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# Worlding Options: Conflation of Personal and Physical Space in Patrick White's Novels

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## Abstract

Great texts that have accrued literary renown over the years and across space, time and genre, are those that are able to project universal sentiments. But simultaneously these texts feature a conscious engagement with the constituent space(s) that are unique to their creation or generation. Every text, then, as it naturally appears, has its singular framework or modality of engagement(s) with space. This article seeks to illustrate how Australian novelist Patrick White's novels enshrine philosophical, and sometimes metaphysical explorations of the nature of spatiality that the self has to contend with as an unavoidable burden of living itself and clarify the singular, pivotal role that spatiality plays in determining individual responses to specific situations and decision-making processes.

**Keywords:** Patrick White, spatiality, Australian, *The Solid Mandala*, *Riders in the Chariot*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *The Twyborn Affair*.

If novels can be credited with the status of being modern-day epics, satisfying the requirement for a sustained narrative that would capture the life and milieu of a certain ethnic unit occupying a specific time-space in its multifaceted entirety, then it has to be epic in scope as well, something that can with conviction be identified as the unmistakable representation of a culture at a definitive stage of development. Oftener than not the cultural component of the abovementioned pattern possesses a national characteristic which then becomes the result and simultaneously, the representation of both what the writer experiences as he engages actively with the national life, and what he would envision as the desired form of nation. The nation being chiefly an ideational or notional concept in its inception and gradual maturation, what the expression really boils down to is a confused spectrum: an arbitrary ensemble of different forces and factors that can neither be organized using a specific epistemological method, nor be perceived as a uniform totality. Different modalities of engagement begin to emerge as ways of coming to terms with the object of representation, necessitating representational techniques that go far beyond mimetic method and aspire to include modes that would, hopefully, arrest individual consciousness with all its quirks and twists and oddities and idiosyncrasies. What chiefly become relatable in terms of the representational variables and associated techniques are obviously Modernist and Post-modernist textual as well as narratorial playfulness and experimentations as exemplified in sufficiently 'innovative' texts like those by Woolf or Fowles or Rushdie. But novels like *To a Lighthouse* or *French Lieutenant's Woman* or *Midnight's Children* are both approached and consumed and understood as what they fundamentally are: aesthetic objects with a promised unique treatment that renders it possible for those texts to be perceived as avant-garde creations.

A typical canonical text like the ones mentioned are now comfortably identified as belonging to a generic, formulaic category that coincides with the cultural expression of certain

period(s). Due to the element of interruption that these texts produce in terms of breaking away from a customary mode of narration, they have come to symbolize an aesthetic movement, preoccupied with a predominantly scholarly-intellectual perspective that, being chiefly motivated by subjective responses to a societal situation multiply influenced by events taking place worldwide, cuts across national divides. The individuality and uniqueness of the perception of one Stephen Daedalus, for instance, could have easily been that of a disillusioned New Yorker or a neurotic Parisian, entrapped in the self-imposed shackles of their own overworked psyche, hysteric in their attempts at wrenching some sort of context out of an endless series of inert images that life appeared to be during the great Wars or immediately after them. In other words, these are great art-objects that, through the projection and representation of trans-national sentiments, aspire to capture moment(s) of crisis, of indecision and of transformation that may not necessarily be tied to either a slice or a totality of what can, in the absence of a more applicable phrase, be referred to as national life or situation. A fiction, therefore, needs to possess a few distinguishing features if it seeks to be consumed as a text that projects itself as inseparable from its national belongingness. The features include first and foremost, and that is a theoretical premise of this essay, an active and conscious engagement with the national space; a concept which, if understood in terms of its constructedness, draws attention to an ensemble of constituent space-s: the domestic space, the social space, the political-financial space, the cultural-academic space, the rural-urban space, and the most fundamental of them all, the personal space and the physical space.

Active engagement with one's spatiality can assume different modalities of accomplishing that objective, but the dynamic that never changes is that between the subject's unique consciousness and the specific spatial situation that the subject happens to inhabit at a particular point in time. The result is a unique, discrete, subject-specific spatiality for every individual consciousness; a construction that is in no ambiguous way directly related to his/her national belongingness. The essential relationship between historically and ethnically organized space appropriated into a territory and altered for societal purposes and a putative 'national identity' can be satisfactorily illustrated from the following passage:

"...wherever they went Europeans immediately began to change the local habitat; their conscious aim was to transform territories in places as far away from Europe as South America and Australia into images of what they left behind... This process was never ending, as a huge number of plants, animals, crops, and farming as well as building methods invaded the colony and gradually turned it into a new place...A changed ecology also introduced a changed political system..."

Those texts are indeed remarkable in which this elaborate, albeit intricate dynamic has been delineated to such an extent that the construction of the idea of the national space, a concept always being de- and re-constructed through the ever-shifting subjective perception of its own spatiality, becomes, in effect, an extension of the experiencing self. As a fictional construct, precisely due to its exemption from genre-specific representational constraints, novel is relatively at more liberty to represent this interactive framework and its theoretical-philosophical as well as individual-collective implications in a more comprehensive way. Undeniably, in the hand of a skillful master of the craft, a novel is able to expound those layers of individual consciousness and its engagement with individual spatiality that ultimately constitutes the act of living. Patrick White's novels meticulously and systematically achieve this very effect: the texts become

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, "Yeats and Decolonization". *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, eds. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, & Edward Said, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 77-78.

representation of exceptional consciousness trapped in and encumbered by unique spatiality, and of the ways the individual who cannot opt out of his/her physical spatiality learns, instead, to come to terms with it, to properly understand and sublimate it in a certain sense.

In order to have a deeper understanding of White's craft what needs to be appreciated at the outset is his idea of literary sublimity. From an academic perspective, he articulates an understanding of the sublime that differs sharply from what has been outlined by Kant<sup>2</sup>, and which has much in common with Jean-Francois Lyotard's conception of the literary sublime as an aesthetic of excess liberated from the Kantian insistence on reason. Unlike Kant, for Lyotard the sublime is a linguistic event which, through an 'abyss' separating imagination and reason, decentres the subject. He defines it as a non-presentable, incommensurable idea because "the imagination fails to present an object which might...come to match [the] concept"<sup>3</sup>. Importantly, then, the sublime resides not in the object of representation, but in the subject's exposure to language's failure to represent, and therefore the failure of the Kantian capacity to conceive, or to present an object corresponding to the concept.

This incommensurable, untranslatable moment of linguistic, and hence representational impasse, of which more has been discussed at length later on in connection with White's structural motifs, derives from his own distinctive spatial ontology. White is unanimously considered a pioneer in dealing with the exceptionally singular nature of Australian consciousness and psyche. But it is in the textualization of the singular, unique nature of subject-space interface that White's consummate excellence lies; - he is the most successful novelist in capturing the essence of Australian space which is made up of the overlapping(s) of diverse histories, cultures and landscapes. His insistence on emphasizing an inescapable, almost subterranean communion with physical space which forever prevents organization or neat categorization underpins a basic element of unpredictability that characterizes the essential vulnerability of human situation at a specific point in time notwithstanding the subject's aspirations or choices or predilections. An instance of it would be his representation of large, enigmatic, vast, vacant spaces and the psychological effect it has on his protagonist. His textual representation of the desert landscape, as for instance, should furnish a fitting example. In ancient literary tradition deserts are represented as places where epistemological categories such as geography and history "are suspended" and "notions of time and space change and disintegrate"<sup>4</sup>. David Jasper argues that "the romance and the lure of the desert lie ultimately and precisely in its total and inescapable and fascinating *otherness*"<sup>5</sup>. The desert's harsh climate is *other* to the European subject, and so "breaks down the epistemology of the Enlightenment"<sup>6</sup>. Significantly, in this regard, deserts were originally named in relation to other, European, landscapes. To the European perceiver's eye, the desert appears empty and desolate. Like many fictional antecedents, the protagonists of the novels under discussion here attempt to document the desert through European discourses, only to find that a "new kind of narrative begins to emerge, on the edge of [their] language and experience"<sup>7</sup>. Active engagement with the physical spatiality of a desert and the consequent

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<sup>2</sup> An overview of the rigorous Kantian categorizations of and conceptualizations on aesthetics and sublime can be accessed via the following URL:

< <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics> > web. Accessed 18.05.2015

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" *Modern Criticism and Theory*, eds. Nigel Wood, David Lodge, (London: Routledge, 2014) 417.

<sup>4</sup> David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture*, Malden: Blackwell, 2004, p. 72

<sup>5</sup> Jasper, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Jasper, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Jasper, 93.

dynamic that emerges out of that interface-scenario is a precise exemplification of *that* moment of Lyotardian sublime which, through the conceptual abyss that exists between perception and conception, experience and intellection, creates moments of 'aesthetic excess' that is essentially incommensurable. And it is only in and through this element of incommensurability that crucial moments of metaphysical realization (as it happens in Voss's ultimate spiritual apotheosis) can be accessed as well as projected.

White is generally accorded a visionary status not simply because of the way he is able to introduce an uneven, inter-woven, inclusive sense of space that engages with, influences and oftener than not determines human responses; it is equally because of his choice and method of indulging in fundamental existential dualisms that include central binaries like those of mind/body, spirit/flesh, individual/society, permanence/flux, abstract/concrete, deformed/healthy, and most importantly, personal space/physical space. The very fact that in White's texts there are dualisms that are exhaustively delineated, that there are polarities consisted of binary oppositions that have been revealed as the protagonist traces his inexorable way toward a deeper understanding of his own consciousness and the forces that actively shape it, are indicative of a central element of dissociation which remains a motif of pivotal significance. As a master novelist of the intuitive apprehension of human psyche that readjusts itself with every unique, exceptional encounter, White's representative novels have a propensity of representing existential schisms as conceptual dissonances that require, most importantly, a spiritual reconciliation. Here reconciliation may imply some sort of readjustment or compromise that underlies a pronounced movement from ambivalence to harmony, from discord to cohesion. This chronological, sequential maturation of perspective demands nothing less than a conceptual realignment which becomes, then, a necessity. Now whether in these texts the 'satisfaction' of this necessity and the resultant heightened realization on the protagonists' part, more often than not bordering on the metaphysical, turn out to be a hurried process in which the much-needed spiritual upliftment is more *introduced* than *arrived at* or, as has been often maintained, White 'submits' a spiritual back door of sorts to bring a speedy, albeit unconvincing reconciliation to the knotty existential questions<sup>8</sup> are issues which, although extremely relevant for textual criticisms of White, are largely irrelevant for the argument of this essay. It is irrelevant because what this paper seeks to address is the precise *nature* of the problem posed in the texts, and the modalities of reconciliation offered.

The subjective plains of memory, consciousness and sensory world as perceived by the self fabricate a fictional universe which is distinctive in its self-contained status: the textual time-space of each of White's representative novels exist in a unique reciprocal relation with the character(s). This exclusivity of the combination of subject and subject-specific spatiality as it unfolds layers of reciprocation-scenarios, in the process realizing its thematic potential vis-à-vis the narrative development, remains the key element in understanding the novels. The dual, mutually interlocked subject-space dynamic<sup>9</sup> then becomes a primary schema which manifests itself in diverse, multifarious dualisms. The fundamental nature of this dualism enhances the element of authenticity that characterizes the ways White's characters realize themselves through the narrative. This same element of authenticity also informs basic motifs that keep recurring in

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<sup>8</sup> Zulfikar Ghose, "The one Comprehensive Vision", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, xxi, 2 (summer, 1979) 267.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive, technical analysis of space as the site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity as it is achieved in narrative, one may consult: W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994).

the novels. They may be of the nature of time and space as experienced, of freedom rediscovered in the self through some sort of philosophical realization, the perennial tragedy of man's homelessness and his frantic search for personal rootedness and cosmic and social relatedness. But the most common evocation is that of human vulnerability when encountered with cosmic forces that will forever remain beyond regulation, or even comprehension. White has a penchant for introducing a human soul afflicted, constantly at war with both itself and its externals, suffering from obscure, intractable existential impasses, and then he imposes a structure of reconciliation, of coming to terms with what is only vaguely recognized as the root cause of the dilemma. It is apparent that these are issues that by their very nature could only have been *suggested* anyway. This proclivity for the ineffable, inexpressible processes of understanding is extended to the sphere of human interrelations as well; - a fitting exemplification being the relation between Laura and Voss which is 'abstracted' to the point of being interpreted as a chiefly mystic affair. And it is only then that the solution offered in terms of a 'spiritual compromise' does indeed appear as a somewhat appropriate riposte.

From a philosophical, and to be even more specific, phenomenological point of view, then, White's exploration of subjective modes of spatial engagement should be approached in terms of the Heideggerian concept of *dasein* which implies, to oversimplify it, the state of 'being-in-the-world'. It is not an objective state or position, but a modality of existence; - the modality that captures the immanence of human consciousness as opposed to the Cartesian belief in the liberated status of the same. In other words, whereas for Descartes the *cogito* is all-important, non-circumscribed by spatial confines in which the body unavoidably finds itself, Heidegger's *Leiblichkeit* can be interpreted as an inextricable duo of body and space that refuses the derivative status of the body, and emphasizes the 'fetteredness' of consciousness itself as it derives its origin from the inseparable trio of space-time, body, and mind. *Dasein*, therefore, can be interpreted as that state of being in which consciousness derives its authenticity from the nature of spatiality it is entangled in, and spatiality is experienced according to altered subjectivities.

Cursory analyses of the textual unfolding of basic plot-configuration and the precise narrative trajectory that each main character of White's representative novels tracks should provide a rudimentary idea of the ways he conceives of the phenomenon of spatial dynamics. The overviews that follow would seek to comprehend spatial schematics as expounded in certain texts, involving situations in which personal, social and physical space(s) conflate and interact. Operating chiefly from within the Heideggerian conceptualizations on *dasein* and spatial belongingness, these 'impressions' would equally speculate on the possibility and feasibility of applying any other theoretical construct that may, hopefully, provide a more pertinent structure of understanding in so far as representation of space in White's fictional universe is concerned.

The theoretical framework that seeks to explicate dysfunctional comprehension of the nature of spatiality and its pivotal role in determining individual responses can perfectly clarify the crisis which White attempted to approach and resolve in *Voss*. A text like *Voss* can demonstrate precisely how the central character's keen awareness of the unrealized potential of its own *dasein* plays perhaps the single most crucial role in the formulation of his distinctive self. Voss's intense yearning for exploration, going into the scarcely-known, the mysterious, even at considerable risk signifies his attempts at discovering the limits of his consciousness and his self-perception that are nothing but co-extension(s) of his own spatial affiliation. When the truth of the self-defeating nature of his peregrination is apparent to him, at last, he could only hope for a spiritual apotheosis that could have only taken place on the level of consciousness. The culmination of the lifelong process of constant pushing of Voss's own boundaries, literally and

figuratively, turned out to be a critical self-knowledge. That knowledge consisted of knowing the crucial end point beyond which consciousness ceases to operate, and *dasein*, having refused to absorb further readjustments, in a phenomenological sense exhausts itself.

The pleasure and satisfaction to be had from worldly success forever eludes Hurtle Duffield, the protagonist of *The Vivisector*. His consciousness is shaped by, as it happens, interactions with chief characters like his adoptive mother, Maman and Rhoda, the prostitute Nance, - his first real love, the wealthy heiress Olivia Davenport; his Greek mistress Hero Pavloussi and finally the child prodigy Kathy Volkov. Despite his achievements words like fame and glory remain empty signifiers for him as he always falls short of comprehending the essence of the inspiration that he derives from the world that surrounds him. The essence that continues to elude him is the synthesized understanding of subjective spatiality and the individual experience of it or *dasein* and its essential relatedness to physical space.

Mrs Ellen Roxburgh, the young castaway stranded on the then sparsely populated Fraser Island doesn't remain the same person after she is suddenly exposed to 'radical alterity' that is represented in the text via the group of aborigines and Jack chance, the escaped convict. A novel in which White explores some of his most straightforward yet recurring dualisms, namely, those of European/Aborigine, White/black, convict/free people, and of course women/men, *A Fringe of Leaves* is remarkable in the way it projects different worlds with incompatible horizons of expectations and actively engages itself with ways of negotiating them. Here, Laurence Steven argues<sup>10</sup>, White most successfully reconnects two worlds which had heretofore been not only separate in his fiction but also frequently antagonistic: a transcendent realm of significance on the one hand and the banal, quotidian actuality of everyday life on the other. This dualism enacts the same process of reciprocation that plays itself out in the dualism of the home and the world, the internal space and the external space, space-as-existing and space-as-experienced. The novel represents the colonial history of Australia rethought: the version of history present there is not only a re-imagined, therefore new, version of what is considered Australian history; - through the reappropriation of a plausible personal story a subjective temporality is grafted onto a collective temporal scheme or in other words a known historical situation, and the result is a tangle of intertwining temporalities with inconsistent spatialities. And it is this very element of the experience of disjunctive spatio-temporal modules that in fact characterizes the Australian spatiality as White conceives it.

In more than one sense *The Solid Mandala* can be regarded as the most conceptually dense text in comparison to White's other novels in that it takes his spatial mythmaking to a completely different level. This affords the reader an extremely valuable opportunity of approaching the thematic content as representative of a particularly intractable existential dilemma. Focusing on the psychically entangled relation between the elderly twins Arthur and Waldo Brown, White comfortably moves beyond the 'Jungian architecture' and the layers of Eastern symbolic as well as mythic structures accompanying it, and delves deep into the oneiric substratum of both the entire narrative and the sub-text. The object of representation being a singularly exceptional interaction of two mutually-dependent individuals, what are explored in *The Solid Mandala* are the spatiotemporal dimensions and associated textual ramifications. Two contorted, mutually-

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<sup>10</sup>Laurence Steven, *Dissociation and Wholeness in Patrick White's Fiction*, (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1989) 129-138.

inclusive, co-dependent subject-positions generate *intertexts*<sup>11</sup> that actively play crucial role in determining the overall movement and impression of this narrative. Just like Voss and Laura, the Browns appear to be divergent beings, or rather, contrasting aspects of the same being, contending but essentially interdependent. It's a bizarre instance of two different consciousness(es) trying to access a shared field of experience, or in other words, a singular *dasein*.

In a number of novels, the eventual culmination of the protagonist's spiritual evolution or the apotheosis is recurrently associated and coincided with physical death. Even after having blessed with a tranquil domestic life of assured growth and owned a lucrative plot in New South Wales Stan Parker dies, and that particular outcome doesn't appear as an unpredictable eventuality in the narrative development. Predominantly a story of growth, *The Tree of Man* projects the essential incompatibility of the domestic space with a propensity for reclusiveness and an ever-increasing urban space with an encapsulating, enveloping predisposition. But *The Tree of Man* is distinct from other representative Patrick White texts in one key aspect. And it is the fact that the tragedy of Stan and Amy Parker is that of the axiomatic everyman: the family has been chosen as indistinguishable from any other family under similar circumstances. The Parker family becomes, for White the novelist, a site for exploration of the consequences of irreconcilable spatialities as well as discordant experiential modules by *not* being peculiar in any way except their individual responses to spatial affiliations, but by being typical.

In *Riders in the Chariot* Mary Hare, an elderly spinster, Mordecai Himmelfarb, a Jewish refugee from Germany, Ruth Godbold, a housewife, and Alf Dubbo, a consumptive part-Aborigine are the four exceptional characters undergoing, in the characteristic Patrick White fashion, a heightening of sensibility and spiritual awareness that would be realized, notwithstanding the intrusion of physical violence in the form of a crucifixion, through intricate and oftentimes manifest intertexts. While it is apparent that through the active intertexts that reverberate through ancient history to contemporary events to ethnic blind-spots the novel seeks to engage with an uninterrupted temporality, the crucial function accorded to space and space as it is experienced via an incessant temporality is obvious from the name given to Miss Hare's decaying residence: Xanadu. White consciously develops a complicated theme of introversion and social reservation that allows Miss Hare not only to take in her surroundings in a unique way but also to form a relationship with nature, the fruits of which trigger many of the book's plot developments. For instance, Miss Hare's character is developed in conjunction with her expansive mansion, Xanadu which, as the narrative suggests, is a house capable of wielding a special significance and power that does not come to all textual environments. By christening the house with a name that resonates with unavoidable intertextual possibilities of signification, White allows the house to stand out as that which marks the boundary of Miss Hare's *dasein*.

*The Eye of the Storm* projects as its chief content the last days of Elizabeth Hunter, a wealthy, inflexible socialite who used to be an attractive woman once, and situates her in her plush Sidney mansion where she desperately tries to reconnect with her own past and present-shaped by that past, as a solution to her quest after transcendent meaning. The novel represents a narrative tapestry which is an intrinsically Patrick White experience: again the thematic terrain is

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<sup>11</sup> The idea of *intertext* as it manifests itself within a semantic construct through subject-positions has been analyzed in detail by Julia Kristeva in her attempts at making sense of Michael Riffaterre's 'hypogram'. One may consult the following reference for details:

Michael Worton & Judith Still, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, (Manchester and London: Manchester University Press, 1991) 86-89.

the nature of consciousness, a subject that he approaches in a most painterly way, working always through a presentation of people's impressions and consciousness. Although *The Eye of the Storm* is a big novel of around 589 pages, the focus is microscopic. Like every other representative Patrick White text, a large background is provided, with impressionistic passages suggesting an encompassing spatial immensity seamlessly amalgamating with a precise, defined use of chosen words indicating a coiling back to the circumscribed limitations and confines of domestic space.

A fitting close to this improvised appraisal of the fundamental thematic tenets of key Patrick White texts should be provided by what is sometimes called his veiled memoir, - *The Twyborn Affair* which, although shortlisted for the Booker, was pulled out due to the writer's disinterest in competing for literary awards. A particularly difficult text that involves problematic components like dissolution of gender-identity, cross-dressing, erogenous fantasies, alternative identity, formation of surrogate self and attendant oedipal complications, *The Twyborn Affair* is a book about how an artist, or perhaps a man, perceives himself, his aspirations, and his limitations. To an observant Patrick White reader this would be a recurring motif as something quite like this has been explored in *The Vivisector* as well. Quite in keeping with his faith in an inexplicable spiritual apotheosis as a mandatory end point in the maturation of human consciousness was White's preoccupation with the absolute seriousness of the role of a writer. *The Twyborn Affair* was an ambitious text in that as he attempted to grapple with issues that bordered on homosexuality White expected this text to create a furor in the Australian literary circle; - he identified this novel, even before its completion, as an "...abrasive novel...(which) will probably earn me complete social ostracism in Australia"<sup>12</sup>. Whether that specific objective was realized or not is not the moot point. There are moments of existential uncertainties in this novel that move beyond the obvious Freudian conceptualizations on multiple identities and the androgyny. Through the narrative which is situated and patterned along a definitive temporal axis the possibilities of alternative as well as multiple spatialities are explored and incorporated into a surface layer of meaning that underpins a frantic search for potential identities that could be, in a certain way, *salvaged* to make decipherable sense of the present.

Now, a summational, aggregative theoretical construct needs to be structured in order to make sense of the nature of spatial dynamics observable in the fictional universe of Patrick White. A typical Patrick White character, effectively the sum total of individual consciousness and its perception of its own spatiality, matures and evolves, through an interlacing pattern, in response to characters who are but similar constructs interacting with him; - and as a result of this comprehensive dynamic profounder, more intuitive modalities of existence are generated which form part of an even more comprehensive vision of artistic activity. Herein lies the real visionary power of White's texts which, bordering on almost-spiritual through the representation of the 'imponderables', are able to exude the essence of what it means to live through multiple dissociations.

An enhanced observation of natural processes and its formative influence on human psyche characterizes White's ambitious tapestry of imagery which is employed with the express intention of arresting that specific element of 'intangibility' that solely constitutes the fleeting, insubstantial moments of semi-conscious perception. The representation of this elusive, yet pervasive frame of interface is predominantly oriented toward the phenomenon of an active process of reciprocation which is about the primordial connection that exists between man and the surrounding nature. The supposedly 'mythic' structure of his imagery that lends a painterly, almost visionary quality to his narrative, is founded on the evocation of such moments of dusky or

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<sup>12</sup> David Marr, ed., Patrick White: Letters, Sydney: Random House, 1994, p. 488

smoky indirect communication, as his characters, oftentimes living on the fringes of social acceptability, recreate through their interweaving yet distinct engagement(s) with surrounding space and each other. The narrative concern with the textual representation of semi-formed moments of psychological communion assumes a preoccupation with the concept of vagueness and 'vague objects'. And it is precisely *here*, in his attempt to psycho-socially situate those untranslatable flashes of interface between one's own spatiality and that which encases him that White goes beyond the Heideggerian understanding of *dasein* and a 'bifocalized' spatial construction. What becomes much more relevant in making sense of the modes of socio-spatial dynamics as explored in these texts is the intersubjective model of spatial appropriation as theorized by Alfred Schütz. A theoretical consideration of vagueness, especially as conceived in Schütz's version of intersubjectivity<sup>13</sup>, can provide insights (without necessarily going into Phenomenologist and Epiphenomenologist metaphysics) into the continuous and multivalent nature of social space and the relationships between spatial experiences, practices and representations. Instead of perceiving the dynamic that exists between personal space and physical space using a purely epistemological and philosophical framework Schütz, having refused the transcendental structures of consciousness of the Heideggerian existentialists, sets forth the ambition of approaching the dynamic as embedded in social context, and interpreting it through decoding that specific syntax. By doing so the word *lebenswelt* isn't necessarily stripped off its signification or mysticism; rather it gains in the added suggestion of social rootedness.

Like every writer at liberty to shape his/her own fictional universe White has had to opt from a number of 'worlding options' available; every option following its distinctive spatio-temporal logic. His is one in which the subject is first made aware of forces beyond his control and sometimes even understanding, and then is allowed an encounter so that this interface itself becomes some sort of learning curve in which the subject, through a heightening of consciousness, learns to appreciate the elemental quality of 'nature', of physical space. The conflation of personal space and physical space emblemizes a most fundamental dualism in White's fictions and the key to its resolution lies in compromise, in acceptance which is not hopeless capitulation on the part of the protagonist, but in fact is a valuable and much-needed edification-process. Patrick White makes the reader aware of the inherent insignificance of 'life' as long as it doesn't learn to come to terms with its own spatiality through a compromise.

The pervasive trope of dualism consisting of a Hegelian thesis-antithesis structure, as it is discernible in White, can justifiably be clarified vis-à-vis even older, more widely pervasive conceptualizations of Australia as a Land of dichotomies. The multi-layered contrasts that has actively shaped the Australian identity may be that between the city and the bush, between the convicts and the free people, between the Aborigines and the Europeans, between the metropolis and the outback, between the densely-populated, demystified, lush and abundant sea-sides and the empty, enigmatic, arid, sterile, scorched interiors, between spaces that have been organized into Cartesian grids and spaces that flagrantly repudiate any attempt at codification. Patrick White, in the final estimate, is a national writer in the truest sense of the term since he, through his fictions, arrested the quintessence of Australian spatiality, of Australian-ness.

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Schütz & Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life World*, Volume 1, (New York and Evanston Northwestern University Press, 1973) 278-79.

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