SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE
A Study of The Great Gatsby, Moon Palace and Cosmopolis

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Abstract

The interaction between fictional characters and literary space has become increasingly influential in modern literature since the spatial turn in the second half of the twentieth century. This study therefore analyses the relationship between six fictional characters and space in three American novels: Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Auster’s *Moon Palace* and DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*. In order to gain an insight into this dynamic relationship, which is argued to be of great importance to character development, several theoretical concepts particularly suited to spatial analysis were selected from Julia Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari, the most of important of which include the former’s Semiotic and the latter’s reworking of desire as plenitude as well as their understanding of schizophrenia. To these theories was added the concept of liminal space to gain a more specific and enriching insight into the transformative function of space and its ability to stimulate identity de- and reconstruction. Through the use of these concepts the analysis argues that literary spaces which stimulate connections to the Semiotic may cause the characters to conceive of alternatives to the Lacanian understanding of desire-as-lack, in which the true object of desire can never be attained. Certain spaces may trigger an experience of plenitude and stimulate creativity which may be restorative or transformative, resulting in personal growth and change. Other spaces may stifle this growth, resulting in the character’s inability to conceive of such Semiotic alternatives. These characters tend not to relinquish desire-as-lack or the will to seize full control over their lives and future, which will prove to be futile in all three of the novels. Those who accept contingency, are open to change and therefore seem to be more adapted to overcoming adversity, while those who remain fixed on singular objectives, display a tendency towards auto-destruction.
Preface

Before you lies the dissertation *Space and Subjectivity in Modern American Literature: A Study of* The Great Gatsby, Moon Palace and Cosmopolis, the basis of which is an analysis of three American novels from the 1920s onwards in which the development of subjectivity and the dynamic relationships between fictional characters and literary space is studied. This dissertation was written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Masters of Arts in Comparative Modern Literature at Ghent University. The research and writing of this thesis was completed between September 2018 and August 2019.

This study was undertaken out of an interest in subject development and literary space which arose after my reading Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*. Together with my supervisor Prof. Dr. Gert Buelens two other novels were selected and the research question was formulated. The result is an extensive analysis starting from close reading to which a combination of theoretical concepts were applied which allowed me to answer the question which was identified. I am very fortunate to have had good advice and feedback from my supervisor, who was always available and willing to answer any questions.

I would therefore like to thank my supervisor for his excellent guidance and support which helped me overcome any difficulties this process may have presented.
I also wish to thank friends, family and anyone so kind to listen and exchange ideas. You have all contributed to this final product in one way or another and have always kept me motivated.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

Lauri Carpentier

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Introduction

For the longest part of known human history, spaces have been regarded as static, neutral containers to be filled with objects or people. However, during the second part of the twentieth century a change, commonly known as the “spatial turn”, has taken place in multiple disciplines such as social studies, architecture and the humanities. In *Space in Theory*, West-Pavlov points to Lefebvre, who is regarded as having made seminal contributions to this spatial turn. West-Pavlov paraphrases Lefebvre’s point made in *The Production of Space*, that space should not be regarded as:

a container, but rather, the very fabric of social existence, a medium woven of the relationships between subjects, their actions, and their environment. Space in its traditional sense is not a pre-existing receptacle for human action, but is created by that action; space, in turn, exerts its own variety of agency, modelling the human actors who have configured it. (West-Pavlov 19)

This quote points to the dynamic function of space as stressed by other early thinkers representative of the spatial turn such as Derrida and Foucault. In the second volume of *The Essential Works*, Foucault is quoted remarking on the arrival of a new era for space:

The present age may be the age of space instead. … We exist in a moment when the word is experiencing, I believe, something less like a great life that would develop through time and like a network that connects points and weaves its skin. (Faubion 175)

In the past four decades this new attention to space has also given rise to the development of analyses of literary works in spatial terms, stressing the dynamic function of spaces within the text. In the field of literary studies, this function is connected to character development. Just like space interacts with humans and objects in our everyday reality, so it is regarded as relevant to the formation of the subject in texts.

In *Space in Theory*, West-Pavlov points out four important thinkers whose theories are, as he states, not necessarily “representative” but “symptomatic” of the spatial turn in their varied disciplines, namely Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their theories all engage with the degree to which space plays a role in the subject’s
development. Kristeva’s concept of the Semiotic *chora* can, for example, be applied to literary as well as actual spaces from a psychoanalytic point of view, while Foucault analyses space with a concern for socio-political power relations and language, and Deleuze and Guattari develop a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary notion of space in their work, though this, as for Kristeva, is not their primary focus. These thinkers should therefore by no means be regarded as all belonging to one specific discipline or school of thought. Neither are they, as West-Pavlov cautions, the most prominent or obvious choices when looking for works which represent the spatial turn. However, the theories and concepts they develop can all be related to physical or literary spaces in a way which can shed a different light on the functions of space and their role in a subject’s meaning-making process from an ontological rather than an epistemological point of view (West-Pavlov 20-22). As West-Pavlov remarks: “Kristeva, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari are one and all busy with the question of the *how* of meaning” (22).

Specifically when applied to literary studies Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari offer interesting concepts which can be connected both to literary spaces and the development of the modern subject. Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, and specifically her later work, provides an insight into the subject’s development as an ongoing process while the socio-political aspect of her work, as well as the relevance of her research in gender and feminist studies, demonstrates the potential application of her theory to modern-day social realities.

With their theory on schizophrenia and their rethinking of Lacanian concepts such as that of desire-as-lack, refuted in their influential work *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate a basis in psychoanalysis (Buchanan 47). Even though they do not agree with Lacan’s definition of central concepts such as ‘desire’, ‘the unconscious’, or fixation on the Oedipal, their rethinking of psychoanalytic concepts enables a connection to Kristeva in the sense that they also conceive of a subject in constant development and flux. In Kristeva’s theory the Semiotic disposition and the *chora* are particularly suited to analyse alternative conceptions of subjectivity, which will be elaborated upon later. Kristeva’s view on these alternatives, however, is not identical to that of Deleuze and Guattari, whose reworking of desire, not as lack but as plenitude, will prove to be particularly relevant to this analysis. The theories of Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari differ primarily because Kristeva maintains Lacan’s definition and importance of the Oedipal throughout her work. Yet their theories offer thought-provoking insights for the analysis of literary spaces and subjectivity (West-Pavlov 20-21).
The concepts of Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari concerning the development of the individual subject in relation to space offer a particularly useful combination for the aims of this study. This is why, for the purpose of this analysis, these three thinkers will be focused upon. Since Foucault’s work on space is often applied to “practices of power and contestation in society” (West-Pavlov 26), he will not be included in the theoretical framework due to the limitations of this study. Instead the individual development of fictional characters in the literary spaces will be brought to the fore while their socio-political contexts will be referred to where relevant to gain more insight into the workings of certain literary spaces and their effects on the characters.

In this thesis, an analysis of the dynamic interaction between literary spaces and characters will be carried out with regard to three American novels: The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Moon Palace by Paul Auster and Cosmopolis by Don DeLillo. All three novels engage with individuals in a modern-day American society where capitalism is strongly influential. As the analysis will demonstrate, Fitzgerald engages with an identity in which commodification and the various spaces are relevant for personal development in a way that can be related to contemporary novelists such as Auster and DeLillo. The analysis will attempt to illuminate the functionality of literary space in each novel. It will be argued that its effects on certain characters is telling in relation to their personal development and search for identity and meaning.

Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari represent different ways of approaching subject-formation and meaning-making, yet the space they reserve for fluidity in these processes is what will be relevant for this analysis. I will argue that constant movement and contingency are necessary for a healthy development of the subject and that space plays an essential role in this in all three novels. In Kristeva’s work, the Semiotic chora as a space outside the social order can be returned to at any point in a subject’s life, since it is inseparable from the Symbolic order and therefore essential to the meaning-making process (West-Pavlov 106). Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenia can also be applied to the study of the subject’s spatially related development (West-Pavlov 182) while their rethinking of desire, which eliminates lack and makes room for plenitude, offers useful views on the formation of an individual who is in
constant flux or, in other words, nomadic.¹ The theoretical concepts are therefore applied in hopes of shedding a new light on the development of some the most prominent characters in the three novels.

The third important term in this analysis is that of liminality, which may concretise the application of Kristeva’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts to spaces in the novels.

In this thesis the following research questions will be considered:

- How is the North-American subject and its interaction with literary spaces portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Palace* and *Cosmopolis*?

- Which important literary spaces can be distinguished in the novels?

- What is the relationship of the three protagonists and their doubles to these important spaces?

- What is the relevance of these spaces for the subject’s development in the cases of Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, Marco S. Fogg and Thomas Effing in *Moon Palace* and Eric Packer and Benno Levin in *Cosmopolis*?

These questions will be answered through the analysis of significant spaces in *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Palace* and *Cosmopolis* in connection to the novels’ protagonists: Jay Gatsby, Marco S. Fogg and Eric Packer as well as the spaces’ and the protagonists’ relationship to their doubles in the broad sense of the term: Nick Carraway, Thomas Effing and Benno Levin. These characters will be analysed with the concepts of Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari to gain an insight into how spaces contribute to these individuals’ identity formation and transformation. The impact of the spaces on the characters can provide an understanding of how the development of the modern subject in a contemporary American setting is portrayed in literature. This analysis will develop the argument that the modern subject exists

¹ The term nomadic will henceforth be applied in the sense employed in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. The nomadic subject moves in smooth space and “traces the process of becoming other” (Bogue 95), also described as a subject of the “in-between” (Howard 115). The significance and application of the nomadic subject will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
in constant flux, based on prominent characters’ development throughout the novel and their relation to the spaces that figure in it.

Therefore, I will argue that the understanding of oneself, the world around one and one’s relationship to objects and other individuals is also never entirely stable in modern-day American society and by extension other western and westernised societies which have adopted capitalism and the constant ‘lack’ which accompanies it. This results in a subject to whom existential crises are familiar and always destructive in one way or another, but can also be overcome, as some of the novels’ individuals will demonstrate, while for others this outcome is less likely or impossible.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the theory of Julia Kristeva and specifically her concept of the Semiotic and the chora will be elaborated upon, followed by a section on Deleuze and Guattari, in which several of their concepts relating to subjectivity and space such as desire and schizophrenia will be explained.

The last part of this section will focus on how liminal spaces can function as a catalyst for character development. Afterwards, in the second chapter the material and methodology of the research will be presented, followed by the analysis, and, lastly, the conclusion in the third and limitations of this research in the final chapter.
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will focus on the principal concepts functioning as the main guideline in this analysis. The backgrounds against which these concepts were developed vary, yet some of them can be directly or indirectly related to psychoanalysis. How they either overlap with or vary and diverge from the Lacanian perspective will also be explained briefly to highlight not only their origins, but also how in the past few decades a change can be observed, moving away from Lacanian dichotomies towards the complete abandonment of binary oppositions which can be observed in Deleuze and Guattari’s work (West-Pavlov 169-70). That movement towards a multiple interpretation of the subject and the relationship to space is signalled in this thesis by what West-Pavlov refers to as “Kristeva’s Kehre” in the 1980s (63-65).

1. Julia Kristeva and the Semiotic Chora

1.1. The Semiotic

The Semiotic has been present in Kristeva’s work since the early beginnings. Her volume *Semiotikè* focuses on the aspects of language outside of the purely communicative, which, according to Lechte, at the time of the work’s publication shed a different perspective on language, then mostly regarded as a “formal device for communicating meaning” (127-8). In purely Lacanian views experience is ruled by the Symbolic: human experience is structured into language, which is associated with the child’s introduction to the Oedipal stage. Kristeva’s work therefore represents a shift in focus, according to Lechte, from the Symbolic to the Semiotic, that which is outside the linguistic order and therefore in Lacanian terms — — which Kristeva adopts especially in her early work — pre-Oedipal.

In *Desire in Language*, in which Kristeva studies poetic language, she remarks on its “heterogeneousness”, meaning that the poetic not only utilises language belonging to the Symbolic order to convey meaning, but also harkens back to forms of communication employed by infants before language acquisition also observed in psychotic discourse in which the signifying function, the linguistic distance between the Speaking Subject and other objects, collapses. These types of communication include pre-linguistic rhythms, intonations...
and echolalia. In poetic language this is represented through musical effects and what Kristeva calls “nonsense effects” which can be observed in experimental poetry, such as that of Artaud or Mallarmé. These effects question the conventions of language by opposing them and include radical experiments that break down denotative meanings and syntax (Kristeva 133). As a result this language ‘breaks the rules’ and foregrounds other aspects of communication. These aspects, according to Kristeva, do not aim for “meaning or signification”. Therefore she calls them the “semiotic disposition”. The Semiotic is subsequently defined as:

a distinctive mark, trace, index, the premonitory sign, the proof, the engraved mark, imprint — in short, a distinctiveness admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not yet refer (for young children) or no longer refers (in psychotic discourse) to a signified object for a thetic 2 consciousness. (Kristeva 133)

The Semiotic is, however, never separate from the Symbolic even though in terms of a child’s development, it precedes it. This becomes clear in the way it is described as “a trace”: since it exists outside of language, what can be observed of the Semiotic is filtered through the Symbolic and what is subsequently observed are effects of it rather than direct representations (West-Pavlov 39).

The Semiotic provides the basis for the individual’s introduction into the Symbolic order or, as West-Pavlov describes it: “the Semiotic is a ‘becoming’ which will later be moulded into ‘being’” (39). Further clarification can be found its embodied meaning as the mother’s body. This is not the actual body itself, but an “unrepresentable body” (Lechte 129). This body, Lechte argues, is “the focus of the semiotic”. The mother’s body here represents what cannot be inserted into the Symbolic order (129). The Semiotic takes on this maternal connotation in opposition to that of the Symbolic, which is paternal (Kristeva 133). In defining the Semiotic disposition, another term immediately arises: the chora, borrowed from Plato’s Timeus, and described as a “receptacle, unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally connoted” (Kristeva 133).

2 In the sense of “directed toward or positing an object” (Gutting 135). In her work Kristeva establishes a dialogue with phenomenological theories on the subject and challenges the dominance of the thetic consciousness, a Husserlian concept which regards the subject as a unitary ‘I’, having made the distinction between subject and object, signifier and signified. Kristeva’s Semiotic, however, precedes this distinction in the subject’s development. She argues for its importance and discusses the evolution from the Semiotic toward the thetic through a process she calls rejection (Lechte 134-135).
1.2. The *Chora*

In *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*, Kristeva describes the *chora* as follows: “a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their states in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated” (616). This definition points out the *chora*’s most important aspects: it is ‘wordless’ and made up out of or inextricably connected to the drives. The term ‘drive’ is well-known in Freudian and Lacanian theory, which provides the basis for Kristeva’s theories as well. For Freud the drive bridges the boundaries between soma, the body, and psyche, the mind, implying that the biological aspects of human beings are always “taken up, or at the point of being taken up, into another register” (Beardsworth 42). However, Beardsworth remarks that Kristeva’s interpretation of the drive is where her theory diverges from the Lacanian and therefore Freudian definition:

> The drive, for her, is a corporeal description of the symbolic that is not only prior to the appearance of linguistic capacities or object-relation. It is distinct from the effects of language that, on the Lacanian perspective, make the subject the material of the structure of language. (42)

This once again emphasises Kristeva’s intention to shed a more attentive light on the Semiotic, where before the Symbolic was mostly focussed on in psychoanalysis.

The definition of the *chora* itself, which might be untransparent without further elaboration, moreover points to what Lechte highlights in his volume on Kristeva: any attempt to define or capture the *chora*’s meaning is paradoxical, for to do so is to verbally express the ineffable and therefore to introduce it into the Symbolic order, which cannot possibly represent what is outside it (128). Lechte himself defines the *chora* as a “non-geometrical space … the locus of the drive activity underlying the semiotic” (129). It is therefore a part of the Semiotic and located in it, yet far from synonymous with it.
1.3. The Chora as a Space

According to West-Pavlov, the *chora* is the component of the Semiotic that relates Kristeva’s theory to spatiality. The description of Plato’s term as “a receptacle” already reveals the *chora* as a space, though without a fixed form (43). The *chora*’s spatial aspect, to Kristeva, is central to providing the basis for a subject’s later understanding of experience and time; temporality is rooted in space and is experience segmented into comprehensible chunks through the same spatial basis (West-Pavlov 42-44). Yet the *chora* is not a traditionally Euclidean space that can be visualised as a container occupied by objects. Euclidean space is the conceptualisation of space in the Symbolic order, while the *chora*, as Kristeva argues in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, is not a space where objects and the container are separate, or as West-Pavlov states: “The spatiality of the chora knows no absence” (46). It is therefore a space of plenitude and complete oneness. The concept of plenitude will later return when the theoretical concepts of Deleuze and Guattari are discussed.

Kristeva’s conceptualisation of the *chora* as a pre-Euclidean space reveals several binary oppositions in her theory: the Semiotic and the Symbolic, the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal and the pre-Euclidean and Euclidean. In her later work, however, Kristeva will move away from these. She argues that for a subject to mature properly, he or she must eventually relinquish the Semiotic and integrate into the Symbolic order, only allowing for occasional traces of the Semiotic to shine through in what Kristeva sees as the creative subject’s revolt against the Symbolic. The Semiotic’s function as a space of subversion in the midst of social life will be reclaimed from what West-Pavlov refers to as “Kristeva’s Kehre” in the 1980s, to symbolise a power struggle between these two modes of meaning-making (48-50).

In practice, an illustration of the kind of space dominated by the Semiotic in later life, after the subject has entered into the Oedipal stage and therefore assumed language, is the schizoid space (West-Pavlov 54). This space sheds a light on how the Semiotic can establish itself after the subject’s entrance into the Symbolic order and functions as an example for states in which some characters find themselves in the novels which will be discussed in the analysis. In her *Revolution*, Kristeva describes the process of the schizophrenic as follows: “The essential operation dominating the space of the subject in process/on trial, and to which schizophrenia bears painful testimony is that of the appending of territories — corporeal, natural, social — invested by drives” (102). West-Pavlov elaborates on schizoid space,
stating that it essentially implies the abandonment of all separation between subject and object, container and that which occupies it, signifier and signified. It is a “folded” space in which the linguistic separations which structure and make sense of our everyday reality are erased. In this context, a passage from Sartre’s La Nausée is quoted, which illustrates how such a state can be represented in literature: “I couldn’t remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things” (Sartre in West-Pavlov 55). More importantly, it illustrates that the schizoid state does not exclusively occur in a subject suffering from the psychological condition of schizophrenia.3 Yet, Kristeva regards the chora’s resurgence as schizoid space as abnormal. It deviates from post-Oedipal logic and behaviour. The question which is relevant for the following analysis remains, what the value of the schizoid experience is for the subject. This will be further elaborated on in the next section through the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari.

The further value of the chora is highlighted by its later repositioning, shifting it away from the more rigid dichotomies of Kristeva’s earlier work. She does this by connecting the chora to the senses. The description of sensation is where the body and language meet, and an experience of immediacy is created in which spatial aspects are foregrounded and linear time fades into the background. It reconnects the individual to plenitude, a space of oneness where time is of no consequence. Kristeva elaborates this theory through her analysis of Proust’s A la Recherche du Temps Perdu where the narrator manages to reclaim ‘lost time’ through sensations until the temporal gap is bridged and an immediate experience transports him back into a space of his past. This theory reconnects language to plenitude where classical structuralism and psychoanalysis regard the sign as a locus of absence, since it stands between the object and its meaning (West-Pavlov 97-98). Sensation is then linked to the Semiotic, which is there from the early beginnings of the subject’s life, but is later introduced into language by attempts to put it into words. It is the Symbolic through which the subject reconnects with the plenitude of the Semiotic, as her Desire in Language makes clear. In this work Kristeva comments on cooperation of the Semiotic and the Symbolic in poetry, demonstrating the fact that these systems are simultaneously present (132-133). This “heterogeneousness” of (poetic) language, according to Kristeva (133), establishes a direct link between language and not absence, as was assumed by the post-Saussureans, but

3 As a mental disorder, schizophrenia appears in the DSM V. No clear-cut definition is provided due to the complexity of the disease, yet the DSM V describes specific criteria. These include “delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and negative symptoms” such as reduction in emotion and expression. Moreover, two or more of these symptoms must occur and each must be present for a “significant portion of time during a one-month period (or less if successfully treated)” (Frankenburg).
plenitude. The *chora* becomes a mediator which allows the subject to access the Semiotic in other ways than through the “abnormal” schizoid state (West-Pavlov 98-100). The subject’s connection to the *chora* takes a prominent role in the later Kristeva and becomes essential for identity formation. In the rejection of the subject’s identity as a place of lack, it comes to signify an ongoing process of development within the Symbolic, through reconnection to the Semiotic in which this lack becomes the individual’s strength, for the constant striving for completion without ever reaching it, allows for change. Lack is no longer suffering as it was for Lacan, it is the “very condition of our subjectivity” (West-Pavlov 105-6).

2. Deleuze and Guattari’s Conception of Space and Subjectivity

2.1. Rethinking Desire

Kristeva’s reworking of the Lacanian view of lack is carried further in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, however, theirs is not rooted in psychoanalysis like Kristeva’s to begin with. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari present their theory, most notably described in their seminal work *Anti-Oedipus*, as an alternative to the psychoanalyst view of subjectivity and “the myth of desire-as-lack” (Reynolds 191). As mentioned above, Lacanian psychoanalysis posits desire as being produced by lack: the unconscious does not desire a real object, but something which cannot be defined, namely the desire of the big Other, separate from the individual subject. What this Other desires, is never known because it is the ‘not-me’, and mostly based on what is missing and can never be attained. Therefore, even if a subject desires a real object, this object is only a substitute for what is truly desired, a temporary fixation to perpetuate the lack, which is exactly what is needed to produce desire (Lechte 42-45).

According to Reynolds, Deleuze and Guattari also concur that one can feel the want or need for a real object, but that this desire is never the result of absence or lack. Rather, desire is a machine which produces desire for itself. Desiring-machines are found everywhere and deconstruct the common perception of the body as a whole. The human body is made up of different desiring-machines constituting the relationship between the interior and exterior and connecting with other desiring-machines, which are not limited to humanity. Their view on desire as a desiring-machine, eliminates lack and turns desire-production into an innate, constant and universal process the only object of which is desire-production (Reynolds 191-
2. Yet repression can also occur and this causes desire to not only focus on desire-production, but on actual objects. The feeling of need or lack is, in Reynolds’ words, “the counter-product within the real that is manufactured by desire, and lack is a counter-effect of desiring-production within this real that is natural and socially constructed” (192).

Deleuze and Guattari thus turn the Lacanian order on its head: desire is not based on lack, rather lack is produced by desire, the basis of which is again desire. They subsequently apply this theory to the workings of socio-political phenomena such as power and capitalism. Capitalist society, constituted by desiring-machines, is structured around perceived lack to stimulate productivity (Reynolds 192): “This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs amid an abundance of production; making all fall victim to the great fear of not having one’s needs satisfied” (Deleuze and Guattari 28). The rethinking of desire demonstrates Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of binaries on which the economy of presence–lack is based as a by-product by encompassing binary oppositions into the constant flow and fluidity of desiring-production. The omnipresence of desiring-production without an opposite term indicates a positive perspective on desire, existing in a flow of constant plenitude and becoming-being (West-Pavlov 177-8).

2.2. A Spatial Theory

In Deleuze and Space Buchanan and Lambert remark on the “proliferation of new concepts of space” in Deleuze and Guattari’s work (3-5), which they notably present in A Thousand Plateaus, the second volume of Capitalism and Schizophrenia. In this work they distinguish between “smooth and striated space — nomad space and sedentary space” (Deleuze and Guattari 474). However, just as their conceptualisation of desire rejects binary thought, smooth and striated space are not regarded as opposites, but as different kinds of spaces which always intersect and mix (Buchanan and Lambert 5).

West-Pavlov remarks that “space is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking” (180). He elaborates this view by connecting their concept of territoriality to desire. The previous section highlighted the importance of the rethinking of desire in Deleuze and Guattari’s work and their conceptualisation of life as a constant flow of desire-production. This desire-production is played out in a space, or rather, space is produced by life and its processes. This points at the centrality of dynamic relationships between desiring-machines, which acquire a
spatial meaning through the idea of territoriality, generated when desiring-machines connect. A territoriality arises from desire pulling two elements, organic or inorganic, towards each other and thus establishing a connection, which as a consequence produces qualified spaces: “The zones add up to series of spaces, but this whole is never given, for there is always the potential for further connection and production”, Colebrook explains in her work on Deleuze (192). The concept of territoriality emphasises that life is played out in a space which is constantly under construction and takes on meanings and affects depending on the relationships formed with and between subjects. A territoriality is also never permanent since desiring-production is anything but static.

Due to its spatial fluidity, West-Pavlov compares the territoriality to the nomadic subject’s movement in fluid space, meaning it is unstructured and does not know private property, roads or fences. This is smooth space which, unlike striated space, is not measurable and divisible. Since it is not quantifiable like Euclidean space, the subject must relate to it in other ways, as Deleuze and Guattari describe in A Thousand Plateaus, through “a tactile encounter with sound and colour”. It is a space of sensations and rhythms which, as West-Pavlov argues, is reminiscent of Kristeva’s chora. However, the nomadic space is not synonymous to it (181-2). This is due to the fact that while the Semiotic chora is an abstract construct which breaks through the Symbolic, which is assumed to be where the subject ‘normally lives’, the processes of territoriality that create both smooth and striated space are always present across all of existence and can be concretised to everyday situations.

2.3. Schizoid Space

The ultimate alternative to Oedipus, or the institutionalised conviction of desire-as lack, according to Deleuze and Guattari, lies in the schizoid. The term schizophrenia refers in the first place to a mental illness, but is employed here to signify a mental state during which the split between meaning and object, or signifier and signified, does not occur. Rather, the subject’s experience of his or her surroundings is immediate and sensual. Language no longer separates objects from meanings, nor does it separate the subject from the other (West-Pavlov 215-6). The optimistic conceptualisation of the schizoid in the theory of Deleuze and Guattari is partially based on the erroneous understanding that schizophrenic subjects have a split personality or assume the identity of others, such as well-known historical figures (Bogue 91). This condition known as Dissociate Identity Disorder or DIS actually differs from
schizophrenia, yet in this theory it is regarded as one of its central aspects. The split-
personality component is important to illustrate another alternative connection the subject can
build with his or her external surroundings. On the one hand, the catatonic state of the
schizophrenic represents an alternative between the subject and the other, unmediated by
language, in which desire-as-lack has no place. The experience envelops the subject in an
overwhelming present which cancels out other temporal constructs – the past and the future –
and is rooted in the senses. This sensual state of presence reminds one of the subject’s
experience of the Semiotic (West-Pavlov 215-6). On the other hand, the subject becoming
multiple, or other, fully identifying with what it is not, is connected to the idea of the nomadic
subject. When the schizophrenic experience cancels out the negativity harboured in language
and social codes no longer apply, the subject can cross any boundaries as “a point of pure
intensity …, a mobile locus of becoming commingling identities as it migrates from desiring-
machine to desiring-machine” (Bogue 94-95).

The schizophrenic condition is a state anyone can experience. It allows for an alternative
and creative connection to space through the senses and illustrates the fluidity of subjectivity.
It is therefore similar to Kristeva’s idea of the revolt in the Semiotic through which the
individual can become Other (West-Pavlov 223). As a result, the subject is always connected
to the multiple. As a multiplicity of desiring-machines interacting with other desiring-
machines, the subject is socialised and inscribed in codes but always capable of
transformation. The dichotomies of inside–outside, self–world, empty–full, are abandoned to
expose a connectivity which, when realised, has the potential to cancel out striving for
completeness arising from lack. The constant changes are enacted in and create space which,
together with all subjects, is always in the process of becoming. These different views of
space and subjectivity allow for human creativity to thrive and for the realisation that there is
no void to fill, nor lack to satisfy (West-Pavlov 239-44). The subject accepting plenitude
instead of lack, therefore, will regard life and selfhood differently which impacts his or her
decisions and attitudes, as the analysis will demonstrate.
3. Liminal Spaces

Although it is the last concept discussed in this chapter, liminality might be one of the first coming to mind when analysing literary space. This concept first arose in the anthropological study of rituals by Van Gennep in his influential work *The Rites of Passage*. The work centres around “ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another” (Van Gennep 11). In these ceremonials rites, Van Gennep distinguishes the category of “threshhold” or liminal rituals. These imply a transformation in those who underwent them in which their regular state of being is temporarily suspended for the duration of the ritual (Aguirre, et al. 7) or, as Van Gennep describes it: “he wavers between two worlds” (18). This already indicates the use of the concept to this study, particularly in combination with those previously discussed in this chapter.

The transformational aim of the rite of passage requires the subject undergoing it to pass through to a new state of being. This also implies a dynamic relationship of the subject to the transformational space and resembles the process of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic subject becoming other in smooth space (Bogue 94-95). Victor Turner later elaborated Van Gennep’s original concept of the liminal ritual and coined the term “liminality”. In *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, Turner focuses on the transformational process of the individual and describes the temporary suspension of his or her social function or identity regarded as permanently altered after the ritual’s completion (Engel 2). The function of liminal space in the study of literary fiction mainly focuses on the power of this ritual passage to challenge socio-cultural norms and stimulate a character’s individual development. An example is provided by Berry in *Whose Threshold? Women’s Strategies of Ritualization*, a research on the effects of liminality on female characters whose creative transition rituals diverge from the socio-cultural norm and “challenge dominant (often patriarchal) narratives” (Engel 2). It can therefore also be argued that the liminal ritual carries within itself an aspect reminiscent of Kristeva’s revolt, which she regards as a function of the Semiotic, since it can be applied creatively to defy the Symbolic order and promote the subject’s individual growth or metamorphosis. Engel similarly refers to this connection in his study of liminality in twentieth-century literature (5-6). The destabilising effect of the Semiotic disposition on identity is implanted in a liminal space, which allows for such an experience and which “seem[s] threatening to subjects who approach [it] … but to
brave this danger often results in self-knowledge and transformation” (Engel 6). The liminal phase can therefore be a means to resist conforming to the socially dominant standard and is not always followed by a reintegration into society. Instead, as a consequence of the liminal experience which requires the individual to distance him- or herself from society and therefore critically examine it, the subject can re-emerge, not to rejoin the social order in a manner which is without conflict, but to continue to challenge social norms. According to Catherine Bell who formulated this critique of Turner’s work, this application of the liminal experience is valuable for marginalised individuals who already found themselves outside of the norm before the liminal phase occurred (24).

The connection to Kristeva’s Semiotic disposition as revolt, which the liminal space allows for according to Engel (6), can therefore be argued to function for individuals who do not, as Bell mentions, already find themselves in the margins of society or are considered to be at a social disadvantage. It can also be valuable for those initially conforming to socio-cultural standards and subsequently aid them to distance themselves from dominant social requirements to pursue what they regard as valuable for their personal development.
Chapter 2: Analysis of Subjectivity and Space in Three American novels

1. Material and Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the dynamic relationship between space and subjectivity in American literature will be analysed by studying six novelistic characters and the literary spaces of three distinct novels: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster and *Cosmopolis* by Don DeLillo.

The novels did not originate in the same era or artistic period. Where Fitzgerald’s work is regarded as modernist (Berman 82), Auster is usually classified as a post-modernist, especially in his earlier work, starting from *The New York Trilogy*, though his later work, including *Moon Palace*, veers away from strict post-modernism through a concern for social and political issues (Martin x). DeLillo is also often classified as a postmodernist, yet Whitcombe argues that certain postmodern convictions, such as the simulacrum as a closed circuit of signs from which the individual cannot escape, are challenged in *Cosmopolis* (6-11) which displays a humanist tendency also discussed in Mary Holland’s work, in which she analyses DeLillo’s *The Names* and *White Noise*.

All three novels reserve a prominent role for New York City. It is the setting of *Cosmopolis* and *The Great Gatsby*, while it figures as one of the most important places in *Moon Palace*, with both Marco S. Fogg and Thomas Effing inhabiting it for most of the years in which the novel is set. This is significant because the associations attached to New York and its influence on the characters can be argued to be a catalyst for some of their decisions in the novels.

Furthermore, human subjectivity is of great importance. Fitzgerald’s work is inspired by the psychological theories of Freud and foregrounds individual psychology, a common feature of modernist literature (Berman 4-5). Psychology has influenced American literature ever since, which both *Moon Palace* and *Cosmopolis* testify to by foregrounding the characters’ mental processes.

Lastly, the effect of the subject’s surroundings, in these cases modern American society, in which capitalism plays an important role, is paramount to subject and plot development. This engagement with capitalist society is central in Fitzgerald and set in an era which can be argued to have given rise to American consumerist society as it still is today (Berman 81-83).
For the purpose of this analysis, all three novels were thoroughly analysed in terms of literary space, ranging from macro-spaces such as New York City, to smaller spatial units which were then related to two characters from each novel. These characters were selected due to their central roles and because the reader is provided with an insight into their psychological states through internal focalisation. This is the case for Nick Carraway, Marco S. Fogg, Eric Packer and Benno Levin. It is not the case for Jay Gatsby, but since Carraway’s narrative centres on Gatsby and his reasons for action and figures ample dialogue with him, the reader can be argued to have gained an insight into Gatsby’s psychology by the end of the novel. *Moon Palace*’s Thomas Effing is not a protagonist nor a narrator in his own right. However, his story functions as the novel’s most important subplot and draws conscious parallels between him and Marco Fogg, of whom Effing is the double. It also includes significant passages of character development which provide an insight into Effing’s inner life related to his journey.

Passages from the novels are taken to illustrate the dynamic interaction between these characters and the literary spaces and are analysed by applying the theoretical concepts of Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, and the theory on liminality. Since dynamism is so central to this analysis, much attention will be paid to how certain spaces are involved in pushing the characters towards new insights, decisions or psychological developments that cause them to reflect on their views and identity. The theory on liminality can afford a deeper understanding of these interactions. Lastly, the rethinking of desire, not as lack but as plenitude, which figures prominently with all three theoretical thinkers, is argued to be central to the interpretation of the characters’ construction of selfhood. This analysis aims to reveal that whether they accept desire-as-lack or search for alternatives is paramount to their further development or lack thereof.

The analysis will discuss the novels in a chronological order, by date of publication. *The Great Gatsby* will be discussed in the first section, followed by *Moon Palace* and *Cosmopolis*. This order is just one way in which these novels may be discussed, yet it was selected as the most straightforward manner to provide an insight into each novel’s subject-space interactions. Ample quotations will be provided to illustrate these interactions between the six characters and literary space.
2. Analysis

2.1. The Great Gatsby

2.1.1. Nick Carraway

This retrospective first-person account centres around narrator Nick Carraway’s extremely wealthy and enigmatic neighbour Jay Gatsby while also recounting Nick’s experiences in New York City. Nick Carraway eventually returns to his home in the West and will write out his story there, a significant aspect of the novel. The various spaces Nick visits: Manhattan, Long Island, and Queens, as well as the events that take place there, leave impressions on him which shape his overall experience of the East, which will prove to be far from positive.

The analysis of these spaces aims to reveal them as actively contributing to Nick’s experience. On the one hand, they influence the new meaning Nick attributes to the West, which will be explained using Deleuze and Guattari’s term re-territorialisation. On the other hand, Fitzgerald’s New York will be argued to be a space where the Semiotic is granted little to no room to flourish. Yet, despite the overwhelming dominance of capitalism, operating through desire-as-lack, Nick’s senses are constantly called on by what appears to lie outside of the Symbolic order and what causes him to eventually turn his back on the East Coast.

A. Modernist fragmentation

When Nick first visits Tom and Daisy Buchanan in their large mansion on East Egg, the house is described as “cheerful red-and-white Georgian” with the lawn running up to the house “in bright vines” while the windows are “glowing now with reflected gold and wide open to the warm windy afternoon” (GG 8). This positive first impression is, however, quite deceptive and changes quickly after Nick has entered the house. Tom Buchanan closes the windows, which before had given the room a dream-like air due to the flowing curtains. The room is cut off from the outside with a “boom” and “the caught wind died about the room”

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4 The excerpts and quotations from The Great Gatsby cited in this analysis were taken from the 2013 Picador edition. References to pages of the novel will henceforth be abbreviated as GG.
This is the first in a series of loud, alarming noises, which announce a change in atmosphere and are accompanied by negative experiences for Nick and others present. When later that evening the telephone rings incessantly, Nick describes this event thus:

The telephone rang inside, startlingly … all subjects, vanished into air. Among the broken fragments of the last five minutes at table I remember the candles being lit again, pointlessly, and I was conscious of wanting to look squarely at every one, and yet to avoid all eyes. … I doubt if even Miss Baker … was able to utterly put this fifth guest’s shrill metallic urgency out of mind. To a certain temperament the situation might have seemed intriguing — my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police. (GG 20-21)

Nick’s urge to call for the police indicates a strong physical reaction similar to fight or flight. The ringing telephone resembles an alarm and is so intrusive that it cannot be ignored. Nick’s violently emotional response lingers as he leaves the house: “I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house, child in arms — but apparently there were no such intentions in her head” (GG 26). Intrusive and unpleasant noises are present throughout the novel. They seem to mirror Nick’s physical and emotional alarm system, which gradually becomes more aware of the devastating effects of his surroundings.

The passage cited above also thematises fragmentation, which accompanies this unsettling experience and increases along with the noises as the novel progresses. Fragmentation, an important theme for the modernists according to Keunen’s article Living with Fragments, consists of three aspects: functional differentiation, which goes hand in hand with commodification, moral and social fragmentation (272). In this sense modernism is represented in The Great Gatsby on all three fronts. Functional differentiation, or the subdivision of social domains into smaller units, as Keunen explains, creates an ever widening gap between the private and public sphere. It is accompanied by commodification, in which currency determines value, undermining alternative value systems such as tradition and family, which persist only in the family home. According to Keunen “[t]his break with tradition is first felt in cities: the urban environment is explicitly conceptualised as a heterogeneous, overly complex, and even chaotic sphere” (273). The choice of New York City as the setting for urban chaos and confusion reflecting on the individual is not only present in The Great Gatsby, but is also thematised in Moon Palace and Cosmopolis.
The metropolis will remain the locus where the different aspects of fragmentation are most observable and poignant. The heterogeneity caused by functional differentiation and commodification is mirrored in the large variety of moral discourse. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick’s values differ from the people he spends time with on the East Coast, whom he judges as immoral. Nick describes himself as “one of the few honest people I have ever known”, yet he himself is lying to friends about having broken off his engagement and to his fiancée in the West, who is unaware of his intention not to marry her (*GG* 76-77). Morality becomes an individualised and situational construct in a strongly heterogeneous society, where moral consensus can only exist when values become extremely abstract (Keunen 274).

Lastly, Keunen remarks that modern fragmentation affects the social domain, leaving the individual with ‘a chaos of impressions and interactions’ (274). As a result the overwhelmed subject internalises the fragmentation, causing a wide range of emotions and the risk of falling apart at every turn: “I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye … At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others” (*GG* 74). The subject experiencing this social fragmentation is, however, also capable of glueing the pieces back together, be it not without visible cracks, thus creating a new porous whole, as Nick demonstrates later on by leaving New York and writing about the events that took place there.

B. Myrtle Wilson’s Apartment

More examples of alarming noises occur when Nick accompanies Tom and his mistress Myrtle Wilson to their Manhattan apartment, where various aspects contribute to his increasing desire to escape. Auditive triggers once more build towards a climax similar to the manner in which they are employed during the scene at the Buchanans’ house. However, in this passage they are more frequent and the climax more violent.

The first visitor that afternoon is Myrtle’s sister Catherine whose bracelets produce “an incessant clicking as they jingled up and down upon her arms” (*GG* 38). Soon after, Myrtle changes her dress, “which gave out a continual rustle as she swept about the room” and she seems to “be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air”. She also speaks in a “high, mincing shout” (*GG* 39) while the other guests join in loud conversation.
However, this commotion does not constitute the only ‘attack’ on Nick’s senses. While his hearing is receiving what appears to be more noise than he would like, his vision is constantly described in terms of ‘blurring’. This is due on the one hand to a copious consumption of alcohol effecting his potential to visualise and memorise the afternoon: “everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it” (GG 37). On the other hand, a fair amount of cigarettes is being smoked in the small living space, causing even Myrtle’s dog to be “looking with blind eyes through the smoke”. Yet it is not only due to these rather obvious factors that Nick’s senses are stunned. In fact, overwhelming effects are present from the moment he enters the space:

The living-room was crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it, so that to move about was to stumble continually over scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles. The only picture was an over-enlarged photograph, apparently a hen sitting on a blurred rock. Looked at from a distance, however, the hen resolved itself into a bonnet, and the countenance of a stout old lady beamed into the room. (GG 36-37)

The photograph of Wilson’s mother returns later on when Nick comments that it “hovered like an ectoplasm on the wall” (GG 39). The choice of this term, finding its origin in the Greek for ‘moulded’ or ‘formed’ and also applied as a biological term to the outer layer of an amoeba, is most often used to indicate a spirit or ghost. In this sense the Oxford English Dictionary defines “ectoplasm” as follows: “A viscous substance which is supposed to emanate from the body of a spiritualistic medium, and develop into a human form or face”. The picture can be argued to be a liminal item, as it holds the power of transformation (Engel 2-6). What Nick first perceives as random objects — “a hen sitting on a blurred rock” — morphs into a human face. The ectoplasm’s viscous nature is in-between, on the boundary between solid and fluid, adding to its liminality. As in the previous passage, where a reference is made to “broken fragments” (GG 20-21), the painting may once again indicate an unravelling taking place. This is mirrored in the increasingly noisy surroundings, which seem directly proportionate to Nick’s ever more aggravated state of inebriation, as well as his sense of becoming something other to the point of crossing the boundary between inside and outside. His desire to escape the room is first expressed through a (re)connection with nature: “The late afternoon sky bloomed in the open window for a moment like the blue honey of the Mediterranean— then the shrill voice of Mrs. McKee called me back inside” (GG 44).
Similar to the “boom” with which Tom Buchanan closed the windows, an unpleasant noise inhibits Nick’s crossing into the natural world, which he was already attempting as his phrasing of being pulled “back into the room” suggests. Later on his dissociation from his own body and location is expressed in much clearer terms:

I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward the Park through the soft twilight, but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild, strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair. Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. 

*(GG 45-46)*

Nick associates nature with a certain peace of mind, which is the opposite of the room in this passage. No matter how unpleasant the situation, the City exercises an attraction which extends into and beyond the room. This prevents Nick from leaving and exercises both fear and fascination upon him, since he is both “enchanted and repelled”, and contributes to his feeling both “within and without”. His exit is inevitable, however, as the scene mounts to a violent climax when Tom Buchanan breaks Myrtle’s nose. The chaos which ensues is mirrored in a description where metonymical references reveal the unravelling previously hinted at: “Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor, and women’s voices scolding, and high over the confusion a long broken wail of pain” *(GG 48)*.

C. The Valley of Ashes

While the locations discussed above harbour the ambiguity of fascination and fear, another space of paramount importance is the “Valley of Ashes”, where the use of sounds and fragmentation is continued and events take place which shock Nick even further.

In contrast to Manhattan, the Valley of Ashes is not aestheticised. It is a wasteland where “ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills” *(GG 88)* and its inhabitants have the same colour as their environment. They are “ash-grey men” who display signs of unravelling, thus continuing the previously encountered fragmentation, as they “move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air” *(GG 29)*. To this already unsettling image are added the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, an old advertisement for an oculist, which are “blue and gigantic
— their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose” (GG 29-30). The image is later compared to the eyes of God by Wilson (GG 206), and has been argued by Goldhurst in F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Contemporaries to be watching — and judging — the moral decay in the Valley (39). It is a space where the three types of fragmentation described by Keunen, commodification, moral and social fragmentation (272), seem to have taken over.

The Valley of Ashes can be regarded as a space where capitalism reigns so dominantly that it allows little room for individual creativity to flourish. Deleuze and Guattari argue that capitalist society constructs a space to suit its system, with profit driven by lack as the main objective. Monetary value has become the filter through which objects are perceived, so the object itself is secondary to its price or potential profit. This is what seems to have happened to the “ash-grey men” (GG 29), who are only workers, not individuals. By taking money as the primary meaning-maker, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the main process of capitalism is that of decodification: the fewer rules and regulations, the more money dominates.

Decodification is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, however, and nor is the related process Deleuze and Guattari term deterritorialisation, which describes the dissolution of the connections that desire produced between objects. Both decodification and deterritorialisation, like their opposites codification, or the creation of rules and codes, and territorialisation, or the formation of connections between desiring-machines, constantly occur in all of existence. However, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between these phenomena taking place inside and outside of capitalism. In that sense, codification can be a way of curbing creativity on the one hand, and function as a way of socially connecting individuals as a counterweight to the constant decodification in the name of profit on the other (West-Pavlov 185-91).

The Valley of Ashes is a space where decodification is taking place inside the capitalist system, causing its inhabitants to lose their individuality. Those who end up in it, also have little chance of getting out, as the case of Myrtle Wilson illustrates. At a certain point her husband informs Tom on their intention to leave: “I’ve been here too long. I want to get away. My wife and I want to go West”, adding that “she’s been talking about it for ten years” (GG 158-9). However, unlike Nick who passes through the Valley to get from Long Island to the City and back, Myrtle cannot escape her permanent home in spite of her efforts. She dies instantly when Daisy hits her in Gatsby’s car and her body becomes another zone of
fragmentation: “they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap … The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long” (GG 177).

The Valley of Ashes, which does not seem to allow its inhabitants to escape, is a space which Nick and others who live outside of it can pass through, though not always unharmed. It lies in the borough of Queens, between Long Island and Manhattan, and is therefore literally an in-between space. It is liminal in the sense that it confronts Nick with the possible consequences of desire-as-lack as it functions in a capitalist society, since it strips the workers from their individuality and reduces them to parts in this system. This encounter with a space standing in such stark contrast to the superficial beauty of the Long-Island mansions or the liveliness of Manhattan incites reflections in Nick which contribute to his relinquishing his objective of becoming a fully functional member of the capitalist system. It is therefore strongly connected to ‘the other side’ or the adjacent spaces to create this contrast. The Valley of Ashes is consequently not liminal in isolation, but is deeply functional in achieving a transformational effect on Nick, allowing for his gradual deconstruction and rebuilding of his identity from a man who belonged on the East Coast to become successful in bonds trading, to a man who recognises that his individual need for growth is not met there and may be better served in the West.

D. Dissonance as a Semiotic warning

When Nick and Tom visit Wilson’s garage after Myrtle’s death, she is laid on a table covered in blankets. However, the focal point of this passage is not the body, but Wilson’s noises of grief: “I became aware of a hollow, wailing sound which issued incessantly from the garage, a sound which as we got out of the coupé and walked toward the door resolved itself into the words ‘Oh, my God!’ uttered over and over in a gasping moan” (GG 178). Wilson’s cry is constantly repeated: “he gave out incessantly this high, horrible: ‘Oh, my Ga-od! Oh, my Ga-od! Oh, my Ga-od!’” (GG 179). The words have lost most of their meaning at this point. They are the soundtrack of shock and pain thus finding expression. The repetition of the formula creates a rhythm which may not be immediately healing for Wilson, but gives him the capacity to express the ineffable. It can be argued that the use of both lingual and meta-lingual tools in the formula “Oh, my Ga-od!”, containing the words on the one hand and
repetition, rhythm and volume on the other, links it to the Semiotic, since it combines the Symbolic and pre-Symbolic to express a multitude of emotions. The combination of the Symbolic and Semiotic is discussed in Kristeva’s *Desire in Language* where she demonstrates the importance of the Semiotic in language, since non-verbal elements and non-grammatical language can break through the Symbolic order to create expressions beyond the “signifying practice” (134). Combined with and functioning through the Symbolic, the Semiotic can create “a new space of significance” (Kristeva 135). This demonstrates the Semiotic’s importance in creating additional meaning in combination with the Symbolic, of which Wilson’s cry is an example.

Berman states that “Fitzgerald opposes harmony and dissonance” throughout the novel, also noting the importance of sounds and noises, which, he adds, contain a moral judgment similar to the interpretation attributed to the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg: “The harsh, blaring noises … were perfectly calculated to represent not only the tone but the moral dissonance of industrial life” (93). This sound-focused approach to the effects of life in New York is continued throughout the novel until the final climactic event which causes Nick to turn away from the East Coast. The night before Gatsby is murdered by Wilson, Nick physically experiences the trauma of the car accident: “I tossed half-sick between grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams”. In the background “a fog-horn was groaning incessantly on the Sound” (*GG* 189), drawing a parallel with Wilson’s uttering of grief which is also described as “groaning” (*GG* 178). The sound of the fog-horn can also be read as a warning sign for the following day: “I felt that I had something to tell [Gatsby], something to warn him about, and morning would be too late” (*GG* 189).

The series of intrusive sounds in the novel, apart from containing a moral judgment of modernity as Berman argues, can therefore be read as an appeal to Nick’s senses similar to Wilson’s screams, yet without the accompaniment of a verbal formula. The noises can be interpreted as a connection to what cannot be expressed through language as they transmit and anticipate the unsettling nature of Nick’s experiences through his senses. They not only accompany but aggravate the effect of the events which take place and can be regarded as an alternative means of communication, establishing a connection to the Semiotic through a sensual experience. This Semiotic connection, as West-Pavlov states, can be perceived through or in combination with the Symbolic (98-99), meaning Nick does not have to find himself in a schizoid state to sense its presence, as the examples above demonstrate. A Semiotic connection through the senses may allow Nick to come to a deeper understanding of
his own needs in an embodied, wordless manner. Nick’s sensing the Semiotic’s presence may help him make decisions based on what he requires for his individual growth and well-being rather than what is needed to function appropriately in capitalist society.

E. Recodification of East and West

After Gatsby has died, Nick is left to take care of the funeral and is confronted once more with the individualised sense of morality — or lack thereof — which according to Keunen is an aspect of modern fragmentation (274): “Nobody came” (GG 224). This leads to a re-territorialisation of the West. Nick first talks about his home when the novel is nearly at its end:

That’s my Middle West … the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow … I see now that this has been a story of the West after all — Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life. (GG 227)

Re-territorialisation, another term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, is a reaction within capitalist society to deterritorialisation. As with the other concepts presented here, the manifestation of this phenomenon is manifold, and can be seen as an at times artificial way of reconnecting social subjects to some sense of rootedness, which can lie in the revival of traditions or the creation of national parks to regain a sense of freedom. History and tradition play a major role in re-territorialisation (West-Pavlov 192-7): “These neoterritorialities are often artificial, residual, archaic; but they are archaisms having a perfectly current function, our modern way of ‘imbricating’ of sectioning off, of reintroducing code fragments, resuscitating old codes, inventing pseudo-codes or jargons” (Deleuze and Guattari 257).

Upon his return home Nick has placed the West and East in two contrasting categories or re-codified them by attributing new meanings to both areas. The West is associated with traditional moral values he supports while being infused with a large amount of youth nostalgia: “I wanted the world to be in uniform and a sort of moral attention forever” (GG 2)
The East is its opposite as a place of “riotous excursions” and Long Island itself is described as a “riotous island” (GG 6), which does not hold positive connotations for him.

However, a nuanced position is held for Gatsby, whom Nick claims to have “disapproved of from beginning to end” (GG 198) and “who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (GG 2). It seems he is not packed up with the rest of the East but undergoes a separation of the man from the system; not Gatsby himself is toxic, but what he was trying to achieve was: “Gatsby turned out all right in the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (GG 3).

This demonstrates that the re-codification is not as rigid as it seems at first glance. The result of Nick’s return home may also have caused him to gradually relinquish these stark contrasts and angry associations since he claims to only “temporarily” lose faith. More importantly, his return to the West is more productive than any of the events which took place in the East: he writes this story and in doing so engages in a creative act. The West is therefore a space which is stimulating and his writing a possibility to recover from his time in the East, where few if any of the places described invoke a similar sort of creative response. The spaces which at first seem conducive to alternative identity construction such as Daisy’s house, turn out to be spaces of fragmentation and negative tension, while the Valley of Ashes, as a space of extreme capitalist decodification without alternatives, is mostly characterised by death.

All of the literary spaces discussed trigger emotional and physical responses in Nick which gradually become more intrusive and alarming, to the point where he decides to return home. Therefore spaces which are deeply entrenched in capitalist processes and have negative effects on the narrator can be stated to be deeply tied up with alternative regimes of identity construction and meaning-making. In this case that is demonstrated by the fact that no matter how hard Nick tries to fit in and participate in the capitalist system, his Semiotic disposition — most noticeable present in alarming noises — helps him to understand at a physical level that this life does not stimulate his personal growth. The Semiotic and the Symbolic are demonstrated here to be engaged in a dialogue which is central to the meaning-making process. Consequently they are also capable of deconstructing the subject responsible for this meaning-making process who is able to conceive of alternatives, which indicates the impossibility to starkly divide the spaces of East and West into binary-based categories of Symbolic versus Semiotic or vice versa.
2.1.2. Jay Gatsby

A. Reversed space-time of the singularity

In relation to Jay Gatsby two spaces are of utmost importance: his house on West Egg and the city of Louisville, where he met Daisy five years prior to his meeting with Nick. These spaces most highlight Gatsby’s outlook on life as described by Nick and Gatsby’s relationship to space-time, which can be argued to function differently.

The house is the setting of Gatsby’s parties, where Nick first meets him. Before this moment he has only heard of Gatsby and caught a glimpse of him staring at the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock (GG 28). Nick briefly describes Gatsby’s large mansion as “a colossal affair by any standard — it was a factual imitation of Hôtel de ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (GG 6-7). The house is a very bright place in the evening during Gatsby’s well-known parties: “The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music” (GG 52). The mansion’s brightness attracts many guests who seem to be drawn to it like moths to a flame, arriving automatically at Gatsby’s party at some point in the evening: “People were not invited — they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby’s door” (GG 53). However, the host himself remains invisible for a long time: “Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all” (GG 53). This is challenging even for Nick, who actively searches for Gatsby, the subject of many a rumour among the guests. Gatsby is a figure who, as Nick states, inspires “romantic speculation” among people “who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world” (GG 57).

Gatsby, his house and parties all take on quasi-mythical proportions, with Gatsby initially seeming more of a force of nature than a human being: his presence is signalled by rumours, bright lights and music at his house, yet he himself cannot be seen, and a large number of guests seem to be automatically drawn there. Gatsby is taking on many characteristics of a black hole at this point. This cosmic phenomenon cannot be observed directly, since light is absorbed by it and not reflected, yet its presence can be derived from objects in its vicinity, which due to the strong gravitational force of the black hole, often shine brighter than other stars. The black hole’s great mass and density create a singularity which exercises such a strong force on objects in its vicinity, that they are attracted to it. It is
“surrounded by a spherical boundary called its event horizon”. Once this event horizon is passed, particles can theoretically not exit it and are annihilated by the great density of the singularity in which matter cannot survive (Raine and Thomas 1-2). When Nick finally meets Gatsby, the latter smiles particularly meaningfully at him:

He smiled understandingly — much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced — or seemed to face the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (GG 62)

Gatsby makes a strong impression on Nick which further incites his fascination. He seems to have passed Gatsby’s event horizon at this point. However, as Raine and Thomas state: “in more general black holes, destruction is not inevitable and the fate of a particle or photon inside the hole is more complicated” (2-3). This statement certainly holds true for human subjects, since Nick, though still compelled by Gatsby after his death, is not destroyed at the end of the novel.

Moreover, the black hole’s tendency to annihilate any objects within its event horizon relates to the fragmentation Nick observes at the party. As in the scenes discussed in the section on Nick Carraway, Gatsby’s house and its guests are also prone to unravelling as the evening progresses. This fragmentation accelerates at a certain point when a guest starts weeping while singing:

during the course of her song she had decided, ineptly, that everything was very, very sad — she was not only singing, she was weeping too. Whenever there was a pause in the song she filled it with gasping, broken sobs, and then took up the lyric in a quavering soprano. The tears coursed down her cheeks … when they came into contact with her heavily beaded eyelashes they assumed an inky color, and pursued the rest of their way in slow black rivulets. A humorous suggestion was made that she sing the notes on her face (GG 66).
Her “broken sobs” are integrated into the song, filling the pauses, while the music integrates with the singer, who displays “notes on her face”, creating a new expressive whole. This can be interpreted similarly to the other alarming sounds: as an alternative mode of expression through a combination of the Symbolic, the words of the song, and the Semiotic, in the musical rhythm and discordant weeping, to signal an ineffable sadness or tragedy.

After the girl has finished singing “most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands” (GG 67) and as the last guests are leaving, a car accident causes uproar in the driveway. The guests, who experienced little difficulty finding Gatsby’s house, now appear to be struggling to get away from it. Nick first notices the accident due to the noise of car horns and the brightness of headlights: “Fifty feet from the door a dozen headlights illuminated a bizarre and tumultuous scene. In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupé which had left Gatsby’s drive not two minutes before. … a harsh, discordant din from those in the rear had been audible some time, and added to the already violent confusion of the scene” (GG 69-70).

Although Nick calls the singer’s sadness “inept”, the examples illustrate how the rest of the evening finds itself in a downward spiral with many negative events taking place, after which Gatsby is left by himself, being the only person ultimately unable to leave: “A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host” (GG 72).

The black hole metaphor is likely to be one of many which can be found to explain Gatsby’s effect on his surroundings, nor do I hint at any intentio auctoris by drawing these parallels, which arise simply out of my own observations. The metaphor is employed mainly because it serves this analysis not only in clarifying the fragmentation around the figure of Gatsby, but also his perception of space-time, which is closely linked to the way in which he approaches desire. Simply put, the properties of space-time are reversed within a black hole’s event horizon. Relative space-time in which the rest of the universe outside of the black hole finds itself, has a causal structure. Where time is unidirectional in flat space, meaning it can only move into the future, space is multidirectional, meaning one can take many, yet not all directions as time progresses since movement is regulated by gravity, curving space-time and influencing an object’s options. Within the black hole’s event horizon, one would observe past light, trying to escape from the black hole, which it cannot, while future light from outside of the event horizon enters. This gives one the chance of moving either towards the
past or the future, making time multidirectional and thus reversing these properties of space-time. Moreover, all objects within the black hole move inevitably towards the singularity, leaving them with only one possible spatial direction (Frolov and Zelnikov 6-7).

This small side-track into astrophysics illustrates that while Gatsby chooses to move towards the past, believing it retrievable, rather than the future, he does not consider moving away from the East Coast, nor from his house, since he believes it to be the setting where his dream can be fulfilled, which will be explained further in the following section.

B. Gatsby’s desire-as-lack

At the party, Gatsby is static and sober while the guests dance and consume copious amounts of alcohol. In this manner he contrasts with his surroundings: “my eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes” (GG 65). Yet Gatsby is a restless character: “He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand” (GG 82).

This “impatient opening and closing of a hand” is a grasping motion similar to the one Nick observes the first time he sees Gatsby: “he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way … [Nick] distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been at the end of the dock” (GG 28). Nick later discovers that “Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay” (GG 101). The green light becomes a symbol for the dream Gatsby is chasing, which always remains out of reach, just across the bay: “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter — tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. … And one fine morning” (GG 233). This dream is not simply to be with Daisy, however, though she is incorporated in it. This becomes clear to Nick when Daisy spends the afternoon with him and Gatsby at the latter’s mansion: “There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams — not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything” (GG 123).

Nick’s observation indicates that Daisy is the objet-petit-a or the small other in Lacanian terms. The big Other Gatsby is chasing will always be the green light at the end of the dock, since only the dream of what he does not possess can be perfect in his mind, unmarred by reality, as the case of Daisy illustrates. Nick points out that Daisy’s function was
more that of a catalyst of Gatsby’s dream than the dream itself in the following passage: “He talked about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was” (GG 142).

C. Louisville as locus of the past

The “certain starting place” Gatsby wishes to return to is Louisville. There he first met Daisy at her house were he had arrived “by a colossal accident” as “a penniless young man without a past” (GG 191). In Louisville Gatsby’s dream as he envisioned it, must be completed: “He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house — as if it were five years ago” (GG 141-2). The contingency which led him to Daisy shows that Gatsby was still open to chance then. His plans were not so fixed as they would be after the end of the war, when he was not able to return to Louisville because “some complication or misunderstanding sent him to Oxford instead” (GG 194).

When he finally hears of Daisy’s engagement to Tom, he becomes the opposite of the “penniless young man without a past” (GG 191). What is hinted at initially as Gatsby’s weakness, his lack of a good name or family fortune, might in hindsight have been his strength, since his urge to control his future and in doing so repeat the past set him on a unidirectional course. Nick, not seeing time as Gatsby does, remarks that “you can’t repeat the past”, which to him seems obvious. Gatsby’s reaction sums up his opposite view: “‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’” (GG 142). Gatsby’s dream is impossible, which never stops him from continuing to believe in it. It is the dream which is necessary for capitalism to function, since it constantly relocates desire to a new, absent object when another which held it previously has been gained, which is also known as deterritorialisation (West-Pavlov 188), a term which was already mentioned in the analysis of The Valley of Ashes. While deterritorialisation within capitalism functions as a way to dissolve desire between objects, it can also function outside of capitalism. Deterritorialisation can be accepted on a personal level by allowing for contingency and constant change, which
means the subject also constantly rethinks and reevaluates his or her own identity, which can be an act of non-conformism since every individual’s process is unique according to Deleuze and Guattari: “To become is never to imitate, nor to ‘do like’, nor to conform to a model, whether it’s of justice or of truth. There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at” (2). In this case, Gatsby’s desire follows the capitalist process and therefore does not lead him to deconstruct his identity in a way which allows him to open himself up to contingency.

Gatsby’s deterritorialisation is demonstrated in the fact that does not content himself with the love and attention Daisy gives him in the present, because he wants to erase the past four years. His collaboration in the capitalist system by accepting desire-as-lack resembles that of all those before him who destroyed the locus of the dream. This becomes clear in Nick’s likening of Gatsby’s dream to that of the first sailors who set out to build a life on a newly discovered continent, only to erase the natural landscape which so appealed to them: “I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes — a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams” (GG 233).

D. Lack of lines of flight

Gatsby’s house is the location where the impossibility of his dream, combined with the impossibility of complete control and the elimination of contingency, becomes visible. Towards the ending of the novel, Gatsby’s house takes on aspects of the Valley of Ashes, becoming a space of fragmentation once more as it had been at the party:

The house had never seemed so enormous to me as it did that night when we hunted through the great rooms for cigarettes. We pushed aside curtains that were like pavilions, and felt over innumerable feet of dark wall for electric light switches — once I tumbled with a sort of splash upon the keys of a ghostly piano. There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere, and the rooms were musty, as though they hadn’t been aired for many days. I found the humidor on an unfamiliar table, with two stale, dry cigarettes inside. (GG 189-90)
The presence of dust, a feature found in the Valley of Ashes, and the “musty” rooms make the house seem uninhabited and might announce future absence. The house’s proportions are exaggerated to the point of becoming grotesque and the space is infused with an unsettling capacity, creating a correspondence with Nick’s sense of unrest. The house is not, and has never been, a home. Even the previous owner, who similar to Gatsby had a grandiose dream which did not materialise after which his wealth — and likely also his health — declined, was never able to complete his vision of the mansion surrounded by others with thatched roofs, and “[h]is children sold his house with the black wreath still on the door” (GG 113). The objects in the house are no comfort; the piano, emitting another sudden sound, is “ghostly”, the table “unfamiliar”. Nick later describes it as “that huge incoherent failure of a house” (GG 232). The unsettling feeling is also mirrored in the natural surroundings: “the shadow of a tree fell abruptly across the dew and ghostly birds began to sing among the blue leaves. There was a slow, pleasant movement in the air, scarcely a wind, promising a cool, lovely day” (GG 195). This final sentence contrasts with the preceding statements. The weather announces the welcome change from summer to autumn, relieving the characters of the heat. Along with this Nick observes a change in Gatsby, who decides at the very end to make use of his swimming pool, where he is shot dead a few hours later. It might indicate Gatsby’s change in mindset and announce his resignation, even though he cannot have known what would happen. Nick speculates that “perhaps he no longer cared” since “he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (GG 208).

Gatsby’s past cannot be repeated as he believed for five years during which he attempted to assume complete control over his life and narrative. Yet, as the various rumours about him indicate, he was never completely successful at obtaining it. It can be stated that this realisation begins to dawn on him when Daisy admits that she also loved Tom: “‘Oh, you want too much!’ she cried to Gatsby. ‘I love you now— isn’t that enough? I can’t help what’s past’” (GG 171-2). When Nick tells him that he “ought to go away”, however, he responds that he wants to be certain of Daisy’s decision first. “He was clutching at some last hope” (GG 190), Nick comments. Later he suspects that Gatsby realises that “he had lost that part of [Louisville], the freshest and the best forever” (GG 197). The city of Louisville as the locus of the idealised past which Gatsby desires to repeat, may therefore be losing its fixed significance and become deterritorialised, yet it is not clear whether this will happen within our outside of the capitalist regime given Gatsby’s strongly capitalist mindset.
Gatsby’s decision to go swimming may be interpreted as his gradual relinquishing of his urge to control, since he can never fully obtain what he set out to achieve. Contingency, which he never allowed for, eventually catches up with him as Wilson shoots him. This contingency is emphasised in Nick’s description of the scene in which he finds Gatsby adrift on an air mattress: “A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb [the mattress’] accidental course with its accidental burden” (*GG* 209). The possible deterritorialisation of his dream outside of capitalism and therefore his allowing for change are not granted the opportunity. This may be due to the fact that Gatsby’s mindset is so deeply entrenched in desire-as-lack, that he cannot conceive of alternatives outside of it.

What Gatsby truly lacks, is the capacity to conceive of “lines of flight”. This concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari describes the paths along which the subject moves “in its true state” (*West-Pavlov* 202). Lines of flight are possibilities which allow for creativity and new experiences and offer an escape from capitalist deterritorialisation and decodification. Similar to other concepts by Deleuze and Guattari, lines of flight are ubiquitous. They can be small or great and are possible at any time or place in our everyday existence. In connection to Kristeva’s theory, lines of flight transport the function of the *chora*, which disrupts the Symbolic order, to the everyday and enable its resurgence at any place or time (*West-Pavlov* 201-5).

Gatsby’s lack of lines of flight establishes itself in his inability to relinquish his dream and, more specifically, in the conviction that there is only one way of realising it. This results in his reluctance to veer off course or accept contingency. His attempt to gain full control leaves little room to explore alternative scenarios not including Daisy. He has ample means to leave his mansion and the East Coast altogether and start a new life elsewhere. Yet Gatsby never does, because it would not correspond to his vision. Even after his death he is buried at a near-by cemetery and not in the West, where his origins lie, because his father states that “Jimmy always liked it better down East” (*GG* 216). *The Rosary*, an song from America’s Gilded Age, whistled “tunelessly” by Gatsby’s business partner Wolfsheim (*GG* 219), is the appropriate soundtrack to his funeral since it so aptly expresses the fact that Gatsby’s focus on the past kept him from moving forward. The text sums up the last five years of his life, repeating memories as one would pray the rosary: “O memories that bless and burn!/ O barren gain and bitter loss!/ I kiss each bead and strive at last to learn/ To kiss the cross, sweetheart, to kiss the cross”.

42
2.2. Moon Palace

While the literary spaces of New York in *The Great Gatsby* seldom offer the occasion for the characters to connect to the Semiotic, Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace* focuses on the possibility for the subject to conceive of lines of flight and to engage with the Semiotic, either through the schizoid or through the Symbolic. As the novel’s title suggests, lunar symbolism is central to signalling alternatives to capitalist desire-as-lack and emphasising the underlying flux and interconnectedness of existence.

The novel is a retrospective narrative told by Marco S. Fogg while also recounting the story of his grandfather, Thomas Effing, and his father, Solomon Barber. Both Marco Fogg and Thomas Effing will be discussed in the context of lines of flight due to the similarities in their stories: both men share a transformative experience crossing the plains of the American West and are compelled to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities as a consequence. The constant flow underlying the lives of these characters will prove to be central in their conception of subjectivity, in which contingency reigns and any illusions of stability must be relinquished. Solomon Barber will only be involved briefly in Marco’s process of becoming-being, since his own story represents a minor proportion of the novel compared to that of Thomas Effing.

2.2.1. Marco S. Fogg

A. Smooth and striated space

The novel’s narrator Marco Stanley Fogg is an outsider from the start. He is an orphan who never knew his father and is raised by his uncle Victor, who teaches Marco that “every man is the author of his own life” and “the book you are writing is not yet finished” (*MP* 7).5 Victor’s point is twofold, emphasising both that one is able to live one’s life as one pleases and that a subject’s identity remains unfinished throughout his lifetime. The constantly changing nature of this identity and the subject’s hand in shaping and reshaping it, is one of

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5 The excerpts and quotations from *Moon Palace* cited in this analysis were taken from the 2004 Faber and Faber edition. References to pages of the novel will henceforth be abbreviated as *MP*. 
the major themes in the novel and will also be reiterated often by Thomas Effing in his
correspondences with Marco. That taking control over one’s identity is possible, but not
attainable in an absolute sense is also argued by Herzogenrath, who takes a psychoanalytic
approach to Moon Palace in An Art of Desire: “Marco … soon has to learn that he is far from
occupying the traditional ‘author position’” (126).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, in any society systems are created to structure reality in
an attempt to maintain stability and ward off constant flux. This is the difference between
“smooth and striated space — nomad space and sedentary space” (Deleuze and Guattari
474). These spaces always overlap and intersect on various points, so that the subject must
come across smooth space eventually, no matter how much stability or structure has been
created (Buchanan and Lambert 5). The interaction of smooth and striated space is essential
to the characters in Moon Palace, since to live only in one of these spaces inevitably leads to
destructive fragmentation. When striated space, the space of order, becomes too dominant in
one of the characters’ lives, smooth space intervenes and vice versa.

A switch from the striated to the smooth is first signalled by the spatial metaphor of
the box, a motif in the novel. When Marco moves from Chicago to New York to study at
university, Victor bestows mainly boxes and box-like objects on him: a wooden chess set, a
cigar box with baseball player autographs, a tweed suit and a large amount of moving boxes
containing Victor’s 1492 books. It is the first time Marco is required to live without a
parental figure, which causes him to feel uprooted and insecure. He reacts to this by encasing
himself in the tweed suit: “I felt at home in it … I had no other home, I continued to wear it
every day” (MP 14). It provides him with a sense of security and protects him from
unravelling: “there were times when I imagined the suit was actually holding me together,
that if I did not wear it my body would fly apart. It functioned as a protective membrane”
(MP 14-15). Marco’s identity is wrapped up with the suit, which provides him with a striated
space or comforting structure. Simultaneously the outfit makes him stand apart from his
peers, emphasising his outsider position: “I had merely found a different way of being young.
More than anything else, the suit was the badge of my identity, the emblem of how I wanted
others to see me” (MP 15). As with most situations Marco will encounter, this sense of
stability cannot last. Marco’s identity cannot seem to be kept from flux as the suit starts to
unravel: “after several months of constant wear, it began to give a haphazard impression,
hanging on my skinny frame like some wrinkled afterthought” (MP 15).
B. Schizophrenia through a sign of intensity

When the suit is worn out, Marco finds an apartment where “the air was dim …, tinged grey throughout, and even on the brightest days it did not exude more than a paltry radiance” (MP 16). This lack of natural light through windows only looking out on a small alley creates a space penetrated by little other than the light of the neon sign of a Chinese restaurant called Moon Palace, which has a singular effect on Marco:

the force with which those words assaulted me drowned out every practical reference and association. They were magic letters, and they hung there in the darkness like a message from the sky itself. MOON PALACE. … in that first, irrational moment, my fears lost their hold on me. I had never experienced anything so sudden and absolute. A bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events. I went on staring at the Moon Palace sign, and little by little I understood that I had come to the right place, and that this small apartment was indeed were I was meant to live. (MP 16-17)

The apartment in this instant is a conductor of the schizoid experience the Moon Palace sign triggers in Marco. The term is schizoid is employed here in the sense used by Deleuze and Guattari: the separation between the subject and object, or signifier and signified, disappears, causing the subject to experience complete unification with his surroundings and plenitude, a sensation similar to the pre-Oedipal experience of Kristeva’s Semiotic (West-Pavlov 215-6).

The experience transforms Marco’s apartment into a liminal space, providing him with the right setting to connect to the Semiotic and allowing him to relinquish some his fears. As with the next liminal space Marco moves through, the identity de- and re-construction he undergoes does not result in seamless reintegration into society due to his outsider status. As Bell has noted on the liminal experience, this may enable the marginalised individual to continue life outside of the norm and challenge social conventions (24). In this case, the Moon Palace sign reassures Marco through an experience outside of language. It has become a sign of intensity, an individualised territoriality around which a zone of intensity is formed. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this type of sign is immediate, located directly in the thing and without reference to what is elsewhere. In this sense, the zone of intensity not only stands alone without language, it also does not redirect desire and therefore represents plenitude (West-Pavlov 211-2). The sign of intensity triggers a schizoid experience of
presence in Marco and is therefore a manner in which he can connect to the Semiotic *chora*, while the dimly lit room and neon light provide comfort and create a situation resembling that of an infant in the womb, thus reinforcing the link to the Semiotic, which is located in the mother’s body in an abstract sense in Kristeva’s work (Lechte 129).

C. The danger of complete flux

As further examples will illustrate, lunar imagery signals the subject’s opening up to complete flux as is the case for Marco’s first encounter with the Moon Palace sign. When his uncle Victor unexpectedly passes away shortly after Marco moved into the apartment, he is left nearly penniless and his sole objective is to do right by his deceased uncle. The idea of finding a job to support himself is revolting; it literally makes him nauseous. Marco’s senses seem to be rebelling against any act which may be considered normal. His revolt therefore consists in doing nothing but reading his uncle’s books and selling them when he has finished them. This decision subjects Marco’s apartment to flux, since the boxes containing the books constituted his furniture. Marco’s objective is to control his grieving process and his own narrative; by organising his life in this manner he attains certainty about the outcome:

Each time I opened a box, I was able to enter another segment of my uncle’s life, a fixed period of days or weeks or months, and it consoled me to feel that I was occupying the same mental space that Victor had once occupied. … It was almost like following the route of an explorer from long ago, duplicating his steps … moving westward with the sun, pursuing the light until it was finally extinguished … By the end, all the blanks would be filled in, all the distances covered. (*MP* 21-22)

Marco’s undertaking centres around the past and a person who is no longer alive and leads to auto-destruction. The life he envisions is mainly mental, yet has physical ramifications: “Each time I ventured into my uncle’s past, it produced a physical result” (*MP* 24). The dichotomies of inside/outside and physical/mental are quickly eroding, hinting at the unsustainability of Marco’s project. This is also apparent from the fact that, in spite of his isolation, important events still reach him: “I saw an oil tank explode, … and as I watched the chunks of burning wreckage …, it occurred to me that the inner and the outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth” (*MP* 24).
The impossibility of seizing complete control manifests itself when Marco loses his grip on his mental states. As he is pushed to his physical limits by hunger and deprivation it gradually dawns on him that “the mind cannot win over matter, for once the mind is asked to do too much, it quickly shows itself to be matter as well” (MP 29). This eventually leads to difficulties reading Victor’s books. Similar to his first experience with the Moon Palace sign, words are separated from their meanings and he can no longer comprehend them: “The black marks seemed wholly bewildering, an arbitrary collection of lines and curves that divulged nothing but their own muteness” (MP 30). Marco, so starved that language fails him, chooses an embodied approach to the books and thus establishes a sensual connection to them: “I would pull a book from the box, open it to the first page and then move my finger along the first line … like a blind man reading braille. If I couldn’t see the words, at least I wanted to touch them” (MP 30). Marco gradually enters a long-term schizoid state in which he shifts to a sense-based life. When all of his books are sold and his apartment is left empty it is all the more clear that it is a smooth space and Marco a nomadic subject, intuitively moving around in it, relinquishing to total flux:

I paced around my room, I stretched out on my mattress, I wrote down my thoughts in a notebook. It didn’t matter. … Every now and then I would plant myself between the two windows and watch the Moon Palace sign … it always seemed to generate a series of interesting thoughts … clusters of wild associations, a rambling circuit of reveries … Everything was mixed up in it at once … One thing kept giving way to another, spiralling into ever larger masses of connectedness. (MP 31-32)

For a while Marco lives in schizoid plenitude, but his physical needs cannot be ignored. The unsustainable situation is mirrored in his apartment, which from a soothing space conducive of a healing connection to the Semiotic, is transformed into a space of destructive isolation: “The air in the apartment was intolerable, a sweatbox stillness that bore down on me night and day” (MP 40). Varvogli remarks in The World that is the Book that “the room becomes a place of meditation and asceticism, and nearly a tomb when [Marco] runs out of money” (133). The “sweatbox” apartment has become a tomb-like space, signalling a return of the box metaphor which is also employed by Marco’s landlord during his eviction: “You’ve got some place here my friend. If you don’t mind me saying so, it reminds me of a coffin. One of those pine boxes they bury bums in” (MP 44).
The re-territorialised space of Central Park

After his eviction Marco bases himself in Central Park, a space which he finds to stand apart from the striated space of New York City streets. It represents freedom of movement and alternative behaviour not permitted by the codes of the streets:

It was devoid of associations, a place that could have been anywhere … It became a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets … In the streets, everything is bodies and commotion … you cannot enter them without adhering to a rigid protocol of behavior … By contrast, life in Central Park allowed for a much broader range of variables. (MP 54-55)

Central Park is a re-territorialised space in an urban context, since it is an artificially created alternative to life on the streets of New York and harkens back to the natural wilderness that once covered the area. A collective sense of historical rootedness is therefore an important aspect of the park’s role as an alternative space (West-Pavlov 192-7). However, it is not outside of the city, since it is geographically located at its heart, and is meant for leisurely activity, a function of daily life. In Foucault’s work this type of space is termed a heterotopia, an “effectively enacted utopia” (Keunen 170). It is a space which provides alternative connections within the community and stimulates individual and collective creativity (Keunen 173-4), which Marco’s assessment of it as a space with more flexible behavioural codes also indicates. Yet the heterotopia differs from Marco’s apartment since it is a space of connection, not isolation. The initial overwhelming sense of freedom is curbed when his lack of money drives him to search the park’s garbage cans for food and sleep in the outdoors, sheltered only by shrubbery. This sets him apart from the other visitors to the park and once again marks him as an outsider. The park is inscribed in societal norms and taken up in striated space, which places boundaries on tolerated types of behaviour. Since Marco previously lacked codes in his apartment, the space has a restorative effect on him, which indicates the importance of interaction and balance between smooth and striated space as between the Symbolic and Semiotic: “It gave me a threshold, a boundary, a way to distinguish between the inside and the outside” (MP 56). However, Marco does not leave his state of total flux, believing that “change was the only constant” (MP 61), nor does he return to language: “I found little inclination to write … I understood that I had already spent too much of my life living through words” (MP 61-62). He reaches breaking point during a night
of incessant rain, which leaves him delirious with fever. The sign of intensity, the neon letters of Moon Palace, appears like a vision before his eyes, but rather than stimulate restorative transformation, it stresses the fragmentation and imminent demise of a subject who has been in and out of rapidly ensuing schizoid states for too long. A series of alarming images appear, ending with two judgmental eyes, very similar to those of Dr. Eckleburg in *The Great Gatsby*. According to Donovan’s *Postmodern Counternarratives*, they symbolise Marco’s sense of failure, not having lived up to society’s expectations (70):

Nothing could hold its shape in me. Once, I remember, I saw the Moon Palace sign in front of me, more vivid than it had ever been in life. The pink and blue neon letters were so large, that the whole sky was filled with their brightness. Then suddenly, the letters disappeared, and only the two *os* from the word *Moon* were left. I was myself dangling from one of them … Then I was slithering around it like a tiny worm, and then I wasn’t there anymore. The two *os* had turned into eyes, gigantic human eyes that were looking down at me with scorn and impatience. They kept staring at me, and after a while I became convinced that they were the eyes of God. (*MP* 68)

E. Reintegration and the quest for balance

After this episode, Marco is sheltered by a friend and starts a period of recovery paired with a slow reintegration into society. He eventually takes up a position as caretaker for the elderly Thomas Effing. The blind Effing warns Marco on their first encounter that their “relationship … will be composed of words” (*MP* 100). Effing constantly demands descriptions of his surroundings, causing Marco to develop an alternative relationship to language with an increasing appreciation for non-verbal elements of oral communication and the potential for language to stimulate the listener’s imagination:

In the end, the words didn’t matter. Their task was to enable him to apprehend the objects as quickly as possible … I had to make them disappear the moment they were pronounced. … the more air I left around a thing, the happier the result, for that allowed Effing to do the crucial work on his own: to construct an image on the basis of a few hints, to feel his own mind traveling toward the thing I was describing for him. (*MP* 119)
During his time with Effing Marco comes to realise the transportational power of language and its ability to stimulate creativity. Moreover, it allows him to return to creative writing, noting down Effing’s life story and later the very narrative of *Moon Palace*. This new connection to language opens up the possibility to access the Semiotic without a schizoid phase. It unites worlds which until then were apart for Marco. Effing helps him see the importance of engagement with the physical world, so that one is not completely absorbed by mental processes, and keeps Marco from becoming disembodied once again:

there were times when I became so engrossed in what I was reading that I hardly knew where I was anymore, that I felt I was no longer sitting in my own skin. … Effing would cut me off mid-sentence and tell me to stop. … ‘Too bad,’ he would say. ‘Just when it was getting interesting.’ … I offered to continue reading for a while longer. ‘Impossible,’ he said. ‘We can’t disrupt the world for the sake of momentary pleasures. (MP 108-9)

This lesson is elementary to Marco’s further development and is reinforced by Effing’s cautionary tale of the painter Blakelock, another moonstruck figure, who spent so long living with Native Americans on the Western plains that he lost all connection to the striated space of his own society and lived out his life in a mental hospital after his return (MP 127-9). Effing sends Marco to watch Blakelock’s painting *Moonlight* with a set of instructions he is to follow closely and adds: “if you don’t do exactly what I say, I’ll never talk to you again” (MP 132).

While looking at Blakelock’s *Moonlight*, the lunar imagery engrosses Marco: “I was shocked to see how bright everything was in the upper part. Even taking the full moon into consideration, the sky seemed too visible” (MP 134). Marco also notes after having seen other moons by Blakelock that they resemble “holes in the canvas, apertures of whiteness looking out onto another world” (MP 137). In his essay *Inside Moon Palace*, Weisenburger comments that Blakelock’s moons are: “Not windows, in the conventional mimetic sense, they are understood as the gaps or ‘apertures’ specific to any medium … Their potential function, once one has gotten Inside, is to paradoxically open onto the unrecognized novel world Outside, a world of ‘alteriors’ charged with new social and ideological powers” (141). The moons, similar to the Moon Palace sign, have a transformational and liminal function: they can cause the individual to gain a different perspective on the world or to inhabit a different world altogether. Yet to fall into one of the holes, as Blakelock seems to have done,
may cause another schizoid episode and dissociate Marco from the world he currently inhabits, without any guarantee of a safe return.

Instead of triggering a schizoid state, *Moonlight* sets Marco on a path towards interpretation, thus causing him to establish a connection with art through language: “I wondered if Blakelock hadn’t painted his sky green in order to emphasize this harmony, to make a point of showing the connection between heaven and earth. If men can live comfortably in their surroundings . . ., then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness” (*MP* 135). Marco successfully completes the task and returns home. In hindsight, Effing’s threat never to talk to Marco again if he failed can be argued to carry additional meaning: if Marco had not let the instructions curb his flux and ground him, he might have become as disconnected as Blakelock and lose the ability to communicate and function in the Symbolic order.

The story of Blakelock is balanced out later with that of Thomas Moran, a painter who used his landscapes in an advertising campaign to increase the continent’s white population during the time of American expansion: “Manifest Destiny! They mapped it out, they made pictures of it, they digested it into the great American profit machine. Those were the last bits of the continent, the blank spaces no one had explored. Now here it was, all laid out on a pretty piece of canvas for everyone to see. The golden spike, driven right through our hearts!” (*MP* 145). Effing expresses his disdain for capitalist commodification of art and the natural world and seems to warn Marco to be neither like Blakelock nor like Moran, but to maintain the status of the traveller not only going back and forth between the Symbolic and Semiotic, but also to adjust one’s relationship with both, creating new paths to connect to one’s own identity in the process.
F. Liminal experience in the West

Marco’s life is never free of contingency and change. He experiences depression after Effing has died and his relationship with his girlfriend has broken down. During that time he enters into more intense contact with Solomon Barber, Effing’s son and Marco’s biological father, a fact he is unaware of until much later. Solomon and Marco decide to go on a long journey into the West to search for Effing’s cave in Utah, which will be discussed in the section on Thomas Effing. This journey will prove to be transformative for Marco, for whom the arid plains will function as a liminal space after he discovers his father’s identity. Initially Marco struggles to accept this: “A shock had been sent through my entire system, and I didn’t know how to absorb the blow” (MP 287). However, when Barber is in hospital after an accident, Marco can no longer ignore the fact that they are indeed father and son due to the physical resemblance: “I had no choice but to accept it. I was Barber’s son, and I knew it now beyond a shadow of a doubt” (MP 288).

Fragmentation and loss characterise the five-month period between Barber’s accident and Marco’s arrival in California. All of Marco’s connections to his previous life are stripped from him: when he is in need of comfort after accepting that Barber is his father and hopes for a Proustian moment of chicken pot pie, the waitress of the diner informs him that “there are no more chicken pot pies” which causes Marco to feel “as though the roof had caved in on me” (MP 289). After burying his father, who died in hospital, he vents his anger on his motel room which reflect his inner fragmentation: “I curled my hand into a fist, stood up, and punched the walls as hard as I could … [I] picked up a chair … smashed it down on the bureau, then watched in happiness as the whole thing splintered to bits” (MP 239). After these moments of unravelling, his car and most of his remaining money are stolen and he is informed that he can never set eyes on Effing’s cave because its supposed location was flooded to create a lake (MP 296).

Contingency thus strips Marco of the last objective guiding his direction and causes him to walk the remaining distance to the West Coast in smooth space. During this journey he experiences strong emotions which he expresses wordlessly in nomadic isolation. Yet he manages to reconstruct himself and gradually initiate reintegration, signalled by conversations with others and the purchase of a box:
I continued walking, slowly working my way west, stopping off in little towns for a day or two and then moving on, sleeping in open fields, in caves, in ditches by the side of the road. For the first two weeks I was like someone who had been struck by lightning. I thundered inside myself, I wept, I howled like a madman, but then, little by little, the anger seemed to burn itself out, and I settled into the rhythm of my steps. … By the end of the first month, I gradually began talking to people again. A few days later, I bought a box of cigars, and every night I smoked one in honor of my father. (MP 297)

His time in the liminal Western plains gives him the chance to incorporate his father’s identity into his own, until he is ready to interact with others once more. The box of cigars and the ritual developed in honour of a deceased loved one is reminiscent of Marco’s grieving of his uncle Victor, yet this time he does not continue on a destructive path but initiates his own reintegration, without the help of friends.

G. The significance of celestial symbolism

Solomon Barber once remarked that his nickname, Sol, meaning ‘sun’ in Latin and ‘ground’ in French, pleased him because “it intrigued him that he could be both the sun and the ground” (MP 244). This would entail that Marco comes to accept the sun as a part of his own identity as well, even though he has spent most of his life living under the moon, having only known a mother and not his biological father. Herzogenrath also remarks on the tension between the maternal and paternal or moon and sun in Moon Palace: “Since Sol, the father/sun, is missing from Marco’s life-text, he actually grows up under the aegis of the ‘moon’ … Marco’s life seems to be dominated by the signifier ‘moon’ and all its various associations, culminating in the neon sign of a Chinese restaurant called ‘Moon Palace’” (133). As this quotation and the examples cited above illustrate, the novel likens the moon to moments of creativity, both of a schizoid and linguistic nature, and therefore the maternal link to the Semiotic (Lechte 129) can also be observed here. As well as being a dominant motif in Moon Palace, the moon is also interpreted as a sign of creativity by Seidl, who argues in his essay that the frontier experience in the West offers “regeneration through creativity” for both Marco and Thomas Effing (60). Seidl cites Ickstadt’s interpretation of the moon in Moon Palace as: “a unifying symbol that embraces the variety of plots within the
novel. Together with the plots it also unites the different frontier settings and brings them together under the metaphor of a greater, final frontier that embodies all desires and dreams, and triggers creativity and imagination” (Seidl 61).

Lastly, the use of lunar and solar symbolism suggests a certain interpretation of Nikola Tesla’s sentence, which Marco keeps coming across: “The sun is the past, the earth is the present, the moon is the future” (MP 227). Solomon as the sun has become a part of Marco’s past, while his time spent in liminal spaces, where he is often confronted with the immediacy of things, may represent the earth. This leaves the moon as a symbol of the Semiotic *chora*, a line of flight which allows for alternative connections to the self and one’s surroundings. Tesla’s sentence gains a cyclical rather than linear nature through its recurrence: past, present and future, or sun, earth and moon can occur in one’s life at any point, since constant change and contingency underlie existence. The repetition also refutes stark boundaries or dichotomies; all three of these celestial bodies are always present within the subject and in his or her surroundings, or as Effing told Marco: “A man can’t know where he is on the earth except in relation to the moon or a star” (MP 149). The constantly imminent change is reflected in the final passage of the novel. When Marco feels that he has finally arrived at his destination after months of walking, the full moon above the Californian shore can be read as a sign of intensity that signals arrival is not the objective in life:

This is where I start, I said to myself, this is where my life begins. … As I looked down the curve of the coast, I saw the lights of the houses being turned on, one by one. Then the moon came up from behind the hills. It was a full moon, as round and yellow as a burning stone. I kept my eyes on it as it rose into the night sky, not turning away until it had found its place in the darkness. (MP 298)
2.2.2. Thomas Effing

A. Schizoid experience in the Western plains

Effing’s journey displays several parallels with Marco’s in his experience of the American West. Originally named Julian Barber, a painter from Long Island, he travels there to gain a better understanding of the space to enrich his art. When he enters the Great Salt Desert, which he describes as “a dead world”, he is confronted with an ineffable space. The startling whiteness and magnitude stimulate the erosion of boundaries between inner and outer:

It all jumped at me in ways I wasn’t prepared for. The mountains, the snow on the top of the mountains, the clouds hovering around the snow. After a while they began to merge together and I couldn’t tell them apart. Whiteness, and then more whiteness. How can you draw something if you don’t know it’s there? … Unearthly silence, Fogg. The only thing you could hear was your heart beating in your chest, the sound of blood rushing through your brain. (MP 151)

Effing’s aim to create representative art fails, since he has trouble distinguishing one object from another and ultimately the space from himself. He makes drawings, however, but cannot seem to grasp what they represent: “I drew like a fiend. Odd stuff … the marks on the page became smaller and smaller, small to the point of vanishing. It was as if my hand had a life of its own” (MP 150). The arid space elicits an intuitive and embodied response, since Effing does not seem to be consciously engaged in creating the “marks”. The emotional and wordless reaction to the landscape continues while his isolation increases, since language fails to make sense of his experience: “The land is too big out there. It swallows you up … eventually it just stops being there. The only place you exist is in your head” (MP 152).

The plains continue to present Effing with surreal, fluid forms which trigger a chain of associations like the Moon Palace sign, with the rocks in the desert acting like Deleuze and Guattari’s signs of intensity, morphing into familiar shapes yet, at the same time not referring to any of them (West-Pavlov 211-2):

tremendous structures rising out of the ground, they stood there like the ruins of some lost city built by giants. Obelisks, minarets, palaces: everything was at once recognizable and alien. You couldn’t help seeing familiar shapes when you looked at
them, even though you knew it was all chance … Thumbs, eye sockets, penises, mushrooms, human beings, hats. It was like making pictures out of clouds. (MP 152)

When his travelling companion dies, Effing’s connection to the outside world is entirely cut off and his isolation completed. He is stripped from any social conventions and turns to wordless expression in a schizoid state: “I started to scream, and after that I just let myself be crazy” (MP 158). His description of the desert plains as a place of death acquires another meaning at this point. Not only has his friend died, Effing decides after “he howled almost constantly for three days” (MP 161) that his identity as Julian Barber must also figuratively die, since he is convinced actual death is inevitable for lack of sufficient resources to last him more than a few days: “That was the moment Julian Barber was obliterated: out there in the desert, hemmed in by rocks and blistering light, he simply canceled himself out” (MP 161).

B. Semiotic regeneration and Symbolic reintegration

After days of incessant howling Effing discovers a cave. This is initially also a space of death; it contains the body of a recently murdered man. However, it soon transforms into a nourishing and life-giving space for Effing, a dimension signalled by the presence of a small oasis nearby: “a miniature pocket of life in the midst of overpowering barrenness” (MP 163). In the cave Effing not only finds the resources for physical survival, but recovers enough after a period of mental instability to uncover new artistic creativity. He does this by first taking control over his daily life, realising his resources are bound to run out within a year: “[He] set about organizing his life in the strictest possible way, doing everything he could to stretch out the time he would spend there” (MP 165). Soon after this reorganisation, he enters a period of incessant creativity, while also structuring his daily existence with a diary. One might argue that this discipline is an important factor in Effing’s overall stability which allows him to explore his creativity. The stark separation between his artistic creation and his daily tasks and obligations is that of codification (West-Pavlov 185-91), a term from the work of Deleuze and Guattari previously mentioned in the analysis of The Great Gatsby’s Valley of Ashes. Effing’s daily existence is highly codified. It follows a strict set of rules while his painting becomes decodified, since he no longer needs to take into account a society to watch and judge his work: “there was the fact that no one would ever see these paintings. … but rather than torment Effing with a sense of futility, it actually seemed to liberate him. He was
working for himself now, no longer burdened by the threat of other people’s opinions, and that alone was enough to produce a fundamental change in how he approached his art” (MP 166). In contrast to the Valley of Ashes both the codification and decodification occur outside of capitalism in Effing’s case and have a positive effect on him. His art is liberated from all conventions and restrictions, which positively impacts his artistic development: “He untaught himself the rules he had learned, trusting in the landscape as an equal partner, voluntarily abandoning his intentions to the assaults of chance, of spontaneity, the onrush of brute particulars” (MP 166). The cave is a type of sanctuary where he is content to live in complete solitude and paint what he claims to be his best work. It is a womb-like space, not unlike Marco’s apartment, which serves as a connection to the Semiotic. He abandons conventional surfaces after running out of canvas and paints the cave itself, physically transforming it into art. When he also finishes his paint, he develops creative writing, maintaining the separation between artistic freedom and daily discipline: “In one notebook he recorded his thoughts and observations, attempting to do in words what he had previously been doing in images, and in another he continued with the log of his daily routine” (MP 167). It is also during this period that Effing experiences Semiotic plenitude without a schizoid state: “He found it almost unimaginable, but little by little the world had become enough for him” (MP 168).

However, this situation is not permanent. At a certain point a friendly visitor passes by with whom Effing has his first conversation in months, thus initiating his reintegration into society. Shortly after, Effing finds more violent intruders in the Gresham brothers, criminals who murdered the cave’s previous occupant. Effing shoots the three men and takes their money, thus marking an abrupt end to his creative isolation: “he knew that his time in the cave had come to an end — just like that, with the speed and force of a book slamming shut” (MP 177). The murder returns the cave to the initial state in which Effing found it: a locus of death. It can no longer continue to perform its nourishing function and is later regarded by Effing as: “his private monument, the tomb in which he had buried his past” (MP 178). However, the cave remains in Effing’s memory as a space of comfort he can turn to at any time: “he wanted to know that it was still there, exactly as it had been. In that way it would continue to serve as a mental refuge for him, even if he never set foot in it again” (MP 178).
C. Salvation by contingency

As in Marco’s case, Effing’s time in the liminal Western plains is also concluded by his arrival in California. There he invents the name Thomas Effing, thus forever leaving his identity as Julian Barber behind. Herzogenrath comments on the name “Effing” that it “might be read as a pun on the impossible activity of ‘effing the ineffable’” (150), since the ineffable has played an important role in Effing’s life and art up to this point. Other interpretations of the name are possible, as Marco’s own view of it illustrates: “In writing out the word Thomas, he had probably been reminded of the phrase doubting Thomas. The gerund had then given way to another: fucking Thomas, which for convention’s sake had been further modified into f-ing. Thus, he was Thomas Effing, the man who had fucked his life” (MP 180).

The new identity is accompanied by financial gain through good investments with the Gresham brothers’ money. However, the previously found plenitude of the cave is relinquished and societal pressure overwhelms Effing. The capitalist system, requiring the individual to perpetually pursue new objects of desire, operates in broader terms than the purchase of new items and is also projected onto the individual’s decisions. In a society with so many possibilities, especially for those as wealthy as Effing, the choices seem endless and the social obligation to choose overwhelmingly stressful at times, which Keunen describes in his work on Western chronotopes (29). The effects Effing experiences from capitalist desire-as-lack are what Keunen terms “kairophobia”, or the choice not to choose at all and therefore not to conform to societal demands (155): “He lapsed into inertia, could not make plans or think about the possibilities that were open to him … he shut himself off from the world, sleeping in his darkened room by day and venturing out to Chinatown at night” (MP 182). This kairophobia leads to self-destructive behaviour: “He was looking for oblivion … trying to drown in degradation that would equal the loathing he felt for himself” (MP 182).

Contingency causes Effing to lose the use of his legs, an event foreshadowed by heavy rain similar to Marco’s final episode in Central Park. This changes his outlook on life and he realises both the importance of chance as well as the control he can exercise over his own narrative: “Julian Barber was dead. He wasn’t an artist anymore, he wasn’t anyone. He was Thomas Effing, a crippled expatriate confined to a wheelchair, and if anyone challenged him about his identity, he would tell him to go to hell. It was that simple. He no longer cared what anyone thought” (MP 185). The constant interaction of contingency and control will remain
with Effing until the end of his life and will also mark his demise, which is partially planned — he dies on the twelfth of May as he had decided — and partially left to chance. Contingency comes in the form of the comedian Orlando, a man with a broken umbrella, whom Marco and Effing encounter during one of their walks. Orlando passes the umbrella on to Effing saying: “That’s the thing about the weather: it changes all the time. If you’re not ready for everything, you’re not ready for anything” (MP 204-5). Effing afterwards uses the umbrella received by chance, to pass away on the desired date. His death is ultimately caused by pneumonia willingly caught in a heavy thunderstorm while completing his project of distributing fifty-dollar bills to random individuals in the streets of New York. In this manner he spreads his message of the importance of chance not only to Marco but also to strangers, though many may not be aware of it, judging by the variety of reactions (MP 201-2).

Effing’s liminal experience in the smooth space of the West and his schizoid episode result in his relinquishing his identity and constructing a new one. His subsequent experience in striated capitalist space, which overwhelms him to the point of near-auto-destruction, is interrupted by contingency. This eventually leads him to balance both the smooth and striated, the Semiotic and Symbolic. He accepts chance as a part of life and appreciates its paramount importance in the individual’s development, but also maintains partial control over his narrative, allowing him to function in society without succumbing to its pressures. The importance of contingency as well as the impossibility to make complete sense of reality, is underscored by Auster himself as cited in Varvogli, who mentions the author’s use of coincidence as a recurring theme in his work:

When I talk about coincidence, I’m not referring to a desire to manipulate. … what I’m talking about is the presence of the unpredictable, the utterly bewildering nature of human experience. From one moment to the next, anything can happen. Our life-long certainties about the world can be demolished in a single second. In philosophical terms, I’m talking about the powers of contingency (Varvogli 126)

Effing attempts to pass his view of life on to Marco, who by the end of the novel also seems to realise that he has the power to decide what kind of life he wants to lead, while also taking into account that complete control is never attainable, nor desirable, as contingency often introduces lines of flight which provide valuable alternatives to the order of everyday existence.
2.3. Cosmopolis

Where *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates the effects of modern city life and capitalist desire-as-lack in the guise of the American Dream and *Moon Palace* focuses on alternative connections to existence resulting in a balance between the Semiotic and Symbolic, *Cosmopolis* by Don DeLillo, similar to *The Great Gatsby*, is a novel deeply concerned with the workings of capitalism. Set in 2000, *Cosmopolis* focuses on digital evolution’s impact on capitalism, in which the flow and creation of money has become virtual. The novel’s protagonist Eric Packer is a young and powerful asset manager who is deeply interested in virtual currency and supports the ever-increasing digitalisation of every aspect of life. The movement from physical to virtual currency is a central theme in the novel and will prove to be paramount to Eric’s own understanding of existence while also contributing to his auto-destruction. Capitalist desire-as-lack operates in this character, which is signalled and reinforced by his nearly obsessive focus on virtual imagery from which he ultimately remains inseparable.

Antagonist Benno Levin will also be discussed as Eric’s double. As a man whose sole desire it is to murder Eric, he similarly displays a mentality related to desire-as-lack. Since Levin’s role is not as prominent as Eric’s in the novel, a smaller section will be dedicated to this character. His autobiographical *Confessions* highlight his thinking, while also providing an insight into his living space, and how this contributes to his view of life and unravelling. In Eric’s case the limousine in which he crosses New York City is a crucial space of fragmentation which provides an insight into his thoughts and the reasoning behind capitalism, in which the opposition between the physical and the virtual is of paramount importance.

Although capitalism and its application of desire-as-lack seem to dominate the lives of both characters, the role of the Semiotic remains crucial. It will be demonstrated that the Semiotic contributes to Eric’s increasing awareness of a possible existence outside of the capitalist system and that therefore not everything is the result of a set of fixed rules, contrary to what he initially believes.
2.3.1 Eric Packer

A. All that is solid melts into air

_Cosmopolis_\(^6\) centres around a day in the life of Eric Packer as he attempts to cross New York City to reach a barbershop for a haircut. Eric is determined to fulfil this objective no matter the cost, revealing the singular direction of his movements. The haircut is a desired object, which Eric actively searched for at the beginning of the day: “He didn’t know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut” (CS 7).

To have this haircut, Eric moves through the city in a stretched white limousine accompanied by three bodyguards and his driver. The car is not only a means of transportation, but has also been transformed into a highly technological living space dominated by “an array of visual display units. There were medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing” (CS 13). Furthermore a heart monitor and microwave are provided as well as a spycam filming Eric’s every movements and livestreaming everything to one of the screens. Inside the car “[t]he context was nearly touchless” (CS 13), which will prove to be a central characteristic of this space and conditions further events.

Eric interacts with a few of his employees in the car, the first of whom is Shiner, his chief of technology. Shiner’s physical characteristics are of no importance to Eric, who deliberately ignores them: “He did not look at Shiner anymore. He hadn’t looked in three years. Once you’d looked, there was nothing else to know” (CS 11). Eric’s impersonal approach characterises all interaction in the car by avoiding the physical aspect of humanity as much as possible. In this manner he receives a daily medical check-up, including a prostate examination — without any sign of shame — in front of his chief of finance Jane Melman. The examination is a highly utilitarian way of reassuring Eric that he is functioning appropriately and is an example of his tendency to control all aspects of his life. Moreover, during the examination the conversation between Eric and Melman becomes increasingly sexual until they both reach a climax without physical contact: “man and woman reached completion more or less together, touching neither each other nor themselves” (CS 52).

\(^6\) For this analysis excerpts and quotations have been taken from the 2011 Picador edition. References to pages of the novel will henceforth be abbreviated as _CS_. 
Another factor indicating the unimportance of the physical in the car is that there are only beverages present: “there was nothing solid for the microwave” (CS 14).

This unphysical approach also determines Eric’s first meeting with his wife Elise Shifrin, whose name may imply a certain emptiness: Elise sounds like the Italian ‘elissi’ or ‘elipsis’ and Shifrin reminds one either of the French ‘chiffre’ or of its Arabic origin ‘صفر’ (Sifr), meaning ‘zero’ but originally ‘empty’. She is portrayed as nearly ephemeral being even as they move outside of the car. This is clear from her aversion to eating: “It seemed, the food, to make her draw back. Green tea and toast untouched before her” (CS 18). Moreover, she refuses to engage in a physical relationship with her husband and has a tendency to hide or disappear: “I curl up somewhere. I’ve always done this. My mother used to send people to find me … She thought I was dissolvable in water” (CS 18). A well-known quote from the Communist Manifesto, “All that is solid melts into air”8 can be argued to be appropriate for all initial interaction in the novel, in which the car functions a space of capitalist deterritorialisation (West-Pavlov 185-9) of the human body, dissolving desire for the physical and resulting in a mind-body separation for all who enter.

Meanwhile, the limousine’s interior is so technologically advanced that it is personified. Human beings lack solid food in the car, yet it can eat: “Chin loosed one of his vegetarian farts. Mode control ate it at once” (CS 37). Moreover, the spycam, which supposedly operates in real-time, registers some of Eric’s movements before he himself performs them: “Eric watched himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline … and he realized queerly that he’d just placed his thumb on his chinline, a second or two after he’d seen it on screen” (CS 22). The spycam showing the imminent future occurs several times throughout the novel and will be a determining factor in Eric’s final moments. Lastly, the evaporation within the limousine contrasts with the solidity of the outside, described by Eric as “meat space” (CS 64).

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7 This interpretation of Shifrin’s name is my own. Other options may possible.

8 The complete English translation of the sentence reads: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (Marx and Engels 5). It is the final sentence of a paragraph describing the workings of the bourgeoisie, and by extension the capitalist system, which is driven toward constant renewal of production methods. The consequence of this is “disturbance of all social conditions” (Marx and Engels 5), describing modern social fragmentation as mentioned by Keunen (272).
B. Knowledge is control

While human beings are disembodied in the limousine, the data on the screens takes on organic aspects and is regarded by Eric as a harmonious whole mimicking natural patterns. Neither in data nor in nature, however, does Eric tolerate irregularities. He sternly believes in the “zero-oneness of the world” and the possibility to discover its underlying order:

He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing and chambered shell. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (CS 24)

This belief determines Eric’s world view which he also projects onto the initially chaotic and loud streets. In the chaos of New York he uncovers behavioural patterns which reflect his own desire for distance from the physical. Eric observes how pedestrians meticulously avoid physical contact like electrons, always repelling each other no matter how near they are. Marco notices similar behaviour on the streets in Moon Palace, but Eric focuses on the underlying regularity rather than the psychological impact of these behavioural codes on the individual:

Eye contact was a delicate matter. A quarter of a second of a shared glance was a violation of agreements that made the city operational. Who steps aside for whom, who looks or does not look at whom, what level of umbrage does a brush or a touch constitute? No one wanted to be touched. There was a pact of untouchability. Even here, in the huddle of old cultures, tactile and close-woven, with passersby mixed in, and security guards, and shoppers pressed to windows, and wandering fools, people did not touch each other. (CS 66)
Eric’s strong belief in the absence of irregularities is an attempt to gain and maintain complete control. If nothing is irregular, those with an intelligence like Eric’s have the possibility of uncovering the essence of existence and eradicating contingency: “He liked knowing what was coming. It confirmed the presence of some hereditary script available to those who could decode it” (CS 38).

The belief in complete knowability, however, is challenged by the events unfolding that day. Riots are taking place throughout New York, with protesters opposing capitalist decodification in which money is the only unit of value and individuals are devalued as a consequence. In an era where digitalisation is central to economic progress, humans are at risk of becoming obsolete according to Vija Kinski, Eric’s chief of theory, with whom he witnesses the riots from the car: “The more visionary the idea the more people it leaves behind. This is what the protest is all about. Visions of technology and wealth. The force of cyber-capital that will send people into the gutter to retch and die” (CS 90).

Kinski inscribes the riots within capitalism. She regards them not only as a result of neophile tendencies but as a necessary force which will eventually stimulate the system’s further development. Eric remarks that “the urge to destroy is a creative urge”, thus hinting at an alternative or movements outside of capitalism, yet Kinski refutes this: “This is also the hallmark of capitalist thought. Enforced destruction. Old industries have to be harshly eliminated. New markets have to be forcibly claimed. Old markets have to be re-exploited. Destroy the past, make the future” (CS 92-93). Kinski significantly indicates that capitalism is exclusively future-oriented: it must destroy the past or reincorporate it for profit and deterritorialise the present, undo its relevance, so as not to impede progress. She convinces Eric that “[t]he protest was a form of systemic hygiene, purging and lubricating. It attested again, for the ten thousandth time, to the market culture’s innovative brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible end, absorbing everything around it” (CS 99).
C. Riots as Semiotic revolt

The belief in the totality of the market is only short-lived, however. Eric witnesses a case of self-immolation during the riots and realises the market’s failure to incorporate this phenomenon: “Now look. A man in flames. And all action was at a pause, the protesters and riot police milling about and only the cameras jostling. What did this change? Everything, he thought. Kinski had been wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act … This was a thing outside its reach” (CS 99-100).

Kinski’s only remark when Eric challenges her on her totalising point of view is that the man’s act is “not original”, which is true in the sense that it is not the first case of self-immolation as a sign of protest in history. Yet this may actually prove Eric’s point that this act stands outside of the market, which is also what Donovan states in his reading of Cosmopolis in the context of terrorism. The act of self-immolation is “an act that successfully defies both interpretation and capitalism” (157). If it is not original, as Kinski claims, it is connected to and a recreation of a past event. Moreover, this historical connection is not employed directly to reinvigorate or re-exploit an old market since it is not easily inscribed within any market, culture or time. The act is therefore not solely directed towards the future, unlike capitalism. Eric’s observation moreover reveals the burning man as a sign of intensity: everything around him seems to stop moving. He is not only connected to the past, but his act creates a deep sense of presence for Eric, the present being another factor ignored by capitalism, according to Kinksi, since it is constantly deterritorialised, or its status as a desired object removed to make way for the future.

Rather than a product of capitalism, the riots may therefore be regarded as an in-between moment such as described by Howard in his essay on Deleuze and Guattari. The protest provides the opportunity to reverse the rigid hierarchy of the capitalist system (117) and therefore demonstrates that subjects always have alternatives at hand and are not stuck in the perpetual motions of capitalism. As an example, Howard cites the Los Angeles riots to demonstrate that the city, though operating as a space where power relations and the capitalist system regulate everyday reality, is itself an active force, for it consists of all the subjects inhabiting it. Howard argues that the very centre of the city allows for “counterattack”, a sort of carnivalesque experience in which the normal order and social stratifications are suspended. These “in-between” moments, are what Howard argues one should look for even in the most hierarchical, regulated spaces. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, the in-
between moments can multiply and even become a way of “living” the city as an alternative to its own rigid power structures (117-8).

This view reveals the centre of New York City as a space which can lend itself to creative transformation and revolt in the sense employed by Kristeva, an interpretation reinforced by the protesters’ use of a line from Zbigniew Herbert’s poem *Report from the Besieged City*: “a rat became the unit of currency”, to challenge the dominant position of money. According to Kristeva, poetic language has a subversive power and the potential to introduce the Semiotic into the Symbolic order where society tends not to recognise it. Especially her work on avant-garde poetry, *Revolution in Poetic Language* demonstrates how the Semiotic can focus on the aesthetic practice of art rather than other functions that are attributed to it, such as political, social or religious, thus freeing art from its social duties (Beardsworth 47-48). In this case art is directly connected to revolt, stressing its revolutionary potential as well as supporting the protesters in their attempt to subvert the social order.

The protests also serve to once again demonstrate that Deleuze and Guattari’s striated and smooth space are no stark opposites and that Kristeva’s Symbolic and Semiotic likewise are combined in the construction of identity, whether it be individual or collective in the case of these riots.

D. Lines of flight in physical connections

The man committing self-immolation may be regarded as a possible line of flight for Eric — a way to bring about the realisation that there is an outside to capitalism. Other moments throughout the novel may also be considered potential ‘points of exit’, such as the funeral of the rapper Brutha Fez, an event on a massive scale, which forms an obstacle for daily traffic. The procession features a wide mixture of cultural elements and cross-overs of historical and religious traditions with popular culture, as well as various forms of artistic expression, such as dancing and singing. The procession is oriented towards the past to celebrate the deceased rapper’s life as well as the traditions which inspired him, while hip-hop music in itself is a form of revolt. Finding its origins in inner-city ghettos of the 1970s — significantly the Bronx in New York — rap music has been a form of musical protest ever since, providing a platform of emancipation for socio-cultural minorities (Martinez 272-3).
The breakdancers, who harken back to Fez’s past, first become a focal point of interest for Eric to whom they seem out of place: “they spun on their heads, bodies upright and legs spread slightly … Eric thought there was something mystical about this … the half-crazed passion of a desert saint. How lost to the world he must be, here in the grease and tar of Ninth Avenue” (CS 134). Moreover, non-musical and non-verbal emotional sounds uttered by those present unite with the rhythm of Fez’s music and penetrate the vehicles which were brought to a standstill by the march: “There were great howls of devotion, whoops and street shouts. The clapping spread … to the people in the limos and crowd on the sidewalks and it brought a clear emotion to the night, a joy of intoxicating wholeness, he and they, the dead and provisionally living” (CS 135). Similar to the breakdancers, to whom he sees a connection, dervishes, accompanied by a mixture of musical instruments, catch Eric’s attention: “they were the archetype, perhaps, the early and sacred model, maybe, of the posse of breakdancers … Now music filled the night, ouds, flutes, cymbals and drums, and the dancers whirled, counterclockwise, faster with every turn. They were spinning out of their bodies, he thought, toward the end of all possessions” (CS 138). The counterclockwise direction of their dancing may once again indicate a movement into the past, which is not a typically capitalist one according to Vija Kinksi.

Moreover, the dervishes spin themselves into a religious trance, using their bodies as a vessel to reach a higher mental state which, according to Sufi tradition, transports them to a spiritual realm. Eric’s observation reveals parallels between their mind-body separation and his own, since the dancing causes a disconnect to the point where the physical is no longer relevant: “he thought of the whirlers deliquescing, resolving into fluid states, into spinning liquid, rings of water and fog that eventually disappear in air” (CS 139). This description resembles that of the burning man: “His shirt was assumed, it was received spiritually into the air in the form of shreds of smoky matter” (CS 98). The term evaporation can be argued to apply here in the same manner as to the subjects in the car, yet the nature of this evaporation differs from its capitalist counterparts. Eric’s desire is for human consciousness to be permanently detached from the body and uploaded digitally, redefining immortality: “He always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue of bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, consciousness saved from the void” (CS 206). This description resembles that of the dervishes’ transcendent spinning, yet the crucial difference lies in the role of the body. Where Eric desires to eliminate the body all-together, the dervishes, breakdancers and even the burning man employ their bodies to reach a higher spiritual state,
display artistic movements, and spread a strong political message respectively. The body can in these cases become a liminal space, a realm of transformation that allows subjects to communicate deeper meanings about life or come to new spiritual understandings. The dervishes must inevitably also return to their bodies when their trance has ended. This is not the case for Eric, who regards his body as a temporary vessel for his mind until a better alternative arises.

The artistic spectacle at the funeral stimulates critical reflection for Eric and leads him to experience a strongly physical and emotional reaction: “He wept violently. He pummelled himself, crossing his arms and beating his fists on his chest … he rocked and wept as mourners in cars went by … He wept for Fez and everyone here and for himself of course, yielding completely to enormous body sobs“ (CS 139).

The physical aspect of Eric’s reaction is of paramount importance as his engagement with the world outside of his car becomes increasingly physical. At the beginning of the day, this physicality is announced by several sexual encounters and bouts of excessive eating, which may be Eric’s manner of compensating for the car’s highly virtual environment: “He ate quickly, inhaling his food. Then he ate [Elise’s] food” (CS 18). The medical examination of his prostate confronts Eric with unwelcome physical sensations he cannot ignore, already hinting at the impossibility of complete detachment from the body: “He felt the pain. … He was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss … He wanted to judge it redundant and transferable. It was convertible to wave arrays of information. It was the thing he watched on the oval screen” (CS 48).

Moreover, the blackhead he points out to his doctor is not removed. Instead Eric is told to “[l]et it express itself” (CS 45). What frightens Eric most, however, is his asymmetrical prostate, which indicates the existence of irregularities, contrary to what Eric wishes to believe. It can also be regarded as an important reason for Eric’s desire for physical detachment, since the asymmetry confronts him with a fact beyond his control. The prostate becomes a zone of intensity during the examination, demanding Eric’s attention and forcing him into a sense of presence:
The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words. It was a point of hellish perception that was steady-state, unchanging in degree, and not a point at all but some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness, but not that either … he operated from within. He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology. (CS 50)

Eric’s body is central to potential alternative connections. However, his mind-body disconnect needs to be lifted in order for him to experience the Semiotic, which is closely linked to sensation. As mentioned before, Kristeva’s later theory allows the subject to reconnect to the Semiotic through the Symbolic at any given time with the chora acting as a mediator (West-Pavlov 98-100). The chora has a deeply physical connection to the subject as the locus of the drive without being concretely physical itself (Beardsworth 44-45). It can therefore link the subject to the Semiotic without a schizoid experience. Eric’s increasing physicality may be a way for him to reconnect to the Semiotic through sensation and the discovery of an alternative to capitalist desire-as-lack offer the opportunity for him to change his course.

As the day progresses, Eric unravels in his search for stronger sensations and his behaviour becomes more violent and destructive towards himself and others while he is losing all of his assets on the ever-climbing yen. He asks one of his bodyguards to stun him with an electrical gun in order to distance himself from rational thought: “The yen spree was releasing Eric from the influence of his neocortex. He felt freer than usual, attuned to the registers of his lower brain and gaining distance from the need to take inspired action, make original judgments, maintain independent principles and convictions, all the reasons why people are fucked up and birds and rats are not” (CS 115). He also inflicts violence on others and finds this to be exhilarating. First, he kicks “the pastry assassin” André Petrescu for throwing a crème pie in his face and afterwards he attacks photographers who registered the event: “He felt great. He held his clenched fist in the other hand. It felt great, it stung, it was quick and hot. His body whispered to him. It hummed with the action” (CS 143). Eventually Eric severs as many ties as possible to any type of security and shoots his bodyguard Torval with the latter’s own pistol: “He’d tossed the weapon rashly but how fantastic it had felt. Lose the man, shed the gun. Too late now to reconsider” (CS 147).
E. The barbershop

Shortly after the murder of his bodyguard Eric reaches the barbershop he had attempted to arrive at all day. This barbershop can be considered a locus of the past, which holds an ambiguous position for Eric. The past is first and foremost a dangerous time for Eric since it is unfamiliar, his main occupation being centred around the neophile urge of capitalism and technological advancements. This is announced at the beginning of the novel by his choice of artwork, which he does not seem to have purchased for purely aesthetic purposes: “He liked paintings that his guests didn’t know how to look at. The white paintings were unknowable to many, knife-applied slabs of mucoid color. The work was all the more dangerous for not being new. There’s no more danger in the new” (CS 8). Moreover, the barbershop is located in a dilapidated neighbourhood, reflecting the destruction that has increasingly accompanied Eric throughout the day: “He looked at the middle building in a line of five and felt a lonely chill, fourth floor, windows dark and fire escape bare of plants. The building was grim. It was a grim street but people used to live here in loud close company, in railroad flats, and happy as anywhere, he thought, and still did, and still were” (CS 159). The barbershop itself likewise shows signs of decay, missing one of its barber chairs: “There was a hole in the linoleum where the other chair had been” (CS 160).

The barbershop’s significance is explained through Eric’s father, who grew up in the neighbourhood and used to take Eric there when he was a child. However, Eric is not visiting for the sake of nostalgia: “it wasn’t his longing or yearning or sense of the past. He was too young to feel such things … He was feeling what his father would feel, standing in this place” (CS 159). More than a cherish a memory, Eric seems to desire to go a step further and recreate it by incarnating his father. Osteen, whose essay on Cosmopolis focuses on the reinterpretation of currency, views Eric’s intention as: “dramatizing the desire hidden within postmodern money— a yen to re-anchor itself to the material world” (298). In other words, by figuratively stepping into his father’s shoes, Eric may be expressing the desire to materialise himself and his surroundings after they have become so immaterial due to the dominance of virtual data. Eric’s attempt to become other may lead to further unravelling due to the danger the past holds for him.

However, the barbershop is also a place of safety, since Eric finds the barber’s repetition of the same formulae soothing: “Eric had heard this a number of times and the man used the same words nearly every time, with topical variations. This is what he wanted from Anthony. The same words” (CS 161). Eric once more displays his desire for control and
predictability. It is also here that he manages to fall asleep, briefly interrupting his insomnia and restlessness. The barbershop can therefore also be considered a re-territorialised space with historical significance capable of reconnecting Eric to his origins. It differs from the spaces Eric normally enters and provides a sense of security he can turn to when he feels the need. This is due to the space being located in the past while Eric’s life is deeply engaged with the future, the pressure of which is not felt here due to the repetition which suspends it in time. Lastly, the barbershop is a space of solidity, where the individual matters, thus countering most of the other spaces of collectivity or evaporation Eric has moved through during the day: “he told [his driver and the barber] about the credible threat. He confided in them. It felt good to trust someone. It felt right to expose the matter in this particular place, where elapsed time hangs in the air, suffusing solid objects and men’s faces. This is where he felt safe” (CS 166).

However, the barbershop fails to fulfil its purpose. Once the time has arrived for the long-awaited haircut to be completed, Eric’s patience runs out and he leaves with only one half of his hair cut. This reveals the haircut as the objet-petit-a in Lacanian terms. It is not the object Eric truly seems to desire, yet pursuing it was exhilarating, since the road toward it was paved with obstacles. Eric’s great wealth and power allow him to easily gain anything he might desire, which eliminates the excitement and challenge. A simple haircut was more difficult to obtain in this case than his extremely rare nuclear bomber. Yet when Eric finally receives it, the direction of his desire reveals itself as pointing elsewhere.

F. Failure to connect

After leaving the barbershop, Eric once more attempts to engage alternatively with his surroundings by intruding on a film set where a large group of extras is lying naked on the ground. Eric strips and joins them. On the film set individual identity no longer seems of any importance as all subjects lie silent: “He lay on his back, head twisted, arm bent on chest. His body felt stupid here, a pearly froth of animal fat in some industrial waste” (CS 174). The set also provides the possibility for connections to others, a desire which Eric expresses: “He wanted to be there among them, all-body, the tattooed, the hairy-assed, those who stank. … There were the young and strong. He was one of them. He was one of the morbidly obese … He thought of the children in the scrupulous beauty of their pretending … He was one” (CS 176). The act of lying down among the actors may potentially result in a liminal experience.
in which Eric can shed more than his clothes. Yet Eric and the others are required to close their eyes while the camera is rolling, which gives another sense to his being “one”. He cannot fully connect to the group this way and so he imagines himself as the camera eye, which is not the solution: “he saw the clustered bodies as the camera did, coldly. … Why see these things? They isolated him. They set him apart and this is not what he wanted” (CS 176).

In spite of the barrier erected by the camera, Eric connects with a woman next to him, whom he identifies as his wife Elise and finally engages in a sexual act with her. Afterwards, Eric returns to his limousine where he feels sheltered for a brief moment: the car is transformed into a womb-like space with which he establishes a sensual connection:

He wanted to be in the rear cabin … in bronzy light, alone in the flow of space, noting the lines and grains, the sweet transitions, this shape or texture modulated to that. The long interior had a thrust, a fluid motion rearward, and he smelled the leather around him and the red cedar paneling up front … He felt the marble underfoot, bone cold. He looked at the ceiling mural, a dark ink wash, semi-abstract, that showed the arrangement of the planets at the time of his birth, calculated to the hour, minute and second. (CS 179)

The end of the description reveals the cold and the exactness of the mural. Even as Eric’s increased physical connection to his surroundings penetrates the limousine, it can be argued the car remains a Euclidean space that leaves few opportunities for any connection to the Semiotic. In Deleuze and Guattari’s terms it remains a strongly “striated space” of order and separation (474). It is left behind at a parking garage shortly afterward, which may indicate Eric’s renouncing his last barrier between himself and the outside world. According to Meissner, the car holds an ambiguous position in the novel, in the sense that it never fully succeeds in separating the inside from the outside. During the day external elements intrude on the car, for example when the protesters attack it. Even its separation from the physical does not entail complete isolation from the world, since the advanced technology produces “new forms of electronic connections” between Eric and the City (113).

After several failures to connect alternatively Eric eventually realises, standing face to face with his murderer Benno Levin, that there is nothing in life which he desires. Moreover, he no longer desires life itself: “What did he want that was not posthumous? He stared into space. He understood what was missing, the predatory impulse, the sense of large excitation
that drove him through his days, the sheer and reeling need to be” (CS 209). This is the cause for Eric’s demise rather than Levin murdering him, since he voluntarily follows Levin into the building and fires into his own hand — possibly in a final attempt to feel — instead of shooting Levin. The pain in his hand, similar to the pain of the prostate examination, becomes a zone of intensity, which carries an ineffable meaning and holds him in the present. Moreover, it confronts him very clearly with the irrefutable embodiment of humanity and is the culmination of his increasing search for physical sensations: “The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. … He’d come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain” (CS 207).

G. Virtual imagery as an obstacle

Eric’s increasing urge towards destruction and search for ever more intense physical sensations leave him few opportunities for healing Semiotic connections or productive schizophrenia. What seems to prevent Eric from truly pursuing lines of flight is his fixation on screens and video images, which mark the end of all possibly alternative or emotional experiences for Eric throughout the novel. Eric feels the urge to join the protests at a certain point, thinking “maybe … he’d like to be out there, mangling and smashing” (CS 92), yet he remains in the car as it is attacked by the protesters. While they violently rock the vehicle, Eric does not seem much concerned with the movement, but prefers to watch the protests on his screens instead, because “[i]t made more sense on TV” (CS 89), thus letting the screens stand between him and the event he can physically feel.

Similarly, after his violent weeping at Brutha Fez’ funeral, his attention is drawn to the screens displaying Fez’ body and his desire-as-lack shows in his dissatisfaction: “There was one thing more wanted from this funeral. He wanted to see the hearse pass by again, the body tilted for viewing, a digital corpse, a loop, a replication” (CS 139).

The camera on the film set similarly functions as an obstacle, as was described above, since all those present are required to close their eyes, causing Eric to imagine the set from the camera’s perspective in a failed attempt to connect to the others. Lastly, Eric’s fixation on screens remains with him in his final moments, where once again events are shown before they have taken place. Eric sees himself as a corpse in the display of his crystal watch, which
also contains a livestream camera, behaving like the spycam in his limousine. His death becomes multiple: where first he commits financial suicide losing all his assets on the yen, he later dies on the screen of his watch, and therefore sees no other option than to be shot by Levin in real life. The screens determine Eric’s worldview to a point where they seem to display a future so real that he has no choice but to follow, thus once more orienting himself inevitably toward the future like Vija Kinski’s idea of capitalism. The camera eye dominates his view of reality, leaving little to no room for irregularities and contingency.

Ultimately, virtual imagery is never relinquished and therefore offers Eric no possibility of seizing lines of flight, even though Eric experiences several moments in which the Semiotic may potentially reach him through sensations. This becomes apparent in the fact that the mind-body separation which the car stimulates is ultimately withstood by Eric when he realises the physical aspect of humanity cannot be ignored. Moreover, his reflections on the burning man during the riots, his attempts to create connections to others in the outside world and his tears at Brutha Fez’s funeral indicate that Eric can conceive of a reality outside of capitalism. However, his connection to the Semiotic is not continued to a point of experiencing the plenitude described by Kristeva (West-Pavlov 46). Instead, it is interrupted by a virtual display or camera. Therefore Donovan states in his discussion of the importance of cameras in Cosmopolis: “cinematic time and cinematic reality may have won out” (155). In the end, Eric cannot seem to detach himself completely from the screen, which continues to form an obstacle between him and any alternative connections which may stimulate creative growth.
2.3.3. Benno Levin

A. Challenging boundaries

Benno Levin makes his first appearance in the chapter The Confessions of Benno Levin, a diary which reveals his thinking and motives for the murder of Eric Packer. Levin’s diary forms a counter-narrative to Eric’s and creates a few contrasts, as Ferry points out in his work on Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction: Levin’s writings reflect on his past and what led him to his life off the grid plotting to murder Eric, while the latter, as the section above also pointed out, is mainly focused on the future (144). Ferry also points out Levin’s everyday life at the bottom of the New-York hierarchy while Eric stands on top and apart from it in his position of power (144). However, both men are isolated in their own way. Eric’s isolation, which becomes most apparent through his limousine, demonstrates that his interaction with city life is a choice for him. Levin’s interaction with others is also minimal, but his outsider status is created by a lack of financial means in contrast to Eric’s wealth.

Levin’s living space indicates his outcast position: he illegally squats in a condemned building. Here Levin feels the need to break down barriers separating the inside from the outside. This is a parallel drawn with Eric’s reflection on the fragility of surfaces in their function separating within from without. Eric is increasingly confronted with this theme, as his failure to separate the mind from the body discussed in the previous section illustrates, and is the first to bring the instability of the inside–outside dichotomy to the fore: “He scanned [the tower’s] length and felt connected to it, sharing the surface and the environment that came into contact with the surface from both sides. A surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other” (CS 9).

In his living space Levin challenges the boundaries of spatial and social norms: “I live a practical life of starting over, with middle-class values intact. I’m knocking down walls because I don’t want to live in a set of little quads where other people lived, doors and narrow hallways, whole families with their packed lives and so many steps to the bed and so many steps to the door. I want to live an open life of the mind where my Confessions can thrive” (CS 58). Levin has recodified the space previously condemned by the City by transforming it into a living space once again, as well as recodified what constitutes this: separating boxes have become an open space without typically homely arrangements. This cancelling out of stark boundaries to serve his creativity is similar to West-Pavlov’s description of the process
of the schizoid subject, for whom dichotomies are no longer relevant (239-244). Levin indeed claims to need this erosion of boundaries for his writing to be successful. This may initially indicate that he challenges these norms to serve his creativity. His building can in this sense be interpreted as a liminal space, where his previous identity is shed and values are reconstructed based on personal and creative development as described by Engel (2). This, however, does not seem to happen for Levin, who does not shed his previous identity but instead keeps his “middle-class values intact” (CS 58).

Rather than relinquishing himself to flux, he does not seem prepared to give up attempts of controlling his narrative. This is illustrated by the frustration language causes him in being insufficient to grasp his experience. Levin’s own thought processes also constantly interfere with his recounting of past events, which results in a text with little structure, similar to a stream of consciousness, demonstrating his failure to attain control:

I’m not one of those trodden bodies you try not to look at when you walk down certain streets. I don’t look at them either. I’m knocking down the walls in my living space, a task of many weeks that’s nearly done now. I buy my bottled water in the Mexican grocery up the street. There are two clerks or an owner and a clerk and they both say No problem. I say Thank you. No problem. (CS 154).

B. Levin as Eric’s double

The parallels and contrasts drawn between Eric and Levin as described above indicate a process of doubling. Osteen, who views the human body as counter-currency to abstract currency in Cosmopolis, calls Levin: “Packer’s own self-destructive impulse come to squalid life” (298). Ferry also highlights Levin’s function as Eric’s double and argues that apart from this, Levin resembles certain characters by Paul Auster (144). Ferry illustrates this by referring to Auster’s New York Trilogy and specifically the final confrontation in The Locked Room (144). This work is not discussed in this analysis, yet a comparison between Moon Palace’s Marco and Levin may provide more insight into the latter’s thinking. What Levin has in common with Marco is his position as the author of his own story and his retrospective focus. This is also a parallel between Levin and Nick Carraway for that matter. All three characters attempt to write about their past in order to process certain life-changing events, yet Levin’s writing reveals his belief in a single objective culminating in the death of Eric
Packer and ending with the completion of ten thousand autobiographical pages. In this he differs from Marco and Nick in the sense that their writing seems to be focused on the past in hopes of moving forward with a different outlook on life. The lack of a future becomes apparent early on in Levin’s work and Eric’s death seems to be the final great moment Levin will ever know: “There are great themes running through my mind. The themes of loneliness and human discard. The theme of who do I hate when there is no one left” (CS 58). What is more, he does not seem to believe he will ever truly produce ten thousand pages: “I have my paper, legal size, white with blue lines. I want to write ten thousand pages. But already I see that I’m repeating myself. I’m repeating myself” (CS 57). This repetition and the struggle to move forward indicates that Levin’s focus on the past may be so dominant at this point that the future cannot be incorporated.

The arguments for this statement reveal themselves further as Levin’s account progresses. The quotation cited above in which Levin mentions that his project of knocking down his walls is nearly completed (CS 154), indicates his single-mindedness. He seems to be setting objectives which he expects to complete in the near future, but does not hint at any long-term plans, apart from finishing his large autobiography: “I want ten thousand pages that will stop the world” (CS 152). This statement resembles Eric’s thought that “when he died he would not end. The world would end” (CS 6) and demonstrates a finality in both Levin’s and Eric’s thinking and a limited role for the future in Levin’s life.

C. Fragmentation caused by lack

Levin struggles to represent his narrative in ten thousand pages due to the insufficiency of language. He cannot, for instance, accurately describe the sound Eric emitted when he was killed: “There was a brief sound in his throat that I could spend weeks trying to describe. But how can you make words out of sounds? These are two separate systems that we miserably try to link” (CS 55). This description of language and sound as “two separate systems” highlights the inability to bridge the gap between the verbal and non-verbal caused by the lack Levin perceives at the centre of language. This lack does not seem to deter him as he continues his work. However, the constant confrontation with verbal deficiency is a burden, physically represented by his heavy writing desk, for which he went through great efforts: “I have my writing desk, which I dragged along the sidewalk, through the alley and up the stairs. This was an undertaking of days, with a system of wedges and ropes. This was two
days I needed to do this” (CS 59). Although Levin is determined to complete his self-imposed task, he is not only hindered by language, but also his own thought processes. This results in a fragmented discourse, mirrored by a fragmented living space. Apart from the walls Levin knocked down, nothing in the building functions properly and certain necessities have not been provided, making the space inhospitable: “I spend my bare cash every day on bottled water. This is for drinking and bathing. I have my toilet arrangements that I made, my take-out places that I patronize and my water needs in a building without water, heat or lights except what I provide” (CS 150).

D. Inescapable desire-as-lack

Instead of providing Levin with a space where his creativity can flourish, the building is a space of increasing fragmentation which has only unravelled over time. Levin’s fragmented account seems to follow the same direction and to build up an argument for why his past and present state can only lead to one future outcome: the death of Eric Packer. Levin fixates on Eric’s death as a desired object, stating: “how do I live if he’s not dead?” (CS 154). It seems, however that Eric is the last obstacle between Levin and his own death, since he also indicates, as mentioned before that he may not have another object of fixation afterwards, there being no one left to hate (CS 58). Ferry also indicates that Levin “feels he has nothing to live for” (145).

Yet Levin looks to Eric for salvation. He regards Eric as a symbol of the governing system in which he himself remained powerless. This is why Ferry describes him as “the everyman” (145). Yet salvation is unlikely, since Eric has relinquished his status at the top of the capitalist food chain and increasingly explored the outside of this system by the time he meets Levin. The latter even stimulates further movement away from the status quo by driving home to Eric that existence includes contingency:

\[
\text{you forgot something along the way. … The importance of the lopsided, the thing that is skewed a little. You were looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal sides. … you should have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quick. The misshape. … That’s where the answer was, in your body, in your prostate. (CS 200)}
\]
It seems ironic that Levin, who points out the importance of irregularities to Eric, is himself aiming to restore a balance, stating justice as the reason for Eric’s death: “You have to die for how you think and act. … For how much you had and how much you lost, equally. No less for losing it than making it. For the limousine that displaces the air people need to breathe in Bangladesh. This alone” (CS 202). Global justice is simply an excuse, however, as Levin confirms afterwards that the aim of Eric’s death is individual rather than collective: “there’s no life for me unless I do this” (CS 201). Even this balance, Levin realises, is unlikely to materialise since Eric disappoints him:

“I wanted you to save me.” The voice had a terrible intimacy, a nearness of feeling and experience that Eric could not reciprocate. He felt sad for the man. What lonely devotedness and hatred and disappointment. The man knew him in ways no one ever had. … Eric had failed this docile and friendless man, raging man, this lunatic, and would fail him again and had to look away. (CS 204)

At this point Eric also realises that his death will not guarantee a life for Levin, which reinforces the argument that Levin is Eric’s double: both fail to leave their unidirectional path conditioned by desire-as-lack to explore alternatives.

Ferry concludes his analysis of *Cosmopolis* by arguing that Eric’s destruction cannot simply be read as a death wish. His journey in search of alternatives to his position of power indeed leads him to important insights (149-50), which my own analysis of Eric Packer also confirms. To state that Eric’s demise is caused by his death wish would indeed not take into account the complexity of this character or of Benno Levin, whose death is not confirmed at the end of the novel. Yet both characters find themselves in a situation where neither seems capable of escape. Their death is imminent, but rather than wished for, it is an inevitability of their thinking patterns in which desire-as-lack plays a prominent role. Although possibilities exist outside of the capitalist system for both characters, they do not seem to experience alternative moments of subjectivity as described by Kristeva or Deleuze and Guattari. This ultimately signifies that they remain tethered to capitalist desire-as-lack, driving them to find meaning located in the elsewhere without stimulating creative growth through the experience of plenitude.
3. Conclusion

This analysis examined the research questions formulated in the introduction focusing on how the interaction of the North-American subject with literary spaces is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Palace*, and *Cosmopolis*. In order to answer this, the novel’s protagonists and doubles were selected in combination with literary spaces relevant to these characters in the three novels. Subsequently concepts from the theories of Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari as well as the idea of liminality were applied to the character-space interaction in order to gain an insight into the significance of literary space to character development. The result is the research before you, an extensive close reading of these characters and spaces combined with the theoretical concepts, the most important of which, apart from liminality, are Kristeva’s Semiotic disposition and Deleuze and Guattari’s rethinking of desire as plenitude, to which other relevant ideas were connected such as that of schizophrenia, smooth and striated space and de- and re-territorialisation.

The section on *The Great Gatsby* focused on narrator Nick Carraway and protagonist Jay Gatsby. A close study of the case of Nick Carraway gave an insight into this character’s attempt to adopt the capitalist mindset in which desire-as-lack is dominant according to the theory of Deleuze and Guattari. Carraway is increasingly confronted with the negative effects of this choice on his development and overall experience of New York. This is represented by a series of unpleasant, alarming noises which seem to mirror Nick’s internal struggle to adapt to New York culture. These noises can be interpreted as a Semiotic appeal to Nick’s senses, since they are a form of wordless communication and stimulate alternative meaning-making for the character concerning both his internal and external reality.

The spaces on the East Coast into which Nick ventures do not seem to offer safety or stimulate creativity. Examples include Myrtle Wilson’s Manhattan apartment, a stifling space which triggers Nick’s urge to escape and reconnect to nature, and the Valley of Ashes, a liminal space where he is confronted with the harsh conditions of the workers, their inability to escape and the violence of the car accident which kills Myrtle Wilson, an event which shocks him and adds to his sense that he cannot adapt to life on the East Coast. The murder of Gatsby signifies the loss of a dear friend and causes him to turn away from New York. Nick returns to his place of birth in the mid-West and recodifies both the American East and West by attaching new associations to these spaces. Where New York did not offer Nick a sense of
safety or creativity and comes to signify moral depravity, the West, re-territorialised as a space of positive childhood memories and conservative codes of behaviour, seems to aid Nick’s recovery and allows him to creatively express himself in writing, of which the novel’s narrative is the result.

The study of Jay Gatsby allowed for an insight into the character as an individual who has fully adopted capitalist desire-as-lack, causing him to chase an unachievable dream. Gatsby’s treatment of time and space was compared to that of a singularity, to illustrate his strong belief in the possibility of a return to the past, located in the city of Louisville, where he first met his small desired object Daisy. His movement in space seems unidirectional instead of multiple: he is convinced he must remain in his mansion until he conquers Daisy and then return to Louisville. Gatsby’s treatment of space-time and strong fixation on his single dream, operating in the system of desire-as-lack, seem to create the impossibility for alternative connections which may have resulted in his survival by his exploration of other options. Gatsby is not described as experiencing Semiotic moments capable of causing an identity de- and reconstruction, nor does he seem to experience plenitude or an overwhelming sense of presence, which may be the reason for not adapting his mindset or trajectory. Moreover, Gatsby’s belief in his ability to achieve complete control over his life and future causes him not to consider contingency. Chance, however, will be what causes his death in the end, emphasised by Nick’s focus on the accidental nature of the incident in his description of Gatsby’s body in his swimming pool.

Where *The Great Gatsby* describes an individual’s failure to achieve complete control over his life through the adoption of capitalist desire-as-lack, the analysis of *Moon Palace* is focused on the relevance of contingency in an individual’s development. Marco S. Fogg is shown to experience schizoid states triggered by lunar elements such as the neon Moon Palace sign, causing him to initially relinquish completely to chance. His apartment initially functions as a liminal space which allows this Semiotic connection. However, complete flux nearly costs Marco his life, since it results in his losing control over his cognitive functions due to physical hardship, his eviction and ensuing period of homelessness. This is lived out in the re-territorialised space of Central Park, which reflects the need for order and connection to others within the Symbolic which Marco lacks during this time. Marco’s initial connection to the Semiotic through schizophrenia is later balanced out by his time with Thomas Effing, who teaches him to connect to his creativity through the Symbolic, which can also be
employed to access the Semiotic as Kristeva’s theory describes. Marco therefore does not risk schizoid lunacy and can maintain a sense of order while exploring his identity and creativity.

The characters in Auster’s novel were shown to be subjected to constant change. This is portrayed by Marco’s existential crisis after large life changes and the discovery of his father’s identity. He subsequently undertakes a journey through the liminal space of the American West and emerges with a reconstructed identity, having accepted his past as well as his father. After this liminal episode Marco is able to reintegrate into society, thus assuming the Symbolic order once more. This demonstrates his success at moving in Deleuze and Guattari’s smooth and striated space, allowing for contingency to cause one space to intersect the other at any given time. Chance will continue to interfere in Marco’s life, as the appearance of the moon at the end of the novel indicates, but the final passage signals his ability to connect to both the Semiotic and Symbolic to critically examine his identity and allow for change.

Thomas Effing’s journey echoes many of the points made in the analysis of Marco. Effing also experiences a schizoid episode in the plains of the American West, which similarly function as a liminal space. He deconstructs his identity as the painter Julian Barber and emerges from his liminal experience with a reconstructed identity as Thomas Effing and reintegrates into capitalist society. Effing’s life is also never fully under his control, as contingency triggers the most important changes from his schizoid state to his recovery of the Symbolic in the cave — one of the most central spaces to his development — and the loss the use of his legs during a time in which capitalist desire-as-lack has become so dominant as to form an obstacle to his personal growth. The balance of the Semiotic and Symbolic proves to be central to Effing’s view of life, as his time in the cave allows him to connect to the Semiotic through his painting, but prevents him from relinquishing to complete flux and schizophrenia, which may be deadly when this state is prolonged as Marco’s case illustrates. Effing integrates the Symbolic into his life and balances out his Semiotic experiences by maintaining strict order and discipline in his cave and by writing his daily activities and creative pieces in two separate books. Effing’s identity construction demonstrates the individual’s partial mastery and the power of personal choice, while the important life changes caused by contingency indicate that complete control is never possible nor desirable.
The analysis of *Moon Palace* foregrounded alternative connections to one’s identity and external reality which lie outside of capitalism and do not operate within desire-as-lack, while the section on *Cosmopolis*, similar to *The Great Gatsby*, revealed the novel’s focus on the processes of capitalism. This is achieved through the protagonist Eric Packer and his double Benno Levin. Both characters were shown to operate within desire-as-lack, setting singular objectives which they are determined to fulfil whatever the cost. Eric’s fixation is a haircut in a barbershop which is revealed as a re-territorialised space as well as a connection to the past. This entails both the promise of safety and risk. On the one hand, the barbershop is a space of constants and repetition, which Eric expects will satisfy his need for complete control. On the other hand, the past is where childhood memories are located and is considered a dangerous time by Eric, since he is more confident focusing on the future and constant modernisation in the same way as the capitalist system in the novel. This can be observed in his wish to sever the tie between the mind and the body, hoping to one day digitally upload his consciousness in order to live unencumbered by the physical aspect of humanity and the temporal limitations this entails.

The limousine in which Eric crosses New York to reach his barber is a space which mirrors his capitalist and future-oriented mindset, where the increasing digitalisation and disconnect between the mind and body is played out. This is reflected in the absence of solid food and Eric’s lack of attention to the physical aspects of others and of his own, illustrated by the complete physical examination he receives while conducting a conversation with one of his employees. The limousine is filled with numerous displays to give Eric selective access to the outside world without the obligation to engage with it and is therefore a physical barrier to separate himself from the daily goings-on of New York City. However, Eric increasingly ventures outside of the limousine during the day, while riots illustrate that the limousine is not completely impenetrable as protesters attack it. These riots can be regarded as a Semiotic revolt in Kristeva’s theory, or an in-between moment where smooth space is able to topple the capitalist hierarchy in striated space for Deleuze and Guattari. The riots also signal to Eric the presence of connections to reality outside of the capitalist system. Eric’s engagement with the world becomes increasingly physical during the day and reflects his attempt to explore these alternatives, while he comes to understand that the mind and body can never be separated, the body being a seminal part of the individual’s identity. Through physical sensations Eric experiences moments in which the Semiotic may have the opportunity of breaking through the Symbolic to cause him to experience plenitude, which may prevent his auto-destruction to a point of no return.
Moments in which Eric is prompted to connect to his body and others, apart from the riots, include Brutha Fez’s funeral, where he experiences strong emotions, and the film set, where he attempts to connect to the extras by lying down among them. Yet Eric’s attempts fail to distract him from his increasingly violent engagement with external reality and his objective of reaching the barber, a small desired object which ultimately fails to satisfy his need for connection. The encounter with his murderer Benno Levin, who makes Eric realise contingency is inevitable, is based on chance yet does not seem to offer any escape for Eric, whose future death is already displayed on his watch.

All productive alternative connections to the Semiotic seem to be prevented repeatedly by Eric’s fixation on virtual imagery, which even predicts the future in some instances, reversing the causal order of real-life events and their appearance on the screen. This distracts Eric from further exploring how he can productively de-and reconstruct his identity and in this manner conceive of lines of flight, other directions in which to travel in flux and plenitude outside of capitalist desire-as-lack.

As Eric Packer’s double, Benno Levin is shown to display several contrasts and similarities with the protagonist. Similar to Eric, Levin is on a path towards auto-destruction from which there seems to be no escape, which is reflected in the condemned building he illegally inhabits: a fragmented space without basic necessities such as running water and electricity where Levin has spent days breaking down walls in order to stimulate the completion of his large autobiography. This may initially be read as Levin’s attempt to defy conventions in order to retrieve a Semiotic connection and creative flow. He harbours the ambition of writing ten thousand pages, yet from the beginning shows little belief this can actually be achieved, thus indicating his failure to connect to the Semiotic. Levin’s plan of creative writing seems to be overshadowed by his objective to murder Eric Packer, his motive being that this will allow him to continue his own life. Yet the moment he is confronted with Eric it becomes clear this is a fantasy as well, bound to disappoint Levin. The murder of Eric Packer may be the final act for Levin, whose future prospects seem extremely limited and whose desires are not satisfied. Levin is shown to also operate within desire-as-lack. His autobiographical chapters reveal no successful Semiotic connections or experiences of plenitude which may redirect him away from his singular objective. Both Levin and Eric seem to be headed in a similar direction, without lines of flight at hand to reorient them.
The analysis of the three novels and six central characters has attempted to reveal the importance of the Semiotic and of desire as plenitude in the development of an individual all throughout his adult life. The Semiotic can be experienced in a schizoid state or through the Symbolic, for example in writing, as several of the analysed characters have demonstrated. It has the potential to reconnect the individual to plenitude, an alternative to lack, and to stimulate creative expressions which may also be interpreted as a revolt against conventions and carry the ability to break the rules and critically examine order and hierarchy. By combining these concepts developed by Kristeva with those of Deleuze and Guattari and liminality, the importance of the reworking of desire in order to conceive of useful and personally stimulating alternatives is revealed.

Three of the characters, Jay Gatsby, Eric Packer and Benno Levin, have been shown not to be able to conceive of lines of flight nor to be able to experience desire as plenitude instead of lack. It can therefore be argued that their path to auto-destruction is not interrupted, nor do they explore the possibilities of relocating to spaces which may stimulate restorative changes. All three characters display the tendency to gain complete control over their lives and futures in an attempt to eliminate uncertainty and contingency, yet chance seems to catch up with them, resulting in the demise of two characters and likely of the third, Benno Levin. Although Thomas Effing’s life also ends in Moon Palace, this differs from the other three characters whose deaths can be said to be unforeseen or premature, especially since Jay Gatsby and Eric Packer are quite young and physically sound, while Benno Levin’s life led in voluntary difficulty and squalor can be argued to end with Eric’s. Effing’s death demonstrates his acceptance of contingency, which fundamentally differs from the manner in which this is handled by the other characters who do not survive.

The other characters, Marco S. Fogg, Thomas Effing and Nick Carraway, have been demonstrated to have experienced moments of a Semiotic nature which eventually brought about changes in perspective, causing them to critically examine their realities, reconstruct their identities and discover lines of flight. This last and spatially rooted concept is particularly useful in demonstrating how these individuals have allowed contingency and their senses to interfere with their status quo. In these moments they seem to realise that complete stability is not achievable nor desirable, since change can be a catalyst for personal growth. They experience crises as well as great creativity and flux, yet none of them remain in a fixed state or maintain the belief that life can be completely controlled and contingency
eliminated. This may contribute to the continuous development of these characters which is accompanied by relocations to spaces several of which are liminal and which stimulate this development and collaborate with the individual to effect a change.

4. Research limitations

The purpose of a close reading of the three selected novels has been to attribute to insights into the relationship of fictional characters with literary space. Through the application of several concepts by Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari combined with liminality, this study has attempted to shed a new light on these novels. However, this research also contains several limitations. Firstly, as a close analysis of three novels this research can only offer a glimpse into American literature from the nineteen-twenties onwards with these three examples, in which characters whose lack of lines of flight result in their demise or failure to conceive of alternatives outside of desire-as-lack. In order to chart larger phenomena a much wider selection of works would need to be analysed using the same concepts to gain a further insight into the use of spatial relationships to represent character development and growth or the lack thereof.

Secondly, the combination of these theoretical concepts is only one manner in which fictional characters and space can be analysed. While this study focused on the individual’s relationship to literary space, one might also focus more on macro-spaces in the novels to gain an insight into power relations and their effects on the literary characters. Foucault’s theory comes to mind here, which, although certainly relevant to the study of spatial relations, was not included in this research. Instead a separate analysis may be conducted with his theoretical insights and related concepts.

Lastly, the interaction of the selected characters with others is only briefly referred to in this analysis. In order to gain a more extensive insight into the network of characters functioning within dynamic literary space, one may focus on relationships not only between the characters and their spaces but also between each other. This may reveal further compelling insights into character development. The findings in this research present a viewpoint of these novels and the workings of literary space on their characters which may contribute to the possible functions of space in literature and highlight its importance for character development as well as shedding a different perspective on the individual cases selected for this research.
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