Cosmopolitan Futures, Modernist Afterlives:
Critical Aesthetics in Teju Cole's *Open City* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*

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Introduction

Is the cosmopolitan *flâneur* doomed to mere aesthetic spectatorship? There has been a tendency in contemporary cosmopolitan theory to resist associating rarified aesthetic experiences with global material realities. Hence, as Rebecca Walkowitz suggests, new cosmopolitanisms have been reluctant to embrace the cultural and literary genealogy of modernism, which encompasses the decadent tradition of aestheticism, dandyism, and fin de siècle *flânerie*.[1] It is certainly contentious to negotiate the continued relevance of a largely Eurocentric, and largely elitist, cultural movement, with the suspicious or "critical" edge of cosmopolitan discourse today—which is heavily influenced by the poststructuralist-inflected analyses of universalism (by critics such as Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, and Ernesto Laclau).[2]

Yet, numerous contemporary novelists choose to advance the transnational value of literature through this very vehicle of a modernist consciousness; adopting a repertoire of formal experimentation, ontological solitude, and challenges to epistemic foundations, they engage with the mission of their predecessors to reflect and defamiliarize microscopic facets of a changed social reality. Two such descendants I examine in this project are Teju Cole and Kazuo Ishiguro, and their respective works *Open City* (2011) and *The Unconsoled* (1995). Through the lens of the novels' simultaneous defense of and resistance to an aesthetic cosmopolitanism, I hope to draw out the tension between the increasingly coalescing frameworks of transnational literary studies and cosmopolitan ethics. To bridge the arenas, I would first like to single out two thinkers within the vast discursive field of cosmopolitan philosophy: Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Julia

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[1] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 12-15.
[2] Amanda Anderson, "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity," in *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 69–92, 69.

Kristeva. I will then proceed to outline the novels' methodology in relation to the thinkers' modes of thought.

In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Kwame Anthony Appiah explores why the term cosmopolitanism may be the most apt rubric to assess our new way of life as a global tribe. He recognizes that cosmopolitanism's meaning is just as disputed as that of alternative rubrics—"globalization" and "multiculturalism"—but argues that the term can be revived to hold contemporary moral relevance. Cosmopolitanism, originating in antiquity and most often associated with the age of Enlightenment, has traditionally been defined by a "reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity."[3] In suggesting that cosmopolitanism should not be seen as an unattainable elevated ideal, but rather as the simple concept of "coexistence," Appiah aligns with a new cosmopolitan optimism that contrasts sharply with the hermeneutics of suspicion dominating the cultural left."[4] Appiah's defense of a new cosmopolitanism, however, avoids the territory of cultivated naiveté through its attentiveness to the term's unique challenge of synthesizing an intellectual and ethical ideal. He asks, "how far can we take that idea [a citizen of the world]? Are you really supposed to abjure all local allegiances and partialities in the name of this vast abstraction, humanity?"[5] Claiming that both extreme nationalisms and the "icy impartiality" of "hard-core cosmopolitans" pose danger, he advocates for a partial, "rooted" cosmopolitanism.[6]

On the other hand, Amanda Anderson sketches out the aforementioned hermeneutics of suspicion in several poststructuralist critics' reconsiderations of universalism. She invokes Judith

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[3] Anderson, 72.
[4] Ibid., 74.
[5] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Issues of Our Time (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 23.
[6] Ibid., 24.

Butler's *Feminist Contentions* and Étienne Balibar's "Ambiguous Universality" to demonstrate new universalists' guarded awareness of the tension between an ideal, elusive universality and an actual (false) universality.[7] Both critics' lines of thinking possess new cosmopolitanisms' "heightened sensitivity to the potential violence and coerciveness of imperial thinking," but lack their "ideals of intersubjective recognition and engagement"; Anderson attributes this difference to the new universalists' emphasis on political subversion (through a non-normalizing universal).[8] New cosmopolitanisms—which would include Appiah's advocacy for conversations in the spirit of curiosity—have a less radical conception of freedom, focusing instead on "reciprocal exchanges between variously situated people."[9] While Appiah is not one of the thinkers mentioned by Anderson, his view shares interesting theoretical foundations with that of Julia Kristeva—who Anderson singles out among the poststructuralists for her critical posture that synthesizes the *suspiciousness* of new universalisms and the *utopianism* of new cosmopolitanisms.

In her texts *Strangers To Ourselves* and *Nations Without Nationalism*, Kristeva suggests that a purely negative critique against Enlightenment cosmopolitanism reduces the potential for its adaptation and resuscitation (she elaborates on how Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* can enhance the articulation of new transitional nationalisms) while remaining wary of exclusionary universalisms and the violence of heteronormativity.[10]

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[7] Butler, in the context of modern identity formation and political rights, argues that while "any claim for rights will always be situated and hence can never be truly universal," we must nevertheless attempt a fuller articulation of universality through the "labor of translation" (setting different conceptions of rights in dialogue with one another). Balibar, like Butler, acknowledges the historicity of particular universalisms by proposing a model of three categories of universality: *real* (the old ideal of a cosmopolis rendered obsolete by globalization), *fictive* (a constructed ideal necessary for the oppressed to struggle for inclusion and rights, albeit thereafter subjecting said dominated groups to normalization by various power regimes), and *ideal* (a universality against the constraints of normalcy, striving for noncoercion and nondiscrimination—for freedom and equality). Anderson, 86-88.
[8] Anderson, 89.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 90.

> [the upholding of a symbolic dignity for the whole of humankind] appears to me as a rampart against a nationalist, regionalist, and religious fragmentation whose integrative contractions are only too visible today. Yes, let us have universality for the rights of man, provided we integrate in that universality not only the smug principle according to which "all men are brothers" but also that portion of conflict, hatred, violence, and destructiveness that for two centuries since the Declaration has ceaselessly been unloaded upon the realities of wars and fratricidal closeness and that the Freudian discovery of the unconscious tells us is a surely modifiable but yet constituent portion of the human psyche.[11]

Thus, Kristeva "sublates the opposition…whereby universalism asserts sameness and cosmopolitanism explores and embraces diversity and otherness" by occupying a third space.[12] This sublation echoes that of Appiah, whose "rooted" cosmopolitanism reconciles Martha Nussbaum's dramatic division of patriotism and cosmopolitanism.[13] Working within a psychoanalytic tradition, Kristeva proposes a universal *interior* "strangeness" as the basis of an individual ethical practice. That is, she argues that we must embrace an innate otherness within the self in order to understand external foreignness: "we cannot suppress the symptom that the foreigner provokes; but we simply must come back to it, clear it up, give it the resources our own essential depersonalizations provide, and only thus soothe it."[14]

Appiah also "starts by taking individuals—not nations, tribes or 'peoples'—as the proper object of moral concern," but colors his third space with an *exterior* focus on the value of intercultural exchange.[15]

> The conclusion is obvious enough: the points of entry to cross-cultural conversations are things that are shared by those who are in the conversation. They do not need to be universal; all they need to be is what these particular people have in common. Once we have found enough we share, there is the further possibility that we will be able to enjoy discovering things we do not yet share. That is one of the payoffs of cosmopolitan

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[11] Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, European Perspectives (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993). Qtd. in Anderson, 90.
[12] Anderson, 91.
[13] re: Martha C. Nussbaum's generative essay, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," *Boston Review* 19, no. 5 (1994): 3-34.
[14] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 190.
[15] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2006, sec. Magazine.

> curiosity. We can learn from one another; or we can simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.[16]

Notably, this model of "connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference," is predicated on Appiah's liberal notion that variety enables the autonomy of choice, and that most autonomous individuals are capable of thriving on variety alongside localized loyalties.[17] This optimistic belief in a human proclivity toward intercultural connection encompasses his attitude toward aesthetics, as he claims that "we can respond to art that is not ours; indeed, we can fully respond to 'our' art only if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art."[18] For Appiah, both our encounters of art and otherness are not tied to geography. Literature—as a key facet of *Bildung*—enhances the empathetic relationship between self and other.

Meanwhile, keeping in tune with her interior focus, Kristeva suggests that aesthetics (specifically, literature) can cathartically provoke the "astonishment" necessary for depersonalization and hence, for identification with the other.[19] However, she (like Freud in his expression of *Das Unheimliche*) separates the uncanniness of aesthetic, fictitious experience and that of material experience.[20] She does so to point to the link between abjection and poetic catharsis, the intricacies of which cannot be explored in this paper, but her conception of literature as an "other" space will be crucial to my twofold examination of Strangeness in this essay—*externally encountered* Strangeness, and *internally contained* Strangeness. My deliberation on encountered and contained Strangeness is, in part, indebted to Palumbo Liu's

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[16] Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 120.
[17] Ibid., 154.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 189.
[20] In *Strangers*, Kristeva notes that "Freud took pains to separate the uncanniness provoked by esthetic experience from that which is sustained in reality; he most particularly stressed those works in which the uncanny effect is abolished because of the very fact that the entire world of the narrative is fictitious. Such are fairy tales, in which the generalized artifice spares us any possible comparison between sign, imagination, and material reality. As a consequence, artifice neutralizes uncanniness and makes all returns of the repressed plausible, acceptable, and pleasurable." 187.

dual conception of contemporary literature as "delivery systems": he has poignantly gestured to modern literature's valorization of communicating otherness to foster moral growth and cosmopolitan tolerance, on one hand, and its admittance to the inability of a mimetic world to "reach complete deliverance," on the other.[21]

In the first chapter, I discuss the complexities of encountering otherness and fostering tolerance in Teju Cole's *Open City*. *Open City*, a novel filled to the brim with cultural references and philosophical contemplation, centers around Julius, a Nigerian-German psychiatric fellow residing in New York City. In a distinctly *flanêurial* fashion, Julius weaves his surrounding sights, people, and memories into a stream-of-consciousness narrative as he walks through New York and Brussels. While his many intercultural encounters facilitate a productive communication of marginalized experiences to the reader, they fail to evoke the protagonist's empathy and humanity. Cole thereby challenges Appiah's optimistic adage "connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference"; Julius, a passionate aesthete with a professional and philosophical interest in the human mind, nonetheless cannot achieve a cosmopolitan connectivity. Yet, in the chapter's second section, I suggest that Cole's novel forms its own "cosmopolitan style," despite its confrontation of a merely aesthetic cosmopolitanism. *Open City*'s meditation on historical erasure, public memory, and its layered notion of "blind spots," shape its questioning of calibrated knowledge, and therefore, its modernist posture.

In the second chapter, I explore Kazuo Ishiguro's interpretation of a universal Strangeness in *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro, who often negates strictly historical and particularist interpretations of his works, crafts a curiously "placeless" novel in which the wandering

[21] David Palumbo-Liu, *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-12. His project revolves around defining what exactly constitutes "otherness" in the arena of late twentieth and early twenty-first century globalization and cultural contagion, and how contemporary novels can productively continue to communicate said otherness.

first-person protagonist (acclaimed concert pianist Ryder) is just as lost as the reader in a semi-realist dreamscape. In the first section, I suggest that Ishiguro attempts an enclosed and transferable style through a unique (heterotopic) spatial duality and uncanny repetition—it is increasingly evident, as the absurdly labyrinthine plot progresses, that the characters of the town are projections and fragments of Ryder's consciousness. In the second section, I posit that Ishiguro constructs an imagined system of "modern" music to satirize and assess the validity of a decontextualized, transcendent aesthetic. In other words, he questions the attainability of a cosmopolitan form. His dialectic involves not only the distinction between the provincial and metropolitan, but between the national and universal. Framing my analysis is Kristeva's coexistent conception of national identity and universal Strangeness. Through my discussion of the two novels, I ask how contemporary novelists strive for a cosmopolitan disposition while recognizing its constraints. Cole and Ishiguro, through their embrace and critique of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, illustrate Appiah's poignant observation—that "cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge."[22]

[22] Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 23.

CHAPTER I

Encountered Strangeness:
Teju Cole's *Open City* and Cosmopolitan Curiosity

One of *Open City*'s most salient characteristics is its plethora of cultural references, particularly in the highbrow realm. These references range from painters (Diego Velázquez, Gustave Courbet, Johannes Vermeer), musicians (Gustav Mahler, J. S. Bach, Frédéric Chopin), writers (Vladimir Nabokov, Mohamed Choukri, Albert Camus, J. M. Coetzee), literary critics, and philosophers (Walter Benjamin, Nietzsche, Roland Barthes, Edward Said, Simone Weil). This list only scratches the surface of Julius' expansive and meticulous reservoir of cultural knowledge. His role as an aesthete is not confined to an appreciation of high art; he references popular culture (i.e. Michael Jackson's *Thriller* brought up in the context of his father's funeral), and his eyes and ears are always open to observe art in his everyday world. In one walking sequence, he remarks on the beauty of Chinese women dancing in formation to martial pop music blasting from a radio in Battery Park. In another, he describes the eclectic "glamorous details" of the United Palace Theatre: "chandeliers, red carpeting, a profusion of architectural ornament within and without—and the terra-cotta elements on the façade [drawn] from Egyptian, Moorish, Persian, and Art Deco styles."[23] Julius' ordinary and elevated engagement with aesthetics positions him as the ultimate representation of a *flâneur* in the Baudelairean sense—"...the passionate spectator…in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite."[24] More pertinently, however, the variegated nature of his aesthetic engagement suggests that Cole is dealing with a broader relationship between filtered and objective realities. In this section, I will argue that

[23] Teju Cole, *Open City*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2012), 234. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.
[24] Charles Baudelaire and Jonathan (ed. and tr) Mayne, *The Painter of Modern Life: And Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1964), 9.

Julius' attachment to visible forms, as well as his detached aestheticization of encountered subjects, demonstrate Cole's challenging of an aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

The Silent Painter: Confronting an Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism

Julius' ruminations on the paintings of John Brewster during a visit to the American Folk Art Museum, and an encounter following his visit, provide a useful framework for Cole's intervention on whether aesthetics can advance intercultural curiosity and understanding. Notably, John Brewster does not produce "high art" in the traditional sense, as Julius points out— "the artists featured at the museum were, in almost every case, working outside the elite tradition. They lacked formal training, but their work had soul" (35-36). Julius is struck by Brewsters' portraits' "feeling of quietness," heightened by the silence of the gallery and its patrons; each painting, containing "a sealed-away world, visible from without, but impossible to enter," intrigues Julius with an elusive "air of hermeticism" (35-36). Julius decides that the key to Brewster's pictorial silence is the artist's, and the portrayed children's, deafness.[25] While there are often romantic ideas attached to *blindness* (Milton, Borges, and Homer were all thought to have greater sensitivity, unusual genius, or even gifts of memory and of prophecy), the deaf are "often seen as merely unfortunate" and "even treated as if they were mentally retarded" (38). Julius subsequently romanticizes Brewster's *deafness*:

> Standing before Brewster's portraits, my mind grew 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 great artists of stillness: Vermeer, Chardin, Hammershøi. The silence was even more profound…when the private world of the artist was total in its quietness. Unlike those

[25] Many of the subjects were pupils at the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, founded in 1817. As an adult student, Brewster was enrolled at the school for three years. Cole, *Open City*, 37.

> other painters, Brewster hadn't 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 (38).

By comparing Brewster to renowned masters of subdued domestic scenes or still lifes,[26] and commenting on the former's reciprocal gaze and superior, candid quietness, Julius implies that he is drawn to Brewster's portraiture for two juxtaposing qualities which I will expound upon: the self-containment of its final products, and the subject-object exchange embedded in its process.

Julius is completely absorbed by Brewster's "silent worlds"— he "lost all track of time before these images, fell deep into their world, as if all the time between them and me had somehow vanished," and feels like "someone who had returned to the earth from a great distance" when he walks out of the museum after the guard announces its closing (37, 40). Outside, the chaos of Sixth Avenue "contrast[s] violently" with the museum's isolated calm; the rain pours "like a great torrent of mirrors sweeping down the sheer sides of the glass buildings," and Julius struggles to hail a cab, shouting at a woman who tries to take his ride (he remarks that the sound of his own voice surprised him) (40). When Julius greets the driver, he is angered by Julius' sudden entrance into the car ("you know, the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I'm African just like you, why you do this?") (40). A confused Julius apologizes, but he is not truly apologetic, and he is in turn angered by the loud obnoxiousness of the driver's chosen radio station. The driver drops him off at the wrong address on purpose and Julius walks home in the rain. The narrative alignment of an extended aesthetic contemplation and an intensely ordinary vignette reinforces Julius' oscillation between the shifting material

[26] See as examples of "indirect gazes" and "chiaroscuro" (creating depth and dimension through lightness and shade): Johannes Vermeer's *The Milkmaid* (1658) and *Woman Reading a Letter* (1664), Jean Siméon Chardin's *The Good Education* (1758) and *The Silver Goblet* (1728), Frederikke Hammershøi's *the artist's mother* (1886) and *Interior with Young Woman Seen from the Back* (1904). Compare them to John Brewster's *Francis O. Watts with Bird* (1805)—rendered in Cole's novel through ekphrasis—or *Elizabeth Abigail Wallingford* (1808).

world and timeless realm of art. But more importantly, as Vermeulen has noted, the chapter portrays the tension between "the novel's commitment to the aesthetic and its investment in cosmopolitan connectedness"—in other words, Julius' experience of art does not seamlessly transfer into "a scene of humane connectedness."[27]

I further this reading to suggest that John Brewster's transactional silence holds a greater significance for the novel's exploration of an aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The numerous intercultural encounters which color Julius' existence in New York and Brussels create embedded narratives that communicate Other lives to the reader; Yet, such encounters fail to spark a sense of humane connectedness because Julius approaches the storytellers with silence—with "deafness." Julius explicitly links the concepts of sound, conversation, and narrative in one of his first interior musings in the novel:

> 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 are no longer at all habituated to our own voices, except in conversation or from within the safety of a shouting crowd. But a book suggests conversation: one person is speaking to another, and audible sound is, or should be, natural to that exchange. So I read aloud with myself as my audience, and gave voice to another's words (5-6).

Throughout the novel, Julius does exactly that: he carves space in his narrative to give voice to strangers' words, whether they contain his conversational partner's political opinions, intellectual meditations, personal histories, or random anecdotes. But he is no closer to these narratives than he is to Brewster's sealed worlds. The presence of transactional silence in Julius' interactions is most visible in his encounter with Saidu, an undocumented immigrant from Liberia. Julius meets Saidu through his visit to a detention facility in Queens with a church group, which his ex-girlfriend Nadège introduces him to.

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[27] Pieter Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's Open City and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Modern Literature* 37, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 40–57, 49.

When Julius joins Nadège for her bimonthly visit to the facility, he is quick to distance himself from the rest of the group—"a mix of human-rights types and church ladies," many of them "with that beatific, slightly unfocused expression one finds in do-gooders" (62). Julius paints the early summer scene thoroughly, describing "the vicious landscape of wire fencing and broken concrete, the bus like a resting beast," the detention facility as "a long, gray, metal box," the "purgatorial waiting room [that] had no windows…brightly lit with fluorescent tubes, which seemed to suck into them the little remaining air," and the silent visitors "staring into space" (62-63). When he meets Saidu in the meeting room, he is depicted "as good-looking, as striking in appearance as any man I had ever seen" with "delicate cheekbones, a dark, even complexion" and "a broad white smile" (64). Saidu has been in the detention facility for twenty-six months, and is waiting indefinitely after his application for asylum was recently rejected. Julius encourages him to recount the details of why he ended up at the facility, and lends "a sympathetic ear to a story that, for too long, he had been forced to keep to himself" (64).

America had always been the focus of Saidu's dreams because he had been taught at home and at school about "the special relationship between Liberia and America, which was like the relationship between an uncle and a favorite nephew." When the Second Liberian Civil War broke out, his mother and sister were shot, and he was taken away by Charles Taylor's men to work on a rubber farm, he escaped with a tattered backpack with the eventual goal of getting to America. As Saidu speaks rapidly about how he went from sleeping in the burnt ruins of his old school in Monrovia, to Bamako, Mali, to Ceuta, Spain, to Lisbon, Portugal (where he spent two years living in a room with ten other Africans and working as a barber), Julius is in silent concentration: "I was startled by a sudden knock on the plexiglas [separating the visitors and the detainees]. One of the Wackenhut guards had walked up, behind me, and I had been so absorbed

in Saidu's story that I started, and dropped my hat" (66). Julius enters, while gazing at the animated portrait behind the plexiglas, a sealed-away narrative world; he approaches the conversation as an aesthete studying an object of interest, rather than as a sympathetic listener. He meets Saidu's hand through the Plexiglas when their time comes to an end, and promises he will visit again, but never does. Telling Nadège about the visit on their way back into Manhattan, Julius wonders whether "she fell in love with the idea of myself that I presented in that story. I was the listener, the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of someone else's life and struggle"— he admits he himself "had fallen in love with that idea" (70).

In this light, Julius becomes the "silent" painter of marginalized Others like Saidu, imbuing his portraits with the same concentration, suspension of time, and "unobtrusive wit" that he claims Brewster possessed (39). Like Brewster, whose disability and outsider status contributed to a unique connection with his deaf subjects, Julius believes his partial identification with Africans and African-Americans—being half-Nigerian and spending his childhood in Nigeria, as well as dealing with racial stereotyping and everyday microaggressions in New York— allows him to truthfully render disadvantaged minority experiences (hence, his self-appointment as "the compassionate African"). Simultaneously, Julius' cultivated privilege as an educated upper-class individual, and his innate privilege as a mixed-race child in Nigeria (he recalls that as a "half-caste" he "had no conception of what it would mean to be darker"), prevents a true empathetic bond (132). It is doubtful whether Julius has an empathetic or sympathetic bond at all in his past or his present. Rather, in true *flâneurial* fashion, he "enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes."[28]

[28] Charles Baudelaire, "Crowds (*Les Foules*)", qtd.Walter Benjamin, "The *Flâneur*" *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Verso Classics (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 55.

As Appiah claims, no critic of a humanistic cosmopolitanism would argue "that we can't take a moral interest in strangers"; rather, one would argue "that the interest is bound to be abstract, lacking in the warmth and power that comes from shared identity."[29] Julius seems to be devoid of this sense of shared identity or community; he is regarded as "a half-Nigerian, a foreigner" during his youth by his teachers at the Nigerian Military School, and is frequently discomforted by the "aggressive familiarity" imposed upon him by various strangers of African descent (83, 102). He is likewise disconnected from his German roots on his mother's side—his mother tells him about her painful past in postwar Berlin, but her story fails to resonate with him. Julius notes in his recounting that the conversation was one-sided, as his mother (distraught after his father's funeral) was "addressing not the teenage child before her but…an imaginary confessor"; when he attempts to recount the details of his estranged mother's life as an adult, he realizes that "it was an entire vanished world of people, experiences, sensations, desires, a world that, in some odd way, [he] was the unaware continuation of" (80). Accordingly, Julius is constantly "intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting"—in other words, he is replete with "cosmopolitan curiosity," but never builds the affective bridge necessary to close the gap between self and other.[30]

The novel's most productive instance of "cosmopolitan contamination," which Appiah poses as a counter-ideal to cultural purity (in his eyes, an oxymoron), is the extended conversation between Julius and Farouq in Brussels.[31] When Julius meets Farouq, a Moroccan

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[29] Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 121.
[30] Ibid., 120.
[31] Appiah draws the term *contamination* from the conservative criticism against Roman African playwright Terence's incorporation of earlier Greek plays into a single Latin drama. Terence, of course, coined "the golden rule" of cosmopolitanism— *Homo sum: humanini nil a me alienum puto* ("I am human: nothing human is alien to me"). Appiah cites Salman Rushdie as a modern exponent of contamination through mass migration. To Appiah, cosmopolitan contamination is a given: "the odds are that…you already live a cosmopolitan life, enriched by literature, art, and film that come from many places, and that contains influences from many more." *Cosmopolitanism*, 132-134.

immigrant who works at an Internet and telephone shop (Julius visits the shop in search of his maternal grandmother's contact information), he surprises the man by asking for his name the next day, and surprises himself by greeting him with a "how are you doing, my brother?" (101) It is worth noting that this is the first and only personal interaction with a stranger that Julius initiates, and the first and only moment in which Julius (somewhat performatively) participates in the overly familiar greeting between black men that he typically recoils from. Farouq is also one of the few characters that engages in multiple substantial conversations with Julius. Impressed by Farouq's eloquence and his grasp of literature and philosophy (on the third consecutive day he visits the shop, Farouq is reading a secondary text on Walter Benjamin's *On the Concept of History*), Julius engages in a lively intellectual debate, seemingly forgetting about his original intention in going to the shop.

As Farouq talks about the notion of authentic fiction, Edward Said's conception of difference, and the political philosophies of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Julius is stimulated by arguments he cannot fully follow and inspired by their orator's passion, clarity, and calm. The conversation with Farouq exemplifies Appiah's notion of "connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference"; after Farouq disagrees with Martin Luther King's Christian ideal of the victimized Other's dignified refusal, Julius remarks,

> …how strange, I thought, that he used an expression like [the victimized Other] in a casual conversation. And yet, when he said it, it had a far deeper resonance than it would have in any academic situation. It occurred to me, at the same time, that our conversation had happened without the usual small talk. He was still just a man in a shop. He was a student, too, or had been one, but of what? Here he was, as anonymous as Marx in London…[to most of Brussels] he would be just another Arab, subject to a quick suspicious glance on the tram. And of me, he knew nothing either…the biographical details had been irrelevant to our encounter (106).

Julius suggests that their spontaneous exchange transcends his usual engagement with literature and art in its cultural value. Farouq also romanticizes the possibilities of intercultural exchange.

He enjoys working at the phone shop because "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" (112). His belief all but rephrases Appiah's aforementioned adage.

This "productive" contamination through intellectual curiosity alone initially heightens in effect when Farouq invites Julius to a Portuguese café in Brussels to talk with him and his friend Khalil. Julius' intense conversation with the chain-smoking duo, "turns into exchanges in which liberal and Islamist worldviews clash."[32] Khalil suggests that Muslims, just like Africans and African-Americans, are subject to reductive portrayals. Americans might assume European Muslims are "covered from head to toe if they are women, or that they wear a full beard if they are men, and that they are only interested in protesting perceived insults to Islam"; the ordinary American would not conceive of Muslims sitting in cafés smoking and discussing political philosophy (119). Continuing this line of thought, Khalil argues that Saddam Hussein—"the least of the dictators in the Middle East"—was unfairly portrayed (119-20). Positioning their support of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Al qaeda in relation to the regimes of other dictators in the region (such as king Mohammed VI of Morocco, Gaddafi in Libya, Mubarak in Egypt) who "remain in power because they sell the national interests of their countries to the Americans," Farouq and Khalil claim that the organizations' extremism is doing the work of resistance (120).

Once Julius realizes that their conversation has reached an impasse, he abandons his hope for a mutually enlightening debate and views it as a sparring performance; Julius pretends to be "the outraged American," while Farouq makes the vague claim that "America is a version of Al-Qaeda" without any conviction (120-121). Julius' aestheticization of Farouq by way of

[32] Werner Sollors, "Cosmopolitan Curiosity in an Open City: Notes on Reading Teju Cole by Way of Kwame Anthony Appiah," *New Literary History* 49, no. 2 (2018): 227–48, 233.

comparison to Robert De Niro's image in *The Godfather II* completes the severance of their brief friendship:

> …I saw a startling resemblance; he was the very image of Robert De Niro, specifically in De Niro's role as the young Vito Corleone in *The Godfather II*. The straight, thin, black eyebrows, the rubbery expression, the smile that seemed a mask for skepticism or shyness, and the lean handsomeness, too…What was the meaning of De Niro's smile? He, De Niro, smiled, but one had no idea what he was smiling about. Perhaps this is why, when I first met Farouq, I had been taken aback. I had subconsciously overinterpreted his smile, connecting his face to another's, reading it as a face to be liked but feared…it was this face, not as inscrutable as I had once feared, that spoke now (121).

In reasoning that his fascination with Farouq stemmed from an aesthetic reference point, Julius justifies their encounter's hollow ending. Because Julius knows any refutation of Farouq's radical arguments would "feel like futility piled on futility," he reverts to his role as a detached listener by asking Farouq about his life growing up in Tétouan (121). Upon hearing about Farouq's religious family background, his thwarted academic dreams in Brussels, and his disillusionment with European liberalism, Julius narrates that he "no longer saw [Farouq]" because "he had brought me too close to his pain" (129).

Julius' gaze at Saidu and Farouq's "portraits" from a safe distance follows his consistent aestheticizing of strangers. During a subway ride without a destination in mind, he looks upon a woman, "unusually tall, more than six feet" wearing "a black jacket over a long, black, pleated skirt and knee-length black boots", and is reminded of "the virtuoso black-on-black passages in certain paintings by Velázquez" by "the play of depth in these layers of her clothing" (44-45). On the same day, he compares another man on the subway to a gargoyle, and observes that Kenneth—the guard at the American Folk Art Museum who later comes up to him at a restaurant bar—"was dark skinned, bald, with a broad, smooth forehead, and a carefully trimmed pencil mustache. His upper body was powerful, but his legs were spindly, so that he looked like Nabokov's Pnin come to life" (45, 53). Again, his reference points are not limited to the

highbrow, as he refers to a waiter in Brussels as "a dead ringer for Obelix" (141).[33] Aesthetic reference points are not only reserved for specific individuals, but also for specific sceneries: the "Cézannesque tableau" of three men playing cards at a café, the "dantesque vision of huddled and faceless bodies" at Columbus Circle during the New York Marathon, and the retrospective overlapping vision of his father's burial with El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* and Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (116, 161, 228).

These images that render the memory of his father's burial "faint and unreliable," alongside his fractured empathetic connection to Farouq and Saidu, gesture to the relationship between the novel's aesthetic cosmopolitanism and affectlessness. That is, Julius continually fails to form an emotional attachment to his past, and to others. Professor Saito, his eighty-nine year old former university mentor, is the only person from his past that he maintains an attachment to and visits regularly. This attachment only survives, however, because Saito is his mirror image—an aesthete who does not cross the conversational boundary of impersonal intellectual musings. Saito initially takes Julius under his wing because he senses that Julius is "someone on whom his rarefied subject (early English literature) would not be wasted," and the two continue their academically-inflected conversations post-graduation, even after Saito is diagnosed with cancer and bedridden in his apartment (9). Saito talks about his career as a scholar, poetry (the changed role of memorization in literary studies), history (the generational erasure and cyclicality of war), and politics (equal rights for same-sex relationships), but never about his family or personal life. Only close to his death, Julius realizes that Saito neglected to ever mention that he had cared for a long-term partner, after coming across this information through a profile in Maxwell University's alumni magazine. A lifetime art collector, Saito fills his apartment with collections of Polynesian masks, months' worth of newspapers, overstuffed

[33] A rotund, simpleminded cartoon character from the French comic book series *Asterix*.

bookshelves, figurines, and puppets; "all that was missing…were photographs of family members, of friends, of Professor Saito himself" (170, 11). Saito is surrounded by the records of his cosmopolitan curiosity, but isolated in his physical deterioration. Julius, one of his only voluntary associates, inadvertently avoids visiting during the final weeks of Saito's life to "avoid the drama of death, its unpleasantness" (183).

"No One is Spared": The Blind Spots of History and Perception

Julius' reliance on self-contained forms to resist emotional bonds emerges in his avoidance of memories. For example, as previously mentioned, the memory of his father's burial is overpowered by artistic renderings of burials, in an attempt to repress the painful emotions associated with the event. In the following section, I will argue that the novel's exploration of blindness—Julius' unreliable grasp of the past, his ruminations and observations about historical erasure and the flattening of public memory, and the metaphoric device of psychiatry in portraying the notion of "blind spots"—contribute to Cole's "cosmopolitan style": his problematization of narrative and historical progress, and his reflection on the limits of perception and epistemic confidence.[34] Hence, as I have suggested in my introduction, *Open City* interrogates an aesthetic cosmopolitanism while crafting a cosmopolitan aesthetic.

As Julius watches the film *The Last King of Scotland*, depicting the rule of Idi Amin Dada, a Ugandan President from the 1970s who "earned himself a reputation as one of the most grotesque stains on Africa's recent history," he notices the film's divergence from a film from his childhood—*The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*. The latter spared no shocking detail in its "powerful and stylized realism," presenting "the callousness, insanity, and sheer excitement of the man,"

[34] Walkowitz, 5, 20.

"images of people being shot and stuffed into car trunks, or decapitated and stored in freezers" (29-30). The former, avoiding such gory imagery, focuses on the relationship between Idi Amin and the fictional Scottish doctor Nicholas Garrigan. Julius is certain that the film's portrayal of the "nuances of [Idi Amin's] personality"—hosting parties, telling jokes, speaking about the need for African self-determination—would bring "a bad taste" to certain viewers' mouths. Yet, Julius

> wished to believe that things were not as bad as they seemed. This was the part of me that wanted to be entertained, that preferred not to confront the horror. But that satisfaction did not come: things ended badly, as they usually do. I wondered, as Coetzee did in *Elizabeth Costello*, what the use was of going into these recesses of the human heart. Why show torture? Was it not enough to be told, in imprecise detail, that bad things happened? We wish to be spared…It is a common wish, and a foolish one: no one is spared (31).

Throughout the novel, Julius continues to reflect on the notion that "no one is spared" from the horrors of history. Cole is evidently invested in the concealment of violence and collective trauma. His title choice reflects this interest; he was drawn to the ironies of the term "open city," which possesses the positive connotation of liberation and freedom, but also contains a much grimmer military definition— "a city that has surrendered to an invading force in return for not being destroyed. A destruction happens…but it's quieter and more psychological…an unseen psychic distress."[35] Of course, Brussels, which occupies a significant portion of Julius' narrative in the novel, was one of the cities declared "open" during World War II.

Just as he comments on the missing gory details of Idi Amin's rampant human rights abuses in *The Last King of Scotland*, Julius frequently considers how the landscape of New York (the novel's primary "open city") obscures past suffering. As he flies back to the city from Brussels, he is "saddled with strange mental transpositions: that the plane was a coffin, that the city below was a vast graveyard with white marble and stone blocks of various heights and sizes" (150). In a striking series of passages, he discusses the African Burial Ground in Lower

[35] Teju Cole, "The Strangest of Islands: An Interview with Teju Cole," interview by Kate Welsh, February 20, 2016.

Manhattan, marked only by a single monument on a patch of grass.[36] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the site was as large as six acres—human remains are still uncovered routinely along Chambers Street and City Hall park, but the burial ground was now largely "under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government" (220). Julius reasons that six acres of prime real estate in Lower Manhattan would never have been rededicated as holy ground, but reflects that

> What I was steeped in, on that warm morning, was the echo across centuries of slavery in New York. At the Negro Burial Ground, as it was then known, and others like it on the eastern seaboard, excavated bodies bore traces of suffering: blunt trauma, grievous bodily harm. Many of the skeletons had broken bones, evidence of the suffering they'd endured in life…How difficult it was, from the point of view of the twenty-first century, to fully believe that these people, with the difficult lives they were forced to live, were truly people, complex in all their dimensions as we are, fond of pleasures, shy of suffering, attached to their families. How many times, in the course of each of these lives, would death have invaded, carrying off a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a child, a cousin, a lover? (221-22).

Part of the difficulty in imagining this distant past suffering, Julius posits, is due to the new "lack of familiarity with mass death, with plague, war, and famine" in recent decades; he suggests that "we are the first humans who are completely unprepared for disaster," and "to live in a secure world" in which "wars flare up in patches instead of being all-consuming, and agriculture no longer evokes elemental fear" (200). There is also the sense, however, that Julius positions himself above the blissful ignorance, or denial, of the masses.

When Julius walks across the overpass that once connected the World Financial Center to the World Trade Center buildings, he wonders what the exercisers pedaling directly above the construction site think about daily. The overpass is full of people, and various colored advertisements for tourist sites in lower Manhattan decorate its rafters, with slogans like "show your kids where the aliens landed" (for Ellis Island) and "relive the day America's ticker

[36] The African Burial Ground National Monument is located in Lower Manhattan, near Foley Square and north of City Hall. It was designated as a National Historical Landmark in February 2006.

stopped" (for the Museum of American Finance). While the other commuters with Julius "marched along, shoulders up, heads low, all in black and gray," Julius "felt conspicuous, the only person among the crowd who stopped to look out from the overpass at the site. Everyone else went straight ahead, and nothing separated them, nothing separated us, from the people who had worked directly across the street on the day of disaster" (58). He considers that the 9/11 ruins are "not the first erasure on the site"; before the towers were built, a network of forgotten streets had been obliterated in the 1960s, and before that, the old Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwives, the Christian Syrian enclave from the late 1800s—"the site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten. There had been communities here before Columbus ever set sail" (58-59).

As much as Julius rises above urban forgetfulness through his observations of the city, his rootlessness and dissociation separate him from the "rooted" suffering of his patient "V.," who struggles with depression partly because of the emotional toll of researching her ancestors' suffering. V., a member of the Delaware tribe and an assistant professor at New York University, writes an acclaimed historical biography about Cornelis van Tienhoven (*The Monster of New Amsterdam*)—a seventeenth-century Dutch *schout*[37] who brutally murdered hundreds of native Americans during raids, bringing back the victims' heads on pikes. V. reads through the relevant seventeenth-century records, "written in calm and pious language that presented mass murder as little more than the regrettable side effect of colonizing the land" (26). Her book "[comes] with much of the emotional distance typical of an academic study," but V.'s research affects her profoundly; she cannot pretend it isn't about her life because she bears the burden of knowing that her country "erased [her] past…There are almost no Native Americans in New York City,

[37] A municipal or administrative officer in the Low Countries and in Dutch colonies. "Schout, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 11, 2023.

and very few in all of the Northeast. It isn't right that people are not terrified by this because this is a terrifying thing that happened to a vast population" (27). The past remains as a vivid bruise in her consciousness. As Julius notices that her trembling eyelids and tears are "the only physical signs of distress" on her otherwise "curiously serene face," he approaches her story with a diagnostic interest rather than a human one; he later purchases her book hoping that the "moments when it left the strict historical record and betrayed some subjective analysis" would "give [him] further insight into her psychological state" (27).

Cole pushes Julius' distance from and diagnostic abstraction of suffering to its limits through the incorporation of physical trauma—the physical trauma that Julius inflicts in his past, and that he experiences in his present. The ending of the novel reveals that Julius sexually assaulted his childhood friend Dayo's older sister Moji as a teen, yet he has no recollection of her when she emerges in a grocery store in Union Square. Before describing this sudden reencounter, Julius muses that

> We experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities. 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 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 that I had been constructing since 1992 (155-56).

Julius completely rids of Moji's existence in the "secure" rewrite of his personal history, while Moji thinks of Julius "either fleetingly or in extended agonies, for almost every day of her adult life"; she is not granted "the luxury of denial…[Julius] had been ever-present in her life, like a stain or a scar" (244). Like patient V.'s sorrow at her peoples' erased history, her trauma intensifies through the willing blindness of those around her— her brother Dayo's silent neglect as a bystander, and her abuser Julius' cruel carelessness in forgetting about her existence.

Cole positions Julius' description of his own physical trauma in narrative proximity to Moji's reveal, to highlight Julius' lack of resonance with Moji's pain despite his recent firsthand account as an assault victim. On his way home from work, Julius encounters three black teen boys near Morningside Park and they, unprovoked, beat him in "a quick, preplanned choreography"; Julius initially begs them to stop, but eventually "lost the will to speak, and took the blows in silence" (212). Much worse than the excruciating pain, however, is the anticipation of the mental and physical scars the attack would leave—as Julius lies on the ground, "time became material in a strange new way: fragmented, torn into incoherent tufts, and at the same time spreading, like something spilled, like a stain" (212). Julius' trauma, in its visceral depiction, makes visible Moji's obscured experience. He describes his mouth as "uncooperative, alien, ugly" as he moves his tongue around its inside after the attack; he thinks of "every cliché by which the assault could be minimized" ("These things happen," "it could have been worse"); he realizes two weeks later that what he initially assumed was a minor bruise on his trampled hand had been a bone fracture (213-18). Comparatively, Moji's precise memory of her assault is barely given narrative space. As she repeatedly asks Julius to "say something" in reaction, Julius recedes into his default mode of erudition and detachment, thinking about Camus' retelling of an episode from Nietszche's youth (244-46). Whether Moji is provided with any acknowledgement or apology from Julius is left unclear.

This lack of resolution, and Julius' dissociation from what would be an emotional climax, emphasizes the novel's ultimate paradox: the illuminating, singular gaze of the cosmopolite penetrates the city's layered erasure of human rights abuses, yet evades the opacity of his own mind. As Julius narrates before Moji's reveal, "each person must…take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque

to him. Perhaps this is what we mean by sanity: that, whatever our self-admitted eccentricity might be, we are not the villains of our own stories" (243). Previously, while entertaining his friends with "humorous tales from the horror of mental illnesses," Julius claims that paranoid schizophrenics are good storytellers because they engage in building a world that is "remarkably consistent" within "the parameters of their own realities…they looked crazy only from the outside" (201-2). The barrier separating self-calibrated sanity and the "real insanity" of a "deep down, in-the-gut disjunction" between material and personally invented realities, then, becomes tenuous (202).

Cole points to this tenuous distinction in our definitions of objective and constructed realities to merge his macroscopic and microscopic consideration of epistemic confidence. Julius resides in a city that is the symbolic beacon of America's multiculturalism, yet recognizes the "unseen psychic distress" manifested in the landscape its subjects; to most New Yorkers, certain historical realities of all-consuming war or genocide exist "only as footnotes" (201). In his training as a psychiatrist, Julius wonders whether the diagnostic practice of "seeing the world as a collection of tribes" and its reliance on "carefully calibrated knowledge" could truthfully decipher the nuances of the human soul; ironically, his own consciousness, carefully calibrated, is marked by a blind spot of fateful significance (204-6). Cole's *flâneur*—perceptive of the gaps present in a collectively varnished account of modern history, yet unaware of the gaps present in his own invented reality—fuses a public and private loss of epistemic control.

Hence, Julius' *flâneurie* enables a depiction of a post world-war II, post-9/11 metropolis that is at once objective in its incorporation of encyclopedic entries on various acts of international violence, and subjective in its incorporation of immigrant voices. W.G. Sebald, one of Cole's most noted influences, points to the necessity of such panoramic and microscopic

accounts ("synoptic" and "artificial" views) in an authentic literary depiction of history.[38] Following Sebald's ethos of uncertainty, Cole synthesizes close-up individual stories with real-world reports in his narrative (i.e. patient V.'s emotional turmoil in writing about van Tienhoven, and Julius' factual retelling of van Tienhoven's brutality) to avoid a naturalized, or mythologized, account of history—"the ossification of the past into repeated but unanalyzed stories."[39] This outlook is evident not only in the novel's repeated emphasis on New York City's numbness to history, but also in Saito and Julius' discussion about the cyclicality of mass atrocity; as Julius reads Saito the *Times* headlines about the invasion of Iraq, and how he cannot stop thinking about the news, Saito notes that he felt similarly about the Korean war—

> But the war ended, as all wars eventually end; it exhausted itself. By the time Vietnam came around, it was a different pressure, at least for those of us who had been psychologically invested in Korea. Vietnam was a mental battle for the young, for the generation after ours. You go through that experience only once, the experience of how futile a war can be. You latch on to all the names of the towns, all the news…There are towns whose names evoke a real horror in you because you have learned to link those names with atrocities, but, for the generation that follows yours, those names will mean nothing; forgetting doesn't take long. Fallujah will be as meaningless to them as Daejeon is to you (170-71).

The headlines become empty signifiers to those beyond the generation impacted. Saito, detained at an internment camp during World War II and mentally involved in the Korean war, becomes numb to his wounds through the repetition of violence.

On one of his walks, Julius muses while staring at the Hudson river that "...we all were…paying as little attention as possible to the pair of black eternities between which our little light intervened" (56). When he later envisions Saito, in the September of 1944 "with [his] eyes open as if shut, mercifully seeing nothing of the brutal half century ahead and, better yet, hardly anything at all of all that was happening in [his] world, the corpse-filled cities, camps, beaches,

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[38] W. G. (Winfried Georg) Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Random House, 2003), 25-26, qtd. In Walkowitz, 155.
[39] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 11. Qtd. in Walkowitz, 155.

and field, the unspeakable worldwide disorder of that very moment," the novel questions whether the "little light" of our benumbed present can overcome the depths of the past to seek a cosmopolitan future. As I have claimed in the chapter's first section, Cole self-reflexively highlights the limits of a merely aesthetic cosmopolitanism through Julius' "deaf," affectless rendering of his subjects. Yet, by linking the limits of his narrator's metropolitan perception to the innate blind spots of human perception through the vehicle of psychiatry, Cole's own aesthetic holds cosmopolitan aspirations. In this double gesture, *Open City* encapsulates Walkowitz's notion that a modernist critical cosmopolitanism reflects both a desire for and an ambivalence about art as a collective social project.[40] Cole conveys a distrust in the civilizing, transnational ideals of aesthetic cosmopolitanism by resisting the "neutral models" of evaluation and detachment; simultaneously, he attempts a cosmopolitan aesthetic that not only contemplates our capacity to negotiate moral norms through intercultural encounters, but also examines the norms of critical thinking itself.[41] In this way, Cole diverges from the optimistic cosmopolitanism of Appiah, and instead questions the possibility of progress. *Open City*'s stance on cosmopolitanism, then, is at once hesitant and hopeful, as conveyed by one of the novel's final passages in which Julius is trapped on a fire escape outside Carnegie Hall after a performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony:

> But, in the dark spaces between the dead, shining stars, were stars I could not see, stars that still existed, and were giving out light that hadn't reached me yet, stars now living and giving out light but present to me only as blank interstices. Their light would arrive on earth eventually, long after I and my whole generation and the generation after me had slipped out of time…I wished I could meet the unseen starlight halfway, starlight that was unreachable because my entire being was caught up in a blind spot, starlight that was coming as fast as it could, covering almost seven hundred million miles every hour. It would arrive in due time, and cast its illumination on other humans, or perhaps on other configurations of our world, after unimaginable catastrophes had altered it beyond recognition. My hands held metal, my eyes starlight, and it was as though I had come so

[40] Walkowitz, 4.
[41] Ibid., 2.

close to something that it had fallen out of focus, or fallen so far away from it that it had faded away (247-48).

CHAPTER II

Strangeness Mirrored:
Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and Cosmopolitan Form

I have suggested in the first chapter that Cole employs psychiatry as a tool to question the boundary of calibrated knowledge, and to highlight the "blind spots" of perception. I have also suggested that this questioning of epistemic belief contributes to the modernist posture of Cole's cosmopolitanism. As Irving Howe notes, modernist culture adheres to the problematization of human morality through such questioning not merely because of the dissolution of traditional beliefs and absolutism, but because "men learn to find comfort in their wounds…it comes to be considered good, proper, and even beautiful that men should live in discomfort."[42] Accordingly, Nietzsche claims that "Objection, evasion, joyous distrust, and love of irony are signs of health; everything absolute belongs to pathology."[43] If Cole negates the absolutism of pathology in a more literal fashion—through the lacunae present in the lived reality of a psychiatrist—Ishiguro adopts a figurative approach to an epistemic "wound," through stylistic experimentation.

Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* tells the story of a renowned concert pianist named Ryder, invited to perform at an unnamed Central European city. To his frustration, he spends the three days leading up to the concert bogged down by the townspeople's personal favors, long-winded confessions, and collective anxieties about the city's declining culture. The novel operates in a seemingly self-contained world, in two interconnected ways. For one, it withholds a definitive setting and historical period from the reader; the text's diminution of contextual clues locates it in an aesthetic realm removed from the real. Moreover, the narrative's dream logic and embedded psychological doubles prompt a reading of its world as the fragmented psyche of the

[42] Irving Howe, "The Culture of Modernism," in *Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 9.
[43] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, qtd. In Howe.

protagonist. I argue in this section that *The Unconsoled*'s elimination of the extrapoetical, and its narrative and thematic syntheses of observed and projected realities, gesture to a detached cosmopolitan aesthetic.

Literature as Other: Heterotopia, Cyclicality, Enclosure

Ishiguro addresses the novel's lack of socio-cultural and historical determinants in an interview: "you could almost set that thing down anywhere. It was by and large a landscape of imagination."[44] The novelist has often clarified that his works do not strive for historical accuracy, and that they should not be viewed through a strictly realist or national lens. Particularly in relation to his first two novels (*A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*)—one dealing with Japanese characters and the other set in post-war Japan—he had begun to be known as "a kind of Japanese foreign correspondent in residence in London," a role he consciously cast off with *The Remains of the Day*.[45] His usage of history "as a piece of orchestration to bring out [universal] themes" is pushed to its limits with the ahistorical novel in question.[46] Richard Robinson outlines the three kinds of critical responses to setting in *The Unconsoled*: those who happily accepted the novel's removal from geographic, cultural and political space, those who criticized the novel's detachment as a failed imitation of Kafka's style, and those who highlighted the significance of Central European history and culture in the novel. Notable examples of the second group of critics include Amit Chaudhuri, who commented on Ishiguro's refusal to provide Kafka's "minuteness of observation," and James Wood, who

[44] Kazuo Ishiguro, "Rooted in a Small Space: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," in *Conversations With Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, Literary Conversations Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 146-154, 151.
[45] Ibid., 149.
[46] Ibid.

compared Kafka's self-described stylistic effect of "seasickness on dry land" with Ishiguro's "seasickness at sea."[47] Both critics, among others, implied that there was not enough naturalistic detail or socio-historical grounding, nor compensatory metaphysical "pressure," for the novel to succeed as a Kafkaesque allegory.[48]

Indeed, Ishiguro offers only the minimum description necessary for the reader to conjure familiar, generic scenes. On his first walk outside the hotel after arriving at an unnamed city on his tour as a pianist, Ryder walks through an "unpromising" series of streets lined with "glassy office buildings" to reach the city's pleasant Old Town—as he crosses the "humped-back bridge," he notices "colourful awnings", "café parasols", "the movement of waiters and of children running in circles", "a tiny dog", "narrow cobbled streets", and "souvenir shops, confectioners and bakeries."[49] In a later drive around the city with Stephan Hoffman (the hotel manager's son), he describes a residential district close to the city center with "tram lines", "an occasional café or restaurant closed for the night", and "stately apartment buildings" (55). In multiple sequences, Stephan drives Ryder through quiet long roads with "dark open spaces—perhaps farmland", or "thick forests", on either side (120, 191).

Robinson invokes Roland Barthes' definition of the "reality effect" to emphasize *The Unconsoled*'s deviation from a mimetic imperative. Barthes highlights Flaubert's description of the Rouen Cathedral in *Madame Bovary* to posit that realist novels aimed for a new kind of verisimilitude: the cathedral, while still subject to "the tyrannical constraints" of aesthetic verisimilitude, is used as a "backcloth for metaphor" rather than as a representational setting.[50]

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[47] Amit Chaudhuri, "Unlike Kafka," *London Review of Books*, June 8, 1995, 30-31., James Wood, "Ishiguro in the Underworld," *Guardian*, May 5, 1996, 5., qtd. in Richard Robinson, "Nowhere, in Particular: Kazuo Ishiguro's The Unconsoled and Central Europe," *Critical Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2006 Winter 2006): 107–30, 110.
[48] Robinson, 109-110.
[49] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, Reprint edition (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996), 31. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.
[50] Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 141–47, qtd. in Robinson, 111.

Barthes' conception of realism revolves around the absence of the signified in superfluous descriptive "residues" (insignificant gestures, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, redundant words).[51] Ishiguro's novel is anti-realist in this sense, as the reader never receives detailed self-contained referents like Flaubert's Rouen; instead, the minimal "collusions" between referents and signified content constructs an atopic space "with something of the virtual territory that Foucault called 'placeless place' or heterotopia."[52]

Foucault's introduction of heterotopia in "Of Other Spaces" yields a productive metaphor in considering Ishiguro's philosophy of space. Foucault presents the mirror as a metaphor to link utopias and heterotopias. Utopias, which are "fundamentally unreal spaces" that portray society in a perfected or upside-down form, are the mirror images of reality— "I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see there where I am absent."[53] Yet, Foucault reasons, the mirror is *also* a heterotopia, given that it is a materially real object "exert[ing] a sort of counteraction on the position I occupy"; that is, the mirror makes a place "at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there."[54] The "over there" in Foucault's article is centered on external heterotopias (such as prisons, museums, cemeteries) but I will draw on Foucault's mirror metaphor to suggest that Ishiguro attempts a spatial duality: the novel's space is both "real" in its aforementioned generality and its punctuated geographical references, and "unreal" in its absurdism, distortion,

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[51] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 146.
[52] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27, qtd. in Robinson. He notes that the term "atopia" or "atopos" is used by Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. In Barthes' text, *Atopos* is defined as a qualification given to Socrates by his interlocutors– "unclassifiable, of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality. Robinson uses the term to "avoid the ethical and political connotations of utopia and dystopia, which speak of aspirations towards a totalising ideal: atopian unusualness is…a place which can exist but which cannot be represented by the language of space" 113, 128.
[53] Foucault, 24.
[54] Ibid.

and insularity. Within this analogy, the mirror world—the "over there"—Ishiguro paints requires a suspension of disbelief to be perceived in its peculiar semi-reality.

The novel's unidentifiable town, despite its blandness and generic presence in the text, nonetheless possesses several distinguishing accents. Miss Collins' "large white apartment" is "several storeys high" with "dark wrought-iron balconies at each level" giving it a "Spanish flavour" (55). In another scene, Ryder drives with Sophie and Boris to a reception held at "an imposing house built in the manner of a French chateau" that was "full of faded charm, evoking the slow decline of some dreamy land-owning family" (260). A car park is described as "fenced off, like a corral on an American ranch" (242). Through sporadic glimpses into Ryder's memories—triggered by random appearances of people and objects from his past— we are aware that he spent his childhood in Worcestershire, England. He remarks that Fiona Roberts, "a girl from my village primary school in Worcestershire," had been a special friend to him until he moved to Manchester; When he comes across an old ruined car that turns out to be the family car from his childhood, he remembers the car parked outside "our little cottage in Worcestershire." (171, 261). A minor character implies that the novel's backdrop is a city smaller than Paris or Stuttgart, yet the city is significant enough to be part of the concert tour—Ryder's next stop on the train at the end of the novel is Helsinki (238, 526).

Why provide any relative location clues at all? Ishiguro creates a city still "connected with all the space that surrounds it" (like the mirror in Foucault's metaphor)—still aesthetically and geographically tied to a European landscape, but isolated in its separation from identifiable political affairs or historical events. When asked whether he had heard the "bad news" about Brodsky's dog's death, Ryder asks, "what bad news are you referring to? There's been so much bad news lately…the fighting in Africa and so on. Everywhere, bad news" (118). In another

curious scene, Ryder tries to console his son Boris after visiting his sick grandfather (Gustav, the hotel's porter), and notices a large sheet marked "Lost Property" on the wall:

> There was a long list of entries in every kind of handwriting, a column each for the date, the article lost and the owner's name. For some reason, I found the sheet diverting and went on studying it for a little while. The entries near the top appeared to have been written in earnest—a lost pen, a lost chess piece, a lost wallet. Then, from about halfway down, the entries grew facetious. Someone was claiming to have lost "three million US dollars". Another entry was that of "Genghis Khan" who had lost "the Asian Continent" (471).

Crafting a sense of atemporality and absurdity by lingering on the peripheries of "real-world matters" allows Ishiguro to avoid localizing the novel's universe, while playfully drawing attention to such avoidance. The temporospatial distortions and collapse that saturate Ryder's paths echo this self-aware insulation. Dressing rooms morph into classrooms, corridors spontaneously become dead ends, an entire night of sleep passes by in minutes, while a twenty minute-long conversation takes place in a brief elevator ride. Ryder has no control over his constantly shifting environment—external agents continue to inhibit his agency and movement. Traffic suddenly emerges whenever he is in a rush to get somewhere, townspeople that do not give him a second glance in one instant engulf him in the next, and a functionless brick wall—covering the entire breadth of the street leading up to the concert hall—blocks him from getting to his destination. When a passerby tells him the wall, while an annoyance to "an outsider" like Ryder, is "quite a tourist attraction," (comically, a nearby gift shop features various postcards depicting the wall) Ryder loses his patience; he yells that the wall is "quite typical of this town. Utterly preposterous obstacles everywhere" (388).

In another instance of absurd disruption, Ryder attempts to depart early from a stifling party, and looks for the door that he and Stephan Hoffman, in an earlier scene, exited through; he and Stephan had previously teleported to the labyrinthian hotel corridors by simply walking

through a door in the reception hall. In a quandary about which "vaguely familiar" door to choose, he thinks of

> The numerous scenes from movies in which a character, wishing to make an impressive exit from a room, flings open the wrong door and walks into a cupboard. Although for exactly the opposite reason—I wished us [Sophie, Boris, and myself] to leave so inconspicuously that when it was discussed afterwards no one would be quite sure at which point we had done so…In the end I settled for the door most central in the row simply because it was the most imposing. There were pearl inlays within its deep panels and stone columns flanking each side. And at this moment, in front of each column, there stood a uniformed waiter as rigid as any sentry. A doorway of this status, I reasoned, while it might not necessarily take us directly through to the hotel, was certain to lead somewhere of significance from where we would work out our route, away from the public gaze (278).

Of course, as Ryder opens the door with a deliberate nonchalance, "the very thing [he] had most feared" happens: the door leads to a broom cupboard, and mops loudly tumble out onto the marble floor (278). While the various characters that shepherd Ryder around the town can navigate its tangled spatiotemporal logic effortlessly, Ryder struggles to replicate such maneuvers when left unattended. This helplessness is deeply ironic, as the townspeople look to him for guidance—forcibly involving him in their personal crises and the communal loss of cultural identity. Ryder's arbitrary selection of the door's "status" founded on its decorative appeal, and his reasoning that even if it does not lead them to their ultimate destination, it would at the very least lead to a "significant" place, symbolize the townspeoples' blind faith in Ryder's ability to restore and enrich the town's artistic spirit. He is put on a pedestal because most townspeople believe—for reasons that are never made clear—that he is "not only the world's finest living pianist, but perhaps the very greatest of the century" (11).

Although his piano performance and speech will supposedly be the key to the town's restoration, Ryder is prevented from ever preparing for these occasions for his visit because of the townspeoples' unsolicited confessions. Many of these interruptions are repetitive annoyances

that contribute to the novel's frustrating lack of progression; characters consistently ask Ryder for small favors that are of no consequence for Ryder, but of great significance for them (e.g. Hoffman repeatedly inquires Ryder to look at his wife's albums compiling news articles about Ryder's career). However, some interruptions accrue greater weight, as they reveal facets of Ryder's past, present, and future. In Lukácsian terms, Ryder initially appears to be the prototypical modernist hero, "strictly confined within the limits of his own experience" and thrown-into-being in the town (in a Heideggerean sense).[55] Ishiguro's incorporation of Ryder's psychological doubles, however, enables the reader to piece together Ryder's interiority.

The narrative features an uncanny recurrence of the same melody in different keys: Stephan Hoffman, whose strained relationship with his parents unravel Ryder's estrangement from his family, and Leo Brodsky, the town's washed-up former musical icon, whose drunken trance and isolation foreshadow Ryder's future. The two musicians, as Ryder's personae, are also appropriately the two preceding acts to the novel's anticlimax—Ryder's anticipated performance. The strange "doubles" appear "as a defense put up by a distraught self"; Ryder's repressed memories and fears, under the "condition" of his return to a town he formerly resided in, "show up again and produce a feeling of uncanny strangeness."[56] If Teju Cole accentuates the dissonance between Julius' internal monologue and its intercultural "counterpoints," then, Ishiguro accentuates the ripples of resonance between Ryder and his subjects.[57] Rather than being "fixed and synthetic entities," Ishiguro's characters embody "a psychic battlefield, or an insoluble puzzle."[58]

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[55] György Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1963), 21.
[56] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 184.
[57] Birgit Neumann and Yvonne Kappel analyze Open City's contrapuntal fugue-like structure, and the novel's "intermedial poetics," in their article "Music and Latency in Teju Cole's "*Open City*: Presences of the Past" (see works consulted).
[58] Howe, 26.

The post-Freudian Uncanny, the "doubling of the strange and the familiar," begins with Kafka's "unclassifiable texts."[59] The oedipal struggles Rabaté underlines in Kafka's short story "The Judgment"—the universal ambivalence in love for one's parents, and the "apparently absurd condemnation" by such authority figures—certainly emerge in Ishiguro's character relationships.[60] The most obvious manifestation of this parent-child relationship is between the Hoffman couple and Stephan, their son.[61] Stephan Hoffman, like Ryder, plays piano from a young age to please his parents, yet never manages to meet their impossibly high expectations. Hoffman, who lives in constant fear that his cultured wife will see through his falsely crafted "role" (he initially lets her believe he composes music, even though he had never touched an instrument), projects his own insecurities onto Stephan; he tells Ryder that he wishes Stephan had "been blessed with at least some of the gifts her side of the family possess in such abundance." (350, 353). Christine Hoffman, emotionally reserved and sophisticated (with an "infectious" love for Baudelaire's poetry), spends Stephan's childhood as an invested patron of the town's art scene (351). She goes out of her way to give visiting musicians her personal praise in their dressing rooms after concerts, "even if a performer had done badly," but never regards her son's playing with anything more than "frosty" disdain (72, 69).

Stephan hopes to play *Dahlia* by Jean-Louis La Roche, a composer his father loves and his mother despises, but questions his decision repeatedly after his father informs him of Christine's distaste for anything La Roche. She had apparently let Hoffman know that she

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[59] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "From the Uncanny to the Unhomely," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis*, Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 71–92, 75, 79-80.

[60] Ibid., 80. In "The Judgment," Georg Bendemann writes a letter to a friend living in Russia that he is engaged to be married, but commits suicide a few hours later because he has been condemned by his sick father—Rabaté suggests that Kafka universalizes his own father's disapproval through Georg's father's convoluted logic of "judgment," prompting his readers to feel that they still react to authority as "sons."

[61] Naming the family "Hoffman" may or may not be a subtle nod to the novel's psychoanalytic influence; Freud famously developed his concept of the Uncanny drawing on E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman."

wanted Stephan to play Kazan's *Glass Passions*, a much more difficult piece; she does not directly communicate this demand, but implies it:

> You see, when I [Stephan] say Mother let Father know about the Kazan, I don't mean she actually told him. It's a little hard to explain to an outsider. The way it works is that Mother would somehow, you know, somehow just let it be known to Father without ever directly mentioning it. She'll do it through signals, which to him would be very clear. I'm not sure precisely what she did this time. Perhaps he'd come home and found her listening to *Glass Passions* on the stereo. Well, since she very rarely puts anything on the stereo, that would be a pretty obvious sign. Or perhaps Father had come to bed after his bath and found her reading a book in bed on Kazan, I don't know, it's just the way things have always been done between them (132).

Ryder advises that Stephan just stick to his original choice because it is too late to switch, but Stephan is paralyzed by the possibility of disappointing his mother yet again, and putting his father in distress as the mediator between them; Hoffman tells Stephan that he has "let them both down" by not picking up on Christine's cues (133). Stephan's dilemma, which Ryder initially seems to assess from a practical distance, echoes much later in the novel when Ryder finds himself in conflict about whether he should stick with his decision to perform Mullery's *Asbestos and Fibre*, remembering that his mother once expressed her irritation with the work. He considers playing Kazan's *Wind Tunnels* instead, trying to recall the "elusive fragment of memory" that prevents him from feeling at ease with his choice (344).

In the end, Stephan practices rigorously and plays *Glass Passions*, only for his parents to leave right before his performance. Hoffman claims Stephan was never fit to play "serious music" for "real concert audiences," and that "we [your mother and I] love you too much to be able to…see our own dear son being made a laughing stock" (480). Tragically, Stephan gives the performance of his life in their absence; the audience is astonished into complete silence at his rendition's "strangely intense quality…playing that virtually refused to be ignored" (482). Ryder's own performance never takes place, and his own parents, despite Ryder and the town's

painstaking effort in anticipating their arrival (Hoffman paints an elaborate vision of them getting to the concert hall in a "gleaming carriage" led by "beautifully groomed thoroughbreds"), never make an appearance; Ryder bitterly wonders, "Surely, it wasn't unreasonable of me to assume they would come this time? After all, I'm at the height of my powers now. How much longer am I supposed to go on traveling like this?" (379, 512). Stephan, unsatisfied still by the audience's applause—he argues that the townspeople's amazement at "a pretty ordinary performance of *Glass Passions*" reveals their provincialism—decides to venture "somewhere bigger, study under someone like Lubetkin or Peruzzi," to measure up to his parents' "highest standards" (520-21). This sentiment outlines the origins of Ryder's ambitions.

Leo Brodsky's diminished public presence and pitiful personal life, on the other hand, foretell Ryder's future. Karl Pedersen, one of the town's cultural "councilors," explains that Brodksy, an out-of-towner like Ryder, lives his life as a drunk recluse; he is often seen at the local library with his dog (his only companion) "thumbing through…these same turgid-looking volumes of history," and

> In a world of his own. I must say he was a sad sight. The morning light made him look rather feeble. There was a droplet on the end of his nose, his eyes seemed so far away and he'd quite forgotten the page he was holding. And it occurred to me it was a little cruel, the way the atmosphere had turned [the library is always much louder with people talking whenever Brodsky sits there silently]. It was as though they were taking advantage of him, though I'm not quite sure in what sense. But you see, another morning, he'd have been quite capable of silencing the lot of them in an instant. Well anyway, Mr Ryder, what I'm trying to say is that for many years that's who Mr Brodsky was to us (111).

The town's civic leaders (von Winterstein, the Countess, von Braun) characterize Brodsky as an odd hermit, but are determined to rehabilitate him after being reduced to tears while listening to old recordings of his concerts: "something we had so sorely missed over the years…the work of

a conductor not only immensely gifted, but who shared our values" (113). The magnificence of Brosky's heyday contrasts Christoff's current mediocrity.[62]

The dissolution of Brodsky's public status results in the dissolution of his relationship with Miss Collins, and clues woven throughout the novel gesture to the complexity of their history. In one scene, Miss Collins spots Brodsky on the street and chases after him, and thinks about his "shows of indifference" over the years while they take an awkward walk together (321). It is implied that Miss Collins still harbors nostalgia and hope for their past happiness as she leads Brodsky into Sternberg Garden, where they often conversed in the beginning of their relationship— "Miss Collins had rarely glanced towards that iron gate without experiencing a small tug somewhere within her…for all the prominence the Sternberg Garden had come to assume in [her] imagination, it was not an especially appealing place. Essentially a concreted square no larger than a supermarket car park" (323). In the garden, the awkwardness of their years apart seems to "evaporate entirely," but as they talk, Miss Collins comes to the conclusion that "It's nice to remember some of these things. But we can't live in the past" (324, 326).

The couple's separation is caused by Brodsky's alcoholism and abuse, which parallel Ryder's mistreatment of Sophie and Boris: while walking around a housing estate with Boris, Ryder is informed by a stranger (who turns out to be the family's former neighbor) of his past drinking, fights, and absence (214-15). Neither Ryder nor Brodsky reconnect with their significant others in the end. Ryder ultimately neglects Sophie and Boris yet again by deserting them at Gustav's (Sophie's father's) deathbed. Brodsky, who falls down in pain mid-concert on stage, asks for Miss Collins' embrace; in tears, she says that he wasted her life: "That's your real

[62] Henri Christoff is another musician from out of town who is propped up to a position of influence, but is now largely discredited by the townspeople. Pedersen explains that he had arrived during the town's cultural "hiatus" in which both designated "helms" of cultural life (the painter, Bernd, and the composer, Vollmöller) died within months of each other. The people demand a recital from Christoff every six months, but eventually start blaming him for the town's cultural void. See pages 98-99.

love, Leo, that wound…Me, the music, we're neither of us anything more to you than mistresses you seek consolation from. You'll always go back to your one real love. To that wound!" (498). Miss Collins deems Brodsky's "wound" as "nothing special…In this town alone, I know there are many people with far worse. And yet they carry on, every one of them, with greater courage than you ever did" (498-99). Her derision illustrates the limits of a modernist hail for the artist-as-Sisyphus; Brodsky, then, not only foreshadows Ryder's futile fate, but also projects Ishiguro's self-reflection about his own experimentation.

Brodsky's vanguard staging of Mullery's *Verticality*, the hollow ending of which symbolizes one temporal stage of Ryder's career in cyclical progression (another stage being Stephan's doomed initiation into the cycle), is emblematic of this extradiegetic self-reflection. Despite all comically tragic odds—an amputated leg and a shabby ironing board as a crutch—Brodsky offers the audience the artistic innovation they so craved. Ryder is thoroughly impressed by Brodsky's

> Push into ever stranger territories…He was almost perversely ignoring the outer structure of the music—the composer's nods towards tonality and melody that decorated the surface of the work—to focus instead on the peculiar life-forms hiding just under the shell. There was a slightly sordid quality about it all, something close to exhibitionism, that suggested Brodsky was himself profoundly embarrassed by the nature of what he was uncovering, but could not resist the compulsion to go yet further. The effect was unnerving, but compelling (492).

Ishiguro asks of the reader what Brodsky demands of his audience: to focus on "the peculiar life-forms"—the haunting repetition of failed relationships and unrealized goals—glistening underneath an exhaustively circuitous narrative structure densely layered with verbose and evasive interjections. Yet, Ishiguro proceeds into "stranger territories" with caution and a degree of self-deprecation. The novel's heterotopic landscape, cyclical logic, and uncanny merging of actual and projected realities, on the one hand, signal a kind of formalist containment; the reader

is prompted to "decode," to "analyse and construct," his or her impressions into a cohesive "system."[63] He or she is "obliged simply to concentrate on the text itself, to appreciate the strenuous experience of perceiving it for its own sake."[64] Ishiguro himself highlights the importance of maintaining consistent "rules" in his construction: "I wanted the reader to feel, after the initial period of confusion, that there were new laws…[in] a world that is seen so much from the point of view of one consciousness that it very boldly appropriates things that it finds to serve its needs."[65] On the other hand, the novel pokes fun at intellectual "disinterestedness" and the arbitrary qualifications of "high" art. Ishiguro's interest in the constructed binaries within our classification of art will be expounded upon further in the following section.

Localizing Universality: National Spirit and Aesthetic Transferability

The tension present between self and other in Ryder's psychological ties to independently existing characters manifests in the novel's take on a national versus "universal" style. That is, Ishiguro links the protagonist's crisis in navigating the familiar and the foreign—the internal and the external, the lived and the observed—to the city's crisis in navigating the nostalgic longing for cultural heritage and the restless want for an outsider's "modernizing" artistic influence. Through these interwoven dual threads—these "formal patterns of relevance and recognition" that "are crucial to the politics of cosmopolitanism"—Ishiguro "assert[s] the often-invisible connections between personal and international experiences."[66] In this section, I discuss how the novel's satirization of the "highbrow" and the "provincial" engages with broader notions of

[63] T. S. (Thomas Stearns) Eliot, "The Perfect Critic," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (S.l.: Bartleby Library, 1920). I borrow Eliot's vocabulary to emphasize that Ishiguro's novel demands a degree of disinterested, and rigorous, systematization.
[64] Timothy Richard Aubry, "The Intellectual Critics and the Pleasures of Complexity," in *Guilty Aesthetic Pleasures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 31–63, 35.
[65] Ishiguro, "Rooted in a Small Space," 152.
[66] Walkowitz, 6.

Volksgeist and *Bildung*.[67] The town's oscillation between a baseless confidence in the restorative capability of formal innovation, and a parochial rejection of said formal innovation, illustrates Ishiguro's central dilemma that is at once self-critical and general: can form attain "universality" and transcend historicity through decontextualization and transferability?

The townspeople, and Ryder, constantly suggest that the world of "high" art (symbolized in the novel by the realm of music) is inaccessible and incomprehensible to the "ordinary" person. Hypocritically, every "ordinary" character offers his or her two cents on what traits constitute musical innovation. Hoffman, who sees himself as an imposter next to his cultured wife, does not hesitate to criticize his son's piano playing as "charming" and "extremely accomplished in its way" but not fit for "serious" audiences' standards (479). "The Citizen's Mutual Support Group," which Gustav describes as "made up of ordinary people from every walk of life brought together by the sense of having suffered from the present crisis," appears periodically throughout the novel to discern the kind of artistic direction the town should pursue in order to restore its cultural faith (12). Most evidently, everyone Ryder encounters blindly believes he holds the answers to their cultural void, based entirely on his reputation—as opposed to his abilities, which are never put to test by the characters nor witnessed by the novel's readers.

Ordinary citizens ceaselessly romanticize the creative process as experienced by a genius of Ryder's stature. Hoffman, leading Ryder to a quiet location to practice, chirps that Ryder will find its tranquility ideal:

> …you'll be lost in your music. How I envy you, sir! You'll soon be browsing among your musical ideas. Just as if you were wandering through some magnificent gallery where by some miracle you'd been told you could pick up a shopping basket and take home

[67] *Volksgeist*: "The defining spirit or character of a particular nation of people." "Volksgeist, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. (accessed April 08, 2023). *Bildung*: "culture—political, economic, social, intellectual—as estrangement of the natural being." Kristeva invokes Hegel in discussing the "dialectical motion" with which consciousness becomes foreign to itself through encounters with "the alien and external." Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 144.

> whatever you fancied…I've always entertained just such a fantasy. My wife and I, walking through some wonderful gallery full of the most beautiful objects. Apart from ourselves, the place is deserted…there is a shopping basket on my arm, we have been told we can take whatever we wish. There would be certain rules, naturally. We could not take more than could be held in the basket. And of course, we would not be permitted to sell anything later on—not that we would dream of abusing such a sublime opportunity in that way…[the gallery] would be part of some large country mansion somewhere, perhaps overlooking vast areas of land. The balcony would have a spectacular view. And great statues of lions at each corner…In this fantasy, for some reason, there is always a storm about to break. The sky is slate grey, and yet somehow the shadows are all as though the brightest summer sun were shining on us. Creepers, ivy, all over the terrace. And just my wife and I, our supermarket basket still empty, discussing our choice…I'm being indulgent. It's just that this is how I imagine it must be for someone like yourself, someone of your genius, left at a piano for an hour or so in tranquil surroundings. That this is how it must be for the inspired. You will wander amidst your sublime musical ideas. You will examine this one, shake your head, put it back…Ha! How Beautiful it must be inside your head, Mr Ryder! How I would love to be able to accompany you on the journey you will embark on the moment your fingers touch the keys. But of course, you will go where I can't possibly follow (345).

Hoffman's ekphrastic fantasy spins the illusory strands that fabricate a collective vision of grandeur surrounding the messianic "genius" (Ryder, in this case). The first strand is the implication of the genius' wealth and leisure; he is able to take whatever invaluable object he wants as he saunters through the gallery, but takes his time choosing, knowing he can access the space again. His deliberation delights in its purposelessness: it is stripped of commercial motivations. As if to unintentionally validate his class envy, Hoffman cannot reach this relaxed upper echelon even within his own fantasy, as he can only conceive of "a supermarket basket" to hold his treasures. The second strand is the distinction made between the aesthete's "actual life" and his removed "imaginative life," as outlined by formalist critic Roger Fry; here, Ryder's musical ideas float in a transcendent state "distinguished by the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion."[68] This supposed sense of clarity and freedom is crucial to Hoffman's fantasy, even more so than the choices being made. In other words, it is crucial that the genius is both a spectator and participant of his aesthetic

[68] Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 11.

emotions—that he exists "both on the stage and in the auditorium."[69] The third strand is the parallel drawn between the lion-adorned museum as a sacred space that "converts what were once displays of material wealth and social status into displays of spiritual wealth," and the sublime space of Romantic contemplation—Hoffman's dramatic rendering of him and his wife, spotlit, gazing at a shadowy vastness, is suspiciously reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* "for some reason."[70] These strands act as the framework for my following analysis of the novel's conceptions of national and universal art, and their respective spiritual and aesthetic value.

Upon painting this vivid portrait of Ryder's brilliance, Hoffman apologetically makes a disclaimer that he cannot "possibly follow" Ryder to his prismatic aesthetic realm. In turn, Ryder "mutters something nondescript" and the two walk in silence (345). Ryder's taciturn demeanor and emotional reticence are ironic in the context of his designated role as visitor: a translator and renovator of "modern" musical conventions. Henri Christoff, the best musician the town has had to offer for the past seventeen years (who is now reduced to being called "a provincial cellist"), explains the current cultural climate to Ryder as they walk to a Citizen's Mutual Support Group meeting (196). The people at the meeting, Christoff says, are "the very few in this town one might reasonably describe as intellectuals" who "understand something of how the modern forms work," unlike the town's civic leaders (the same group reduced to tears by old recordings of Brodsky's concerts) who are "too proud" to attend these meetings or to admit to their inability to understand modern forms (187, 185). Christoff reasons that

> The modern forms, they're so complex now. Kazan, Mullery, Yoshimoto. Even for a trained musician such as myself, it's hard now, very hard. The likes of von Winterstein, the Countess, what chance do they have?...To them it's just crashing noise, a whirl of

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[69] Ibid., 26-27.
[70] Carol Duncan, "Museums and Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 88–103, 95.

> strange rhythms…Once it was simply Mozart, Bach, Tchaikovsky. Even the man in the street could make a reasoned guess about that sort of music. But the modern forms! How can people like this, untrained, provincial people, how can they ever understand such things, however great a sense of duty they feel towards the community? They can't distinguish a crushed cadence from a struck motif. Or a fractured time signature from a sequence of vented rests. And now they misread the whole situation! They want things to go the opposite way! (185-86)

Despite Christoff's positive characterization of the group of intellectuals, they berate everything Christoff says during the meeting regarding issues like the "controversy concerning ringed harmonies"; his "unnecessarily slow delivery, the way he explained things twice and three times" as he reads from his folder of "facts" irritates both Ryder and the members present (196). The same people who hailed Christoff's initial contribution to the town when he arrived— "an approach, a system that would allow [the discontented public] some way into the likes of Kazan and Mullery. Some way of discovering meaning and value in the works"—now condemn his approach as "mechanical" and as "stif[ling] natural emotion" (190). Von Winterstein and the Countess, dissatisfied with Christoff's formalist approach to music, want to "go the opposite way" and reintroduce Brodsky as the town's figurehead.

What exactly does Christoff's method consist of, and how is it opposed? The vocabulary Ishiguro uses to describe his "modern" method is entirely constructed, and can be comically pretentious—a "pigmented triad" sounds like utter nonsense. Yet, this artificial system of conventions captures the decontextualized, detached, cosmopolitan aesthetic Ishiguro himself attempts with *The Unconsoled*.[71] In this sense, the ensuing debate between Christoff, who is alone in his defense of the "system," and Ryder, applauded for his criticism of formal restraints,

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[71] Ishiguro perhaps uses the medium of music not only because of his own experiences as a musician, but because of the indispensability of the medium in shaping modernist formalism. Ortega claims that "In Wagner, melodrama comes to a peak. Now, an artistic form, on reaching its maximum, is likely to topple over into its opposite…we find that in Wagner the human voice has already ceased to be the protagonist and is drowned in the cosmic din of the orchestra. However, a more radical change was to follow. Music had to be relieved of private sentiments and purified in an exemplary objectification. This was the deed of Debussy…Debussy dehumanized music."José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," in *The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Writings on Art and Culture*, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 1–50, 27-28.

reflects Ishiguro's internal dialogue concerning the novel's experimental containment (as outlined in the first section of this chapter). Ryder opines that contrary to Christoff's belief, pigmented triads *do not* have intrinsic emotional value regardless of context: "its emotional colour can change significantly not only according to context, but according to volume." He also argues that "Kazan [whose formalist interpretation Christoff upholds] never benefits from formalised restraints. Neither from the circular dynamic, nor even a double-bar structure. There are simply too many layers, too many emotions" (197, 201).

This (deliberately) convoluted analogical rejection of a formalist literary approach echoes Lukács' conviction that modernist "abstract particularity" cannot replace realist "concrete typicality."[72] That is, Lukác argues that the novel form (in Ishiguro's metaphor, Christoff's musical "approach") cannot succeed as self-contained allegory; it must draw on and reflect social context. Ishiguro's merging of musical conventions with literary ones comes further into light with Ryder's comment that a formally restrained approach is often coupled with "other unattractive traits": "A hostility towards the introspective tone, most often characterised by an over-use of the crushed cadence," "pointlessly matching fragmented passages with each other," and "a megalomania masquerading behind a modest and kindly manner" (202). These three traits respectively mirror Ishiguro's own collapsed temporality, collaged narrative, and his self-indulgent experimentation.[73]

Although the group, scorning Christoff's methods, is awestruck by Ryder's criticism (one woman mutters "'that's it, that's it,' as though [Ryder] had just articulated something she had

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[72] Lukács, 43. Lukács posits that modernist allegory (exemplified by Kafka) rejects immanence, but fails to succeed due to its "transcendental Nothingness." It relies on the "basic ideological determination of form and content," but in doing so, "leads to the destruction of literature as such." 45.

[73] Ishiguro notes, in writing *The Unconsoled*, "I probably did err on the side of playing a lick [here and there] simply because nobody had ever played such a lick before," as opposed to his previous fidelity to "required" and familiar technical maneuvers (in *Remains of the Day*). The term "megalomania" here pokes fun at the "power trip" of stylistic experimentation. Ishiguro, "Rooted in a Small Space," 149.

been struggling to formulate for years"), Ryder does not provide an actual alternative direction; he vaguely claims that the musician must rise to the challenge of overcoming "the temptation to resort to such devices" when faced with a complex composition, instead of "resort[ing] to restraints…One should not, in any case, attempt to make a virtue out of one's limitations" (201). The "opposite way," indicating the town's wish to return to a past artistic heyday, is equally vague as a solution. Yet, both the civic leaders and Christoff's group of intellectuals (who he claims were once his greatest advocates) express their strong belief in it. The mission to revive Brodsky's image and status, to return to his "true music" and to "re-discover the happiness we once had," serves as an abstract hope against the community's resignation "to being just another cold, lonely city" without "soul" (113, 115, 107). Interestingly, Brodsky (like Christoff and Ryder) is an outsider, not a native genius. Robinson posits that the novel's tension between natives and outsiders "has peculiarly Germanic-Slav coordinates…the cultural identity of the city is always imported."[74] He suggests that "the former confidence of Austro-Germanic tradition (Enlightenment, Romantic) has drained away; outsiders are needed to revivify it."[75]

I would further this reading to argue that Ishiguro engages with Germanic intellectual history to explore broader questions involving nationalism and universalism. Kristeva outlines the legacy of Enlightenment moral philosophy in two "contrapuntal" lines of thinking: on one side, Kant's rational universalism, and on the other, the Romantic inversion and German nationalism (she hones in on Herder's concept of *Volksgeist*).[76]

> It can be said that in central and eastern Europe the dissolution of Napoleon's Empire did not lead to the formation of a despotic state sufficiently powerful and well-ordered to further the development of political will…Luther's Protestantism inverted into a pragmatic mystique concerned with individual accomplishment what in France produced a common sense of what social stakes were entailed and in England a democratic public

[74] Robinson, 116.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 169.

> opinion eager for political sovereignty. Undoubtedly numerous elements have, through Klopstock, Moser, and especially Herder, ended in the advent of the notion of national community, *Gemeinschaft*: not a political one, but organic, evolutionary, at the same time vital and metaphysical—the expression of a nearly irrational and indiscernible spirit that is summoned up by the word *Gemeinsinn*. A supreme value, such a national spirit, *Volksgeist*, is not, with Herder, biological, "scientific," or even political, but essentially moral.[77]

Such "romantic withdrawal into the mystique of the past, into the people's character, or into the individual and national genius—all irreducible, rebel, unthinkable, and restorative," in opposition to the "universalist abstraction" of the French Enlightenment, leaves "room both for national withdrawal (in times of defeat and difficulties, as a structure insuring an archaic integrity, an indispensable guarantee for [the nation as] family) and national pride (during periods of aggression, as the spearhead of a policy of economic and military expansion)."[78]

The novel's incorporation of the "Sattler monument," a nondescript building at the peak of a steep hill that Ryder poses in front of for an article about his visit (the monument is described as akin to "a single turret…removed from a medieval castle"), embodies these notions of national withdrawal and pride (182). Ryder has no idea what the monument stands for when a journalist and photographer ask him to stand in front of it, but the photo causes a stir, because of Max Sattler's place in the citizens' imaginations; his role is "mythical. Sometimes he's feared, sometimes he's abhorred. At other times, his memory is worshipped" (374). Sattler's political ideology is unspecified, but Pedersen implies that some people wonder whether the town would have become a city like Antwerp or Stuttgart "if we'd only…allowed Max Sattler to take us where he wished" (374). Yet Pedersen contends that Sattler could never have changed anything "fundamental," because of certain "embedded" things about the town, and because "it's simply not in this city's nature to embrace the extremes of Sattler. He holds an attraction for certain

[77] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 176.
[78] Ibid., 177.

people *precisely because* he's so distant, a piece of local myth. Reintroduce him as a serious prospect…people here will panic" (374-75). Sattler's "extremism" could be symbolic of an imperialist past, but more pertinently, it seems symbolic of a cultural conservatism. The latter connection is made evident when Christoff, on the defense from the townspeople's attacks, accuses Ryder of aligning himself with Sattler's values by posing for the photo. The group of intellectuals decides that Ryder's "gesture" only further indicates the "misguidedness" of Christoff's present systematic approach—they equate Sattler's myth with a return to tradition.

In light of the novel's equally exclusionary and unrealized dual aesthetic regimes (formalist / naturalist, disinterested / attached, universal / national), locked in perpetual conflict, the intricate "porter's dance"—what Kristeva might label a "civic form of nationalism" that protects democratic practices and voluntary affiliations—is distinctly gratifying and inclusionary.[79] Gustav, the hotel's aged porter (and also Ryder's father-in-law), invites an anxiety-ridden Ryder to watch an uplifting performance by an adoring band of porters and gypsy musicians at the Hungarian Café. Gustav, the eldest and most respected performer of the group, appears to lead the jovial dance ("Come on, let's show Mr Ryder how we *really* enjoy ourselves!"), which Ishiguro describes in painstaking detail (the following passage is only one fragment of the chapter-long ordeal) (395).

> It was a curious, static dance, the feet hardly leaving the table surface, with the emphasis on the statuesque qualities of the human body rather than its agility or mobile grace. The bearded porter adopted a pose like some Greek god, his arms positioned as though carrying an invisible burden, and as the clapping and the shouts of encouragement continued, he would subtly change the angle of his hip or rotate himself slowly. I wondered for a moment if the whole thing was supposed to be comic, but for all the exuberant laughter around the table, it soon became clear there was no satiric intention in the performance (396).

[79] Kristeva, like Hollinger, positions the value of these civic forms over "the dangerous destructiveness of ethnic nationalisms." Anderson, 15.

A random stranger in the crowd, a frequent participant in the ritual, seems certain that Ryder would have heard about this peculiar folk tradition. Despite never having heard of the ritual, Ryder soon begins to feel a "human warmth" that engulfs him, and easily immerses himself in the porters' communal spirit (398). This organic evocation of kinship certainly seems more reminiscent of *Volksgeist*, as opposed to the intellectuals' and councilors' hazy attachment to Brodsky.

Its overwhelming "human warmth" also sharply contrasts Ryder's default affectlessness. In a childhood memory, he tells Fiona (one of the few old classmates that resurface in his present), that he *likes* being lonely: he feels confident in this proclamation, as he had been practicing an art of loneliness for several months by that point. These tragic "training sessions" involve a young Ryder forcing himself to sit under a large oak tree whenever he feels the urge to run home; he fights off these emotions to free himself from "immaturity."[80] The townspeople's melancholy shadows Ryder's emotional estrangement. Christine Hoffman confides in Ryder that she was never thought of as a "cold person" in her youth (416). She thought for a long time that replacing Christoff's mechanical approach with "someone more substantial" would cure her ennui, but now wonders, "It might even be part of the aging process. After all, we get older and parts of us start to die. Perhaps we start to die emotionally too" (417). She keeps having early morning dreams "about tenderness"—nothing significant happens in these dreams; she watches Stephan play in the garden, and unpacks a suitcase in comfortable silence with her husband. (416). In his typical manner, Ishiguro melds the emotional crises present in "the micro intimacies of domesticity" with an (imagined) historical period of communal discontent.[81]

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[80] These "training sessions" highlight Ryder's dysfunctional childhood and his quarreling parents' neglect of him—Ryder's son Boris' isolation throughout the plot echoes this loneliness, perhaps symbolic of Ryder's "inner child."

[81] Walkowitz, 31.

Ultimately, the aesthetic solutions to this discontentment, whether stemming from national heritage or from an external, globalizing source, fail to "console." The promisingly energetic porter's dance ends with Gustav getting fatally injured, leading to his eventual death. The porters' small request for Ryder to mention their profession's diminishing reputation in the town—symbolic of a fading folk art—is unmet. Brodsky's revolutionary interpretation of *Verticality*, which infuses a harshly modern structure with emotional nuance and passion, prompts the orchestra musicians' "expressions of incredulity, distress, even disgust" in a "clear sign of mutiny," and the audience's visible discomfort (some guests leave mid-concert) (494). Their panic subsides only after von Winterstein, the mayor, gives "a fine speech…about the splendid heritage of this city, all the things we've got to be proud of" (516). The climactic concert that dangles over the entirety of the novel's plot leaves the town's culture unchanged. Stephan tells Ryder in private that Brodsky's performance, while "it was the finest thing that's been heard in this concert hall for many many years," was too extreme for the startled town—they want something only "a *little* different [from Christoff's approach]. A new name, at least" (522). Thus, Ryder's raison d'etre in the novel's world—to "localize" a new cosmopolitan approach to art—is nullified. He ends the story where he started: a rootless, isolated traveler.

Coda

Walter Benjamin reckons that Baudelaire always remained aware of the modern hero's predestination for doom—that only after modernism's "time has run out…it will become apparent whether it will ever be able to become antiquity."[82]

> He experienced the ancient claim to immortality as his claim to being read as an ancient writer some day. "That all modernism is worthy of becoming antiquity one day"—to him that defined the artistic mission generally. In Baudelaire Gustave Kahn very aptly noticed a "*refus de l'occasion, tendu par la nature du prétexte lyrique*".[83] What made him indifferent towards opportunities and occasions was the consciousness of that mission. In the epoch to which he belonged, nothing came closer to the "task" of the ancient hero, to the "labours" of a Hercules than the task imposed upon him as his very own; to give shape to modernity.[84]

Upon examining Teju Cole's *Open City* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, one wonders whether the works share the poet's belief in the eternal, and universal, value of exalted aesthetic pleasure and autonomy. Cole's encyclopedic and variegated incorporation of literary and artistic elements in Julius' thought narrative clearly highlights his own fascination with cultural cosmopolitanisms; yet, he is reluctant to forge a lasting connection between a cultivated mind and an empathetic one. Ishiguro, who offers an interpretation of a universal unconscious through a removed, "contained" aesthetic, nonetheless emphasizes the futility of reconciling the demands of equally arbitrary aesthetic regimes. Both Cole and Ishiguro question the utopian inflections in Appiah and Kristeva's new cosmopolitanisms: Cole considers the limits of intercultural encounters in fostering tolerance and understanding, and Ishiguro considers the limits of universal form in overcoming national history and identity.

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[82] Walter Benjamin, "Modernism," in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Verso Classics (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 67–102, 81.
[83] Translation: "refusal of the occasion, strained by the nature of the lyrical pretext." Gustave Khan, "Preface to *Mon coeur mis à nu et Fusées*," 15. Qtd. in Benjamin, "Modernism," 81.
[84] Ibid.

Within one of the contributing essays to Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah's immensely generative volume *Cosmopolitics*, Scott Malcomson coins the term "actually existing cosmopolitanism" to highlight the inevitable failings of high-level academic debates on the concept. He suggests that "philosophy is of limited use in thinking about cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan's challenges are not in theory but in practice, and in practice Kant and the cosmopolitan Stoics of classical Greece and Rome are not of great use."[85] Actually existing cosmopolitanism, he reasons, is *spiritual* (religio-military expansion), *anti-imperial* or *extranational* (adopting external social or political models), *merchant* (the global trade network), or *popular* (the circulation of entertainment). Yet all of the above real systems "involve individuals with limited choices deciding to enter into something larger than their immediate cultures," which explains why they "rarely enter into scholarly discussions of cosmopolitanism: to argue that the choice of cosmopolitanism is in some sense self-betraying and made under duress takes away much of its ethical attractiveness. If cosmopolitanism is both indeterminate and inescapable, it becomes difficult to theorize."[86] Such "ethical attractiveness," I think, is at the heart of the residual relationship between aestheticism and cosmopolitanism. As much as a literary, or cultural, cosmopolitanism hinges on the potential for egalitarianism, this aspiration is difficult to extricate from its original elitist constitution; within Hoffman's vivid fantasy of cosmopolitan leisure and choice, the vessel to his enlightenment remains an empty supermarket basket.

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[85] Scott L. Malcolmson, "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, Cultural Politics (Minneapolis, Minn.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 233-245, 238.
[86] Ibid., 240.

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