A Landscape of Shame: Exploring the Digital Space in Contemporary British Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to unite phenomenology and metamodernism through an investigation of shame in contemporary British fiction. Due to the rise of social media platforms, the way we communicate online has shaped how we converse in real-life as our reduced attention span is reinforced by technology's 'blinkered preference for familiarity, similarity and proximity.'[1] Affect can no longer be conceptualised through interpersonal transactions when we consider how the content we consume shapes our world – in short, shame constructs a digital *landscape*, whilst operating within it.

Philosophers and psychologists have explored both the positive and negative aspects of shame, with the primary group admitting its beneficial moral function. Whilst acts of public shaming generally do not provoke long-lasting change (and can prompt further damage to the self) our inhibitions *can* serve a purpose within a cohesive society. Chronic shame, however, as an endured state impairs functioning and, if left unresolved, is compensated against. This compensatory system, often existing on a spectrum of narcissism, is increasing at alarming rates as individuals are becoming more isolated.

Using Heidegger's phenomenology, I extend Rudi Visker's claim that shame 'shares a similar topos to anxiety'[2], revealing an emotion that, when acknowledged, reconstructs a new understanding of self that directly impacts the form of contemporary texts. In a society that stigmatises vulnerability whilst simultaneously producing a background of competition and envy, shame fluctuates between experience and avoidance. This movement, I argue, expands van den Akker and Vermeulen's metamodern structure of feeling, that is 'characterised by an oscillating in-betweenness.'[3] Using the work of Eley Williams and Tom McCarthy, I reveal

[1] Alice Bennett, *Contemporary Fictions of Attention: Reading and Distraction in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), p. 12.
[2] Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 10.
[3] Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), pp. 1-19 (p. 10).

shame's impact through an analysis of language and movement that embeds our experience in a digital world.

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Introduction

Shame as a landscape, not a transaction?

'Shame is like an atomic particle: we often know where it is only by the trace it leaves, by the effects it causes.'[4]

A discussion of shame is always a conversation about *time*. Not only the lived time of the individual, but the temporality of a specific place. The time, and space, discussed within this thesis is both everywhere and nowhere at all: it is the digital landscape. We are undeniably living in the age of the internet as many of us work online, form relationships through social media, and consume news through online sites - our online lives are becoming more real than our embodied selves. As we curate our lives to fit a particular image, we unconsciously manipulate our experience of time as our photos are archived and revisited creating an emotional feedback loop. It is not uncommon for previous versions of ourselves to haunt the peripheries of the present, and whilst development in real-time is subtle, this virtual reminder of lost things creates a landscape of shame. Experiences we might otherwise leave behind are infinitely catalogued under the façade of connection. Online scrutiny is therefore a symptom of a much more embedded background of emotion; public humiliation previously contained by the awareness of immediate witnesses now belongs to virtual time. This thesis aims to bring awareness to the undetectable environment shaping our lives as I explore the digital landscape of shame.

Michael Uebel argues that 'shame is itself a technology of control'[5], as its function prompts an ethical drive to 'self-reform.'[6] For Uebel, shame is about 'self-mastery'[7] as we can use it to wield power over others. If we consider the fragility of our online selves, public shaming is more damaging on the internet due to its

[4] Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 119.
[5] Michael Uebel, 'Technologies of Shame: Agency, Identity, Visibility', in *Shame 4.0: Investigating an Emotion in Digital Worlds and the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, ed. by Claude-Helene Mayer, Elisabeth Vanderheiden and Paul T. P. Wong (Switzerland: Springer, 2022), pp. 575-591 (p. 579).
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

longevity. Digital footprint allows information to be stored indefinitely, resulting in the transformation of an emotion that, by nature, is an immediate experience. The conversation of shame now includes its avoidance: the prospect of unrestricted accesses to our private humiliations accordingly creates a defence mechanism around the self.

Uebel's notion supports my claim that shame configures the digital landscape, whilst introducing its opposition – dangerous compensatory mechanisms to protect the self against long-lasting disgrace. The rise of individualism rewards shameless behaviour, with increasing numbers of disenfranchised individuals living under a cost-of-living crisis. How can we criticise the rising display of narcissistic traits when social media rewards bullying, harassment, and exploitation of others? It is not only the potential fear of online embarrassment, rather there is the censoring of voices seeking to overthrow this trend. When humiliation/neglect occurs at an early age, without the correct support to process it, an individual can develop a defensive personality structure that no longer seeks connection, but instead relies on communication of a self that is better than others. Daniel Shaw considers unprocessed shame to be 'a result of developmental trauma connected to dependency as the person externalises dependency, and with it, shame.'[8] People struggling to raise families are less equipped to deal with developmental difficulties, and a personality that compensates against an attachment wound becomes a strategy that is rewarded. As a grasping, selfish solution, narcissism can be likened to colonialism as it eradicates autonomy and any subsequent hope for shared authenticity. The narcissist, like the coloniser, does not care for boundaries - the entitlement that entails hinges on suppressed shame.

A landscape of shame is therefore an environment of competition: either with ourselves or others. The use of data informs content we repeatedly consume, desensitising us to global issues – we are at risk of being overly informed or ignorant of other perspectives. We cannot keep up, and the more that we endeavour to do so, we turn away from our offline lives. This cycle itself causes shame as it is the speed

[8] Daniel Shaw, *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 35.

in which we must develop an opinion, nourish a connection, or style our avatar that perpetuates this unconscious competition. Individuals unaware of their own shame use the internet to bolster a more shameless self – smear campaigns are an example of the defences used against reality when an individual, or group, feels threatened. Such attempts at warping reality occur when narcissism has an online platform. We cannot escape our devices which means that there is an implicit shame in how we communicate with others; comparing our lives on a global level is unnatural and to deny its reality would not only be problematic, but indicative of a more grandiose rerouting of self.

Netflix's recent success, *Adolescence*, reveals how a digital landscape of shame operates. As an intolerable, and often unidentified emotion, the show highlights generational wounds exacerbated by unrestricted access to hateful, Incel-informed commentary. The public frustration towards the show's ending highlights our unwillingness to question our own empathy - we should not have to see the trial to understand how insidious this emotion can be. When we ignore or displace our own shame, we cannot see it in others which has dangerous consequences. Jamie's pathology is inconsequential as the show's purpose reveals a national (and global) attempt to stigmatise vulnerability. Andrew Tate's videos, for example, have been edited and reformatted into 5-minute misogynistic tirades that have been shared on TikTok, with dangerous consequences.

Commenting on the relationship between shame and violence, Peter N. Stearns comments, 'it was shame, and its destruction of self-respect, that was responsible for violent acts in the first place.'[9] Young boys who are struggling with a lack of connection, particularly during the pandemic, are turning to hate-fuelled content to understand the world around them. Content that is shared and liked across different social media sites has the attached implication of normalcy – those who do not agree are singled out and shamed, alongside the provocation of the content itself. Shame becomes a landscape and an interpersonal weapon as we dare not divert from the norm, whilst participating in the active shaming of others.

[9] Peter N. Stearns, *Shame: A Brief History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), p. 104.

Before shame is considered as a landscape, it is important to discuss the most well-known example of transactional shame in philosophy: Sartre's gaze of the Other, that depicts a jealous lover looking through a keyhole to spy on their partner. When caught, they feel a deep sense of shame that transcends the neutrality of seeing, and is according to Luna Dolezal, 'a value-laden *looking* which has the power to objectify and causes the subject to turn attention to himself or herself in a self-reflective manner.'[10] The distinction between seeing and *looking* holds the weight of the Other's judgment. For Dolezal, Sartre's account is 'both phenomenological and ontological'[11] as shame discloses something about the world through my experience of it and it reveals a fundamental aspect of the human condition. Intersubjectivity thus becomes identifiable through shame. Dolezal notes that critics have, at times, dismissed Sartre's cynicism towards shame as it cannot be the only emotion that reveals our being-alongside-others. If we resurrect Sartre's conceptualisation of shame in the digital realm, however, its experience does in fact reveal our co-existence with others, more than positive affects. Rather than a keyhole, our moments of shame become part of a highlight real; iPhone memories, Facebook memories, Instagram yearly highlights all present a self that, whilst aging, is eternal in our desire to be well-received.

Sartre's example of the disgraced lover also presents the state of 'pure shame'[12] which Dolezal clarifies is 'a relation of embodied dependency and vulnerability to the other.'[13] The concept of vulnerability is inextricably linked to shame, which is revealed on a bodily level through the work of Dolezal and Elspeth Probyn. Dolezal's treatment of the body reveals that women are more likely to exist in a permanent state of visibility, thus experiencing more shame than their male counterparts. The intersubjective framework of 'self-presentation'[14] exists 'between the expression that one "gives" and the expression that one "gives off" when

[10] Luna Dolezal, 'Shame, Vulnerability and Belonging: Reconsidering Sartre's Account of Shame', *Human Studies,* 40 (217), 421-438 (426) < https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10746-017-9427-7> [accessed 10 September 2024].
[11] Dolezal, 'Shame, Vulnerability and Belonging: Reconsidering Sartre's Account of Shame', p. 427.
[12] Dolezal, 'Shame, Vulnerability and Belonging: Reconsidering Sartre's Account of Shame', p. 431.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Luna Dolezal, 'The phenomenology of self-presentation: describing the structures of intercorporeality with Erving Goffman', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 16.2 (2017), 237-254 (p. 248) https://philpapers.org/rec/DOLTPO-6 [accessed 10 September 2024].

engaged in strategic interaction.'[15] Women are thus more likely to engage in the maintenance of self-presentation to avoid shame, (whilst avoiding vulnerability through perfectionism), through alterations to their aesthetic, and overall affect. Dolezal's concept of self-presentation is explored further in the third chapter, however I use it to explain the behaviour behind the male protagonist in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005).

Probyn's work on body shame considers the positives of the emotion as an affective opening-up towards others. Moving across the landscape of Australia, Probyn's personal account considers diverse aspects such as ancestral shame and its functioning on a grassroots level, 'shame has the task of making that interest urgent. Shame also reminds us that getting along together in a better and more equitable way is hard work.'[16] The moral purpose allocated to shame, moving beyond Sartre's phenomenological application to a sociological one, is important. If we again consider the online space through Probyn's lens, shame prompts interest in local (and global) causes that inspire action – scientists now consider the importance of TikTok as a teaching aid both in and out of the classroom, as it is 'the ethical responsibility of researchers to disseminate findings with the public in a timely way.'[17] The immediacy of the internet thus mimics the urgency of our bodily affects, integrating the digital into our being-in-the-world on an unnoticeable level. It is our responsibility to consume the *correct* information and express our knowledge to ways to help others. This is the positive, cohesive application of shame's moral function.

Probyn also considers her experience as an academic and asks, 'if writing shame doesn't necessarily make you a good person, why have I insisted that it may have an ethical implication in how we write?'[18] The responsibility of writing is therefore a heavy one. Not only are we haunted by the perceived reaction from the reader – a phenomenological response that is visible through our closed-off posture,

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[15] Dolezal, 'The phenomenology of self-presentation: describing the structures of intercorporeality with Erving Goffman' p. 250.
[16] Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 35.
[17] Abigail G.B. Radin, Caitlin J. Light, 'TikTok: An Emergent Opportunity for Teaching and Learning Science Communication Online', *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, 23.1 (2022), 1-12 (p. 10) < https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9053053/> [accessed 10 September 2024].
[18] Probyn, p. 148.

hanging head cast down towards the object of our shame – but there is a need to write with honesty, clarity, and an expression true to oneself. Probyn does not answer her existential question, rather, her respect for the complexities of writing shame as a practice that 'involves a body grappling with interests, hoping to engage others'[19], becomes a springboard for further critical interest.

In her recent monograph, Kaye Mitchell argues that novels about shame are always written *through* shame. Mitchell considers the political, and gendered activism that often accompanies these fictions, identifying the 'inextricability of shame and writing.'[20] Considering the moral responsibility prompted by Probyn, Mitchell's shame is a 'redemptive act' belonging to the 'structural and constitutive (not merely regulative) role that shame plays in the formation of femininity in particular.'[21] Thus, adopting the same area of interest as Dolezal, Mitchell interrogates female shame and considers the use of form in texts to replicate feelings of fragmentation, and, if processed, solace. Focusing on autofiction, Mitchell notes the affective state that discloses the writer to his/her practice: 'writing brings with it a particular anxiety of exposure.'[22] There is consequently an emerging recognition, not only of the complexity of shame, but of its structural compound as inseparable from the being of those trying to *express* it.

Both Probyn and Mitchell discuss the undeniability of shame. As a fundamental part of the human condition, it is an emotion that can lead towards change (if acknowledged.) The antidote to shame lies in its expression - when we ignore its persistent ache, we deny parts of ourselves and our community (as seen in *Adolescence*.) The aim of this thesis is therefore not to debate the validity of shame, or even its moral function, rather I focus on the movement of the emotion and how this, in turn, constructs texts. Taking the digital landscape as a backdrop for my chosen novelists: Tom McCarthy and Eley Williams, I examine the phenomenological impact of shame and its impact on form. My analysis of form extends the arguments seen in Alice Bennett and Gilles Lipovetsky as scholars interested in the fluctuating

[19] Probyn, p. 162.
[20] Kaye Mitchell, *Writing Shame: Contemporary Literature, Gender and Negative Affect* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 201.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Mitchell, p. 25.

aesthetics of contemporary fiction: for Bennett, the nemesis is distraction, and for Lipovetsky it is dread. Lipovetsky's *Hypermodern Times,* for example, can be characterised by a shifting sense of urgency due to over-exertion at work and during leisure time. New technologies 'have made possible a growing independence from collective temporal constraints: as a result, individual activities, rhythms and itineraries have become de-synchronised.'[23] This sense of freedom, whilst tantalising, creates 'an atmosphere of dramatization, of permanent stress – as well as a whole host of psychosomatic disorders.'[24] In a digital world characterised by perpetual entertainment, distraction can easily become emotional dysregulation as shame is produced through competing avatars.

Shame therefore occupies a temporal movement as it is simultaneously produced online and, in most cases, immediately suppressed. The shameless increase in online gambling and fast fashion is a poignant antidote to any threatening sense of vulnerability. In Chapter One, I consider Ben Agger and Alfie Bown's philosophical reflections on the ramifications of an algorithm that is competing with less social time. An isolated community is one that is prone to shame (as seen in *Adolescence*.) Screens are becoming more reliable than face-to-face interaction as both McCarthy and Williams consider the meaning of truth in a world in which difficult moments can *always* be replayed. The emotional feedback loop caused by social media's archiving function distorts our lived sense of time: we share both past and present, curating our future rather than allowing it to unfold. Moments of distress go undetected, and our inability to witness vulnerability or emotional pain cause further social alienation.

The algorithm therefore not only informs our future self, but it also placates us - a self that is continually trapped in the past cannot move forward. Not only are we provided with a myriad distractions, but our communication style is also changing as a result. We are becoming listless beings caught in waiting mode: this is, according to Tung-Hui Hu, the age of *digital lethargy*. The pressure to perform online equals the expectations placed upon us in real life. Considering the societal pressures of

[23] Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 51.

[24] Lipovetsky, p. 50.

social media must therefore encompass its everyday usage as we must engage with others at an alarmingly rapid rate whilst retaining genuine self-expression. As we try to cope with constant news feeds and global updates, our engagement becomes less authentic and more prone to shame. A society that cannot rests becomes sluggish as 'algorithms prod us to engage and be active in order to create ourselves as users.'[25] Choosing to opt out of social media is, especially for young people, unimaginable as our real life is inextricably linked to our online selves - side effects of immediate interactions cause fatigue whilst perpetuating loneliness. For Hu, the 'main difference between the couch potato and the user is simply that it is almost impossible to opt out of the work of being a user.'[26] Not only are we shamed for our digital coping strategies, but our engagement with others is also under scrutiny.

A fast-paced algorithm also informs how we process our emotions. As we wait and continually refresh our social media pages, we can get caught in the buffering trap. Hu describes this phenomenon as 'a form of timepass'[27]: we switch apps to pass the time when one server is not loading fast enough. Real life interactions cannot mimic this speed, and what we perceive as momentum, is atrophy as 'the smartphone waits for our touch.'[28] The user therefore stagnates under the guise of productivity. *Adolescence* is a painful example of our reduced attention spans and waning empathy. Its uncomfortable viewing is more pronounced due to its one-shot style and the emotional range of betrayal, shame, rage and subsequent denial highlights how disconnected we are from each other. Unlike a fast-paced action film, the elongated sequences reveal our emotional processing that lurks beneath the distraction of our devices. We cannot turn to buffering as a template to inspire patience as, according to Hu, 'most of the time the server or network is serving someone else – one of the thousand or million other people accessing the same resource at the same time.'[29] Waiting for a loading webpage thus inspires frustration and entitlement as we immediately seek out Google to find blame.

[25] Tung-Hui Hu, *Digital Lethargy: Dispatches from an Age of Disconnection* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2022), p. 41.
[26] Hu, p. 41.
[27] Hu, p. 55.
[28] Hu, p. 56.
[29] Ibid.

Tom McCarthy discusses buffering in his essay, 'Recessional – Or, the Time of the Hammer'[30], and its impact on authenticity. In his novel, *Remainder*, McCarthy notes that, 'in order to experience the presence of his present moment he (the protagonist) has to detour it, wire it via its imaginary future mediation. And then it's a very strange temporality and he does this in order to be authentic, but he's radically inauthentic at that point.'[31] In essence, our attempts to escape reality often result in more waiting, (or buffering.) The uncomfortable feeling of watching life (or data) load for others causes shame which is immediately diverted through blame or distractions. Trauma follows the temporal rhythm of buffering as it is deferred, rerouted, and ultimately avoided. Shame, as the underlying emotion behind experiencing trauma, can thus be seen as occupying physical space in our navigation of technology. A society that stigmatises vulnerability is a traumatised one, and as our devices are rapidly becoming more integrated, our relationship to the internet mirrors *and* informs the one we have with ourselves. If shame constructs the digital landscape, its occurrence in our daily lives is analogous to the experience of buffering – Stephen Graham's campaign to include *Adolescence* in the curriculum is an attempt to ground the impact of the show in the present moment. Instead of avoiding our collective horror (which the filming deliberately provokes), there is a need to be vulnerable with each other.

The difficult scene between Jamie and his psychologist, Briony, in *Adolescence* exemplifies this continuing tension between empathy and avoidance as she leaves the room to rewatch the footage on the security monitor. Jamie's outburst is due to hidden shame being triggered - the ensuing volatility is strong enough to cause Briony to leave the room. After watching footage from the scene, she re-enters and engages him in further conversation. This need to pause and replay the scene in her own time (and space) further prompts the question: as a society, can we understand shame? Can we even *identify* it? Avoidance is a key component to shame, not only within those experiencing it but by those who bear witness to its dysfunctional appearance. Shame can be an accentuated photograph, an

[30] Tom McCarthy, '"Something that is not nothing" Zurich Seminar', in *Recessional – Or, the Time of the Hammer* (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2016), pp. 49-73 (p. 55).
[31] Ibid.

embellished truth – or more drastically, it is the fiery rage when our motives are questioned. As *Adolescence* has revealed, chronic shame is dangerous when mixed with the isolation of an increasingly misogynistic culture. This thesis therefore seeks to examine the interplay between shame and its avoidance as a movement that defines how we communicate online and in real-life. A landscape of shame is an environment in which guilt cannot be accessed as our interactions are indefinitely stored – guilt requires time and space to consider the impact of our actions on another.

In terms of consciousness, shame occupies the lowest emotional state. Devoid of empathy and compassion for self and others, a lifetime of chronic shame prevents true connection as it blocks forward movement. According to American psychiatrist, David Hawkins, 'shame presents as humiliation'[32] (inevitably leading to an isolated society). Hawkins' research reveals a map of consciousness that lists shame, guilt, and apathy as the most self-defeating states. Moving beyond apathy towards grief requires an acknowledgement of regret which, in our post-Brexit, current MAGA landscape, is rare. Regret is rooted in accountability which proves difficult amidst the archives of social media. Previous opinions are as valid as today's beliefs which causes a cycle of alienation and reappearance whilst sidestepping responsibility. There is no comprehension to be found in cancel culture, and as an act of public shaming, it traps the individual in a self-fulfilling prophecy of misery or chronic attention-seeing behaviours.

Whether shame is therefore acknowledged or supressed (or, even, repressed as an unconscious state), its liminal quality creates an unstable environment as it exists 'perilously proximate to death.'[33] Situated between unconsciousness (or shameless behaviours) and guilt (requiring acknowledgment of the Other), it remains difficult to pinpoint. Most mental health disorders have shame as the root cause and due to its evasive composition, symptoms reveal themselves as rage, competition, cruelty and inflexibility. It is an emotion that leads to stagnation, distraction – it lurks in delayed decisions and people-pleasing. When we feel ashamed, we immediately

[32] David Hawkins, *The Map of Consciousness Explained* (London: Hay House, 2020), p. 40.
[33] Hawkins, p. 64.

make our bodies smaller to flee from the site of rejection. We become nomads, seeking empathy in a climate that is predisposed to judgment rather than compassion.

David Keen's latest work, *Shame: The Politics and Power of an Emotion* connects economic struggle with the tactic of passing the shame, 'a kind of golden blinker – profitable politically and economically – that keeps our eyes shut when it comes to finding proper solutions for urgent problems.'[34] Politicians are keen to pass the responsibility of cost-of-living on to those financially struggling in a further act of displacement (both from self and environment). Challenging social and political problems requires us to 'look closely at the powerful role that shame and shaming have played – and continue to play – in cementing these systems.'[35] Occupying the same feedback loop as seen on social media, this is a system of alienation as there is a disjuncture between 'the distribution of shame and the distribution of responsibility.'[36] Politicians flee from transparency in the same way that we ignore our triggers online: it is a never-ending oscillation between deception and clarity, as we excavate sincerity.

Novelists Joanna Walsh and Sophie Ratcliffe, for example, are two authors that explore the nomadic quality of shame. As writers of autofiction, Walsh's *Break.up* and Ratcliffe's *The Lost Properties of Love,* reconcile loss and regret experienced within relationships. The novels explore those things we leave behind as we move on from connections (from makeup to love letters) as artifacts of shame. Ratcliffe remembers each train journey taken to visit her lover, whilst Walsh returns to shared holiday sites across Europe. There is an act of revisiting here that is essential to the experience of shame: only when both women leave previous journeys behind can they escape the feedback loop of being uprooted from themselves.

Shame can therefore be seen as a critical point of interest between philosophers, psychologists, and due to Kaye Mitchell's direct contribution, literary

[34] David Keen, *Shame: The Politics and Power of an Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 282.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

theorists. There is to date, however, a lack of research into phenomenological accounts of shame that inform both the contained themes and structuring of texts. Whilst Mitchell considers the stylistics and formal devices used to highlight the presence of shame, they relay the importance of the body as a political site of enquiry separate from its positioning *within* time. As an affect, shame discloses the world *to* us as we cannot perceive other entities, and objects without the pre-determined structure of mood. In this sense, a phenomenological account of shame would likely tell us more about the time in which it's experienced, rather than the bodily experience itself – hence, a landscape of shame requires a temporal analysis. This type of enquiry offers an analysis of shame that charts its movement within society, as an expression that *manipulates* the rhythm of texts. In chapter two's analysis of contemporary short story writer, Eley Williams, I focus on the self's latent oscillation between shame and grandiosity and its relationship to vulnerability. Chapter three's interrogation of experimental fiction writer, Tom McCarthy, considers the use of shame as a response to trauma, alongside the observation of promethean shame in the face of a technological world. As both writers experiment with form, shame's fracturing yet cathartic grasp on our orientation within the world becomes a textual feature through its lived experience within time.

My decision to use Eley Williams and Tom McCarthy contextualises this thesis in metamodernism. As a writer of two short story collections and one novel, Williams is intrigued by language and often depicts jaded narrators seeking their most authentic form of self-expression. McCarthy's protagonists are on a similar quest however they are in search of the perfect movement. Communication consists of both perspectives; comprehension is mostly attained by understanding bodily cues and speech. Shame, therefore, disrupts both our ability to accurately communicate our feelings, and our capacity to interpret them. Daniel Shaw views this rupture as a feedback loop that operates from an objective, rather than subjective, view of the self. Shame (and its implicit avoidance) can only be unravelled through expression, 'repair processes are subjective processes that dissolve complementarity.'[37] Williams

[37] Shaw, p. 38.

and McCarthy are undeniably seeking to reframe shame in a way that mirrors the subtlety of its domination in a digital world.

Williams and McCarthy belong to a group of writers working in metamodernism that can be defined as the era after postmodernism in which scholars have come together to, according to Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'create a new language to put into words this altogether weirder reality and its still stranger cultural landscape.'[38] As Fukuyama's 'The End of History'[39] has reached its capacity in terms of explaining the new cultural shift - History has been 'rebooted by recent world historical crises of an ecological, economic or (geo-)political nature'[40] - then we can consider metamodernism as a 'bending of History.'[41] For van den Akker and Vermeulen, this rerouting deserved critical attention thus prompting the formation of the Metamodernism Network. The return to modernist 'forms, techniques and aspirations'[42] reveals a world once again seeking authenticity amidst chaos. Where we once sought external space within changing landscapes, we do so (internally) online. Social media has its own network that mirrors the development of a city - only with much larger stakes. Metamodernism's conceptual framework thus leaves adequate room for interpretation as it is still developing. Its central idea, the metaxy, is not prescriptive, rather, it is an attempt to 'try to grasp the sensibility of the metamodern condition, to comprehend what it means to experience and live in the twenty-first century.'[43] This thesis seeks to insert a phenomenological model of shame (and its repression) as a way in which to explore the metaxy further.

In their 2021 article on the individuation of shame, phenomenologists Daniel Ross and Ouyang Man argue that 'we could thus characterise the feeling of shame in

[38] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 3.
[39] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 1.
[40] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 2.
[41] Ibid.
[42] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After* Postmodernism, p. 3.
[43] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 11.

a manner akin to the Stimmung of *Angst* that Heidegger describes as accompanying the moral knowledge of Dasein and opening up the possibility for a "voice of conscience" that in turn enables an "authentic" existence that is "existentially only a modified grasp of everydayness."'[44] Put simply, Ross and Man support the philosophical model used within this thesis: shame, when viewed phenomenologically, shares the same experiential parameters as Heidegger's Angst (existential anxiety.) The totalising feature of shame functions on two levels – it discloses a *global* negative evaluation of self, and subsequently, it recalibrates a trajectory towards more authentic modes (our self-expression; the spaces we inhabit) of being-in-the-world.

A Heideggerian analysis of shame therefore extends Mitchell's literary enquiry to include a discussion of digital time. As a buffer against entropy, shame 'in some way is always striving for what one cannot "have"'[45], as a self-consuming emotion, it arises during moments when the limits of our imagined selves are confronted with reality: a gap, which becomes increasingly distorted through narcissistic defences. The speed with which we consume information online, particularly of embellishments to lives that we cannot afford to live, is an urgent problem within society. As Tom McCarthy forewarns in *The Making of Incarnation* (2021), data is the invisible enemy that seeks to erase the body as an autonomous site. Whilst we engage in online acts of competition to further Dolezal's concept of self-presentation, we remain oblivious to the eradication of agency that enables the collection of our movements. Zara Dinnen supports this invisible adversary in her research on new technologies, claiming that 'novelty is always being incorporated as the to-be-expected, and the banal is always surfacing as the lived political reality of becoming-with digital media.'[46] Essentially, we are living in an age of dissatisfaction as we are accustomed to novelty, which disrupts the trajectory of our being-in-the-world. The concept of 'becoming-with'[47] thus subverts the distance between our

[44] Daniel Ross and Ouyang Man, 'Towards a metacosmics of shame', in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change: Ominous Transitions*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 103-123 (p. 113).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 168.
[47] Ibid.

bodies and objects as our online selves now disclose what we orient towards, rather than operating from a conscious drive in our physical reality.

In summary, our relationship with shame discloses the uncertainty of living within a digital world. An emotion that has previously been viewed as an interpersonal issue now becomes the landscape within which further transgressions can occur. Shame *is* a landscape, not merely a transaction as the digital world forms the backdrop for all interactions. The aim of contemporary fiction is to navigate this new realm – where modernists sought to calibrate the self and other, metamodern writers recalibrate the real-world self and our online lives. The two writers explored in this thesis use the digital landscape as a predetermined feature within their narratives; Williams considers online dating, social media bullying and parental neglect whilst McCarthy explores PTSD and the mishandling of data. Whilst these issues may appear to be tentatively linked, they are two parts of the same whole. Our data is constantly being archived without our knowing, which informs the struggles we experience everyday (and vice versa – it is symbiotic.) The experimental nature of both writers therefore reveals a phenomenology of shame within an environment that ensures its experience. Our attention is harvested by companies that seek to cause global harm, which on a micro level, impairs our relationships. How can we not feel shame in a world that distracts us from ourselves?

This thesis therefore seeks to understand interpersonal shame as both a symptom *and* formation of a world that rewards individualistic ways of being with others. The following three chapters incorporate Heidegger's phenomenology as a springboard to incorporate more diverse philosophical accounts of the experience of shame, revealing a narrative self that fluctuates between awareness and avoidance. The temporal adaptation of a shamed self subsequently extends van den Akker and Vermeulen's concept of the metaxy whilst bridging the gap between metamodernism and shame studies. Whilst Ross and Man argue that 'what we are currently (barely) living through indeed amounts to an immense regression'[48], I remain hopeful that shame, if acknowledged, signifies a more robust expression of self and a restructuring of authenticity.

[48] Ross and Man, p. 121.

Chapter One: Exploring Shame

Cosmology

But we are that from which draws back a thumb.
- John Berryman

When God was a little boy he stuck his finger in THE VOID.
The VOID felt weird so he pulled back,
Then in a rush to fill the space His finger left,
The void sent out a universe in ripples.

God was ashamed,

So he found a world to play with,
birthed a devil out of his VOID finger,
formed men and women from the dust.

Then he abandoned his shame to us and left.[49]

Shame Studies

Shame is a complex and universal emotion. Philosophers mostly consider shame to be a helpful stepping stone towards living a morally beneficial life as it exposes how we view ourselves and the world around us. If we were to demolish shame, we would not be able to form relationships with others as shame *reveals* the presence of the other; without this acknowledgement we would not be able to access guilt and other emotions based on empathy. Shame therefore can be understood as something

[49] Devin Becker, 'Cosmology', in *Shame/Shame* (New York: BOA Editions, Ltd., 2015), pp. 50-52 (p. 50).

innate to the human experience: whilst it may be 'very painful, and it may be triggered by features of one's environment that often have little to do with moral concerns…it is assumed that shame at least motivates people to avoid transgressions and improprieties of various socially detrimental kinds.'[50] The endurance of shame can thus be found in its hiddenness, not only in the shrinking quality of our response to the emotion, but in its ability to make ordinary situations a moral landscape. As society advances, it is an emotion that cannot be confiscated from our presentation and vocabulary within the world.

Stephen Pattison agrees with the fundamentality of shame, categorising it as 'ontological'[51] or 'inherent'[52] as human awareness 'produces a sense of autonomy and standing out from the rest of creation, but it is accompanied by a sense of abjection or disgust.'[53] Shame is therefore a by-product of being human, and being aware that we exist as ourselves and amongst others who continually perceive us as something we cannot perceive ourselves, is a chronic state. For Pattison, 'many human institutions such as religion and politics are defences against having to acknowledge and own this kind of shame.'[54] Whilst these defences protect us from the disabling feeling of being seen, and feeling powerless amongst a society that requires compliance, it does not account for the shaming that takes place within, and by the hands, of that society. Shame is part of being human; as a secondary emotion, it splits the self and requires an 'observing self'[55] that 'witnesses and denigrates the focal self as unworthy and reprehensible.'[56] When we are perceived incorrectly (whether this is overtly bad or good), the self is made acutely aware of itself, and whilst this can be inherent to the human experience, when we speak of shame, we must speak of those doing the shaming, and the defences at play that enable us to avoid its dismantling grasp (both privately and publicly). As shame can only function

[50] *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, ed. by Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno and Fabrice Teroni (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 45.
[51] Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 86.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] June Price Tangney, Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002), p. 18.
[56] Ibid.

by rooting us directly in a specific place - whilst we consider our past indiscretions and expectations - the internet, specifically social media, acts as a prism, always reflecting our previous thoughts and behaviour back to the focal self. We can therefore be shamed at all points in time as *we are always what we once thought, said, and felt* and this constructs what we will be. If shame can allow us to consider where we are not being authentic, then the internet and new technologies disrupts this idealistic goal.

Social media simultaneously enables shame to be weaponised on a larger scale, (as a landscape, it informs our experiences), whilst also offering a safe-haven for those who have been shamed in 'real-life' and are looking for reinvention (often-times, *not all*, disguised as redemption). Our appearance is both criticised and constructed online, and our viewpoints are shaped by algorithms that act as a vacuum, allowing us to see others with similar opinions to our own without an alternative. As shame provokes a 'motivation to withdraw'[57], then I wonder how we can regroup and reconsider ways to express ourselves more authentically; how to move towards guilt and acceptance, when our lives are continually replayed in the present? The internet works at a relentless pace, with trends often shaping how we live our lives in the present, whilst predicting the future - yet we are tied to the past. New technologies are an operating ground for shame, and as the emotion (the denial of such) responsible for high levels of narcissism, it is no surprise that that the ways we communicate are becoming fractured and inflamed by ego-threatening narratives. Whilst shame has been accepted for its presence in a moral society, it has been criticised for its marginal levels of *personal* growth: Tangney and Dearing conclude that 'guilt may be the moral emotion of the new millennium'[58] as it revolves around 'reparative action.'[59] However, if we want to access guilt, then shame must first be acknowledged.

The experience of this unsettling emotion requires time to be processed and understood which the current digital landscape denies; equally, shame suits the

[57] Tangney and Dearing, p. 127.
[58] Tangney and Dearing, p. 128.
[59] Ibid.

temporality of fast capitalism as we are living in the age of 'iTime'[60], which Ben Agger argues, is characterised by 'the compressed, elastic time of people who are constantly plugged in.'[61] When we experience humiliation online, there is a button presented to us for a swift, angry retort – our ability to engage with criticism prevents shame from being acknowledged, yet the vitriol of responses would be precisely due to the rise of this emotion. When we cannot confront our shame, we become defensive which, if chronic, is a narcissistic trait. Social media can therefore perpetuate aspects of a narcissistically injured self as we avoid the evidence our real lives present to us, trapping us in a state of 'loyal waiting'[62] which is the 'private fantasy construction that puts into play unrequited longings.'[63] The addictive algorithm of 'iTime'[64] reflects to us the person we believe we are however the ephemeral quality of this reassurance requires constant engagement: in places where honesty is left to perish, shame lingers.

The question therefore is not whether shaming leads to quantifiable change, but how it operates in digital spaces and how this is represented in the stories we produce at present. Alfie Bown considers the (seemingly) opposing side of the spectrum as he analyses enjoyment in the age of late-capitalism: 'the point is not so much that society tells us what to enjoy (though it does), but that it tells us to *enjoy* per se…social media seems to make this ring truer than ever, with both Facebook and Instagram appearing not so much like a competition to be 'successful' than our peers…but a competition to be *enjoying* more.'[65] Shame, as we have surmised, exists on the fringes of such spaces when we are exposed for not conforming, however it also causes us to create an avatar outside ourselves, one that exists both online and in real-life to defend our ego from crumbling. It makes sense that our enjoyment can now be taxonomized and priced online, as a subconscious defence against who we are, 'we now see a new mode of subjectivity that corresponds to global capitalism

[60] Ben Agger, *Oversharing: Presentations of Self in the Internet Age* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 8.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Patricia A. DeYoung, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame: A Relational/Neurobiological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 149.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Agger, p. 8.
[65] Alfie Bown, *Enjoying It: Candy Crush and Capitalism* (London: Zero Books, 2015), p.6.

which we can call pathological narcissism, a subject for whom duty is transformed into a duty to enjoy.'[66] What happens when we fall out of line with enjoyment, and what is such enjoyment attempting to conceal? The answer, I believe, leaks out in narratives concerning an existing tension between new technologies and how we now communicate with ourselves and others. In the following chapters, I shall analyse how shame is woven into the fabric of contemporary fiction as it creates a pause to *recalibrate* our morality, and in a time of unparalleled change, it allows us to consider what authenticity truly means in a globalised, virtual world.

Towards a Philosophy of Shame

Philosophers tend to accept shame as an inherent part of society and change, as it is an emotion that defies erasure due to its role in connecting human being with the world. Phil Hutchinson introduces the concept of 'world-taking cognitivism'[67] which argues that 'the emotional state is a way of seeing (taking) the world: being alive to an aspect of the world.'[68] The world, for Hutchinson, refers to the conceptualised notion, rather than the pre-conceptualised (which would consider the 'given world of the natural sciences.'[69]) The conceptualised world is therefore conceived of by 'thinkable concepts through which we take this/our world to have normative properties inseparable from their descriptive properties.'[70] If we take two people and they both watch a mugging, one person might immediately feel ashamed by walking by without intervening. However, the other person may not come to this conclusion – thus, they both have a different understanding of the event. Walking is shame for the first person; however, it might be fear for the second. The difference in these perspectives of the world is due to an 'internal relation'[71]; that is, 'the dawning of an

[66] Bown, p.7.
[67] Phil Hutchinson, *Shame and Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 102.
[68] Hutchinson, p. 103.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

aspect.'[72] The first person had previously integrated the aspect of compliance in the face of a crime, thus viewing it as shame, whereas the second person had not. The difference between these responses (aspects) is the dawning of an aspect: from witnessing an event to experiencing it as feeling ashamed.

Hutchinson argues that 'when we are not alive to such aspects, we can come to be so by means of the dawning of an aspect.'[73] This model of having an emotional response to the world differs from 'reason-giving cognitivism'[74] which is when there is a separate 'brute, given world'[75] and there is us and our beliefs, which leaves room for cynicism and subsequent judgment over having that specific emotional response as it is based on interpretation. World-cognitivism is when, due to 'one's perception of the internal relations, one sees the world as meeting the emotional response'[76], which essentially means 'you *have* the emotional response.'[77] Hutchinson's framework is especially useful when considering shame as, unlike other emotions such as fear, shame occurs when one suspends judgement over having that emotion – it rises up almost spontaneously (which can be seen in the blushing, cowering bodily response.) This could only occur when we do not judge the emotional state we are having, which informs how we view the world in front of us. If we again consider the two people witnessing the crime, the difference is in the integration of the aspect of shame, or as Hutchinson states, being 'alive'[78] to it.

Conversely, when we are not alive to a certain aspect, it does not necessarily mean that we have not had this realisation, rather we might choose to shun it. This turning away can be used as a lens to view shamelessness: 'such a denial of that second nature (Bildung*[79]) which invokes, which activates, relations between the meaning of disgust, dignity, and shame; such a 'turning away'[80], such a denial, a refusal to acknowledge, needs to be, if successful, the product of training, a process whereby the place those concepts have in one's life, the significance they have for

[72] Ibid.
[73] Hutchinson, p. 104.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Hutchinson, p. 105.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Hutchinson, p. 104.
[79] *Bildung meaning education/moral development.
[80] Hutchinson, p. 107.

one, becomes fundamentally altered.'[81] This is a particularly useful framework when we consider how shamelessness operates in the digital landscape of late capitalism as Hutchinson implies that 'turning away'[82] from shame, or shunning the emotion, is a process that requires significant repetition to become an innate way of perceiving the world.

As world-cognitivism means that we 'grasp at a rule'[83] which activates the emotional response due to the internalised aspect, not feeling shame is because we have grasped at a refusal to feel shame: shamelessness, then, is a *choice*. Internal aspects require training of the individual and must be taught, so it follows that a society that is built on competition and constant surveillance does not invoke the need to integrate shame as a helpful way of viewing the world. I use the term helpful, in this instance, as an internalised acknowledgement of our own privileges and shortcomings that if (reconciled collectively) could aid change. Hutchinson is keen to separate his framework from being another theory, rather it is an attempt to present 'the emotional expression so as to bring to light, by describing the meaning relations in play, the resources which serve to give sense to that emotion.'[84]

In his book, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, Carl D. Schneider also argues that shame has an important social value with its roots in 'moral obligation'[85] (shamelessness is therefore a 'moral deficiency.'[86]) This sense of shame, for Schneider, 'recognises what is the proper attitude, the fitting response'[87] which he categorises as 'discretion-shame.'[88] When we are behaving incorrectly, or harmfully, it is through shame that we can act in accordance with society's moral values as we perceive a context that is greater than ourselves - shame, then, 'is not just a feeling, but reflects an *order of things*.'[89] As a corrective action, shame thus builds morality from the inside out as we are always acting within a society. As social creatures, we

[81] Hutchinson, p. 108.
[82] Hutchinson, p. 107.
[83] Hutchinson, p. 104.
[84] Hutchinson, p. 134.
[85] Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992), p. 19.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Schneider, p. 20.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

do not want to feel excluded due to something we inherently *are* (this is more easily explained through psychoanalytic accounts of shame as fear of rejection, ridicule etc which can be summarised as a fear of rejection.) The individual feeling of being ashamed differentiates from the previous example of a corrective strategy as it occurs after the emotion. When we have been humiliated or rejected, ('disgrace-shame'[90]), our sense of time – and subsequently our sense of self – feels disoriented and we experience an identity collapse. This suffering is connected to the ego as 'disgrace-shame is a painful experience of the disintegration of one's world.'[91] During this moment, both our external and internal world have been disrupted by the presence of another which is unexpected: 'shame burns.'[92] When we see ourselves through the perspective of another, we can see not only the relational aspect of shame, but as Schneider argues, its 'revelatory capacity'; it is by witnessing these parts which we ordinarily conceal, that enable growth.

The unveiling mechanism of shame has a purpose which Silvan Tomkins notes in his early example of children covering their faces when embarrassed in front of a stranger, yet they still peek through fingers to look at the person in front of them. Shame is therefore categorised as 'deeply ambivalent'[93] contrasted to the 'univalent affects of disgust and contempt.[94]' Put simply, if we feel good about ourselves to some degree, we can feel shame; if we are filled with self-loathing, we perceive rejection and thus, contempt for the other will surface. Shame can therefore be seen as transformative through its difficulties, and as this thesis argues, whilst the experience disrupts temporality to a significant degree, there is an undeniability in the process that can lead to growth and authenticity. It is part of a broader framework of living alongside others that ensures we consistently consider the presence (and thus, *value*) of another person, even when such constant assimilation of knowing ourselves feels disruptive to our established place in the world.

Krista Thomason also supports the morality of shame, arguing that 'those who point out shame's negative face assume that if an emotion is dark and damaging,

[90] Schneider, p. 22.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Schneider, p. 27.
[94] Ibid.

we would be better off without it. They further assume that we can (with effort no doubt) temper, downplay, and ultimately root out feelings like shame.'[95] If we attempt to erase shame, then we attempt to hide ourselves in wider society as there are differing levels of embarrassment between individuals: for example, a person could feel ashamed by their appearance when being rejected by a group; likewise, another person could feel ashamed by their appearance being appreciated by a group. This is an example of the 'dark side of shame'[96], which is when the emotion occurs *irrationally*. Thomason argues that 'genuine shame is the moral kind that occurs when we fail to live up to our ideals, but false shame occurs when we have standards or norms imposed upon us.'[97]

The previous examples are evidence of 'false shame'[98] as, in both instances, the body is deemed shameful due to how it is perceived. Firstly, the person who is rejected has an irrational response to the situation as it is not their fault they haven't been included; secondly, the person feeling ashamed over the positive reception of their body is aware of their sexuality being appreciated hence the emotion is irrational considering the circumstances. These types of shame have largely been dismissed by previous accounts of moral shame as the irrational nature of this experience does not account for the person's experience. Thomason questions whether an emotion can truly be experienced irrationally, or whether it is a logical response to an irrational set of false beliefs maintained by the person. Either way, it is troublesome to have a theory that 'attempts to explain some phenomenon, but then has to classify the most recognisable instances of that phenomenon as somehow anomalous.'[99]

Thomason maintains that previous theories of shame have not grasped the totalising aspect of the emotion beyond its morality, without disregarding such features as irrational. Rather than extend this dichotomy, she argues that 'shame can be a morally valuable emotion, but here I am primarily concerned with the contours

[95] Krista K. Thomason, *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 7.
[96] Thomason, p. 31.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Thomason, p. 40.

of shame – what its features are and why we feel it when we do – rather than its moral appropriateness or moral value.'[100] This 'unified account of shame' follows Sartre's phenomenological account in Being and Nothingness which essentially argues that 'Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object, but in general of being *an* object; that is, of r*ecognising myself* in this degraded, fixed, dependent being which I am for the Other.'[101] Sartre's shame revolves around the idea that we cannot control how we are perceived by another. Thomason extends this concept as she defines shame as existing when we feel a tension between 'our self-conception and our identity.'[102] To differentiate between these elements: self-conception is the way 'we represent ourselves to ourselves either on the whole or in particular moments'[103], whereas our identity is 'comprised of contingent features of our individual histories as well as the way we come across to others'[104] – shame exists when parts of our identity overshadows our self-conception. Thomason's theory accounts for the shame referenced in the two examples of being either rejected or appreciated within a group of strangers. Whereas previous studies of the morality of shame would have viewed this case-study as irrational, Thomason's account explains how shame can exist when people think positively of us (in the second case, the person's sexual identity overshadows how they view their own body.) This unifying theory also enables us to further identify the phenomenology of shame as 'the feeling of smallness is the feeling of our self-conception being dwarfed by the aspect of our identities that inspires our shame.'[105]

Shame is therefore inescapable as we each have our own self-conception and identity – social media however introduces a new platform for this discrepancy to occur as we build the former often at the expense of the latter. Thomason maintains the moral value of feelings of shame but concludes that 'moral value does not entail any conclusions about the moral appropriateness of inviting shame, shaming, or stigmatising…we can condemn flaws and bad behaviour without holding people up

[100] Thomason, p. 85.
[101] Thomason, p. 86.
[102] Thomason, p. 87.
[103] Thomason, p. 93.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Thomason, p. 103.

for scorn and without mocking them.'[106] Shame therefore upholds a sense of morality as we must continually revisit the reality of our self-conception in terms of its relation to our identity. When our self-concept is too inflated or too low, our reality will not reflect the accuracy of both aspects of self, and we will be at risk of experiencing chronic shame due to our behaviours. Whilst this corrective mechanism is important for a cohesive self (and society), the methods of highlighting this disconnect are troublesome particularly on a digital landscape where tone, misinformation and abuse are tolerated.

The Psychology of Shame

In terms of impact, shame could be identified as the most disabling emotion. It is the 'affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation. Though terror speaks to life and death and distress makes of the world a value of tears, yet shame strikes deepest into the heart of man.'[107] Affect theorist, Silvan Tomkins, categorises the felt experience of shame as belonging to the 'shame-humiliation'[108] affect which encompasses each element of shyness, shame, and guilt. Whilst shyness and guilt can certainly exist without shame, the 'central assembly'[109] of all three is present in this difficult emotion. Shame is nonverbal, and when experienced more pathologically, originates in the pre-verbal stage of development. It 'reduces facial communication'[110] as the individual no longer wants to meet the gaze of the other and they feel the need to hide themselves. Tomkins describes the consequence of this exposure as 'a complete reduction of interest or joy'[111] resulting in further depressive states. If we are to consider the root cause of many mood disorders, the tendrils of shame are responsible for how a person perceives the world around them.

[106] Thomason, p. 215.
[107] *Shame and Its Sisters, A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 133.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Sedgwick and Frank, p. 134.
[111] Ibid.

What separates shame, however, from other affects such as disgust is the direct attack on a person's dignity, 'shame guarantees a perpetual sensitivity to any violation of the dignity of man.'[112]

As the expression 'saving face' denotes, our identity and connection to others is tied to our facial communication which is directly altered the moment that we feel ashamed i.e. through blushing, lack of eye contact and turning away from someone. During the moment of shaming, the individual will either respond with 'shame-humiliation'[113], or 'contempt-disgust'[114]; the former prompts introspection and is an affect 'linked with love and identification'[115] as it has a reparative quality. The negative affect of 'contempt-disgust is linked with individuation and hate'[116] as the individual will respond aggressively. Tomkins considers both effects of shame to communicate the differences between a democratic versus a hierarchical society: the first has the transformative quality wherein the subject will acknowledge their wrongdoing and seek to amends, the latter will isolate the individual through control to maintain distance.

Our response to shame is as much a social one as it is an individual concern. In a democratic society, we are encouraged to feel 'empathic shame'[117] which allows empathy to reroute blame towards accountability. At present, we do not allocate sufficient time or funding towards the resources required in this process: more families struggle with the stressors of living in a cost-of-living crisis which means more pressure at home. Without proper attunement, there is a greater risk of causing the type of shame that is assembled in the nervous system (chronic shame); a condition that is much harder to rectify further perpetuating a shame-avoidant (or, narcissistic) society. Psychologist Gershen Kaufman agrees with Tomkins, arguing that 'the changes which have produced our technological society have in turn created new challenges for the individual seeking to develop a secure identity in the wake of such accelerating conditions'[118] as we are more exposed to 'societal change, societal

[112] Sedgwick and Frank, p. 136.
[113] Sedgwick and Frank, p. 139.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1992), p. 76.

mobility, bureaucracy, depersonalisation, alienation, and felt powerlessness.' Navigating these changes after a pandemic that further dismantled the boundaries between our real and online selves, for example, requires an assured sense of self that is fluid enough to allow moments of shame, without collapsing in on itself.

Phenomenological Shame

Phenomenologists view the world as a process of revealing itself to us (which, in turn, situates ourselves within the world.) It is a relational dynamic in which 'structural elements and features are examined as they actually manifest themselves.'[119] We cannot examine shame therefore without considering its relation to both time and space – as a self-evaluative emotion, 'that involves concern and attention about oneself…it may have the power for self-break'[120], it freezes the individual in time, whilst reflecting on missed opportunities, idealising a nostalgic state. Shame connects both the individual and society in a strange rupturing wherein we become painfully aware of our present shortfalls whilst lamenting expectations from the past. How we choose to process (or, avoid) this shame informs how we progress towards the future. In this sense, shame can be said to have an 'ontological dimension that is at the core of our being and opens new dimensions and perspectives on self and world.'[121]

Shame's complex temporal *structure,* (one that is reflexive whilst being rooted in a specific time, within a specific locale) is a useful lens in which to view this emotion as it situates the experience within a network of social processes. As a guiding emotion, shame prompts us to note the gulf between certain rules within society, and the restrictions of those rules. These moments of exile are painful and

[119] Gunter Harry Sedler, *In Others' Eyes: An Analysis of Shame*, trans. by Andrew Jenkins (Connecticut: International University Press, 2000), p. 1.
[120] Yohanes Budiarto, Avin Fadilla Helmi, 'Shame and Self-Esteem: A Meta-Analysis', *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 17.2 (2021) 131-145 (p. 133) https://ejop.psychopen.eu/index.php/ejop/article/view/2115/2115.pdf [accessed 12 August 2024].
[121] Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen, 'Introduction', in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1-11 (p. 3).

can often only be felt by the individual on reflection, as the moment feels too humiliating, too disturbing to verbalise – however once understood, it can point towards something different: not, I would argue, false expectations imposed upon the self, but modes of authenticity, or areas in which we lack honest expression. Shame, then, as this thesis argues becomes *reconstructive* (in terms of affect and aesthetics.) Chad Engelland argues that inauthenticity forces us to 'shrink from the truth of things and ourselves, obstinately dwelling superficially among the topics of our lives.'[122] A phenomenological account therefore differs from a philosophical (understanding the expression of an emotion), and the psychoanalytic (unveiling the unconscious origins of an emotion), as this is an analysis of the *self within time*.

Heideggerian phenomenologist, Sandra Bartky, argues that, whilst language is not gender neutral, neither is feeling when it comes to the differences between men and women. Following Heidegger's model of attunement which discloses our state of being-in-the-world, Bartky maintains that 'women are more shame-prone than men, that shame is not so much a particular feeling or emotion (although it involves specific feelings and emotions) as a pervasive affective attunement to the social environment.'[123] Bartky's shame is a 'psychic distress occasioned by a self or a state of the self apprehended as inferior, defective, or in some way diminished.'[124] The emotion requires the gaze of another which invalidates our sense of self, and consequently our self within a social network – it speaks to who we are (or, more accurately, are *not*) on a deeper level.

Whilst teaching female college students, Bartky discovered a difference in how women answered questions in class compared to their male counterparts. Even when submitting assignments, female students apologised for the quality of their work, which turned out to be good, however this style of communication was ingrained in how they oriented the classroom. This shame could not be classified entirely as a 'belief as a *feeling* of inferiority or a *sense* of inferiority.'[125] Through

[122] Chad Engelland, *Phenomenology* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020), p. 109.
[123] Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 85.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Bartky, p. 94.

witnessing this exchange, Bartky concluded that women do no experience shame 'at the level of belief, but the corrosive character of shame and of similar sensings, their undermining effect and the peculiar helplessness women exhibit when in their power, lies in part in the very failure of these feelings to attain to the status of belief.'[126] Moral psychology has previously situated the shamed experience as a universal affect, however the way in which shame discloses the individual to his/herself is very much dependent on a subset of categories (gender, race, class.) In this sense, Bartky emancipates shame from the restrictive (and seemingly invisible) patriarchy of psychoanalytic categories by arguing that, for those who are 'shame-ridden and shame-prone'[127], there is no such equilibrium to which to return: '"Feeling inadequate" may colour a person's entire emotional life.'[128]

In summary, Bartky's use of phenomenology reveals the hidden networks within which moral emotions occur. Choosing to situate shame as a mood that disclosed her students' being-in-the-world, she realised it was not a belief that impacted their speech and demeanour, but an invisible affectedness which, in turn, disclosed shyness, humiliation etc. Phenomenology is a methodology that is inextricably linked to temporality - understanding shame as a fracturing pause therefore repositions contemporary theories towards a new way of *revealing* the rhythms of a digital landscape.

Heidegger's shame

'Shame can thus be seen to occupy a structurally similar place – a *topos* – to anxiety in Heidegger's fundamental ontology of which it is claimed too that if it does not set itself through this is because it is simply suppressed.'[129]

[126] Bartky, p. 95.
[127] Bartky, p. 96.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Visker, p. 10.

'…this is how Anders *interprets Being and Time* – as the *problem* of the relationship between the *who* and the *it*: "*Being and Time'* is about the attempt of the "I" (which is ashamed-of-itself) to overcome the disgrace of being an "it" and to become "itself."'[130]

My decision to use Heidegger as the key phenomenologist in this thesis might be considered an unusual choice as he does not reference shame in his philosophical works. Outside of Rudi Visker's interpretation that shame 'shares a similar topos to anxiety'[131] for Heidegger, there is little research connecting the philosopher with this emotion. As previously stated, my intention is to map out a phenomenology of shame in contemporary fiction, rather than attributing to it a moral purpose (though recognition of it points to authenticity). Heidegger's phenomenological method, based here on the 1927 work *Being and Time* wants to answer the question of being: specifically, how do we overcome the metaphysics of presence? Heidegger sought to investigate the state of Being before conceptualising human beings – why, in the Western philosophical tradition had this primordial structure evaded enquiry? What are we in relation to ourselves and others, and the surrounding world, and how to answer this without straying into anthropology or psychology? Heidegger found his answer in the concept of Dasein, 'this entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being'[132], and believed that to understand Being, we could not separate ourselves from the temporal space we each inhabit – put simply, we are time.

Heidegger did not agree that the answer to this question of Being could be traced back to some mythical origin, as he argued that Being simultaneously reveals and conceals itself to us as we are made aware of ourselves through time. This

[130] Daniel Ross, 'The pharmacology of shame, or Promethean, Epimethean and Antigonian temporality', in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change: Ominous Transitions*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 158-185 (p. 168).
[131] Visker, p. 10.
[132] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), p. 27.

structure, he stated, showed a 'remarkable relatedness backward or forward'[133], rather than previous 'circular reasoning'[134] that allows us to not only interrogate the state of Being, but illuminate the need for enquiry in the first place. Dasein, unlike objects, plants, animals etc has its own structure as the question of Being is an 'issue for it'[135] – as Heidegger argues this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being; understanding Being in relation to itself is 'ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological.'[136] For Heidegger, human beings are thrown into a world which continuously reveals itself to us through our relation to objects, those things 'ready-to-hand'[137]: however we are only made aware of those tools/objects available to us through their function and relation to other objects. If an object reveals itself to us and is faulty for example, it is 'present-at-hand'[138] as it does not disclose an immediate standpoint in the world, however it does not vanish. The importance is placed on context, and this differentiates those things that are ready-to-hand and 'present-at-hand'[139]: things themselves do not have inherent purpose yet their useability in relation to us (Dasein)is what discloses the 'worldly character of the environment.'[140]

The structure of Being of those things ready-to-hand can be 'determined by references or assignments.'[141] Objects are therefore implicated by the potential to become equipment – when we use such tools, the world is opened up to us, however when an item is unusable, and the 'assignment has been disturbed'[142], the positioning towards the project is revealed to us, announcing not only the faulty tools but the project itself. The context, therefore, of working tools is 'lit up'[143], not by the presence of the objects themselves but as Heidegger argues, 'a totality sighted beforehand in circumspection.'[144] The consideration is not that all things have their

[133] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 102.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 105.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

place, rather, their place exists in relation *with each other.* When objects are unsuitable for their intended purpose, and they become 'un-ready-to-hand'[145], revealing their 'presence-at-hand', they do so by three ways: conspicuousness (item cannot be used); obtrusiveness (we are missing an item); obstinacy (items appear as obstacles to our project.) The objects we surround ourselves with are positioned and made available through their collaboration with Dasein towards a goal, a 'towards-which'[146] of serviceability – essentially the world is revealed through our involvement with the surrounding environment. When the function of an object becomes maladaptive, it can *also* cause shame. This concept is explored further in chapter three through the work on *Remainder* (2005).

It is not only alongside objects that Dasein finds his/herself within-the-world, but amongst others. While Dasein is 'absorbed'[147] in the world, we encounter '*Others*'[148] which cannot be reduced to those things ready-to-hand, or present-at-hand. The Other in this context, capitalised by Heidegger and will correlate here, stands for those beings that Dasein experiences 'environmentally'[149], not through the self-awareness and subsequent judgment in the face of such beings, but those we come across as we comport ourselves within our own lives. In short, this explains the digital landscape as a phenomenological experience – we are aware of the lives of others through our interactions (likes, shares and other engagements) yet are lives do not truly intersect.

The ontological structure of Dasein is that it finds 'itself proximally in *what* it does, uses, expects, avoids – in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with which it is proximally concerned'[150]; we are always acting in connection (Being-with) with other people: as objects can only act alongside neighbouring tools, our structure of Being is relational. This does not mean, however, that we need to acknowledge the Other to confirm their presence, the Other is always part of Dasein's being-in-the-world (digital landscape.) Even if we choose to shut ourselves from society and

[145] Ibid.
[146] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 114.
[147] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 149.
[148] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 154.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

isolate, we still inhabit the world through Being-with as 'knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially.'[151] Similar to how we experience those objects ready-to-hand through concern, we experience Others through care. However, what happens when we experience the Other beyond those meetings environmentally (when we both encounter the same place; same sequential behaviours) – how do we talk about the *who* of the Other?

Heidegger states 'the "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "they" [das Man].'[152] The "they" is revealed through the collapse of distinct barriers between Dasein and the Other: furthermore, Being-with-one-another 'dissolves one's own Dasein into the kind of Being of "the Others."'[153] The "they" allows Dasein to exist in the Being of everydayness which is an average, mindless state of being wherein we are not confronted with individuating flashes of anxiety regarding our ownmost potential (death). The "they" is an existentiale: an inherent framework of living within any world, and one that cannot be eradicated from Dasein's structure: it is not a specific person, or group, but a familiarity as 'everyone is the other, and no one is himself.'[154] The "they" is both everyone and no-one and cannot be disentangled from Dasein's Being as we are always Being-with-others.

The concept of 'the they'[155] forms a considerable part of my analysis as it accounts for a regulatory structure within society that permits shameless behaviour. Dasein's purpose is to continually extricate itself from the clutches of das Man whilst continuing to co-exist with others. In chapter three, McCarthy's *The Making of Incarnation* (2021) is a novel directly concerned with the associated guilt, and shame, as the characters struggle to reconcile their participation in the collection and exploitation of data. For Kevin Thompson, the challenge of Heidegger's analysis is that 'it shows that conventions are part and parcel of what it is to be an agent at a

[151] Heidegger*, Being and Time,* p. 161.
[152] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[153] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 165.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.

level much deeper than the order of reflection upon one's motivations.'[156] This depth exists due to Dasein's structure wherein conventionality *is* part of its ontological definition. When 'the they' increasingly act with less shame, our motivations are also impacted due to our innate association with 'the they.' A large part of contemporary life is designated towards mindless living - the novel subsequently reflects this changing ontological state through its experimental form as we both move towards and away from addressing our collective shame.

Heidegger moves his analysis along from explicating the 'essential relations'[157] of Dasein as 'Being alongside the world, towards Being-with-others and one's-Self '"who"'[158] into an interrogation of Being-in (there). Wherever Dasein exists, it takes its 'there' with it: 'Dasein is its disclosedness.'[159] As the concept of 'there' is not something present-at-hand, it is an existential enquiry which reveals the state of everydayness to be one of 'falling'[160] which has 'its own movement.'[161] Dasein is revealed to itself, in order to inhabit and interpret the world through the phenomena of mood (Stimmung), which Heidegger allocates a meaning to beyond the psychological. Moods enable us to exist within the world as it situates us in a specific time, and therefore *place*, 'in this "how one is", having a mood brings Being to its "there."'[162]

As the structure of mood precedes cognition of a specific type of emotional state, this framework is equiprimordial do Dasein's Being; it is through moods that Dasein can find itself, not merely as a lens in which we perceive ourselves, but as a positioning that enables us to turn away from the 'burdensome character of Dasein.'[163] This positioning within time is called 'thrownness'[164] as we turn away from the overwhelming question of Being, as the world is disclosed to us through 'bare

[156] Kevin Thompson, 'The Historicality of das Man: Foucault on Docility and Optimality', in *From Conventionalism to Social Authenticity*, ed. by Hans Bernhard Schmid and Gerhard Thonhauser (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 101-114 (105).
[157] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 169.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Heidegger*, Being and Time,* p. 172.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 173.
[163] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174.
[164] Ibid.

mood'[165]: essentially it is impossible for us to experience Being-in-the-world without this structure, and it is what separates us from other entities like those things 'present-at-hand.' Heidegger summarises the concept of mood as stating that 'having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons.'[166]

Individual affects and feelings are parts of the state-of-mind which Dasein is only capable of experiencing because the world is previously disclosed to us through mood. As we have asserted, Dasein find itself in a specific time and place through this disclosure, each setting of the everydayness – 'publicness, as the kind of Being which belongs to the "they"'[167], has its own type of mood in which we speak and act in accordance with that mood. Essentially, we find ourselves thrown into this world, amidst certain social structures and norms and operate within those settings before we even begin to acknowledge specific affects that are constituted within those spheres. In the section on *Remainder* (2005) in chapter three, the narrator watches people and traces the patterns of their movements. As his being-in-the-world has been impacted by a traumatic event, he is no longer contained by the previous practices into which he was thrown. As he seeks to *recalibrate* his trauma, the mapping of people's movements reveal his pre-existing judgments.

The state-of-mind which we occupy is the existential way in which we are 'disclosed in our thrownness'[168], meaning our feelings and affects day-to-day disclose the type of mood structure we surrender to as part of everydayness. Heidegger argues that a predominant state-of-mind is fear, not to be confused with the existential mood, anxiety (Angst). Fear is always fear towards something threatening, 'in fearing as such, what we have thus characterised as threatening is freed and allowed to matter to us.'[169] We cannot occupy some future state of being afraid of something: fear reveals the proximity of something which would threaten us, and when this is removed from sight, the fear decreases. Fear therefore reveals those

[165] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.
[166] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174.
[167] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 180.

things within our reach/sight that would harm us and highlights the space between ourselves and the things we fear, 'Being-in'[170], disclosing the world around us. Alongside state-of-mind, Being-there is *understanding,* that is to say, the *possibility* for Dasein exists equiprimordially alongside 'state-of-mind' as disclosing the world in which Dasein finds itself. This possibility is not some 'free-floating potentiality-for Being', but an awareness that Dasein's Being is *potential*, which is very thing that makes it so. Understanding is rooted in possibilities, whose structure Heidegger refers to as, '"projection."'[171] Projection is part of our thrownness – as we are thrown into in this world, we are carried along by '"projecting"'[172], which is not 'comporting'[173] towards a pre-arranged plan of Being, but the movement in which Dasein is able to carry itself, disclosing the world through these possibilities. Dasein *is* its possibilities.

Heidegger continues the existeniale structure of 'Being-there' through his analysis of language. It has been stated that 'Being-there' discloses our state of Being-in-the-world through state-of-mind and understanding, which also lends itself to interpretation (how we process that which is made possible to us). Language, for Heidegger, has its ontological foundation in 'discourse or talk.'[174] Discourse is equiprimordial to state-of-mind and understanding as the 'intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any positive interpretation of it.'[175] The way in which Being-there is understood, disclosing our state of Being-in-the-world is 'expressed as discourse'[176] which is then communicated through language.

Shame is often accompanied by a trace that, if unprocessed, often prompts rage or avoidant behaviours. As our orientation within the world is informed by an interpretation of discourse, shame fractures intelligibility. Eley Williams' short story collections, *Attrib. and other stories* and *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* sit at the intersection between intelligibility and ambiguity. As discourse informs speech

[170] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 182.
[171] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 185.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 203.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 205.

(articulation), Heidegger's model allows for an analysis of the linguistic impact of shame, thus furthering the reconstructive practices adopted by metamodern writers.

Through our state-of-mind and understanding our potential within our thrownness, we find ourselves able to process this through discourse, which is spoken as language as this contains a '"worldly" Being of its own.'[177] As part of our 'Being-with' is 'Being-with-one-another'[178], this is discursive as 'assenting or refusing, as demanding or waning, as pronouncing, consulting, or interceding, as "making assertion", and as talking in the way of "giving a talk."'[179] Discourse articulates our intelligibility of the world to ourselves, discloses Dasein in Being-in-the-world and our 'Being-with' becomes shared (we become aware of this sharing) which is *then* expressed through language. In essence, 'discourse which expresses itself is communication.'[180] Heidegger provides the example of '"poetical" discourse'[181], which is when the 'communication of the existential possibilities of one's state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence.'[182]

There are many ways in which to categorise and systematise language, from the ideas of 'expression'[183], to the 'making-known of experiences'[184], to 'the patterning of life.'[185] Language therefore articulates our state-of-mind however it does not guarantee positive interpretation from others as a) the other may not have heard, 'listening to…is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others,'[186] and b) language could have been misinterpreted by the other. There is of course, a type of talk that constitutes everydayness, '"idle talk"'[187], which is not something pejorative, however is a form of discourse that belongs to the 'they' and the everyday existence of Dasein. Heidegger underlines his argument as not a

[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 211.
[181] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 206.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 212.

'moralising critique of everyday Dasein'[188], but one that understands the everyday nature of '"falling."'[189]

Heidegger's concept of 'idle talk'[190], alongside 'the they'[191] mentioned previously, constitutes the temporal aspect of my phenomenological model. In his work on philosophy and authenticity, David Egan compares Heidegger's 'idle talk' to sophistry, claiming that 'the discursive trifler is closer to the sort of person who in engages in Heidegger's "idle talk."'[192] Represented as a figure that deliberately wastes time, chapter three's discussion on *The Making of Incarnation* (2021), reveals this type of interaction as lacking empathy. 'Idle talk', however, not only refers to the direct communication experienced as part of 'the they', but it also points to an aspect of the digital landscape that priorities expansion over connection. 'Idle talk' is the noise of the digital space into which we are disclosed as beings-in-the-world. Its function, whilst distracting, is not entirely negative as we have historically always engaged in light-hearted communication - the digital landscape is a mirror to our real lives; however, it is the sheer size and speed of its development that is problematic. Shame therefore occurs when we only situate ourselves within 'idle talk' as it requires constant self-monitoring. Obsessive rumination also applies to this form of communication as it prevents clarity, which is explored further in Eley Williams' short story, 'Wilgefortis', from *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good* (2024) in chapter two.

Temporality can be divided into three parts for Heidegger: past/thrownness; future/understanding; present/fallen-ness. The everydayness of the "they" is where we spend most of our life – it is being in a group, present with others, 'Being-with' is to be alongside the other as a constitutive part of Being-in-the-world. Even when we are alone, we are only capable of feeling this loneliness because our ontological structure is Being-with; so, when we are not with others, because that is how we experience the world, we are able to feel lonely. 'Falling' is where we find ourselves after we have been thrown into this world: this 'absorption in…has mostly the

[188] Ibid.
[189] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 219.
[190] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 212.
[191] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[192] David Egan, *The Pursuit of an Authentic Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Heidegger & the Everyday* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 128).

character of Being-lost in the publicness of the "they". Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the '"world."'[193] Heidegger refers to this state of everydayness as 'inauthentic'[194], however it is important to note that this does not mean Dasein loses sense of its Being, rather it is the state that Dasein most finds itself in – it instead amounts to 'a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world – the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the "they."'[195]

The type of communication predominantly found in everydayness, 'idle talk' specifically 'discloses to Dasein a Being towards its world, towards Others, and towards itself – a Being in which these are understood, but in a mode of groundless floating.'[196] 'Idle talk' is interconnected with *curiosity* as how we perceive the world (beyond perception) and *ambiguity* as the way in which we disclose what is and what is not, (though not something 'aiming explicitly at disguise or distortion, and that is it not something which the individual Dasein first conjures up.'[197]) Curiosity is taking an interest beyond what is readily available, it 'seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters…it is concerned with the constant possibility of *distraction*.'[198] This unparalleled attentiveness means that curiosity is 'everywhere and nowhere…nothing is closed off'[199], and combined with 'idle talk' for which 'there is nothing that is not understood', collectively guarantees a 'life which, supposedly, is genuinely lively.'[200] Ambiguity however ensures that 'what is genuinely and newly created is out of date as soon as it emerges before the public'[201] – it is a type of suspicion that allows us, alongside curiosity and through 'idle talk' to live alongside each other without upsetting the everyday structure of things. Ambiguity is Dasein's unsureness while disclosing Being-in-the-world, it is the

[193] Heidegger*, Being and Time,* p. 220.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 221.
[197] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 219.
[198] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 216.
[199] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 217.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 218.

'ambiguous watching of one another, secret and reciprocal listening-in…under the mask of "for-one-another", and "against-one-another" is in play.'[202]

The combination of 'idle talk', curiosity and ambiguity 'characterise the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is "there."'[203] Living presently in everydayness is to live inauthentically, however this inauthenticity is necessary for Dasein as through the 'self-certainty and decidedness of the "they", it gets spread abroad increasingly that there is no need of authentic understanding or the state-of-mind that goes with it.'[204] Put simply, the inauthentic state of 'falling' that defines living in the present, allows Dasein to co-exist with Others, and as 'Being-with' is a necessary position for Dasein as Being-in-the-world, it is part of our ontology. Heidegger states that the 'supposition of the "they" that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine 'life', brings Dasein a *tranquillity*, for which everything is 'in the best order' and all doors are open.'[205] The tranquil state that falling provides for Dasein, however, is not one of rest and stagnation but one that promotes hustling and strives to perform as part of meeting the expectations of the "they."' This tranquillity, and the *understanding* of it, leads to an alienating state.

In terms of a digital landscape, the experience of 'falling' can be identified through our desperate engagement with content that disconnects instead of connects. The Endless loops found in social media feeds deliberately replicate our need to escape ourselves. Heidegger's alienation here is not used to signify a state of being 'torn away from itself', rather, it is a state in which Dasein is unconcerned with authenticity and the possibilities that exist for itself. As human beings, our desire to fit in is part of collective consciousness and Heidegger's analysis allows this experience to exist as part of our totalised experience. Dasein is always 'falling' as part of our navigating thrownness, and this 'downward plunge' into the 'groundlessness' of everydayness creates a sense of turbulence. My exploration of the digital space allows these societal movements to be revealed through a material analysis: as Bown argues in his work on pleasure, 'enjoyment structures and

[202] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 219.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 222
[205] Ibid.

constructs us as modern subjects rather than reflecting who we are already are.'[206] Equally, so does shame through its *unveiling* of these distractions.

'Thrownness', 'projection' and 'falling' make up the three dimensions of care, as Heidegger states, 'Dasein's Being reveals itself as *care*'[207], which is not an act of good-will, but rather the total state of Dasein within which we enact our possibilities of what Dasein can *be.* If the state of everydayness and living 'Being-with' the "they" (das Man) is inauthenticity, and the alternative is not an awareness of something superior above our movement of 'falling', then authenticity must be something which causes us to face ourselves. This meeting of oneself, is anxiety. Unlike fear, which is always fear of something proximally close to us, this fleeing and turning away that is present in 'falling' is fleeing in the face of something that shares the same 'character of threatening; yet this entity has the same kind of Being as the one that shrinks back: it is Dasein itself.'[208] Fear disappears when the fearsome object ready-to-hand or present-at-hand is no longer in view, however anxiety is a state-of-mind which first allows fear to be present – 'Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world.'[209] Anxiety, therefore, is not the state of being anxious in the face of something, but 'as a state-of-mind, it is anxiety *about* something.'

When we are anxious, we are no longer aware of those entities ready-to-hand and the Others we live alongside 'Being-with', we are isolated and feel out of place amongst our surroundings. Anxiety individuates as we become conscious of own potential and 'Being-free for'[210] within the world; through this anxiousness, we feel 'uncanny'[211]: there is an underlying sense of 'nothing and nowhere'[212] as uncanniness is 'not-being-at-home.'[213] In terms of fallen-ness, it can be shown that we are fleeing towards, not in the face of, entities as we become absorbed in the everydayness of the 'they'- anxiety therefore 'brings it (Dasein) back from its absorption in the "world." Everyday familiarity collapses.'[214] Torn away from the tranquil state of

[206] Bown, p. 70.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 230.
[209] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.

Being-with Others, anxiety pulls us out of the uncanniness of everydayness, a state which is the 'essential'[215] state of Being-in-the-world. Only because anxiety is the ontological structure at the very depths of Dasein's Being, can anxiousness be felt on a physiological level.

The fracturing experience of shame shares a similar structure to existential anxiety (Angst). As the experience of anxiety reveals our finitude as being-towards-death, it projects us towards a more authentic way of being-in-the-world. In her work on Heidegger and responsibility, Francois Raffoul argues that 'Heidegger's corpus, it is perhaps not stressed enough, entails a major thought of responsibility.'[216] For Raffoul, responsibility is revealed through the call of conscience which is a pre-determinative feature of Angst: *shame, therefore, equally reveals a collective sense of duty as it exists as a moral function*.

Dasein is always moving towards its own possibilities, or potential-for-Being, which Heidegger calls '"Being-ahead-of-itself"[217], and as we are thrown into a world in which we are abandoned to ourselves (as revealed through anxiety), we experience this through '"care" [Sorge.]'[218] 'Care' embraces the ways 'Being may be characterised'[219], as Heidegger does not use this as a reference to refer only to oneself, but as a way to connect the state of Being-in (alongside Others, the 'they'), and Being alongside (those entities ready-to-hand) – 'Being-in-the-world is essentially care.'[220] The 'itself' that is referenced in "Being-ahead-of-itself" also belongs to the 'they' as, 'even in authenticity, Dasein remains essentially ahead of itself.'[221] The structure of care, therefore, precedes any phenomena and cannot be reduced to a 'special act or drive like willing and wishing or urge and addiction'[222], care is the primordial structural totality: it is the state of Being-in-the-world through which we experience those other entities.

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[215] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234.
[216] Francois Raffoul, 'The Question of Responsibility', in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, ed. by John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014), pp. 175-206 (p. 192).
[217] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 236.
[218] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 237.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 238.
[222] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 240.

Heidegger's analysis until now has revealed that Dasein's basic state is Being-in-the-world and that is revealed through the ontological structure of care. Time has been referenced within everydayness and through 'Being-ahead-of-itself' however the question remains: how can Being be authentic if the present mode of falling (alongside the 'they') is either inauthentic or undifferentiated experience? What is the ahead-of-itself wherein anxiety reveals authenticity? The answer is Dasein's 'ownmost possibility'[223]: death is our 'potentiality-for-Being'[224] that can never be actualised, as if Dasein were to reach its 'wholeness'[225], then this gain would accompany the 'utter loss of Being-in-the-world.'[226] Through death, Dasein reaches its wholeness as it loses the Being of its '"there."'[227] This potentiality for Being which constitutes 'Being-ahead-of-itself' is not to consider death as a way in which Dasein ceases to exist, but rather death 'as a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is.'[228] We are aware of our own death, as we can never feel anyone else's: to mourn someone's death is to experience the transition from Being-with to Present-at-hand, and not actually experience the end of Being itself.

Death is not the fulfilment of Dasein, it informs how we comport ourselves within the world, 'as soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die.'[229] In order to separate death from any other event that could streamline one's life through its impending nature i.e., 'a storm, the remodelling of the house (*Remainder*), or the arrival of a friend'[230], death has a different type of Being as it reveals a 'possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped.' Anxiety, or authenticity, thus functions as a 'state-of-mind of Dasein that amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being t*owards* its end.'[231] This anxiety is anticipation of the possibility of death as it reveals the world to us in a distinctive way.

[223] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 279.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 280.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 289.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 294.
[231] Ibid.

The alternative, however, as 'Being-towards-death' is how we comport ourselves in everydayness alongside the 'they.' The 'they' is constituted by how things have been 'publicly interpreted'[232] and death is 'perverted into an event of public occurrence…it is passed off as always something 'actual'; its character as a possibility gets concealed.'[233] Dasein's 'Being-towards-death' in everydayness is therefore disguised from itself through the 'idle talk' of the 'they' – the tranquilisation present in the movement of falling is a 'constant feeling in the face of death.'[234] This evasion is inauthentic being-towards-death, however it is based on the 'possibility of authenticity.'[235] In order to face our death, which is present from the very first moment we are thrown into this world, we must extricate ourselves from the sedation of falling and give in to the anticipation of being-towards-death. The individualisation of anticipation allows Dasein to turn towards itself: put simply, 'Being-towards-death is anxiety.'[236]

Finally, Heidegger discusses how Dasein can lean into its authenticity, and he does this by introducing the concept of resoluteness. As we spend most of our lives in everydayness absorbed in the 'they', Dasein must first choose another possibility which is its 'authentic potentiality-for-being.'[237] Dasein brings itself back from inauthenticity through 'the voice of conscience'[238], which gives us something to understand: 'it discloses…this disclosedness, as a basic state of entity which we ourselves are, is constituted by state-of-mind, understanding, falling, and discourse.'[239] The voice, which could be likened to an appeal, is 'the call'[240] which calls Dasein to its 'ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of summoning it to its ownmost Being-guilty.'[241] Conscience manifests as Dasein *wanting* to have a conscience; it corresponds to a 'possible hearing.'[242] It is only

[232] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 297.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 303.
[236] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 310.
[237] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 311.
[238] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 314.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

through wanting to be the type of Being that listens, that we are able to authentically comport ourselves within the world through 'resoluteness.' Listening to 'the call' requires hearing something that can penetrate through the 'idle talk' of the they, it must 'do its calling without any hubbub and unambiguously leave no foothold for curiosity,'[243] meaning it must take on an oppositional form to background noise.

The call to conscience, therefore, cannot be put into words at all, 'conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent.'[244] Heidegger situates this '*alien* voice'[245] as something which calls 'from me and beyond me'[246] which asserts Dasein's structure as something whose meaning comes out of the future. For this reason, 'Being-guilty' can be seen as an opening which allows Dasein to exist authentically for, and as, itself – 'the unwavering precision with which Dasein is thus essentially individualised down to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, discloses the anticipation of death as the possibility which is non-relational.'[247] Authenticity is accepting one's death as present throughout all stages of life, and it is within this awareness that Dasein can confront its Being as its existence can no longer be 'outstripped by anything.'[248] It is important to note here that 'Being-guilty' does not refer to a psychological state of concern over acts of moral transgression, rather it is a *possible* opening that can lead to that state-of-mind.

In the final section, Heidegger outlines the notions of historicity as he further temporalizes Dasein. It has been established that Dasein is care, and it is within this ontological structure that the world is disclosed, thus disclosing Dasein to itself. How are we able to define the meaning of care? The answer is time. As we are a future entity always living towards our ownmost potential (death), it is this movement, 'a future which makes present in the process of having been'[249], (or *temporality*) that reveals 'the primordial unity of the structure of care *is* temporality.'[250] When we listen to 'the call' and are individualised within everydayness, Dasein is opened up to

[243] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 316.
[244] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 318.
[245] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 321.
[246] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 320.
[247] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 354.
[248] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 355.
[249] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 374.
[250] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 375.

different possibilities – the authentic potential of 'Being-towards death' is future-oriented whereas Being-with (fallenness) is preoccupied by present living, only. This fluctuating movement can be neatly summarised as 'temporality does not signify that ecstases (three dimensions of time) come in a "succession." The future is not later than having been and having been *not earlier* than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in the process of having been.'[251]

The concluding part of *Being and Time*, and the last stage of temporalizing Dasein, is a focus on birth and legacy. Dasein is not an accumulation of all its experiences until it 'disappears', it 'does not fill up a track of stretch of 'life' with the phases of its momentary actualities…it stretches *itself* along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along.'[252] This 'stretching along'[253] Heidegger terms "historizing."[254] As we are thrown into a world in which Dasein inhabits certain cultural practices, history is the 'historizing of that which is 'past' in our Being-with-one-another, and which at the same time has been 'handed down to us' and is continuingly effective.'[255] Essentially, Dasein is a temporal Being and when we are thrown into a pre-existing world which it projects itself onto, the handing down of possibilities can be interpreted as heritage.

This final stage of temporalizing Dasein is 'primordial historizing' which 'lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which is has inherited and yet has chosen.'[256] It is only through realising that we are a finite being with a heritage that we can accept our authentic being-towards-death as we adopt that heritage. Heidegger then distinguishes between 'fate'[257] (the destiny of the resolute individual) and 'destiny'[258] (the destiny of a larger group, or of Dasein as a member of such a group.) Fate enables Dasein to 'project itself upon one's own Being-guilty, and of doing so reticently, with readiness

[251] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 401.
[252] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 426.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 427.
[255] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 431.
[256] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 435.
[257] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 436.
[258] Ibid.

for anxiety'[259], meaning that the 'futural'[260] nature of Dasein (as we exist thrown into this world and are projecting ourselves towards the future, which situates us as Being-there, we can experience fate). Fate as 'authentic historicality'[261] is only possible because we are essentially existing in 'authentic temporality' (we are finite) – knowing the cultural practices we are born into can help us move authentically towards the future, and the collective aspect of fate (destiny) unfolds in the same way.

It is important to note here that Heidegger's later political affiliation with Nazi ideology is more explicitly revealed after the publication of *Being and Time,* when he gives an inaugural lecture at Freiburg University in 1933. The latter half of *Being and Time* rewrites his structure of 'care' that he had previously described as being the ontological structure of Dasein. Through temporalizing Dasein, Heidegger brings forth concepts of history and individual possibility which culminates in his analysis of 'fate' and 'destiny.' It is difficult to separate his personal belief system with this work, however, much research has considered the ethical implications of using his phenomenological model. It is undeniable that Heidegger's phenomenology became a springboard for later phenomenologists, philosophers of mind, critics, and psychologists.

The elements of mysticism and aspects of Buddhist philosophies have also been noted in his work with critics commenting, 'while there is no way to play down the moral worries raised by Heidegger's thought…this mystical man once redrew the philosophical map, laying out the lines of questioning for generations to come.'[262] Comparisons to Mahayana Buddhism have been made, 'both emphasise that the un-self-conscious nature of everyday practices reveals that people are not separate from things, but are rather directly involved in them.'[263] This likeness is due to the comparison between 'compassion (Buddhism) and care (Heidegger).' It would be

[259] Ibid.
[260] Heidegger*, Being and Time,* p. 437.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Charles B. Guignon, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-41 (p.36).
[263] Michael E. Zimmerman, 'Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 293-325 (p.309).

dismissive of us to discount the ways in which Heidegger's philosophy allows for a more relational view of the world, which is why his method has been adopted by existential therapists as treatment for patients struggling with mood and personality disorders (disorders revolving around object constancy and fractured Self).

Heidegger's phenomenology has also helped to navigate the 'phenomenological turn' in literary criticism, as there is much to be gleaned from understanding the human being as inseparable from the environment they inhabit. Sara Ahmed, for example, in her book Queer Phenomenology uses phenomenology to investigate the concept of orientations, specifically queer objects and how they *disorient*, allowing for a different perspective on how we identify social gatherings. Ahmed extends Heidegger's concept of the ready-to-hand by questioning how the way in which we use objects creates spaces that attract and disallow queerness, 'objects might be near other objects as signs of orientation, which shapes the arrangements of objects, thereby creating the shape of their gathering.'[264] Whilst the dark undertones of the final section of Being and Time should therefore be acknowledged, it does not have to be read in such a way that makes it unethical to use: if we are to take an understanding of our present cultural practices and heritage both individually and collectively, we can equip ourselves with a more authentic way of Being-in-the-world. It is within this way of reading Heidegger that I shall be using his philosophy throughout this thesis. Apart from his work on technology from *The Question Concerning Technology* published in 1954, I will not be referring to *Contributions to Philosophy* that was written during 1933-36 and will only utilise *Being and Time*.

Reading Shame through Heidegger

[264] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 88.

'…in this familiarity Dasein can lose itself in what it encounters within-the-world and be fascinated with it.'[265]

'Man shows himself as the entity which talks.'[266]

Heidegger's phenomenology has impacted not only the field of phenomenology, but psychiatry and literary theory. His analysis of mood allows the subject to be understood as inseparable from the world we live in: our unifying structure of 'care' is always extended outwards to other entities, which in turn positions the perspective we inhabit. The most important mood for Heidegger is anxiety ('Angst'), a primordial state that positions Dasein towards its ownmost potential 'Being-towards-death.' Through anxiety, we are confronted with our finitude which makes us turn away from the everydayness of living alongside 'the they', as we project our potential into the future. Living in anxiety is not the same as being anxious as there is nothing tangible that could provoke this existential feeling: it is a fundamental structure of Dasein which allows other moods to be experienced (the anxiousness we commonly experience, for example.) Heidegger differentiates the ontological ('affectedness'/'Befindlichkeit') and the ontic ('mood'/'Stimmung'); affectedness implies that Dasein is always affectively determined within-the-world, whilst mood refers to the 'manifestation of those structures in actual beings.'[267] Both of these dimensions of care (the ontological and ontic) shape how we live, as we are beings that are radically affected by those around us – Heidegger's philosophy, whilst introspective, is essentially a social one. Matthew King neatly summarises existential anxiety as 'Being-apprehensive-of-my-end which is something that is always with us, not in the sense that it lurks in an unconscious, but in that it is always partially determinative of our relationship with the world.'[268]

[265] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 107.
[266] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 208.
[267] Matthew King, *Heidegger and Happiness* (London: Continuum Books, 2009), p.15.
[268] King, p. 16.

Anxiety cannot be disentangled from Dasein, as it allows its comportment towards a more authentic 'Being-in-the-world', which is always 'Being-with' – put simply, to be aware of mortality is to live a more authentic life, one in which our 'destiny' can be fulfilled both individually and collectively. 'Destiny' as the final temporal unravelling of Dasein has some dubious connotations considering the political landscape of 1930s Germany: however, if we are to read its meaning according to Heidegger, it can mean a collective transformation for the good of all. Anxiety can arise in the 'most innocuous situations'[269] as it is when Dasein feels uncanny: within this uncanniness, 'there is no need for darkness, in which it is commonly easier for one to feel uncanny.'[270] As a state that continually follows Dasein, it does not require important events to be revealed; it can occur during everyday situations such as when we lose track of time waiting for a friend and we disappear into reverie: that is the uncanny. It rises as we cross the road without looking at oncoming traffic, narrowly missing a cyclist.

Katherine Withy deconstructs the process of uncanniness, from its experience in falling, to the structure of care that discloses our being-in-the-world. Withy notes 'the flaring up of the manifestness of the world is the end of the explanatory line.'[271] Uncanniness, like angst, 'comes out of nowhere and nothing'[272] and thus can be viewed as an awareness of finitude that reveals its face to us when we are turned away and focusing on life. Withy conceptualises the stages of uncanniness from birth to the mood of angst (our experience of existential anxiety).

1. Originary angst, Dasein's birth: Being/openness/world is given; the ontological opens.
2. Uncanniness/the obscure whence of thrownness/falling as flight: Being is taken/withheld; the world/ Dasein's being backgrounds itself; the nothing nihilates.

[269] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Katherine Withy, *Heidegger on being uncanny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 92.
[272] Ibid.

3. Falling as absorption: Comportment to entities is given: Dasein irrupts into the ontic.
4. The mood of angst: Comportment to entitles is taken: falling is disrupted (withdrawal); ontological insight is given (revelation), and so the possibility of ownedness is also given.[273]

The presence of uncanniness, for Withy, is a necessary stage for Dasein to occupy that allows the mood of angst (existential anxiety) to occur. Considering its presence within the previous examples: it is the waiting-mode that occurs when a friend is late, which prompts our reverie; likewise, it is the sensory distractions that cause us to walk out into the road without looking. Uncanniness is therefore the in-between state of awareness and distraction, and as am I claiming in this thesis, it is a space that has been amplified through living within a digital world.

Contemporary Shame

Using Heidegger's interpretation of anxiety as a springboard, I am two claiming two points about shame:

1. Working with Rudi Visker's claim that 'shame can thus be seen to occupy a structurally similar place – a *topos* – to anxiety'[274], this emotion can now be said to exist in both private and public spaces because it is rerouted through our devices. We can feel ashamed in the presence of an *online* Other, which affirms the importance of language, and how it is felt within the body, when interpreting our emotional state. As technology reconsiders our relationship to other entities, (those things 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand'), a different state of Being-in-the-world discloses Dasein to itself. Whilst shame

[273] Withy, p. 99.
[274] Visker, p. 10.

shares a similar structure to ontological anxiety, it will be experienced ontically as a mood that disrupts our ordinary sense of time. We have ascertained that Angst (*not* ontic anxiety which is felt) cannot be experienced consciously, the uncanniness that accompanies this pre-conscious feeling is found in the writings and artworks produced within a culture that seeks to reconstruct depth (authenticity). Ontical experiences (moods) are phenomena that reveal Dasein to itself (via emotions, feelings) and consequently inform our state of Being-in-the-world. During times of embarrassment, or rejection – any moment wherein the self feels negatively judged by another, thus informing their self-perception - shame discloses the humiliated self to its own understanding (we do not differentiate between negative feelings and self, we *are* them.) In other words, if the other views me as bad, I am bad. These painful moments do not immediately register any benefit; however, the accompanying pause and recalibration within self, *if* registered, does enable change.

2. An account of shame must include a hypothesis of why this emotion is so prominent (the digital landscape.) The reality of removing shame from society is an improbability, as we all experience empathy in ways that are genetically and environmentally influenced. Our advancement of technology therefore creates a narcissistic society due to reducing empathy (devices create a lack of recognition of the Other), whilst providing an escape from the dissatisfaction of our daily lives. This artificial escape repositions shame as the driving force behind oversharing and overconsumption, hidden behind the guise of connection. Ben Agger argues that 'we want others to know where we are but not who we are.'[275] The temporal impact of this destabilising emotion impacts the narrative structure of contemporary fiction. As time situates Dasein within the world, our experience of temporal rhythms reveals who we are – as Agger states, 'human identity'[276] exists within a 'fast capitalism.'[277]

[275] Agger, p. 13.
[276] Agger, p. 8.
[277] Ibid.

The two obstacles to this analytic structure are concerning the dimensions of authenticity – how do we conceive this concept in the material world? And, as Heidegger notably neglects an explication of the role of the body in *Being and Time*, how can we situate shame as a bodily emotion?

In response to the first part of this question, I refer to the work of Mahon O'Brien as he argues that 'Heidegger is looking to inaugurate a fundamental ontology, not to provide an ethics of existence for which authenticity would operate in the manner of a normative measure.'[278] Essentially, the concept of authenticity is the final aspect of temporalizing Dasein as Being-within-the-world: authenticity projects us towards living a life that is fulfilling, and one that is ours, as we become aware of our own finitude. Authenticity is therefore a project of time; it is the potential of living a more self-aware life that turns us away from the mindlessness of everydayness. Dasein's state of falling (as experienced living alongside 'the they' in the present) is filled with certain limiting societal structures and practises into which we are thrown. As these are specific to each culture, we cannot construct a global sense of ethics through authenticity as inauthenticity is localised. For O'Brien, Heidegger's intent is consequently not to 'foster a lifelong meditation on death but to remind us of the effect that an awareness of our being as being-towards-death can have on our daily lives.'[279]

The second obstacle is *Being and Time*'s neglect of the human body. Whilst it is true that he does not explicitly reference anatomy, Heidegger situates the body in its own private domain through language. The world is disclosed to Dasein through our interpretation of the *purpose* of surrounding objects which forms the basis of language. As the meaning of words are common, which James Mensch argues 'for an expression to be irremediably private, the appearing it relates to would also have to be private,'[280]we can claim that there is no private language. Our authentic way of

[278] Mahon O'Brien, *Heidegger and Authenticity: From Resoluteness to Releasement* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p. 60.
[279] O'Brien, p. 61.
[280] James Richard Mensch, *Hiddenness and Alterity: Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 107.

being-towards-death, or, Dasein's 'ownmost potential' is, however, something we can *only* do for ourselves, meaning that other experiences such as 'taking a bath'[281] belongs to the same 'organic functioning as death'[282] in the sense that these experiences 'delimit a sphere of ownness that is radically private.'[283] Put simply, the privacy of the body precedes interpretation through language, so it is mine alone. As shame is preverbal, it is, accordingly, a bodily emotion that occurs when boundaries have been breached, thus reinstating the body into Heidegger's phenomenology.

Shame and Narcissism

Heideggerian psychotherapist, Robert Stolorow, considers the impact of shame-based disorders. Shame is at the root of dysregulated personality structures, specifically Narcissism, which has increased exponentially during late capitalism. Stolorow claims that children's emotional experiences 'can be characterised as somatic-linguistic unities.'[284] Words are conveyed through the 'caregiver's attuned responsiveness leading to the crystallization of distinctive emotions that can be named.'[285] When this attunement is ineffectively configured, 'derailments of the developmental process can occur, whereby emotional experience of remains inchoate, diffuse, and largely bodily. The persistence of psychosomatic states and disorders in adults may be understood of such developmental derailments.'[286]

When the infant has not been attuned correctly to the world, as an adult their Being-in-the-world is disclosed through this enduring mood. This model not only allows for a phenomenologically informed understanding of narcissism, but we can also insert this structure as a side-effect of living in everydayness amidst Dasein's 'lostness in the "they."'[287] Heidegger states 'The "they" has always kept Dasein from taking hold of these possibilities of Being. The "they" even hides the manner in which

[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Robert D. Stolorow, Heidegger, Mood, and the Lived Body: The Ontical and the Ontological, *Janus Head*, 13.12 (2012), pp. 1-11 (p. 9) < http://janushead.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Stolorow1.pdf> [accessed 20 August 2024].
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 312.

it has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly choosing these possibilities.'[288] A commentary on narcissism therefore must consider the increasing number of responsibilities and financial pressure allocated to life in a post-pandemic Britain with its accompanying cost-of-living crisis. The 'break-up of residential communities and thus extended family relationships'[289] are uncomfortable and can be rerouted through the many forms of distraction available to us, for example, 'addictions to consumption as a surrogate for love, celebrity identifications as a substitute for the real'[290] and, most importantly for this thesis, 'dependence on 'virtual'[291] worlds for emotional sustenance.

To summarise, shame is a transgression of boundaries between the self and other. Heidegger's phenomenology situates human beings (Dasein) as occupying a specific place in time, which informs how the surrounding environment reveals our being-in-the-world. Shame, like anxiety, takes Dasein away from an unreflective way of living, prompting self-evaluation. Even though Heidegger does not focus on the body in *Being and Time*, critics still engage with his phenomenology in terms of how we act towards others, as he 'chose to emphasise the world in which and with which the body is always already engaged.'[292] To live within an overpopulated world both in real life and virtually, is to always exist 'Being-with.'[293] Meindert Peters argues that 'we encounter other people as living bodies'[294], and Heidegger 'shows them as entangled in our meaningful, shared world.'[295] When we consider how the digital space remaps our understanding of a shared environment, we must seek to understand the new rhythms of das Man which are 'the normative structure

[288] Ibid.
[289] M Rustin, Belonging to Oneself Alone: the spirit of neoliberalism, *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 19 (2014), pp. 145-160 (p. 156) < https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/f550f9cf1cb1bb2ac72015479c2184dec67455f0b2314ba207b054573935b6c2/263009/Belonging%20to%20Myself%20Alone%20%20Final%20Pre-Publication.pdf> [accessed 20 August 2024].
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Meindert E. Peters, Heidegger's embodied others: on critique of the body and 'intersubjectivity' in *Being and Time, Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 18 (2019) pp. 441-458 (p. 442) < https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11097-018-9580-0> [accessed 20 August 2024].
[293] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 161.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Peters, p. 448.

structures guiding our behaviour.'[296] It is therefore not only the individuation of shame, but consequently, an issue of how the self re-enters the communal space that ostracised them.

Shameful aesthetics in Contemporary British Fiction

Literary theorists have described contemporary British fiction as a response to, and departure from, a time of unprecedented social and individual change. If we are to consider the landscape of the present moment, I repeatedly find myself drawn to Peter Boxall's definition that, 'the moment, now, is woven, it seems, from a different fabric and holds a different elasticity.'[297] I find this commentary particularly useful as we can begin to chart the temporal movements within a text, that are enabled through certain affective structures. The movement of time and how it is represented within a story, and how this structures the story itself (through form and the multimodal distractions of the twenty-first century) reveal how it is to live in a world with so much *distraction* – and shame. Boxall explains that this change is noticeable in the 'mechanics of narrative itself – our capacity to capture and recount events as they unfold in time and space – have undergone a transformation, and it is in the shadow or light of this transformation that prose narrative is required to make for itself a new world.'[298] It is the ability to *recount* that I am most interested in, as it is the springboard for my analysis of shame.

We experience the world in an entirely new way to our predecessors due to the proliferation of technological devices. The screen is everywhere, and we are the screen. As a backdrop for modern life, we are more conscious than ever of how others perceive us, which is internalised as our own self-judgment. The mediator between our online life and our real lives (the screen) has diminished phenomenologically so we no longer register the device as a separate entity. Our perception of our online selves is becoming increasingly impaired, thus our tolerance for others is shrinking. This combination of a profitable lack of empathy, and the

[296] Peters, p. 449.
[297] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 6.
[298] Ibid.

constant surveillance of the internet produces an ideal environment for shame to reproduce in, claiming its place as the identifiable affect of contemporary texts.

In a recent study conducted on social media use during the pandemic, there was an increased feeling of negativity due to social liability. Social liability 'stems from the reciprocal nature of human relationships…from the perspective of social exchange theory, both parties must reciprocate for relationships to be preserved.'[299] This obligation proved difficult during the pandemic as people were exposed daily to those who were suffering: an urgent requirement for action caused difficult feelings in some users. The study noted that whilst there were benefits such as a sense of community, and sharing with others during a period of isolation, the need to help was, at times, overbearing. This is a perfect example of how shame operates as it diminishes the capacity for empathy which requires boundaries towards another person - 'empathic distress occurs when one is more upset *by* another's suffering than one is concerned *for* the other.'[300] The pressure of not switching-off from social media encapsulates our struggle with connection: in a turbulent world with so much conflict, how can we increase emotional tolerance which would decrease opportunities for shame? *Should* we be allowed to eradicate shame online, and what does that say about its function in real life? The constant buzz of online connection (whether this is news or connecting with others) creates an influx of disingenuous ways of relating to the world. This 'embeddedness'[301] in our online world has also been shown to impact our work environments 'impeding managers' operation, adjustment, and adaptation, especially in times of disruptive change, discontinuity, and uncertainty.'[302] Empathy is an openness that cannot be solved by quick-fix solutions and profit.

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[299] Hichang Cho, Pengxiang Li, Annabel Ngien, Marion Grace Tan, Anfan Chen, Elmie Nekmat, 'The bright and dark sides of social media use during COVID-19 lockdown: Contrasting social media effects through social liability vs. social support', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 146 (2023), 1-11 (p. 4) https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10123536/ [accessed 20 August 204].
[300] Charlotte von Lotringen, Benedetta Lusi, Gerben J Westerhof, Geke D S Ludden, Hanneke Kip, Saskia M Kelders, Matthhijs L Noordzij, The Role of Compassionate Technology in Blended and Digital Mental Health Interventions: Systemic Scoping Review, *JMIR Ment Health*, 10 (2023), 1-24 (p. 2) < https://mental.jmir.org/2023/1/e42403/PDF< [accessed 20 August 2024].
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

Our natural desire to avoid shame, however, is not a beneficial practice for society. As revealed in the social media study, the internet propagates a lack of empathy due to the *speed* in which it reflects and constructs modern life. As our emotional experiences are always understood through the context of time (our being-in-the-world is disclosed to us through the relational interactions with other entities and people), a consideration of shame, *is* an interrogation of a specific moment, or era. In her work on body shaming and social media, Lisa Cassidy argues that, whilst online shaming takes the form of real-life experiences (the judgment of self through the gaze of the other), 'there is a perplexingly simultaneous intimacy and anonymity of online experiences.'[303]

Due to the lack of accountability that is fuelled by faceless avatars, there is a tendency for 'shame reversals'[304] to occur which is when the person receiving comments on their body turns around and shames the person making such comments. This creates a cyclical movement of public shaming that integrates itself into real life. The frustration for Cassidy is not only a reduced individual responsibility towards making these comments, but our endorsement of the culture that produces them (the articles we read and the shows we consume.) Equally, the study from the pandemic reveals our frustration with the associated anonymity behind the information we consume - not only must we be responsive to friends and family (not anonymous communication), but we must also find time to comment on issues that require consideration. These issues are often provided from outlets unknown to us: it is an anonymous call to our conscience. Shame reversals are thus an unsurprising phenomenon as they mimic our collective lack of processing time, which is further discussed in chapter two.

Surrounded by short-form modes of communication, our language becomes charged with insincerity. As Boxall states, 'the devices by which we navigate both time and space have become exponentially more precise over the last decades'[305], thus contributing to our inability to accurately recount our experiences in the

[303] Lisa Cassidy, 'Body Shaming in the Era of Social Media', *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Shame*, ed. by Cecilea Mun (London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 157-175 (p. 161).
[304] Ibid.
[305] Boxall, p. 19.

present. The discrepancy between accuracy and accountability *is* the landscape that contemporary fiction emerges from. The novels that are currently being produced therefore seek to reconstruct a level of authenticity that mimics the diverging networks of the online space.

Shame can therefore be understood as a response to a global lack of time in the digital world. As a self-reflexive emotion, its structure reveals a broader societal framework: the underlying assumption that everyone else correctly *interprets* the world, and we do not. In her work on digital self-presentation, Vera King argues that 'the potential to be ashamed, is thus a constitutive and indispensable part of a dependency constellation from which we cannot escape.'[306] We need the gaze of the other for healthy development: shame's regulatory role within society maintains a moral structure. The fragility of this developmental network, however, is currently being exploited and redirected through an unregulated digital landscape. King notes that 'impression management'[307] is quickly gathering critical attention as competitive practices inform how we present our online lives to both ourselves and others. In this sense, shame is denied expression as the focus turns towards perfection, which, as an avoidant tactic, further perpetuates narcissistic societal structures.

The maintenance of our online self-image is demanding, and we unconsciously spend a large portion of time upholding a specific image as 'to assert oneself, one needs attention.'[308] For King, the outlook is bleak as she concludes that young people are being trained to adopt an entrepreneurial mind from a young age due to 'the imperative of constant improvement and performance.'[309] The concern is therefore the process in which our need for expression is increasingly being construed as something shameful. In chapter three, the 'constellations'[310] of King's formative development become an embodied concern. Tom McCarthy's *The Making of Incarnation* (2021) is an interrogation of copyright law in the digital realm,

[306] Vera King, '"Lots of People Pretend…"' Shame Conflicts in an Age of Digital Self-presentation and Point-scoring"', *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2 (2020), 388-402 (p. 390) < https://brill.com/view/journals/bire/2/3/article-p388_388.xml?language=en> [accessed 04 September 2024].
[307] King, p. 391.
[308] Ibid.
[309] King, p. 396.
[310] King, p. 390.

specifically how the body is atomised and effaced through artificial intelligence, and how the 'constellations' of our movements and gestures are for sale.

If we consider contemporary fiction to therefore be a response to digital time, there are two lenses worth investigating. Alan Kirby's book, *Digimodernism,* seeks to chart specific features of contemporary texts, which he concludes 'are a new form of textuality.' Kirby does not wish to isolate a singular aesthetic feature that is present across all texts within this category, rather, digimodernism is 'the impact of cultural forms of computerisation (inventing some, altering others). It is a *set* of aesthetic characteristics consequent on that process and gaining a unique cast from their next context. It's a cultural shift, a communicative revolution, a social organisation.'[311] Two of the aesthetic features that help situate my thesis in the context of contemporary fiction are Kirby's notions of 'onwardness'[312] and 'haphazardness.'[313] The first points to the ongoing nature of digimodernist texts: they stay with the reader after the end as it is a process of 'coming into being, as something growing and incomplete.'[314] The feature of 'haphazardness'[315] considers the future development of the text as something unpredictable, 'this feels like freedom; it may also feel like futility.'[316] As a phenomenological account of shame is continually changing – our being-in-time is disclosed to us through time – Williams and McCarthy are examples of writers that consider the current fragility of a world disclosed through a digital network. Williams' stories shift between favouring the emancipation of the online space, to mourning organic connections; McCarthy, in contrast, plays with the anti-technological in *Remainder*, before painting a darker picture of the influence of data in The Making of Incarnation.

Kirby claims that 'Facebook suggests that the drift of information technology is now toward the phenomenological elimination of the sense of the electronic interface, of the text.'[317] As presented in the social media study, the interface

[311] Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 50.
[312] Kirby, p. 52.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Kirby, p. 123.

between our online self and our real life is barely recognisable which prompts s a phenomenological rethinking of the text itself. Kirby concludes that 'it won't be a question then of oscillating between offline and online, but of hovering permanently between those extremes.'[318] This intermediary space, I am arguing, *is* the phenomenological experience of shame as it is experienced, and avoided, within a digital landscape that allows this evasion. Even during our focus on online self-presentation, this operates as a shame-based behaviour (perfectionism) and provides an escape from the loneliness that accompanies the emotion.

Our struggle with focus within a digital world connects Kirby's work with Alice Bennett's *Contemporary Fictions of Attention* (2018). Bennett notes that attention is now defined in 'economic terms and so "paying attention" becomes a concretized metaphor in the context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.'[319] The relationship between attention and distraction can be differentiated by their application: distraction is 'divided, diverted, misdirected'[320] whereas attention is the call to focus. In a similar effort to my own, Bennett charts the *experience* of attention through the act of reading, concluding that literary texts 'test conversational reading practices with boredom, distraction, information overload and attentive self-monitoring.'[321] Williams' first story collection, *Attrib. and other Stories* (2017), grapples with information, and sensory, overload which equally impacts our understanding of the narrative as disjointed prose mimic a processing condition. Equally, the onslaught of images presented through multi-body capture prompts a panic attack for one of the characters in *The Making of Incarnation*, which reveals how the digital manipulation of attention causes a phenomenological response. Bennett notes that our reading practices mimic the text's struggle to maintain focus, often honing-in on the glorified presence of undiluted attention, as a 'parable of attention.'[322] The relationship between attention and distraction thus continues the permanent hovering between online/offline as presented by Kirby. Due to the fragmenting phenomenological experience of shame, this thesis continues the

[318] Ibid.
[319] Bennett, p. 18.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Bennett, p.20.
[322] Bennett, p.86.

discussion of contemporary time through the work of Eley Williams and Tom McCarthy as writers occupying the in-between state of confrontation and shameless evasion.

This thesis therefore situates contemporary fiction in both a period informed by digimodernism, and our climate of stolen attention (and data). There are two parts to this categorisation that will be interrogated within the following chapters:

- Shame *of* a digital world: the phenomenology of narrowing time.
- Shame *in* a digital word: the phenomenology of newly emerging networks of expression.

Shame in contemporary texts is thus an aesthetic concern as its presence impacts the temporal flow of the narrative. Protagonists often struggle with existing outside time: through illness and reconciling their own finitude, as seen in Eley Williams' *Attrib. and other Stories.* Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, equally, is a novel that represents the experience of lost time after trauma. The Making of Incarnation, however, recalibrates the synchronicity of time as a motion-capture company seek to copyright gestures alongside the discovery of the perfect movement. As an extension of Agger's 'iTime'[323], shamelessness becomes the primary affect, alongside the concept of 'promeathean shame.'[324]

The phenomenology of shame in fiction is therefore a study of language and time. Before isolating the aesthetics of authenticity, it is important to situate the context in which these fictions are being produced. The focus on creative labour in New Labour's expansion of cultural diversity has been analysed by Sarah Brouillette in her work, *Literature, and the Creative Economy*. Brouillette argues that cultural workers have been subject to the creative-economy discourse that has emerged alongside neoliberalism. New Labour is seen to use 'creative-economy discourse as a means to market its own political program and seek legitimacy for it…it used culture

[323] Agger, p. 8.
[324] Christopher John Muller, *Prometheanism: Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd), p. 29.

that could be highlighted and rewarded.'[325] This is apparent in the language that is present in management/ policy documents within the arts – it borrows language that is used to describe the novelist (or cultural worker), 'committed to introspection, self-expression, and self-direction.'[326] This work therefore tends to 'be figured contradictorily by creative-economy rhetoric, as at once newly valuable to capitalism and romantically honourable and free.'[327]

The novelist has their own history that is materially produced, yet this new language situates the writer as virtuously existing outside of capital: they are heralded as a motivated artist whose self-generated work ethic has been incorporated into management doctrine. As psychology terminology has also been incorporated in policymaking since the 1980s, this framework relies upon 'images of the expressive and autonomous self as creator of new intellectual properties.'[328] What emerges is an image of the 'antisocial, flexible individualist'[329] that is created and controlled within the arts under the guise of superior psychological traits. It is difficult therefore to reconceive authenticity in the novel, when the surrounding structures (how the novel is produced, taught, marketed) contains the same language it critiques. Brouillette's answer lies in articulating 'a self not sufficient to itself'; acknowledging the shame manufactured in individualism would in turn, allow us to associate creative work with community.

During the modernisation phase of a society, there is a focus on 'maximising one's income and job security'[330] whilst postmodernism brought 'complexity'[331] to the creative workplace which should be 'accepted in all its paradoxes…liberation means a lot of sleepless nights and the abandonment of certain comforts; the new kind of organisation is disorganisation.'[332]As the language mirrors both the writer and work environment, disguised in a management document that seeks to, 'deconstruct

[325] Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), p.6.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Brouillette, p. 83.
[329] Brouillette, p. 7.
[330] Brouillette, p. 72.
[331] Brouillette, p. 74.
[332] Brouillette, p. 75.

the corporation'[333], temporality in the creative workplace is therefore being consistently narrowed under the veil of self-motivation. Haunted by Derrida's deconstruction, 'the self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move'[334], the contemporary worker, and writer, inherits shame as their language is being repurposed under managerial structures. In Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, the narrator's construction of flats in which he employs actors to perform various tasks highlights the creative dynamic Brouillette refers to. The pianist who consistently plays the wrong notes, for example, eventually rebels against this direction due to shame – an inherent part of his labour (practising) is being enjoyed without reason. In the creative workplace, solitary writing practices are being packaged and sold as admirable self-motivation, however they are often behaviours prompted by attention which is increasingly under threat.

Brouillette's work was published in 2014, four years after Vermeulen and van den Akker published their essay, 'Notes on Metamodernism'[335] which argued that the cultural industry has 'increasingly abandoned tactics such as pastiche and parataxis for strategies like myth and metaxis, melancholy for hope, and exhibitionism for engagement.'[336] This departure from irony to earnestness corresponds with Brouillette's claim that current economic conditions foster 'the writer's expressions of embarrassment about and disavowal of the affiliations he draws upon in order for his work to circulate as unique.'[337] Both Vermeulen and van den Akker, and Brouillette are referring to a trajectory of shame: the sincerity associated with metamodernism is fiction that seeks to 'recount'[338] our experience through new modes of engagement. For Brouillette, the incorporation of writing practices into the language of institutions also proves shameful.

In 2022, Tom McCarthy joined contemporary art theorist, Hal Foster, in a discussion of his latest novel situated in the context of a post-farce world. Foster's

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[333] Brouillette, p. 74.
[334] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 49.
[335] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2.1 (2010), 1-14 (p.5) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677> [accessed 20 August 2024].
[336] Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p. 5.
[337] Brouillette, p.150.
[338] Boxall, p. 6.

work questions, 'if farce follows tragedy, what follows farce?'[339] His bleak forecast unpacks capitalism's shrinking landscape - 'capitalism privatises space and degrades language'[340] - through contemporary artists and the museums/galleries they inhabit. Artists such as Jeff Koons work with 'illusionism'[341] by adding an uncanny depth to everyday objects: a steel rabbit, for example, becomes a balloon animal as each installation 'becomes its own weird simulation, at once faithful and distorted…this illusionism reveals a basic truth about the ontological status of countless objects in our world where the opposition between original and copy or model and replica is undone.'[342] This rewriting of its 'ontological status'[343] not only changes how the object reveals itself to us, but our perception is also altered due to the disruption of its use. Koon's reason for the project is to 'relieve us of our shame'[344]; working with the liminal space between material states, he focuses on 'subjects where humiliation runs deep: sex and class.'[345] The disruption of status from ready-to-hand to present-at-hand reflects the shame found in McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005) as humiliation is *performed* through repetitive mishandling of tools through which we re-think our relationship with objects, and our routines.

Metamodernism's relationship to shame can be found in its prioritisation of affect that has 're-merged and re-awoken' after postmodernism.'[346] As the affective structure of texts reveal its temporality, it is a necessary lens when considering literature that is produced amidst a digital landscape. Autofiction, specifically, deploys the merging of fact and fiction in a hybrid form of life writing that 'does not reflect a straightforward, uncritical return to the affective subjectivity that defined modernism nor is it a complete rebuttal of postmodern disintegration but a vicissitude of both.'[347] Alison Gibbons notes that a common theme begins to define

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[339] Hal Foster, *What Comes After Farce? Art and Criticism at a Time of Debate* (London: Verso Books, 2020), p. 1.
[340] Foster, p. 64.
[341] Foster, p. 48.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Foster, p. 49.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Alison Gibbons, 'Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), pp. 117-130 (p. 130).
[347] Gibbons, 'Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect', p. 119.

this literary period, 'the importance of collectivity or with-ness'[348], which requires authentic self-awareness and engagement with the world. As we are still recalibrating to a post-pandemic landscape, it appears that we are avoiding shame, which is understandable considering its didactic function. In her work on the emotion, Elspeth Probyn also supports its undeniable importance as 'the feeling of shame teaches us about our relations to others. Shame makes us feel proximity differently.'[349] The refusal to acknowledge this emotion is unsurprising considering our perception of personal space has changed drastically during the last four years. In summary, shame is an affect that requires critical consideration: in metamodernism, it is detectable through a fragmentation within form, which consequently prompts discussions on the aesthetics of authenticity. According to Thomas Docherty, it is the identifiable affect of a neoliberal climate – a 'determining precondition of value as such'[350] – which, whilst jarring, leads to novel ways of representing the human experience in a digital world.

Metamodernism therefore provides a useful lens to examine contemporary fiction as its incorporation of affect alongside form allows the critic to read the movement of emotion. In this sense, its ontology has a fluid structure that is more than the decentring of postmodern poetics, it rebuilds value through connection. It is a structure of feeling that contextualises an oscillation between 'what we may call – but what of course cannot be reduced to – post-postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections.'[351] Vermeulen and van den Akker are keen to emphasise that whilst, 'a structure of feeling may amount to a 'world' or realm, it is not better or worse.'[352] Shame as a structure of feeling, specifically the existential shame of living and producing art within a digital world, is more of a mapping of the contemporary moment than an itemisation of it. Reading shame through Heidegger allows space to view the immediate impact of the emotion, without allocating a

[348] Alison Gibbons, 'Affect', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), p. 83-86 (p. 86).
[349] Probyn, p. 35.
[350] Thomas Docherty, 'Cultural Capital and the Shameful University', in *Shame and Modern Writing*, ed. by Barry Sheils and Julie Walsh (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 236-252 (p. 237).
[351] van den Akker and Vermeulen, p. 11.
[352] Ibid.

comprehensive strategy to remove ourselves from its grasp. The continuation of modernist influence in metamodernism is also important, particularly concerning form (stream of consciousness, for example) but also the return to phenomenology (Heidegger's *Being and Time* was published in 1927.)

In terms of aesthetics, another element from modernism that has re-emerged in contemporary fiction, is the renewal of Impressionism. This term which has its origins in art, defines the in-between state of surface, and depth: it is a reconciliation of fragments and the totality of a whole – a constant movement between representing 'psychology and aesthetics.'[353] Many critics argue over the legitimacy of Impressionism as a useful analytic lens as its very function seems to undo such categorising. The Impressionist writer therefore 'promises mediation'[354] between thoughts and feelings, creating work that Jesse Matz describes as existing beyond an 'imprint that lasts and the feeling that passes, error and insight, authenticity and irresponsibility.'[355] For Matz, working within the impression is to grapple with flux and indeterminacy, it is a dialectic between representation and the thing itself.

The question, then, for the contemporary critic is why is modernist Impressionism and phenomenology reified in metamodernism? What does this tell us about producing art in the current landscape, and how does shame intersect these networks? We have noted the rise of creative-economy discourse through Brouilette's work that situates the creative worker as both a necessary component of the managerial structure (they produce the language that is appropriated by administration), and someone miraculously existing outside it (rendering their production a self-focused separation from community.) A phenomenological analysis of the landscape that is producing new fictions is therefore reflected within the work itself through its focus on temporality. Essentially, how we read has come to represent the mode in which these novels are produced. As we can frustratingly stop and start a novel, the novel reflects our fractured attention back to us through the inclusion of other forms of media and jarring changes in narrative structure. If

[353] Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 17.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.

postmodernism sought to play with structure, then metamodernism seeks to reapply it. We can make this claim through an interrogation of shame, specifically existential shame (borrowed from Heidegger's methodology), as the dominating force in our digital, individualised society. Shame both disrupts time *and* positions the subject firmly within it (through the moment of judgement); unprocessed shame leads to stagnation whereas its acknowledgement *recalibrates* towards something authentic - in terms of form and language.

Matthew Rukgaber uses Heidegger to investigate disabilities and shame which will be expanded on in chapter two. For Rukgaber, 'while Heidegger believes that anxiety is something like the feeling of the loss of our grasp on all entities in the world and their significance, I maintain that prepersonal shame is the feeling of the loss of the significant yet impersonal relations and things that constitute our sociotechnical world, and that form the shared foundation of existence with others.'[356] Whilst it is true that anxiety, for Heidegger, individuates, it does not mean turning away from others as we cannot (and should not) escape our fundamental condition 'Being-in'. Rukgaber therefore positions shame as sharing a similar 'place – a *topos* – to anxiety'[357] previously argued by Visker, and now developed throughout this thesis. This feeling of loss that accompanies the moment we exist outside a preconceived network (we are always thrown into 'everydayness') is the perspective needed for interrogating the limits of that system, and the cultural artifacts it produces.

Rukgaber's phenomenology requires an understanding of the societal networks that cause exclusion. In her work on forms, Caroline Levine notes the rhythms that dominate a cross-section of institutions, concluding that whilst on the surface they can appear 'dominant'[358], even the 'most entrenched rhythms are vulnerable.'[359] These 'rhythms' are temporality: institutions are not 'static structures but rather relatively consistent reiterations of norms and practices, they necessarily

[356] Matthew Rukgaber, 'Being In and Excluded from the Sociotechnical World', in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Shame*, ed. by Cecilea Mun (London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 95-113 (p. 101).
[357] Visker, p. 10.
[358] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 67.
[359] Ibid.

follow temporal rhythms.'[360] The institutions in question are the publishing houses that produce contemporary writers (as marketing *is* the text), but also the points of focus in my choice of novels – Williams moves between public healthcare, education, and cultural institutions whereas McCarthy investigates the legal sector, STEM, and film production. The temporality of these institutions is now governed by digitisation that collapses pre-existing borders (i.e., the inevitability of creative-economy discourse.) Consequently, there is an illusion of expansion as our access to the world has purportedly increased, but the purpose of these institutions remains the same.

Both writers and cultural workers may believe there is a mutual ethics between their work and the institutions they collaborative with as there is a shared vocabulary, however there is no depth beyond the aesthetic similarity. Shame is therefore not only an important point of analysis, but also an inescapable affective structure of producing work in the contemporary landscape. Through using the framework of Heidegger, we are not relegated to a specific phenomenological experience, as I am comparing it to the experience of anxiety in terms of what it leads towards. This awareness allows recognition of the rhythms and social practices we cannot extricate ourselves from. Shame disrupts this discourse as it is a moment of self-judgment and recognition of broader transgressions.

As contemporary writers search for depth both in the work they produce, and the collaborations they form, there is, according to Vermeulen, a feeling that 'appearances may well inspire sensations of an outside, of an elsewhere – even if the existence of that elsewhere is by no means certain, often even unlikely or impossible.'[361]Tom McCarthy and Eley Williams operate within these between spaces, producing fiction that is continuously out of grasp, revealing the 'onwardness' of the digimodern text. It is possible to frame both of Williams' collections, *Attrib. and other stories* (2017) and *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good* (2024) within the 'eerie'[362], defined by Mark Fisher as an aesthetic experience that is

[360] Levine, p. 61.
[361] Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Metamodern Depth, or 'Depthiness', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism,* ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), p. 147-150 (p.149).
[362] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p. 61.

constituted by 'a failure of absence'[363] or by 'a failure of presence'[364], these stories seek connection through sharing personal artwork: they *need* to be read. Shame can therefore be interpreted as the affect that haunts the narrative as it always in the periphery; however, the presence of the reader is also required for this affective exchange to take place. This intermediary state is another example of the 'oscillating in-betweenness'[365] of metamodernism.

Fisher claims that there are two parts of 'the eerie'[366] – 'the notion of an "eerie cry" often cited in dictionary definitions of the eerie is an example of the first (the failure of absence.'[367]) Fisher relates this cry to the sound a bird makes, and the unsettling feelings it prompts within us as we cannot pinpoint the reasons behind such a noise. The eerie therefore revolves around speculation which dissipates once we collect enough data to understand. The sound itself pierces our awareness as we are dragged from our immersion in the surrounding environment: similarly, the call for Heidegger is the uncanniness we experience when we become aware of our finitude (being-towards-death.) Both the 'eerie cry'[368] and anxiety puncture our daily lives, reminding us of our fallibility, *and* mortality. Shame shares the disruption of the previous examples; however, it is often accompanied by concealment which extends the feeling of 'the eerie' as new data is not collected. Shame, we can argue, *is* eerie.

Mark Fisher's experience of the eerie signifies a final point in our conceptualisation of shame: the importance of its aesthetic function. Postmodern critic, Linda Hutcheon, and recently, Nicoline Timmer, both claim that metafiction is a narcissistic mode of writing. For Hutcheon, 'narcissistic narrative, then, is process made visible,'[369], which Timmer extends as 'a certain passivity, and almost devotional receptivity.'[370] Previously, the novel had been unaware of its value in 'the verbal

[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.
[365] van den Akker and Vermeulen, p. 11.
[366] Fisher, p. 62.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 6.
[370] Nicoline Timmer, 'Radical Defenselessness: A New Sense of Self in the Work of David Foster Wallace', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), p. 103-115 (p. 115).

component of its form'[371], which 'like Echo's voice in the myth of Narcissus, might be said to have retired in shame.'[372] Metafiction, like Narcissus, therefore falls in love with its own form through self-ironizing, introspective prose which reveal the scaffolding of a text: fiction becomes aware of its need to be *consumed to* exist. Timmer also notes the continuous interruption of metafiction's need for approval as 'it apparently caters very well to the insecure self, a self that constantly needs to assert its presence by being neurotically upfront about its own insecurity.'[373] Texts such as *Remainder* (2005) and 'Alphabet' and 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet' from *Attrib. and other stories* (2017) are infatuated with the limits of their form. McCarthy's settlement functions in a similar way to the processing difficulties experienced by Williams' narrators in her short stories. The power struggle between the parameters of form and the affective experience of reading the text mimic the phenomenological movement between shame and its avoidance. As both critics reveal the in-betweenness of metafiction, they inadvertently support a phenomenological analysis of an emotion that follows the same structure. The overarching framework of the novel is revealed as a compensatory structure against the fragility of its voice.

Wolfgang Funk's critical exploration of the aesthetics of authenticity also considers the metareferential (or metafictional) aspect of contemporary fiction. For Funk, metareference is a device that is used to reconstruct authenticity within texts. Authenticity 'lays claim to a direct and immediate link to a realm beyond symbolic representation, while metareference can disrupt clear-cut ascriptions and hierarchies within a work of art.'[374] Reconstructing authenticity is therefore a *process* rather than a position, as the incorporation of different narrative devices (such as alternative media) and its contained self-referentiality thrive on 'ontological oscillation and epistemological confusion.'[375] This movement of reconstruction shares a similar rhythm to shame as the continued state of deconstructing

[371] Hutcheon, p. 11.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Timmer, p. 107.
[374] Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 8.
[375] Ibid.

hierarchies to rebuild within self-knowledge mimics the 'self-positioning'[376] of existing within a digital landscape. Our online lives also require further ontological enquiry as we 'leave a trail'[377] of interactions that often deny categorisation – as Fisher argues, 'we are compelled to imagine our own world as a set of eerie traces.'[378]

Metareference equally applies to narrative form as Funk argues, 'such a perpetual oscillation between proximity and distance, similarity and difference, simultaneity and sequence'[379] also constructs authenticity. This oscillating movement resembles shame's disruptive presence, swiftly followed by its avoidance, in a thematic struggle of the self-refencing enforced by a digital landscape. *Remainder* (2005) and *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good* (2024) are novels about *feedback*, that construct a feedback-loop within the narratives. After watching his actors perform sequences of banal repetitions, McCarthy's narrator eventually loses his grip on reality, arguably prompted by shame. Likewise, both characters in Williams' stories: Jenny in 'Wilgefortis', and Danny in 'Rituals', struggle with compulsive behaviours due to feeling humiliated at various points within the narrative. Their shame, however, occurs when they have been caught perceiving another. Jenny closely regards the face of her bully, and Danny is infatuated with his friend. This gaze causes a sense of ontological shame that can be seen in Sartre's example of a spectator being caught looking through a keyhole. Lisa Guenther considers the temporal aspect of shame as being an acknowledgement of 'a being-for-others that contests my position at the centre of the world.'[380] The loss of self-image that occurs during shame, however, gains something else: 'an escape from the problem of solipsism, an ontological proof of the Other.'[381] For Sartre, we can only experience shame through the presence of another – put differently, it is feedback.

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[376] Agger, p. 12.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Fisher, p. 63.
[379] Irmtraud Huber and Wolfgang Funk, 'Reconstructing Depth: Authentic Fiction and Responsibility,' in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism,* ed. by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), p. 151-165 (p. 158).
[380] Lisa Guenther, 'Shame and the temporality of social life', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 44 (2011), 23-39 (p.27) https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11007-011-9164-y [accessed 04 September].
[381] Ibid.

If we therefore take shame as an emotion fuelled by the process of assembling a self that is already dispersed across various medias in late capitalism, then we inevitably embody that affect as we produce fiction. Critics that are working within metamodernism, digimodernism, and the fictions of attention, are using an aesthetics of reconstruction as a turn towards authenticity which is not necessarily an idealised form, but an awareness and subsequent reposition of what it means to write contemporary fiction. We can only reconstruct that which we have worked *through* on an individual and societal level; a phenomenological account of shame, therefore, will subsequently change our reading practices and the meta-referentiality of the text. Agger argues that 'technology plays a huge role in enabling the person to be lost in the world'[382]; this alienation, and conversely, the community of an online space is critiqued in the next two chapters. Each writer maps a phenomenology of shame that critiques the integration of devices, and data, into the fabric of our being. Both authors belong to a category of contemporary novelists that are 'taking their cue from postmodernist insights and deconstructive urges.'[383] Technology is presented as a method of communication, which is not to be confused with forming a community: 'the former is only contact, an acknowledgement of one's existence.'[384]

[382] Agger, p. 58.
[383] Huber and Funk, p. 153.
[384] Agger, p. 58.

Chapter Two: (Mis)Communicating Shame in Eley Williams

'Shame establishes boundaries and protects against vulnerability; it is shame that, supposedly, stands between power and vulnerability.'[385]

Eley Williams is a writer of short stories, and recently, the novel *The Liar's Dictionary*. Her work interrogates speech and our ability to articulate an interpretation of the world, which informs how we proceed within it. As a writer interested in the *expression* and *temporal fragility* of vulnerability, Williams' work is based around the experience of shame. Due to the focus on language, her work encapsulates Heideggerian concerns as, according to the philosopher, 'language shelters within itself the treasure of everything that is essential.'[386] Heidegger's ontology reveals Dasein to be a fundamentally social being that is inseparable from living alongside others. As our understanding of the world is predominantly experienced during everydayness, we most commonly inhabit the language of 'idle talk'[387] which is the gossip and small talk that constitutes everyday life. Heidegger, however, insists that this is not a pejorative term as this seemingly mindless type of communication enables Dasein to belong to a society within the world. Whilst the goal is always to become aware of our potential (experienced through existential angst), it is not a state that can exist everyday as it would separate Dasein from other beings – which is impossible due to our biological need for community.

Even though 'idle talk'[388] is not inherently negative, it can be analysed as a mode of distraction that takes us away from forming new ideas and opinions about the world. Brandon Absher argues that 'idle talk'[389] is what happens when 'discovery becomes perverted' – essentially, it is a closing-off from conceptual discussion, however, it is an inescapable aspect of normalised functioning. Absher gives the

[385] Eric Severson, 'A time for shame: Levinas, diachrony and the hope of shame', in in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change: Ominous Transitions*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 57-73 (p. 62).
[386] Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), p. 142.
[387] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 211.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.

example of a couple arguing, whilst one partner still uses the word *love*, it is in inaccurate articulation of feelings, 'genuine speech involves removing such concealments in a direct discovery that draws entities forth into unconcealment -a lover's admission, for example, that her love is fading.'[390] 'Idle talk' in this instance is a useful lens to view what would ordinarily be described as an act of deception as what is being revealed is the lover's shame. If language articulates our being-in-the-world, the lover's dishonesty conceals an emotion that prompts such misalignment: why else would she lie if she could access the clarity of emotional discernment? Shame is a self-reflexive emotion that prevents the experience of positive affects such as acceptance, contentment, and joy as it traps the self in a negative global understanding (I *am* bad, rather than I have done something bad.) As language discloses our being-in-the-world, experiencing shame is thus to speak its language. The lover's example signals the area of interest for this chapter: specifically, what happens to our language (and thus *interpretation*) of the world when we are paralysed by the emotion of shame; likewise, what unfolds when we try to avoid it?

As shame is constituted through language, it inevitably impacts the form of Williams' work. Both McCarthy and Williams belong to a type of contemporary fiction that is written *through* affect. Whilst there are incorporated themes that belong to metamodernism (the search for depth, for example) the writers' similarity is rooted in language and feeling. The closest category for *Attrib. and other Stories*, and *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* can be found in the aesthetic category of authenticity by Wolfgang Funk and similar close readings of fragmentation. For Funk, 'authenticity always entails a degree of attribution'[391], which, when applied to literary works, is the reader who becomes 'a quintessential constituent of the authenticity of the work in question and not merely its detached adjudicator.'[392] In the examples that follow, an affective exchange takes place between reader and writer, as shame constructs a thematic rerouting towards authentic modes of communication that represents our current struggle in a digital world.

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[390] Brandon Absher, 'Speaking of Being: Language, Speech, and Silence in Being and Time', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 30.2 (2016), 204-231 (p. 2010) https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jspecphil.30.2.0204 [accessed 24 August 2024].
[391] Funk, p. 65.
[392] Ibid.

Fictions of fragmentation are equally constructed using affect as Merritt Moseley argues, 'fragmentary fiction is fiction that feels fragmented, broken, unfinished, incomplete, incoherent.'[393] For Moseley, such texts can have an ontological structure that is impacted by literal fragments (the inclusion of multimedia, for example), or it could allude to a disjointed consciousness. If we consider the emotion of shame, that is widely regarded as the most negative affect, its disruptive nature will accordingly alter the narrative flow (and consumption of) texts. In her first collection, *Attrib. and other Stories*, Williams' deliberately uses unnamed narrators whose vastly different perspectives imply they do not belong to a cohesive whole. In *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, however, names and more in-depth descriptions of appearances are used, representing our renewed focus on appearances that correlates with a dependence on media during the pandemic. 'Wilgefortis' and 'Rituals' (*Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*) are thus more explicitly concerned with embodied shame, whereas 'The Alphabet' and 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet' (*Attrib. and other Stories*) can be read as allegories for the shame of miscommunication.

The effect of both collections is kaleidoscopic as the reader feels as though they have entered an online space with many voices talking at once. Instead of the typical homogeneity found in short story collections that David Malcolm argues is always deliberate, 'fragmentariness in experience and its recounting within the context of a collection may *encourage* a vision of wholeness and completion'[394], Williams seeks to understand different ways of being-in-the-world. We could argue that the expression of shame unites the stories, however due to the multitude of its representation, the emotion resists competition: authenticity is something continually out of grasp as shame is always, at some point, avoided.

Our collective struggle with communication is identified within Randal Tonks' work on social media and the concept of self as he argues that 'online life diminishes

[393] Merritt Moseley, 'What is fragmentary fiction?', in *The Poetics of Fragmentation in Contemporary British and American Fiction*, ed. by Vanessa Guignery and Wojciech Drag (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2019), pp. 2-18 (p. 4).
[394] David Malcolm, 'The short story: fragment and augment', in *The Poetics of Fragmentation in Contemporary British and American Fiction*, ed. by Vanessa Guignery and Wojciech Drag (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2019), pp. 33-43 (p. 42).

face-to-face presence which is central to the recognition of, and ethical responsibility towards, others.'[395] As many of our connections are based online, this loss of presence 'reflects the shift from being subjective beings exchanging glances to becoming objects viewed from a distance.' Shame, then, has morphed from needing the corporeal gaze of the other to prompt a negative evaluation of self, to the requirement of a screen. Not only is shame a universally experienced emotion, but we can now classify it as the defining affect of the digital age.

In the samples that follow, Williams' narrators experience and withdraw from the feeling of shame; the most impacting scenes (often fuelled by humiliation), reveal a narcissistic self-structure. Narcissism appears to be the pathology of the decade, with many researchers exploring the rise of both narcissistic traits, and the personality disorder. As shame occurs when an individual has a *globalised* negative evaluation of self, the emotion is always connected to a defended self-image. Guilt requires a level of intersubjective empathy that is being effaced through new modes of communication – it is difficult to maintain compassion when the presence of another person is missing from interactions. Not only does the proliferation of screens impact our registry of others, but narcissism is an integral part of the capitalist model. There are many readings of entitlement being a profitable trait, however, the aim of this thesis is not to contribute to materialist analyses: my interest lies in its relationship to *time*.

As shame (and its relationship to narcissism) is always a temporal experience, it is reasonable to consider the form of the short story as most suited to representing its jarring affect. Gabriela Tucan claims that the short story 'gives the sensation of irresistible fascination, pulsates and throbs ceaselessly, suspends motion, emphasises vigorous nuances'[396]; in short, it is a riotous construction of affect. Williams is therefore a writer that stands at the forefront of affective reconstruction within texts. Her short story collections represent her commitment to understanding

[395] Randal G. Tonks, 'Changing self in the digital age: The impact of digital technology on the self and person', *International Review of Theoretical Psychologies*, 1.2 (2021), 234-257 (p. 252). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354698238_Changing_self_in_the_digital_age_The_impact_of_digital_technology_on_the_self_and_person> [accessed 28 August 2024].

[396] Gabriela Tucan, 'What is a Short Story Besides Short? Questioning Minds in Search of Understanding Short Fiction', *Romanian Journal of English*, 11.1 (2014), 1-8 (p.1) < 10.2478/rjes-2014-0018> [accessed 28 August 2024].

diverse modes of communication, disclosing alternative states of being-in-the-world. Undeniably situated in the digital landscape, she mourns our diminishing capacity for empathy (and *attention* – the short story 'never exhausts the subject') and considers how the increase of societal issues such as illness and bullying contribute to an isolated generation. Her work rages against and upholds the text's form as she uses fragmentary devices to pause and accelerate our reading as together, we journey through the phenomenological frustrations of shame.

***Sensory Differences*: 'The Alphabet' & 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet'**

Both 'The Alphabet' and 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet' include examples of living with neurodivergence: aphasia featured in 'The Alphabet' is a neurological condition that impacts speech, and synaesthesia, while not a disorder, can lead to isolation. Aphasia is caused by an injury to the brain wherein 'damage to language processing regions may disrupt initial input and output processes for learning and the long-term storage of newly acquired linguistic knowledge.'[397] Existing in a fast-paced world is therefore difficult as new information cannot be so readily stored and recalled. Alternatively, synaesthesia has received recent critical attention as researchers are arguing that it should be classified as a neurodivergence due to its prevalence in autism, which is a developmental disorder. The question of whether 'synaesthesia is dichotomous (some people have it, and others don't) or continuous is unresolved and has been a barrier to significant progress.'[398] Put simply, the issue of the parameters of synaesthesia stagnates further research however it is largely considered to exist on a spectrum alongside other neurodivergences.

These two conditions do not inherently *cause* shame in the individual, however the impact on daily life can lead to more frequent moments of feeling rejected from society. Inserting both texts into Heidegger's phenomenology offers

[397] Claudia Penaloza, Nadine Martin, Matti Laine and Antoni Rodriguez-Fornells, 'Language learning in aphasia: A narrative review and critical analysis of the literature with implications for language therapy', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Reviews*, 141 (2022), pp. 1-29 (p. 4) < https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763422003141?via%3Dihub> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[398] Jamie Ward, 'Synaesthesia as a model system for understanding variation in the human mind and brain', in *Cognitive Neuropsychology*, 38.4 (2021), pp. 259-278 (p. 261).

an empathic lens to read shame as we are forced to confront the fact that we always exist relationally alongside other beings and other entities as part of being-in-the-world. Matthew Ratcliffe uses Heidegger's structure of mood as a springboard for his own work in psychiatry, noting that the conception of Dasein 'does not carve us off from the world but emphasises the fact that we are situated in the world.'[399] As the world is disclosed to us through the structure of mood, Ratcliffe conceptualises 'existential feeling as a phenomenological category'[400], which refers to something that can be 'both a bodily feeling and a sense of belonging to the world.'[401] Existential feeling typically arises through a 'lack of physiological affect, rather than an excess'[402] for example when we are deprived of touch, or when we feel the tiredness of depression – we are suddenly aware of existing outside time: we feel not at home in ourselves.

Both 'Alphabet' and 'Synesthete, Would Like To Meet' include narrators that do not feel at home within a highly individualised, digital world due to the limiting effects of their conditions. It is within this existential feeling of not belonging that shame operates; during moments of humiliation, (immediate or recalled), the form of the text is fractured to mimic the internal changes that are being experienced. The ontic phenomena of hiding, averting eyes, and blushing due to shame therefore have 'neither a psychic, nor a somatic, but a psychosomatic character.'[403] As the narrators grapple with struggling to interpret the world, they struggle with feelings of loneliness and rejection that are a)in the case of 'Alphabet': defended against; b) in 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet': avoided until finally acknowledged and worked through. Disrupting the form of the text through its affective structure allows the reader to engage in a shared state of being-in-the-world. Particularly in 'The Alphabet', sections must be re-read to ensure correct interpretation as the disjointed form (which simultaneously matches the condition and the unsettling experience of shame) prompt an intrusive existential feeling. The reader feels implicated in

[399] Matthew Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, psychiatry and the sense of reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 43.
[400] Ratcliffe, p. 52.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ratcliffe, p. 57.
[403] Petr Kouba, *The Phenomenon of Mental Disorder: Perspectives of Heidegger's Though in Psychopathology* (London: Springer, 2014), p. 23.

witnessing the deterioration of the narrator, a feeling that is universal to the event of shame as 'an inescapable publicity.'[404]

Aphasia and synaesthesia can also be read as allegories for connection: in the first text, the breakdown of a relationship correlates with the decline of a processing condition; conversely, in the second story, the narrator's sensory issues are tranquilised after meeting an online companion. As our being-in-the-world is social – we are always 'being-with' (even during moments of ontological anxiety that prompt solitude, it is *temporary*.) Existing without others is to deprive ourselves of an anchoring within the world, as we can never truly leave the 'idle talk'[405] of everydayness. Whilst the conditions can be read literally, and should be analysed as such, their allegorical function presents interesting questions regarding shame: namely, if we can no longer correctly *interpret* the world, can we still feel shame? Such a question has exhaustive ethical implications which I cannot discuss here due to the restricting word count. If we are to consider it purely within Heidegger's model, however, it raises significant points concerning the hermeneutics of contemporary fiction and vulnerability.

The Alphabet

'The Alphabet' (or Love Letters or Writing Love Letters Before I Forget How to Use Them or These Miserable Loops Look So Much Better On Paper Than In Practice) explores the grief of living through a degenerative illness and the shame that accompanies it. The anonymous narrator recounts the ending of a relationship due to their worsening condition of aphasia. There is a connection between 'The Alphabet' and McCarthy's *Remainder* as both protagonists endure mental and physical upheaval that cannot be spoken about; specifically in this short story, the unspeakableness of the problem defies the correct linguistic processing. Roger Luckhurst notes that trauma is 'worryingly transmissible'[406] which highlights how the affective structure of shame leaks into our reading experience – in the case of both

[404] Rukgaber, p. 105.
[405] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 211.
[406] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 3.

texts, we share the protagonist's difficulties *through* reconstruction.[407] The settlement provided in *Remainder* prevents the narrator from recounting his traumatic accident which changes his perception of being-in-the-world, similarly, 'Alphabet', is framed in ambiguity due to the narrator's condition.

We often take for granted the tranquilised state of everydayness ('the supposition that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine "life"'[408]) that is the most common mode of being-in-the-world. Full of its distractions and mindless absorption in the 'idle talk'[409] of 'the they'[410] ('everyone is the other, and no-one is himself'[411]), we are pivoted away from these moments during anxiety, and as previously argued, when we feel judged by another. However, what happens when we are unable to live within these invisible networks due to a disability or illness? Matthew Rukgaber considers the shame of being excluded from a sociotechnical world, arguing that when we are not part of the rhythm of everyday life, we experience a 'boundary reaction of shame'[412] which leaves us in an 'unanswerable situation.'[413] Unanswerable here means, 'one finds oneself without any pathway back to the anonymous and effortless way that we typically inhabit the world.'[414] Unfortunately, due to the nature of their condition, the protagonist cannot answer the question of how to insert themselves back into everyday life as they cannot communicate the parameters of their situation. It is both unanswerable and unspeakable.

Aphasia is defined as a 'language disorder caused by an injury to the brain. In aphasia, the ability to talk, to understand spoken language, to read and write are all impaired, to varying degrees.'[415] The narrator does not reference their initial response to the diagnosis, which indicates two things – firstly, the trauma has not yet

[407] Reconstruction here meaning Funk's definition.
[408] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 222.
[409] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 211.
[410] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[411] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 165.
[412] Rukgaber, p. 100.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Maria V. Ivanova and Nina F. Dronkers, Aphasia: How Our Language System Can Break, *Front Young Mind*, 10 (April 2022), 1-10 (p.2) < https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9635485/< [accessed 20 August 2024].

been processed, and secondly, the dysfunctional processing prevents them from an accurate retelling of events. By layering such loss, the self-imposed isolation after trauma is thrown back on itself to represent how not communicating with others also *causes* trauma. This unanchored sense of self illustrates Rukgaber's 'boundary reaction of shame'[416] as the narrator deflects with humour as she reflects on the relationship, 'you can't spell aphrodisiac without aphasia,' you said later, trying to make a filthy joke out of it and holding me,'[417] however this lucidity is punctured by reality, '- what was I saying? -'[418] The broken speech reflects the condition whilst representing a feeling of loss: it is an aesthetic device that constructs an ontology of shame which the reader shares in, as our processing of the narrative (the boundaries of form) are also disrupted.

The disintegration of boundaries within the narrative highlights Rukgaber's argument that 'prepersonal shame is a sense of loss of the communicative space that allows us to enter into the lived body relations that make up the shared anonymous world.'[419] The narrator's condition prevents them from having complete agency within the relationship, which impacts the text's form as the narrator can no longer correctly assign objects with their correct description, 'and from then on it became – like *easier* but the opposite. Forgetting *hairbrush* became forgetting our address became forgetting dates became figmenting became fragmenting…my brain had unpinned you without me wanting it to and now you have gone.'[420] The visual decline of 'forgetting, figmenting, and fragmenting' reflects the dissolution of self as the narrator's recollection of the relationship is shattering. It is therefore possible to read aphasia as an analogy for the breakdown of romantic relationships, as the intelligibility of the world is understood *through* the self's connection to others (Heidegger argues this case through 'being-with'[421] which is when 'everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken hold of, genuinely spoken.'[422])

[416] Rukgaber, p. 100.
[417] Eley Williams, *Attrib. and other stories* (Influx Press: London, 2017), p. 14.
[418] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 13.
[419] Rukgaber, p. 100.
[420] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 22.
[421] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 153.
[422] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 217.

When a fracture occurs during 'being-with'[423], we employ strategies to cope. Maladaptive daydreaming is commonly used as a defence mechanism that enables the individual to escape their surroundings; as the narrator is trapped by the parameters of their condition, however, there is an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia. Understanding the present is therefore relational, as trauma theorists note, 'self-reflection or conversation with others may lead us to interpret our current experience in terms of past events' which informs how we live in the present.'[424] This reflection 'constructs an account of how our patterns of response embody and express specific elements of our personal history.' Robbed of the ability to have this conversation, the narrator spirals into disarray:

'And

You should never start sentences like that, I know, but

what's a sentence, really, if not time spent alone -'[425]

This fracturing unintentionally emphasises Alison Gibbons' argument that 'in the contemporary, then, we can perhaps speak once more of a hermeneutics of the self.'[426] For Gibbons, there is a 'will and ability to process intensities so that we can articulate meaningful emotional reactions or cognitive responses to today's social situation in which another affective modality has substituted yesterday's fragmented and fragmenting euphoria.'[427] What happens, however, to understanding when articulation is severed? If metamodernism reflects our need to rebuild honesty after cynicism, Williams' story highlights the fragility of this desire. Reconstructing a self through an understanding of its experiences leaves room for the unreliability of the

[423] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 153.
[424] Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand, 'Introduction: Inscribing Trauma in Culture, Brain, and Body' in *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-26 (p. 9).
[425] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 21.
[426] Gibbons, 'Metamodern Affect', p. 85.
[427] Ibid.

postmodern narrative to repeat itself. The desire to articulate is always built on an invisible interpretation that can only be made possible through a relational understanding of self and other entities. Understanding the self is thus at risk of perpetuating more solipsistic narratives that reflect our individualised culture – the process that Gibbons refers to is best shown precisely when it falters.

Heidegger's hermeneutics prioritise an understanding of *why* we give meanings to certain things (which we then interpret) and the answer is through our Being. As the Being of Dasein is always rooted in time and we typically occupy the average state of everydayness, our sense of time (and thus, interpretation of self) is always compared to 'the they.'[428] A hermeneutics of self is therefore indivisible from a hermeneutics of others, which collapses the initial goal. As a defining feature of metamodernism, the search for understanding the self through texts is therefore more noticeable when we cannot achieve it. Williams' text, when read as an analogy, highlights this as the narrator's ability to interpret the world collapses after the relationship ends. The goal, then, is not to understand the self as a stand-alone feature, rather it is to *overthrow this self-seeking behaviour in exchange for community*. Gibbons' aesthetic model reveals our obsession with reconstructing an authenticity that has the appearance of a destination instead of the outward process it should be.

The shame that accompanies the narrator's onset of illness is not the only example of this emotion within the text. A deep anguish that inevitably turns to loss after the narrator can no longer interpret the world around them is preceded by a subtle sense of shame masquerading as vulnerability. At the beginning of the story, we are presented with more nostalgic reimaginings of the relationship which gradually decrease as the narrator's cognition declines. One example is when the paragraph opens with 'I have realised with some embarrassment that the reason I could not find them[429] if of course because I am *wearing* my glasses.'[430] The embarrassment the narrator feels is understandable, as their orientation of the world

[428] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[429] * Here referring to the previous paragraph, 'I completely lost it (the plot, not the glasses – they're only mislaid.') *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 12.
[430] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 13.

is under threat – it is a discombobulation that we would all share, and a natural response. Whilst it is tempting to read this as an example of shame, it is what follows that reveals the narrator's hidden wounds:

'This is like the time someone (I am being coy – mean you) complemented no complimented my eyes and suddenly I wished that I could pop them out onto your palm and say, 'Hey, damn right, they're the best thing about me; *not, you know, functionally, of course, hence the glasses, but in terms of form*; want to swap? I wanna see you in 'em', which would of course be impossible for three reasons and horrible for about twelve, but

what was I saying? - '[431]

The use of italics here represents an inner voice that is almost subdued. Set against the rest of the paragraph, the italicisation discloses a truth that is quickly disguised by more important elements of the narrator's condition (the misplacing of the glasses.) What is revealed, is an inability to be vulnerable and accept compliments within the relationship. When shame is unacknowledged, it can be hidden beneath a façade of vulnerability that is more calculated than instinctual. The deliberate use of the distinction between 'complemented'[432] and 'complimented'[433] also reveals hidden shame as the first refers to the addition of something to make a perfect whole – the narrator needs the reflection of another to become a complete self. This example of pre-existing shame before the illness also supports the claim that aphasia could be read as an allegory for not being able to communicate within relationships in the current landscape.

The narrator's low self-esteem is evident in wanting to hand their partner their eyes (figuratively speaking of course) after they have been complimented on them. This reveals a refusal to accept compliments, and more importantly, the need to hand over the very part of themselves which is being appreciated: essentially, it is

[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid.

an oscillating desire and reticence to be seen. Tangney and Dearing comment on the link between low self-esteem and shame as they argue that 'feelings of shame involve an affective reaction to a global negative evaluation of self.'[434] As the narrator compartmentalises their body in response to the compliment, they dissect the self as a whole and cut off the very aspect which is desirable, handing over their eyes is almost an exchange of esteem – if they cannot accept themselves, then taking away something that is good allows them to sit in their shame which is more comfortable. It is the totalising aspect that differentiates standardised low self-esteem from shame, and this is acutely presented in the narrator's response.

When we consider this reaction, if we did not understand how chronic shame functions, we would not understand the refusal to accept the compliment however shame is always rooted in narcissism. The spectrum of narcissism is vast, and all human beings have traits as it is an evolutionary behaviour. When narcissism is unhealthy, however, it becomes a compensatory structure against the experience of rejection which explains the narrator's response. As shame is typically associated with a response to a 'specific failure or transgression'[435] it seems odd that a compliment could prompt such an uncanny, horror-esque reaction. When we are ashamed by our appearance, however, any perceived judgment to our body is a breach against a boundary, hence the narrator responds accordingly to this 'transgression.'[436] As narcissism is transactional, the eyes are offered to the other as a trade: if the private is made public then true feelings do not have to be acknowledged.

The form of the previous romantic interaction is deliberately jarring to highlight the oscillation between feelings of shame and the refusal to process them. Incorrect wording, italics and broken sentence structure reveal the confusion of this affective experience: the narrator's being-in-the-world is suddenly rooted in '*shame-proneness*'[437] which existed long before their illness. If we experienced frequent criticism at a young age, we are more prone to repeat the totalising aspect of the

[434] Tangney and Dearing, p. 57.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid.

shame-response (rather than guilt, for example) in later situations. Individuals who suffer from 'shame-proneness' have connecting low self-esteem and 'over time, ego threats may motivate actions ranging from proactive change to defensive avoidance.'[438] As evidenced in the example from the text, the narrator cannot come to terms with these feelings and swiftly changes the subject, '– what was I saying? -'[439] As soon as vulnerability is acknowledged, it is dismissed.

Vulnerability is currently receiving more critical attention than ever. Many philosophers consider the COVID-19 pandemic to be a turning point in how humans respond to the modern stressors of daily life. Elodie Boublil considers vulnerability from a phenomenological perspective, 'which emphasises the intentional and relational structure of consciousness and its meaning-making activity, it characterises the very condition of subjectivity as being in the world with others, always immersed in intersubjective dynamics and networks of relations.'[440] Vulnerability is inherent in our being-in-the-world as we live in relation to others, it is, as Boublil argues, 'an ethical compass and an operative tool for philosophical critique – like a trigger that would us reset and reopen ethical questions to challenge the ideological assumptions of our zeitgeist.'[441] A nascent interest in vulnerability therefore mirrors the proliferation of research in shame studies. From an outsider's perspective, these two terms have an opposing impact as one is revealed during vulnerable moments and concealed through shame.

Avoiding shame, however, is part of the narcissistic individual (and societal) structure which flies under the radar of *appropriated vulnerability*. Within this defence against shame, an individual will present in a grandiose or vulnerable fashion which often shares elements of both states. As a façade that is absolutely rooted in shame, this mechanism allows the person to exist in the world without experiencing true vulnerability that would threaten the fragile presentation of self. Williams' narrator approaches the painful feeling of being in a vulnerable position (in

[438] Tangney and Dearing, p. 59.
[439] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 13.
[440] Elodie Boublil, 'A Critical Phenomenology of Vulnerability: Toward a Paradigm Shift? A Contribution to an Interdisciplinary Trialogue on Vulnerability', *Human Studies*, 47 (2024), 275-285 (p.277) < https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10746-024-09736-3> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[441] Boublil, p. 278.

relationships we are seen), however they turn away from it, 'even though I now know the whereabouts of my glasses the feeling of lack remains.'[442] This turning away (or, embracing of emptiness) is the unidentifiable feeling of chronic shame that is experienced as an 'affective state of very low arousal'[443] that can be an 'ongoing, chronically dysregulated, and very painful experience.' The broken form of 'Alphabet' articulates this dysregulation in which transparency is intermittently woven.

Working through interpersonal shame within relationships requires an embracing of vulnerability which emphasises the 'plasticity of our boundaries and the fact they are contingent on a mutual desire for love and recognition.'[444] As shame is a breaching of boundaries, vulnerability is the acknowledgement that such boundaries are permeable in the first instance, and this requires community. For shame-prone individuals, conversation is fundamental in processing an emotion that has previously been avoided: a 'social strategy might involve "talking through" the failure or transgression and associated shame feelings, seeking support and reassurance from a trusted friend/family member.'[445] Williams' narrator refuses to have such conversations, and the previous examples highlights their warring need for affection and solitude. In a recent study of vulnerable narcissism which is notably titled, 'Shame behind the corner?', it has been found that 'vulnerable narcissism was positively associated with shame in both its within-and between-person parts.'[446] Essentially, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits experienced shame within the self-structure (compared to more grandiose subjects), and during social interactions with others.

As the narrator cannot endure difficult conversations due to this pre-existing tension with vulnerability before their illness, it is a cruel twist of fate that they are permanently robbed of the ability to do so. Speech is integral to human beings for Heidegger (even silence has a robust quality, only when it is *purposeful* not

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[442] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 13.
[443] Patricia A. DeYoung, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame: A Relational/Neurobiological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 41.
[444] Boublil, p. 278.
[445] Tangney and Dearing, p. 62.
[446] Marco Di Sarno, Johannes Zimmerman, Fabio Madeddu, Erica Casini and Rossella Di Pierro, 'Shame behind the corner? A daily diary investigation of pathological narcissism', *Journal of Research in Personality*, 85 (2020), 1-13 (p.7) https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0092656620300131 [accessed 24 August 2024].

consequential), as 'man shows himself as the entity which talks.'[447] Our everyday communication, 'idle talk' is how Dasein relates to others, which is how it is disclosed as being-in-the-world; for 'what is said is always understood proximally as 'saying' something – that is, an uncovering something.'[448] Whilst Heidegger argues that everydayness is inauthentic, it is a required state wherein we can access authenticity – vulnerability, therefore, is acute and not a lived state. If, like the narrator, there is a presentation of vulnerability that is defended against and lived within, we can assume that it is shame rather than genuine expression.

Shame, and its avoidance, operate on multiple levels within the text however there is a limited time frame for this emotion to occur as the symptoms of aphasia slowly inhibit cognition. Not only is the narrator alienated from their relationship (and society), but they are also estranged from themselves as their interpretative lens in which to view the world is damaged. This raises the question: if we are no longer living alongside (and, more importantly, *interpreting* the same world as) others, can we still feel shame? As the narrator's condition worsens, they refer to a children's alphabet poster, however each letter gradually morphs into a memory of their partner, 'I have a children's laminated alphabet poster on my wall. There is a cartoon apple on it, and a ball, and a large yellow cat…M and N are always claimed by my memory of your knuckles and O invariably is your surprise.'[449] Seemingly lost in a romantic reverie, the narrator alters the meaning of words which looks like a dedication; however, it reveals a lack of interpretation. Our being-in-the-world is defined through our relationships with other people and other entities (the poster, for example) which, if severed, poses a threat to the experience of self-conscious emotions.

Removing ourselves from language could therefore be seen as no longer being-in-the-world. This is not to say that the self no longer exists, rather Heidegger's ontology is predicated on a 'being-with'[450] which requires an understanding of others and other entities. Without an interpretation of our relational existence, we are no

[447] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 208.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 18.
[450] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 161.

longer able to correctly articulate our experiences (from which we can move towards authenticity.) Both chronic shame (originating in childhood; leading to shame-proneness) and moments of shame occur when we do not match society's standards. The narrator experiences both as her vulnerability in relationships is exposed before the shame-inducing deterioration of her condition. Rukgaber argues that the problem of shame is 'an inescapable publicity, which means one is cut off from ever being at home among the objects and norms of society as it is currently constituted.'[451] As aphasia will eventually remove the knowledge that the narrator is adrift from their surroundings, we once again consider Gibbons' argument that the contemporary turns towards 'a hermeneutics of self'[452] – without the relational awareness of community, the self collapses. Shame individuates which leads to awareness (if it is not defended against) so it requires a collective interpretation of society that we all participate in. Intelligibility is a defining aspect of being-in-the-world, and if 'Alphabet' is read as an allegory, it reveals not only the fragility of hermeneutics, but its innate egocentrism that is arguably behind the rise in narcissism.

Synesthete, Would Like To Meet

The story, 'Synesthete, Would Like To Meet', recounts the anonymous narrator's struggle with synaesthesia. Similarly framed to 'The Alphabet', the narrative is coiled around the condition as the language reflects its symptoms. Williams describes neurological synaesthesia in the style of the taboo it embodies, 'neurological synaesthesia is an unwieldy phrase to sprinkle into conversation.'[453] The verb 'sprinkles'[454] has childish connotations that imply a rhizomatic tendency to infiltrate the adult sphere, atomising our orientation within the world. Whilst seemingly poetic, synaesthesia 'actually falls within rather strict and usually testable statistical parameters as for colour-related synesthetes, the same colour is always associated

[451] Rukgaber, p. 105.
[452] Gibbons, 'Metamodern Affect', p. 85.
[453] Williams, *Attrib. and other short stories*, p. 95.
[454] Ibid.

with the same meaning for the individual.'[455] Synesthetes 'cannot "turn on" or "turn off" these connections',[456] and not only is it a lifelong condition, but it also correlates with strong memory and its cause is relatively unknown (sensory deprivation and trauma to the brain have been hypothesised.) A synaesthetic experience of being-in-the-world, whilst appearing chaotic, is thus its own processing system: arguably, it is a controlled existence amidst the unpredictability of modern life.

Reading the narrative replicates the narrator's temporal experience: it is a complete sensory phenomenon; one which muddles the boundaries between ordinary epistemological categories. The effect is a romanticised state of being, 'I see fireflies when a tyre screeches, smell fried onions when I step on an upturned plug'[457], which provoke an affective response within the reader. Ramachandran and Hubbard claim that 'synaesthesia is no mere quirk in some people's brains; it has broad implications and may give us an experimental handle on elusive phenomena like metaphor, abstract thinking and the evolution of language.'[458] Williams' story, like 'Alphabet' is therefore an investigation of *interpretation* and consequently how shame disturbs articulation.

The condition itself, unlike aphasia, does not pejoratively impact cognition in most cases, and currently is not listed in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) 'because it is not technically a psychological or mental disorder, nor does it disrupt the functioning of most individuals who have it.'[459] The narrator however is 'a very rare case…my condition is complete.'[460] Their synaesthesia impacts all the senses which has a profound impact on forming relationships; this emotional dysregulation has been noted in certain cases, 'some lesser known types connect certain senses or meanings with taste, touch, or emotional responses.'[461]

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[455] Lanei Rodemeyer, 'What about synaesthesia? A phenomenological analysis of a perceptual phenomenon' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (2023), 39-49 (p. 40) < https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/sjp.12533?saml_referrer> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[456] Ibid.
[457] Williams, *Attrib. and other short stories*, p. 97.
[458] Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and Edward M. Hubbard, 'The Phenomenology of Synaesthesia', Journal of Consciousness Studies, 10 (2003), 49-57 (p.56) http://cbc.ucsd.edu/pdf/Ramachandran_JCS2003.pdf [accessed 24 August 2024].
[459] Rodemeyer, p. 41.
[460] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 96.
[461] Rodemeyer, p. 40.

The effect is a heightened existence wherein novelty becomes exhausting, 'the sound of birdsong outside my window tastes of rosewater and it is scalding.' It is important to note however, these differences do not inherently produce a feeling of shame like the narrator experienced in 'Alphabet', there is, rather, loneliness which implies the *desire* for connection, 'wearing shades and looking either wary or disgusted whenever I leave the house can make for quite a lonely existence.'[462]

Rather than face the sensory onslaught of the outside world, the narrator forms most of their relationships online. Unlike the previous story, however, their experience is not dismantled within the allegory of a relationship breakdown, it is already fragmented, 'in an attempt to process fewer sensations and block out the worst unexpected repercussions of my surroundings, I have taken to wearing tinted shades even when indoors…I'm well aware how daft this looks.'[463] Instead of allowing the condition to eclipse their life, they still seek out connection, 'this is why I chat online…online dating marked a huge step.'[464] There is an authentic vulnerability at work here, as the persistent desire to reconnect with the outside world reconstructs an earnest sincerity.

The narrator's yearning for romantic connection highlights the difference between shame and loneliness: the latter can be solved through connection; however, shame perpetuates within connections unless it is *expressed*. Online relationships can therefore be an act of agency as, according to Alan Kirby, the individual has authorial hold over the content, 'the content is *tangible*; the act is physical.'[465] After meeting someone online, the narrator's emotional landscape becomes regulated, impacting their sensory interpretation of the world, 'your email back, however, smelt like a sea breeze.'[466] Connecting through email is thus a tangible act as it has quantifiable effects on the narrator's condition – it begins to introduce a sense of peace that transcends metaphor, it quietens their being-in-the-world. Psychologist Richard Geist argues that 'at the dynamic centre of every client's world is a hidden but powerful drive toward health – health understood not as

[462] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 97.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 98.
[465] Kirby, p. 51.
[466] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 98.

cohesion but as connectedness.'[467] As the narrator seeks connection, they are tackling any residual discomfort they feel regarding their condition; for shame-prone individuals like the narrator in 'Alphabet' connection is unsafe.

In terms of allegory, the disarray of synaesthesia parallels the search for connection after postmodernism. Bracken argues that 'postmodernity is a time when the established routes through life have been destroyed and we are left individually to set a course for ourselves. We are left with fragments of maps, in which we can have little faith.'[468] Synaesthesia is a condition that fragments neural pathways, allowing individuals to experience 'temporal series through mental mapping.'[469] The narrator's orientation of the world can be read as our collective effort to reconstruct meaning in the contemporary landscape. Working through shame therefore means embracing the vulnerability that comes with 'being-with' – we are not supposed to live isolated lives. Schneider agrees with the notion of transcending shame, insisting 'the recovery of acknowledgement of such interrelatedness would lead us back from our pursuit of the path of an autonomous individualism.'[470] This individualism which has left us with 'little faith' can be overcome through connecting with others; equally, when the narrator meets their online date in person, peace rewriters their sensory experiences allowing an emotional reset. We could therefore argue that this reset highlights the 'renewed emphasis on depth and authenticity in the cultural sphere'[471] that Sam Browse argues, is 'at the heart of such a shift from a post- to metamodern cultural sensibility.'[472]

Aesthetically, the story plays with impressions. Jesse Matz argues that Impressionism's specialities are 'intense momentary perceptions, pitching sensibility to heights sublime enough to reduce the world to apparition, but the power they thereby get to "make us *see*" does not show us much more than "reduced"

[467] Patricia A. DeYoung, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame: A Relational/Neurobiological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.119.
[468] Patrick Bracken, *Trauma: Culture, Meaning & Philosophy* (London: Whurr Publishers Ltd), p.182.
[469] Rodemeyer, p. 40.
[470] Schneider, p. 138.
[471] Sam Browse, 'Between Truth, Sincerity and Satire: Post-Truth Politics and the Rhetoric of Authenticity', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2018), pp. 167-181 (p. 168).
[472] Ibid.

appearances.'[473] Impressionism, in this sense, is a flat evocation of human experience; one which is ephemeral and privileges immediacy over sustained reflection.[474] Literary impressionists thus attempted to reincorporate, or mediate, human experience within realist prose to account for the specific sense of being-in-the-world that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Increased urbanisation and advances of technology after the first world war created a fractured sense of self, and as Tom Slevin argues, 'modernity's narratives contain multiple and scattered events that unfold, interconnected with the subject. The narrator, for whom time is unique and bound to desire and intention, is necessarily entangled with lived events.'[475] Intentionality of the subject and our comportment within the world are therefore explored within modernist fiction, which is reified within metamodernism. The entanglement of external and internal orientation represents crucial phenomenological concerns without delineating a specific ontological structure. Slevin's notion of the uniqueness of time is precisely the form of mediation that Matz claims to be uncovered within literary impressionism. Intentionality and immediate human experience convey a very specific representation of time as something urgent and intensely felt, a form that is conveyed and argued against within Williams' work (as she works with allegory.)

When we consider the representation of synaesthesia, we must acknowledge Vladimir Nabokov's memoir, *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov also struggled with the condition, 'as far back as I remember myself (with interest, with amusement, seldom with admiration or disgust), I have been subject to mild hallucinations…on top of all this I present a fine case of coloured hearing.'[476] Synaesthesia is viewed within a liminal state of wry observation as he notes, 'the long *a* of the English alphabet has for me the tint of weathered wood, but a French *a* evokes polished ebony. Oatmeal *n*, noodle-limp *l*, and the ivory-backed hand mirror of *o* take care of the whites'[477], providing an elaborate description of his sensory world. His sense of time was also

[473] Matz, p. 3.
[474] Matz, p. 18.
[475] Tom Slevin, *Visions of the Human: Art, World 1 and the Modernist Subject* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2015), p. 142.
[476] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 16.
[477] Nabokov, p. 17.

displaced, 'initially, I was unaware that time, so boundless at first blush, was a prison,'[478] revealing the disorientation of a personal history that is continually [re]mediated through a condition which impacts present understanding. Sara-Louise Cooper argues that 'the tension between timely form and timeless content places both the writer and his readers in the role of decipherer of enigmas: the writer discerns timelessness within experience which appears to be linear; the reader discerns timelessness within a text which appears to be linear.'[479] Rewriting temporality could therefore be exclusively connected to synaesthesia as a condition that reroutes being-in-the-world. As Lisa Zunshine argues that 'Impressionism in itself is neither naturalistic nor fantastic enough to evoke the special illusionistic realism peculiar to Nabokov's universe,'[480]it is his neural processing of the world that separates his work from other impressionist writers. The imagery that both writers share reveals not only their interpretation of the world, but their *articulation* of it.

Nabokov also struggled with the limits of this condition, 'the best I can do for *w*'[481] which hints at his own feelings of shame. Like Williams' narrator, they are momentary as Nabokov finds solace and connection with his wife, Vera. David Bethea argues that the aspect of creativity Nabokov most valued was 'the written trace. It was what remained behind, always under his control, to be wielded with consummate elegance and grace even as the enemy, time itself, took from him his homeland, his loved ones, and eventually his own life.'[482] This trace is the impressionistic prose that he leaves behind, which informs contemporary texts.

William's narrator, like Nabokov, does find the connection they have been looking for, 'and your colour, when you introduced yourself? You must not be insulted, but you were blank. A soundless, tasteless, brilliant blank.' Interestingly, their companion is a respite to the turbulent processing of synaesthesia, which affirms its impact on emotional processing. This is the turning-point in the narrative

[478] Nabokov, p. 6.
[479] Sara-Louise Cooper, 'Translating Timelessness: The Relationship between Vladimir Nabokov's Conclusive Evidence, Drugie berega, and Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited', *The Modern Language Review*, 113.1 (2018), 39-56 (p. 42).
[480] Lisa Zunshine, *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 246.
[481] Nabokov, p. 17.
[482] David M. Bethea, *The Superstitious Muse: Thinking Russian Literature Mythopoetically* (Massachusetts: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. 337.

as shame is suddenly felt: the narrator was not ashamed of their condition (though they were undeniably lonely), however feeling seen proves to be shocking to their system. In the previous story, 'Alphabet', unresolved shame unravels a relationship (shown through the metaphor of aphasia), in contrast, shame brings an accompanying illumination that is also painful for this narrator. After meeting in person, they note, 'as I watched your bus turn the corner the rain was singing a sweeter, brighter note. It was too sweet, almost, and just a touch too bright.'[483] The colours of the world are suddenly brighter, and the narrator feels exposed; consequently, they respond with avoidance, 'here is a warning, then, and a too-late apology for my lack of communication. Since our meeting my synaesthesia has become more intense.'[484] Ordinarily, shame exists in the shadows, meaning that it can be healed under a spotlight. As the narrator suddenly exists *within* this light, they retreat to the safety of the digital world.

The differentiating aspect of 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet' from 'Alphabet' therefore, is the longevity of shame – here it is a *momentary* experience: they retreat, apologise, and move forwards. Previously, aphasia can be read as a metaphor for the consequences of solipsism (or, as I argue, vulnerable narcissism), however it can be also seen as the onset of chronic sorrow. Susan Roos argues that this 'can be considered a severe life narrative interruption, that is, a shattering of the assumptive world and the self, whether it is momentous or consists of gradual, incremental concerns that culminate in a realisation of the loss.'[485] Roos is keen to note that 'chronic sorrow is not a state of permanent despair. It can be the basis of a life that has increased meaning and richness and is more deeply appreciated', however the grief contained in the first story cannot be processed as the narrator's cognitive decline unequivocally alters their being-in-the-world. The narrator in this story does not enter a chronic state, as they work through shame.

Set against the story's burgeoning romance is the relationship shared between the narrator and their doctor. Strangely, the doctor is threatened by the

[483] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 100.
[484] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 105.
[485] Susan Roos, 'The Long Road to Relevance: Disability, Chronic Sorrow, and Shame', in *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma*, ed. by Jeffrey Kauffman (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 171-197 (p.181).

presence of a lover, as he views their treatment as something that can only be impacted by his efforts, 'I believe that he thinks you might be my chance of a breakthrough and he wants that triumph for himself.'[486] Martha Nussbaum considers the displaced power dynamic within social structures, extending Heidegger's view that we are thrown into a world of pre-conceived practises: 'human beings are born into a world that they have not made and do not control.'[487] In this era of privatisation under neoliberal capitalism, Jeffrey Nealon argues that 'under an economic logic that is in fact dedicated to the unleashing of multifarious individual desires and floating values, rather than desire's dampening or repressive territorialisation on a gold standard of univocal value, the role of social "normalization" needs to be rethought from the ground up.'[488] Put simply, greed is disguised as charity; ownership masked as support.

The doctor's unusual methods, (suggesting they attend the cinema together), "it's for me and you," he said. "*Intensity*. Emotional immersion!"'[489] aim to reduce the narrator's sensory difficulties by confronting them. He states his reasons for this, 'we won't be able to observe any useful results in a lab so it makes sense to keep you under scrutiny out in the wild.'[490] In a bizarre Clockwork Orange-esque situation that follows, the narrator's response is studied whilst they watch Casablanca, ' he leaned a little closer over the armrest to peer at my face as the film's opening titles began.'[491] The possibility of an unclaimed, unmonitored breakthrough is enough reason for the doctor to behave shamelessly which highlights Nealon's argument that 'difference in the postmodern world isn't there to be overcome; it's there to be intensified.' While we have exceeded postmodernism in terms of aesthetic categories, we are still controlled by privatisation. Shamelessness here is not pathological but denotes a lack of empathy as the doctor's questionable methods do not consider the entirety of his patient. In this sense, the help is misguided, and can be seen as self-serving, 'he says

[486] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 105.
[487] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 177.
[488] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 21.
[489] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 103.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 101.

your name with a certain professional jealousy.'[492] For Heidegger, the doctor's treatment would be an example of inauthenticity and working alongside 'the they.' As 'inauthentic life is busy with things, whereby we always remain "curious" and "fascinated" with the outer appearances of things, we rarely attempt to understand where this curiosity comes from or where it is heading.'[493] As the doctor does not pause to consider the ethics of his methods, he does not consider *his* curiosity. The anxiety (angst) that occurs when we are living authentically is when we find ourselves being-towards-death; the doctor's need to cure his patient comes from his own fears of mortality that he disguises as morality.

At the end of the story, the narrator reflects on meeting their online companion as they find a stray eyelash on their shirt, 'you should know that this eyelash was the loudest thing I had ever heard and the sound of it almost threw me across the room.'[494] After processing their initial shame, 'I don't want to feel fascinating'[495], they arrive at acceptance that eventually turns towards excitement. The imagery of the eyelash represents a 'caesura'[496] which is 'a moment that can both separate and connect.'[497] The in-between state of such moments, 'highlights the direction of an experience, its movement and momentum.'[498] As the eyelash is caught on the narrator's sleeve, they are suspended between joy and anticipation, 'and as sure as hell don't you ever again kiss me goodbye because I cannot promise it would not leave me blinded.'[499] The caesura allows the narrator to reconsider their fear, as the eyelash is a stark reminder that the other person exists entirely as an independent entity. Shame creeps in when there is a tendency to control which living with synaesthesia automatically does. In this sense, the condition can be read as an inverted allegory to the one that functions in 'Alphabet' – the narrator makes sense

[492] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 104.
[493] Kevin A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 65.
[494] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 105.
[495] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 101.
[496] Jeffrey Eaton, 'On caesura, temporality and ego-destructive shame', in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change: Ominous Transitions*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 27-39 (p. 27).
[497] Ibid.
[498] Eaton, p. 28.
[499] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories*, p. 106.

of the world when they re-join it, their sensory experience regulates itself. Aphasia can be read as a warning against shutting out the world, which toxic shame can do if hidden behind a defensive structure (vulnerable narcissism.)

Jeffrey Eaton therefore considers caesuras to be an important part of healing shame as they introduce flexibility based on the acknowledgement that extreme ways of thinking and feeling reduce a natural flow of attention. When shame is left untreated, it corrodes our perception, 'through our desire and fear, we populate the world with phantoms born of our anxieties.'[500] Such phantoms exist freely (behind email addresses and avatars), as we already live in a digital world that is one of 'rupture, driven by technological innovation, which permits such a form.'[501] The more demands that are placed on our attention, the further we move away from genuine connection with others which can only exist through *reflection.* The narrator is deprived of the ability to reflect naturally due to their overwhelming condition, yet it is through their romantic involvement they achieve an inner quiet, 'there was no poetic extension, no misfiring of fizzing neurons as you said your name and shook my hand.'[502] Individuation through shame requires an attunement towards authenticity which is always a shared state – to exist in a community is therefore to live as ourselves. If we again consider Gibbons' claim that 'in the contemporary, then, we can perhaps speak once more of a hermeneutics of the self', this is not desirable as our relational state of being-in-the-world prevents it. Hermeneutics will always be 'vulnerable to an alteration of perspective'[503], as our structures of mood that disclose our being (shame, for example) have their own language. Perspective also encourages growth: 'if you cling to a fixed picture of the world, refusal feels easier than registering the impact of difference.'[504]

'Keeping up' Appearances: 'Wilgefortis' & 'Rituals'

[500] Eaton, p. 35.
[501] Kirby, p. 50.
[502] Williams, *Attrib. and other stories,* p. 99.
[503] Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 227.
[504] Eaton, p. 39.

Both 'Wilgefortis' and 'Rituals' are stories about humiliation and unhealed shame. Secondary school student, Jenny, is bullied for her facial hair in 'Wilgefortis' whilst six-year-old Danny's friend has an accident in 'Rituals'. Both events reveal the protagonist's rejection wounds, prompting the unravelling (and avoidance) of chronic shame. In his work on humiliation, Phil Leask argues that there are always consequences for harm: the humiliated individual can either feel shame by not extending blame to those who hurt them, or they can participate in humiliating others through fear (which causes shame.) Repeated exposure to acts of humiliation causes a disassociated response as part of complex post-traumatic stress disorder, which is often connected to guilt and shame. Jenny develops ritualistic responses to her continued bullying - obsessive prayers to Saint Wilgefortis whilst touching her philtrum; Danny, however, cannot tolerate humiliation and responds with rage (which arguably presents the initial gendered difference in reactions, though this changes at the end of the first story.)

Leask notes that after humiliation, 'the victim tends to pass through different sets of responses, from a sense of bewildered helplessness to rage and from there to revolt, resistance or submission, which may involve despair and self-destruction.'[505] The narrative represents this process in both stories as Jenny repeatedly communicates with her saint, until she eventually confronts herself in the mirror. Danny, however, refutes submission and hides his friend's face as an act of revolt. Arguably, Danny's actions after the accident highlight Leasks's claim that 'anger resulting from humiliation might also be matched by a realistic sense of powerlessness.'[506] As he surveys his friend on the ground (after falling down a flight of stairs), he is overwhelmed with inadequacy yet refuses to ask his mother for help - this act reveals his untreated shame: it is an issue of neglect.

The protagonists both employ avoidant strategies as the source of their shame is too painful to face. Behind the present humiliation (bullying and the

[505] Phil Leask, 'Losing trust in the world: Humiliation and its consequences', *Psychodynamic Practice*, 19.2 (2013), 129-142 (p. 136) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14753634.2013.778485> [accessed 28 August].
[506] Ibid.

accident) lurks a deeper loss: the absent parent. Jenny's father has passed away in 'Wilgefortis' and she eventually confronts her grief at the end of the story as she uses his razor on her face; for Danny, however, his parents are divorced, yet he does not feel as though they are present figures in his life. His envy is rooted in abandonment as he says about his friend, 'it was clear as day and you could bet a million pounds that Mark's mother had beautiful paintings on the wall…or photographs of Mark being balletic or loved.'[507] Turning away from the heaviness of grief, both characters conceal their vulnerability, until they are met with it. At the end of 'Wilgefortis', Jenny confronts her reflection as she uses her father's razor, thus orienting herself towards a new state of being-in-the-world; Danny, however, cannot tolerate his own sensitivity so he conceals his struggling friend's face in an act of contempt.

Both stories not only consider the phenomenological response to humiliation (and shame), they are also concerned with issues of queerness and *blaming* in a society that heralds the era of 'the reflexive self.'[508] Stephen Pattison argues that 'we are living in the age of the self-conscious reflexive self'[509] as we are no longer bound by more traditional structures within society – we move around more in terms of location, work, and families. This detached way of living has created a society that, for Pattison, is overly individualistic and no longer struggles with the ongoing guilt that previously acted as a moral guide for our decision-making. This modern self is 'frail, brittle, fractured and fragmented'[510] and responds to collective feelings of uncertainty and instability through re-invention. Whilst the constant of renewal is exciting for some people – Danny's parents can divorce without societal shame, for example, the toll is that 'it creates anxiety as people worry about whether their 'face fits.'[511] The trajectory towards authenticity has become performative, and due to limited resources (mostly, our attention which is our *time*), there is an epidemic of shame. As we try to keep up appearances, the tendency to avoid this difficult emotion is understandable, and our solution is to blame others.

[507] Eley Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good* (London: 4th Estate, 2024), p. 84.
[508] Pattison, p. 142.
[509] Ibid.
[510] Pattison, p. 144.
[511] Pattison, p. 143.

How we differentiate reasonable cause for blaming, from a narcissistic defence against shame is problematic when we consider humiliation. Leask notes that 'when humiliating acts are continuing – where, that is, the extreme imbalance of power has not been altered – the patient may have a realistic sense that he continues to be a victim who capacity to act autonomously is still heavily compromised.'[512] Danny blames Mark for his accident, as he also blames his parents for not attending to him. It is unreasonable to expect a six-year-old to make this connection, however the narrative predicts a trajectory of blame (as an adult, Danny will likely use anger to conceal his shame) regardless of future humiliation. Danny's global attribution of self, rather than specific ('self characteristic versus self action'[513]), cements his binary thinking which will likely continue into adulthood until he is made aware of it. This behaviour usually does not tolerate criticism and thus the blaming cannot ever be acknowledged; Danny will, as an overwhelming amount of research suggests, be a continual victim. Jenny, however, confronts an aspect of her shame at the end of the story as she questions her interpretation of gender with a sense of curiosity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that 'shame is a barrier towards future emotional enjoyment and curiosity'[514], and during Jenny's moment of catharsis, she reorients her being-in-the-world towards authenticity through confronting her father's death (arguably, becoming aware of her own as being-towards-death.)

Hilary Clark in her work on shame and death considers the use of masking in carnivals and similar contexts as she claims, 'shaming by masks hides (is a mask for) our shaming *by* death – a mask to hide our inescapable mortality.'[515] Masks therefore 'manifest death and disguise it through laughter and contempt.' Our use of masks is as complex as our relationship with mortality itself – if we consider Heidegger's principle of being-towards-death as necessary in revealing our authenticity, our awareness of death drops the mask (and the boundary) that allows us to live despite

[512] Leask, p. 140.
[513] Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 103.
[514] Sedgwick and Frank, p. 135.
[515] Hilary Clark, 'Mask of Shame, Mask of Death: Some Speculations on the Shame of Death', in *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma*, ed. by Jeffrey Kauffman (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 141-153 (p. 143).

it. Living with finitude is to acknowledge the boundary of death which the mask both invites and ruptures; Jenny's mask drops when she confronts her grief and *own* mortality (using her father's razor on a face that has some of his attributes) shaping her subsequent orientation in the world. Danny looks at his friend in pain, 'Danny looked at Mark and Mark looked like death'[516], and uses mince to cover his face as he resurrects a boundary between death and himself, between empathy and blame. Clark argues that Western civilisation's tendency for splitting the soul from the body reveals how the 'body is "meat" just this side of death and decay'; our materiality is thus exposed through shame. When we defend ourselves against vulnerability, we embody the characteristics of Pattison's 'reflexive self'[517] - performance is therefore a refusal of death; masks, consequently, 'hide this shame – and, shameless, show it to the world.'[518]

Wilgefortis

'Wilgefortis' is a story about grief and body shame and living as a young person in the digital age. The story takes place in one day as Jenny (a secondary school student) is being bullied by a group of girls for having facial hair on her upper lip. Since this has become an ongoing event, she has taken to praying to Saint Wilgefortis for *connection, '*it was not so much a prayer as a hello. She imagined Wilgefortis didn't get many prayers sent her way.'[519] The story is an interrogation of boundaries: between private and public; school and home, as Jenny has recently lost her father and is struggling to cope with the volume of news accessible to her, 'Jenny found she was laid low by all kinds of things nowadays.'[520] What emerges is a story about the loss of childhood and the accompanying shame that exists within a changing body that is on display for all to see.

The story opens with Jenny being locked inside a gym locker by Vanessa and her group of friends, 'There was a certain amount of gentleness in the way the other

[516] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 86.
[517] Pattison, p. 142.
[518] Pattison, p. 143.
[519] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 18.
[520] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 19.

girls pushed the locker door shut on her.' Instead of responding with anger, Jenny crouches down to pray, 'Jenny did not usually pray out loud but today…it seemed important that she should *declare* the words rolling around her head rather than merely think them.'[521] I would argue that whilst this scene has the appearance of shame (being cast out from her peers), it is a moment of humiliation. Susan Miller in her work on shame, investigates the phenomenological stance of different aspects of the emotion (humiliation, defensive anger etc), and notes that 'the states that I will call humiliation have as their emotional centre the feeling that the person has been put into a lowered or degraded position.'[522] This act of bullying does not immediately cause shame as she forgives the perpetrator, 'she didn't blame Vanessa, really'[523], hinting that the constant feeling of unworthiness belonging to Jenny is something that predates the bullying. Miller argues the distinction between humiliation and shame as the former can be overcome, there is a 'temporary alteration in status, not an alteration in identity'[524], whereas the latter is more consistent. Shame requires 'more thinking internally…it is something that is felt inside of you.'[525] For Jenny to behave in such a way denotes an uncertainty within herself that has been exploited by her peers - her repressed anger at the situation is apparent as she 'declares' her prayers to Wilgefortis: an assuredness that she otherwise cannot express.

Humiliation involves a 'loss of dignity and loss of power'[526] which is usually caused by someone else as it is an act of abasement. As Jenny struggles with the bullying, 'Vanessa's words still hot in her ears'[527] the frequency of her prayers increases. Every display of cruelty is accepted and not argued against which highlight Jenny's underlying low self-esteem that believes she warrants such malicious treatment. In Williams' previous collection of short stories, shame is avoided (and defended against) as a common theme and this is continued in 'Wilgefortis.' As a fervent distraction from her pain, Wilgefortis becomes a symbol of hope, or mantra

[521] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. *9.*
[522] Susan Miller, *The Shame Experience* (New Jersey: The Analytic Press, 1985), p. 43.
[523] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 19.
[524] Miller*,* p. 44.
[525] Miller, p. 45.
[526] Ibid.
[527] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 19.

to *avoid* shame. The repetitive nature of her prayers, 'Wil-guh-fortis, hear my prayer'[528] is combined with an attached obsessional behaviour (she presses her philtrum while doing so, 'at times of stress, Jenny had developed a habit of pressing a finger into that natural depression between her nose and her upper lip.'[529] This combination is an example of the ritualistic nature of OCD that usually accompanies trauma. Typically, the repetition of moralistic thoughts or behaviours can cause shame in the individual, however Jenny uses them as self-soothing practices to divert her attention away from the emotion. A study conducted by phenomenology-informed researchers divided OCD into four categories, 'Harm, Unacceptable Thoughts, Symmetry and Contamination'[530] and concluded that rituals regarding symmetry produces the most shame as individuals suffered with perfectionism. The indicator of shame is therefore not the dialogue with Wilgefortis, but the touching of her upper lip which she fears is asymmetrical (figuratively, hair is where it 'should' not be, thus altering her symmetry.)

Jenny's research on Wilgefortis is prompted by the discovery of a crisp that had the appearance of the bearded saint, 'Jenny had once found a crip that – in the right light, to a very gullible person – looked a bit like what she imagined Jesus Christ or Wilgefortis to look like.'[531] This sentence reveals Jenny's being-in-the-world as she considers herself to be 'gullible'[532], however, the admission is immediately reoriented through a discussion of other figures that remind her of Wilgefortis, before reflecting on the situation with Vanessa. As a result, her internal rumination reflects an ability to comprehend her feelings, deflecting them with humour and ultimately forgiveness for a person who does not deserve it. Throughout this reverie, she 'listened to the sounds of the water-heater in the air cupboard next door…she observed the pulse. As she watched, either her pulse or the water-heater changed pace. Philtrum. Philtrum.'[533] Williams' use of italics is a common textual feature in

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[528] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 11.
[529] Ibid.
[530] Michelle Laving, Francesco Foroni, Madeline Ferrari, Cynthia Turner and Keong Yap, 'The association between OCD and Shame: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62.6 (2022) 1-26 (p.20) < https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10091722/> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[531] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p.18.
[532] Ibid.
[533] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 19.

her work to signal a level of internal disruption that usually emerges from a moment of vulnerability. Jenny's repetitive mantras are therefore an avoidance of shame, yet the behaviour is an example of how emotions cannot be contained and usually escape without knowing. This subconscious escape has been discussed by Miller, as 'meaningful feelings'[534] can be recognised through 'verbalisation regardless of whether the feeling is expressed through feeling labels, through descriptions of body feeling, through descriptions of the state of a person's house or the contour of a hillside or the rhythm of a song that has been recalled, or through intellectual ideas that point the way to emotion.'[535] While Jenny believes she is protecting herself, associating herself with the omnipotence of saint, she is disclosing her vulnerability.

Sandra Bartky's phenomenology of the female experience notes that women have a different being-in-the-world as a there is a certain apologetic attunement for taking up space. Particularly during secondary school, Jenny's character resembles a common experience of a deepening self-consciousness of the changing body. While shame can be 'an intrusion in daily life that brings in its wake an altered understanding of self'[536], for the shame-prone individual (particularly an adolescent) it becomes an accepted part of their attunement. For Bartky, then, shame is part of the female being-in-the-world which consequently discloses a different state to their male counterparts: put simply, shame exists before moments of humiliation – women are naturally shame-prone. Jenny does not realise that shame is part of her experience (equally, and excusing her behaviour, it belongs to Vanessa too) so she mistakes vulnerability for gullibility. If community was encouraged, ostracization within groups of young people would inevitably decrease, as individualism creates narcissism (which is always a defence against shame.)

Communicating with Wilgefortis is not the deviation away from her vulnerability that Jenny believes it to be as she exposes her grandiosity, she 'locked eyes with the bearded face in the mirror, and offered her a shy, sure smile.'[537] According to research, the saint is associated with gender fluidity and has become a

[534] Miller, p. 175.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Bartky, p. 96.
[537] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 20

figure of reassurance for non-binary people; she (Williams also she/her pronouns for the saint so I will replicate) is also a symbol of oppressed women as the facial hair was considered a deliberate repellent towards the advances of men. There are two ideas at work here that reveal Jenny's defence against shame as a vulnerable and grandiose state. Firstly, the affiliation with a saint reveals the longing for community and secondly, the internal belief that she is being communicated with suggests her need to be a chosen individual. Miller's claim that 'omnipotence is a defence against shame and vulnerability'[538] can be seen in Jenny's dutiful prayers. As she does not want to register the reasons behind such behaviours ('it was not so much a prayer as a *hello*'[539] and the allusion to 'a very gullible person'[540]), there is a reticence to admit the need for community – her orientation towards dogma is a rejection of self.

The repetitive prayers are an example of self-monitoring that is not to be confused with obsessive body-checking behaviour primarily found in OCD (the touching of her philtrum, for example.) As previously discussed, communicating with Wilgefortis defends Jenny from the humiliation of her bullying and the grief of losing her father. Tangney and Dearing note that 'a person's concern with impression management (public self-consciousness) is related to the behaviour of self-monitoring.'[541] Jenny desperately wants to fit in and be liked at the extent of her values (she forgives Vanessa), however it is an act of self-betrayal. When we are concerned with our own self presentation, particularly how others view us, we become more shame-prone individuals. For Tangney and Dearing, these individuals 'are prone to see environmental factors as the cause of their own behaviour'[542]: Jenny's rejection of herself is thus rerouted through her loyalty towards the saint, which is another defence against her vulnerability. Shame grows through acts of unequivocal loyalty as the dynamic requires a constant breach of one's boundaries.

Another reason for Jenny's self-consciousness is the difficulties of living life in a digital world. After searched for information on Wilgefortis online, she discusses her reaction to news events: 'she had cried twice because of half-caught news

[538] Miller, p. 139.
[539] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 18.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Tangney and Dearing, p. 65.
[542] Ibid.

features she heard on the radio – a team of thieves had taken to hacking off cow's legs, leaving them to die in the field…ancient, priceless ruins of Mesopotamia had been unwittingly ground up and packed into sandbags by soldiers in parts of Iraq.'[543] There is a sense of overwhelm coming from both the radio and the internet as the digital network of constant information (and thus misinformation) is relentless. Her reaction to both events was in stark contrast to comments made in class about her face as 'hearing both these things, Jenny had not-prayed to Wilgefortis and pressed her philtrum.'[544] Crying over these atrocities reveals Jenny's empathy that exists for other entities than herself – an act of genuine vulnerability. Interestingly, she shares this experience alone at home, without the guidance of her saint. It could be argued, then, that Wilgefortis is more of a surveillance tactic than a mentor. Heidegger argues that whilst living in everydayness, we are always at risk of doing things without realising it, 'Dasein *can* comport itself towards its possibilities, even *unwillingly*; it can be inauthentically; and factically it is inauthentically, proximally and for the most part.'[545] Existing alongside others is our natural state of being-in-the-world: Jenny's reaction shows that she desires community because she can produce emotional responses *for* others but struggles to share *with* others.

During class is when Jenny is first alerted to her facial hair, 'it had been the sound of the rain against the maths lesson windows that had almost made her miss Vanessa's comment. "At least I don't have a moustache," she had hissed at Jenny across her desk.'[546] As a humiliating event, her response is to dissociate and immediately consider the nature of eyebrows, 'Jenny, dazed, found herself blanking out the statement and just staring at Vanessa's eyebrows.'[547] This aggressive confrontation (and judgment) of the self through another's eyes is unfortunately not new to teenagers, however the temporality of such humiliation has been stretched outwards through our digital footprint. In a society that privileges competition over co-operation, we commodify features at the rate that we screenshot them. There is seemingly no consequence for Vanessa's behaviour as she represents a more

[543] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 19.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 237.
[546] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 16.
[547] Ibid.

insidious issue occurring within society: online bullying. This form of persecution (like shame) breaches the boundary of the private and public sphere as we can be accessed by strangers in our homes.

As the phenomenology of our devices and ourselves has diminished to an unrecognisable degree, when we are shamed on our phones, it produces the same response as Jenny in the maths lesson. Whilst Jenny's face is itemised and graded, Vanessa's is blank representing the anonymity of the avatar. The immediacy of this interaction mirrors the speed of taking a selfie, uploading it, and receiving hurtful comments; narcissism, then, is an understandable defence when we consider growing up in an environment in which young people are encouraged to view the world through the dimensions and palatability of a screenshot. In a recent study by Amparo Lasen and Hector, they discovered that participants struggled with committing to a standard that was an inaccurate representation of their bodies and lives. They note, 'the ambivalence or impossibility of complying with the social mandates of being autonomous, logical, and in control, since we are all vulnerable, social subjects entangled in interdependent relationships of recognition that make up both our privates lives and public presence.'[548] The proliferation of images we consume online is *interpreted* as sharing, however there is a reluctance to acknowledge our desire for validation, which threatens true vulnerability.

At the end of the story, Jenny confronts her shame, and no longer praying to Wilgefortis, she 'used her father's badger-bristle shaving brush and some yellow soap to build up a thick lather'[549] to remove her facial hair. Jenny *becomes* the saint through this act of transgression, 'stretching out one's hands with the palms extended so that an onlooker might not be sure if you were mining holding the world or holding it back.' No longer the object in the confessional, she transmutes her shame. Virginia Burrus in her work on the Christian genealogy of shame argues that confession is 'not a catharsis but an ongoing responsiveness – a painfully unrelieved

[548] Amparo Lasen and Hector Puente, 'Haunting shame and haunted bodies: Mixed feelings and entangled times in the online sharing of personal images', *First Monday* (2021), 1-15 (p. 10) < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350571735_Haunting_shame_and_haunted_bodies_Mixed_feelings_and_entangled_times_in_the_online_sharing_of_personal_images> [accessed 24 August 2024].

[549] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 20

openness.'[550] Through validating her shame (not via the repetitive prayers to Wilgefortis, but by finally acknowledging her grief), her self-consciousness appears to dissipate, which will be a continued process. The difference therefore between prayer and confession appears to be the shameless arena in which it is *expressed*; Jenny previously confided in no one about her sorrow which contributes to shame. As she faces herself in the mirror, however, she witnesses a new person, one who *listens* and smiles back.

The use of her father's razor not only forces Jenny to confront her grief, 'it looked as if it would look more at home in a reliquary or a museum than in this room filled with chrome and scented shampoo,'[551] but it allows her to explore the confines of her gender. Whilst the story is centred on Jenny's experience of bullying (humiliation), her obsessive attempts to avoid shame can be seen as an interrogation of queer identity. The iconography of Saint Wilgefortis in the late Middle Ages shows a woman with indiscernible female (or, even, male) attributes in an image that is 'genuinely genderless in its presentation.'[552] Hannah Skoda argues that the saint was 'a figure of hope for both unhappily married wives *and* non-binary people…the very austerity of the figure, its severe lines, its refusal to sit in any categories, render it one quite literally for everyone.'[553] Wilgefortis' defining feature is precisely the characteristic that renders her/them formless. Equally, Jenny's facial hair causes her to become boundaryless as she tolerates bullying behaviour so as not to feel her shame. Her self-destructive behaviours could be explained by the loss of her father, however grief is only revealed when using his belongings, 'bought as an anniversary gift long before she was born, it was made of wood and metal and had her father's initials worked into it along the handle; to her knowledge he had never actually used it.'[554] The reverent admiration of his items, 'the washbag had a broad metal zip, like

[550] Virginia Burrus, Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 115.
[551] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 17.
[552] Hannah Skoda, 'St Wilgefortis and Her/Their Beard: The Devotions of Unhappy Wives and Non-Binary People', *History Workshop Journal*, 95 (2023), 51-74 (p.68) < https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article/doi/10.1093/hwj/dbad005/7146513> [accessed 28 August 2024].
[553] Ibid.
[554] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 17.

a pencil case…she unzipped it, re-zipped it, unzipped it once more', is another ritual (similarly explored in 'Rituals') against shame, as vulnerability emerges.

A recent phenomenological account of vulnerability by Ignacio Quepons is firstly described in terms of its physicality as being 'the horizon of limitation of self-motivated movement of the body.'[555] Quepons then argues that 'feeling vulnerable is a kind of expectation which is not grounded in the continuity of what is perceptually given but rather points to something that matters and nevertheless goes beyond our control.'[556] Essentially, it is an awareness of the lived-body as something confined by physical limitations and one at risk of being harmed by others; it is a wound that can occur on an emotional and physical level. Jenny's ritualistic tendences are a distraction from embracing vulnerability. By adopting behaviours that continually shrink her world, there is no room for expectation.

Through using her father's belonging, the items reveal themselves as tools ready-to-hand. Heidegger argues that the 'un-ready-to-hand can be encountered not only in the sense of that which is unusable or simply missing, but as something un-ready-to-hand which is *not* missing at all and *not* unusable, but which 'stands in the way' of our concern.'[557] Put simply, items that do not immediately register their usage in terms of immediate need can be viewed as an obstacle to the task or train of thought at hand – we do not notice them. Jenny only notices her father's razor when she needs it, equally, she only allows herself to miss him when she repeats his actions, 'she stacked the condoms she found there into a little house-of-cards arrangement. She unscrewed the white bottle of contact-lens fluid and smelled it.'[558] These behaviours reveal the hidden affect behind her grief: whilst Jenny misses her father, she envies his self-expression. As shame is the exposure of vulnerability, Jenny finally faces her hidden desires through a role-play of masculinity, which eventually orients her towards her *own* understanding of gender. From sorting through condoms and copying gestures from films, 'she unfolded the razor, mimicking the

[555] Ignacio Quepons, 'Vulnerability and Trust: An attempt at phenomenological description', *PhoenEx*, 13.2 (2020), 1-10 (p.6) < https://philpapers.org/rec/QUEVAT> [accessed 28 August 2024].
[556] Quepons, p. 7.
[557] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 103.
[558] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 15.

way she had seen actors use them as a prop in Westerns', she arrives at her own arrangement that makes sense to her.

Sara Ahmed argues that 'the failure of work is not, then, "in" the thing or "in" the person but rather is about whether the person and the thing face each other *in the right way.*'[559] Jenny did not notice her father's razor as she previously did not experience it ready-to-hand; stripped of its use, it was present-at-hand that could be bypassed without thought. After her humiliation at school, however, the item reveals itself to her, as its purpose now matches her physicality. As her father failed to use the engraved razor, (perhaps due to his passing, or because it did not match *his* aesthetic requirements) it can be said that both man and object did not face each other correctly. Jenny's inheritance of the object highlights Ahmed's claim that 'bodies are hence shaped by contact with objects and with others, with "what" is near enough to be reached.'[560] In an act of reclamation, Jenny expresses herself in a way that her father did not as the razor reveals itself to her, and not to him. Allowing a pause to consider her new orientation (towards objects and herself) 'she said a little prayer, the words of it inexact and unmemorable but straying near thoughts of daughters, and suspension'[561], she shares a moment of true vulnerability.

Rituals

'Rituals' is a story about the onset of shame. It follows two six-year-olds (Mark and Danny) as they play together after school, until one of them has an accident. After falling down the stairs, Danny struggles to help Mark as he is preoccupied with the state of his home which he suddenly sees through a new perspective, 'the scuffed skirting boards were suddenly unignorable, obviously gross.'[562] What follows is a representation of acute shame: as the emotion paralyses Danny, shame's disruptive impact on temporality becomes a question of ethics. If shame prompts inaction, how can we help others without shutting out the emotion? When we do not acknowledge

[559] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), p 51.
[560] Ahmed, p. 54.
[561] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 20.
[562] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 84.

negative evaluations of self, it can produce a host of ego-dystonic issues such as defensiveness. The accident in 'Rituals' thus pauses the experience of shame in real-time, allowing us to monitor the phenomenological responses (hiding and concealing the face of the other, for example.) As previously seen in 'Wilgefortis' Danny's behaviour becomes a *compulsive* defence against his embarrassment as he fastidiously monitors his environment, analysing the worth of each object as an extension of himself. Watching Mark struggle at the bottom of the stairs, we are reminded of Hinton and Willemsen's claim that 'it's all too common to resist the slowing effects of shame, its interruption of flow, out of fear of what might erupt when we stop and look.'[563]

Michael Lewis articulates an early propensity towards shame as having biological factors. For infants that register more sensitivity which can be characterised as having a 'difficult temperament: these people are more irritable and tend to be highly somatic. They complain about minor pain, and they seem to have difficulty in coping with internal bodily sensations.'[564] Sensitive children are therefore more likely to internalise external judgments on a globalised level. Put simply, any criticism received from an educator or parental figure is interpreted as a totalising indicator of self. This does not only apply to criticism, but it also incorporates the opposite side of the spectrum – praise is internalised on a comprehensive level. Danny comments that 'everyone trips, we all trip, but while with Danny it was all muttered apologies and bumbliclumsiness, Mark made even stumbling look like a virtue.' Through this observation, Danny revels his interpretation of the world as entirely black or white (wholly bad or good.) Danny is clumsy; Mark is elegant – beyond elegance, Mark's movements (even when displaying clumsiness also), are *virtuous*. This is an example of global attribution as Danny's judgement of himself, even at the age of six, has been internalised through an external presence currently missing from the scene (as his mother enters later in the story, I would argue that it is her critical voice that he has incorporated.)

[563] Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen, 'Introduction', in *Temporality and Shame: Perspectives from Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-13 (p. 5).
[564] Lewis, p. 104.

The use of the neologism, 'bumbliclumsiness'[565] is intentionally difficult for the reader to pronounce as we repeatedly try to say it loud to enhance our understanding. The result of this is frustration, and a sharp embarrassment as we stumble over its complexity disguised as childlike playfulness. Depending on the reader, this prompts our own attribution: if we can laugh at our own silliness then we quickly move on, or if like myself, there's a fleeting annoyance, it hints at our own internalised judgments. Through this interplay, shame (we might only feel slight frustration here, but it works as a stepping stone argument) reveals itself to be rooted in memories. Our struggling pronunciation is Danny's battle as an adult – at some point we also mirrored adult language, extending/contorting and developing words for the language of our childhood, in a subconscious attempt to dazzle, but also *articulate* the world. As 'memory lies at the heart of our sense of temporality'[566], Hinton and Willemsen comment that 'shame is often connected with memories, and that may stop us short.'[567]

Danny further evaluates his friend's movements as he claims, 'it was as if Mark's limbs, cartilage, and bearing had been fed on a diet of words like lissom and lithe and supple. It was as if Danny had learned how to move from the clomping, flailing Popeye or Flintstones cartoons he watched every day, and Mark had learned from documentaries about snakes and air.'[568] Binary thinking undeniably shows a learned global attribution of characteristics: wealth is internalised as moral character. The emotion veiled behind Danny's compliments is envy, which functions as a defence against shame. If Danny's development had followed specific attribution rather than global, he would not make the connection between Mark's speech and his being, 'limbs and cartilage'[569] and a 'diet of words like lissom and lithe and supple.'[570] Lewis argues that 'the tendency to make global or specific attributions about our failure can be learned from those around us.'[571] Somewhere in Danny's development, he has learned that mistakes resolutely indicate who he is: likewise,

[565] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 83.
[566] Hinton and Willemsen, *Temporality and Shame*, p. 6.
[567] Ibid.
[568] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 83.
[569] Ibid.
[570] Ibid.
[571] Lewis, p. 106.

features and our ability to perform is our entire character. Whilst Danny divides the two friends via a system of wealth and its impact on self-presentation, what he is really indicating is care, interpreted as a child through *time.* Documentaries have a longer duration that cartoons; Mark's guardians, therefore, had more time to give.

As Danny invites Mark into his home for the first time, he is ashamed of his environment, 'it had never occurred to six-year-old Danny that he should be embarrassed about his home…he found he was looking around the house with new and disappointed eyes.'[572] Each entity ready-to-hand is reduced in effectiveness as he views the objects with a sense of disdain, 'the brand name of the soap by the sink was manifestly cheap and inferior.'[573] There is nothing inherently wrong with the soap that Danny uses, yet it is suddenly unusable. In Heidegger's ontology, he argues that all entities are revealed to us *through* their usage which is interpreted on a subconscious level, 'the structure of the Being of what is ready-to-hand as equipment is determined by references or assignments…when an assignment has been disturbed – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment becomes explicit.'[574] As Danny observes the soap's brand, he limits the useability of the object therefore it appears to him *as unusable*, thus reinstating his global attribution that cheaper objects equals a lesser self. If he had not acknowledged the name of the soap, he would not have perceived it as anything other than something to clean dishes with – how he commodifies appearances (like Jenny's categorisation in 'Wilgefortis') is therefore how he interprets other beings-in-the-world.

Danny's judgment of the house eventually reveals his harsh criticism towards himself as he comments on his artwork, '…his picture of a toucan wearing a hat and holding a cane, tacked up on the fridge: dumb. The postcard from his dad that had a picture of a big red empty canyon, the dustiest thing: dumb.'[575] The repetition of 'dumb'[576] at the end of the sentence has the quality of an assessment – he is literally giving himself feedback in the format of an educator (or in this instance, we assume a parental figure.) Lewis argues that girls are more likely to generate global

[572] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 84.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 105.
[575] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 84.
[576] Ibid.

attribution of their failings rather than specific attribution, in comparison to boys. The former's failings are usually blamed on their ability, whilst the latter is blamed on the environment. Males therefore 'are likely not to think that they are the cause of their own failure, and therefore are not likely to suffer loss of self-esteem.'[577] Clearly, Danny is *compulsively* repeating feedback from an adult that he has internalised, thus feeling a deep sense of shame that correlates with his low self-esteem. This example goes against Lewis' gender differentiation as Danny is incapable of viewing his house as separate from himself and his art as something distinct from his worth.

The house surveillance continues whilst Mark uses the bathroom upstairs. Danny notes other items on the fridge, 'the long-forgotten to-do list sellotaped there by his mother: it included the scribbled words "nit shampoo" and "malt (?) vinegar." His anger towards his mother becomes apparent as Danny implicates her lack of care, with 'long-forgotten to-do list.' What follows is a frantic display of rage as 'the idea that puckish, light-as-air Mark could see *this* on the walls of his house filled Danny with a flip of worry. He wishes he could reach up and rip the whole poster and to-do list down from the wall, smash the frame, crumple up the picture and hide it in a drawer.'[578] This contraction of time reveals another element of shame that Hinton and Willemsen argue is due to anxiety about 'a loss of control and the psychic pain that is involved.'[579] During moments of perceived rejection, Danny's perception of the to-do list for example, there is a desperate attempt to diminish the emotion by destroying the evidence. As we 'resist the slowing effect of shame'[580], we do so through fear over 'what might bubble up within us if we "gave it time?"'[581] Danny believes it is cluttered fridge that provokes distressing feelings, however it is the rejection from his parents that causes his shame, which is briefly alluded to, 'you could bet a million pounds that Marks' mother had beautiful painting or interesting posters on the walls of her kitchen, or photographs of Mark being balletic or

[577] Lewis, p. 106.
[578] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 85.
[579] Hinton and Willemsen, *Temporality and Shame*, p. 5.
[580] Ibid.
[581] Ibid.

loved.'[582] As is consistently revealed throughout the story, the crux of the affective experience is revealed at the end of the sentence: Danny does not feel loved.

Shame is often said to leave a trace, 'it is possible that shame is associated with maladaptive emotion regulation, which in turn may explain the associations that shame has with psychopathological symptoms and aggression.'[583] Danny's anger is therefore a dysregulated response to shame, or as Lewis argues, 'it is the focus on *another emotional state*.'[584] His feelings of rejection, whilst redirected, are not eradicated as revealed in his descriptive tirade. When individuals are shamed but do want to reconcile the feeling, they 'become manic and start to talk compulsively.'[585] The root of the emotion is thus revealed through his internal wording, 'rip; smash; crumple'[586] – the dissolution of anger throughout this verb choice illustrates how, at the epicentre of emotion, is a diminished child.

Alongside his anger, his mother's absence haunts the story as she is only alluded to in passing, 'to mark the occasion Danny asked his mother if they had any Tizer.'[587] Even after the accident, she is on the periphery, 'beyond them was the sound of Danny's mother coming in from the garden, carrying and empty laundry basket in her hands.'[588] As we see her through the perspective of Danny, we do not see her at all. Children internalise the presence of the adult (and thus, all future objects within the world) through the structure of care (which according to Heidegger is always revealed within time; 'Heidegger who wrote about temporality as the basis for human life'[589]), meaning that her lack of time *is* a lack of presence. We cannot comment on the mother's shame as she is a ghost haunting the periphery of the text, always on the edge of Danny's rage, however we can use her absence to consider our collective lack of time.

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[582] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 84.
[583] Patrizia Velotti, Carlo Garofalo, Federica Bottazzi, and Vincenzo Caretti, 'Faces of Shame: Implications for Self-Esteem, Emotion Regulation, Aggression, and Well-Being', *The Journal of Psychology*, 151.2 (2017), pp. 171-184 (p. 173) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00223980.2016.1248809#abstract> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[584] Lewis, p. 124.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 85.
[587] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 83.
[588] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 88.
[589] Hinton and Willemsen, *Temporality and Shame*, p. 4.

Ladson Hinton has written extensively on shame's relationship with consumerism and time. As we are now living in a digital world, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic when many forms of communication never returned to their organic state, we are always accessible. As the limits of our reachability is forever expanding, we seem to have less time rather than more of it. The experience of shame freezes the individual in time, which, if left unprocessed, further disrupts temporality as other emotions such as anger or sadness take its place – 'at such a time in history, we need, above all, a capacity for reflection.'[590] We often speed up our thoughts and speech as a way to distance ourselves from shame, but the world is interpreted through our articulation of it, 'idle talk' as part of 'the they'[591] slips in between Being-with-one-another, 'everyone keeps his eye on the Other first and next, watching how he will comport himself and what he will say in reply.'[592] Our internal lives, whether we want to admit it or not, share the same flow of temporality as the structures which shape it.

As real-time now mimics the digital experience, our connection to others in everydayness follows this transformation: we watch others more closely, and more frequently. If we allow the stagnation of shame as a temporary experience that must be expressed, we agree to exist at the margins of contemporary society. For Hinton, our 'apathy and disaffection'[593], are 'in many ways, a product of mass media and the technologies of consumerism to which we have become addicted.'[594] Shame therefore alters our interpretation of the world both in its experience and its avoidance as we slow down and speed up (an already fast-paced) temporality that discloses our being-in-the-world. Whilst the absence of Danny's mother is apparent, it is easy to blame those (especially women) for their lack of time, when we all encounter its deficit.

The accident is a jarring occurrence within the story as Mark trips and falls down the stairs, 'there was a slapping, lolloping, awful bang, the kind of sound that

[590] Ladson Hinton, 'Shame and temporality in the streets: consumerism, technology, truth and raw life', in *Temporality and Shame: Perspectives from Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 14-32 (p. 15).
[591] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[592] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 219.
[593] Hinton, *Temporality and Shame: Perspectives from Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, p. 17.
[594] Ibid.

makes you pivot towards it.'[595]An accompanying image of 'Mark's foot lay resting on the final step, twisted slightly so that the toe pointed directly at the ceiling'[596] continues the violent language previously used to describe Danny's inner voice. No longer attributed with grace and virtue, Mark now appears vulnerable, 'the word for it might be *sprawl*; the word might be *rapture*; the word might be *rest.*'[597] As Danny struggles to assign the correct wording to the display before him, we are reminded of his embarrassment regarding his artwork, 'dumb': the sentence structure again mirrors feedback with an absent figure; his immediate response to criticise himself (thus disclosing his environment) prevents movement. Mark's disbelief in falling, 'I think I tripped'[598] mirrors Danny's refusal to accept his imperfection, 'the idea that Mark was being brave was too painful to be entertained.'[599] Both behaviours are instigated by the same cause, perfectionism, however they have different manifestations – Mark turns away from his vulnerability through bravery, and Danny refuses to get help, 'he wanted to prove that everything was all right here and he could be the man who knew what to do in times of crisis.'[600]

Danny responds to the accident by attempting to cover Mark's face in mince, 'the graceful boy let his graceless friend crane his neck and administer to him…he scooped the meat into his fist and worked it into Mark's browbone.'[601] As he cannot tolerate vulnerability, Danny wants to cover his friend's face, so he is no longer able to perceive, and *be* perceived. The use of mince is a grotesque image which is an extension of Danny's disgust – a common avoidance of shame. Lewis notes that a disgusted face looks very similar to an angry one and can be used as a socialisation tactic by parents when they 'fail to use reasoning and finds it inappropriate or inadmissible to yell or punish, the use of the disgusted/contemptuous face is an ideal solution.'[602] Danny does not know how to use his external voice as his internal narrative talks too loudly for him to collect his thoughts. The reaction to the accident,

[595] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 86.
[596] Ibid.
[597] Ibid.
[598] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 87.
[599] Ibid.
[600] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 86.
[601] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 88.
[602] Lewis, p. 111.

therefore, is one of disgust and by concealing Mark's face, he does not have to hide his lack of empathy.

Mark reacts with embarrassment as he refuses to acknowledge his pain, 'eyes still shut, he propped himself up on an elbow, gingerly, testing the mettle of his arm.'[603] The physical pain distracts him from the emotional discomfort of his infallibility - for Lewis, 'from a phenomenological point of view, when we feel shame, we also notice that we are feeling pain.'[604] Danny diverts *his* pain by adopting the speech of an adult, 'the line sprang unbidden to Danny's lips: "I'll get something for the swelling"'[605], which in this context, is disproportionate to the injury: put simply, he cannot look. In Schneider's work on vulnerability mentioned previously in the first chapter, the 'very notion of "face" (for example, "saving face," "losing face") suggests the degree to which the self is literally identified with the face, which in turn symbolises the integrity of the individual.'[606] The exposure of the face is why we blush when feeling ashamed, as our whole selves are being seen and consequently judged (then internalised as a global attribution of self.) Danny cannot bear to witness Mark's face in duress, equally he does not want his friend to see his true feelings (disgust) over such powerlessness. Using the mince, the 'label on the clingfilm wrapping said VALUE and BEST BEFORE'[607], he resurrects boundaries once again between what is private and public as, according to Schneider, 'the face is the seat of privacy.'[608] Through crafting a false face for Mark, Danny's mask is kept in place.

There is an undeniable queerness to the friendship which is alluded to in one of the artworks on the fridge, 'the photo had a caption that began You Construct Intricate Rituals…written alongside the picture on zig-zagging white and black bands of text.'[609] The postcard is a copy of Barbara Kruger's Untitled piece from 1981, which shows a group of men jostling with each other, as the rest of the sentence states, 'you construct intricate rituals which allow you to touch the skin of other men.'[610]

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[603] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 87.
[604] Lewis, p. 125.
[605] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 87.
[606] Schneider, p. 48.
[607] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 87.
[608] Schneider, p. 47.
[609] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 85.
[610] https://collections.mfa.org/objects/35582 [accessed 24 August].

Kruger asks the question, 'Why is violence placed so close to intimacy?'[611] 'Rituals' is a violent text – the accident is brutal, and Danny's internal envy is deafening as each object in his house reminds him of everything he lacks. Instead of acknowledging his shame, Danny responds with anger which belies his need for closeness. When finally presented with vulnerability, it is not only intolerable for Danny to experience, but it is beyond his comprehension (mimicking an adult voice, for example.) For intimacy to be experienced, it requires the acknowledgement of another person as a separate object, however, Danny can only experience other beings as extensions of himself. Danny's infatuation with Mark is thus a devotion to (and rejection of) self. Kruger's work, whilst overtly representing intimacy, also reveals the lack of it as we question the need to *consume* the other under the guise of desire.

Danny's perception of Mark is fantastical as his movements are dissected and praised without an interpretation of who he really is, 'this had long been the dynamic between the two six-year-olds: 'Mark moved and Danny marvelled.'[612] The friendship accordingly becomes an act of competition which is a narcissistic defence against shame, as Danny displays traits of hypercompetitiveness which is 'associated with heightened self-worth fluctuating with underlying low self-esteem, decreased need for others, interest in admiration and recognition from others, and high levels of neuroticism.'[613] The need to be admired goes beyond a healthy desire for connection as Danny wants his friend's virtuous qualities to cancel out his unworthy self-image. The friendship thus functions as a role-play that highlights the dynamic of Kruger's work: attachment is a battle for control.

Kaye Mitchell continues this discussion of masculinity and competition as she argues that 'men may feel shame at failing to attain levels of power, influence or success expected of them as men, while for women shame may be a kind of generalised condition of being a woman in the world.'[614] As 'Rituals' takes place in

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[611] Ibid.
[612] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good*, p. 83.
[613] Andrew F. Luchner, John M. Houston, Christina Walker, M. Alex Houston, 'Exploring the relationship between two forms of narcissism and competitiveness ', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 51 (2011), 779-782 (p. 780) < https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886911003102?via%3Dihub> [accessed 24 August 2024].
[614] Mitchell, p. 201.

childhood, we are perhaps witnessing Danny's burgeoning shame (that does not arise from the accident, but from his neglect), whereas for Mark, his injury will likely create a series of emotions that if avoided, will create issues in later life. Both friends are already struggling with power: Danny envies Mark's success, and Mark cannot perceive his own flaws – the wrestle for perfectionism exists *relationally*, as both are disclosed as being-in-the-world through the reflected lens of the other. During an analysis of Knausgard, Mitchell identifies the protagonist's shame as an 'experience of erasure – the loss of a self not yet established'[615], which if we consider to be an explication of male shame, can be attributed to the day of the accident. Danny does not yet realise that his internal criticism will lead to arrested development, and Mark does not foresee the limiting effects of perfectionism.

The story's acknowledgement (and avoidance) of shame, as seen throughout all of Williams' texts is revealed in the second sentence, 'at the time, rather than feel ashamed, Danny delighted in the difference between his own relative looming slow-footedness and his schoolfriend's proinking grace.'[616] It was only after entering his home, that Mark became a threat to Danny as he breached a boundary. As his space (and thus, his *self*) felt threatened, Danny becomes overly critical – his previous adulation of Mark's gestures can now be viewed as hypervigilance masquerading as acute flattery. The fixation on specific movements, 'Mark came back from hurtling beautifully about upstairs'[617], not only femininizes his friend but reveals Lewis' previous claim that sensitive children who are more prone to shame are, 'highly somatic.'[618] Shame, when not acknowledged, is bound to repeat and the story ends with Danny's mother coming in from the margins of the narrative to help Mark in an act of care that will likely further threaten her son's tentative self-image.

According to Mitchell, shame 'always brings with it some taint of femininity – and femininity carries, likewise, some echo of shame' which emphasises my previous point that in an age of overwhelming responsibility, blame is an easy device often pointed at women. As a single mother (Danny showed contempt for a postcard from

[615] Mitchell, p. 224.
[616] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 83.
[617] Williams, *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good,* p. 85.
[618] Lewis, p. 104.

his dad on the fridge), she is already an ostracised figure – her requirement of extra support (both economically and emotionally) puts her at risk of further blame. Graham Scambler argues that 'shaming and blaming have their taproots in the statics and dynamics of social systems'[619], which underlines Hinton's argument that shame requires time to be processed, and it is subtly being stolen from us through our fragmented attention. Danny's mother did not and does not have enough time for Danny which prompts further shame in both parties: likely, as one acknowledges, the other avoids. This endless cycle reiterates Mitchell's claim that 'the writing of shame may facilitate its mutation, displacement, expansion or transmission, but never its purgation.'[620]

[619] Graham Scambler, *A Sociology of Shame and Blame* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 97.
[620] Mitchell, p. 236.

Chapter Three: (Re)Constructing Shame in Tom McCarthy

'We have an abiding sense, however obscure and obscured, that the lives we do lead are informed by the lives that escape us.'[621]

Tom McCarthy is a writer and observer of patterns. His novels often oversee the conflict between human beings and our relationship with technology. Both *Remainder* (2005) and *The Making of Incarnation* (2021) depict a search to achieve the perfect form: the instance in the first novel is a response to trauma, whilst the second seeks to monetise data. Shame is an essential affect within the texts as fragmentary narratives restructure an aesthetics of authenticity.

The association of McCarthy with authenticity has been widely discussed by critics. In Sam Slote's work on *Remainder*, he notes the narrator's struggle with reconstruction, 'on the one hand it is entirely dependent upon remainders – the ineluctable remainder of memory, but on the other it tries to eliminate those remainders in the staging of the re-enactments.'[622] I would extend Slote's claims further by adding that this is a direct phenomenological representation of shame (and its avoidance.) As the narrator tries to piece together the remnants of trauma, thus reorienting his shame, he avoids it through the manipulation of his re-enactments. What emerges is a pattern of unending reconstruction that pushes authenticity further out of reach. Equally, it is also the story of someone struggling with PTSD, and the narrator's set of behaviours are layered defence mechanisms that prevent a reconciliation with self.

The Making of Incarnation currently has no associated research as it is a relatively new novel. As a less experimental text than *Remainder*, it still considers the same themes of body, motion, and the digital world, however it can be read as an inverted narrative. Whilst *Remainder* seeks to deconstruct patterns, *The Making of Incarnation* seeks to replicate them outside the scope of the body. Contributing to both texts, however, is a trace of shame that informs these temporal movements.

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[621] Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 13.
[622] Sam Slote, 'The Recidual Remainder', in *Tom McCarthy Critical Essays*, ed. by Dennis Duncan (London: Gylphi Limited, 2016), pp. 121-135 (p. 125).

In her work on attention, Alice Bennett claims that *Remainder* analyses 'technology and subjectivity that function in concert with the metaphor of amputated attention.'[623] This amputation refers to the 'raw surfaces where technologies join'[624] which she claims are 'analogous to sites of amputation.'[625] This prompts a springboard for my research as the stitching-together of amputated parts mimic the phenomenological response of shame which both exposes and conceals the self. Both readings of the text thus operate by charting a temporal flow that can be revealed through a preoccupation with authenticity.

Pieter Vermeulen also considers movement within the novel as he claims, 'the novel is less a form that represents the after-effects of trauma than a form that transmits the "after-effects" that the traumatised subject leaves in its wake.'[626] Vermeulen's claim, equally, is a consideration of shame. As the narrator tries to find connection, he creates the opposite: the novel becomes restrictive through its inclusion of fragmentary devices that oscillate between metareference and realism. This ontological structure impacts our reading of the text, which highlights my argument that writings of shame embody the 'contagious'[627] element of emotion. Sue Austin notes that due to the heaviness of shame, we often prefer to look away from it as quickly as possible. When shame is unacknowledged, there is a risk 'a falling into (and potentially getting stuck forever) in the nightmarish tensions and gaps in and around it.'[628] Austin's phenomenology of shame thus reveals the novel's movement as the narrator creates a re-enactment of his isolated state that, in its looping, cannot experience a stable perspective.

Throughout this chapter, a phenomenological account of shame continues to reveal the fragility of community within a digital landscape. As McCarthy's narrators continue the temporal pattern of shame's acknowledgement and its avoidance, the struggle for authentic expression can be seen on a wider scale than in the previous

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[623] Bennett, p. 97.
[624] Ibid.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 24.
[627] Sue Austin, 'Existential shame, temporality and cracks in the 'ordinary "filled in" process of things', in *Temporality and Shame*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), pp. 119-138 (p. 130).
[628] Ibid.

chapter. Whereas Williams is relegated to the locale of the short story, McCarthy takes the structure of a fragmented form and pushes it to the limits of coherence. Moving in opposite directions, *Remainder*'s temporality collapses it on itself, whereas *The Making of Incarnation*'s zealous search for the perfect movement becomes a sweeping novel across digital time and space.

Remainder

Remainder is a first-person narrative following an unnamed narrator as he is injured in a mysterious accident and subsequently receives a settlement of eight and a half million pounds. Not only is he not allowed to discuss the nature of the accident, but he also cannot remember it, 'about the accident itself I can say very little.'[629] We can immediately discern that this is a trauma narrative, 'it's not that I'm being shy. It's just that – well, for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black whole.' Often, moments of acute trauma remain unprocessed and instead take root in the nervous system. In his work on PTSD, Laurence Kirmayer notes that previous research on 'body memory conflates two different types of learning: 'classical conditioning and verbal declarative memory.'[630] The latter involves semantic/episodic forms of memory that can be recollected to reconstruct a specific event.

Classical conditioning, however, does not include the semantic processing of declarative memory, meaning that body memories 'are not memories at all in the colloquial sense of the term but rather learning dispositions to respond in particular ways.'[631] As a result, certain behaviours can manifest within an individual that feel completely real as they are performed in the belief that they are a response to a particular stressor. These behaviours typically are not processed verbally with another individual (a therapist, or friend) as most trauma victims repeat these habits

[629] Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), p.3.
[630] Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand, 'Introduction: Inscribing Trauma in Culture, Brain, and Body' in *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-26 (p. 8).
[631] Kirmayer, Lemelson and Brand, p. 9.

in private. Without verbal processing, body memories are robust in 'durability'[632] and will prevent the individual from accurately *reconstructing* their experience. What follows is a series of secretive behavioural patterns that can either cause or be used as a defence against shame. Writing about trauma, is therefore always an exercise in writing about shame as the deferral of the event remains unacknowledged, instigating the rise of other emotions (shame, guilt, anger etc.) *Remainder* is a novel about shame that is avoided until the narrator gets caught in its looping affect at the end.

In terms of aesthetics, the authenticity of the entire novel is called into question as the construction of the text remains elusively within the realms of the settlement. 'The settlement. That word: Settlement. Set-l-ment…it wormed its way into my coma…weeks later, after I'd emerged from the coma, come off the drip-feed and put onto mushy solids, I'd think of the word's middle bit, the -l-, each time I tried to swallow. The Settlement made me gag before it gagged me: that's for sure.'[633] The unspeakability of the event is thus defined (and contained) by the rigidity of the settlement. If the novel functions as declarative memory, the body of content *is* body memory – accordingly, the text performs in unexpected ways which critics have struggled to grapple with.

Whether *Remainder* belongs to postmodernism, or metamodernism is a long-held debate. Daniel Lea argues that this is a novel 'about how the not-known becomes known'[634]; specifically, McCarthy disrupts post-structural tendencies to decentre the author as his text is 'about a man seeking to author himself.'[635] In this sense, it a novel that is written about, and *through* shame, as he reconstructs an authentic interpretation of both the narrator's experience, and more broadly speaking, an element of contemporary fiction that engages and mimics our attention (as dispersed through digital networks.) The novel's defiance of periodisation is the impact of writing within shame as belonging to a relational structure of being-in-the-world. Shame disturbs our orientation as we recollect ourselves from everydayness,

[632] Ibid.
[633] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 4.
[634] Daniel Lea, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 120.
[635] Lea, p. 121.

leading to moments of existential anxiety: equally, shame calls into question how we taxonomize texts – *Remainder* is based on contemporary fiction's ability to *recount* as previously argued by Boxall in the first chapter.

As the novel is written within the confines of the settlement: the reader's interpretation of the text is subjective. The episodic nature of declarative memory reveals that some scenes have more importance for one reader (and critic), rather than another. The settlement flexes therefore flexes and strains against not only our need to categorise it, but the narrator's desire to dismantle it. Agreeing to the settlement means accepting its clause: whilst he has been generously compensated, his wealth now separates him from his previous state of being-in-the-world. In this sense, he is having to re-learn how to live amongst 'the they'[636] in everydayness as he has now been thrown into a new set of cultural practices. The irony of the settlement, then, is that through their attempt to silence the narrator, they have reoriented the means to which he will make some noise. His actions speak for him as they (the mysterious organisation offering the settlement) have not accounted for *how* he would spend his money as a traumatised person. If we consider the settlement to represent declarative memory, this reveals how the stories we tell ourselves are always articulated through living alongside 'das Man', 'for the most part discourse is expressed by being spoken out and has always been so expressed; it is language.'[637]

Tragically, the narrator repeatedly tries to overthrow the confines of the settlement's clause and re-merge into the world as someone before the accident, however, shame arises and immediately disconnects him other beings. During an afternoon of people watching, he notices a 'regularity to the pattern of their movements, the circuits they made between the two spots, who replaced whom, when and in what order…after a while I started thinking that these people, finally were genuine. That they weren't interlopers. That they really did possess the street, themselves, the moment they were in.'[638] This observation reveals the temporal disturbance of shame, as disputing the flow of everydayness which is always, 'this

[636] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[637] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 211.
[638] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 56.

downward plunge into and within the groundlessness of the inauthentic Being of "they."'[639] As existing alongside 'the they'[640] has a 'kind of motion which constantly tears the understanding away from the projecting of authentic possibilities', the narrator realises the structure of this formation as he traces patterns from an outsider's perspective. This viewpoint is only made available through shame as he exists *outside* of this formation. Watching people go about their errands suddenly brings to light two points of consideration: firstly, our lives now resemble the anonymity and fast-paced rhythm of the digital world and secondly, his commitment to the settlement prevents him from truly living. As Heidegger argues that we are always 'being-with' and the aim, even with existential anxiety, is not to live a solitary life, McCarthy's narrator is denied a normalised state of being-in-the-world.

As soon as the narrator realises that he does not share the same being-in-the-world as the people he is watching, he turns to join them though fear of isolation, 'I wanted to make contact with them. I decided that I *would* make contact with them.'[641] What follows is a bizarre conversation with a 'wrapped-up dog guy'[642] (a homeless person) about performativity, 'you know, in films, when people do things – characters, the heroes, like Robert De Niro, say – when they do things, it's perfect…And then his dialogue will be just perfect too. You see what I mean? If you or I tried that, it would keep slipping out and falling.'[643] Trying to avoid shame thus reorients the narrator towards it, as the affect leaks through his language, 'slipping'[644] and 'falling.'[645] As part of PTSD, the stress response once activated, 'is highly dynamic with excitatory and inhibitory brain mechanisms modulating its expression'[646] which, in turn, causes survivors to develop 'rigid responses that reduce their capacity for everyday functioning.'[647] As seen in this conversation with the

[639] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[640] Ibid.
[641] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 56.
[642] Ibid.
[643] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 59.
[644] Ibid.
[645] Ibid.
[646] Derrick Silove, 'Adaptation, Ecosocial Safety Signals, and the Trajectory of PTSD', in *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 242-258 (p. 249).
[647] Ibid.

homeless man, the narrator's understanding of danger is drastically inhibited and he speaks in patterns, *about* patterns. This rigidity prevents the expression of his trauma (which would decrease his shame), however due to his body memory, he compulsively repeats that which he is trying to solve.

In her work on the phenomenology of shame and the body, Luna Dolezal argues that the 'coherent and competent body described by both phenomenology and social constructionism'[648] requires a 'lifelong process of body management, skill acquisition and self-presentation within intersubjective relations.' A body that escapes shame therefore must perform certain habits to maintain itself and the expectations of society – not only this, if the body wants to succeed then it must accumulate more enhanced ways of being-in-the-world through its comportment: via expression, and appearance for example. For Dolezal, the 'lived body is constantly engaged in strategies of self-presentation and impression management'[649], which can be seen in the narrator's conversation with the homeless man. Arguably, his selection of interlocutor is deliberate to reinstate some of the powerlessness that accompanies trauma.

As the esoteric conversation does not give the expected reaction, the narrator suddenly reveals that this exchange is purely fictional, 'the truth is, I've been making all this up – the stuff about the homeless person. He existed all right, sitting camouflaged against the shop fronts and the dustbins – but I didn't go across to him.'[650] He further comments about the man's friends, 'they had a point to prove: that they were ne with the street; that they and only they spoke its true language; that they really owned the space around them. Crap: total crap.'[651] His anger is fuelled by his loneliness as his inability to express (due the settlement) prevents him from joining a community. Even with all his wealth, the narrator is incapable of impressing – his self-presentation whilst aesthetically appealing hides an overwhelming shame that can be disorienting for the other person to experience. Unbeknownst to him, his feelings of rejection are verbalised, thus negating all the

[648] Luna Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body* (London: Lexington Books, p. 2015 (p. 82).
[649] Dolezal, p. 85.
[650] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 60.
[651] Ibid.

physical attributes and the altruism (he bought the man a coffee.) The overspill of shame is the remaining aspect of his self-presentation.

As a defence against his own feelings of unworthiness, the narrator comments that the man and his friends, 'don't even come from London. Luton, Glasgow, anywhere, but somewhere else, far away, irrelevant.' He blames his irritation on their self-presentation – not his xenophobic frustration that regards them as Other, but 'their swaggering, their arrogance: a cover. Usurpers. Frauds.'[652] The narrator's anger towards himself is extended outwards as blame which is the narcissistic response of a globally attributed self – the homeless man is not interested in my conversation; therefore, *I* am not interesting. This level of shaming highlights Cecilea Mun's claim that 'some acts of shaming and being shamed (rather than being ashamed) are acts of testimonial injustice including acts of systematic testimonial injustice.'[653] For Mun previous accounts of shame enable epistemic injustices as they encourage 'co-participants, especially those who may be regarded as having a higher status, rank, or place of privilege, to resort to shaming to not only mark the other as being defective and degraded, but to also attempt to cause the other to believe that they are defective and degraded.'[654] Whether the narrator responds with anger due to his repressed trauma, or if he was previously harbouring racist opinions is unknown and irrelevant. This shaming incident highlights the narrator's standard account of shame (the displaced power dynamic), and the reader's as we incorporate a hierarchical viewpoint to perceive the incident as a shaming event, thus upholding a structure rooted in marginalisation.

Standard accounts of shame are therefore revealed as examples of 'groundless shame' which can be understood as 'being-marked-as-being-wrong-in-some-way.' The social mechanisms at work when such shaming occurs towards minorities and ostracised people, is upheld by the very philosophical practise that wants to dismantle it. This results in 'epistemic silencing' wherein those who oversee the testimonials of such injustices are complicit in their standard accounts of shame.

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[652] Ibid.
[653] Cecilea Mun, 'Oppression and Liberation via the Rationalities of Shame', in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Shame*, ed. by Cecilea Mun (London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 51-74 (p. 59).
[654] Mun, p. 63.

If we are to consider non-standard accounts of shame, we must revisit hermeneutic injustice (the gap of disadvantaged peoples), to reconstruct what a) what shame is, and b) how it profits society. If the man had responded in anger, for example, it would have been referenced as rage, which feeds into the narrator's judgement of their 'arrogance.'[655]The homeless man is silenced, not given a name, and immediately othered as the narrator continues, 'I didn't go and talk to him. I didn't want to, didn't have a thing to learn from him.'[656]

The narrator's contempt of the homeless man reflects the settlement's silencing clause. His lawyer, Daubenay initially congratulates him, 'it's an unprecedented sum. Well done'[657], to which the narrator replies, 'I didn't earn it.'[658] Rather than process his trauma, he is forced to repeat it and be grateful as he has been compensated, 'you've suffered' Daubenay replies before the phone cuts off 'mid-conversation again.'[659] The refusal of accountability highlights how satisfaction always occurs twice: within the mind and then in reality. Daubenay expects the narrator to be satisfied and cannot conceive of a reality in which this is not true. Adam Philips notes that 'the language of satisfaction is 'notably impoverished, riddled with clichés and exclamations.' Daubenay's dialogue is punctuated with a lack of care (he also upholds standard accounts of shame as any response from the narrator would be deemed exorbitant, and consequently he cuts him off.) The lack of expression from the narrator and his lawyer combined with the silencing of the settlement corroborates Heidegger's claim that being-in-the-world is articulated through language. In her work on Heidegger and language, Irene McMullin argues that 'language allows us an empty co-orientation to the words – not a full sharing of the affective, practical stance – such that only a residue of genuine communication remains.'[660] The narrator's conversation with both Daubenay and the homeless man are examples of the alienating effect of 'idle talk', as the desire for true expression is effaced by wanting to conform (a common symptom of PTSD.)

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[655] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 60.
[656] Ibid.
[657] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 13.
[658] Ibid.
[659] Ibid.
[660] Irene McMullin, *Time and the Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p. 180.

Heidegger's use of language, for McMullin, does not necessarily relegate us to inauthenticity due to the enabling of 'shared orientations without demanding a primordial repetition of the act of discovering' – there are 'some concepts that are not individuated by laymen but by experts.' Put simply, the opening-up of the possibility of inauthenticity does not condemn us to it, as language articulates meaning across time and space. The potential of meaning is something which compels Dasein to become authentic for itself. As the novel shares the aesthetics of metamodernism (specifically, the metaxy between inauthenticity and authenticity), the possibility of authentic expression is another way of searching for depth, highlighting Huber and Seita's argument that 'in its depiction of a quest for ultimate authentic being, *Remainder* progresses beyond a mere recovery of personal history and identity.'[661]

Whilst the narrator continues his life after the accident, an incident at a party forces him to confront his shame. Feeling disconnected from others, he is hypnotised by a crack in the wall of the flat which seems to grow alongside his sense of déjà vu. Suddenly disoriented, he claims, 'this extra room seemed to have just popped up beside it like the half had in my Settlement: off-set, an extra…then it happened, the event that, the accident aside, was the most significant of my whole life.'[662] The room accordingly sparks a memory of a flat which he had previously rented or, perhaps, imagined. He notes, 'I remembered it all, but I couldn't remember where I'd been in this place, this flat, this bathroom. Or when… and yet it was growing, minute by minute as I stood there in the bathroom, this remembered building, spreading outwards from the crack.'[663] The crack represents a universally understood definition of trauma as something fracturing and explosive, with an epicentre that reaches out, engulfing the surrounding environment. Roger Luckhurst coined the term, 'trauma knot', in which he argues that 'trauma is a breaching of disciplines.'[664] As trauma disrupts an ordinary experience of time, its extension across the wall, and through

[661] Irmtraud Huber and Sophie Seita, 'Authentic Simulacra or The Aura of Repetition: Experiencing Authenticity in Tom McCarthy's Remainder', in *The Aesthetics of Authenticity*, ed. by Wolfgang Funk, Florian GroB and Irmtraud Huber (London: Transaction Publishers, 2012), pp. 261-280 (p. 262).
[662] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 66.
[663] Ibid.
[664] Luckhurst, p. 4.

the rest of the flat represents Heidegger's structure of temporality: Dasein is always being-ahead-of-itself; projecting onto the future, through being-towards-death, we are always intentionally striving for something. Traumatic events, however, splinter our interpretation of the world in everydayness: an unsightly crack of an otherwise blemish-free wall is how the shame of trauma disturbs our orientation in the world.

The crack represents the Caruthian nature of deferred trauma as the narrator's life has been splintered by a mystifying event which is to remain anonymous to both himself, and the reader, presenting an endless state of deferral. When observing the crack, memories resurface, 'I'd been in a space like this before, a place that had jutted and meandered in the same way as the one beside the mirror…there'd been that same crack, and a bathtub also…and the taps older, different.'[665] The frantic memories prompt feelings of anxiousness as something is being peeled away: the subterranean system of frantic offshoots reveals the complexity of trauma responses as a defence against shame. Trauma directly impacts the globally attributed self, and under the weight of such disillusionment, a façade is automatically constructed. Confronted by his withdrawn, alienated state after the accident, the crack memorialises what is lost and what could have been, further disrupting the narrator's being-in-the-world.

In Patrick Bracken's work on trauma, he argues that 'the essence of trauma is in the way the inner world of the victim is abruptly ruptured and starts to disintegrate.'[666] The inner world is the narrator's defence against shame (as previously seen in his conversation with the homeless man, *blaming* the other gives a voice to his otherwise silenced state.) For Bracken, this puncturing movement causes not only an overwhelming sense of fear and anxiety in the individual, but the conceptual system is broken and in a state of upheaval.'[667] Startled, the narrator finds his strength, exclaiming, 'right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again. I wanted to; I had to; I would. Nothing else mattered.'[668] His response therefore to

[665] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 65.
[666] Patrick Bracken, *Trauma: Culture, Meaning & Philosophy* (London: Whurr Publishers Ltd, 2002), p. 59.
[667] Ibid.
[668] McCarthy, R*emainder*, p. 67.

this threatening moment of individuation, is to reconstruct his trauma *without* shame as a model in which to understand it. The staccato-esque sentences signify a promise to himself, a commitment to authenticity, and a reclaiming of self. As the settlement functions as declarative memory, the crack in the apartment and the proceeding determination highlights body memory's malleability (made possible through expression.) Resolving to turn away from fallenness, 'the turning-away of falling is grounded rather in anxiety, which in turn is what first makes fear possible'[669], the narrator seeks to repair his self-abandonment in the face of shame.

This hopeful reconciliation has disastrous consequences, however, the ontological property of the crack reveals an important state for that narrator that can be seen in Heidegger's anxiety as a state that 'individualises Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities.'[670] The jarring experience of confrontation and future projection causes a specific temporal movement that I argue has the rhythm of a buffering motion. The narrator's being-in-the-world accordingly gets stuck in a cycle of continually refreshing a memory that refuses to fully develop. Referring to Dolezal's acknowledgement of the repeated habits that are required in sustained self-presentation, this buffering ensures further experiences of shame. The narrator believes he is reconstructing life before the accident; however, it is a solitary venture that further removes him from community. A thematic tendency to work within and against vulnerability arguably characterises metamodernism's 'oscillating in-betweenness, or, rather, a dialectical movement that identifies with and negates – and hence, overcomes and undermines – conflicting positions.'[671]

Buffering presents the narrator with a refracted, rather than reflected, understanding of his trauma as it can never be fully understood due to the silencing clause of the settlement. As the buffering nature of his memories disclose a very fragmented comportment of the world, it is a process that reveals broader concerns of life in a digital world. The narrator desperately tries to reclaim a rational

[669] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 235.
[670] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.
[671] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 10.

interpretation of his experiences, but his encroaching memories threaten to completely unravel his being-in-the-world. In an article on suicidality and buffering, resilience has been described as 'an ability, perception or set of beliefs which buffer individuals from the development of suicidality in the face of risk factors or stressors.'[672] Researchers found that, as emotional dysregulation increases the risk of suicidality, 'emotional intelligence may have a buffering effect.' Certain cognitive biases such as an 'overgenerality in autobiographical memory', which is a 'phenomena whereby individuals are less able to recall specific events from their past' and rumination which is characterised as a 'repetitive, self-focused thinking style' are, paradoxically, associated with both an increased risk of suicidality, and act as a buffer against it. McCarthy's narrator embodies this dichotomy as his rumination on the perfect form reorients his being-in-the-world towards authentic expression yet paralyses him in a perpetual echo of attaining it.

Shame, therefore, enables temporality to slow down as it provokes 'a kind of opening, a gap or crack, through which a more enlivening form of translation might become possible.'[673] The narrator leaves the party with a renewed sense of resilience as he plans to rebuild the apartment of his imagination, alive in its all flaws. The spark of intention that directly follows this moment of anxiety emphasises Hinton and Willemsen's claim that 'embracing shame and temporality opens the way toward becoming that clod of earth, that vulnerable, singular entity that we are.'[674] During his experience at the party, the narrator no longer feels at home within himself or beside his acquaintances (the emotional gap does not hint at friend.) His resilience could therefore be viewed as another defence mechanism that has the appearance of vulnerability yet is secretly rooted in control. Buffering, after all, in its digital context is the act of preloading data into a reserved area of memory: as repressed body memories are attempting to take form, they are inhibited by the narrator's capacity (or, incapacity) for structuring a sequence of events.

[672] Judith Johnson, Alex M. Wood, Patricia Gooding, Peter J. Taylor, Nicholas Tarrier, 'Resilience to suicidality: The buffering hypothesis', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31 (2011), pp. 563-591 (564).
[673] Austin, p. 123.
[674] Hinton and Willemsen, *Temporality and Shame*, p. 8.

The narrator's project could therefore be viewed as a *distraction*, rather than a reconciliation. Robert Stolorow's Heideggerian approach to trauma reveals that, 'in trauma, a potential dimension of authenticity is forced upon the traumatized person, and the accompanying anxiety can be unendurable.' Authenticity for Heidegger is becoming aware of our finitude, which for a traumatised person is disabling. As the narrator struggles with building his apartment, he experiences moments of lucidity, swiftly followed by periods of mindless coping to avoid shame. Stolorow's approach to trauma is grounded in community and empathy which validate negative feelings of shame and guilt. The narrator seeks to construct his own community; however, the flats are inhabited by actors – it is grandiosity disguised as vulnerability. Bracken affirms the need for connection, arguing that 'the opening up of a world is never an individual act'[675] – the narrator successfully opens a world (literally and figurative speaking), yet he finds no-one at home but himself. The world of his creation is thus comparable to the one on our devices as they both efface the curation of their construction.

During a visit to his old flat, the narrator is prompted to buy it, 'oh yes: it was my building. My own, the one that I remembered.' A sense of home overwhelms him as he notes, 'I stood there, projecting all this in. The tingling became very intense. I stood completely still: I didn't want to move, and I'm not sure I could have even if I wanted to. The tingling crept from the top of my legs to my shoulders and right up into my neck.'[676] Shame is often defined as a feeling of uncanniness, yet the narrator's pleasant experience is at odds with our understanding of the experience. Its phenomenological description reveals a point of disorientation (situated between something pleasant and painful), and the creeping sensation mimics the slow flush of shame that reveals its presence to others. This description which previously prompted a fleeing reaction, (the dystopian horror of the crack on the wall), is now embodied as the creeping feeling is 'intense and serene, tingling. It felt very good.'[677] The ontology is therefore different on two separate occasions, which highlight the emotion's indefinability. As this thesis argues, the embodied experience of shame is

[675] Bracken, p. 89.
[676] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 108.
[677] Ibid.

less important to the narrator's (and, arguably, contemporary fiction's) positioning of shame within a temporal framework. If shame is repeatedly written about, and within, contemporary texts then we are writing as a society that desires community but refuses vulnerability. The mediation of the internet further enables this gap as, ironically, the space between our devices and ourselves has decreased to the point where technology is integrated in our being-in-the-world.

In their work on the descriptive project of shame, Dolican Kollareth et al, claim that such an enterprise is unhelpful in defining this difficult emotion as 'descriptive definitions, as explanations of everyday word use, can also be context dependent.'[678] Shame is 'not well defined, and instead refers to a cluster of events that share overlapping features, but none are defining.' The researchers conclude that shame can only be viewed as a 'heterogeneous set of events' as its impact is equally illusory, 'if aggression is taken as different from, or even the opposite of, avoidance, then it seems no one consequence of shame has been established.' Put simply, as the negative effect of shame often corresponds with a series of resulting behaviours (rage, avoidance, depressive thinking etc), where is the line between the presence of these negative core affects and the moment of shame? As the narrator's experience at the party looks identical to the one produced at his old apartment, it more helpful to understand the moment in terms of its temporality, rather than physicality.

After buying his flat, the narrator employs actors to repeatedly perform routine tasks that he would oversee, 'These tasks range from the mundanity of cooking, emptying bins to poorly playing a piano, 'in the day he'd practise, pausing when he made mistakes, running over the same passages again and again, slowing right down into the bits that he'd got wrong.'[679] Through overseeing these tasks, he borrows an element of his previous life and places it into a building (unsurprisingly made of glass in the classic modernist style) of his control. The actions which he asks the actors to perform are snippets from everydayness, however they are subverted

[678] Dolichan Kollareth, Mariko Kikutani, and James A. Russell, 'Shame is a Folk Term Unsuitable as a Technical Term in Science', in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Shame*, ed. by Cecilea Mun (London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 3- 26 (p. 12).
[679] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 70.

with the reflexive knowledge of their uselessness. The pianist, for example, is continually playing mistakes and the elderly lady consistently burns the liver she is cooking – the space between mindless habit and purposeful activity, gets *sharpened* by their mistakes. This sharpening draws focus to the issue of ownership as the compulsive need to correct is an avoidant strategy against progress, which is daunting and unpredictable. The narrator feels relief during this process, commenting that 'downstairs the pianist was coming out of a corrective loop, speeding up as he took off for new territory. I opened the fridge faultlessly once more, then closed it for the last time: I was ready to go.'[680] Compulsively correcting himself and the behaviour of others gives the appearance of self-mastery as he proclaims, 'moving across the landing and down the staircase, I felt like an astronaut taking his first steps – humanity's first steps – across the surface of a previously untouched planet.'[681]

The diverse range of movements performed by the actors further supports Kollareth et al's claim that shame is a heterogeneous series of gestures and affects. The individual mistakes get caught on a loop, creating a buffering that likely is in place of the emotional resilience needed to process the narrator's trauma. Susan Miller's phenomenology of shame further supports its inscrutability, claiming that the only rhythmic element of shame that she can identify is the 'characteristic experience of shrinking away from others and pulling inward and downward.'[682] Miller is more concerned with shame's interplay between affective states, 'such shame experiences might be described as efforts to hide the self in order to save it from further narcissistic trauma.'[683] As the actors perform their mistakes, they produce an image that deliberately prevents the narrator's progression as his perfectionism protects him from vulnerability. The actors never meet or interact and are secluded to their own glass microcosms: the pianist crouches over his piano whilst continually playing the wrong notes and the elderly lady hunches over her cooking embodying the humiliated stance that occurs when making mistakes.

[680] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 142.
[681] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 143.
[682] Susan Miller, *The Shame Experience* (New Jersey: The Analytic Press, 1985), p. 37.
[683] Miller, p. 134.

The apartment, in all its defected rhythm, becomes a museum of shame and a life unlived. Andreas Elpidorou states that 'our projects, interests, and indeed our existence as such, are in a fundamental sense worldly.'[684] The totalising value of each practice thus represents the global self-evaluation affiliated with their mistakes. The actors continually re-enact their shameful choreography as the narrator stumbles over how to describe his staff, stating, 'All the…performers – no, not performers: that's not the right word…the participants, the…staff…must be…I mean, we'll need. Complete…jurisdiction over all the space.'[685] The fragmented sentence represents his fractured hold on temporality as he searches for the correct words whilst the motions themselves are buffering/loading. The actors and their roles resemble Brataille's consideration of creative economy discourse as the narrator appropriates the language of theatre, yet does not feel qualified enough use it, hence its clumsy application. Existing within the inauthentic state of everydayness 'denies Dasein from achieving self-mastery'[686], which can be seen through the imbalanced power dynamic within the flats. Through the curation and replication of mistakes in a controlled setting, the narrator therefore commodifies self-mastery, using it as a buffer against shame.

Adam Philips claims that 'your project, so to speak, is to fit in with what the other wants you to be (or what you imagine they want you to be); but there are aspects of yourself that are always threatening to break the bonds you need.'[687] When shame is avoided, and trauma not expressed, frustration inevitably creeps into the most clinical settings: 'a more serious problem was the pianist. This one did upset me, plenty: I caught him out red-handed one day, blatantly defrauding me.'[688] Enraged, the narrator discovers the pianist using a recording of himself playing Rachmaninov as it was too upsetting to repeatedly play the wrong notes. The anger, whilst appearing to be directed towards this act of disobedience, can be understood

[684] Andreas Elpidorou, 'Moods and Appraisals: How the Phenomenology and Science of Emotions Can Come Together', *Human Studies*, 36.4 (Winter, 2013), 565-591 (p. 584) < https://www.jstor.org/stable/24021633> [accessed 04 September 2024].
[685] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 88.
[686] Simon Critchley, 'Originary Inauthenticity', in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, ed. by John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson (New York: Suny Press, 2014), pp. 109-133 (p. 124).
[687] Philips, p. 43.
[688] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 158.

as envy towards the actor's values. Shame occurs when there is a misalignment of values between self and comportment within the world. In his work on temporality across phenomenology, David Couzens argues that 'for the authentic Dasein, time passes, but it does so as a coherent connectedness rather than as a disconnected leaping from one missed opportunity to the next.'[689] The narrator's distractedness in his project thus reveals his inability to express his shame, as he cannot speak his trauma due to the settlement.

The world continues as normal outside of the apartment creating an ever-widening gap between this strange project of shame, and the rest of society, between the narrator and his trauma. Temporality within the apartment is continually loading, relentlessly pursuing the speed of time, yet continually falling short. In his short essay on time and technology, McCarthy states, 'that's how I understand this buffer: we're just caught in that little ball and we keep spinning and spinning.'[690] Existential therapist, Hans W Cohn, favours the term 'creativity'[691] instead of 'authenticity'[692] in relation to Heidegger's phenomenology, as expressing shame (through talking or art) dissipates its negative affect. Cohn argues that 'anxiety may make us turn away from the possibility of creating a painting, or a close relationship, and we may experience this turning away as a failure in the context of our life.'[693] Whilst the narrator micromanages his creative efforts, his reconstruction of life before trauma, *becomes* his construction of trauma as we repeat that which is not processed.

The conclusion of the novel is an act of aggression as the narrator loses all sense of rationality and commits murder in a fake bank heist that becomes reality. The decline of the narrator's mental state culminates in the construction of a simulated bank robbery, 'his ultimate goal, of course, being to – how shall we put it? To attain – no, to accede to – a kind of authenticity through this strange, pointless residual.'[694] As he flees the scene, he boycotts an airplane and proceeds to fly it in a

[689] David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), p. 58.
[690] McCarthy, *Recessional – Or, the Time of the Hammer*, p. 59.
[691] Hans W Cohn, *Heidegger and the Roots of Existential Therapy* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 92.
[692] Ibid.
[693] Ibid.
[694] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 259.

looping symbol of infinity. The looping plane represents the residue that the narrator has simultaneously tried to confront and avoid throughout his project. Petr Kouba claims that Heideggerian phenomenology enables us to see that 'every mental illness means a restriction of a free and full realization of certain possibilities.'[695] The narrator cannot see beyond the limits of his obsession – his desire to reconstruct a sense of self that has been lost to him since the accident – as Funk argues, 'the authentic moment as pursued in *Remainder* is one of pure form.'[696]

The final act of the looping airplane reiterates Kouba's argument that 'once, however, the ecstatic unity of temporality has fallen apart, being-there draws to its definitive end.'[697] The narrator's attempt to control time submerges him in it: he is trapped in a zone of non-existence, no longer occupying a being-in-the-world that is informed through the presence of others. Essentially, he no longer exists. The infinity symbol which the plane repeats is a material example of the temporality of unprocessed shame: lost in feedback, we become what we avoid. Jeffrey Kaufman claims that 'shame disconnects a person from the social world and from oneself. It weakens a person's sense of familiarity in the world and with their own self'[698], revealing how the distance created between the narrator and his shame, and land and sky, does nothing more than re-enact the movement of avoidance.

For Sam Slote, the novel explores the 'tension between fetishizing the remainder while eliminating the surplus matter: the problem of the recidual, as it were.'[699] The apartment is continuing to re-enact its montage of shame as the protagonist flees the scene, its rhythm a reminder of the mindless ways we comport ourselves within the world, and the alerting shame we feel when we fail at such tasks. The abandoned re-enactment also points to those practises that are left behind in pursuit of productivity, which naturally co-occurs within a digital landscape. In her work on different temporal horizons, Lisa Baraitser makes the claim, 'I do not believe that anyone *lives* a philosophy of becoming…I would contend psychosocial life is

[695] Petr Kouba, *The Phenomenon of Mental Disorder: Perspectives of Heidegger's Thought in Psychopathology* (New York: Springer, 2015), p. 94.
[696] Funk, p. 190.
[697] Kouba, p. 96.
[698] Jeffrey Kauffman, 'On the Primacy of Shame', in *The Shame of Death, Grief and Trauma, ed. by Jeffrey Kauffman* (Routledge: New York, 2014), pp. 3-22 (p. 3).
[699] Slote, p. 131.

lived.'[700] In her chapter on Remaining, Baraitser argues the case for practices of slowness: knitting, stitching, cooking are examples of hobbies that exist within communities, forging bonds between participants (typically women). As these circles are slowly being effaced due to lack of interest perpetuated by our waning attention span, we are only now aware of the remaining outlets. For Baraitser, 'the time of a communal future has indeed withdrawn and can only be resurrected through the arduous noticing of its withdrawal through time-consuming practices.'[701]

The movement of the plane juxtaposed against the communal flat of re-enactments concludes the two types of temporalities experienced within digital time: self-recollection and auto-pilot. Shame, like existential anxiety, pierces the space between these experiences of time. Kirmayer notes that 'if one accepts traumatic experience as the cause of symptoms, it is easy to reconstruct one's history with a temporal sequence that supports trauma as a causal explanation'[702] – due to the settlement, McCarthy's narrator is denied acceptance as he cannot access his experience through language or memory. His 'temporal sequence' is thus an infinite feedback loop of things he will never comprehend.

The Making of Incarnation

Cosmology

From the moment He first touched The Void,
He's been always on-the-go-

And so we may draw two conclusions:

[700] Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 13.
[701] *Baraitser,* p. 177.
[702] Robert Lemelson, Laurence J. Kirmayer, and Mark Brand, 'Trauma in Context: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives', in *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Brand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 451-474 (p.464).

God's leaving
creates the rent
through which time issues us.

{in the beginning was the slip of his finger}[703]

The Making of Incarnation is a novel about motion. If *Remainder* is a novel about trauma, and its subsequent shame, *The Making of Incarnation* is its inverted, shameless counterpart. The novel follows Mark Phocan, a contemporary motion-capture consultant for Pantarey, who is working alongside a film production company to ensure the correct special effects for their new space-opera, Incarnation. Meanwhile, newly qualified lawyer, Monica Dean, is researching the early history of time-and-motion studies when she comes across a reference to engineering pioneer Lilian Gilbreth's mystery box, 808, that contains the perfect movement – 'Box 808 – is that charges? No, it's changes – Box 808 changes everything.'[704] What follows is a race across the globe to find the box and reveal its secrets.

McCarthy's love of patterns and ontology is revived throughout the novel. Whereas *Remainder*'s narrator is doomed to repeat his infinite solipsism (unhealed shame) through the looping plane, 'the formal authenticity envisioned in *Remainder* can never transcend its status as mere formal and deliberate re-enactment'[705], Dean discovers the secret to 808 is a reference to Gilbreth's love affair, from Dante, 'l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle, the love that moves the sun and other stars.'[706] The narrator in *Remainder* thus seeks to reconstruct his life before the accident; both Phocan and Dean, however, want to discover the most scientifically accurate movement that would seek to efface the body in general. Dean's research, for

[703] Becker, p. 51.
[704] Tom McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation* (London: Penguin Random House, 2021), p. 129.
[705] Funk, p. 191.
[706] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 303.

example, is helping a firm win a copyright case on choreography, 'beyond the old dichotomy of man/machine, of operator/tool, and begin to view the whole thing instead as a…as a kind of constellation.'[707] The novels thus exist in opposing areas of concern – the body is atomised in *Remainder* as an attempt to distinguish shame, whereas the body is shamelessly discarded in *The Making of Incarnation*, reduced to the sum of its mechanical parts, only to realise at the end that perfect movement is *relational* (it is the in-between.)

Discarding the body as a site of existence is to continually live in everydayness. For Heidegger, living authentically is to be aware of one's potential that is individuated through existential anxiety, 'anxiety individualises Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world.'[708] The uncanniness that is experienced during moments of anxiety (when Dasein is aware of its constant projection as being-towards-death), brings Dasein back from 'its absorption of the "world." Everyday familiarity collapses.'[709] Existential anxiety (angst) therefore grounds Dasein in itself as uncanniness is always an embodied subject. If we attempt to remove the body as a site of subjectivity, there is no disturbance to our mindless comportment alongside those practices that control our lives ('the they.'[710])

The novel's desire to isolate a constellation of movements, 'the *moment*, the designed *relation*'[711] is thus an extension of ownership within the digital space which replicates the intersubjective patterns of 'the they.'[712] If the body has no agency of its own, there is no distinguishability between our own selves, and the intentions of others, which render us powerless and trapped in inauthenticity. For McMullin, the 'sameness of human beings existing in terms of das Man must be understood existentially: as a way of existing, as patterns of interpreting and behaving in the world that we all share.'[713] If Project A therefore succeeds in their choreography case, the body is reduced to a series of homogeneous gestures and thus, is denied autonomy. Our interpretation of the world is based on our ability to feel as Dasein's

[707] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, 60.
[708] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232.
[709] Heidegger*, Being and Time,* p. 233.
[710] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[711] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 65.
[712] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[713] McMullin, p. 33.

being-in-the-world is always disclosed through the affective structure of care. Attunement towards others, subsequently, is a shared experience of time – the desire to copyright individual gestures such as swiping, 'the true "content" of their work: the soft-and hardware are just trappings – props, or prompts'[714], integrates the structures of 'the they'[715] within the site of the body which rendering it anonymous. Existing alongside 'das Man'[716] is to witness the flattening of possibilities as everything is socially interpreted as 'given in advance, as settled and prearranged.'[717] The commodification of gestures therefore limits the possibility of the body and the spaces we inhabit.

In her essay, 'On Shamelessness', Michelle Mason considers the suspicion surrounding shame as a moral emotion. As philosophers have primarily concentrated on the benefits, or conversely, inherent faults of the emotion, Mason asks why the same insight has not been granted for its opposite – shamelessness. In her argument, the absence of shame is enough to pause the critical debate, concluding that, 'as an evasion of moral self-censure, shamelessness can be morally pernicious'[718] – thus, we cannot forget shame and 'we should be mindful of its moral importance and unapologetic in its defence.' A conversation surrounding shame is therefore always a discussion of the lack of it: as previously noted in Eley Williams, shame is irrevocably linked to narcissism. Shamelessness, equally, is linked to the experience of shame, however, it does not take the same form. Narcissism is a compensatory *defence* against shame (often subconscious as it is an ego-syntonic behaviour); shamelessness is a moral *choice* against shame.

A philosophical consideration of shamelessness thus depends on the stance towards shame – Mason uses the argument of a male dance student who, on walking past football practice, is ridiculed for his leotard. The dancer, however, feels no shame and confidently strides to class: his shameless behaviour is therefore an act of agency against the prohibitive powers of shame. This is only one (arguably small)

[714] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 59.
[715] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[716] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[717] McMullin, p. 35.
[718] Michelle Mason, 'On Shamelessness', *Philosophical Papers*, 39.3 (2010), 401-425 (p. 403) < https://philpapers.org/archive/MASOS.pdf> [accessed 4 September 2024].

side of the debate and shamelessness is more commonly experienced as 'a form of moral evasion.'[719] If shame is an act of self-censure, then it 'signals a susceptibility to more comprehensive moral appraisal of oneself in light of certain character ideals.'[720] We are more mindful of our words and actions when we consider shame which creates a more harmonious society. For her main example of shamelessness, Mason considers a CEO who commits fraud for her own material gain, which highlights 'the extent that one is shameless, on my proposed view, one lacks constraint on what one will allow themselves to be.'[721] To act shamelessly is therefore 'a failure to value any character ideals recognisable as worthy of a well-lived life.' When we consider this stance against narcissistic defences against shame, (rage, anger, or avoidance), the impact appears identical as it is a lack of consideration (a complete omission would be pathological). The relevance, I am arguing, is the *size* of the impact of this behaviour.

As previously seen in chapter two, moments of shame within contemporary fiction reorient the narrative towards authenticity. For Williams, the desired state is authentic expression that is consistently denied within a narcissistic society; McCarthy's *Remainder* tries to construct authenticity after trauma but devolves into re-enactment. *The Making of Incarnation*, however, poses a different question: what happens when authenticity is no longer society's concern Both Panterey, and Dean's law firm have no interest in catering to authenticity, in fact, they would rather allocate it (our gestures) and sell it on to companies that wish to efface the human body. As seen in the examples below, the mechanisms of our bodies are replicated within technology which give the *appearance* of authenticity, however it is the opposite. For Heidegger, authenticity is always relational, therefore our isolation within a pre-programmed world is to be controlled by the invisible networks of 'das Man' which can be defined in this context by David Egan: 'in its impersonality, *das Man* lacks the crucial particularity that is a central feature of Dasein's existence.'[722]

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[719] Mason, p. 417.
[720] Mason, p. 419.
[721] Mason, p. 422.
[722] David Egan, 'Das Man and Distantiality in Being and Time', *Inquiry*, 55.3 (2012), pp. 289-306 (p. 295) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/0020174X.2012.678606?needAccess=true> [accessed 04 September 2024].

The opening of the novel recounts a formative memory from Mark Phocan's childhood. During a visit to the Tate, Phocan gets in trouble with security for throwing a ball at an art exhibit, after which he is removed from the gallery, and is required to repeatedly watch the footage. The bus journey hints at Phocan's natural interest in patterns,

'The aluminium of the vehicle's carapace behind which it disappears is thin and translucent; the sun, head-on to them now, shines through it to illuminate the letters SCHOOL BUS stamped across it, broadcasting them to passengers in reversed form: SUB LOOCHS. Below this the same letters, smaller and similarly reversed, though this time through reflection of the front shell of the bus hugging their tail, run across the driver's rear-view mirror: SUB LOOCHS. To Markie, these are real words, drawn from a hybrid language whose vocabulary and grammar he can just about intuit; doubled they present a header and subtitle, repeating a single cryptic instruction: *sub loohcs – look below*…'[723]

The lettering becomes interesting *through* its reflection. As it shrinks due to the changing perspective of the bus, there is an unravelling that eventually ends with the ominous, 'look below.' Mark, or Markie, follows phenomenology's pursuit of getting to the things themselves, or as Gallagher & Zahavi argue, 'the world we live in, and the world as we perceive it, is a world saturated by practical references of use.'[724] It is the relationship between the positioning of the sun, the bus, and Mark's perspective that creates a new language. This acts as a direct foreshadowing of the '*constellation*'[725] presented in Project A's case of copyright law which is described as 'held in formation by a force-of-gravity specific to its own context: a specific task, a particular design-moment, a uniquely codified relation…'[726] The letters themselves have previously not prompted much reflection as they are something we experience present-to-hand – through their reflection, however, they are enhanced in purpose

[723] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 12.
[724] Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 171.
[725] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 60.
[726] Ibid.

(and *use* as they prompt further discourse), thus becoming ready-to-hand. Whilst only a brief scene in the novel, a pattern emerges that dictates the rest of the plot: the need to uncover the relational space between objects, thus disclosing a new state of being-in-the-world.

The scene in the gallery is the next stage in the pattern sequence as Mark's preoccupation with reflections increase from the natural (the sun), to the digital (security camera), eventually ending with his work on the set of Incarnation (artificial intelligence.) Mark moves through the gallery clutching a ball as he comments on the paintings, 'he ambles past hangman figures, scribbled stars and charmingly imperfect circles.'[727] He eventually finds himself fascinated by surrealist piece in which a faceless human is throwing a stone at a bird that is also moving towards the ball. As the painting does not show the collision, the two figures are suspended in permanent motion.

Considering, at first, the hidden context of the piece, Mark eventually concludes that 'in this painting's universe there are only bird and only one person – nothing else. They *are* its universe, locked together in celestial terror, the yellow, lidless, and black-centred sun in the thrower's face the only source of light, condemned to gaze unblinkingly, to shine in red-flecked perpetuality on its own crime.'[728]As previously seen in the case of the lettering, the bird, and human, are made interesting through flight, which cannot be reduced to either entity. An important warning, however, that Mark does not acknowledge is the presence of the sun in this exchange as the force behind this dynamic. Without the reflection of the sun on the windows, the letters would not have been apparent; equally, without the sun in the painting, the human would not have been able to aim the stone at the bird.

One of humanity's worst traits is that we collectively extend our natural curiosity into the realms of greed. For Thomason, the moral function of shame is when 'our actions, judgments, or feelings do not match up with the way we represent our moral character to ourselves.'[729] Our desire to consume more is therefore

[727] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 17.
[728] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 20.
[729] Thomason, p.116.

inhibited by moral shame which acts as a barrier (or, buffer) to our innate self-interest. Our moral character is consequently dispensed with through acts of shamelessness as we turn away from the call of conscience, 'blinding ourselves to morally significant goods.'[730] As presented in the painting, our disregard for nature (wishing to harm a bird) eclipses the generosity naturally available to us within the environment. Not only present in the action of throwing, but throughout the novel, Mark forgets that it is the sun that allows for the perspective of movement and not just the interrelation between subject and object. Put simply, we cannot play God.

Our obsession with power is analysed through Gunther Anders's essay 'On Promethean Shame'[731], as he argues that in the presence of newly advanced technologies, we feel shame. Anthers borrows the concept from the myth of Prometheus in which the god from Ancient Greek mythology gifts humans the creation of fire (later claimed to represent technology and wisdom.) After being discovered by Zeus, Prometheus is sentenced to endless torment, and he has now come to represent a figure of self- sacrifice and knowledge. Watching his friend walk around an exhibition in 1950, Anthers notes, 'T. behaved in a most peculiar manner; so strangely, in fact, that I ended up only looking at him instead of the appliances on show…he concealed his hands behind his back, as if he were ashamed to have brought these heavy, graceless and obsolete instruments into the company of machines working with such accuracy and refinement.'[732] Anthers analyses the phenomenology of his friend's movements and concludes that, 'the pattern of behaviour left me in no doubt…to stand in his bodily clumsiness and his corporeal imprecision under the gaze of such perfect devices was really unbearable for him. He was truly ashamed.'[733]

Our inferiority next to the perceived perfection of technology, Anthers argues, is 'promethean shame'[734], which leads to a disruption of identity. Such imperfection however is not based on the functioning of the machine (as shame is

[730] Mason, p. 425.
[731] Christopher John Muller, *Prometheanism: Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd), p. 29.
[732] Muller, p. 30.
[733] Ibid.
[734] Ibid.

always relational), we are ashamed because 'the self encounters itself as a failing self'[735] through failing *labour*. There are two clauses to this argument, Anthers notes: firstly, instead of encountering ourselves when using machines, we discover 'something that already conforms to the world of machines' – we discover ourselves as part of a machine. Secondly, as we have already integrated ourselves with a machine – despite this, when we are unable to 'loyally hold the line and achieve a full conversion and co-substantiality with machines', we encounter ourselves instead of 'finding a machine part.' *The Making of Incarnation* could be read as the development from the first to the second clause, as it is the scene in the Tate that prompts Mark's fascination with motion-capture, yet throughout his career, he slowly reconciles his humanity amongst a curated world of mechanised parts.

'Promethean shame'[736] therefore requires an element of shamelessness as our advancement of technology comes with an inherent dismissal for the environment, and whilst it meets the needs of some people, it alienates others. In the Tate, Mark throws his ball at the painting instead of his friend, 'does it actually remain there for a moment, or is this just retinal delay? For what seems like several seconds, Markie sees it clinging to the painted surface. Figure, bird, stone, beach and sky and sea all shudder, unsettled by their world's off-centring…then nothing: total stasis – in the work, the room, in everywhere and everything.'[737] Unphased by his action, Mark is disappointed by the feeling that is left after throwing the ball – the motion he intended to replicate from the painting has not prompted the feeling experience through looking at it. As an allegory for Prometheus, Mark's shameless stunt represents how acts of creation have a moral function, and if committed through vanity, end badly.

After being sent to the security office, Mark watches himself on camera which confuses him, 'Markie sees a small boy, whom the rolled-up gloves in his right hand as he stands before a figure, bird and landscape drained of colour identity as no one but himself.' He asks the guard how this is possible, '"I mean…" Markie tries again,

[735] Muller, p. 81.
[736] Muller, p. 30.
[737] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 21.

"I'm here"'[738], to which he receives the answer, '"I said we'd watch the *replay*."'[739] This formative conversation prompts Mark's career choice as he seeks to isolate the movements between subject and object and transpose it into the technological. During this exchange, Mark moves his eyeline to the female figure of his classmate who stands on the outskirts of the scene, 'her face is turned away'[740] – this appears to cause a fracturing response as suddenly 'the monitors are silent, though. The chamber's silent…it's all happening, and not, in greyscale, here and somewhere else, draining away.'[741] Watching Bea's concealed face causes Mark to feel ashamed for his behaviour; the uncanniness of watching himself on a screen also prompts promethean shame as his robotic action is devoid of empathy and originality – it is just a replay.

As an adult, Mark works at motion-capture production company, Pantarey, whose HQ is an homage to technology, 'framed pictures of sensory-fitted athletes, soldiers, actors; of drones, robots and virtual assembly lines, all culminating in an upper landing-level picture that shows nothing more than strings of data, jiggling luminescent on a screen.'[742] Everything is thus reduced to movement, without acknowledging the sites that allow this force to exist. It is a flattening of bodies, and subsequently, affect. As humans are reduced to data, there is an acknowledgement of both the shameless act of creation that Pantarey has allowed itself, and an element of the first clause of promethean shame as, 'the "I" encounters itself as an "it."'[743] In his work on shame and time, Eric Stevenson argues that 'shame aims, not at what a person has done but at who a person *is*; this means that in its purest form, shame is *timeless*.'[744] As previously seen in chapter two, 'people hiding "shameful" aspects of themselves are chiefly afraid of the abandonment associated with what is unforgivable.'[745] Mark's surveillance of his data causes promethean shame through

[738] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 24.
[739] Ibid.
[740] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 25.
[741] Ibid.
[742] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 40.
[743] Muller, p. 81.
[744] Eric R. Severson, 'What lies beneath: Shame, time and diachrony', *Shame, Temporality and Social Change: Ominous Transitions*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 141-161 (p. 142).
[745] Severson, p. 144.

the recognition that we are reducible to predicted sequences, however, it also reveals Pantarey's goal of wanting to erase shame. If the body is no longer seen in all its flaws, there is nothing to conceal, hence no longer needing to feel ashamed.

Stevenson extends his argument to reveal a specific temporal pattern of shame: 'synchronic shame.'[746] As time is a concept 'that is used to synchronise, to pull together the diverse experiences of our lives'[747], shame, accordingly, consolidates our *interpretation* of events. If we again consider the moral function of shame, we are referring to 'synchronic shame'[748] as the emotion enables certain behaviours to fuse together for a cohesive society. Technology's impact on our experience of time - 'iTime' for example - changes the synchronicity of temporality, which alters the experience of emotions. As shame and guilt require a pause to be acknowledged, a society that no longer affords stillness is the beginning of a shameless world. Synchronic shame is thus 'a tool of control; those who are far from the centre, from the norm, are abnormal, untimely and shameful…it is sometimes helpful and sometimes devastating.'[749]

Pantarey's experiments with motion-capture can therefore be seen as a government-backed endeavour to *recalibrate (*and more unnervingly, efface) the experience of synchronic shame. During her internship at HQ, Lucy Diamond works alongside Phocan and ex-forces employee, Roger, as they sort through some of the live footage captured by drones. When asked why he was discharged from the forces, Roger replies, '"PTSD"'[750], which prompts confusion as he was steering the drones from a garden in Hampshire. Querying this, '"you weren't…I mean…in a war zone…"'[751], Roger retorts, '"wasn't I?" He smiled, then added: '"Aren't we?"'[752] This allusion to both the war on data, and a war *fought* through data prompts further disintegration of the human body, and consequently, shame. Diamond struggles through watching a missile clip, 'pixels refreshing at a rate that matched the speed of descent…white robed-man, locked in their confab, unaware that they were being

[746] Ibid.
[747] Ibid.
[748] Ibid.
[749] Severson, p. 148.
[750] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 98.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Ibid.

observed – until the mpeg's final frames, in which they turned their heads up to look straight at the camera, and at Diamond, for the fraction of a second just before the screen went blank.'[753]

Diamond does not immediately respond to the brutality on screen; her delayed reaction, however, is understandable considering the grotesque anonymity behind the violence. The ability to win a war on the other side of the globe is consequently one of the darker integrative aspects of technology. Her dismissal of PTSD as something that could occur *through* a screen is later reconsidered as she has a panic attack prompted by watching live footage from a shopping centre. As the layered images of bodies present more excitable affects than in the previous situation, this act of *witnessing* becomes unbearable, 'a woman in a dress is entering this sub-strip now, being hit side-on by sunlight falling through the gap that Sennet point out a moment ago…at the precinct's far end, by the bollards, a man leave the optician's, holding the door open for a policewoman who's peering at a notebook as she enters.'[754] One of Pantarey's colleagues dutifully notes the patterns of the pedestrians, claiming 'what's interesting about the way people move in public spaces is that they don't do what they're meant to. They don't follow the paths laid down for them.'[755] What emerges is a contrasting description of human behaviour that is differentiated by the presence of fear.

Watching the anonymous selection of bodies orient their lives in the shopping centre causes Diamond to fear two things. Firstly, the sense of promethean shame has now evolved to the second clause as no longer being able to 'loyally hold the line'[756], Diamond finds her humanity juxtaposed against the cruelty of the machine. Secondly, she fears her human employers as they discuss the data with an apparent lack of empathy, 'his conversation defaults to them in every second gap imaginable - and, the rhythmic sensitivity inculcated in her by today's task hints at her now, is about to start again.'[757] Diamond's propensity to feel shame is thus starkly contrasted against technologies and the men that own them.

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[753] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 100.
[754] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 104.
[755] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 102.
[756] Muller, p. 81
[757] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 103.

Diamond's delayed panic also induces a paranoid state as she claims, 'she senses her whole presence as a threat: to buildings, people, life itself, to the whole atmosphere and habitat in which she finds herself embedded – unsuspected, deadly, fingers caressing the interface.'[758] Her agency disintegrates through the integration of an alien technology, altering her moral structure: she collects data; therefore, she commits the crime. In her work on affect, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that 'paranoia is characterised by placing an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se – knowledge in the form of exposure.'[759] Diamond's paranoia is understandable as she has the knowledge that informs her experience of the affect; however, she is bound to secrecy. As seen in the function of the settlement in *Remainder*, Diamond is unable to express her knowledge which prompts a visceral reaction. Sedgwick considers paranoia 'for all its vaunted suspicion acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known.'[760] Whilst Diamond would like to exposure Pantarey's secret monitoring, 'there's a shortness to her breath, a need to tell someone, let them know…'[761] her reaction eventually calms, and she continues the work.

The alarming impact of the panic attack is therefore not the experience itself, but her inability to let empathy redirect her affiliation. In an uncanny sequence, Diamond feels herself becoming part of a machine, 'what's creeping into her mind now, metabolising with the sugar in a buzz of whimsical conjecture, is the apprehension, the suspicion, that some algo's at work here *already.*'[762] Reminiscent of *Remainder*, there is a latent desire to achieve the perfect movement that requires a dismissal of shame. Diamond's belief that life is dictated by an invisible algorithm is thus due to the significance of data. As her employer states, people naturally gravitate to others: 'people instinctively move to spots where other people happen to be gathering. These spots are themselves as often as not intermediary – that is, they spring up in the gaps between "actual" or landmarked spots.'[763] The ideal

[758] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 106.
[759] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 138.
[760] Ibid.
[761] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 107.
[762] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 105.
[763] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 103.

movement can therefore not be accessed by the digital because it is sentient - it is the disclosing state of being-in-the-world that reveals Dasein as relational – our 'being-there' *is* the directing force behind our movements.

At the end of the novel, Monica Dean has not been able to find box 808 until she is informed by a mysterious figure at dinner to try 808 on the menu. After responding with surprise, the guest leaves his card and disappears into the night. Reflecting on this interaction at home, Dean scans a version of Gilbreth's notes that alludes to the number's reference, 'the doodle hieroglyphics, then the strings of letters…that seem to connect one fragment to another, bind them all in some kind of tapestry of reason, or at least of correspondence.' Wading through this puzzle, she notes the letters 'TT' in the corner and promptly decodes the initials using a previous system: the result is a quotation from Dante's Divine Comedy. The perfect movement is thus revealed as our orientation towards, and *not* shamelessly away, from others; 'after plotting the entire machinery of circles driving other circles, wheels within wheels, then passing even further, on into the centre, the Empyrean finally gets to hold, face-to-face, the love that moves the sun and stars.'[764] This revelation prompts humour, and Dean finally understands the joke that after all, 'it's just bodies, in space…'[765]

In conclusion, promethean shame serves a purpose beyond the moral function of a standard experience of shame. When we position ourselves next to technologies that seek to efface the body, our perceived lowliness reflects our humanity. Anthony Steinbeck considers the self-givenness of shame as arising from the experience of this '"homeworld" not just as a "we world", but as "our" world in which I play a constitutive role.'[766] As experienced through Diamond's witnessing; shame, whilst painful, is *educational* through its reconstruction. The perfect movement of box 808 is therefore the inversion of the looping plane: as Dante climbs out of hell, he reunites with Beatrice in a perfect sequence. Motion is, accordingly,

[764] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 303.
[765] McCarthy, *The Making of Incarnation*, p. 293.
[766] Anthony J. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 87.

an extension outwards towards authenticity, which is always experienced alongside others.

Conclusion

'Shame is our body's way of telling us that we are interested and that we will continue to be despite shame's painful interruption.'[767]

In conclusion, when we consider shame, we are no longer limiting the experience to an interpersonal transference of the emotion, rather it is both the defining structure *and* inevitable symptom of living within this context. In short, shame is a landscape, not a transaction. As Williams and McCarthy reveal, there is an invisible framework that informs our experience within the world, shifting our communication style which inevitably leads to a change in form. As a disabling emotion, it often goes unacknowledged, or the shamed subject shifts responsibility, as David Keen argues, 'we have seen that in fleeing from shame we may easily find ourselves descending into a fantasy world that potentially brings more shame in its wake as "solutions" depart further and further from reality.'[768] Writing shame is therefore an aesthetic concern for as quickly as the emotion appears, it is pushed away and defended against. This shift can be seen in contemporary British fiction as writers experiment with form that transcends the disintegration of postmodernism, instead favouring a sincerity that cannot be reduced to modernist impressionism. Autofiction reflects this struggle to express our shame, often bringing awareness to a liminal human experience. For Alison Gibbons, 'contemporary autofiction is situational in that it narrativizes the self, seeking to locate that self in a place, a time and a body.'[769] The authenticity associated with metamodernism consequently explores life defined by the integration of the digital: locating the self in contemporary fiction *is* navigating a landscape of shame.

My decision to use Williams and McCarthy extends phenomenological analysis within metamodernism and contemporary British fiction more broadly. Williams' collections use experimental form to reveal the confusion of chronic shame; disruptive prose mirror the jarring steam of consciousness cultivated by

767 Probyn, p. 63.
768 Keen, p. 282.
769 Gibbons, p. 118.

social media. The uncertainty of a new romance in 'Scrimshaw' highlights the link between distraction and shame, '*I can distract you*, I draft. I delete. *I want to drive you to distraction*, I try typing. No. Dot dot dot dot. *I love you*, I draft in my text message, a word for each dot drip-drip water-torturing your phone's screen. I delete the draft.' This tentative cycle reveals how a digital landscape of shame informs our interactions within it (and the inevitable self-shaming when acknowledged.) Narrator and reader subsequently engage in a dialogue that *reconstructs* authenticity through an acknowledgement of shame. Vermeulen's work on depth in metamodernism argues that 'authenticity engendered by an act of literary communication cannot be attributed to a distinctly designated interplay between author, text and reader but rather results from practices of reconstruction.'[770] Reconstructive practises therefore rely on engagement with the reader which, when examining shame, becomes a phenomenological concern due to its transference. We understand the narrator's embarrassment and denial which reconstitutes the cohesion of the story – truth, however, is not the primary concern here, rather it is carving depth into a landscape that deflects self-expression.

McCarthy's shame is promethean – presented with the vastness of technology (in particular, data), we are reminded of our insignificance. Where Williams explores everyday interactions informed by an algorithm, McCarthy looks to the formal structure of a world that is entirely technological. Language can shapeshift through technology, yet movement (how we navigate the world around us) is repetitious in ways that we cannot always perceive: both writers are therefore concerned with *patterns* of avoidance that reveal a landscape. As the texts reconstruct authenticity through their own exploration of shame, this thesis reinforces Vermeulen's argument that 'reconstructive texts can be said to transcend themselves.'[771] McCarthy's use of metareference in *The Making of Incarnation* pokes fun at our global quest for embodiment - substituting the human body for AI during love scenes, for example. The perfect form is thus revealed as something illusory as our quest for autonomy is swapped out by something mechanical.

770 Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 164.
771 Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p. 161.

Both writers reveal the connection between shame and our depleted attention spans as we reroute authenticity in favour of immediacy. Whilst *Moderate to Poor, Occasionally Good* resembles a dialogue with our online selves alongside the narrator, *The Making of Incarnation* reveals the widening vacuum between those collecting data, and the lives informing its patterns. Both writers are concerned with the lives we do not reveal, and our attempts to hide them, as they seldom remain undetected in the digital landscape. This thesis therefore extends Probyn's argument (via Gibbons' work on affect) that writing shame is a way of anchoring the self within time. A perpetually shamed self indicates an environment that deflects self-expression, extending the aim of metamodernism in a shared analysis of 'the bend of History.'[772] Where postmodern aesthetics cannot account for the reconstructive practices found in contemporary writers, the integration of technology also undermines previous subjectivity as our lives are now oriented through our devices. Probyn concludes, 'shame is subjective in the strong sense of bringing into being an entity or an idea through the specific explosion of mind, body, place, and history.'[773] A phenomenological approach thus reveals the entity that is being brought to our awareness through our collective shame is the current stigmatisation of vulnerability.

A landscape of shame leaves no room for reflection. Instead of taking time to consider our impact with the world, digital lethargy drains our reactions, minimising authenticity. Williams' stories vary in the severity of shame: from reconciling grief in 'Wilgefortis', to a portrayal of attachment shame in 'Rituals', there exists an oscillating experience of time that is only identifiable *through* affect. The irredeemable end of a relationship shown through the limitations of aphasia in 'Alphabet' is contrasted against the quiet hope of online dating presented in 'Synesthete, Would Like to Meet.' Both collections thus embody the disorienting prospect of existing authentically in an age that encourages the maintenance of self-presentation.

Tom McCarthy is equally concerned by our narrowing tolerance for vulnerability. As a writer, his work charts the tension between analog movement and

[772] van den Akker and Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, p.2.
773 Probyn, p. 148.

digital time - shame becomes expansive when a society lacks connection. The isolated movement in *Remainder* (2005) is redeemed at the end of *The Making of Incarnation* (2024) through the revelation that 'being-with'[774] is the antidote for a society slowly forgetting the importance of community. Shame disconnects the self from the body and the external search for the perfect movement (or, form) reveals a need to collaborate with others rather than isolating from them.

A society that prohibits vulnerability is one that propagates shame. In Donald Trump's 2025 presidential inauguration, he states, 'And we have an education system that teaches our children to be ashamed of themselves – in many cases, to hate our country despite the love that we try so desperately to provide to them.' The undertone behind this message is very clear: control. Shame is taught through invalidation which contradicts the purpose of education and freethinking – children that cannot connect with their own thoughts become intolerant of others. A classroom that limits learning under the guise of support is a dangerous indicator that narcissism is increasing among younger generations. Trump's shamelessness is therefore his tool to *enforce* shame, as David Keen notes, 'this system long preceded Trump and helped produce him.'[775]

Trump's attack on vulnerability can be echoed across the globe as the UK has announced its first programme to trial the teaching of 'everyday but essential' tools. This online curriculum based in Manchester works with University of Manchester, Salford University and Manchester Metropolitan University to deliver a course on 'empathy, time management, speaking to customers, problem-solving and critical thinking.'[776] Since the pandemic, our devices have become more integrated in our reality which outsources these everyday tools. Instead of shaming younger generations for the unregulated number of distractions available to them digitally, this trial prompts connection *through* learning. In Julian Honkasalo's work on

774 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[775] Keen, p. 282.
[776] Josh Halliday, 'Gen Z students in Manchester to learn 'soft skills' such as empathy and time management', *Guardian*, 21 April 2025, < https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/21/gen-z-students-in-manchester-to-learn-soft-skills-such-as-empathy-and-time-management?CMP=fb_gu&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwY2xjawJzSnNleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHiuWcJs5XOrEctHSilQxQhzdAF4OiWvxuxMV8cAWf7xn8syv_ULgM4-3fRFs_aem_fr8Wz-S11XMon91mJiJsvg#Echobox=1745234841> [accessed 03 May 2025].

Queering Shame, he argues that 'shame, as constitutive of estrangement from the body, is also intimately linked to insult and injury.'[777] As we are only now adapting to the changed landscape of a post-pandemic world, the lack of connection experienced by young people during Covid-19 has caused a developmental injury. Teaching empathy online therefore disrupts the digital landscape of shame as students relearn how to connect with themselves and others. Honkasalo insists that 'to resist shame is intertwined with the question of how to reclaim the stolen body in order to make it a home'[778]; a landscape of shame therefore accounts for our stolen attention on a global level – we can no longer conceptualise home as primarily an embodied state when our lives are lived primarily online.

In future, this thesis raises questions about the diminishing returns on vulnerability as we cannot ignore the link between decreasing empathy levels and our time spent online. Keen concludes in his work *Shame: The Politics and Power of an Emotion*, that 'the trap of fleeing from shaming into some new shaming is one that seems to hover uneasily over the current book.'[779] Likewise, this thesis offers no respite from shame, rather it is working through Heidegger's phenomenology that we can note a striving towards authenticity amidst a landscape that scaffolds negative affects. For Martin Weichold, 'the way we experience the world is completely contingent, but this cannot be realised as long as we just take our experience at face value and do not reflect on their fundamental ontological status – this is why becoming authentic is so hard.'[780] Ignoring our shame projects it on to someone else, which is how the digital landscape operates: shaming others online cannot be prevented without questioning the entire structure. Self-reflection is difficult when living conditions are becoming increasingly pressured: there simply is not enough time. As previously stated in chapter one, digital shame is connected to new modes of communication within a constricting temporality. Contemporary

[777] Julian Honkasalo, 'Queering Shame', in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Shame*, ed. by Cecilea Mun (London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 197-213 (p. 205).
[778] Ibid.
[779] Keen, p. 283.
[780] Martin Weichold, 'Social Authenticity: Towards a Heideggerian Analysis of Social Change', in *From Conventionalism to Social Authenticity*, ed. by Hans Bernhard Schmid and Gerhard Thonhauser (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 219-240 (p. 228).

British fiction's experimental turn thus reveals our repositioning of shame (when attempt to flee it, we experience it on our devices.)

Matthew Turner's *Loom* belongs to the innovative writers working within metamodernism. His interdisciplinary novella uses architectural drawings to enhance the story of a security guard tasked with watching an abandoned property in the edgelands of London. As the story develops, the identity of the guard is revealed to be the owner who left money in the property before running from police and his previous employers. The sketches reveal in-depth drawings of the house's plumbing, interspersed with pictures of constricting knots. Walking through the house feels eerie and suffocating as he notes, 'a failure to understand the space we are in, to see its phantoms and apparitions – however much our intuition hints that they are there.'[781] Shame, likewise, makes haunted houses of us all. As developers build properties that are too expensive to sustain, they are left unfurnished as residents are pushed further out of the city. The metaphor of the guard's wealth (a single gold thread woven under the floorboards of the house) reveals our desire for order in chaotic spaces, and the façades we maintain under late capitalism.

The metareferential aspect of *Loom*'s sketches are comparable to Williams' experimental prose. Williams explores the cognitive decline present within neurological conditions through her wordplay, whereas Turner explores surveillance through his tightening knots. Both reveal metamodernism's focus on reconstructive practices – depth becomes an aesthetic *and* conceptual concern. A landscape of shame can therefore be researched outside of the digital space, extending the scope of Place Writing. Devin Becker's poem, 'Cosmology', used throughout this thesis highlights the potential for further research in this area. His 2015 debut collection, *Shame*, reveals 'moments of ethical free-fall'[782] as 'these discrete and precisely described locales are, in fact, panoramic.'[783] The confusing experience of a life lacking connection pierces our 'self-righteous fantasies about ourselves, we have at the very least these fables of forgiveness – both of ourselves and those around us.' Becker's writing thus extends the argument that fleeing from shame is an act of uprooting.

[781] Matthew Turner, *Loom* (Gordian Projects, 2020), p. 49.
[782] Becker, p. 8.
[783] Ibid.

Shame makes us feel not at home within ourselves yet avoiding it will turn us into nomads without connection. Accepting one's shame is to anchor into a specific time and place – a digital landscape built on this emotion is the liminal space between attention and distraction which will inevitably impact creative form.

Throughout this thesis, I have referenced Heidegger's *Being and Time* to view shame as an emotional intrusion. If acknowledged, it can lead towards more authentic awareness of ourselves and others (as existential anxiety does), yet an environment of shame means that we are living in a perpetual state of uncanniness which *causes* more shaming. I deliberately have not discussed Heidegger's views on technology until now as I wanted to map the digital landscape of shame as a direct mirror to our everyday interactions that, in turn, informs how we operate in real life. Heidegger held the advancement of technology in low regard as reality then becomes something that is revealed, 'that challenges him (man) to approach nature as an object of research, until then the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.'[784] If reality becomes something that is revealed to us, then man, too, is a 'standing-reserve.'[785] This approach calls into question the very nature of Being, 'Will we see the lightning-flash of Being in the essence of technology? The flash that comes out of stillness, as stillness itself?'[786] The power of technology therefore threatens Being which differentiates man (Dasein) from other entities; Heidegger's fears are now even more pronounced as technology is not only rising but is integrating itself into our daily lives. When man becomes a 'standing-reserve', shame exists as inherently promethean (as described in *The Making of Incarnation* in chapter three), before it can be experienced interpersonally – in short, our subservience to technology will *reveal* our existence. Inheriting a landscape of shame rather than existing within an emerging one is a dilemma for future generations to explore.

In conclusion, this thesis conceptualises shame from a more expansive perspective – beyond interpersonal experience, it constructs a digital landscape that

[784] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013), p. 19.
[785] Ibid.
[786] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 49.

informs our orientation within the world. Using Heidegger's phenomenology, my study on shame extends van den Akker and Vermeulen's discussion of depth within metamodernism to include an emotion that reconstructs authenticity in contemporary British fiction. Digital shame changes the aesthetic features of experimental fiction as its alteration of language and movement impacts novel form. There are, however, a new set of questions to be answered regarding the development of AI and ChatGPT. Our reliance on these applications is minimising real interactions, with ChatGPT becoming favoured for its counselling abilities. Paolo Raile notes the dangers of only using this feature for therapy as it prioritises CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), 'a major weakness of ChatGPT, despite regular reminders to see an expert, is its failure to ask for more information, such as biography, presence of suicidal thoughts, symptoms, and other important data.'[787] Without considering our history, the effectiveness of AI is limited as users get caught in a vacuum of their *own* interpretation. What happens to shame when it can no longer be expressed digitally? AI mirrors ourselves back to each other without nuance, eclipsing real empathy. When self-expression and connection are compromised, shame becomes an insidious feature of everyday – exactly how this will impact the changing form of the novel remains unseen.

[787] Paolo Raie, 'The usefulness of ChatGPT for psychotherapists and patients', *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 11.47 (2024), 1-8 (p. 5) < https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-023-02567-0> [accessed 05 May 2025].

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