

Reflection Statement

“Fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

My creative response, *Caliphoria*, draws on spatial theory to examine art itself as a space that exists simultaneously in a real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured collective experience. As conceptualized by spatial philosophers in Foucault’s essay ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1967), Umberto Eco’s *Travels in Hyper Reality* (1973) and Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974), my narrative constructs a world in which the responder can observe and inhabit the trialectics of space: the interplay of the real space, the perceived space, and the conflation of these two.

When visiting Haight Ashbury, San Francisco in 2017, I saw a clear interplay of these dimensions. As the renowned birthplace of the ‘60s hippy counterculture, a place so lucidly constructed by Kerouac, Burroughs, and Thompson, I had expected, even projected, a romantic ideal onto this city. However, as I explored Haight Ashbury, this mythical landscape which I had superimposed onto its streets converged with an alternative reality: a modern US city floundering amidst a capitalist mania. At this site that nostalgically fetishizes the Woodstock movement, I found a tourist trade of tie-dyed t-shirts at outrageous prices, ironically “Made in Vietnam.”¹⁵

Parallel to my experience, my protagonist, a young painter named Julian, visits *The Museum*

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of Nostalgia to seek inspiration for a mural he has been commissioned to paint to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Woodstock festival. Engaging with Lefebvre's "tactics of cultural construction," my narrative aims to create, through its setting, an initial hippy utopia. Yet, ultimately through Julian's research into, and interrogation of, the hippy mythology, this utopia is deconstructed, revealing the gaunt actuality of a dark underbelly where "love's antidote to hate devolves to militant hypocrisy."¹⁶ By the end of the narrative, material reality does not simply supplant the myth; rather, the two are unified in an ontological space signified by Julian's mural. I evoke the mural, but do not physically describe it, inviting the reader to imagine its embodiment of the Thirdspace of Haight Ashbury.

The hippy counterculture as a real-world model for this theory of spatial trialectics arose from *The New Yorker's* review of Joan Didion's work of new age journalism, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), which labels the hippies as "drowning in a culture of reckless hedonism." The review brands "Leary's LSD Vortex"¹⁷ as a symptom of an American fever precipitated by the cultural fallout from Vietnam, which induced a sense of spatial dysmorphia and hallucinogenic escape.

My interest in spatial theory arises from Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* (1982), which examines the implications of a relative reality on the representation of setting and the metaphorical curation of space in literary texts. Further, Blanchot illuminates how the power of ficto-spatial construction may be harnessed through the manipulation of the physical layout of text on the page, with which the responder physically and imaginatively interacts. By manipulating Burroughs's DADA cut-up technique into a visual bricolage that the reader must

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¹⁷ Caliphoria

decode, I aim to construct an immersive, interactive space for the reader. Understanding these reader-text dynamics ultimately led to my attempt to transport the responder to a cognitive space disassociated from concrete, physicalized reality, using a self-reflexive voice that directly addresses the responder; “Let us sip from the beaker of electric Kool-Aid!”

Claire Seiler’s Barthesian analysis of Ishiguro’s *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), studied in *After the Bomb*, identified this kind of extra-diegetic projection as the “conduit for immersion into a solipsistic world” that anesthetises them to Ono’s self-consoling reconfiguration of truth. This prompted my experimentation with textual strategies to actively involve the responder as an “architect of surreality,¹⁸” co-constructing the space of the text. By forming this relationship, the reader not only enters a “world or words¹⁹” abiding to the trialectic dimensions of spatial theory, engages in their own negotiations of the real and imagined. This freedom allotted to the responder to determine their own perspective was influenced by Brechtian theatre, which allows several ideas to float simultaneously on stage, picked by the individual at will for an authentic experience.

My understanding of the enduring relevance of spatial theory, and its application to modern society, was informed by Soja’s contemporary, postmodern perspective in *Thirdspace* (1996). Soja suggests that the power to define and construct what my piece calls the “architecture of the cerebral dimension²⁰” allows corporations and governments to manipulate reality. Indeed, in *Advanced English*, the preservation of a sterile environment perpetually in ruin is integral to the political oppression of Winston in Orwell’s, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948). For by

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¹⁹ Caliphoria

²⁰ Caliphoria

colonising the mind, we lose all autonomy as free agents. However, The Museum of Nostalgia, a “taxidermy of time²¹,” rather captures and immobilises the temporal flux of the hippy era within the confines of a fixed, present space. Representing Foucault’s notion of Heterotopias – a space which perpetually accumulates time, yet preserves its objects from time’s ravages – I use the Museum to symbolise the conundrum of spatial theory in its intrinsic paradoxes. In my depiction of the different settings of Haight Ashbury, I explore how corporations have fuelled this cultural fantasy of the era, sustained by ‘60s music and films that have cemented the free love idealism as a cultural axiom in our society.

To elucidate this setting, I have constructed Julian as a “*flâneur*²²” figure. Aimlessly wandering the city for pleasure, he is our eyes onto the world of “San Francisco, the city of transplants and transients.²³” In representing the city, I employed elements of Michel de Certeau’s literary cartography, elucidated in *Heterologies* (1986), which defines social space as a phenomenon enacted through social practices. Virginia Woolf’s mapping of London in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) became a structural model for my depiction of Julian’s journey, and his perception of the unnoticed details of our spatial surroundings. In this world-building, I use the micro-space to metonymically explore the macro-frame; “half buried bottle caps and yellowing teeth of cigarette butts are littered across the shore.²⁴” As well as Woolf, I have redeployed models from ‘60s San Francisco, replicating the hybrid stream of consciousness of Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) and the beat poetics of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), as studied in *After the Bomb*. Projecting real-world San Francisco through the prism of synesthetic imagery, I aim to textually simulate the psychedelic disorientation of ‘60s acid culture, and render a

²¹ Caliphoria

²² Caliphoria

²³ Caliphoria

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paradoxical sense of ‘surreal verisimilitude;’ “ice daiquiri blue, dripping dopamine.” An initial thrill from flowing patterns of rhyme, word play and rhythm – “twirl and whirl in cosmic symphony” – eventually descends to the very emulation of the over-sentimental, prose emblematic of the Hippy cliché that the responder slowly awakens to.

In my short story, music is not merely a staple of the hippy era, but a force that can both extinguish political polarization and ignite the flames of separatist violence. Theodor Zioloski’s analytical work, *Music into Fiction* (2017) informed my attempt to translate the sound of music into print; “dripping violins coat the wall in some silicon gloss of empty key signatures.²⁵” Art equally becomes a vital mode of translation for Julian, whose journey is catalysed by the creative challenge set for him to incorporate both the utopian and dystopian faces of Haight Ashbury in his mural. Indeed, this very dualist mode of thinking is ultimately unable to communicate his vision. He discovers in Yeatsian terms (studied in Advanced English), that like “the leaf, the blossom, or the bole,” one cannot simply “separate the dancer from the dance;” the parts are inseparable. Questioning the ‘Yeatsian Poetic of Will’ in Frank Lentricchia’s essay, ‘The Artist’s Tragic Flight’,²⁶ concretized my conceptual understanding of the artist’s role, which, like a museum curator and a writer, is to create an “ultimate reality...a stream of images that floods the mind.”

The form of short story intertwined with visual imagery is essential in elucidating the theoretical framework as it constructs its own ficto-spacial realm to then analyse the physical and metaphysical dimensions of reality. Due to this philosophical basis and experimentations

²⁵ Caliphoria

²⁶ Pickering, E. (2009). The Artist's Tragic Flight: Yeats's Portrayal of Major Robert Gregory. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32(2), 80-99.

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with language and the layout of the page, *Caliphoria* is focused towards a new-wave print periodical such as the publication *PANK*, which actively calls for deconstructionist texts that question what some may perceive as stable ontological pillars to our society. Through its portrait of an artist who shakes the pillars of the hippy myth, my piece aims to elucidate and prompt reflection on the processes by which texts have constructed and deconstructed the cultural myths of all places we inhabit.

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