; Cole is attentive to complexity and ambivalences of violence, the ways each of us are implicated in violence, as victims, perpetrators, and as protectors, bearing a responsibility to shield the Other and the self from harm. In Cole's work the black body is precarious in the fullest sense – a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed. Julius, the narrator-protagonist of *Open City*, embodies each of these possibilities, as a victim of violent crime, a perpetrator, and a mediator. This ambivalence of the black body becomes clear as it travels across space. Julius's various accounts of travel, his own experiences of travelling and those of others as narrated by him, and especially his conversations with fellow travellers, offer complex case studies of the usefulness and limits of anger and violence.

In this context I will use the word traveller broadly as a general term for any character (any body) that is in transit at the moment of their encounter, or have arrived at their current destination (and identity position) through extensive travel. It is a category that may include tourists, migrants, immigrants, and refugees. Each of these words signify a distinct way of being in and travelling through the world, and those



distinctions will be accounted for, but ‘traveller’ remains useful as a catch-all that affirms the shared human experience of traversing space. Occasionally the travellers Julius meets are Westerners, white, at home in the West, but more often they have arrived in the West from elsewhere, or are at home in the West but at the same time exist outside of it – the West’s internal Others. Professor Saito, born to Japanese immigrant parents in the United States, is such a character. Including Professor Saito in my definition of traveller is perhaps loading it with too much semantic weight for one noun to bear, but I insist on doing so as a way of affirming travel as an experience of dislocation as well as relocation.

When thinking and writing about travel, here and elsewhere, I have invoked The West as the metropolitan centre of privilege and influence. In doing so I am using a definition articulated by Stuart Hall in “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (1992). Hall’s work reveals the ways in which The West does not merely refer to a geographic location but is in fact an ideological construction signifying a range of discourses that emerged in Europe over several centuries, and the societies in which those discourses have attained hegemony:

... ‘the West’ is a *historical*, not a geographical, construct. By ‘western’ we mean... a society that is developed, industrialised, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern. Such societies arose at a particular historical period – roughly, during the sixteenth century, after the Middle Ages and the break-up of feudalism. They were the result of a specific set of historical processes – economic, political, social, and cultural. Nowadays, any society, wherever it exists on a geographical map, which shares these characteristics can be said to belong to the ‘West’. The meaning of this term is therefore virtually identical to that of the word ‘modern’. (Hall 277)

It is this understanding of the West that emboldens me to include a character like Professor Saito in my definition of traveller – the West, as a terrain to be traversed, is as much an idea as it is a place. Hall enumerates the ways the West and Western subjects define themselves in opposition to those places, peoples, and ideas who exist outside of it, establishing a hierarchy with the West at the top, according to criteria that the West alone had established:

The West and the Rest became two sides of a single coin. What each now is, and what the terms we use to describe them mean, depend on the relations which were established between them long ago. The so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe's contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very different in their histories, ecologies, patterns of development and cultures from the European model. The difference of these other societies and cultures from the west was the standard against which the West's achievement was measured. It is within the context of these relationships that the idea of "The West" took on shape and meaning. (Hall 278)

In Hall's work those who exist outside of the West are called "the Rest", a deliberately provocative term that reveals the ways the West's self-anointed and imposed supremacy have diminished and collapsed countless cultures and societies into the single all-encompassing category of the Other. In that way the discourse of the West enforces not just a hierarchy, but a binary. Accounts of travel in Cole's work are notable for the ways his characters negotiate that binary: as they travel to the West, across it, or away from it, Julius and others confront their tenuous but inextricable ties to the West, and embody different ways of being Other in the West.

Read in concert, Hall's work in "The West and The Rest: Discourse and Power" and Judith Butler's in *Precarious Life* echo each other in important ways – principally in their explorations of relationality and identity formation. Hall's formulation of the relationship between the West and the Rest is mirrored in Butler's on the self and the Other. Both West/Rest and Self/Other are presented as binary but Hall and Butler endeavour to reveal their interdependency, the ways they attain meaning in and through each other, how one cannot sustain itself as a distinct entity in the absence of the other:

I am referring to violence, vulnerability, and mourning, but there is a more general conception of the human with which I am trying to work here, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others: this conception means that we are vulnerable to those we are too young to know and to judge and, hence, vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, and range that includes the eradication of our being at one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other. (Butler 31)

Butler, writing from the West after 9/11 as Islamophobic sentiment was calcifying, evokes Hall's conception of the West and the Rest to widen the scope of the Levinasian theorisation of the face of the Other. Butler is attentive to identity positions and categories of human experience along which the difference between the West and the Rest are charted – nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, language – in addition to questions of gender, sexuality, disability, and more. To exist outside of the identities codified and prioritised in Western discourse is to have your humanity questioned, ignored, diminished, and perhaps extinguished. It is easy, or easier, to recognise the precarious body of the Other when they are embodied as you are, especially if your bodies are normalised. With reference to the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl and the public outpouring of grief and mourning that followed, Butler describes how certain bodies come to be more grievable than others:

His is a familiar name, a familiar face, a story about education that I understand and share; his wife's education makes her language familiar, even moving, to me, a proximity of what is similar. In relation to him, I am not disturbed by the proximity of the unfamiliar, the proximity of difference that makes me work to forge new ties of identification and to reimagine what it is to belong to a human community in which common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot always be assumed. His story takes me home and tempts me to stay there. But at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable. (Butler 38)

When direct identification is not possible, recognising and honouring precarity becomes more difficult, and more pressing. In Butler's work, as in Cole's, susceptibility to violence (as victim and perpetrator) is a consequence of the difficulty to recognise the Other's humanity, but it is also, at the same time, evidence for the necessity of that recognition.

Accounts of travel offer a lens through which to observe violence and anger because it is a corporeal experience: it involves exchanges of ideas, resources, and capital, but it is first and foremost the movement of human bodies, and for that reason travel reveals precarity. How does a body move, how is its movement restricted or prohibited, in what ways does it address and in what ways is it addressed by the Other it encounters – these are all questions that arise from travel. In *Open City*, Julius asks these questions of himself and others. Stephen Clingman's theorisation of "the boundary" in "Looking from South Africa to the World: A story of Identity for our

times” (2013) offers a productive theoretical framework through which to think about the accounts of travel in Cole’s work. The boundary, in Clingman’s work, marks the divisions between individual and collective identities. It signifies a limit between the self and the Other, a limit that can never be entirely collapsed, but is nevertheless permeable, allowing for transgression and exchange:

Identity is discovered not in retreat to the centre, but by heading out toward the boundary. If we want to find out who we are at the core, let us see how we treat people on, or at, the edge. Or how we deal with edges and boundaries within ourselves, the potential for difference and discovery inside us. In the end, periphery and centre are not separable but intrinsically related. That is where the existential freight is, the moral questions that check us for worth, some of the deepest ethical problems we face, as well as the prospects for liberation in our own lives. (Clingman 247)

Clingman offers the example of Bram Fischer and Nelson Mandela to illustrate this possibility of the boundary. Mandela, the black South African liberation leader, and Fischer, scion of a wealthy and politically influential Afrikaner family who became a member of the South African Communist Party and represented Mandela and others at the Rivonia trial, embody the possibilities of the boundary. They met each other across boundaries and forged a solidarity that enabled the articulation of new identities and new political affiliations – “And so, at the edges of their identity, they opened themselves up. They made contact with others; their sense of who they were and who they could be was transformed.”(Clingman 238) One does not need to be convinced by the evidence of what he calls South Africa’s “great generation” to make productive use of Clingman’s theorisation of the boundary. His boundary is not physical, let alone geographic, but the ambiguity of the word allows the opportunity to consider the boundaries between individual identities, the self and the Other, alongside the physical boundaries that divide people across space. National borders, for example, are also at once limiting and generative. Harry Garuba’s critique of colonial cartography and its implications for individual and national subjectivities in “Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative” is instructive:

It is no accident that maps and metaphors of mapping abound in postcolonial studies, because colonialism as a regime of power was largely organised through spatiality and subjectivity: spaces to capture, subjects to control. To capture the land, it first had to be explored and

mapped, literally and figuratively. For the subject to be controlled, she first had to be contained, not only in terms of physical containment within subject territories-colonies and protectorates for example-but also contained in 'tribes', territorially demarcated, defined and culturally described. Physical containment was necessary to circumscribe the natural mobility of the body (in space) and discursive containment served to define the limits of the cultural (identity) mobility available to the subject. (Garuba 87)

Where Clingman foregrounds the transgressive and generative possibilities implied by the figurative boundary between individual subjects, Garuba returns us to the geographic boundary as a site of containment. The colonial map is a product of the West imposed upon colonised lands in order to contain and dominate the Other by re-inscribing them into a conceptual framework of individual identity it understands. This is the process through which pre-colonial African societies, such as the network of republican Igbo city-states Cole celebrates for their egalitarian governments, at a time when Europe was mired in feudalism and nascent capitalism, would be erased and remade as Nigeria. And yet it must be acknowledged that what began as colonial project of erasure and domination would with time, and by necessity, generate new subjectivities with liberatory potential. This link between the “natural mobility” of the body and the “cultural mobility” of individual and collective identities that Garuba describes is vividly illustrated in *Open City* by various characters who experience boundaries as an inhibition, containing their bodies and limiting their subjectivity, but also permeable site across which new possibilities can be articulated.

In the opening chapter of *Open City*, Julius visits Professor Saito, a distinguished literary scholar and an old university mentor, and through their conversations a number of Cole's thematic concerns are introduced. Before Julius reveals the trajectory of his own life that led him from Lagos to New York City, Professor Saito's account of life as a Japanese-American during World War II initiates the novel's reflections on travel and travellers (though those migratory geese on the first page set the scene in no uncertain terms). I have already said that Saito is not a traveller in the traditional sense, but he does offer several insights that can deepen how we think about the ties of spatiality and subjectivity. When the United States entered war with Japan, American citizens of Japanese descent were forced into internment camps. The young Saito suspended his graduate studies in the United Kingdom and joined his family at an internment camp in Idaho. Here we are presented with the traveller as

immigrant, and the immigrant as prisoner: immigration is figured as a transgression of the boundary of the nation-state and nationalist identity, in response to which the immigrant's body is contained, literally, at the internment camp. Saito turns to art as a reprieve from the violence and banality of internment, passing the time by memorising the classics of English language poetry. Art, material evidence of human culture and history, are a means through which the Other can reckon the legacies of the past, and find their place within it (this, perhaps, is what Cole is gesturing towards in his essay "Black Body" when he claims the masterworks of European culture as part of his own cultural inheritance). In that way Saito sets a precedent for Julius, who frequently finds comfort in music and literature as he travels, at home and afar. It also places them in contrast to another traveller, the Moroccan Farouq, who relies most assiduously on polemical critical theory to make sense of and find meaning in his position as Other in the West. That, ultimately, is what connects the travellers in Open City: they embody distinct ways of being the Other – of being othered – in the West.

The Other in the West, because they are embodied in particular ways, are unfamiliar, and thus do not fit neatly into western frameworks of citizenship and humanity. Saito says he and other Japanese-Americans "...were all confused about what was happening; we were American, had always thought ourselves so, and not Japanese" (13). He assumed that because he was born and lived much of his life in the United States, spoke English, and was versed in its culture, his identity as an American should be secured and recognised; he is surprised when denied that recognition because the definitions of citizenship that obtained in the West depended on his exclusion from it. In this way, without naming it, Julius and Saito touch on the concept of the differend as described by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Differend: Phases in dispute* (1988):

I would like to call a differend the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim.... A case of differend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom (Lyotard 9).

The Other demands that their humanity be recognised, but they cannot be recognised as human, because humanity, from the point of view of power, only attains meaning

through their exclusion from it. The differend is one way of understanding the boundaries between individual and collective subjectivities and discourses as a chasm of mutual incomprehensibility. Such moments of incomprehensibility, inscrutability, and misrecognition are inevitable as bodies travel across space and encounter the Other – they recur in *Open City*.

Professor Saito traverses the idea of the West. Later, Julius recalls and encounters characters for whom the idea of the West is only accessible through physical travel. Julius is one of a line of travellers; his mother had moved from her native Germany to the United States, and finally Nigeria. His grandmother had visited Nigeria from Germany before eventually disappearing from his map somewhere in Brussels. Julius himself moves from Lagos to a military school in the north of Nigeria, then to university in the American Midwest, and finally to New York City, where we meet him. These are experiences of migration and immigration borne of restlessness and wanderlust. But for others travel is borne of desperation and necessity, a flight from violence that is itself mired in violence. Saidu, an undocumented Liberian immigrant detained by homeland security, is a migrant and prisoner, like Professor Saito, but his journey is more violent and of its time. Julius accompanies his girlfriend Nadege and members of her church on their visit to the detention centre at which Saidu is held. Julius is there not out of any special curiosity or concern for a fellow West African traveller in New York, by his own admission, but rather because “it seemed an interesting way to get to know [Nadege] better” (62). He is not a member of the church and does not imagine he is acting on behalf of any cause or furthering a political agenda, and certainly not charity. Julius carefully distances himself from the Welcomers (that is what the church group call themselves) by dismissively describing them as possessing “that beatific, slightly unfocused look one finds in do-gooders” (62). This initial scepticism all but disappears when he sits down across the Plexiglas screen from Saidu and listens as he tells his story. The narration of that story proceeds largely uninterrupted for several pages, and Cole’s decision not to mark dialogue with quotation marks attains new importance. The clarity of the prose and sureness of the storytelling ensure that there is no point at which the reader is unsure who is speaking, and to whom they are speaking, but by not punctuating to distinguish narration from dialogue Cole creates a supple storytelling mode that drifts between direct and indirect discourses without sacrificing Julius as the narrative voice:

They brought me here, he said, and that was the end. I have been here ever since. I have only been outside three times, on the days when I went to court. The lawyer they assigned to me said I might have had a chance before 9/11. (Cole 63)

It is a stylistic quirk that compliments and at times illuminates the novel's thematic concerns. There are passages in which the effect is beguiling, such as the conversation with Saidu at the detention centre. The boundary between Julius and Saidu, the self and the Other, is blurred, perhaps even breached, so that what is said by one and what is heard by the other is one and the same:

The first thing he asked, perhaps aware that I was with the Welcomers, was if I was a Christian. I hesitated, then told him I supposed I was. Oh, he said, I'm happy about that because I am a Christian too, a believer in Jesus. So, will you please pray for me? I told him I would, and began to ask him how things were at the detention facility. Not so bad, not as bad as it could be, he said. But I am tired of it, I want to be released. I have been here more than two years. Twenty-six months. They have just finished my case, and we made an appeal, but it was rejected. Now they are sending me back, but there is no date, just this waiting and waiting. (Cole 64)

Julius never relinquishes the narrative voice, and the absence of quotation marks complicates the reader's ability to discern whether his interlocutors are being quoted or paraphrased, whether their words are being heard or remembered. We never hear the voice of the Other outright, only as Julius has heard them, and who can say what Julius forgets, or chooses not to remember. The details of Saidu's long and traumatic journey from civil-war ravaged Liberia, through West Africa and the Maghreb to Morocco, then across the Mediterranean to Spain and finally Portugal, from where he would board an ill-fated flight to New York City, is told almost exclusively in the third-person. Julius tells Saidu's story but does not reflect on its commonalities with his own, a black man from West Africa who finds himself in New York by way of Europe. Whereas Professor Saito's account of suffering in the distant past fascinates Julius so deeply that the subject has sustained their conversations for many years, Saidu's immediate suffering renders him speechless. When they are informed that the visiting hour has elapsed, Saidu makes a request of Julius – "When I got up to leave, he remained seated, and said, Come back and visit me, if I am not deported. I said that



I would, but I never did.” (70). The Other makes a demand which Julius cannot meet. Saidu is a fascinating counterpart to both Julius and Professor Saito: like those men he is an Other in the West, a traveller whose body and movement have been contained and is subject to violence. He is precarious, as are they, but his experience of precarity much different. Saidu, perhaps more than any other character in *Open City*, confronts the reader with the idea of Julius as a privileged subject.

A brief encounter with Pierre, a Haitian shoe-shiner, or bootblack, shortly after the conversation with Saidu also highlights the question of privilege. Like Saidu, Pierre comes to the United States after his home country descends into violent conflict, but the Haitian manages to find a degree of contentment in America that the incarcerated Saidu does not. Pierre is a documented immigrant, and his story is told in the first person. He had come to America from Haiti with his employers, the Berards, the family he served. After immigration he remained loyal to the Berards until their death:

When Mr. Berard died, I could have walked away, but I had to remain in my work, because Mrs. Berard needed me. They were higher and we were lower, but in truth it was a family, in which each part plays a role. The head is not greater than the foot. This is the truth...After a while, I had enough money even for my own freedom, but I preferred the freedom in that house to the freedom without. (Cole 73)

Pierre does not relinquish the identity he had established in Haiti. In this instance the relation between spatiality and subjectivity does not follow the predictable formula; even as he travels, Pierre's identity remains, in some senses, static. The race of the Berards is never specified. It is easy and perhaps justifiable to assume, given the association in Western discourses of whiteness with mastery and blackness with servitude, that the Berards are white. However, Haiti's particular history and demographics complicate that assumption. In the absence of definitive proof one way or the other, we cannot rule out the possibility that the family Pierre served are black, and thus we are compelled to consider his statement “they were higher, we were lower” as a distinction not of race but of class. Julius's class position is not insignificant in *Open City*. He is a highly educated, comfortably middle-class, mixed-race man, and this affords him a set of privileges. The world is accessible to him in

ways that it is not to other kinds of black bodies; his black body is observed and addressed in particular ways because of those identity positions, and he observes and addresses others in particular ways by virtue of his privilege. When Pierre convinces him to accept his shoe-shine service, Julius hesitates, weary of the way that exchange would literally place him higher than the other man:

I have always had a problem with the shoeshine business, and even on the rare occasions when I wished to have my scuffed shoes cleaned, some egalitarian spirit kept me from doing so; it felt ridiculous to mount the elevated chairs in the shops and have someone kneel before me. It wasn't, as I often said to myself, the kind of relationship I wanted to have with another person. (Cole 71)

Julius is attentive to the ways the world places certain bodies in positions of power over, and privilege at the expense of, others, but he struggles to acknowledge his own implication in systems of inequality. When he leaves New York City for Brussels, Julius becomes perhaps the most middle class thing a person can be: a tourist.

In *Open City's* Brussels chapters, Cole performs his own variation of what Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts named 'the Jimmy', but instead of the panoramic insight of Baldwin's essays, Cole's pivot from America to Europe and back again enables him to reveal character in fine detail. Julius, away from the familiarity of New York, is revealed in a new light, with insight into his political and cultural points of view. These insights emerge through lengthy conversations with Farouq, a Moroccan immigrant. Farouq works at the internet café Julius frequents. It is at the café that they meet, and Julius, for reasons that are not specified, perhaps because Julius himself cannot articulate them, strikes up conversation. There is certainly something queer, and perhaps something erotic, in their encounters; the two men mirror each other in the brown tones of their skin, the depth of their intellects and breadth of their reading, and their positions as Other in the West. The attraction precedes the mutual recognition:

I introduced myself, shaking his hand, and added: How are you doing, my brother? Good, he said, with a quick, puzzled smile. As I stepped out onto the street, I wondered why I had said it. A false note, I decided. But soon after I changed my mind. (Cole 101-102)

Earlier in the novel Julius had greeted a black taxi driver in New York City by calling him “my brother”, a gesture the taxi driver reciprocates, and perceives as an invitation to assume a degree of familiarity, by virtue of their blackness. Julius silently disabuses him of that notion – “I was in no mood for people who try to lay claims on me” (41). In this instance both Julius and Farouq recognise something in each other, and in a sense lay a claim on each other, which neither resists. What do they observe in each other that initiates this recognition? There are of course those similarities in their bodies and personal histories, but Julius insists it is something more than that: “The biographical details had been irrelevant to our encounter”. Blackness is not precisely, or not entirely, a biographical detail, it is a visual reality with political and cultural implications, so it is difficult to argue against as a factor in their mutual recognition and attraction. But their experiences of blackness are surely disparate – Julius is mixed-race, and at no point does Farouq, who is described as having “Mediterranean features”, self-identify as black. What Julius recognises in Farouq, and perhaps what Farouq recognises in return, is a fellow traveller: “He had the passion of youth, but his clarity was unfussy and seemed to belong (this was the image that came to me) to someone who had undertaken long journeys.” (104)

Farouq has indeed undertaken long journeys. The third of eight children born to poor and devout Muslim parents in Tetouan, Morocco, he had come to Belgium as a graduate student, studying critical theory at the University of Brussels. His career in academia had stalled and he found himself working as a janitor, and then in the internet café, while resuming his studies part-time at a less prestigious institution. Like Julius who had plotted an escape to America from his military school in northern Nigeria, the young Farouq had imagined travel as an opportunity remake himself, and the West as a site of unlimited imaginative and intellectual freedom:

When we were young, he said, or I should say, when I was young, Europe was a dream. Not just a dream, it was the dream: it represented freedom of thought. We wanted to come here, and exercise our minds in this free space. When I was doing my undergraduate degree in Rabat, I dreamed of Europe; we all did, my friends and I. Not America, about which we already had bad feelings, but Europe. But I have been disappointed. Europe only looks free. The dream was an apparition. (Cole 122)

That early scepticism of America is revealing characterisation, as is the frank admission that those childhood dreams about the West were misplaced. Farouq is disillusioned, discontented, angry. Julius, for all his sober confrontations of Western dogmas, nevertheless offers his critiques with an even keel, tempering criticism with affection. He is invested in the West in ways that Farouq is not, because the West is open to him in ways it is not for Farouq. He arrives in Brussels as a tourist, visits museums and historical landmarks, and is invited to genteel dinners at the elegant homes of the city's upper classes. When discussing the Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun, the two men indirectly touch on these issues. Farouq identifies an orientalisising impulse in Ben Jelloun's fiction, borne of a disconnection from the lives of the ordinary people he attempts to write about. Ben Jelloun is resident in France, a proximity to the West and Western culture which, for Farouq, explains the acclaim and success his work garners outside of Morocco:

You see, people like Ben Jelloun have the life of a writer in exile, and this gives them a certain – here Farouq paused, struggling to find the right word – it gives them a certain poeticity, can I say this, in the eyes of the west. To be a writer in exile is a great thing. But what is exile now, when everyone goes and comes freely? (Cole 104)

In these moments *Open City* attains a metafictional aspect, and it is tempting to read a degree of self-reflexivity, even self-criticism, when the topic of the writer in exile is raised. Teju Cole is himself a writer in exile, if exile is the appropriate word for a willing migrant. The question of exile, as posed by Farouq, is central to Cole's project. The title of the novel alludes to a term from the history of warfare: in times of war, the governments or military forces in command of city have occasionally declared it open, abandoning fortifications and ceasing all efforts to defend it from encroaching enemies. This was done in order to spare the city and its citizens from destruction. Brussels is the titular open city; in 1940 the Belgian government surrendered the city to Nazi Germany to spare it from destruction. But the Other who approaches and enters the open city is not necessarily the enemy; they may also be a liberator. The open city, then, is the city that renders itself vulnerable in order that it may be saved from destruction; to open the city is to declare its precarity, both susceptible to and dependent on the approaching Other. It is this conception of an open city that the novel explores: the city at once a site of violence and of refuge. But

what is exile when the cities are open? Cole suggests that the city is open to some more than it is to others. Or, more precisely, its openness – its precarity – can be experienced as the promise of access and the threat of exposure. Julius, with the access afforded him through privilege, comes and goes freely. He is alive to this ambivalence in the open city. Using the example of Ghent in the time of the Flemish Old Master Jan van Eyck, Julius argues the city has always been a forge and a fortress:

When Jan van Eyck depicted himself in a large red turban in the 1430s, he had testified to the multiculturalism of fifteenth century Ghent, that the stranger was nothing unusual. Turks, Arabs, Russians: all had been part of the visual vocabulary of the time. But the stranger had remained strange, and had become a foil for new discontents. (Cole 106)

The city exists as a permeable boundary that allows for generative encounters between the self and the Other, and as a fortified boundary, shielding the self from the Other. Both possibilities exist but at different moments the force of one can overwhelm the other, for reasons that are historical and contingent. This account of late-medieval Ghent in which difference was sustained but not destroyed through assimilation is surely an example from life of the kind of society Farouq believes in and longs for. His intellectual life is devoted to theorising such a society, thinking and working toward its realisation. The small but undeniable evidence of the internet café, a space in which disparate and diverse people operate alongside each other, sustains his hope that such a society can be realised:

It's a test case of what I believe; people can live together but still keep their own values intact. Seeing this crowd of individuals from different places, it appeals to the human side of me, and the intellectual side of me. (Cole 112)

That this society does not yet exist, and that the society in which he finds himself inhibits his attempts to think and work towards its realisation, angers Farouq. His Masters dissertation had been rejected by the University of Brussels on 20 September 2001, nine days after 9/11, and Farouq does not believe it is coincidental – dismissing their accusation of plagiarism, he speculates that in the aftermath of the attacks in America, the Western academy was not receptive to the ideas of a Muslim man. Julius is sceptical about Farouq's claims but acknowledges the threat of violence to which

the black body is subjected when Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment take hold:

What Farouq got on the trams wasn't a quick suspicious glance. It was a simmering, barely contained fear. The classic anti-immigrant view, which saw them as enemies competing for scarce resources, was converging with a new fear of Islam. (Cole 106)

Farouq's political allegiances are complex but unambiguous. Without condoning the 9/11 attacks, he expresses understanding, if not sympathy, for Al Qaeda and their motives. Julius, a New Yorker living with (living in) the trauma of that event performs outrage, but is not surprised at this revelation. His own politics are grounded in an ethic of non-violence. In their conversations Farouq and Julius return several times to the "Palestinian question", the politics of representation as it affects black people and Muslim people, and the right of oppressed peoples to defend themselves. Julius offers erudite explanations of the state and concerns of the progressive left in the United States, distinguishing them from the mainstream liberal left represented by the Democratic Party (117). He outlines prominent debates in American politics, including those around abortion, gun-control, and support for Israel, and while the reader is allowed to assume his sympathies lay somewhere on the left, at no point does Julius declare his personal allegiances outright. Instead he affects a degree of neutrality, from which vantage point he observes and pities Farouq's strident left-wing radicalism:

Farouq's eyes shone. The wound ran deep. How many would-be radicals, just like him, had been formed on just such a slight? It was time for us to leave. He had brought me too close to his pain, and I no longer saw him... There was something powerful about him, a seething intelligence, something that wanted to believe itself indomitable. But he was one of the thwarted ones. His script would stay in proportion. (Cole 129)

It is perhaps too easy to read the narrator-protagonist as a voice of reason. Or, rather, it is appropriate to read Julius as a voice of "reason", but when doing so one ought to interrogate the concept of reason, as Farouq does, as an invention of enlightenment discourse: "When I think about insight that is a form of blindness, I think of rationality, of rationalism which is blind to God and to the things that God can offer human beings. This is the failure of the enlightenment" (128). Farouq is non-

practising but still identifies as Muslim, and Islamic theology is central to his philosophical framework. Similarly, Julius, who calls himself Christian and often thinks with and through theologians like Augustine, situates himself in a Christian tradition. Christianity is central to Western identities and discourses, and Islam has been the foil against which those identities have been defined. In this way, Julius, as a Christian, situates himself in proximity to the West, and Farouq outside of it. The tension between Farouq and Julius on the question of violence echoes the Levinasian ethic of non-violence inscribed in the command “you shall not kill”, disclosed by the face of the Other, a theory Levinas places in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Farouq challenges that notion and argues for a political ethic with Islam at its centre:

Martin Luther King is admired by everyone, he wants everyone to join together, but this idea that you should let them hit you on the other side of your face, this makes no sense to me. It's a Christian idea, I said. He was a churchman, you see, his principles came from the Christian concept. That is it exactly, Farouq said. This is not an idea I can accept. There's always the expectation that the victimized other is the one that covers the distance, that has the noble ideas; I disagree with this expectation (Cole 105)

Farouq insists his allegiance with Malcolm X over King on the question of violence is not a blind allegiance on the basis of faith. Yet his Islamic faith must be accounted for. It is not the entirety of his identity but is central to it; it forms part of the basis of the theoretical framework through which he views the world. Islam is also inscribed on his body: in Brussels and everywhere in the West his brown skin and North African features are signs of difference and expose him to violence. The black body is recontextualised as it traverses space, and also time. In the historical moment of the novel, Farouq's identity, and the body that signifies a particular identity in the eyes of the West, are exposed to violence in ways that Julius is not. Julius suggests the experience of America as a kind of reprieve that may be useful in Farouq's political and ideological formation, and may moderate his anger. He believes travel is the reprieve; he tells the victimised Other to literally “cover the distance”. Julius offers the example of Fela Kuti, whose awareness of injustice was sharpened in the United States:

I think you and America are ready for each other, I said. As we spoke, it was hard to escape a feeling that we were having a conversation before the twentieth century had begun or just as it

started to run its cruel course. We were suddenly back in the age of pamphlets, solidarity, travel by steamship, world congresses, and young men attending to the world of radicals. I thought of, decades later, Fela Kuti in Los Angeles, the individuals who had been formed and sharpened by their encounters with American freedom and American injustice who, by seeing the worst America could do to its marginalised peoples, had something in them awakened. Even at this belated date, in the antiterror regime, Farouq could still benefit from entering that regime (Cole 126).

It is not clear why Julius believes the experience of American freedoms and injustices are so distinct as to offer insights unavailable anywhere else. He risks accusations of Americentricism: Farouq has travelled extensively and has clear perspectives on the nature and experience of injustice around the world, but the trajectory of his travels and his response to the experience of violence and injustice are radically different. For all that difference, though, Julius is still attentive to the shared experience of proceeding through the world in possession of a black body. Privilege affords protections but does not guarantee safety:

It occurred to me, too, that I was in a situation not so radically different from Farouq's. My presentation – the dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger – made me a target for the inchoate rage of the defenders of Vlaanderen. I could, in the wrong place, be taken for a rapist or “Viking”. But the bearers of the rage could never know how cheap it was. They were insensitive to how common, and how futile, was their violence in the name of monolithic identity. This ignorance was a trait angry young men, as well as their old, politically powerful rhetorical champions, shared the world over. (Cole 106)

Again, Julius acknowledges the recognition and solidarity that black bodies allow; the shared experience of precarity. Throughout the Brussels chapters the reader is invited to read Farouq as his counterpart, and Julius reflects on their commonalities as well as the points at which they depart from each other. The points of departure are most stark on the question of violence and the use of anger. Julius assumes the position of moderate centrist, acknowledging the injustice while at the same time drawing an equivalence between the perpetrators of injustice and victims who turn to violence as a means of self-defence. Seductive though Julius's moderate liberalism is, the moral clarity of his search for a middle ground is subtly unravelled. He imagines someone, in the grip of rage or rhetoric, accuses him of rape, and dismisses this hypothetical scenario as common and futile. But in the second part of the novel, when he returns to



New York City, that statement acquires a shocking irony, and one is confronted by the possibility that Julius is himself guilty of an ethical lapse graver than rage.

What does silence render inaudible? The shocking act of violence of which Julius is accused returns us from the body to the voice of the Other. Throughout the novel Julius narrates the experience of black bodies as the traverse space; his own body primarily, but also Professor Saito, Saidu, Farouq, Pierre, and others. In each case the black body is male, and those characters present as men. The black body implies a shared experience of blackness, but each black person is embodied differently, and questions of sexual and gender difference are central to that experience. The black woman's body is a spectral presence in *Open City*, conspicuous in its absence and silence. Nadege, the ex-girlfriend, exists as a memory; when the novel commences she is in San Francisco and their relationship has ended. V., his patient, a historian of Native American descent, also exists as a memory, and after her suicide, an obituary. His mother and grandmother exist in the Nigeria of his childhood. The women he encounters in Brussels are given voices and bodies, but each of them is white. The only black woman whose body is seen and voice heard is the woman who accuses Julius of violating her body.

Moji, the younger sister of his childhood best friend, Dayo, accuses Julius of sexual assault, a crime he does not recall committing but cannot, or at least does not, deny. He has forgotten. Julius is an unreliable narrator but he is not deceptive; he acknowledges the fickleness of his memory and the limits of his self-perception. The reader is compelled to reevaluate the novel and its protagonist accordingly.

The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float. Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten, except for those few things that I remembered with an outsize intensity. These were the things that had been solidified in my mind by reiteration, that recurred in dreams and daily thoughts: certain faces, certain conversations, which, taken as a group, represented a secure version of the past I had been constructing since 1992. But there was another, irruptive, sense of things past. The sudden reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten, some part of myself I had relegated to childhood and to Africa. (Cole 156)

Moji's revelatory accusation occurs in the penultimate chapter, but it is foreshadowed: on their first meeting, in a grocery store, he does not recognise her until she identifies herself, but he senses a close scrutiny in her bearing towards him. Julius mistakes it for sexual attraction – the remnants of an adolescent crush. Over the course of two hundred and fifty pages the reader is given access through first-person narration and free direct discourse to Julius's mind, a mind so keen, perceptive, and reflexive that it seduces the reader and wins their trust. Moji's revelation undoes the certainty that Julius constructs even in his ambivalence and tendency towards moderation. He had forgotten Moji, or banished the memory of her, but Julius had lingered in her memory – "...I had been ever-present in her life, like a stain or a scar, and she had thought of me, either fleetingly or in extended agonies, for almost every day of her adult life. (244)" The eloquence and erudition of his narration must now be considered with suspicion. So too should his disavowal of anger.

Moji is angry: "She had tried to forgive, she said, and to forget, but neither had worked. (245)" After their first meeting she had attempted to contain her anger, and they had struck up a friendship that occasionally became flirtatious. But eventually she must give voice to her anger. Even then, the crime itself is never named, and is instead clouded by euphemism: he forced himself on her. The profane word, rape, is never spoken, and it is this silence that most enrages her: "You'll say nothing. I know you'll say nothing. I'm just another woman whose story of sexual assault will not be believed. (245)" Julius can no longer be the conscientious observer, he is implicated in violence, inextricably.

Contrary to Julius's explicit disavowals of Farouq's "rage and rhetoric", anger is not irredeemably destructive. It is a shared human experience that follows from possessing a body and can foster solidarities and affiliations. In "The Uses of Anger: Women responding to racism" (1981), Audre Lorde articulates the generative possibilities of anger:

But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision of our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies. Anger is loaded with information and energy. (Lorde "The Uses of Anger")

Confronted by Moji's anger, Julius's passivity is laid bare. Moji shows that anger can also be a revelation. She asks him to respond to the accusation of sexual assault, hoping for an admission, or even a denial; any acknowledgement of her pain. "But will you say something now? Will you say something? (245)" Julius, turning his face from the face of the Other, says nothing.

The five conversations between Julius and fellow travellers addressed in this chapter are *Open City's* most sustained and engaging demonstrations of precarity. These narratives of people, of *bodies*, traversing space, moving between the periphery and the centre, present subjects and spaces at once vulnerable to and dependent upon one another. In "Violence, Mourning, Politics", Butler outlines the political possibilities offered by the recognition of precarity, a possibility that depends in large part on the work of grief and mourning. All of us, Butler argues, have grieved and mourned – this is an inevitable fact of bodily life – and those shared experiences ought to be the basis of an ethical relationship between the self and the Other. Cole's work in his fiction and essays shows that the work of anger can function in a similar way.

## V

## **A Moving Spot of Sun: The City as Palimpsest**

There is no surrender of beauty, only an effort to find beauty by going past the typical and arriving at the common. I do not love the travel pages. I look past them and go into the substratum of the visible environment. What I love about Bali is what I love about São Paulo, Nairobi, Seoul, and Reykjavik: the material evidence of human life which goes on in spite of the world's enmity.

(Cole, "Seminyak")

Teju Cole's grand gesture in *Open City* and *Every Day is For The Thief* is to present the city as palimpsest: a space across which history is written, erased, and rewritten. But the erasure is always incomplete, and attempts to rewrite are cluttered by traces of the past, as to render it indecipherable. Much is lost between the moments of erasure and rewriting, and this loss is both a consequence and a manifestation of violence. Violent because finding space for new articulation involves a process of degradation; violent because re-inscription is itself a further act of degradation. Violence in this model is destructive but also allows for, even necessitates, the possibility of renewal. In Cole's fiction violence is banal but productive, and often revelatory.

In *Open City*, Ground Zero, the site at which the twin towers of the world Trade Centre stood before being felled on September 11 2001, is an exposed wound on the surface of the text. Julius recounts the existence of an immigrant community on that site, a neighbourhood demolished and community dispersed in an original act of violence, so that the towers could be built. Cole does not attempt to draw any equivalence or moral parallels. He simply throws a history of violence into high relief:

This was not the first erasure on the site. Before the towers had gone up, there had been a bustling network of little streets traversing this part of town. Robinson Street, Laurens Street, College Place: all of them had been obliterated in the 1960s to make way for the World Trade Centre buildings, and all were forgotten now. Gone, too, was the old Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwives, the Christian Syrian enclave that was established here in the late 1800s...And before that? What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble? (Cole 59)

The city is precarious; like the body it is vulnerable to violence. Cole and Butler focalise their explorations of vulnerability in New York City after the attacks of September 11 2001. Butler's project is to theorise how the violence inflicted and trauma that followed can be the basis for an ethical relationship with the Other; in what ways can the violence experienced in New York, by New Yorkers, be the basis for an ethical relationship with the Other, rather than a spur to further violence in the name of revenge. The precarity revealed by those attacks in New York could, and perhaps should, allow for solidarity with the bodies exposed to violence in the cities of Iraq, Afghanistan, and every city in the world. In this way Butler's work guides as towards an appreciation of what Cole calls the shared semantics of used space. Cole's fiction is necessarily less concerned with philosophical praxis than Butler's work, but his attentiveness to repetitions in human spaces and lives is underlined by a clear political ethic.

*Every Day is for the Thief* (2007) is narrated by an unnamed protagonist who returns for a brief visit to Lagos, Nigeria, after many years living in New York City. It was Cole's fictional debut; it was published to some acclaim in Nigeria in 2007, and republished internationally once his international reputation had been established with the success of *Open City* in 2011. This publication history goes some way to explaining their very different receptions – *Open City* has received much wider acclaim and critical scrutiny. Other factors that distinguish the debut novel from the sophomore effort is its length (at a relatively brief 128 pages, *Every Day is for the Thief* is often classified as a novella), and its setting in Lagos, i.e. the periphery, rather than the metropolitan centre of Western power and privilege that is New York City. It also diverges from the later novel in its representations of anger and violence. While the protagonists of both novels share striking similarities, and could perhaps be read

as the same character, the unnamed narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief* does not repudiate violence and anger as explicitly as Julius does in *Open City*.

In *Every Day is for the Thief*, Cole channels James Baldwin's ecclesiastical fury with a brand of weary pessimism and despair. Cole's fury is aimed at Nigeria: the endless nightmares of incompetence and corruption that blight the country's bureaucratic structures, the widening disparities in the lives of rich and poor, the neglect of local cultures and slavish pursuit of Western luxuries, the violence that renders life cheap and murder inconsequential. It is a damning text, and it is never more withering than its accounts of public violence. The imprisonment and rumoured death of a notorious public servant is an early example of the indifference with which death is treated:

Later, there are rumours in the papers that Tafa Balogun has died in prison. How, why or when, nobody seems to know. No one seems to mind that he is dead. And when the rumours turn out later to be untrue, that news, too, is met with a shrug. (Cole 20-21)

What work can mourning accomplish when violence and death are not recognised as grave ethical lapses but as common and unremarkable? In this scenario there is no reversion to the comfort of familiarity. Distinctions between the grievable self and the ungrievable Other cannot be mapped along any of the familiar racial, ethnic, religious, or broadly cultural categories. This is a space in which all bodies are on some level unmournable. And yet, amongst all of this, there are moments in which Cole's unnamed narrator finds what he calls, after the Swedish poet Thomas Transtomer, a spot of sunlight: a glimpse of possibility and human endeavour in spite of the general atmosphere of obsolescence. In the novella's ninth chapter celebration and grief are deftly interwoven and juxtaposed. While attending a wedding the narrator is introduced to a family friend, Mrs Adelaja, who he had never previously met but had heard of, her unfortunate notoriety arising from the brutal murder of her husband. The joyous scene of the wedding is interspersed with details of Mr Abelaja's hijacking and murder, as recounted by an old friend.

– They cleaned out the house, but when they were leaving, they forced Mr Adelaja to come with them.

The Master of Ceremonies makes a wisecrack that has both the bride's and the groom's family convulsed with laughter. The bride's family has selected a peach-coloured theme for

the occasion, and all their headwear is of the same fabric. At the laughter, Muyiwa and I both look up, then look down again, and Muyiwa continues his story.

– They locked him up in the trunk of his car, and drove him around to the neighbour’s house.

(Cole 41)

The effect of these events, the wedding and the murder, told alongside and in juxtaposition to each other, is twofold. It undercuts the moment of celebration by revealing a lingering trauma that clutters the present with traces of the past, but it also offers evidence of what Cole, when writing about photography, calls “material evidence of human life which goes on in spite of the world’s enmity.” Moments of celebration and of grief do not overwhelm the other, at least not in this moment, but rather exist alongside each other, the one acting in fact as the precondition for the other.

Perhaps the most startling passage illustrating the work of violence and mourning in the Lagos of *Every Day is for the Thief* is the immolation of a young boy, the novella’s titular thief, by an angry mob in a crowded public market. Here Cole describes scenes of “unspeakable violence” and adjusts his faltering narration accordingly:

The splashing liquid is lighter than water, it is fragrant, it drips off him, beads in his woolly hair. He glistens. The begging stops. He stops begging and he is not yet lit. And then only the last thing, which is soon supplied. The fire catches with a loud gust, and the crowd gasps and inches back. The boy dances furiously but, hemmed down by the tyre, quickly goes prone, and still. The most vivid moment in the fire’s life passes, and its colour dulls and fizzles out. The crowd, chattering and sighing, momentarily sated, melts away. The man with the digicam lowers his machine. He, too, disappears. Traffic quickly reconstitutes around the charred pile. The air smells of rubber, meat and exhaust.

In a few days, it will all be as though nothing had happened. (Cole 51)

The narrator had not witnessed the event himself – like Mr Adelaja’s murder, it was told to him in retrospect. Unlike the earlier violent incident, this immolation is not recounted to the narrator-protagonist by another character, and it is not interspersed with moments of levity, but unfolds in direct, unflinching third-person narration in the present tense. He has stitched together an account of an event he had not witnessed from fragments of his own memories – “I know the rest, even before I’m told: I’ve

seen it before. At least, I've seen its constituent parts, if never all at once." (50) This flattening of time, of local events and personal experiences, past and present, evokes the palimpsestic nature of the city – a space in which the present is cluttered with traces of the past. What is most striking about this account of public violence is the ambivalence of the crowd. The familiarity of the violent act, which allows the narrator to reconstruct an account of it in vivid detail, also strips it of its true horror.

The proliferation, following the attacks in New York, London, and Madrid, of narratives that position the city as a site of violence and danger mirrors a larger socio-political tendency toward parochialism. Those attacks were immediately presented as proof of the failure of multiculturalism as a project, and the multicultural city as its theatre. In "Multicultural and Creole Contemporaries: Postcolonial Artists and Postcolonial Cities" (2009), Rinaldo Walcott argues that the violent city has become a prominent but regressive trope in contemporary art and popular culture, and points to the ways postcolonial artists have countered or complicated that trope. For Walcott, the newly articulated precarity of Western cities allows, perhaps even necessitates, a reimagining of what city life is and can be. Walcott, appropriating a phrase from Jacques Derrida, writes about the city "to come", a site fraught with the possibility of catastrophe and yet alive with progressive energy –

More than any human geography the city has become the dominant site in the Western imagination with its accompanying narratives of threat and fear in the Age of Global Terrorism and virus-fueled pandemics of all kinds, such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, avian flu, and Ebola. The intimacies of city life have always carried a narrative of fear and threat and thus a constant lurking danger or violence. The city also has been a place of possibility, experimentation and pleasure, of anonymity coupled with the promise of something "to come".

(Walcott 161)

Here Walcott is citing Jacques Derrida's "(No) More Rogue States" (2005), a response, like Butler's *Precarious Life*, to the West's militarised response to 9/11. Derrida argues that the true terror of that attack was not merely the violence it wrought, but the fundamental vulnerability it exposed. For Derrida, like Butler, that vulnerability is a threat of violence to come, but also the promise of new solidarities. In an earlier essay, "Generations of a city: Memories, prophesy, responsibilities"



(1998), Derrida articulates the precarity of the city in language that pre-empts Cole's fiction - "A city must remain open to knowing that it does not yet know what it will be" (17).

There are several pointed critiques in *Every Day is for the Thief*. One of the most pertinent, given Cole's training as an art historian and the aesthetic sensibilities elaborated in much of his fiction and essays, is the reflection on the Nigerian government and society in general's neglect of its artistic heritage. When he visits the national museum in Lagos, a gated compound of a few single story bungalows, the narrator despairs of the state of affairs. Exhibits are poorly curated, artefacts are mishandled, and information on the contexts from which those artefacts deemed worthy of preservation, however haphazard, emerge, is conspicuously absent. As a document of Nigerian cultural heritage, the national museum pales in comparison to the collections of old colonial and imperial powers in Europe and the Americas. It is not just a failure to acknowledge and preserve what is great in Nigeria's past – for Cole it seems to point to the absence of history itself in the national consciousness. What obtains is a shared amnesia and wilful disregard of the processes that allow for progress.

What I am looking for, what Tranströmer described as a moving spot of sun, is somewhere in the city. But it is not that easy to find, not here where one has to forget about yesterday. Why is history uncontested here? There is no sign of that dispute over words, that battle over versions of stories that marks the creative inner life of a society. Where are the contradictory voices? I step out of the shop into the midday glare. All around me the unaware forest of flickering faces is visible. The area boys are still hard at work but I imagine they will soon break for lunch. The past is not even past. (Cole 94)

A display dedicated to Nigeria's leaders, pre and post the colonial period, housed in an outhouse described as something akin to a garden shed, betrays this uncritical relationship with the past. Portraits of each leader and artefacts related to their reigns are displayed along with brief captions listing their achievements matter-of-factly. Slavery is described as an "obnoxious practice", and the brutalities of generations of successive military dictatorships is glossed over and replaced with gentle trivia. Here and throughout *Every Day is for the Thief*, the reader is explicitly reminded of Faulkner's dictum of the impassable past. But the past is present in this novel, and it

recurs, most often in the guise of nostalgia. The narrator's disappointment at the state of the national museum is heightened when placed in contrast with his memories of the museum in the 1970's, when the post-colony was young and things like aesthetic heritage mattered, and the experience of art was imbued with childlike wonder. The National Museum's shortcomings are immediately contrasted with the success of a privately run conservatory. The effusive terms with which the narrator-protagonist speaks about the Musical Society of Nigeria, or MUSON, is yet another moment in which art is presented as material evidence of human life which goes on in spite of the world's enmity. And yet, in this deeply stratified society, access to creative refuge is a privileged enjoyed by very few:

They have set the bar quite high: owning a piano, even in the West, is no easy thing. In Nigeria, it is prohibitively expensive for all but the most moneyed (...) Yet, it is better than nothing. As demand and supply both increase, prices will be adjusted. Things will become more egalitarian, the way they already are with private secondary schools. (Cole 71)

Cole is attentive to the rich narrative possibilities Lagos provides – “The city's air is dense with story” (53) – but also to the seeming impossibility of harnessing that creative energy in meaningful and productive ways. What *Every Day is for the Thief* illustrates is the precarity of a creative life in violent contexts. All contexts are violent; creative life is always precarious, but it is especially so when violence and degradation are lived realities rather than existential threats, and where there is little hope of solace or reprieve. In Lagos there is an abundance of life and narrative, what artists sometimes call “material”:

Well, this is wonderful, I think. Life hangs out here. The pungent details are all around me. Here is the material that can really hit a reader between the eyes. A paradise for the gossip-lover (...) It is an appalling way to conduct a society, yes, but I suddenly feel a vague pity for all those writers who have to ply their trade from sleepy American suburbs, writing divorce scenes symbolised by the very slow washing of dishes. (Cole 54)

And yet the infrastructure that enables creative endeavour – well funded universities, quiet public spaces, rooms of one's own, are absent – “There is a disconnect between the wealth of stories available and the rarity of creative refuge.” (56) How many Nigerian Updikes, Cole wonders, have been lost to the world in these circumstances?

The few times the narrator can imagine Nigeria as home, and not merely a place that was once home, occur when he is confronted with evidence of creative endeavour, "...people who, against all odds, keep the flame of aesthetic struggle alive." (56) One example of a creative endeavour is reading a book of which he, the narrator, approves. So when he witnesses a young woman in possession of a Michael Ondaatje novel on public transport, it is a revelation.

What, lady, do you make of Ondaatje's labyrinthine sentences, his sensuous prose? How does his intense visuality strike you? Is it hard to concentrate on such poetry in Lagos traffic, with the noise of the crowd, as the tout's body odour wafts over you? I see all those gathered here, and I believe in you the most. (Cole 37)

Ondaatje is an interesting and inviting comparison. Like Cole he is a metropolitan writer for whom the peripheries are a place of origin and of negation. Cole's Nigeria, like Ondaatje's Sri Lanka, is a past home that is never really past, but which nevertheless cannot be remade in the present. Cole, in writing about a country with a tenuous grasp of its own past and a collective culture of suspicion towards a life of the mind, is making an intervention.

For Cole the city is a palimpsest, and his narrator in *Every Day is for the Thief*, like Julius in the New York of *Open City*, finds Nigerian history writ large and fine on the streets of Lagos. His project attempts to undo the problematic it describes, for it is novel about Lagos published in Lagos, and is as such a product of creative endeavour exercised in Lagos. And New York, too: for the fact remains that the perspective focalised in the text is not one that emerges from Lagos, but enters from afar. And so in his fiction Cole narrates the problematic of the expatriate writer even as in his creative life he embodies it. Like the masterpieces of pre-colonial Nigerian sculpture, many of the most acclaimed Nigerian narratives are written and published in the metropolitan West. Those the Nigerians whose narratives are heard are more often than not those who have managed to leave Nigeria and find the infrastructure that enables creative endeavour elsewhere. Educated and employed at foreign universities, living in foreign cities, published by foreign publishing houses. When these writers return home and write honestly, their work is tinged with the bristling disorientation of a stranger, rather than the intimate alienation of a native. Cole is

exemplary of this breed of writer, but he does not attempt to erase the complexities that arise from the spaces he inhabits and the works he produces from them. Rather, he attempts to sustain the complexity necessitated by his ambivalent position as a subject of both the West and the global south – the centre and the periphery.

In *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief*, Teju Cole attempts to locate the spaces occupied by peripheral subjects in the metropolis, the metropolitan subject in the periphery, and identities and political affiliations articulated along these points of contact. The cityscapes of New York City and Lagos are the backdrop against which performances of modern subjectivities are played out. Read in this way, Cole's fiction extends Butler's conception of bodily precarity to physical spaces, and the city is represented as a palimpsest – a site where trauma and creativity co-exist.

## VI

### Conclusion: And so...

The preceding chapters are an attempt to demonstrate that the concept of precarity, as theorised by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life*, is a productive and generative framework through which to read Teju Cole's fiction and essays. By foregrounding the black body as the metonym for black life and black experiences, Cole's work reveals the fundamental vulnerability and interdependency of human bodies: at once exposed to and dependent on each other. To represent this experience of precarity, Cole adopts an ambivalent storytelling mode that resists simplifications, and sustains complexity; all declarative statements are followed by conjunction, real or implied. And so...

When I began this dissertation, Teju Cole had published two books, both novels. By the time it is completed, that number will have risen to five, including the imminent publication of *Human Archipelago* (2019), a collaboration with the photographer Fazal Sheik. Despite that limited output – two novels, an essay collection, and two books of photography – Cole's literary project is endlessly diverse and diffuse, encompassing a daunting array of media, forms, and ideas. This diversity complicates all attempts to definitively categorise his work. Yet it is also true that all of Cole's published work, fiction and non-fiction, share a number of characteristics that are distinctively Colean. Whatever form he is working in, or working with, the narrative voice is always that of an erudite and cosmopolitan young black man. In the essays it is the author himself who addresses the reader, and in the novels it is first-person narrator-protagonists who function as thinly veiled surrogates for the author. There are not many women in Cole's novels, and even fewer children, and those that do appear are never focalised, but are mediated by the narrator-protagonist. With a few notable exceptions, including an eponymously titled essay on the work of Kenyan visual artist Wangechi Mutu, the subjects of his essays are men, the work of men, and the perspectives of men, including his own. The conspicuous absences of women in his work, as characters and as subjects, is addressed in this dissertation, but there is

surely scope for a more searching enquiry into the effects and implications of that absence, or omission.

My analysis of Cole is indebted to the work of black feminist and queer thinkers, particularly feminist and queer critiques of James Baldwin's prioritisation of black masculinity in his conception of black life. Cole's work invites similar scrutiny. *Open City* especially, as a narrative of sexual violence against a woman told from the perspective of the perpetrating man, will surely attain new resonances when read against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement, which has brought the alarming regularity of sexual violence in public life, including in literary and academic spaces, to wide attention.

The scope of this dissertation is limited to Cole's fiction and essays, and as such I have not engaged with his work as a photographer. Cole's visual acuity is a prominent feature of all his work, and it is addressed in my analysis, but as Karen Jacobs notes in "Teju Cole's Photographic Afterimages" (2014), photography is central to his literary explorations of trauma and displacement, and requires serious consideration. Teju Cole's visual poetics of precarity are yet to be fully accounted for. As are his provocations on, and experiments with, social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

His is a multimedia oeuvre that invites further engagement, and reading precarity in his work may prove to be an effective entry-point, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I have tended toward the prosaic.

## VII

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