Master's thesis

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Narrating Urban Experiences in the Contemporary Novel:

An analysis of how social analysis and analysis of form contribute to conveying contemporary urban experiences in English literature

Master's thesis in English
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Abstract

Drawing on modernist stylistic interest in representations of experience, *Serious Sweet* (2016) by A. L. Kennedy and *NW* (2012) by Zadie Smith are two novels that narrate urban experiences of contemporary London. This thesis investigates how form and social analysis play together in representing urban environment in these two novels. Representation of consciousness, spatial analysis, and the intertwinement of the mind and the outer world inform the analysis of how the novels experiment with form and social explorations. Conclusively, the novels represent numerous experiences of London, which differ greatly from different places of London, and between various characters. The contemporary metropolis is a place of spatial confusion and increasing social differences, affecting dwellers' everyday lives in these two novels.

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Maren Høgevold Busterud

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Introduction

The so-called "London novel" has been a staple in English literary history for a long time. Some of its newest additions include *NW* by Zadie Smith (2012) and *Serious Sweet* by A. L. Kennedy (2016). These novels combine social analysis and literary form to convey contemporary urban experiences. Both discuss the complexities and difficulties of navigating the city, as well as through everyday life. Published before the Brexit referendum, which came to be understood as affecting culture and thought, they describe a changing sense of London. They thematize different significant social aspects of contemporary London life. With the knowledge of the referendum being passed, we see that these novels describe the sense of change in London during the years of and around publication. They have previously been compared for their similar engagement in describing this. For example, they diagnose "the pre-existing ailments of contemporary London, interrogating Tory spending cuts and prevailing fiscal attitudes within the capital" (Shaw 20). They also describe "the specifics of living in this 21st-century metropolis" (Doeberitz and Schneider 7). Kennedy presents London as a place that "poses a threat to the morality of the protagonists", and Smith "targets the multiple levels of inequality and prejudice" (Doeberitz and Schneider 7).

This thesis will investigate how social analysis and literary form work together in expressing the different experiences of twenty-first-century London. I argue that urban novels express battles for space and representation in contemporary urban life and that they engage in prevalent anxieties concerning the future of urban living. Literature plays an important role in representing how we live as both individuals and communities (Eaglestone 2), and the urban setting provides a microcosm in which social conditions are emphasized due to population density and the fast-paced environment. However, the urban is not only a microcosm of society at large. It is also an own, specific type of environment and literary setting, and object of study, with a history and connotations of its own. Contemporary fiction uses the city as "location, subject matter, a cultural source, for energy and as symbol of change", and its mobile form makes possible a combination of the global and the local (Tew *Contemp* 94). The novels studied for this thesis use London for many of these purposes, and the thesis will look closer into specific devices, themes, and ideas the authors are using to convey an image of London. In conclusion, images of London presented are coloured by confusion, sense of anxiety, and increased concerns with privatization and individualism.

Before elaborating on how the novels convey these senses, it will be useful to distinguish between the social analysis aspect and the analysis of form aspect of the thesis to explain how the two are different and how they contribute to creating a more integral understanding of the novels. Analysis of form includes literary form, narrative technique, and representation of consciousness. Considering both novels' stylistic resemblances with modernist literary aesthetics, as well as modernist literature's concern with conveying the experience and sensation of living in the urban, the form of the contemporary novels will be read as contemporary continuations of modernist aesthetics and projects. To what extent modernist writers were interested in socio-political commentary is contested: some critics argue that they often understood their own mission as to question ways of living and the experience of time and individual possibility, contesting tradition and traditional political and social systems and institutions, but "they never understood how deeply they were enmeshed in what they opposed" (Bronner 3). Other critics draw connections between modernism and the massive industrialization and urbanization, as they coincided in time: "modernist texts often represent particular cities [and] how specific social spaces within these cities shape the resulting literary forms" (Thacker *Modern* 3). The desire to experiment with representations of urban life was, then, a result of political, societal and infrastructural changes, and as this thesis argues, there is inherent social commentary in representations of urban life.

It is, however, the stylistic features of how to represent the world that have become the trademark of modernist writing: the modernist novels marked "a turning point in the development of methods for representing fictional minds", according to Herman (243), and their common project was to foreground "the nature and scope of the experience falling within the domain of the mental, including sense impressions, emotions, memories, associative through patterns, and so on" (243). In short, they shifted focus from making direct commentary on the real world to describing the world as experienced. However, as Shiach reminds us, modernism is a term applied in retrospect to a group of writers who had a conscious need to be modern in literary style, as well as in life (2-3). In hindsight, the historical context explains this need, and again shows that the need to find new ways of representing the world sprang up from an experience of liminality of place: "They were writing at a moment of significant historical transition. Technological innovations, rapid urbanization, changing patterns of Empire, political realignments, and the destabilization of range of social institutions all generated particular pressures on the literary imagination of the 1890s" (Shiach 9).

The interest in representation of consciousness and sensuous experiences – the desire to describe the world *as experienced* – can be seen as a result of changing external environments, cultural thought, and political conditions. Kennedy and Smith's novels certainly fit this line of argument and will here be read as contemporary novels drawing on modernist experiments in form, in particular the interest in representation of consciousness, providing numerous experiences of and perspectives on urban life. For example, Knepper argues that Smith's prose is inspired by James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Beckerman and Thompson have noted the similarity between Kennedy and Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style, and the twenty-four-hour narrative that is found in *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses*, and *Serious Sweet*, in their reviews. Analysing the forms of *Serious Sweet* and *NW* also reveal social analysis and commentary on contemporary urban living. Interestingly, the novels studied here were also written during a time of liminality in London, which is both directly addressed in both novels, and understood in hindsight considering the Brexit referendum. They also foreground individual experiences to describe the societal and cultural changes observed in the urban environment.

In the portraits of urban living this thesis is handling, I argue that social analysis and social commentary are inevitably linked to the authors' desire to critically explore social conditions. The urban setting and the urban as subject matter are efficient backdrops for social analysis and commentary due to its history as a site for social realism (Tew *Contemp* 98), which enables a discourse for making clear-cut points. The high density of people, capitalist production and high-paced everyday life will always be portrayed entailing some level of commentary. For example, as will be discussed, representing the difficulties of travelling in London without a car, as seen in Kennedy's novel, can be a way of exploring the extent to which inner-city London is designed for industry rather than humans. Furthermore, Smith explores how walking is experienced in different parts of London by contrasting the strolling of Willesden Lane to the more concentrated, crowded walk near Oxford Street, showing the potential commentary in comparing a London village to central London.

This thesis will look into interactions between social analysis and representations of consciousnesses in the running analysis of form. It will investigate how these two aspects work together to represent the contemporary experiences conveyed. Starting with Kennedy's novel from 2016, we see a dominant interest in representations of consciousness, and the minds of two different characters are represented through two different narrative voices. The

novel is set in London, following two protagonists, Jon and Meg, parallelly and interchangeably through twenty-four hours as they walk across different parts of the city with the goal to cross paths. The experiences of London are shifting from different parts of the city, from the confusing city centre to Telegraph Hill which provides a better overview and sense of control. The thesis will look into how London is experienced as a source of negative emotions, and the descriptions of a political and social system in despair, but also a social place to live with possibilities for human connections. Kennedy's project is to represent subjective consciousnesses, and may come across as apolitical in this regard, but closer readings reveal the political in the seemingly private explorations.

Smith's project is more politically charged, as her aim with *NW* is to strengthen the NW-area's (North-West London) presence on the London map and shed light on narratives of NW. Set on the streets of Kilburn and Willesden for the most part, Smith tells the stories of mainly three characters whose consciousnesses are represented in five distinct parts. All main characters are connected through the council estate that they grew up in but have since come to different lengths in life. Smith depicts how a London village functions as a microcosm for London as a whole, while also describing everyday experiences of the village as a marginalized part of the metropolis. By representing a variety of consciousnesses through different modes of narration, Smith conveys multifaceted urban experiences, providing room to explore the social changes taken notice of from numerous sides. For example, the right to privacy against the privatization of urban spaces is a question explored through viewpoints, needs and financial abilities of different characters. Additionally, the different modes of narration show different approaches to orientation in public space, making *NW* a largely spatially organized novel.

Both novels allow the outer world and the world as experienced to be affected by each other to represent how citizens of London experience the place, and the changes occurring in it. Before delving into the analyses, some theoretical background should be introduced: both the theory of how the mind and the metropolis are intertwined and relevant spatial theories of literary studies.

Intertwining mind and metropolis

The sensory experience of the urban is a central theme in both novels of study, and Georg Simmel's 1903 essay "The Metropolis and the Mental Life" explains how the human body and brain are affected by the sensuous stimuli bombardment one is exposed to in the urban environment. As a sociologist, he "examines the body of culture [the metropolis] with reference to the soul" (325). Similarly, Kennedy and Smith describe London with reference to their characters' experiences, and in understanding Simmel's theory of how the body and the mind are changed by urban environment, we see that the novels employ his ideas in their work, as they are informed by modernist techniques. Additionally, we may see that in conveying the impossibility of interpreting urban signals correctly, Kennedy and Smith analyse the outcomes, just as Simmel does. Their conclusions, however, may vary to some extent.

Simmel's theory explains how the metropolitan man, compared to a man of the countryside, needs to be accommodated to the urban environment, as it is unnatural for humans to move around in such surroundings. It requires more of the brain, since one is bombarded with impressions, and one does not have time to evaluate all signals – consequently, one becomes desensitized. Simmel illustrates this bombardment and the difference between city life and country life as follows:

> Lasting impressions, the slightness in their differences, the habituated regularity of their course and contrast between them, consume, so to speak, less mental energy than the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli. To the extent that the metropolis creates these psychological conditions – with every crossing of street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life – it creates in the sensory foundations of mental life, and in the degree of awareness necessitated by our organization as creatures dependent on differences, a deep contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence (325).

The stressful and quickly shifting environment promotes rational reactions over emotional ones. Simmel argues that rationality permeates every aspect of city life, from activity related to trade involving numbers and calculations to social relations, and in everyday movements

such as described above: a rational manner is acquired through the thousands of modifications necessary to handle the sensuous stimuli and in the individual's adaptation to the rhythms of events. "Thus the reaction of the metropolitan person to those events is moved to a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality" (326) – in other words, the rational manner changes the personality of the individual, promoting detachment.

One consequence of "those rapid shifting stimulations of the nerves" and the promotion of a rational manner, is the blasé attitude or blasé outlook. Simmel argues that only people of the metropolis, and all people of the metropolis become blasé, and that this exemplifies how their personalities become affected by the metropolitan lifestyle:

> Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidly and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form. This incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy constitutes in fact that blasé attitude which every child of a large city evinces when compared with the products of the more peaceful and more stable milieu (329).

Simmel describes a person who has acquired a blasé attitude as flat, grey, and unable to distinguish value between different things. He describes, then, how a metropolis directly changes a person's natural pattern of reaction, how it is automated, and how a person may not react naturally according to the situation they find themselves in. This also affects social relationships: a city person meets a variety of people every day and will therefore become incapable of meeting each one with the same authentic emotional reaction as a person from the countryside may. Simmel's analysis describes bodily and mental reactions and effects of busy urban life, exemplifying the exhaustion of the nervous system and the inevitability of becoming affected. The connections between the outer world and the inner worlds of characters are also clear in the novels studied for this thesis, but Simmel's conclusion that the nervous stimuli deterministically make the citizen rational and blasé is not uncontested.

Although agreeing with Simmel's analysis of how bombardment of stimuli affects the city dweller's ability to interpret surroundings and change their patterns of reactions and behaviour, travel writer Jonathan Raban criticizes the Chicago school of sociology's (built on Simmel's ideas) conclusion that the metropolitan mind becomes more rational. In his book *Soft City*, Raban presents an example of a fictional self walking from his apartment to the nearest tube station. He imagines walking around "two sides of a grassy square full of pigeons, then cross a tumultuous main road on which heavy trucks persistently thunder" (156). Raban believes that a Chicago school sociologist would see the truck as someone else's "recognized need" and that the self in this situation should think "I don't mind being kept hopping in fear of my life for ten minutes as the side of the road, because quite clearly Mr X needs to transport his tractor parts to the Continent in container lorries, and I recognise his rights as a fellow-citizen to temporarily inconvenience me" (156), he writes satirically. Raban argues that people of the metropolis have a deeply embedded fear and dislike of strangers, and since the self in this example may assume that the driver is a stranger, he would react emotionally and irrational, possibly visible to the driver. In a more rural area, however, the chances of the driver and the pedestrian being familiar are greater, and the self would to a larger extent consider whether this is the case or not before showing their true reaction – which Raban considers to be the more rational reaction.

The literary analyses will be informed by Simmel's idea of how personality and response patterns are affected by the metropolis. The novels' narrative styles show the perception of the world and the real world becoming intertwined, making Simmel's analysis of how personality is affected visible. This can also fruitfully be connected to an important aspect of the modernists' epistemological approach to describing the urban in literary form. As the analyses will show, Smith and Kennedy's novels describe how different parts of London have different emotional and bodily effects on characters. Using Simmel's essay, we may see what different qualities are assigned to different types of urban environments, and we may see how different individuals react differently to them. However, regarding the argument that the metropolis makes the mind more rational and blasé, we shall see that the novels are less clear on how or if this is the case in contemporary London. The bodily reactions to stressful places are rather more emotionally and irrationally charged, and to what extent characters appear to be affected by the blasé attitude depends more on their own sense of belonging and involvement in the environment. Personality is, after all, not *only* shaped by the metropolis.

More recent theorizing on how experience and urban environment affect each other makes Simmel's theory look rather simplistic. Although Simmel's connections between individual experience and conditions of city-dwelling demonstrate that the traditional juxtaposition between interest in sociopolitical analysis and individual sensory experience is intertwined, his essay does not take into consideration the many factors that may affect the mind of an individual. His "metropolitan man" is more or less stripped of identity markers. In more contemporary analyses of spatial and urban experiences, identity markers of the individual, such as race, class, or gender, are also important to take into account in studying the contemporary urban experience. Considering the inherent social commentary in Smith and Kennedy's novels, identity markers become particularly important to consider in reading how different people navigate space, and in turn, unlock the various urban experiences conveyed.

Particularly socioeconomic and cultural background are factors that become visible in the analyses of the novels. Giovannoni and Ross suggest that "gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status and cultural background may be factors that affect one's perception of, and how one is being perceived in urban space" (xix), and therefore, representation allows the reader to imagine and emphasize with bodily experiences of several different demographic groups. Having a variety of characters with different backgrounds, Smith is unlocking numerous different urban experiences, all affected by gender, socioeconomic background, and race. Kennedy's project, although less politically charged, also shows the importance of socioeconomic status, as her characters are positioning themselves in relation to other social classes. How characters perceive space in both novels is affected by these markers and should therefore be considered in the analysis of how the mind is affected by the metropolis.

Spatial theoretical background

Having established the relationship between the world and the world as perceived, spatial theories will continue to inform the analyses of how the novels construct and use urban space. Extensive research on how space and place are represented in the literature exists, but my contribution to the field is to investigate spatial representations and experiences of these two contemporary London novels to argue that the post-millennial London is a space of change, confusion, and difficult navigability. Experience and space are additionally closely linked concepts as consciousness "introduces a notion of now" which "in turn provides a further

source of dislocation within space/space-time, for people are everywhere conceptualizing and acting on different spatialities" (Massey 4). The novels are positioned within this field of research – what scholars often refer to as the spatial turn in humanities – due to their interest in conveying London experiences and will therefore be analysed with regard to relevant theories of urban space in literature. They interact with theories on representations of space, what space *is*, strategies for narrating this, and space's metaphorical potential.

The city in literature is first and foremost a space formed by social relations or the lack thereof, and the urban landscape is defined by characters, movement, and histories. Smith plays on this notion by constructing a London village in which the social bonds between citizens are often close, which is typical for a smaller environment. Kennedy uses the lack of social networks on her London streets to signify the intense isolation that occurs when a pedestrian is not looking toward other pedestrians but can only hear one's own thoughts. However, social relations are also valued in her novel, as seen in vignettes when human encounters, often between strangers in public space, are portrayed as warm and as sweet features of urban life. The city is constructed both for and by social encounters, considering the urban form as both a great human achievement and a great human habitat: Doreen Massey argues that a place is not essentially a bounded area, but a network of social relations (121), and Henri Lefebvre argues that the city is "fashioned, shaped and invested by social activities" (73). Both social networks and spaces of social encounters, then, are central in understanding urban space.

This thesis will pay close attention to the representation of urban spaces designed for movement, in particular streets. Such spaces promote representation of urban space, literary space, and of everydayness. Starting with the street's potential to create literary space and as a place in which people from all layers of society are gathered, Mikhail Bakhtin suggested one way in which the street creates artistically and literary space: encounters on the road show "spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial point" (17). This opens a literary space – a chronotope – in which time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (15). Wells too notes the streets' potential to host "fateful meetings between characters occur[ing] due to geographical coincidences" and argues this to be a significant feature of the urban novel (106). In contemporary cities, public transport also holds this function as a space that facilitates, or sometimes enforces encounters between strangers (Thacker *Modern* 182).

Streets and urban movement entail everydayness, which is also a key interest to both Smith and Kennedy, and to modernist writers. They all share the interest in experimenting with how literary form may be shaped by the "quotidian experience of moving around the metropolis" (Thacker *Moving* 7). Kennedy's form shows how Jon and Meg move simultaneously around different parts of London, trying to intersect pathways, while Smith's entire novel may work as a map of the NW-area as her narrative is largely spatially organized. Bryden suggests that urban landscape is materialized and inhabited as individuals move in space, and through everyday life. As literary texts encourage kinaesthetic responses to places, the reader is immersed in the city (224). In her argument, streets signify collectivism, as individuals intertwine movements and stories, making the streets tell. There are many strategies in which writers may promote this: "describing [the exterior]; focusing on characters, their histories and movements through space; prioritizing walking as an aspect of psychotherapy; highlighting perspective, or spatial epistemologies; describing microcosms or the interior of buildings, and emphasizing materialities" (216). All strategies are recognised in the novels, showing the high importance of streets and public space in general as a space of narrative to Kennedy and Smith.

Building streets, railways, highways and pathways is also part of mapping literature. Literary cartography is one of Smith's major projects in this novel, and the idea entails political engagements. However, Kennedy is also consciously mapping the city to demonstrate what value different characters assign to different places. Literary cartography as an analytic framework looks at how literary space is perceived by characters and readers, according to literary scholar Robert Tally, whose field of study is geocriticism. "Narrative also *makes* place", he claims, "establishing relations among places and assigning various levels of significance to different spaces and places. […] We are drafting various maps by telling different stories", because some places will gain importance, and others will be diminished (Tally *Topo* 5-6). However, it is not necessary for the author to constantly remark on where the characters are moving: "even when the text itself is not directly making reference to space or place, as readers we tend to project forms of spatiality upon it, as when we recognize a given narrative's linear structure, its point of view, its background or foreground, parallels, or framing devices" (Tally "Intro" 1).

In tracing characters' steps through London, Kennedy and Smith draft their own interpretations of the map, both helping the reader navigate the literary landscape, and

reflecting how characters find navigating in the fictional world. Creating a literary map "help us visualize the spaces the characters inhabit and in which they move, allowing us to engage emotionally with the text" (Ljungberg 97). Using Thacker's idea of geographical emotions, we see how Kennedy and Smith make the reader engage emotionally also by charging different places with various emotions. He combines geography and mapping with mood to analyse "how particular cities are experienced, viscerally and vitally" to disclose for example spatial phobias in text (*Modern* 7). In this way, we see how the different qualities and connotations Kennedy and Smith associate with places, and therefore become an important part of the analysis of experience of space. Finally, Tally argues that loss of navigation, of the sense that the place one is trying to map is in change, contributes to negative emotions of place, evoking anxiety and confusion. This is also the case for Kennedy and Smith's novels, showing that the Londons they both construct and map, are affected by great shifts in social conditions.

A. L. Kennedy's *Serious Sweet*

Kennedy's novel shows a great interest in human experience as it intertwines third-person narration and internal monologue written in a stream-of-consciousness style to represent the close connection between the outer world and the characters' inner worlds. In style and its twenty-four-hour span, the novel echoes modernist classic novels such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The world represented in this novel is, then, the world as experienced. The novel is set in London and follows Meg and Jon parallelly, as they move around in different parts of the city. Compared to Smith's novel, Kennedy is more concerned with representing individual experiences, and less with mapping the exact steps of characters, although there are distinctions in experiences of moving around in different parts of London. The impression is that whereas Smith has an activist agenda in her novel, as she aims to increase awareness of the NW area and give its presence on the map a stronger hold, Kennedy's writing is more concerned with describing the frightening, individual urban experiences of two marginalized, middle-aged characters. The project may seem apolitical in this regard, but politics and social analyses are explored extensively in the consciousnesses of the characters.

This thesis will investigate devices and ideas Kennedy is exploring to convey the urban experiences of her main characters Jon and Meg. The ways in which the novel raises questions concerning the urban habitat as the ultimate human form of habitation, and whether or not the urban is a social place to live will be analysed through Jon and Meg's experiences of moving in different parts of London. Their elusive minds are in constant dialogue with a more distant narrative voice reporting on both thoughts and events of the outer world, emphasizing the importance of experience itself in this novel. However, the social analyses inherent in these experiences are charged and reflect the 2015-London portrayed well: participation in politics itself is a source of distress in both protagonists' lives, and with decreasing transparency in democratic institutions, a sense of alienation and disconnection increases. However, Kennedy is not deterministic in her portrayal, as the London she depicts is also a place in which happy encounters take place, and where one may find peace in the present moment when reaching a distance from the stressful inner city. Although there are warnings against tendencies observed in politics and social conditions in this novel, Kennedy maintains a sense of hope for her two protagonists.

The novel's protagonists are both middle-aged, neurotic characters in search of safer and more comfortable existences in the city. Meg is a bankrupt alcoholic with experiences from an abusive past relationship. On the day of the novel, she celebrates one year of sobriety, and a visit to a gynaecologist reminds her that she has survived cancer, but it is probably too late for her to have children. She is therefore in a vulnerable state on this day. Jon is a civil servant in Whitehall who is secretly leaking sensitive information to a journalist to restore a political system in which he has lost trust. Additionally, Jon is divorced from a wife who had numerous affairs, and he is struggling to reconnect with his adult daughter, Rebecca. Afraid of, yet desiring intimacy, Jon starts writing love letters anonymously (not initially a correspondence, although he accepts replies). His alias becomes Corwynn August, and Meg comes across the advert for Jon's service shortly after she has quit drinking alcohol. At the time, she believed the letters "seemed a necessity, not a luxury or a risk" (227). After meeting in person, they have initiated a relationship, mostly based on text messages since they have only met a handful of times – it is important for them to "wish each other sweet" (304) every night by midnight. This concern with affirming their connection before midnight creates a sense of urgency in the novel, and the reader gets the sense that if they fail to meet before the day is over, their relationship will be over. If they do meet, however, it will transcend to new levels.

Whereas Smith's novel is largely spatially organized, Kennedy's has an obvious chronological structure, as chapters are divided into hours of the day. The novel spans over twenty-four hours, contributing to the sense of urgency: there is a countdown running. The story carries similarities with a fairytale in this regard. Midnight is presented as a magical threshold that the meeting must not surpass. The heroes of the story need to overcome numerous obstacles before they may have their reward. The novel carries, then, a sense of predestination, which is one common feature of urban narratives, according to Wells (106). Another common feature, she argues, is "fateful meetings between characters […] due to geographical coincidences" (106), of which there are many in Smith's novel in comparison, but Kennedy's protagonists seem to have few interactions with those they meet due to "geographical coincidences", underscoring the isolation Jon and Meg experience while walking through the city. Kennedy's novel differs from Smith's in this regard: *NW* contains several depictions of busy, vital London street crowds. Encounters between strangers in *Serious Sweet* exist for the most part in the vignettes in between chapters, where Meg is

writing about happy and lucky encounters where people show kindness or simply happiness, as a counterweight for the otherwise bleak impression of London as a social place to be.

The mind is of key importance to Kennedy. It is therefore fruitful to open the discussion about this novel by delving into the complex narratological style and how the mind is represented in this novel. Two narrative voices work simultaneously to represent both the outer world, and the consciousnesses of the characters: a third-person narrative voice reporting on thoughts and outer events, and a first-person narrative voice conveying thoughts with no temporal distance in narration – this is an autonomous monologue. The creation of mental space becomes evident through this complex form, and the nature of thoughts is both demonstrated and debated. The form is also flexible, as seen when Jon and Meg finally meet, and the third-person voice represents thoughts from both Jon and Meg interchangeably within one chapter.

Animal imagery is also widely used to convey experience, showing a sense of alienation from and critique of the city as the highlight of human organization. Animals are both used as topic of conversation, and for Jon and Meg to understand their own emotions, providing examples of zoomorphism. The relations between humans and animals are portrayed as unnaturally detached from each other in contemporary understandings of human societies, and Kennedy shows how animal features of humans may make them easier to understand for others. Jon and Meg both compare themselves to animals, both in terms of vulnerability and with strong natural instincts. However, they both feel disconnected from the human society – which is why they find relief in each other. In this question concerning humans and animals, there is inherently an understanding of the city as an urban jungle, both in its confusion and its beauty, and there is a critique of the way in which human societies are constructed.

The question of the city as the most appropriate place for humans to dwell is also seen in Jon and Meg's contrasting bodily reactions from the inner-city areas and the outskirts. Jon experiences distress and nausea from walking around inner-city London. However, walking in this part of town is nearly impossible: London is a motorized city in which it is dangerous to travel far without a car. This causes pollution, and the area is built for industry and capitalism to flourish rather than for humans to move. Meg's experiences of Telegraph Hill and Top Park is a stark contrast, as she finds peace and community here. The view over London provides her space to reflect, and the green areas become a break from the stimuli bombardment and noise of London otherwise.

Storytelling itself is an important part of how we understand places, and it is one of Kennedy's main projects to demonstrate the importance of this. London is experienced as incomprehensible to the characters, and a central explanation for why is that the narratives of London and Britain are changing at the moment, creating a sense of anxiety and crisis of identity. Kennedy draws on London's history as a place of historical rapid changes, but the post-truth era allows narratives to be re-constructed to a larger extent. There is an urgency to find a new, trustworthy, and coherent narrative, and Jon and Meg find it when they unite in Top Park and find a shared future outlook. Storytelling is presented as essential to how place is experienced, and when the story is not making complete sense, disorientation is created.

Finally, considering the ways in which the city may be a social place to live, the discussion will culminate in an exploration of how Kennedy is portraying a dilapidated social system while maintaining the importance of social connections in the urban. The meaning of "social" may refer to both a personal connection with another human or to an overarching system of politics or socioeconomics. Kennedy's introspective style of narration makes the city seem like a non-sociable place to dwell but through Jon and Meg's poor experience of social systems, and through vignettes presenting the importance of social connections, we see that the question of how and whether the city is a social place to live is an underlying theme throughout the novel.

Narrative style and mental space

Kennedy employs a complex narratological form in *Serious Sweet* to demonstrate the elusiveness of the human mind, and to underscore her interest in the world as experienced by her characters. This is a typical trait of Kennedy's fiction: her use of "free indirect discourse and thought […] allows intimate access to characters' interiority, her prose often syntactically recapitulating the interior thought process while emphasizing the ironic distance of conventional third-person narration" (Dunnigan 145). In *Serious Sweet,* two narrative voices are working simultaneously: a first-person voice representing the characters' consciousness as it unfolds, and a third-person narrator reporting actions as well as characters' thoughts. The mind is a central theme in this novel, as the form mirrors how inner and outer world perceptions are shaped by each other. Palmer's idea of consciousness issues on story-level and discourse-level helps in understanding the width of Kennedy's handling of consciousness as a theme: although difficult to maintain distinct in practice, "story-level issue of the mind

treated as a theme in narrative, nature of fictional minds that are constructed by text, the *what* that is the content of those minds" refers to Kennedy's representation of individual, spontaneous thoughts, often in dialogue with thoughts reported by the third-person narrator. Understanding of the mind as a "discourse-level issue of the techniques used to represent consciousness in narrative, the *how* minds are presented in the discourse" (274), shows consciousness in this novel as a flexible phenomenon that allows individuals to be in dialogue with themselves. The specific techniques of how the first-person and the third-person narrators are constructed show how the mind changes according to situations.

The interplay between the narrative voices is demonstrated from the novel's beginning when Jon is saving a bird and the reader follows thoughts as they interrupt each other, and are reported through both narrative voices:

> This was – *oh dear God* – this was not what he'd – *nononononono.*
>
> *Shit.*
>
> Jon could feel his shirt dampening with a panic sweat, his jacket heavy and encumbering. He wasn't dressed for this, for this problem, this level of problem.
>
> 'I'm doing my best. Really. Come on now … Please …'
>
> He was holding a bird.
>
> Although he didn't want to.
>
> He had a bird in his hand.
>
> *And it would be better in the bush. Ha ha ha.*
>
> Although it couldn't be allowed anywhere near the sole currently available bush – that bush was the problem.
>
> *The innuendo is a problem, too. But I'm ignoring it. If you ignore an innuendo it may go away. Unlike a problem.* (13)

Jon's thoughts are focalized through the third-person narrator, as seen in "He was holding a bird. Although he didn't want to". This makes the third-person narrative voice seem personal, although it remains less than the first-person voice. There is also a temporal distance between narrative and action, as can also be recognized in the past tense of the verbs. The third-person voice describes the outer world as well as character thoughts from a distance, and therefore it both establishes a spatio-temporal frame and contributes to the unfolding of how consciousness works. The interplay may resemble Joyce's technique in *Ulysses* for representing consciousness, as he also used a combination of a first- and third-person narrator

(Lodge 55-56), but different from Joyce's work, Kennedy's third-person narrative is not entirely objective or impersonal. One function of the interplay between the two voices in Kennedy's novel is that the third-person voice "establish[es] the spatio-temporal frame in which subjective consciousness of the individual character is operating" (Lodge 55-56), which is an appropriate description for this novel as well.

The first-person voice, marked by italics to be easily distinguished from the third-person narrator, is an interior monologue in which the temporal distance between narrative and action is removed, marked by a present tense. According to Herman, an interior monologue is presented in "more or less extended passages of free direct discourse [...] stripped of quotidian marks and tag phrases such as 'she reflected' or 'he wondered'", and is distinguished from a stream of consciousness, which is a specific technique of interior monologue where the "nature of thoughts themselves, ungrammatical, associative and illogical" is a theme of focus (247). Although Kennedy is interested in the nature of thoughts themselves, the interior monologue is presented as rather grammatical and logical. Dorrit Cohn's idea of autonomous monologue is more suitable for Kennedy's internal monologue. The autonomous monologue is one sort of interior monologue employed in the present tense and "pinpoints the simultaneity of language and happening that distinguishes the new form from 'the usual narrative' in the first person, where language always follows happening" (173), which makes the term applicable to Kennedy's technique, considering the lack of temporal distance between narrative and action. Cohn is using the term mostly to describe texts and narratives where the narrator is conscious of its real or imagined recipient, but it may also be "a silent monologue posing as spoken interlocution" in which an "inner speaker [is] communicating with inner listener" (179), which is the case in Kennedy's novel.

The autonomous monologue may provide the character with an ability to comment on events (Cohn 187), but in Kennedy's novel, both narrative voices contribute to the dialogue. Reading further in the first chapter about Jon, we see that while Jon's thoughts quickly revolve around a self-evaluation, the third-person voice tells us about how Jon is doing in his mission to save a bird.

> *I can rewrite anything, but we are – in this situation – talking about death and that does tend – even in commonplace birds – to be viewed as a negative outcome.*
>
> The blackbird shivered – which might be a bad sign, Jon didn't know.

> Nobody normal liked having a death on their hands. In their hands. In hands which, as it happened, seemed insufficiently evolved for this type of thing – too close to the ape: his had unsightly knuckle hairs and a deficit of manly dexterity.
>
> *One's construction disappoints oneself.*
>
> Plus, this would be an Unforgivable Death, which was worse. (15).

The extract also shows how the first-person voice and the third-person voice may lead two parallel streams interrupting each other. As Jon's thoughts drift, the third-person narrator breaks in to claim that it is Valerie's fault (Jon's ex-wife) that the bird is trapped, because

> Her patio was usually an area of grimly straightforward vegetation, potted clumps of foliage that didn't mind her smoking at them. Now it appeared she'd decided to harbour a blueberry bush. Or somebody had given her this blueberry bush – *much more likely* – and she'd dumped it out here in response. (16).

The first-person voice is directly commenting on the third-person voice's unverified assumption that Valerie had been given the bush as a gift. There is a dialogue, then, where one voice has room to contribute with commentary to the other. By focalizing Jon's thoughts through both narrative voices, Kennedy shows the mind's nature as elusive. The device may be interpreted as a characterization showing neuroticism in instances where the voices are exchanging observations rapidly but may also be an attempt at replicating an organic mindstream.

Narration is focused on only one character at a time throughout much of the novel, but as Jon and Meg finally meet, the third-person narrator becomes more omniscient, showing flexibility. This becomes evident when Jon and Meg finally meet and sit together in a taxi headed to Meg's home. Although it is Jon's autonomous monologue, the third-person narrator reports both's thoughts to create suspension and signify their union:

> It's beautiful, though. Being with him is beautiful and this, this, this stuff that you're doing is beautiful, too – the kissing. He feels just the same as he is on paper and also different but not in bad ways. He is careful. The way he licks and flickers is careful, it's delicate. But here he is, more of him, truly, and now here he is being with you in your mouth. His tongue is speaking to you in your mouth and he feels kind and funny and as if he's making it up as he goes along – there are these pauses while

maybe he does some thinking about what's next. And he also seems pleased. You would say he felt happy.

You have to get used to him, but it's OK.

He tastes serious, if that makes sense. He tastes like a person who means what he's doing. And then his mouth tastes like your mouth which tastes like his.

You're not scared. He doesn't make you scared.

Oh.

And Jon is aware that he is breathing as if he is running, as if he is labouring along in mud and weather and making the long loop back to school with no cheering because he always was the straggling lad, left out at the end of the pack – *this is, this is, she's letting me and I'm allowed and* – but no running is required. He is kissing her and hearing how it sounds, like eating peaches in sunshine, and this is so much the place to be. (271).

Here, the third-person narrator is also written in the present tense, making the sensory experience of Jon and Meg's kiss immediate, while the tension of the kiss is conveyed by shifting focus from one's experience of it to the other's. Excitement is also conveyed in the repetitions as if they are struggling to find the exact words and descriptions for the experience. The third-person narrator, then, may also function to give direct access to Jon and Meg's experiences and thoughts as intimate as the autonomous monologue may, but the impression remains that the autonomous monologue is a direct conveyance of thoughts while the third-person narrator reports on them from a slight distance.

On a story-level, *what* content of mind is, Kennedy is experimenting with the nature of thoughts, how minds are constructed in texts, and what exactly the mind consists of. Nature of thoughts, and what a mind consists of, is demonstrated during Meg's mind exercise in her support group, as mental space is being described through the autonomous monologue. To begin the meeting, Molly, leading the meeting, reads "*a piece from a book of special, womanly meditation in her special womanly and extra calm I-love-the-universe-and-it-loves-me voice*" (147):

> *Then she'd talk us through one of those going-down-steps-and-into-a-charming-garden bollocksy visualisation scripts, only she had lousy timing about it somehow and so you either felt you were hanging around on your imaginary staircase while waiting for random others to catch up, or else she drove you along your tranquil*

> *passageways and over the self-affirming lawns until you began to imagine pursuers, or else your stairs just melted and then you were plunging quick, right down into … I always saw it as a tomb. I didn't get a garden visualised with any success; only a cellar, or a tomb. I mainly conjured up this Gothic arrangement with bones – a sepulchre – and the basic scene got quite ornate. I enjoyed it after a while: rags and costume jewellery scattered on dusty flagstones, footprints of rats. I like rats. You can always trust a rat – intelligent and faithful. Still, I wasn't exactly being invited to explore my fucking happy place – it was more about being forced to hang about in a profoundly disturbing and focused-on-death place. For what my opinion would be worth. (147).*

The autonomous monologue is giving intimate access to Meg's interiority in this memory, while the third-person narrator is left in the narrative present, showing the autonomous monologue's potential in narrating memories. Meg has an ironic distance to the exercise at the beginning of the passage, but as we read further, a sense of vulnerability is recognised from the inability to unlock a happy place within, and the deep sorrow Meg feels. As the novel progress, we know she finds happy places in public space, observing encounters between strangers, and from walks in Top Park. This shows how the mind and the interior may be uncomfortable places to explore for longer periods. As the world is filtered through characters' perceptions in this novel, Kennedy demonstrates how experience and the mental and emotional states of a character affect their worldview in the moment.

The mind and mental space are central topics in Kennedy's novel, as is demonstrated through her complex narrative form in which she attempts to replicate an organic, elusive mind of characters whose experiences of their own minds may be uncomfortable. The dialogue between the autonomous monologue and the third-person narrator throughout the novel shows how characters keep debating their own thoughts. Kennedy is interested in how characters experience the outer world to a larger extent than describing it. The flexible form of narration makes possible explorations of mind and represents sensory and bodily experiences in various situations. We see that the individual experiences of the two main characters are detached from the outer, social world, and through the two consciousnesses, social and political analyses are explored.

The urban jungle

The urban project is considered the highlight of human society and human organization, holding the commerce, financial and industrial seat in contemporary societies. In other words, the city is considered a particularly human form of living. It is therefore astonishing how much use Kennedy makes of animal imagery in her novel. Animals occur both as topics of conversations between the characters, and they are used as mirrors when characters attempt to convey how they see themselves. The latter, zoomorphism, is an efficient literary tool: to describe human attributes in terms of animal characteristics makes commenting on specific human traits more accessible. It "attempts to give an evolutionary account of the full range of human traits" (Garrard 161). Kennedy demonstrates a necessity of understanding the animal features of human in order to understand the human completely, but she is also using the animal imagery to convey the isolation Jon and Meg feels from society. By identifying with animals rather than other humans, they are placed on the outside of human societal networks, and inherently, Kennedy questions the urban as the most favourable human way of habitation.

Contemporary urban society distances the human from the natural world, but also brings out some primal qualities of humans. If cities are primarily inhabited by humans, and if the humans see themselves as animals, then their place of habitation may not be a perfect habitat for humans. Bhattacharyya suggests that the boundary between the domestic and the feral is not as clear as the human would like to believe. She argues that acknowledging the animal in the human is considered a failure of modernity and what the urban way of living has taught humans to be the modern qualities: On one hand, the human becomes rationalized and organized, and "hope that this sense of humanity and collectivity will make us more human". On the other hand, "the city increases the animality of modernity – now we are private, anonymous, individualized, freed from the inborn, inbred in hierarchies of feudalism" (12-13). In order to survive in the urban jungle, humans become short-sighted and self-centred – more animal than we like to think considering the urban project as a result of organization and rationalization. Kennedy's portrayal of humans leans towards private, anonymous, and individualized, and the city is in many ways portrayed as an inadequate place of habitation for humans, uneasily navigated.

The connection between humans and animals is established already in the first chapter, as Jon associates with the blackbird he attempts to save from a blueberry bush. The situation is

stressful and makes Jon late for work. Yet, he is determined to treat the bird with sensitivity and kindness in this rescue mission and is afraid to kill it in the action: "birds were sensitive, animals generally were sensitive and birds, in particular, could be overtaxed and flat-out murdered by simple shock" (14), he thinks. Ironically, in the rescue mission, he is becoming aware of his own physical features, which are "massive" and he has "animal fingers" (17), suggesting an inelegance and clumsiness. As we come to know Jon's character, the similarity between the bird and himself becomes visible: he does not like surprises. His job is to foresee things, and when confronted with a new relationship with Meg, he seems shell-shocked, hiding in the bathroom to avoid direct contact with her. Experiencing an intense fear of intimacy, he is nearly strangled by his own hand, similar to the blackbird.

Jon's view of himself as a damaged animal recurs numerous times, as he feels unable to seamlessly be part of the urban and social machinery surrounding him, and he struggles to express himself. "Do I echo because I am hollow, or because I am a captive animal under stress and reassured by repetitions?" (107) he asks himself after repeating an answer to a colleague. Later, he understands himself to be a "wet, mad animal" (317) while in his daughter's bathroom, afraid to look at himself in the mirror. He is afraid of seeing his own face in the mirror to confirm or refute this self-image, and more comfortable living in this belief of himself than looking up. While saving the bird, Jon thinks "[t]hat was the trouble with animals – their lack of understanding created dismay upon dismay: theirs and then one's own to follow. One looked at them and saw oneself and then became foolish and overwrought" (19). This shows how much of Jon's understanding of reality exists in his own interpretation, and he is unable and afraid to be open toward an outside look on himself, showing a lack of communication skills.

The lack of communication skills becomes particularly clear in both Jon and Meg during their restaurant date. The segment shows how they struggle to conform to social etiquettes of a standard date. In a nervous attempt to keep a common conversational ground, animals become their topic:

> [Jon:] 'Yes, no, you said – wrote. About the dogs. And how's the goat, by the way? The original goat. Is he happy with the new goats?'
>
> Which wasn't what she'd expected to be asked. [Meg:] 'He's … I'm mainly in the office. But he's doing well, I hear. They have funny eyes. Rectangular pupils. They're

these real, precise rectangles with squared-off corners, but their eyes are the usual round shape of eyes – I can never imagine how that works. It doesn't look natural.'

'Rectangles …?'

'Yes.'

'My … I never knew.'

And that was roughly when Meg had realised that she couldn't cope with this any longer, or with the post-goat silence. She was going to have to break something, or laugh, or yell, or throw a chair.

Jon had wagged his head vehemently. 'I don't know a thing about goats.' It apparently disturbed him that he lacked goat knowledge. 'They're all about … aren't they …? The sex thing, I mean, eating and symbols of, the impulse of … Maybe that's why – the eyes – why people associate them with …' He glanced about in what seemed to be moderate despair, clearly trying to find someone to take their order in a close-to-closing restaurant. He was blushing and clearly aware of it, of its rising round his throat. (329-330).

In this conversation, Jon is searching for common ground on the topic of animals, but fails, as he realises that the comparison between himself and the goat can be misinterpreted. Ironically, he wants to be perceived as civilized, keeping a civilized conversation about animals. Following the exchange, numerous misunderstandings occur, creating "dismay upon dismay" (19): Meg is worried about ordering the wrong dish, Jon feels guilty for ordering wine, and uncomfortable silences dominate the atmosphere between them. The scene played out is comic, and their communication resembles the interaction between animals as described by Jon in his first chapter. Using a restaurant date as a setting highlights how Jon and Meg struggle to conform to certain sets of societal rules. During a restaurant visit, there are certain expectations as to how to behave and converse, which they fail to follow. For example, long and uncomfortable moments of silence in the conversation, and bringing up subjects that would make the other one feel uncomfortable. Animals are a safe and recurring topic of conversation because they converse as animals.

Whereas Jon describes himself as an animal or is using animals as a metaphor for himself, Meg is more consciously mirroring herself in animals and using them as an example to reach for. Working part-time at the Gartcosh Farm Home, rescuing and re-placing their stray animals, she particularly mirrors herself in the dog Hector, an abused, and therefore cautious

and nervous animal, who has taken to Meg particularly. "*Hector is training me to love him*" (136), Meg thinks, while resonating that Hector is brighter and braver than her: "*Borrowing the brains of a dog – that'd be lovely"* (136). She also identifies with Jon's desire to be like an animal, and she even recognises this desire of his on his face when she first sees him. She imagines them both as animals together:

> *[...] it proved what type of man he was – he's safe.*
>
> *You'll always be safer with somebody who gets scared. That's how it works. You can be like two animals, hiding together.*
>
> *But first you are scared and then you scare him and then both of you get more scared, because of each other and it hurts you and it's fast.*
>
> The way he'd stared at her.
>
> *Sorrysorrysorrysorry.*
>
> *Don't hate me.*
>
> He had been definitely like an animal then: all startled and ticking and sprung. (308).

Although they both struggle to communicate orally and through body language in the restaurant, Meg sees them as of equal sort, "like two animals, hiding together". The animal in them both becomes a point of connection, showing that Meg and Jon are different from other humans together.

The extensive use of animal imagery shows Meg and Jon as disconnected from other humans, but equivalent attached to each other. It is a more accessible way for Jon and Meg to understand their own emotions and appearances. Most of the humans they encounter throughout the novel are people with whom they have more or less professional or formal bonds: colleagues, doctors, and taxi drivers. As described in Simmel's theory, their social networks are based on intellectual or service-oriented bonds and not emotional ones. One exception, it could be argued, is the appearance of Jon's adult daughter Rebecca. However, in this relationship too, Jon feels insecure about his role as the father, and he is unable to form a strong emotional connection, regardless of his wish to. Kennedy is using animal imagery to portray poor communication skills and poor abilities to express emotions, contributing to describing Jon and Meg's personalities as introverted and introspective. The urban life is experienced as lonely and isolating, as the protagonists are detached from society's streamlined ways of operating.

When visiting Monkey World, Jon's favourite place in the world, the main characters recognise themselves in the caged chimpanzees. The chimpanzees are captured as babies, and their families killed, Jon explains to Meg. The baby chimpanzees are then transported via aircraft or ship, and sold upon arrival, mostly for entertainment purposes.

> [Y]ou're taught to smoke, or given drugs to keep you placid, because that's easier than beating you, or they teach you to drink and you do your tricks, do what you're told, you meet strangers and wear your outfits, put a suit on so you look like a person - this joke person - but you're scared and - (378).

Jon comments on the apes being undressed: "I can't imagine being around humans, growing up against yourself and then you arrive here and you take off your dress [...] And you never put clothes on again. You're just yourself. And you're with family, like a family" (377-78). As Jon remembers telling Meg this, he also remembers the intimacy arising between them – a sensation he did not expect as his low confidence when it comes to romance. He is mirroring himself and Meg in the history of the chimpanzees: they have also been thrown into a cruel world that has not treated them lightly, but they may too be experiencing gaining a new family and daring to undress, both emotionally and physically. Ironically, Jon seems to think of the cages as a sanctuary.

In this mirroring of the chimpanzees lies a social criticism and critique of civilization. Jon and Meg's experiences of being forced to fit into the society in which they have been placed resemble the way in which the chimpanzees have been taught to smoke, wear outfits, and perform tricks. Coming to Monkey World, outside of London, they are allowed to become undressed again and be themselves, surrounded by equals, which is what Meg and Jon dream of. Rearising that they share this dream creates an intimate bond between them, which they were unable to tie during their restaurant date. Kennedy shows that when expected to follow a certain etiquette, as during this urban form of dating, people may fail to successfully perform, but when travelling out of the city – as to Monkey World – bonds may more easily be attached.

As discussed, by implementing animal imagery to help humans understand themselves better, the city – man's greatest achievement in terms of habitation – may be viewed in a different light that sheds beams on the less desirable aspects of city living. The expression "urban jungle" is referring to these aspects, as it is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a

dangerous, bewilderingly complex, or fast-paced urban environment; an urban area characterized by ruthless competition, struggle, or exploitation". However, the comparison between the jungle and the city may not solely be to the human's disadvantage: In Raban's comparison between the jungle and the city, he describes London as a tropical rain forest which is both "unpredictable [and] threatening" and "intermittently beautiful and benign" (157). Animal imagery is used to convey Jon and Meg's experience of detachment and alienation from social life, but also to underscore the similarity between the two of them. This sort of connection is essential for the city to be experienced as "beautiful" and "benign", and not just "dangerous" and "bewilderingly complex".

Emotional reactions to places

The question of whether the city is a good place of habitation or not continues to be explored through the different physical and emotional reactions Jon and Meg experience from moving in different places in London. Kennedy writes Meg and Jon's cities-within-the-city, to use Raban's term (161), to show how they circle different areas in their attempt to cross paths, and consequently also depict the different qualities of different places. Raban describes a city-within-a-city as a limited space in which a metropolitan citizen feels comfortable to move. The space is not necessarily defined by distance, but by points of reference and recognition (161). In general, both characters prefer natural areas and environments they feel an overview of the chaotic, bleak, and disappointing mood and architecture of central London. The idea of geographical emotions, as described by Andrew Thacker, shows precisely how the moods of the different areas of London are prescribed different qualities. Combining literary geography and affect theory, mood and emotions, Thacker analyses "how particular cities are experienced, viscerally and vitally", and enhances the understanding of how a city may entail "a broad understanding of affect, encompassing features such as spatial phobias, sensory responses to urban geographies, and Heidegger's conception of mood (*stimmung*)" (*Modern* 7). Kennedy's characters experience the geographical emotions of the inner city and from a distance quite differently, and inherently, this is a comment upon how the urban life affects the mind and body negatively. Simmel's depiction of how perception is affected by the urban environment is demonstrated in Jon's city-within-a-city, and this causes fear of how the city will engulf the remains of London's outskirts.

Jon's experiences of central London show how the city is not designed for humans to live, as traffic pollutes the air and makes a dangerous, health-depriving environment. On his way to work in a taxi, the driver makes a comment to Jon that cyclists are "smug" to manoeuvre in between vans, and the driver says "Not so smug when a lorry hits 'em. I'd make them take a test to earn a license. For their own good" (61). Throughout the novel, Jon rides a taxi when travelling further than a few blocks. The image portrayed is of London as a "full motorization" city, in which the automobile is the primary mode of transportation, and consequently, social and environmental impacts make the city into an environment of larger socioeconomic differences and detrimental to human health (Kenworthy and Newman 4). The connotations of pollution are also evident, and Kennedy describes how air pollution directly affects a person's mind, and criticizes Parliament for the centralization causing pollution, thereby making the implication that Parliament itself is polluting the area:

> Jon's balance, his vision billowed and twisted momentarily, slid like a loosened building. He chose to believe this was an effect of exposure to exhaust fumes and central London's generally pertaining pollution. Probably if Parliament did exile the civil service to the wastes and moorlands of South-east London, it would add years to everyone's lifespan. (210-211).

In Smith's novel, the car is juxtaposed to public transport, playing on the alleged Thatcher quote "anyone over the age of thirty catching a bus can consider himself a failure" (Elkin n.p.), presenting the car the as ultimate evidence of individual success. The city of "full motorization", then, is also a city of individualism, and navigating the city is an inhumane task, as it favours machines and industry at the cost of human health and security.

Habitation in central areas is also presented with some ambiguities: although acknowledging that "*Bishopsgate really is central and has excellent transport links*" (173), Jon's opinion is that "Nobody lives in Bishopsgate" (172), except his friends Rowan. "It's address fascism all the time, these days. You can't utter an unwelcome postcode and not be forever cast out" (172), Jon claims humorously, to which Rowan responds: "It isn't the postcodes that matter per se, Jon – they are associated with reality" and "London doesn't like reality. We believe we can transcend its limitations" (174). The implication is that reality is determined by changes in society, and Rowan – and particularly his garden – is a contrast to this with its Renaissance aesthetic and anachronisms. Modernity is compared to a plague which Jon and Rowan can watch drift in from their seats in Bishopsgate: "it's running with the big and

clever London rats, all over the Junction [where Jon spends most of his time]. It just hasn't washed up quite as high as Bishopsgate", but it is on its way (175). Therefore, the oasis of a garden Rowan has will soon be killed by concrete and there will only be "one huge play park for the upper-middle-and-above classes" (180). The inner city, and aspects of modernity in general, are sources of great fear to Jon, and he depicts dwelling in the city as an activity that may soon become impossible without a car and habitation will be in inhumane conditions for anyone who will not have access to a park – thereby, the city will only be habitable for a specific social class.

For travelling shorter distances, Jon is experiencing walking in the Westminster area too as displeasing and stressful. The reader follows him around this area throughout his working day. This area is depicted as evoking fear and may be overwhelming and cold. Jon dislikes this environment and seeks its opposite to find comfort. The buildings seem a threat to him: he finds Buckingham Palace "disappointing" and reminds him of "a novelty cake" or "somewhere that would have bad room service" (209). However, the building, and what it represents, is also experienced as overwhelming, and the environment as detached:

> He watched the wide and blue-white delicacy of a spring sky, drifting massively behind the solid pediments of the east façade. He felt the moment when the building came loose from its moorings and seemed to fly, while the high race of clouds locked in place and stood above him, watching him back.
>
> *Mustn't be sick.*
>
> He tried smiling at a pair of older women tourists, but his expression must have failed him. They turned tail and walked briskly the way they'd come, rather than pass him. (209).

Jon feels immensely small compared to the sky and Buckingham Palace, which makes him nauseous. Seeks reassurance, he smiles to the tourists who misunderstand his expression and become frightened. The miscommunication is an example of how a metropolitan mind becomes detached, as Jon fails to communicate a simple emotion and have a smile reciprocated. Moving in this central London area makes Jon seem more alienated and the strong bodily experience is stressful. Earlier this day, shortly after Jon has been given an uncomfortable assignment from his superior, he is desperate to "tread on grass, to be in care of trees and green shades", and therefore seeks comfort in St James's Park (171) – also near Westminster. To him, moving in areas in which crowds are indicated and surrounded by tall

buildings is juxtaposed to movement in green areas, seen both in this example and in the appreciation of Rowan's private garden.

Both Smith and Kennedy treat green areas in the city as valuable spaces. Smith is using access to gardens as an important marker of social status and as sites for debating the increasing privatization of public space and the experience of seclusion while maintaining the need for private personal space. In the current novel, parks offer peace of mind and a sense of perspective to the characters, and they offer breaks from metropolitan noise. The most important park in Kennedy's novel is Meg's local park, Top Park, near her house on Telegraph Hill. Meg's narrative begins here, where she is waiting for the sun to rise:

> The council left the Top Park open, even at night. The qualities of the view it offered made constant access a must. People felt they might have to nip round any time and check on the metropolis where it lay uncharacteristically prostrate at their feet. And wasn't it flat – the city – when you saw it like this, so plainly founded on a tidal basin, rooted in mud? Strangers would remark to strangers about that. Inhabitants of the Hill didn't need to, they were used to it. They could stroll along, perhaps through music – the Hill is a musical place, people practise instruments – and they could hope for the startle of a good London sunset, the blood and the glitter of that splashing on banks of distant windows, making dreams in the sky. Or else they might get the brawling roll of storms, or firework displays, or the tall afternoons when the blues of summer boiled and glared like the flag of some extraordinary, flawless nation. Even on an average day, the city needed watching. You shouldn't turn your back on it, because it was a sly old thing. (27).

By positioning this description of London and the Hill early in the novel, Kennedy reassures the reader that the claustrophobic and dystopian sense conveyed through Jon's experiences is not the full picture of London. This view of London is as if the city is rooted in mud like an organism, submissive, and subordinate to the "flawless nation" of nature. Describing the city as a "sly old thing" on which you should not turn your back indicates a threatening potential, but also that it resembles an object in constant change that needs observation, as if on exhibition. When watched from afar, Meg finds the city beautiful and intriguing, and she has a complete overview as she can see it in a full panoramic view from sky to ground. The park itself is also presented as a local community rather than an integrated part of the metropolis,

where people share mutual social codes and music and may watch the metropolis together in silence.

The park, and the view from it, gives Meg space and perspective to consider her life situation, and the space has become important for her recovery from alcoholism. After quitting, she walks through the park to evolve, and she rediscovers both nature and herself. She decides that her life "should involve more happiness" (217), and the park is a stark contrast to her brown house, in which she has been locked for more than a year.

> And there was the day when Meg had walked through her own park, the Top Park, and seemingly she could watch the push of chlorophyll, the spring fire rising in a green blaze along branches. She'd seen the drift and scatter of white petals, blushed petals, mauve and pink and cream petals, and been struck, been beautifully punched in the heart, by the presence of everything. She'd kept on walking under surely the most blue on record, a sky which should have been commemorated ever after, a phenomenon of nature. The truth of beauty had given up more truth and then more beauty and then this serious sweet truth, this singing and wordless thing, alight, alight, alight. (224).

The passage shows Meg's sudden caution to notice details and appreciate all the elements of the park. This is the opposite of Simmel's idea of the blasé attitude, where one has difficulties distinguishing between the value of things from bombarding of nervous stimuli. Here, Meg finds value in nature and is able to filter out the noise that initially made her drink. In general, Meg remembers the challenge of concentrating on the calming, happy aspects of life: she no longer follows politics, and seeks comfort in the park when London or other aspects of her life become difficult:

> Around her, London went brown in her place: Saharan dust pouncing in and making the breeze taste of broken tiles, of strangeness and thickened views. The screwed-up weather gave her headaches, but nothing like the headaches she'd had before. She could survey the city from above and pity it for being that little bit more afflicted than the Hill, the gentle Hill, the quiet Hill. And when she was out and walking – she did a lot of walking because it aided sleep – the buildings to either side of her had stopped leaning over and slyly bullying. (225).

Top Park and Telegraph Hill are places in London to where Meg may retreat when the London noise becomes overwhelming. Towards the end of the novel, she also takes Jon to Top Park to show him the view, and to prove to him that there is a positive outlook for the future. They watch the city "staring at them, broad in the dark: the coloured prickles and restlessness, the gape of emptinesses, blanks" (520). On the hill, they find optimism, love, and the ability to live together in the present moment.

Jon and Meg's cities-within-the-city are assigned different qualities and emotions, as they have different bodily reactions to the places in which they move, and their personalities are affected differently from them. In short, the inhumane conditions of large social inequality in the inner-city area are contrasted to the natural environments of the outskirts. Jon often finds himself in claustrophobic, vulnerable situations that he is unable to handle, as seen played out in two episodes of Jon locking himself up in the bathroom. Meg, on the other hand, shows willpower and a clear focus, for example in situations where she might have had a drink before. This difference may be understood from their different cities-within-the-city because Jon navigates mostly areas which he is aware affect him negatively, while Meg is conscious seek more positive areas regularly. Consequently, Jon's mind is more affected by the blasé attitude, and he has more difficulties in reacting appropriately to situations. Kennedy explores how the city affects the mind while criticizing the inhumane aspects of central areas. Dependence on automobiles and infrastructure that favours industry over human quality lives shows how the city is becoming driven by individualist and capitalist incentives.

Narratives of place

The art of storytelling itself is an important topic as Kennedy shows how stories of places contribute to shape experiences of them – and most importantly, demonstrates how the experience of place changes when the story is altered. Storytelling and narrative are important components in creating understanding, and this is why Kennedy shows how stories are altered, adjusted and sought after for Jon and Meg to understand London better They experience how stories are altered to fit, or naturally change over time, and they experience them as at times incomprehensible. As long as the narrative of London remains incoherent, spatial anxiety continues to define their experiences of this place.

In understanding how stories of a place are understood, and changed, ideas of palimpsests and the city's plasticity are helpful tools. Because palimpsests and personal memories shape our understanding of particular places, storytelling is regarded as both a social and a spatial activity (Marshall et. al. 1164). A palimpsest is understood as layers of meaning to a place, and an urban palimpsest is therefore a never-ending palimpsest because of the city's dynamic ability to change constantly (Turgut 3). Often used as a "metaphor describing both physical urban form as well as experiences and memories of urban life", the palimpsest refers to mental image as much as physical presentation (Marshall et. al. 1164). Palimpsests and memories may affect current experiences of the city as natural parts of the urban environment, as seen in the way that Jon cannot walk by Buckingham Palace without the reader realising the building's history and power and is therefore surprised by Jon's opinion that it looks like "somewhere that would have bad room service" (209). However, actively remembering, interpreting and applying memories and palimpsests to make an experience more comprehensible may be as useful in narrating the presence. As James Donald writes, "remembering […], however inventively, remains a way of working through current desires and anxieties" connected to place (149). The temporal distance leaves a void for the remembering people to fill with interpretations of how they have ended up where they have: as Lynch argues, "the observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image", and "should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs" (6). In Kennedy's aim to describe the importance of, while debating the implications of storytelling as a business, she shows how her characters take an active part in remembering and in drawing upon palimpsest to make sense of their present, and she describes the sense of disorientation occurring when an established narrative changes.

Jon's associations with stations show one example of how experience of place or type of place may be changed through personal memories, and how his current experience is coloured by memory. As Jon waits for Meg at the London Bridge railway platform, feeling "lost, gone astray, abandoned", a "memory falls on him like water, soaks in" (460): he was with his father at the train station in Inverness, waiting for his mother to come home. Jon's father attempts half-heartedly to make the mother's return a happy occasion, but Jon realises that her leave has been due to an illness that will not have recovered fully upon her arrival.

> Inverness Station was where, for the first time, Jon had been able to watch while what someone said and what was the truth were peeled right apart from each other, like skin from muscle, like muscle from bone. This was proper lying, important and adult lying. This was the kind of lying that meant reality hung about them in sticky shreds and that it was ugly and made no sense. (461).

Jon's memory of waiting for his mother at the station is weaved into his current experience of waiting for Meg. He remembers pretending to believe his father's promise that the mother's return would make everything wonderful, although Jon sees the fright in his eyes. The station signifies a crossroad, a place where life may change and take on a new path. In Jon's childhood memory, the episode from the station signified a return to a state in which truth and reality are undermined by the narrative of a wonderful family life. Ironically, he felt abandoned when his mother returned. In the present experience of waiting in the station, Jon realises that his life will change either way if Meg comes to meet him or not. When the clock passes midnight and they have not yet wished each other sweet dreams, the gravity of the situation shows that if Meg does not appear, their relationship is effectively over. If she does come, his life will intertwine with her. However, it is not the experience of standing alone on the station Jon is afraid of – he is just as scared of the memory of a bad experience, and compares himself to the chimpanzees captures and sold for entertainment:

> It feels clear to him that he is a clumsy-handed, apeish man, soon to be trapped in this huge and over-elaborate case. He is about to be absurd and lonely – *please, Meg, do be here, be with me and see me* – and then afterwards he's going to have the memory of that – *of waiting while she doesn't turn up* (456).

Jon takes a personal memory of stations, applies the memory of the chimpanzees, and weaves it into his current experience of waiting in a station for Meg. The flexibility of memory and narrative is thus demonstrated on a personal level.

The plasticity of memories and stories is drawn attention to as Jon considers "the business of storytelling" parallel to remembering the station of Inverness. The tangent is sparked by a "new and ardently modernistic head office of a rebranded newspaper group" (456) he spots on his way to the station. He thinks that storytelling is "now all the business there is" and that he himself is part of the business (457) through his job. The close positioning of these two thoughts brings attention to how easily stories and memories are altered. Tally argues that

"discourse of liminality itself is perhaps a symptom of the cartographic anxiety or spatial confusion characteristic of the present moment" (*Topo* 54). A station is a typical place of liminality, which makes the example a good illustration of this: Jon is literally in a place waiting to see if his life will change in this direction or that and needs components from his past to narrate the experience of the current situation. Storytelling as a business is also understood as a possible trigger of liminality. As a story is under change, the outcome will remain uncertain for a while. Considering the cartographic anxiety and spatial confusion permeating Kennedy's novel, London may then be viewed as a liminal place in the transition to becoming something else, and the novel's protagonists struggle to understand what. Therefore, they look to palimpsests and memories to foresee the future and make London more graspable.

A comparison between contemporary Britain and the 1960s East Germany shows Britain as in a crisis of identity, possibly moving in a fear-evoking direction, as Jon predicts Britain's future using the progression of East Germany as point of reference. While stuck in traffic, Jon remembers his trip to Berlin earlier the same year with his daughter. In trying to convince her that he did not purposely book the hotel "on the site of what had been the Jüdischen Bruderverein until its forced sale in 1938" (65), meaning he and Rebecca would sleep where Adolf Eichman (one of the major organizers of Holocaust) worked, Jon tries to calm Rebecca by claiming that history is entirely in the past. "'I mean, it's not happening now - it's history'. *Which fundamentally contradicts everything I believe about history and she bloody knew it*". (64). Berlin landmarks are tied with societal progression, as viewed in the past: the TV Tower symbolizes past hopes for a future of peace and socialism which now seems impossible and is therefore only a symbol of the past East Germany (62). The memory of East Germany, however, is connected to contemporary Britain as Jon reflects upon how little times have changed, and that the "*Terrible Enemy is different now. And the same. It serves the same purpose*" (62). Although not elaborating directly on who or what the terrible enemy is, the implication is that British governmental organs play this role in Jon's opinion. He believes that history repeats itself and that memories of other places may be appropriated to suit the narrative of how London and Britain are developing, thereby portraying Britain's "next era" as less democratic and transparent, similar to East Germany.

Memories of national watershed moments may function as important components of personal narratives as well, and one may use public stories to make more sense of private stories, as

Meg is doing in her memories of Margaret Thatcher's death and funeral. She remembers her last round of falling into alcoholism and then rising from it again using memories of the funeral, marking the end of an era in British history, as a reference point. She claims that "Margaret Thatcher got her drunk" (200), before admitting that Meg must hold responsibility herself. The implication is, however, that the Great Britain that Thatcher created, which favoured individualism and cut welfare spending, got Meg drunk. At the time of her death, Meg is sober, but on unsteady grounds and she "no longer really encountered people" (200). Feeling surprisingly numb by the death and the funeral itself, Meg is triggered to have a drink, and from then on stays drunk for more than a year. When she resurfaces, she realises her house is furniture in 1970s style, "often brown" (217), and she decides to not dwell on politics nor the past and rather fill her life with more happiness in order to progress. Having felt passionate about Thatcher's policies and life nearly drowned her, and therefore, Meg decides that life regardless of the national narrative is a safer, more comfortable life. Both examples show a prediction of Britain's future as a place in which participation in politics will become less safe, but Jon understands politics to be the end of Britain as we know it, Meg sees a more prosperous personal future in an apolitical life. Both foreshadow great changes in social and political conditions, and Meg and Jon see these tendencies but lack the tools to grasp the full picture.

Kennedy portrays London as an ontological postmodern type of society where everything can be questioned, which may be characterized by the post-truth era. The past is being reconstructed and re-narrated to the extent where the future becomes impossible to predict – and consequently, a crisis of identity emerges. This is exemplified through the National History Museum, which is an important place to Jon because "natural history is about evidence" (211) and "facts are beautiful things" (212). The museum argues for anachronisms: some facts, such as evolution, cannot be contested, and have not been seriously contested from scientific holds. Jon experiences the museum as a rare place where facts and reality are single ruling principles of narrative constructions. However, upon a coincidental visit, he discovers that the hominid cases have been replaced with a panel for kids to read about Darwin and evolution, with a heavy emphasis on evolution as a theory (362). Hard evidence, then, has been replaced by a new narrative that will not "*offend opinions*". Jon sees this as a disaster, as the museum is "*a palace built to celebrate the scientific method and the safeguard of information in a world full of dangerous dreams*" (362). This exemplifies the novel's argument for how London and Britain are affected by post-truth. The post-truth era is

recognized by public figures, often political (and could be institutions, like the National History Museum) play important roles in "modeling and upholding the truth" (Jacobsen and Mackey 4). Jon's job is to contribute to constructing narratives for officials and thereby contributing to creating a post-truth society, which is why he admired the museum as a counterbalance to this. Kennedy shows how truth is contested and understandings of reality are changed in new aspects, increasing the sense of confusion.

Fear for the future is creating a sense of urgency and suspense throughout much of the novel but is largely stilled as Jon and Meg find a way to live peacefully in the present. Among the fears creating this suspense are the fear of whether Meg will drink or not, of whether Jon will meet her or not, and a fear of what will happen if they do not wish each other sweet dreams after all. The autonomous monologue underscores much of this stress with its elusive and neurotic nature. The present is a threshold between the past and the future, and as long as the future is a fearful thought, the present may unpleasant as well – the present is a liminal condition until Jon and Meg unite. During their visit to Top Park in the end of the novel, Meg and Jon seems to find pleasure in their present. As they watch "London, staring at them, broad in the dark: the coloured prickles and restlessness, the gape of emptinesses, blanks" (520), they are cheered up by the city. Then they think "*Here it is. Love. Here it is*" (523), signifying a calm presence, contrasting their stressful conditions until this moment. London feels more graspable when looked at from this height and Meg and Jon find peace in this place. Meg tells Jon "Be whatever you need to, but not sorry" (523), signifying that the novel ends with the couple entering a phase together. Additionally, the park is considered a place in which truth exists: "The truth of beauty had given up more truth and then more beauty and then this serious sweet truth, this singing and wordless thing, alight, alight, alight." (224), Meg thinks as she walks through the park a spring day. Not only does the park offer a break from the metropolitan noise – but it also functions as a space in which truth exists and matters, as narratives cannot change how the flowers will bloom. The liminality that has affected their experiences of London becomes controllable and more coherent while in Top Park together.

Part of Kennedy's project with this novel is to demonstrate the importance and vulnerability of narratives and experiences of what is true. When narratives of place are altered, the place may be experienced as a crisis of identity, and dwellers may experience spatial anxiety or disorientation. Space is in this way understood in the same way as narratives. London has

historically been a city of rapid change, which Kennedy draws upon by thematizing the industrialization and urbanization of the city through the traffic, pollution, and the "plague" of inner-city London spreading, killing private gardens. This is a strong narrative of London up until today, but the urgency created by Kennedy signifies a crisis of identity for the city, and the post-truth era destabilizes more established truths than previously, contesting narratives at a higher pace than before. Jon and Meg's struggles to navigate the city may be explained by this sense of anxiety, but Kennedy also provides a solution for her protagonists on how to maintain a valuable personal life in a place of changing narratives: they find solid truths in each other's company as well as a safe future together in Top Park.

A social city?

Remembering the notion of the city as first and foremost a place defined by social networks and social activity, Kennedy's writing is an exploration of what ways the city is a social place, and for what good it brings to its citizens. Paradoxically, portrayals of public urban space make the streets seem more or less empty, as Jon and Meg's introspection is of greater interest. As Brydens argues, urban landscape is materialized and inhabited as individuals move in space (224). Massey and Lefebvre also see the city as defined by its social qualities: it is defined by social relations rather than artificial boundaries (Massey 121), and it is shaped by social activities (73). This provokes the question of what "social" may mean. On one hand, it refers to infrastructures and organizational systems that both officially and unofficially determine the operation of society. This may include class divisions, political activity, or otherwise how society views social groups. On the other hand, it refers to the interpersonal connection between a small circle of people, or perhaps only two. Both understandings of "social" are vital for a human to survive, considering we are pack animals. However, Kennedy depicts how the operation of society may fail to protect certain groups and people while maintaining the importance of interpersonal social connection.

The warnings against increased socioeconomic differences are recognized through the dystopian future outlooks Jon imagines while visiting Rowan's garden. Here, he imagines the garden being covered with cement to build more housing, and only the wealthiest of citizens may access private parks to visit green areas. Additionally, a sense of individualization is warned against through for example the traffic operation, as discussed. To analyse how social

inequality is viewed and predicted in the novels, two traditional views on social inequality will with great help be laid out. Birke presents these views on poverty and social inequality, both with long historical roots: the first views "the poor" as "victims of social problems, entitles to support and sympathy", and looks toward the causes of poverty in the belief that these factors should be prevented to avoid poverty to become a social problem (125). The second view entails a "demonization of the working class" and resonates with individualist views, in the belief that all individuals are responsible and able to steer their own destinies (126). Welfare spending in the UK has been reduced since Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s but persisted well into the 2010s (Birke 128), and Kennedy's novel addresses this development directly through Meg's memory of Thatcher's death. In refusing to be associated with her despite their shared first name, Meg positions herself far from her policies, and she finds even her very moment of death to be alienating:

> *Not many pensioners, frail and needful, get to die in a suite at the Ritz, all cosy and dignified.*
>
> *How many pensioners get to die while being cosy and dignified and never mind the Ritz…?*
>
> *I tried to be outraged about that, but it didn't make me angry. I wished it would.* (201).

Politicians and the upper-middle class and above receive more dignified treatment than Meg herself has experienced from her numerous failed attempts to attend AA meetings and other sorts of treatment for her alcoholism, which she eventually treated herself. The extract shows, however, that although Meg wants to feel angry about the inequality displayed so clearly in Thatcher's death, she is rather numb, indicating that the information is not at all new to her. As a result of having felt angry and passionate about social and political changes for years, Meg has become numb and decides to never care for politics again as a strategy for how to remain sober. The social infrastructures and systems of unfairness are too deep and rooted for Meg to waste more time fighting them.

Jon's narrative presents a similar image of politics, and the novel is therefore largely depicting how anti-politics looks like in twenty-first century Britain. Anti-politics refers to "elite strategies of depoliticization" and its effect, "citizen negativity towards formal politics" (Clarke 191). There is a mutual withdrawal on both parts, creating the distance between politicians and voters increasingly larger – a new governing class is developing, consisting of

public office staff and state actors recruiting political leaders, and consequently, citizens are alienated due to decreasing transparency and politics become limited. This image of reality is adopted by Kennedy, who conveys this tendency from both ends, and Meg describes her path to become alienated from politics, and Jon's work as a civil servant, secretly fighting against the opacity of government. The theme is recurring through Jon's narrative: "*Voters are justifiably scared of clever politicians*" (46) summarizes this division, and towards the end, he holds a longer monologue to the journalist Milner about the government body:

> The open secret, the one at the heart of public service is – as you know – that there are facts, but they don't matter. There is knowledge and that knowledge can prove and disprove the better – if not the best – ways to do anything. Anything at all. But ministers, MPs, politicians, theorists, they have to be visible, they have to do things, an if this involves dismantling a functional system, then it will be dismantled – not adjusted, adjustments aren't sexy, not mended, mending is what tradesmen do.
>
> […]
>
> What is a political party? A conspiracy with membership cards. Conspiracy as re-engineered by greedy children. What is Parliament? An institution designed to prevent any activist from staying active. (397-98).

Jon's testament of his ultimate alienation from public service culminates in a leakage to the journalist of sensitive information that he expects will force his resignation – a political and professional suicide. Kennedy shows that involvement in politics will be frustrating enough to nearly kill a human as long as the divide between the citizens and the governing class remains this large, and the novel presents only one solution to live a comfortable life in such suffocating political and social: to look completely the other way. Social systems are run by politicians who are willing to change narratives to achieve power and the powerful institutions that are in place to implement social policies, like political parties and parliament, are reduced to immobile groups of people who are most interested in helping themselves. Kennedy depicts a social system wearing down, and how this

Interpersonal connections are portrayed in vignettes in between chapters and are thereby given a particular focus as something besides the main narratives of Jon and Meg. The vignettes are notes written by Meg, but the reader does not get to know this until towards the end when Meg explains: "Every time I see something good, or kind, or silly, or worth

collecting, I remember it. Every time the city gives me something sweet, I remember it and I write it down" (498). Examples of the vignettes may be as follows: "A woman is crying on platform three at Canada Water Station" (every vignette opens by establishing who and what Meg observes, and where). Most vignettes open by stating the when, where and what quite clear. The woman "produces shuffles amongst the crowds", making other travellers feel embarrassed on her behalf. Eventually, two young women approach her asking what the matter is, and she explains "in a voice made tired by its exertions, that she is autistic. […] She understands that she will not die from having missed her train. […] She will not be trapped here for ever. […] Nevertheless, she is lost". The two younger women wait with her for the next train. "They make sure that she is on-board it and that she can manage from hereon and will be OK. And then they change their minds and they climb on-board with her and are taken away" (168-170).

The vignettes are narrated from a distance and contrast the representation of consciousness otherwise found in this novel. It resembles a style of postmodernist writers who "retreat from the modernist effort to represent subjective consciousness as faithfully as possible", and instead privilege surface over depth (Lodge 64). The device views this objective way of representation as the tip of the iceberg, and the reader is freer to read into what the narrator conveys – similar to how a camera conveys images (Lodge 70-72). Meg might be considered a flâneur figure in the vignettes, as she is an observer of urban life. The contemporary flâneur figure is often a device implemented as an approach to the city rather than in and of itself (Bock and Vila-Cabanes x), but the figure also has a reputation for being detached, unempathetic and affected by Simmel's idea of blasé attitude (Carluccio 99-100). Considering the other evidence of central London making the human mind more detached, and the surface level of narration in the vignettes, Meg shows a blasé attitude in that she assigns more or less the same amount of value to every piece of information, from what people are wearing, to their facial expressions. However, all vignettes zoom in, like a camera, specifically on moments that make Meg feel happy, so she is distinguishing between the negative and the positive impacts of her surroundings.

The vignettes also contrast Jon and Meg's narratives in that they are concerned with surroundings and other people, rather than the introverted, introspective style of narration that seeks to represent their own consciousnesses. Therefore, the vignettes become a counterweight to the otherwise sense of individualism that colours the rest of the London narrative and may be viewed as Kennedy's call for noticing the sweetness of metropolitan

life. There is also a social comment in this: whereas anti-politicism and increased social differences are thematized through Jon and Meg, the vignettes show people of all layers of society encountering, often helping each other, and sharing smiles. The city is presented as a social place in its potential to host such moments as presented in the vignettes. Public space in social space in its ability to have people from all over the city meet and share moments together. Although the vignettes demonstrate everyday happiness of the metropolis, they also signify the importance of focusing on such events. Their everyday characteristics will make them easy to overlook, but Meg's determination to find and remember such moments increase her quality of life.

Zadie Smith's *NW*

Whereas Kennedy maps two distinct parts of London simultaneously with the aim to intersect them, Smith maps multiple geographies of London, with a particular focus on the NW area. The different geographies are overlapping, laying side by side, and weaved together to present an impressionistic image of the contemporary, diverse London village. Also taking cues from Woolf and Joyce in how experience and consciousness are represented in literature (Knepper 113; Wells 101), Smith employs different narrative techniques and voices in order to tell stories of four different characters, focalized through three different consciousnesses in five distinct parts of the novel. Ultimately, Smith describes a London that is difficult to navigate, and experienced as difficult to grasp for her characters. The complex space is tied with the characters' sense of selves, and although the London village is familiar to all characters, they notice how it is in change. Smith's writing is recognized for its commentary on the "social conditions of a modern urban, multicultural society that seems drawn mainly from one like our own" (Tew *Contemp* 223) and reflects changing social values of the nation as well as the city (Tew *Contemp* 229). *NW* also shows great concern for changing social conditions, both in individual thought and behaviour and in political and social action. Smith's novel contains social analysis and discussions of such throughout and is using the site of NW and its citizens as a springboard to comment on power relations between the marginalized and those who control the narrative. This chapter will look closer at some of the devices Smith is using to convey the confusion of urban living, the various experiences of social space in NW and London, and the different experiences of belonging to, and trying to break from one's socioeconomic background.

NW is preoccupied with space and has a spatial organization, despite the presentation as a coming-of-age story about the characters Leah and Natalie. It is quite different from Kennedy's project, which has an obvious temporal focus and a preoccupation with the human mind. Nevertheless, both novels show different approaches to exploring the theme of urban experience in twenty-first-century London. Smith's project is to elevate the area's platform and sheds light on the often overlooked stories of the people moving in this space. Wendy Knepper argues that the novel "eschews chronology in favour of a spatially coherent account of events: the text navigates a series of seemingly unrelated encounters in NW to expose overlooked narratives of dis/connection and violence" (117). Time and space are considered the fundamental categories structuring the human experience, and therefore they are also the

two fundamental pillars of every narrative as space tends to be disclosed through the temporal unfolding of a story (Ryan 420), but in *NW*, Smith is experimenting with letting spatial understanding be guiding to the characters' temporal understanding. In addition to the spatial structure, the novel revolves around the death of Felix. The five distinct parts, all narrated in different styles – Visitation, Guest, Host, Crossing and Visitation (again) – jump back and forth in time to show how Leah and Natalie, primarily, move through NW and everyday life. All four characters, Leah, Natalie, Felix, and Nathan have grown up in the same council estate in Caldwell. The women are childhood friends, and Nathan their classmate, and although they have no previous close relation to Felix, their lives become intertwined due to the novel's local focus. The overlapping narratives show how characters and stories are connected, creating a social web of NW.

By keeping most of the action on the streets of Kilburn and Willesden, Smith demonstrates how a London village operates as a society of itself, and its position in relation to the metropolis as a whole. The village is described through coincidental events and encounters, and as Smith writes "A peculiarity of London villages: faces without names", she shows that the NW area is similar to a smaller town in many regards. However, the metropolis is visible in the dense and diverse, busy public spaces, particularly streets and public transport, which enables easy access to central London for NW citizens. The "impressionistically described [urban] landscape" sends confusing messages to the novel's characters, but the vitality of NW is inescapable (Tew "Will Self" n.p.). This thesis will look into specific devices and ideas employed by Smith to convey how the twenty-first-century London village functions, and how her wide register of characters and narrative voices unlocks numerous experiences of urban living.

Smith explores changing sentiments, social conditions, and changes in distributions of space through five different narrative voices, and focalized on three characters, and she weaves together stories of even more characters. The various styles in narration and the narratives of four characters with rather different destinies, provide the opportunity to convey numerous experiences of urban living. Whereas Kennedy's narrative intersects two narratives and two parts of the city as two pieces of a puzzle – two people who should fit together, and two perspectives on the city that should find a middle ground – Smith's London is a confusing place of numerous possible routes to walk and opportunities only a bus ride away. Smith's main concern is, then, not to convey individual experiences, but to show a variety of them to

puzzle together a larger picture of NW. This chapter will focus on different devices and ideas that Smith explores in conveying the multiple geographies.

The highlighting of the NW-area is evident in the foregrounding of street names, names of places and maps. The use of maps appears to have two functions: as characters look at maps in the novel, they reveal a lost sense of place and a need to navigate, and the tracking of characters makes the novel function as a mapping of the area. The device conveys the experience of confusion and the ungraspable sense of the urban and entails a social commentary about how the NW space has tended to be overlooked and not considered an equal part of London. Maps and the active mapping of characters are foregrounded in Smith's novel, revealing multiple possible cartographic visions of London. Maps offer instructions to follow, and in NW, these may be guiding principles for how characters should move and develop in this space – however, with numerous different maps, some instructions prove misleading.

Public transport is a defining feature of any large city, and in Smith's London, it is used as a metaphor for the experience of life progression. As public transport makes access to the whole city possible, different characters' lives are affected in different ways. Additionally, the underground in particular has a long history of working as a metaphor for the urban – and possibly most often the uncomfortable aspects of it. Smith also uses the underground to debate the unsafe and the difficulty of interpreting the signal bombarding of the urban.

Analysis of real space is also mixed with the creation of literary space, as Smith opens up urban palimpsests and chronotopes to show how past and present urban experiences are weaved together through cultural references and personal memories. These devices elaborate on Felix and Leah's contemporary experiences, while it weaves the contemporary NW into London history, forcing readers to consider the area as part of the greater narrative.

Walking is an important part of moving in space in *NW,* and analysis of walks described from different perspectives reveals the sensation of London streets and some differences between the streets of central London and NW. Similar to Kennedy, Smith employs a contemporary version of the flâneur figure as an approach to describe the streets of London and NW: her characters become walkers and participant-observers. In this chapter, the role of streets in the urban novel will be discussed and compared to Kennedy's vision of London as a city for automobiles rather than walkers.

The engagement in making social analysis and commentary is evident through Smith's explorations of communal thinking and increased privatization of public spaces. The conflict between intellectual or ideological disapproval of privatization and the bodily desire for private spaces shows the tension of this question, which connects the personal and the political. A call for communal thinking and a warning against social seclusion is, however, mediated through the character of Leah, while Natalie views access to private space as a status of high socioeconomic status. The developments in social policies and in cultural thoughts on these questions are explored, debated through characters, and warned against in *NW*.

Lastly, an analysis of how Smith debates two traditional views on poverty will be understood in relation to how characters experience control of their own lives, and how their lives progress in different directions after sharing more or less the same starting point. *NW* arguably forces its reader to rethink behaviour and discourse of social inequality in the new millennium, and the different life experiences conveyed in this novel underscore in what ways. The experiences wary from a perception of having multiple opportunities in life, having no ambitions of achieving more than the bare minimum to live comfortably, over to having been deprived of all possibilities due to being born with the wrong gender and skin colour. The views on poverty and life control in this novel show that life developments are largely coincidental, making the experience of contemporary London life difficult to fully grasp for Smith's characters.

The maps of NW

Maps are visible through Smith's novel and have two main functions: the novel may be viewed as a map of its own, as part of Smith's activist project to make NW become more visible on the London map, and they are used as a literary device to disclose the confusing experience of navigation in London. The novel tracks characters' movements to show how navigating through the city corresponds with their attempts to navigate life, and the characters often turn to actual maps, indicating a lost sense of place and disorientation (Tally *Topo* 1). In this sense, the use of maps is efficient in conveying the confusing experience of navigating life in NW, and as a social commentary on how the area has tended to be overlooked, referring to the Thatcher quote presented in the novel that "Today this is Brent. Tomorrow it

could be Britain" (44). Compared to Kennedy's novel, maps, street names and names of places in general have a much higher frequency and are foregrounded to a larger extent in *NW*. Kennedy tracks her characters using more general descriptions of where they move, and she distinguishes life in central London greatly from life on Telegraph Hill. Smith also distinguishes NW and central London, but more in terms of the power relations between the parts of the city. However, her main concern is to describe the NW-area itself to argue its rightful place in the public consciousness.

Maps signal power and control of narrative of place. Tally argues that there is no "one true" map, as people constantly create, revise, polish, maybe discard, and reproduce new figural representations. This is what he calls the cartographic imperative, and it takes place most visibly in narratives because the narrative *makes* a place. "We are drafting various maps by telling different stories" because some places will gain importance, and others will be diminished (*Topo* 5-6). This concept is an inevitable, cognitive process, and applies to fiction and the real world more or less equally (Ljungberg; Tally *Topo*). Both Smith and Kennedy are making use of the device, both to enhance the spatial understanding, and to demonstrate the power relations that maps may reveal. In Kennedy, this is more subtly discussed, as an area with high density of power institutions is mapped through Jon's movements in London, and this is juxtaposed to Meg's movements in less political and economic influential areas. Smith takes on a more active mission in disclosing the power relations, and one of the ways in which she demonstrates this is by showing how Felix does not recognise his own experience of London when looking at the underground map.

> He considered the tube map. It did not express his reality. The centre was not 'Oxford Circus' but the bright lights of Kilburn High Road. 'Wimbledon' was the countryside, 'Pimlico' pure science fiction. He put his right index finger over Pimlico's blue bar. It was nowhere. Who lived there? Who even passed through it? (163).

The extract shows how London may be viewed from different points of view on a map, and the lost sense of place one may feel when presented with an unfamiliar map. Massey argues that the identity of place is "constantly the site of social contest, battles over the power to label space-time, to impose the meaning to be attributed to a space, for however long or short a span of time" (5). Mapping is therefore a political act, and in this example, and we see that Felix, or any person of NW, have not been considered much in how the underground map is representing London. Slavin writes that "the definition of London is many Londons; the city

has never had only one myth, one narrative, one map" (107), and this is here demonstrated by Smith. Although the standardised underground map may be immediately familiar to the reader, or any person who have visited London, it should not be considered the true map of the city as this London native experiences the map as something defamiliarizing the city.

Smith also uses maps that do not correspond with the real London, and thus increases the sense of NW as a place where navigation may be difficult and deceptive. The true-to-life-style Google Maps instructions of chapter nine, which describes the route walked through Willesden Lane in chapter ten, shows this. When looking up the instructions on Google Maps, one discovers that the instructions in Smith's novel are fictional and will not lead anywhere. Knepper argues that the disparity between chapters nine and ten "signal[s] the discrepancies between mapped and lived spaces, virtual and material worlds, imagined and actual places. Following the instructions […] leads nowhere" (116-7). Considering Smith's overall spatial approach to narrative in this novel, moving through space is similar to structuring a narrative of oneself, and the characters use maps as guiding tools in this task. However, when maps are experienced as alienating from London, or when they may not actually lead anywhere, Smith shows how her citizens of NW find it difficult to control their movements as well as their narratives.

Whereas Kennedy maps London to show different geographical emotions of different parts of the city, Smith maps movements and highlights places in NW for the most part to bring the part of town into attention, and to disclose the power relations between this London village and other parts of London. The novel's title has been suggested to refer to "nowhere" rather than "North-West" (Pirker; Slavin), underscoring the notion of NW as a "nowhere"-place, as is also addressed in the Thatcher quote "Today this is Brent. Tomorrow it could be Britain" (44). By mapping the area and different characters from there, then, Smith is revealing "a multiply cartographed vision of the space of London" (Slavin 99), making the area come to life through several characters' narratives and consciousnesses. There is not only one true map or narrative of NW either, just as there is no one true map or narrative of London. Whereas Kennedy portrays this fact as disorientating, Smith uses it to steer the narrative. Her novel is an attempt to take some of the power of narrating back by shedding light on lives that are being lived there and their relationships to their close area as well as London as a whole. The novel is, then, a map of itself in this regard, and a political response to the powerful institutions that diminish narratives of the NW-area.

Public transport

Smith's use of public transport in *NW* is, like maps, both a device to convey the experience of mobility in the urban space and connected to social commentary. Similar to Kennedy's novel, mode of mobility in *NW* is associated with participation in and values of society: the presence of cars signifies individualism, while public transport may signify participation in or a dependence on the collective. This is particularly clear through another unverified Thatcher quote in Smith's novel: "Anyone over the age of thirty catching a bus can consider himself a failure" (44). Although it is uncertain whether Thatcher uttered these words or not, it is considered probable that she *could* have believed so (Elkin n.p.). Elkin argues that public transport in *NW* mirrors the characters' quest to navigate a route forward in life. The idea resembles how maps are used as a device to demonstrate the difficulty of navigating a city and one's life narrative, but whereas maps offer a bird-view image and more general glimpses of the experience, following characters through journeys on public transport may tell more about where they are headed, for what reasons, and about the bodily experiences of the moving forward. The novel's recurring question of what it means to "move forward" is particularly applicable to the systems of public transport, which always move forward, but according to a map of intersecting lines, often circling, and with limited freedom to deviate from the routes. Public transport, then, offers an analysis of how the web of people of the metropolis is knit together, while also an analysis of how urban mobility is experienced by different characters.

Public transport creates a space in which class is negotiated, and the underground has been a celebrated and massively used metaphor to comment on social issues: historically, the cars were divided into classes, and the Metropolitan line was built partly to allow working-class people to live outside of the inner-city slums. Today, the underground appears to be a temporarily classless space where different sorts of groups are "jumbled together for the time of their ride" (Korte and Zipp 199-200). However, the image of the underground as classless is largely utopian, as the "vision of social *connections* […] has never been realized", and "the underground makes Londoners spatially mobile, but the trajectories of its lines through the city […] reveal how their spatial mobility has boundaries and their life chances differ significantly" (Korte and Zipp 200). Although the underground, and public transport in general, is connecting different parts of the city, it may still be disconnecting social groups.

Additionally, similar to the road's historical function in literature, it is a space associated with coincidental encounters and a space in which "representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages […] intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (Bakhtin 17). Public transport is, then, a good metaphor for commenting on social issues and a space in many ways it may become a microcosm reflecting the density of different people of the metropolis. It is, however, not a classless space, regardless of what public imagination has liked to believe of it.

To Natalie, public transport is a way to be distanced from Caldwell and improve her socioeconomic status. Expensive train tickets prevent her from attending interviews at universities in Manchester and Edinburgh, and to her mother, a short train ride away to go to university seems too unsafe. She would wish for Natalie to attend a university close to Kilburn. Yet Natalie attends university in Bristol, which indicates that her way out of Caldwell was, after all, public transport. Although her upbringing in Caldwell is portrayed as rather locally focused, Natalie experiences living in numerous parts of London after university. Public transport becomes an integral part of her daily life and provides her access to the entire city: "She read long briefs on the long triangulated tube rides: New Cross, Lincoln's Inn, Marylebone. She slipped into Frank's bed. Slipped out. Slipped in" (224). The excerpt is gathered from chapter "101. Onwards. Upwards" from the part Host. The chapter title highlights the idea of public transport as both spatial and social mobility. Few episodes of Natalie riding public transport are described in the novel, and they are described in Host where the narrative voice is distanced and therefore does not describe Natalie's experiences of public transport in vivid detail. Public transport is, however, important for her social status and personal freedom: through public transport, she may access the whole city, and with it its opportunities which may increase her social status. Interestingly, this contradicts the alleged Thatcher quote, as she succeeds in acquiring a greater social status without a car.

As will be discussed later, Natalie's character and view on poverty is that one is responsible for attaining one's own success and happiness – an essentially individualistic value which contradicts her dependence on public transport to achieve such success. Smith shows, then, how there is no clear definition of a car being individualistic and public transport as associated with collectivism, and that public transport is a tool to have one's life move forward and upwards. As Korte and Zipp remark, public transport makes mobility easier, but the limitations of public transport's trajectories may also highlight the differences between

social classes – the ones dependent on public transport, and the car owners. Considering that Smith is portraying the first group in her novel, she shows that there exist nuances of individualism and that public transport may be just as important as a car to attain greater personal freedom.

The only car owner depicted in Smith's novel is Felix, who travels from Kilburn to Oxford Circus, by bus and underground, to buy a car as a gift for his girlfriend to celebrate his improving life path and future outlooks. In this sense, the Thatcher-myth seems correct – he is celebrating success by buying a car. However, as Felix's narrative ends with his death as he is killed near a bus stop after a dispute on the underground, a car is ultimately not a promise of a brighter future. Rather, Smith demonstrates the importance and complexity of public transport behaviour through Felix's part of the novel.

Smith demonstrates that public transport travellers are expected to follow certain sets of rules, and arguably, different sets apply to different modes of transportation. Elkin suggests that the difference is that while the underground "functions heterotopically to the world above, as well as representations of it", the bus is "a kind of utopia, the symbol of an ideal of mobility which some characters covert and others […] are trying to escape" (n.p.). The differences between underground etiquette and bus etiquette are demonstrated in numerous glimpses throughout the novel: A conversation between Natalie and Frank about how Natalie's family's inability to help her financially is ended by Natalie saying she does not want to have the conversation on the tube (228); Leah's embarrassment of her mother's loud voice in the carriage and interference in a conversation between two strangers when she grabbed a newspaper herself because "reading is silent" (46-48). On buses, Natalie answers a woman politely on a bus (329-30) and Leah and Pauline's ride is described as vivid and crowded, where Leah felt easier about having a conversation than she seems to have on the tube. Using Thacker's terminology, the tube is a more negatively charged emotional geography and a site of a greater spatial phobia than the bus (*Modern* 7). The underground is a heterotopia where a stricter version of regular politeness applies, and one is expected to ignore strangers. The bus, however, is a more open space, a utopia where strangers are less threatening, and rather someone to be polite to than to ignore. The different sets of behavioural rules depend on constant interpretations of various signals, and the overload may easily lead to misinterpretations, which Felix's journey demonstrates.

Although being a lifelong Londoner, Felix shows signs of not complying with, or misunderstanding the codes on his underground journey from Kilburn to Oxford Circus:

> Felix […] looked at a tube map like a tourist, taking a moment to convince himself of details no life-long Londoner should need to check: Kilburn to Baker Street (Jubilee); Baker Street to Oxford Circus (Bakerloo). Other people trust themselves. […] A train barreled past, knocking him into the seat he'd been heading for. After a moment the two trains seemed to cruise together. He looked out now at his counterpart, in the other train. Small woman, whom he would have judged Jewish without being able to articulate any very precise reason why: dark, pretty, smiling to herself, in a blue dress from the Seventies – big collar, tiny white bird print. She was frowning at his T-shirt. Trying to figure it. He felt like it: he smiled! A broad smile that emphasized his dimples and revealed three gold teeth. The girl's little dark face pulled tight like a net bag. Her train pulled ahead, then his did (117-8).

This extract shows Felix's lack of understanding of the etiquettes and unfamiliarity with the train's movement, and Felix's fate shows how such a lack of understanding of metropolitan underground behaviour may become fatal. He has not travelled out from Kilburn much in his life – more a London villager than a metropolitan man – and is therefore inexperienced in metropolitan underground sets of rules. For example, smiling to a stranger would not seem strange in his London village since the streets of Kilburn are full of familiar people. Before entering the train, this is demonstrated as Felix stops to talk with his father's neighbour, and with an old Caldwell boy who Felix cannot recognise immediately, but who remembers Felix and his father very well from years past. "A peculiarity of London villages: faces without names" (6), as Smith writes earlier in the novel, and demonstrates through Felix. It is this lack of understanding of the underground's set of rules that eventually has Felix murdered: while on the train back to Kilburn, a white, pregnant woman asks Felix to ask his friend, who is wearing earphones, to remove his feet from a seat so she can sit down. The two men opposite Felix are, however, not his friends, but strangers – the woman makes the assumptions based on their similar dark skin colour. Felix accepts the role he is given by the woman and refers to the man as "bruv" and "blud", to which he responds "Who you calling blud? I ain't your blud" (166), clearly not complying with the woman's interpretation. As Felix walks towards the door, he feels "a great wave of approval, smothering and unwanted" and "contempt and disgust enveloping the two men and separating them, from Felix, from the

rest of the carriage, from humanity" (166). The men follow him to Albert Road, where they demand his valuables, to which Felix declines, upon which they stab him. As he is laying on the pavement, feeling the blood in his throat, he sees his girlfriend, Grace, just reaching the 98 bus, and the bus lets "the doors fold neatly behind her" (169).

The underground is a site for conflict between different social groups, as it ironically disconnects social groups while connecting different parts of the city, and it is a site for conflict between culture and the body. Codes of urban life become increasingly visible here, sometimes exaggerated, and the space is often associated with negative geographical emotions – as seen from Felix's experience of "feeling" a smothering approval after giving his seat away, and "feeling" the cause of separating the two men from the rest of the carriage. He has isolated two black men to show kindness towards a white lady although she has revealed racist prejudice towards him. Caught between norms of British politeness and loyalty to his own social group, he is punished for choosing the first, indicating that politeness, which is fundamental to the operation of society, has been broken (Elkin n.p). Additionally, by siding with the woman, he undermines the authority of the men, elevating his own position from theirs. Considering that he is on his way home for buying a car, and generally experiences his life as moving in a good direction, the situation shows how too great success for a black man will not be tolerated when he is reaching for group membership of another group than that of other comparable black young men.

Public transport is not only a space in which Smith creates a microcosm of urban society. It also reflects the confusing and difficult-to-navigate experience of life progression. Felix has a clear aim for his journey and comes close to realising it but is punished due to a coincidental encounter and a situation that challenged his personal identity in relation to different group identities. Using Thacker's idea of geographical emotions shows that the underground is an uncomfortable place in which pressure may arise more quickly than above ground. He argues that the underground has provided a new experience of everyday life since its construction, and has become an integral part of both the modern metropolis and the urban experience. The "congruence between land development and transport extension expands our sense of space, but diminishes our grasp on time" (*Modern* 173), he writes, showing how the urban dweller's consciousness is changed by, and when on the underground. With this new experience of everyday life, geographical emotions of the underground are often represented as negative, despite the social possibilities it provides. By analysing geographical emotions in literature,

one may find how "particular spaces produce affective responses, often registered in discourse of bodily reactions" (*Modern* 7). The underground is often connected with negative experiences of space in the modern city: "The anxious rejection of one's travelling companions as a crowd or mass can therefore be read as another spatial phobia, where what produces panic is not an open or closed space but the crowded density of other people" (Thacker *Modern* 180). Although providing social opportunities, personal freedom of travel, access to the city, and occasionally positive encounters, the underground is also a compact space of "many of our deepest fears and anxieties about urban life - the crowd, the stranger, technology, dehumanisation, confinement - the sense that somehow our established perceptual grasp upon space is being challenged" (*Modern* 185). The fears are confirmed as interacting with strangers and his grasp of space being challenged proves fatal in Felix's case. His life progression is interrupted by a typical source of metropolitan fear, for the reason of his inexperience with the courtesy required.

Public transport travelling as life progression shows, then, how Natalie sought to leave Caldwell to access both places and life opportunities; how Felix travelled further than usual to ascend the next level in life; and how Leah travels within a close range of Caldwell, afraid to choose the next step in life. "Next stop" in her narrative refers to both the next bus stop, and to the child, her husband and mother wish for her to have. On numerous rides on public transport, she is confronted with the idea of generations and motherhood. For example, chapter 15 shows Leah observing a mother and her baby interacting on the 98 bus. The ride is interrupted by Leah's bodily response as she needs to vomit. At this point, Leah is early in her own pregnancy, but the scene also shows a negative bodily reaction as described by Thacker to associate the bus with negative geographical emotions. During another bus trip with her mother Pauline, the narrator reports on Leah's experience and thoughts:

> You're next. It's the next thing. Next stop Kilburn Station. The doors fold inwards, urban insect closing its wings. A covered girl on her mobile phone steps in as they step off and disturbs the narrative by laughing and dropping her aitches and wearing make-up (44).

The passage shows Leah's geographical emotions associated with the bus as pressing and stressful, as seen in the repetitions of "next", and something to avoid when comparing it to an insect. The bus and her own life progression are closely linked in Leah's experience, and the recurring question of "which way is forwards" and why one must "move forward" is also

connected. The next stop for Leah, if she is to move forward in the direction her husband and mother wish for her, is motherhood. Since this destination seems impossible to her, she struggles to travel far from her home, resisting to move both physically and in life situation (Elkin n.p.). Leah's negative geographical emotions of the bus largely reflect her general negative emotions about moving her life forward, but her travels reveal the experience of urban public transport itself as well.

Whereas the underground is largely associated with negative geographical emotions, as has been discussed, the bus is comparably more open and comfortable. Conversations between characters occur on the bus, while silence is sought on the underground, and the representation of Leah's consciousness reveals a busier environment around the bus than on the train. For example, the dialogue is represented as more rapid exchanges until Leah and Pauline reach their train. Additionally, descriptions of people are more frequent on the bus, indicating that Leah is more avoidant about looking at people on the train. Leah sees a woman with covered hair and a distinct English accent, old Hindus wearing saris with wool, and a Gypsy girl dancing with a tall man on the bus and at the underground station (43-44). The harmonic image shows what Korte and Zipp describe when claiming that all social groups are gathered on public transport, and the discomfort of sharing space with strangers, as described by Thacker (*Modern*), seems not to apply as much to the bus as for the underground. The bus is experienced as safer because it is in the open and less claustrophobic than the underground, but both are equally necessary for the metropolitan citizens, as seen since both Leah and Felix needs to change from one to the other in order to travel where they like.

The Thatcher myth of "anyone over the age of thirty catching a bus can consider himself a failure" is then disproved by Smith. The car, signifying ultimate self-reliance, would provide a safe distance to strangers, which would provide more comfort and it would have saved Felix's life. However, since all of Smith's characters are entirely dependent on public transport, both for physical mobility and to regulate their life progressions, this model of self-reliance is utterly incompatible with metropolitan life in the twenty-first century. On one hand, this is part of Smith's call for collectivism and a move away from individualism, which is recognised through other aspects of the novel as well. She withholds to some extent the utopian vision of public transport as a connecter of social groups and different parts of town. On the other hand, public transport is also depicted as a potentially dangerous space,

characterised by discomfort and a necessity to follow distinct sets of rules about how to travel as safe and comfortable as possible – a skill which has proved to be lifesaving.

Compared to Kennedy, Smith's novel explores the many ways in which public transport plays an important role in the Londoners' lives, but both novels signify a particular fear of the underground, and Jon questions whether it is safe to ride it during night (Kennedy 463). Additionally, the individualist ideology is depicted in traffic in Kennedy's novel, while Smith takes a stand against it in her. However, in addition to make comments on ideological changes in society, public transport is employed in the *NW* to convey general experiences of contemporary urban living: ambivalence of crowded public areas, difficulty of interpreting codes, and the different attitudes towards how one should "move forward" – and with what success – are also themes discussed in relation to public transport. Smith is using public transport as a site to analyse how mobility and the progression of life is experienced while considering how the metropolis and metropolitans are knit together in a confusing, not easily navigable web.

Time-spaces in NW

By representing various sentiments and memories of place, with a particular interest in nostalgia, Smith is conveying various experiences of the urban, and demonstrates how present experiences have been shaped by past ones. Smith's interest in providing NW with a rightful place in history becomes clear as she weaves the contemporary NW experience together with the cultural history of NW, and her main device to make this remark is by representing characters' experiences of the present as heavily influenced by the past. In this way, Smith is using the idea of the urban palimpsest: she consciously adds and shows how new layers are added to further develop the history of places, and how a place defines one's personal narrative. The palimpsest overlaps traces of the past and future together, binding them together, and the layers may be temporal, spatial, and imaginary, making the urban city a never-ending palimpsest (Turgut 3). In remembering palimpsests of the past, Smith opens the literary space, creating time-spaces that represent the present experience of the character whose memory is represented. The way in which literary space is created resembles Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope. The chronotope, he explains, is a helpful device in understanding how exactly time-spaces may open literary space:

> [The chronotope is] the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. […] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully through-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (15).

The chronotope of the road is a particularly fruitful device for the author, according to Bakhtin. This is a spatial and temporal path with a variety of people, where encounters may take place across social groups. As social distance collapse, various fates may intertwine and lives may take on a new course as a result of coincidences (17). Monk argues that inhabitants of London cannot avoid considering the city without a sense of personal memories – "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" Bakhtin is describing will always remind the inhabitant of past events, and therefore narratives of the city and the individual will be constantly rewritten (196). Using the chronotope to analyse how Smith is portraying present experiences that are shaped by the past, allows us to recognise a wider scope of urban experiences, while understanding what new layers are being added to the palimpsest – which ultimately is one of Smith's missions with this novel.

Felix's memories of his upbringing as he is passing a bus stop near Caldwell show how, as Bakhtin describes, time is spatialized. Felix is, at this moment, narrating his life with reference to this one particular place:

> Five and innocent at this bus stop. Fourteen and drunk. Twenty-six and stoned. Twenty-nine in utter oblivion, out of his mind on coke and K: 'You can't sleep here, son. You either need to move it along or we'll have to take you in to the station to sleep it off.' You live in the same place long enough, you get memory overlap (117).

The bus stop is where he met his girlfriend for the first time, and the memory of this is also presented in a flashback. A sense of place and place-identity is a construction of the past, living on through memories, stasis, and nostalgia (Massey 119). By using one place shown at different temporal moments of Felix's life, Smith shows how his life narrative is centred around the place. It is implied that the bus stop has been important in shaping his personality and life path since his upbringing is summarized on this spot in the excerpt. It shows how

personal layers of meaning are added to memories of a place in order to construct the narrative of who a person essentially is.

Smith is not only employing this device to construct characters' understanding of themselves, but also to give the NW area a character of its own by drawing on its history, particularly its cultural and literary history. As Nathan and Natalie walk across NW to Hampstead Heath, Smith is building on a cultural reference to contribute to the layers of meaning of the place – she is adding another palimpsest to Hampstead Heath, which is in line with her larger project of making NW more visible. Hampstead Heath is a district in north London associated with writers, poets and artists through centuries, both as a site of inspiration, hosting and object of art and literature. Smith refers to specific parts of its long history for example when Nathan and Natalie find shelter in the pub Jack Straw's Castle, which was a real pub whose regular guest list included Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and William Makepeace would visit regularly (Knepper 123). Smith is not only highlighting the existing history of the area but weaves the long history into her narrative of the marginalised, overlooked people of NW. The novel is positioned as a contemporary representation of the heritage of Hampstead Heath, and thereby becomes a new layer to this palimpsest.

Similarly, Smith weaves together the cultural history of NW and Leah's personal experience of the place in a scene which summarises how the area is in constant change yet maintaining its core characteristic of being a place for the outsider and the marginalised. Creating a chronotope in which the past and the present merge together, Smith demonstrates how the shared memory of the place's past becomes an integral part in Leah's construction of the narrative of herself. The following excerpt includes numerous references to three different songs by the North London band The Kinks, "You really got me", "Village Green Preservation Society", and "Willesden Green". Lyrics are weaved into Smith's text to represent Leah's experience of listening, and the lyrics and prose together show how the area has been and is changing:

> *We are the village green preservation society. God save little shops, china cups and virginity!* Saturday morning. ALL KINKS ALL DAY. *Girl. You really got me going. You got me so I don't know what I'm doing*. On Saturday mornings Michel helps the ladies and gentlemen of NW look right for their Saturday nights, look fresh and correct, and there, in the salon, he is free to blast his treacly R&B, his oh baby oh shorty till six in the mawnin till the break a' dawn. On Saturday mornings she is free!

> *God save tudor houses, antique tables and billiards! Preserving the old ways from being abused. Protecting the new ways for me and for you. What more can we do?* Stomping around in pyjama bottoms, singing tunelessly. Ned is in the garden. Ned approves of loud music of white origin. He sings along. *Well I tried to settle down in Fulham Broadway. And I tried to make my home in Golders Green.* In this weekend abandon there is always something manic and melancholy: the internal countdown to the working week already begun. In the mirror she is her own dance partner, nose to nose with the reflection. The physical person is smiling and singing. *Oh how I miss the folks back home in Willesden Green!* Meanwhile something inside reels at the mirror's news: the grey streak coming out of the crown, the puffy creases round the eyes, the soft belly. She dances like a girl. She is not a girl any more. *YOU REALLY GOT ME. YOU REALLY GOT ME. YOU REALLY GOT ME* (26). [My italics marking The Kinks' song lyrics].

As with Felix's memories attached to the bus stop, Smith is creating a chronotope of the Willesden area as time suddenly becomes visible and space becomes charged with nostalgia. The opening line and song references signify a collective voice, or shared experience, drawing in the experience of The Kinks, who were active in the 1960s and 1970s, into the 2010s. The lyrics provide vitality to the descriptions of the local environment preparing for weekend festivities. The individual experience conveyed, however, becomes unpleasant to Leah, as she sees herself aging in the mirror, and can feel time passing in her "internal countdown to working week". She also recognises time passing beyond her life span. While Leah is dancing to "music of white origin", Michel blasts "his treacly R&B" – and while The Kinks begged for "preserving the old ways from being abused", the changes in this vibrant area are felt and observed by Leah through her part of the narrative. She is noticing an increased obsession with privatization of public space, and a decreasing trust when she is interrupted by the doorbell. A woman has rung it to ask for money in order to take her mother to a hospital but is too intoxicated to utter the words, and so quickly turns and walks out clumsily. The scene echoes Leah's meeting with Shar who approached Leah's home in the same way, but to whom Leah lent the money, showing trust and loyalty to her local people. Shar spent the money on narcotics, however, and as Leah is experiencing another woman attempting to pull the same stunt now, Smith shows that the experience of living in NW is developing from the village-like atmosphere Leah would like to live in, and rather toward a

threatening big city atmosphere in which fear of strangers is only natural. The passage shows how the area has changed through decades, and how it's continuing to change now.

By creating literary space in chronotopes and adding new layers to the palimpsest of NW and London, Smith shows how important place and memories are in constructing personal experiences of place. This is demonstrated on a micro-scale, as with Felix's memory of a highly specific place, to a macro-scale where Smith consciously weaves contemporary NW into the history of the area, showing how the history affects contemporary experiences while pointing toward what direction these developments might continue to take. Nostalgia is an important emotion to evoke in showing how history of place affects one personally, but as for the future outlook, Smith warns that the specific warmth of NW might become blended with the otherwise metropolitan distrust and metropolitan mindset.

Kennedy's use of palimpsests shows a crisis of identity for London and the protagonists because of shifts in social conditions, and consequently, anxiety colours the spatial experience of the place. In comparison, Smith is using the palimpsest to position NW in a longer artistic history, adding layers to the existing narrative, and making it more inclusive and broader. Kennedy shows how narratives may be changed, and that narratives have an upper hand over facts in the twenty-first century – the era of post-truth. Palimpsests are used for slightly different purposes in the two novels, but they both underscore the importance of palimpsests and memories in understanding sense of place. Both novels' characters are shaped by personal and shared memories, and contemporary London is certainly positioned on a historical timeline. Additionally, the novels share the concern for changing narratives of the city: Smith actively adds to the narrative, and Kennedy portrays the power of narrative, which at the moment threatens facts.

Perspectives on walking

Sensations of walking through streets are important and accessible ways of conveying experiences, and it reveals how walking down Willesden Lane and crossing the street from Oxford to Regent Street are experienced differently. As discussed, Kennedy employs the flâneur figure as an approach to describe metropolitan life through walking in public space, and therefore her approach in this is arguably detached and narrated in a blasé tone as the spectator keeps a distance from the action described. In comparison, Smith is approaching the

theme by showing how characters move through the streets as participant-observers. The characters are still bombarded with sensuous stimuli, as Simmel describes as inevitable in metropolitan public spaces, but Leah and Felix are not heavily affected by the blasé attitude. In the excerpts to be discussed, the narrator is not detached from the action, but rather weaved into the surroundings. Michel de Certeau views walking as "an elementary form of this experience of the city" and argues that the walkers' "bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it" (93). Unconsciously, walkers form a pattern, an "urban text" together, writing new stories of the city constantly. Walking is a primary activity of the metropolitan, and as Bryden argues, the street's both concrete and metaphorical features draw all aspects of the urban together: "The street is symbolic of collectivism – a communal space – whilst being made up of individual buildings and stories (216). This is how Smith allows her characters to be both observers and participants: they contribute to the collective story writing of walking by weaving in their individual stories and experiences of the walk.

The everyday sense of the London village is conveyed through Leah's consciousness as she walks through one of its main roads in chapter ten. The narrator is mimicking a collective voice, conveying a shared experience of the street in this very moment, but it is still focalized through Leah as she is walking through Willesden Lane:

> Sweet stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab, exhaust fumes of a bus deadlock. 98, 16, 32, standing room only – quicker to walk! Escapees from St Mary's, Paddington: expectant father smoking, old lady wheeling herself in a wheelchair smoking, die-hard holding urine sack, blood sack, smoking. (39).

The focalization resembles a camera moving along the street, recalling earlier novelistic descriptions of metropolitan life, such as Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, in which the narrator states "I am a camera, with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking" (9). The cinematic technique may only imply the present experience of a character (Lodge 72-73) but knowing that the camera in this case is Leah's eyes, the chapter may be read as her everyday experience. She is what de Certeau would call an "ordinary practitioner" who walks as "an elementary form of [experiencing] the city", and she becomes part of the network that the city consists of (93). Since being an ordinary practitioner, she is positioning herself in relation to others: the style of narration in the passage shows her moving through the environment, walking by people and goods for sale. We understand that she is attempting to

take in a vast load of information, on one hand struggling to filter out less important signals, and on the other hand, conveying the high tempo and busyness as realistically as possible.

The form of the chapter represents a high tempo and crowdedness, with an ironic tone. For example, the sentences are short, and often referring to goods for sale, the salesmen, or to conversations heard. For example, "98, 16, 32, standing room only – quicker to walk" shows a conversation overheard by Leah about what bus to choose. Repetitions of newspapers, banks, and the word "everyone" – "Everybody loves fags. Everybody. […] Everybody believes in destiny. Everybody. […] Everybody loves fried chicken. Everybody" – indicates a busyness and represents the intensity of the experience if a parodic tone. The inability to filter out the most important signals may be an example of Simmel's idea of the blasé attitude, where the nervous system is bombarded with sensuous stimuli until the person affected "will have difficulties in distinguishing between values of things" (329). Simmel also describes the blasé attitude as making the affected "flat and grey", but in this excerpt, this is not the case. Instead, Leah gives all signals equally high importance, and the walk feels graspable and familiar to her, especially in comparison to Felix's walk through central London, which presents a quite different experience of walking in the metropolis.

Comparing the sensation of walking through a street in Willesden to walking around Oxford and Regent Streets, the two main streets of central London, shows how Smith is portraying the different experiences of a London village and the metropolis of London. Felix, a London native who needs to think twice before finding the underground route from Kilburn to Oxford Circus, showing his narrow knowledge of the wider city, walks through the main streets of London together with Tom, the man who Felix will buy the car from:

> [Tom] did not seem to know how to negotiate the corner crush between Oxford and Regent streets; after a few false starts he was half a foot further back than he had been a moment ago. Felix licked a Rizla and watched the boy concede to a Peruvian holding a twelve-foot banner: BARGAIN CARPET SALE 100 YARDS. Not from London, not originally, thought Felix, who had been to Wiltshire once and returned astounded. Felix stepped in front and took control, walking through a crowd of Indian girls with luxurious black ponytails and little gold Selfridges badges pinned to their lapels. They walked against the natural flow, the white boy and Felix – it took them five minutes to cross the road (119).

The passage shows that Tom, not a native Londoner, finds the street difficult to cross, and Felix needs to take control as they walk through the crowd against its natural flow. There are some similarities between the streets in both excerpts: they are described as diverse, busy, and linked to commercial activities. However, the narration of crossing this road is more focused – in order to cross it successfully, a calculated attitude is necessary, and the narrator is only describing the exact route Felix and Tom are taking and minimal of the crowd they walk through. Viewed in light of each other, the different experiences of Willesden Lane and central London become apparent: Smith demonstrates that both the London village and central London are equally busy and diverse, as shown in descriptions of the streets. She shows that a native citizen will be able to navigate both, and that is a particular skill of Londoners. However, the sentiment of Willesden Lane is not present in central London. Whereas the first one evokes a feeling of home and joy, the latter road is a means to reach another goal.

Viewed in light of Kennedy's novel, Smith's emphasis on walking as an integral part of metropolitan life reveals her image of London as a more human city than Kennedy's city of industry and capitalist activity. Additionally, Smith shows that both Felix and Leah, London natives, easily navigate the urban text to which they contribute, while Kennedy portrays central London streets as threatening to Jon. Kennedy describes London architecture and institutions as sources of fear, as Jon sees "the building come loose from its moorings and seemed to fly" (209), and the metropolitan network of people is non-existent in her novel as Jon and Meg cannot be part of the urban text. Streets, then, are more cold, practical aspects of the urban, whereas Smith portrays them, as Bryden does, as "symbolic of collectivism", where individual stories become part of the story of the metropolis, forcing Leah and Felix to be considered part of the greater narrative of London. Streets can be beautifully busy and pleasurable to walk in Smith's novel, and Leah and Felix become involved in a central part of city life when walking in London.

A city of privacy and seclusion

Both Smith and Kennedy express concern for privatization and individualism, and both demonstrate the social benefits of access to green public spaces as a democratic counteraction to this tendency. Parks and gardens are particularly important in this regard, and sites of

debating social privatization and the experience of seclusion or isolation in both novels. By using green areas for this purpose, the novels show concern with the loss of man-made urban nature, reflecting "the problem and complexity of nature in cities, particularly concerning those who have access to it" (Bracke 103). *NW* depicts a national tendency in an attempt to describe the "condition of England", and the "setting of the council estate functions in *NW* as a metaphor for rigid hierarchies and a clear-cut system of inclusion and exclusion in which NW identifies as a central feature of the condition of England" (Lusin 250). The novel is, then, permeated with commentary on how England is becoming exclusionist, from the novel's beginning where Leah cites Michel claiming that "not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century" (3), to the carnival which becomes a string tying all narratives of the novel together – the carnival is traditionally a public street celebration, but Leah and Natalie choose to celebrate privately: "No need to queue for the toilets, no accumulated street filth between the toes, no six pounds for a can of Red Stripe" (93). Smith is clear in her commentary on how social exclusionism and privatization grow, and with what effects, but she also expresses the experience and natural desire for privacy. There is therefore an ambivalence in what degree of privacy is rightful, and when privatization of space leads to social exclusionism.

Smith is using the character of Leah as the most conscious observer and respondent to the question of privatization, and she actively resists the tendency to privatize. She recognizes the condition of England in the London foxes: In a recent headline, she has read about the North-West fox epidemic, with a "photograph of a man kneeling in a garden surrounded by the corpses of foxes he'd shot. Dozens of them […]. [T]hat's how we live now, defending our little patch, it didn't used to be like that, but everything's changed" (51). Foxes are renowned territorial animals, just like people are increasingly becoming in Leah's view. The obsession to own private land and to exercise social exclusion is observed by Leah and is used to reflect on a shift from her own philosophy of "thinking communally" toward a desire for autonomy and privacy – which may inevitably lead to different people gaining different levels of access to space. The tension between the private and the communal is also demonstrated in a bench Michel and Pauline have brought to Leah and Michel's communal garden, which they later discovered bore the seal of Royal Parks. The Royal Parks were originally private but have become public parks with increasing urbanization. The bench then demonstrated a swinging tendency from providing wider public access to gardens and then restricting it again. This shows how the trend of privatizing space and making space public may ebb and flow, and is

therefore less deterministic than Kennedy's novel, in which it is inevitable for Rowan's garden to become swallowed by the inner city plague of privatization. However, the novels take somewhat different stances in these examples: while Jon fears for Rowan's lost garden to a construction site, Leah fears for public access to green areas due to privatization of green areas.

Natalie and Frank are presented as opposites of what Leah and Michel have, and a source of Michel's envy, as they own a Victorian house with a larger, private garden. In contrast, Leah and Michel live in a council flat with access to a shared garden. While Michel admires their house, garden and success, Leah looks upon it with arrogance:

> Natalie laughs. Frank laughs. Michel laughs the hardest. Slightly drunk. Not only on the Prosecco in his hand. On the grandeur of this Victorian house, the length of the garden, that he should know a barrister and a banker, that he should find funny the things they find funny (60).

The garden is a sign of wealth to Michel, although Natalie thinks of the garden as "short" (252). Leah's attitude is more sarcastic: She takes her dog for a walk out of the garden, so it won't "shit" on the "perfect lawn" (66). As children, however, the roles between Leah and Natalie were reversed. Natalie used to envy Leah and her family for the space they had: "the shared garden, the three bedrooms. Something called a 'study'" (197), while she herself shared a room with her sister, and the room was frequently swept by their mother. In an attempt to lock in her private things, her mother claimed that "[p]eople who want locks got something to hide" (189). As an adult, Natalie's children have their own rooms but insist on sleeping in the same and choosing the smallest one, cancelling out the point of a large Victorian house. It seems that Leah, growing up in an Irish family with more space than they could fill, grew up to frown upon people claiming more space than needed. Natalie, who grew up in an Anglo-Caribbean, has spent her adult life achieving as much space as she could to heighten her social status, although the space is unnecessary to her family, and she is not even much impressed by it herself, considering how she finds the garden small.

Leah's own garden is communal, which she claims to appreciate, and in which she occupies much of her time, isolated. The conflict between this garden as a private and a communal space may not affect her largely, as she claims to be the only one among her neighbours who

"thinks communally", but from the first few lines of the novel, we see that her experience of dwelling in this garden is not undivided ideologically charged:

> In a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in, on all sides.
>
> Four gardens along, in the estate, a grim girl on the third floor screams Anglo-Saxon at nobody. Juliet balcony, projecting for miles. It ain't like that. Nah it ain't like that. Don't you start. Fag in hand. Fleshy, lobster-red. (3).

Focalized through Leah's consciousness, the narrative resembles stream-of-consciousness, indicating a reflective and introspective state of mind. This style of narration gives direct access to Leah's character, which is quite private and introverted. Wells argues that the secretive nature of all the characters in the novel is key to understanding the interplay between the personal and the political in *NW,* drawing on Derrida's belief that "secrecy is essential to individual liberty but is faced by the spatial of social control which is essentially panoptic, in that all individuals become perhaps uncomfortably complicit in each other's oppression" (98). The right to maintain secrets and withhold a private sphere is also debated through Natalie, who also has a secretive nature: as a child, she kept a sex toy hidden from her mother, and as an adult, she lives a secret double life that her husband eventually exposes – leading to a marital crisis. Her house is a façade to hide in and signify success, although the point of buying this exact house was not the size but its location, which is just far enough away from Caldwell. Natalie, then, is able to uphold a private space through distance from others, while Leah upholds her through introspection and becoming protective of the patches she may control. Secrecy gives both women room to feel liberated, which is reflected through Leah in the "fenced in" garden, a space she may defend and maintain authority over. Similarly, she maintains control of her relationship with her husband by keeping her contraceptive pills secret from him while he believes they are planning to have a baby. By keeping secrets and upholding her private space, she is exercising power over space that is meant to be shared, but she finds liberty in restricting others' access (Pirker 73-74). Smith is demonstrating this in both Leah's character and in Leah's affection for her closed-off communal garden. She is protective and territorial, like the man shooting foxes who she read about in the paper, yet she claims to be one of the few people left to think communally.

The ambivalent experience of sharing a garden is also expressed through Leah's relationship to the apple tree in the garden. Chapter seven opens with a concrete poem, contrasting the prose that follows in the chapter: The opening lines of the poem read: "Apple tree, apple tree.

Thing that has apples on it. Apple blossom. So symbolic. Network of branches, roots. Tunnelling under". Michel's monologue, following the poem, opens mid-sentence with "– which I've always believed. Look: you know what is the true difference between these people and me?". The difference in style shows the poetics of Leah's wandering thoughts, again marking her introspectiveness. At the end of the chapter, Leah admits that she is not listening to Michel's monologue because she was thinking of apples. The poem revolves around Leah's thoughts on family, the advantages and disadvantages of increasing the family are situated in the tree's top branches, but as Leah's thoughts are approaching the roots, they become more revolved around herself. "New branches. New blossom. New apples. Same tree? Born and bred. Same streets. Same girl? Next step" shows Leah trying to circle in on her core self, which seems to be confused. The three final lines, "Alice, dreaming. Eve, eating. Under which nice girls make mistakes" shows Leah comparing herself to fairytale- and biblical figures who have made mistakes in other gardens. She sees that her secretive behaviour is immoral, as she is a "nice girl" making mistakes underneath the tree. Smith also shows, in a visual and poetic manner, how Leah is dependent on this private space to reflect upon important issues regarding herself and her future family. Underneath the apple tree is her space to think, and considering how much time she spends there, isolated and quiet, her need to think may be overshadowing the fact that the garden is meant for sharing.

As with Kennedy, Smith's novel is permeated with analysis of how individualism and privatization are on the rise, while the characters convey experiences of seclusion in certain spaces and situations. Kennedy is using the park to oppose this sensation of walking through the city, while Smith is using gardens to demonstrate the ambivalence between the experience of comfort and necessity of private spaces, while also making social commentary on how all sorts of public spaces are becoming increasingly privatized. However, the sense of seclusion is also conveyed in other scenarios, not dependent on green areas as a backdrop. For example, during a dinner party at Frank and Natalie's house, to which Leah and Michel have been invited among barristers and bankers, this becomes a topic of conversation. Filtered through Leah's consciousness, the table conversation goes as follows:

> The thing about Islam. Let me tell you about Islam. The thing about the trouble with Islam. Everyone is suddenly an expert on Islam. But what do you think, Samhita, yeah what do you think, Samhita, what's your take on this? Samhita, the copyright lawyer. Pass the tuna. Solutions are passed across the table, strategies. Private wards. Private

> cinemas. Christmas abroad. A restaurant with only five tables in it. Security systems. Fences. The carriage of 4x4 that lets you sit where, you can get it, although it doesn't come cheap (86-7).

Focalised through Leah, the tone imitates the dinner guests' arrogance and ignorance in a satiric tone. The exclusionism targeting Islam due to the unaddressed "problem" reveals prejudice and unrooted fear, as the problem is never explained but taken as a given for everyone to agree with. The "solution" is increased surveillance and privatization of public spaces, which shows that part of the problem is that Muslims may access the same public spaces as everyone else when they as a group should be restricted. The irony of asking Samhita, a lawyer whose field of work is to protect intellectual property, is presented with great mockery through Leah. However, the issues in focus are very real and concerning to her: Michel believes that "Not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century" (3) an opinion Leah finds cruel. The same ideas are being shared across the dinner table, and Leah is again taking a stand against the seclusion tendencies. The idea of surveillance and privatization of public spaces also seem like opposites: Either one is watched over, or one is allowed to be hidden.

The interplay between the personal and the political, as Wells writes about, is tied together in this example: political and social analysis conveyed through representation of consciousness and experiences through style of narration. An individual may experience personal liberation in a private physical space or may have a sense of comfort and control from surveillance of groups they do not trust. This reality, however, promotes people's opportunities for oppression and social control. Although all people depend on some level of privacy regardless of political point of view, as Smith shows through Leah, an exaggeration of privatizing in order to maintain this free space will eventually be at the expense of others, and social differences are increased. As with the example about the problem with Islam-conversation: one group's desire to feel secure may lead to another's group's great restriction on space. The experience of how access to space is changing is a prominent debate in Smith's novel and may be viewed as a warning not to let a desire for personal space reduce others' right to space.

Views and experiences of social inequality

Experience of time passing and feeling of control over one's life progression, are debated themes in *NW,* and they show how different experiences of social inequality are played out. By narrating the lives of four different characters from the same council estate, who all end up in rather different places in life, Smith illustrates how poverty affects different lives and debates what factors help a person out, or keep them in. The novel forces its reader to rethink how we, as a society, behave in response to questions about social inequality (Birke 128). The two traditional views on poverty presented in the discussion on Kennedy's explorations of the city as a social place, will also be relevant for this discussion because these views on poverty are represented and argued for in Smith's novel through Leah and Natalie. One views poor people as victims of a systemic failure, and the poor person is therefore not responsible for their own social status, but rather focuses on external factors that cause their disadvantages – poverty is in this view outside of an individual's control. The other view sees poverty as something the poor people themselves are responsible for. This view is associated with individualistic ideas, such as the American dream, where the individual has the power to steer their own destinies. Since the 1970s, from Margaret Thatcher's time as prime minister, the UK has overall reduced welfare spending, continued into the 2010s by David Cameron. Whether or not these policies have increased the poverty rate in the UK is not certain but concerns about so have become more visible in public media and discourse (Birke 125-26). Implementing the two different views on poverty in her different characters, Smith can create a debate on what factors contribute to upholding poverty and show nuances of the two traditional views through how all four experiences of social inequality are conveyed.

The novel ends with a confrontation between the two views on poverty as Leah and Natalie are having a conversation about how and why their lives have ended up as they have: while Leah struggles to understand why Felix and Shar have met more crude destinies than herself although they grew up in the same place, Natalie explains the fact by claiming that they worked harder. "We were smarter and we knew we didn't want to end up begging on other people's doorsteps. We wanted to get out" (332) she says, showing an individualistic approach to poverty. Natalie regards herself as the only reason why she is no longer living in Caldwell, while Leah struggles to accept that her own persona is connected to her social status. They decide to call the police to report Nathan, another Caldwell boy who Natalie met shortly before, and who she suspects is connected to the murder of Felix. The conversation

shows that Leah struggles to find meaning in events that seem coincidental, while Natalie acts ruthlessly by the belief that everyone is the master of their own destiny, showing little sympathy for Nathan in turning him to the police.

Nathan represents how systemic failures teach young boys like himself to become criminals. During the walk, which takes place the day before Leah and Natalie's conversation, Nathan tells Natalie about "one piece of truth [his] mum did speak":

> Everyone loves up a bredrin when he's ten. With his lickle ball 'ead. All cute and lively. Everyone loves a bredrin when he's ten. After that he's a problem. Can't stay ten always. […] Last time I was in your yard I was ten, blud. Your mum ain't let me past the gate after that, believe.
>
> […] Once I got fourteen she's crossing the street acting like she ain't even seen me. That's how it is in my eyes. There's no way to live in this country when you're grown. Not at all. They don't want you, your own people don't want you, no one wants you. Ain't the same for girls, it's a man ting. That's the truth of it right there. (313).

Nathan experiences a complete lack of control of his life progression and of the time passing. As he aged towards adulthood, he experienced an increasing sense of isolation and rejection from society and has ended up unable to live a normal life. His life has been standing still since his teenage years due to his gender, skin colour and socioeconomic background – all factors that are also out of his control. This has led him to become an addict and a dealer. Leah's mother recalls Nathan spending time in prison during a short encounter earlier on in the novel, and now, Nathan is probably involved in Felix's death as well. His own explanation is, then, the treatment he received from his surroundings from a very young age, whereas in Natalie's opinion, his destiny is a result of too little work and not enough desire to change path.

The experience of time is tightly knit to the experience of social inequality in Smith's novel. Compared to Kennedy's novel, *NW*'s concern with time is more related to navigation of space. *Serious Sweet* uses time to create an urgency, and the chapter titles referring to the hour of the day, specific to the minute, convey the sense of stress that the characters are experiencing. In *NW,* experience of time is used to a larger extent to demonstrate how different characters view time in relation to their social positions, some conveying similar

sensations of stress, while others convey a sense of standing still or out of control. Each part of *NW* spans over different periods of time, varying from Natalie's life story until her current age in Host, to Guest, Crossing and (the last) Visitation, which all cover between a few hours and a day – Guest and Crossing cover the same day, following Felix until his death, and then Natalie from his death and through the rest the day. While Leah desires to live outside of time, she remains stationary and rather immobile in her house; to Natalie, time passing is a chance to achieve and move forward, regardless of the direction; Felix's time lays ahead of him, until robbed from him; and Nathan's time stopped passing during childhood, leaving him in a state of slow decay.

Leah and Natalie's different experiences of space and time are closely linked, and the two may be viewed as opposite in this regard: Leah urges time to slow down, while living happily immobile in NW, while Natalie wishes for time to move so she may expand her travel range. "Each woman's relationship to her space and understanding of time influences how she makes decisions, which in turn defines her geography, her way of being in and shaping London" (Slavin 102).

Leah's immobility has kept her living in the shadows of her childhood home, with a fenced-in garden and often laying in a hammock – Leah is laying in this hammock in both the beginning and end of the novel. She wishes to remain eighteen years old forever (24) and is highly aware of soon turning thirty-five. She has no desire to leave Kilburn, or her hammock if she can avoid it: When Michel urges Leah to move after the frightening murder of Felix, Leah replies "I don't want to move, it's my home" (92). These traits show that Leah wishes for time to stand still and is reluctant to take the consequences of times changing, and she is devoid of ambitions for the future. For example, she avoids motherhood (and confronting Michel with her uncertainty about having children), and her job has been a temporary solution that has lasted six years, showing a lack of initiative to find another position.

Whereas Leah's part Visitation spans over a few months, Natalie's life story up until Frank discovers her secret double life – coinciding with Felix's death – is narrated through 185 short chapters in Host. She is often referred to with both first and second names, keeping a distance between the narrative present and the Keisha / Natalie of the past, which shows Natalie's concern with spatial markers signifying shifts. Additionally, several of the chapters start with "that was the year when", also indicating a concern with recording the passing of time. Compared to Leah, Natalie is also moving more rapidly through space, and has a wider

geography in which she circles to construct her narrative identity. However, her concern with distancing from her roots is an important cause for why she starts living a double life as the successful lawyer Natalie De Angelis on one hand, and as Keisha Blake of NW, meeting strange men online and in reality for non-committal sexual encounters. Her split identity and lack of a core self is revealed when Frank discovers her double life and asks "Who *are* you", to which Natalie is unable to answer properly before leaving the house – then, as Frank asks "where the fuck she thought she was going", Natalie replies "nowhere" (294-95), indicating she is nobody: "She was nothing more or less than the phenomenon of walking. She had no name, no biography, no characteristics" (300), Smith writes to show that Natalie needs to move at a walking pace, slower than her usual, in order to retrace herself.

The conversation about the sheer coincidence of destiny reflects Leah's experience of time and space as factors not worth trying to control, and Natalie's belief that one may entirely control time and space, although it might mean adapting so far that one might lose oneself. Understandably, none is entirely right, and their conversation underscores the importance of coincidence in the novel: coincidences should not be understood as the topography of the universe's plan, but they do hold the fabric of a community together (Elkin n.p.), a fact which becomes particularly visible in local environments such as NW. In calling the police together, Leah and Natalie accept the coincidences of the past and try to actively affect how they might change the future: they try to take control of the narrative and create a pattern out of the coincidences that have led them thus far. On individual levels, Leah accepts that her destiny has turned out otherwise than others of equal origin, and Natalie accepts her past self becoming part of her present self. However, although the novel ends on a note that encourages moderate control of life progression, remembering how coincidental Felix's death is, shows that Smith acknowledges that control may be impossible. Felix's life is marked by coincidences throughout: from meeting Grace to choosing the wrong underground seat. His story is structured like a *bildungsroman*, where he leaves home, and travels across town in search of increased happiness, but breaks the genre expectancy by never returning home. Additionally, throughout his story, references to Disney princesses and fairytales enhance the sense that Felix's life story is a happy one – he even mentions that Felix means "happy" (116) and that he has "always been lucky" (126) – making the unlucky ending even more ironic. Smith is demonstrating how little people are in control over their destiny by creating this contrast, and that regardless of the effort to create a good life for oneself, following instructions to achieve this is never guaranteed to lead anywhere.

Smith shows that predestination does not exist, and the novel does indeed make one rethink how poverty and social inequality operate in post-millennial London. Kennedy's fearful warning against individualism is recognized in Smith as well, as Natalie's claim that she and Leah came further due to greater abilities is disproved by Felix's death despite his high ambitions and abilities, and by Nathan's claim that his destiny was determined by society from the moment he was born a black, lower-class man. Experiences of social inequality, and its dynamics, are expressed in four distinct ways, and shows how coincidental and unfair urban life may be.

Conclusion

Similar to modernist novels, the novels studied for this thesis have shown to be using form to engage in social analysis of urban environments. When analysis of form and social analysis are viewed in light of each other, the devices used to promote the effect have become clear, and we see that both Kennedy and Smith are using experimental forms of writing to describe shifts in social conditions, and ultimately, they narrate experiences of contemporary London.

The use of internal monologues in Leah's narrative and in Kennedy's prose intertwine consciousness and the experience of space closely, while the more distant styles of narration, as seen in parts of Natalie's narrative and Kennedy's vignettes, represent space through the eyes of participants in space. By employing different perspectives within each novel, both Kennedy and Smith convey different experiences, and thereby underscore the multiple aspects of experience: London is not a place that is only experienced in one way, but there is a continuous attempt for characters to regain a sense of overview and focus on pleasurable aspects of urban living. By referencing the flâneur persona, Kennedy shows detachment between Meg's observation and ability to participate in social life, but also a focus on interpersonal social connection in everyday life, which is contrasted to the more deteriorating societal infrastructures that have failed to provide social stimuli. Smith is using a similar device to show how Leah is a participant-observer, heavily influenced by and indulged in the social activity that public urban space consists of. Through different modes of narration, the authors show that the city is a web of social contacts one needs to become part of in order to persist in an urban way of living.

Social commentary regarding increased privatization, seclusion and individualization are directly addressed and represented through bodily experiences in both novels. The use of cars in Kennedy's novel signifies an urban space in which the communal aspect of streets is becoming individualized, and the decreasing transparency of politics is disillusioning both Meg and Jon from participating in public life. There is also a critique of contemporary civilisation for being alienating, seen through the use of animal imagery and the sense that the city is equally dangerous and confusing as a jungle. In order to survive, they both conclude that a removal from politics is necessary, and their aim becomes to find new meaning and comfort. Smith advocates for a communal way of thinking through Leah, who observes and satirizes surveillance and privatization of public space. However, the need to remain a private

space is debated as Leah and Natalie keep secrets and keep control of personal spaces which they should morally share with their partners. Additionally, access and movement in space is tied to life progressions in Smith's novel: Natalie may access more space in her reach for better socioeconomic conditions, but in what direction she is headed, and what she will reach is rather less in focus; Leah occupies the space of most comfort, avoiding travel, but finds it difficult to accept that her immobility has led her further in life than others who had the same starting point; Felix has a similar approach to Natalie, but with a more clear aim to reach independence, before his poor knowledge of the space in which he moves, kills him; and Nathan's life has been immobile since childhood due to being born with the wrong gender, skin colour, and socioeconomic background.

Although commentary is clearly made, Kennedy and Smith's projects have very aspirations on what to convey when it comes to politics. As seen in the analyses of how the two authors use the idea of palimpsests, Kennedy is demonstrating the vulnerability of such a phenomenon, using it to show how truths and memories are altered, which again creates a sense of unsteady ground to the characters. Smith is using palimpsests to highlight parts of history to make events' connection to NW stronger. Having established a cultural and literary history of NW, she presents her own novel as a new layer to the palimpsest. Additionally, Kennedy's interest to represent individual consciousnesses compared to Smith's multiple presentations of consciousnesses shows that Smith's project is to tell a narrative of place, while Kennedy's is to tell a narrative of how space is experienced by a certain type of character. More direct commentary is, however, revealed through the representations of consciousness, as Jon and Meg have emotions attached to political questions, both consciously and not. The two novels' different projects but overlapping areas of interest make them highly comparable, and viewed in light of each other, one may see how the authors have a similar image of London in their presentations. And, although one project is more obviously politically motivated than the other, they both address how politics and ideologies of the twenty-first century directly affect the ordinary people of London.

In mapping London, the authors essentially demonstrate the large differences that exist within this city, through each their manners. Kennedy's project is to show how personality and emotional reactions are affected by inner-city London compared to Telegraph Hill, from where one may watch the city from a panoramic view. Emotions of inner-city London are overwhelming and nauseating, and one may see from the mode of narration that the internal

monologue becomes more nervous from moving here. London is compared to a plague that will destroy more and more land as it grows, leaving only the wealthier social classes with access to parks. Mapping in Kennedy's novel is confusing, and Jon and Meg struggle to meet to have their maps overlap. Smith is also using maps to show poor navigational skills of NW, but with a more political aim to foreground NW-streets and places on the existing London map. The title may refer to the postal code of the area, just as much as "nowhere", signifying the marginalization the area is affected by. By comparing different areas of London, the authors demonstrate the many possible experiences of London; the city is too large to inhabit only one.

Kennedy shows how the sensation of walking around inner-city London's streets is experienced as depressing, and a feeling of being overwhelmed by buildings stands in the way for communicating friendly with strangers. In contrast, the further away from London Kennedy's protagonists are able to travel, the more they feel in control over their emotional reactions. Similarly, Smith depicts a pleasure and excitement in walking through the busy street Willesden Lane, while using the underground for transportation – in which one is forced closer to strangers of all layers, and which is a more distinct mark of a metropolitan way of living – is experienced as tense and claustrophobic. It is clear, then, that although Simmel's analysis informs the novels' approaches to the subject matter, they do not follow his thinking all the way to the conclusion: rationality and blasé are not always the consequences for these characters. Arguably, we see them becoming desensitised, for example in observing urban life, unable to participate and interact properly. However, irrational, emotional reactions are equally occurring, and we see numerous examples of how the urban environment makes people nervous, stressed, confused, and experiencing a sense of being lost or out of control.

Modernist techniques of writing have clearly informed the authors, as they respond to a changing urban environment with experimental writing. The changed social conditions, lost narratives of the city, and changed narratives of identity and place are important reasons for the sense of London as an ungraspable place. Both novels end with characters in conversations about narrative: Jon and Meg decide that the here and now is the new beginning of their stories, which have now become intertwined; Natalie and Leah take action to change the narrative of Felix's death, while also debating why some previous Caldwell children have come further in life than others, and to what extent this is fair or coincidental.

Narrative itself is, then, important topics on both novels, as the authors consciously narrate everyday lives of the contemporary British capital. Although Kennedy and Smith's projects have initially different starting points, they share this apparent need to explain changes in London as they occur, and thereby they narrate various urban experiences of the twenty-first century.

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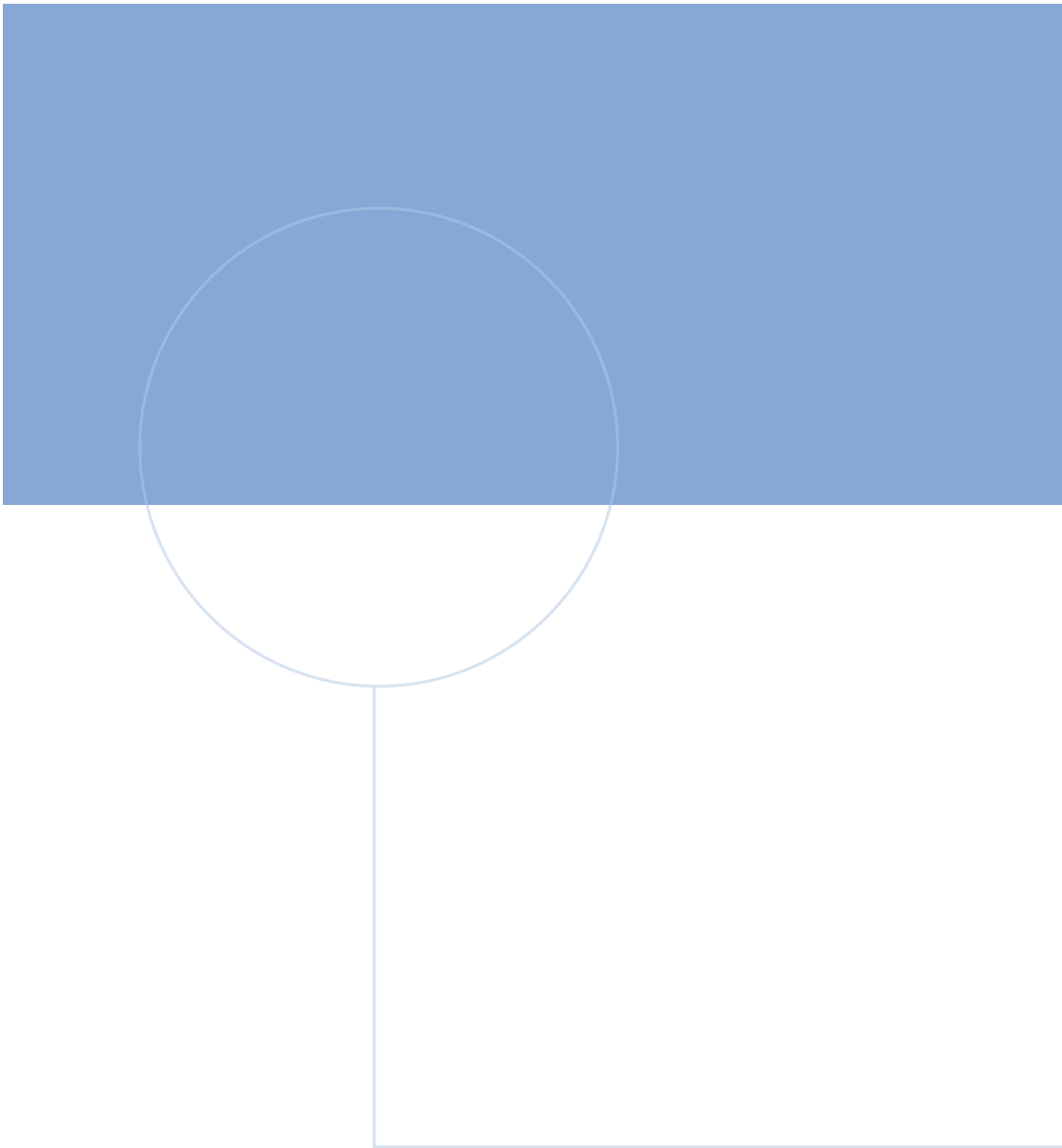

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