Cityscapes and City Spaces—Representations of Gentrifying New York in Novel and Film

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Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future.

-Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984.

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Introduction

New York is many things to many people; first and foremost it is a home to millions, more often than not it is little more than a series of images, connected or disconnected, stories and vignettes—it is, for example, slow-moving grandfathers sitting on stoops speaking in hushed Yiddish, snatches of stockbrokers' conversations overheard while waiting for the uptown 6 (on which Doctor Zizmor's face leers at tired straphangers), cats winding themselves around one's feet whilst waiting for a three-dollar sandwich in a Yemeni bodega, old women fanning themselves in the sun outside botánica shops, pick-up basketball games seemingly on every corner, eternally switched-on lights in towering downtown offices, tunnels and bridges connecting island to island to mainland, cacophony in the streets of midtown, yellow cabs (of course) careening past yelping tourists watching Times Square glitter through so many cameras, salesmen of counterfeit watches and bags on Canal street (prices always negotiable) yelling more in Cantonese than in English, Russian chess-players drinking kvass by the boardwalk in the Coney Island summer, kids splashing in open fire hydrant jets, the block parties, the bagel shops—which surely number in the hundreds of thousands—the innumerable *Ray's* pizzerias, somehow all "the original", storefront churches, restaurants, barber shops, dive bars, gambling dens, and pool halls Puerto Rican, Japanese, Italian, Bengali, Haitian, Chassidic, Ethiopian, a nearly inconceivably long list of epithets—all this set to Gershwin (naturally) and taking place at breakneck speed.

This image of the city is reality as much as it is stereotype; it consists of aging tropes, by now somewhat overused, which have proliferated in representations of the city on screen and in literary texts since New York's rise to fame as a worldwide haven for immigrants. It is a city so over-represented in media that images such as the above are not unfamiliar even far outside the cultural context of New York and the West. It is reality in that it remains a profoundly multicultural and vibrant city, but there is an overarching and profoundly mediatized image of "New York" in literature and the arts, so much so that it can be very difficult to escape stereotypical representations (much like the above-mentioned) of the city in works of fiction and

nonfiction alike. In any case, New York as an ultra-cosmopolitan and culturally diverse “melting pot” of (largely working-class) immigrants is an image that is firmly lodged in the collective imaginations of many—partly due to historical propaganda campaigns which promised the United States as a golden country of opportunity and New York as its shining gate, and partly due to the immense effort put into solidifying this narrative by an extensive series of novels and films which reinforce these preconceptions.

However, the social and economic reality of the present day reflects less and less that represented in such narratives. As a result of the intense economic and urban development of the city in the past decades, the model of urban and social change in the city has dramatically changed. Before the 1980s, urban change in New York was largely defined by the arrival en masse of waves of immigrant groups, who often settled in ethnically or culturally discrete neighborhoods, only to be replaced some decades later by other groups as former inhabitants migrated from the city to the suburbs or westward (for example, the gradual exodus of Americans of Italian descent from Little Italy, and their replacement largely by Yue and Fuzhou Chinese immigrants). In recent decades however, the trend has been that diverse working-class immigrant communities are pushed out by incoming wealthier Americans from elsewhere in the US. This is perhaps the most visible—at least in quantifiable demographic terms—of the many facets of gentrification.[1]

Gentrification has been a known quantity in the demographics of New York since the 1970s, at which point neighborhoods (such as Greenwich Village, famous as a bulwark of bohemian and gay culture) have been slowly transformed by increasing rents and the development of luxury housing unaffordable to previous residents. The turning point comes about following the rise of bohemianism and counterculture movements of the immediate post-war through the 1970s (Schulman 25), after which the city’s representation in media shifts from haven for immigrants

[1] This thesis naturally relies on certain historical and demographic facts to contextualize the debate on gentrification in order to analyze its representation in film and literature. The majority of facts and figures are based on NYU’s Furman Center *State of New York’s Housing and Neighborhoods* annual reports and their special reports on gentrification. Accessible online via the Furman Center website: http://furmancenter.org/thestoop/entry/new-report-analyzes-new-york-citys-gentrifying-neighborhoods-and-finds-dram

and refugees fleeing war, famine, and genocide, to haven for artists and poets seeking refuge from their stifling and oppressive suburban-Americana upbringings.

Framed by official narratives of urban renewal and "rejuvenation", gentrification itself is a nebulous concept, the definition of which is as contentious as its moral justification. Urban planners and city officials often tout noble-minded ideals of progress and improving quality of life.[2] These ideals are all well and good but too often echo, at least in the American context, Manifest Destiny-era propaganda:[3] the post-industrial inner-city as the new colonial frontier, and bringing luxury housing and amenities as well as modern infrastructure instead of civilization (Smith 6). Much like in the 19th century, the first heyday of American imperialism, the state—and the profiteers whose interests the state exists to defend—enlists land management or real estate strategies and modern technologies (in this case those of mass surveillance, especially post-9/11) in order to facilitate development and the promulgation of discriminatory housing policy (Buchanan 50-52): "[n]eoliberalism has also created new systems of governance that integrate state and corporate interests, and through the application of money power, it has ensured that the disbursement of the surplus through the state apparatus favours corporate capital and the upper classes in shaping the urban process" (Harvey 38). Because of this, proponents of gentrification tend to define it positively, as a process of rejuvenation and renewal, likened to pruning dead boughs from a sickly tree, whereas its opponents maintain that despite the surface improvement of conditions, the process inevitably results in the displacement of former inhabitants due to impossibly rising costs of living, and a flattening of a neighborhood's culture and dispersal of its community. At its core however the term gentrification "refers to the movement of new middle-class residents into poor and working-class inner city neighborhoods, spurring the rehabilitation of a district's previously abandoned or neglected housing stock and the revitalization of its commercial life" (Goldfield 302). It is not, as has often been

[2] This is especially noticeable in the large-scale "urban renewal" projects of the post-war economic boom and infrastructure programs of the 1950s through 1970s, wherein many historic neighborhoods and city centers were razed to make way for high-capacity expressways and superhighways. The justification for these projects was eerily similar to the narratives behind the 19th century linking of East and West coasts by rail and telegraph.

[3] Not to mention the racist immigration policies which gave preference to white immigrants, to the detriment of all other groups, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

insisted by city planners and business owners, simply a natural process of migration and enrichment, but rather a system "that divides space along political, economic, and cultural lines [...] a force of capitalism that eschews hybridity and community" (Buchanan 52). For the purposes of this thesis's analysis, what will be taken into consideration is especially the role of class—and by extension, of race, given the far-reaching legacy of slavery and racist government policies—in this phenomenon. Class is the most visible marker of populations in urban change and the way it shapes not only populations but also the types of local amenities and businesses, and even vernacular architecture (and especially the disappearance or commodification thereof). In practical terms, this means that what is most evident in the works I aim to analyze is this element of class; in many texts and even in the theater of politics, Americans readily discuss race and racism, but more rarely turn to socio-economic class as a determining factor in people's experiences[4] and especially in the representation of the process of gentrification. In any case, what is at stake in this thesis is an analysis of gentrification's aesthetic depictions and an exploration of the depiction of city space and loss in the narratives examined.

The objective of this thesis will be to determine how the loss of the disappearing city is dealt with in film and literature, how the city's urban spaces are represented, and how fictional depictions of gentrifying New York change from the 1980s to the present day. I will be analyzing five narratives, among which three films: Spike Lee's *25th Hour* (2002), and Paul Auster's & Wayne Wang's *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* (both 1995) and two novels: Ben Lerner's *10:04* (2014), and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). All five works are situated in New York at a time when gentrification grew exponentially and all five deal with loss and with the disappearance of the old city, its displacement by the new; this is represented in a number of ways, with as prime 'threats' climate change, prison, the loss of loved ones, or a beloved baseball team moving to Los Angeles.[5] The protagonists of the

[4] This perhaps has to do with the enduring mythology of the American Dream and settler-era propaganda of the New World as a place of untold riches—reflected again later in the depiction of New York as a place where "if I can make it there, I can make it anywhere." Many Americans tend to see themselves as unstoppably upwardly mobile, and as only temporarily poor, whereas the reality of the fact is that very few individuals ever "make it," and that the rest are caught in the cycle of systemic poverty.

[5] The Brooklyn Dodgers leaving for LA in 1957 is used in *Blue in the Face* as one of the more apt metaphors for gentrification across these five narratives, although it took place before the beginning of

two novels are members of the gentrifying class, and both show some awareness of the harm caused by the culture of hedonism and consumption (i.e. cocaine use, ecological damages, complicity in the American imperial project, among others) that is common among them and their peers. Common to all five narratives is the theme of the disappearing city, and I will explore how this changes as time progresses and the city gentrifies.

Each of the narratives selected for this thesis provides a glimpse into the zeitgeist of their respective decades—albeit only as extensive a glimpse as a single aesthetic representation can provide, and insofar as one can claim to represent a whole decade as a uniform whole. More precisely they provide a glimpse into how these decades have been narrativized and represented in retrospect. *Bright Lights, Big City* has been selected because of its archetypal representation into the hedonistic materialism of the 1980s, during which decade neighborhoods targeted for gentrification by urban developers were increasingly commodified—i.e. the transformation of Greenwich Village from bohemian slum into yuppie Mecca (Goldfield 303-305, 317). Moreover, it is especially in the late 1970s and the 1980s (the heyday of Reaganomics) that gentrification becomes a serious factor in the urban landscape of the city. *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* portray the city in the more optimistic political moment of the 1990s and represent gentrification intimately by showing a neighborhood in the process of gentrifying and the reactions of its residents to this process. *25th Hour* is an insightful look at the state of the city in the immediate post-9/11 era—it is interesting from the standpoint that it represents New York through a series of vignettes, and as on the cusp of disappearance, which in combination with the film's treatment of socioeconomic class in the early 2000s makes for a fruitful perspective on gentrification. Finally, *10:04*, perhaps the most pessimistic of the lot, portrays with somewhat self-congratulatory derision the society of the gentrifying élite in the mid-2010s. Like the other narratives this thesis will analyze, it is not strictly *about* gentrification, but rather provides a subtle meta-reflection on how gentrification is depicted in storytelling and aesthetic representations of the city. Alongside this I will analyze how as paradigms of urban

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gentrification, and will be addressed in a later chapter. It should be noted that for many older Brooklynites this event is consistently referred to as the first heartbreak of their lives.

change and mobility shift towards gentrification, so too do the representations of nostalgia and narratives of memory constructed about the city change.

A drawback of this approach is its limited scope: it is unable to grapple both with the large scale of gentrification and its manifold representations across multiple media and modes of cultural transmission. For the purposes of this thesis, an intensive rather than extensive approach to this subject is more feasible and productive. However, in a larger-format research project, it would perhaps be productive to include more narratives and representations of the city. It would likewise be fruitful to this thesis to include television series as an important means of representation of gentrification. Notable examples are the contemporary series *Girls* (2012–2017), *Broad City* (2014–present), and earlier even *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). Not only would an analysis of these series' outdoor scenes and many establishing shots[6] over time document the physicality of gentrification in terms of changing exteriors, analyses of these series' representations of their respective era's ethea, as well as which type of people are the central focus, can be indicative of the cultural and political moment they inhabit. In any case, with regards to the corpus of this thesis, I have chosen these particular works because first of their popular appeal—each one has had a very different reception with very different audiences, but they share the fact that they were well-received by their respective readers and viewers. Moreover, at least in the opinion of this thesis's author, they are good depictions of the city. They represent New York more or less as it is (or rather as it was in each respective period—see above), relying often on trope and stereotype but only those which contain in them a grain of the truth—each has its problems and each has its strong points—they are a fascinating balance of critical and celebratory of their social milieux.

Moreover it is important to note that the texts selected for this thesis's corpus prioritize male voices and white, heterosexual, male-bodied protagonists (and are all written or directed by men). Female characters and people of color figure in all texts but *Bright Lights, Big City*, although in all cases but in *Smoke* they are secondary

[6] Transitional scenes which establish the location of a particular scene, usually by showing the exterior of a building or street. The best-known example of this as used in television is in the series *Seinfeld*, through the establishment shots of which a portrait of the city, very incomplete and extremely telling of the show's subject matter and protagonists, is painted.

characters at best, and background figures at worst. Given the way in which gentrification disproportionately impacts communities of color and LGBT people, the disparity between the voices depicted in these works and those of peoples affected by gentrification cannot be ignored. I have selected this corpus not because of their demographic inclusiveness or democratic representations of the city and of gentrification, but rather because of the ways in which they depict urban space and spatial politics. Were the scope of this thesis somewhat larger, it would be beneficial to tackle further representations of the city which approach the subject from different perspectives. However, as it stands, despite the fact that this thesis's corpus is written entirely by men, the representations of gentrifying spaces in the city are extremely compelling, and warrant exploration. An inquest into the depiction of gender and race in addition to that of class in these works and in others—while politically necessary and relevant to the gentrifying city's inhabitants—is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Gentrification itself is not a static object of analysis: as time progresses it takes different forms while cities are transformed and changed by it (Goldfield 317). Likewise, cultural norms and currents of aesthetic representation are in a constant state of flux as new work expands and moves the boundaries of what is considered acceptable. One of the main challenges which this thesis seeks to address is how to deal with changing representations of a changing subject. Literary responses to gentrification frequently underline the immense social consequences of such urban change: the gradual disappearance of ultra-cosmopolitan immigrant neighborhoods, the displacement of working-class, queer, and racially or otherwise socioeconomically disenfranchised communities, and the resettlement of these neighborhoods largely by wealthier white Americans from the heartlands: "this [...] has pushed lower-income residents farther away from downtown centers, creating concentrated ghettos where there are few amenities and public services" (Kellogg 182). Gentrification has been the subject of a large amount of non-fiction writing but has not been treated extensively in fiction *directly*, although it appears as a sort of looming specter in many recent works. This is to say that while the gentrification of New York is not the primary focus of the works analyzed in this thesis, it is inevitable that as a side effect of their depictions of New York these narratives also depict

gentrification, although frequently all too briefly, seen out of the corner of the reader's eye. This is the case in novels such as, to name a few, Adelle Waldman's *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.* (2013), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), Tao Lin's *Taipei* (2013), or Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003). Many published texts and other media on the topic of New York are written by and from the perspective of the gentrifier (due simply to inequality in access to education and resources, as well as a somewhat elitist current in the art industry), as a result of which they tend to ignore or gloss over the realities of gentrification. This is especially so in the aforementioned television series which take place in New York, such as *Girls*, *Broad City*, or *Sex and City.*[7] The sense of loss which stems from this process—though largely ignored in mainstream political discourse, which tends to favor urban development over preservation—takes many shapes in storytelling and narrative representations of New York; for example, outright declamations and anti-gentrification vitriol (such as in certain Spike Lee films, the outrage of black communities at being marginalized in historically black neighborhoods visible in *Do the Right Thing*, among others) but also in satire and comedy (a recent *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* skit entitled "Do the White Thing" is a riff on Lee's aforementioned film, set in the hip, whitewashed Brooklyn of today).

The work of Paul Auster, Jay McInerney, and Spike Lee has been written about extensively, Ben Lerner's less so, due to the fact that until the recent publication (2011 and 2014) of his two novels, he was primarily known as a poet. However, the work of these individuals has not often been treated from the perspective of studying gentrification. Rather, Lee's films are referenced in scholarly debates on race in America and especially urban blackness in the 21st century (Blake 215), although Lee often speaks on the subject of gentrification, and this theme figures in many of his films. Auster's writing, as well as McInerney's, is most often read as prime examples of the postmodern novel (Barone 1-5) and of the "New York novel" (Vahnenbruck 29) of the late 20th century. Many of Auster's works play with the genre of the detective story and inability to understand the city, whereas McInerney's is often cited in critiques of American consumerist society and the

[7] The former two actually play on gentrification as a motif, although more often than not as a comic one.

hyper-capitalist yuppie lifestyle of the 1980s onward (Morley 719). Lerner's prose is commonly written about from the perspective of ecocriticism and a more updated, contemporary critique of the same patterns of consumption exemplified in *Bright Lights, Big City* (Gwiazda 94). All write, whether directly and consciously or not, on the topic of gentrification. The analysis of these works is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of gentrification, but rather a look at the development of narrative treatment of this phenomenon—which has been primarily treated from the standpoint of sociology and urban studies—and its representations in literature and film.

Briefly noted: the social sciences have much to say on the subject of gentrification—facts and figures, statistics, demographics—which neighborhoods are gentrifying and which are gentrified, which are next to go. This is a topic which has been extensively covered from an empirical perspective, but while the social sciences do an excellent job in explaining what gentrification *is*, they rarely concern themselves with what it is *like*. In coming at the problem of gentrification from the perspective of literary responses, in reading the responses it evokes both from the point of view of the gentrifier and of the gentrified, it is my hope that this thesis will—insofar as it is possible for it to do so—attempt to bridge this gap. Whether literature and film are genuinely capable of showing what gentrification is truly like is another matter entirely, but in any case these media and the study thereof can do the work that other fields cannot, of showing the experience of the city after gentrification where, as the epigraph of *10:04* puts it, "everything will be as it is now, just a little different."

I. Preliminary Considerations

Space, Nostalgia and the Disappearing City

Before delving into the nit and grits of gentrification and its representations, it is important to establish the structure of the phenomena this thesis examines in these representations and the conceptual toolkit mobilized by this examination. Two central concepts in particular will provide the backbone of this analysis: first, that of *space*, urban space both physical and social, as well as representative and narrative spaces, which provide the stage, as it were, for gentrification and its depictions to be played out upon. Second, that of *nostalgia*, which has been touched upon earlier in this paper, and which is a driving force of these representations, as well as an expression of the loss of community and shared history. This also necessitates an exploration of how aesthetic representation informs, mediates, and re-mediates (Erll, 2008, 394) narratives of collective and cultural memory, and how in particular literature and film can become a *thought laboratory* for processing loss.

Space is a manifold term which encompasses a large number of different forms, not only of physical but also of mental, of experiential, social, or aesthetic, of innumerable types of spaces. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space* (1974) seeks to create a *science of space*, divorced from the geometrical, mathematical, or epistemological conceptions of space, focusing rather on how space and especially *social space* is produced (as the title indicates) through collective mediation, the creation of knowledge, and the imposition of power structures on and through social interaction (Lefebvre 2-8). His definition of space claims that

> 1. It represents the political (in the case of the West, the 'neocapitalist') use of knowledge. Remember that knowledge under this system is integrated in a more or less 'immediate' way into the forces of production, and in a 'mediate' way into the social relations of production. 2. It implies an ideology designed to conceal that use, along with the conflicts intrinsic to the highly interested employment of a supposedly disinterested knowledge. This ideology carries no flag, and for those who accept the practice of which it is a part it is indistinguishable from knowledge. (Lefebvre 8-9)

For Lefebvre this space is not only an abstract one, accessible primarily in social or metaphysical spheres, but also one which is inherently manifest and quantifiable in physical embodiments of social interaction and production, for example “architecture,

urbanism, or social planning" (Lefebvre 9). More than this, spaces are where political-economic antagonisms or interests, power structures, and social relations occur, which Lefebvre posits as a unification of the physical, the mental and the social (Lefebvre 11-12). According to Michel de Certeau, "space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" (de Certeau 117). Because of this, space is a compelling concept when applied to the production of collective and cultural memory, especially with regards to the shared memory of urban spaces.

Two types of space as used by Lefebvre are of special interest to this thesis: on the one hand *urban space*, and on the other *representational space*. Urban space is itself twofold, in that it refers first to the physical city and second to the socially mediated conceptualization of a city as it is produced and re-produced through socio-spatial interaction and embedded into collective memory (Loughran et al. 197). In this second sense, *urban space* does not refer to a single city or urban space in the material sense, but rather in the sense of the momentum of collective memory and place-related cultural spaces, communal narratives and socially-inherited mores, or the materially inscribed traces of memory upon a physical, urban space (Loughran et al. 197-198). Lefebvre stresses this type of urban spaces as socially produced—and it is indeed important to think of them as *produced,* in the sense that urban spaces are created by the interaction of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups, as well as those of individuals, but, as Lefebvre makes apparent, especially through class struggle. These spaces can be seen in part as the sum of memory narratives of the common past, carried into the present, upon the foundation of which a shared space is produced. The structure of collective memory which is productive of urban space is fundamentally mediated and narrativized; this is to say that it is constructed and maintained through active processes of representation and re-representation of narratives of memory, historiography and aesthetic

interpretation,[8] and through monumental memorialization—the aforementioned materially inscribed traces of a community which take the form of statues, memorials, monuments, or less officious sites of commemoration, such as vernacular architecture or local buildings and public spaces which have memorial value in the collective imaginary (Assmann 100-101).

Representational space refers to "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated - and hence passively experienced - space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre 39). This is the realm of abstractions and concepts which make cohesive social, physical, and other spaces. This *representational space* is distinct from *representations of space*, which

> have a practical impact, that they intervene in and modify spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology. Representations of space must therefore have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space. Their intervention occurs by way of construction—in other words, by way of architecture, conceived of not as the building of a particular structure, palace or monument, but rather as a project embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms. By contrast, the only products of representational spaces are symbolic works. These are often unique; sometimes they set in train 'aesthetic' trends and, after a time, having provoked a series of manifestations and incursions into the imaginary, run out of steam. (Lefebvre 42)

The difference in these two spaces of production (as Lefebvre stresses, these spaces are both socially produced *and* socially productive) is subtle: *Representational* space is the mental space of qualitative and conceptual evaluation, systems of symbolism and signification which Lefebvre claims are the domain of ethnologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts (41), and are directly influenced by ideology and power structures. Representations *of* space, on the other hand, are aesthetic and narrative depictions of space and their social production, that is, the

[8] This is to say that these processes feed into the pool of shared remembrance, and it is in no small part through the continual, multidirectional interplay between canonical history, cultural memory, and (sometimes revisionist) narrativizations of the past, that spaces are produced

type of representation which is the primary concern of this thesis. The concept of space (as a whole, including representative and representations of space) is moreover easily applicable to the realm of cultural and collective memory, especially given the ways in which such memory narratives are produced and maintained largely through mediation and representation (Assmann 99-100). Lefebvre conceives representations of space as the intervention of socially imposed or inherited ideology and patterns of knowledge in aesthetic representation and the production of space; this parallels how *schemata* and internalized shared memory narratives inform the mediation and production of collective memory: “According to cognitive psychology, schemata are patterns and structures of knowledge on the basis of which we make assumptions regarding specific objects, people, situations and the relation between them. Schemata reduce real-world complexity and guide perception and remembering” (Erll, 2014, 31-32).

Gentrification is the imposition of one group’s conceptualization of “community” and forms of cultural remembrance upon another’s and the erasure of the earlier socio-spatial characteristics of the pre-existing community—or more often than not, their commodification by the newcomers and mediatization as a fetishized ideal of ‘authenticity’ (Loughran et al. 197-198). This ideological mechanism takes place in representational space. It is not effected through a change of direction in the current of collective memory due to natural processes of forgetting (Assmann 99) but rather through displacement and the superimposition of newer processes of collective remembrance, the replacement of one pattern of remembrance and knowledge production by another—that of the hegemon:

> Hegemony implies more than an influence, more even than the permanent use of repressive violence. It is exercised over society as a whole, culture and knowledge included, and generally via human mediation: policies, political leaders, parties, as also a good many intellectuals and experts. It is exercised. therefore, over both institutions and ideas. The ruling class seeks to maintain its hegemony by all available means, and knowledge is one such means (Lefebvre 10)

This is fundamentally a part of the gentrification process: the displacement of norms of cosmopolitanism, of urbanism, and of those of the socially disenfranchised by those of the professional middle class, geared towards conspicuous consumption and the suburban ideal. In this case, processes of cultural remembrance and social

knowledge are the vanguard of this phenomenon: this is materially and visibly manifest through the non-ideological mechanisms of gentrification discussed in the following subchapter.

Space as a concept is frequently associated (though not conflated) with the concept of *place*. More specifically, the scholarly debate on *place* is almost always defined within the scope of the spatial; it is a space—or rather a manifestation of space—in which

> [c]ollectivities (or those who direct them), like their individual members, need to think simultaneously about identity and relations; and to this end, they need to symbolize the components of shared identity (shared by the whole of a group), particular identity (of a given group or individual in relation to others) and singular identity (what makes the individual or group of individuals different from any other). The handling of space is one of the means to this end, and it is hardly astonishing that the ethnologist should be tempted to follow in reverse the route from space to the social, as if the latter had produced the former once and for all. This route is essentially 'cultural' since, when it passes through the most visible, the most institutionalized signs, those most recognized by the social order, it simultaneously designates the place of the social order, defined by the same stroke as a common place. (Augé 51)

Marc Augé here describes the concept he calls *anthropological place*, the locus of organic social meaning-making, spaces where identity, relations, and history take place (54)—not a space that marks history or commemorates it but a space that *lives* it (55). Augé relies on Michel de Certeau's definitions of space and place—in the case of the latter, De Certeau claims "place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence [...] A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions" (117). This anthropological place is contrasted with, on the one hand, Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* concept, the inscription of memory onto physical place, which, by reflecting the past, projects the new (modernity) as a space marked by its distinction from the old (antiquity). It is "formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how" (Augé 101).

The *place* concept is especially compelling in its mobilization in Augé's work to delineate the titular concept of the book, the *non-place*. Non-places are "spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces [...] non-places mediate a whole

mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality" (Augé 94). Non-places are spaces in which individuality is replaced by contractual anonymity, and identity by the euphemism 'consumer': what Augé refers to is the flattening of individual identity and difference, and the reduction of persons to the role they play in an economic transaction (De Certeau's exploration of consumption will be returned to later on). What is meant by 'contractual anonymity' is the solitude of places like airports, which require an initial identification (a passport and boarding pass) to enter the space of "solitude and similitude" (Augé 103) of the non-place. What these spaces represent is a place without history, in stark opposition to the anthropological place and the *lieux de mémoire*: "[t]here is no room for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle, usually in allusive texts. What reigns there is actuality, the urgency of the present moment" (Augé 104). The non-place is a central concept to understanding postmodern and gentrifying cities, where mass surveillance and digital technologies[9] extend the scope of the contractual, and neoliberalism produces ever more privatized services, leading to ever more infringements of personal privacy, into the digitally panoptic (i.e. where digital technologies make social invisibility more and more difficult, verging on impossible in cities). In urban spaces such as these, gentrification strips neighborhoods of their local character: displacing the social *practices* (de Certeau 118) which constitute their anthropological place, but especially also erasing their histories. This is done by a physical erasure—the destruction of landmarks and historic buildings. Now, as a result of which occurs a social and cultural erasure, just as when the baron Haussmann did in 19th century Paris, "[v]iolence is required to build the new urban worlds on the wreckage of the old" (Harvey 33). Cultural and physical erasures function cyclically, and the result is a culturally and socioeconomically segregated city with working-class elements of society relegated to the suburbs or shoved into distant slums (Harvey 33-34).

An exploration of loss and dealing with loss will therefore be central to this analysis. Literary representations of New York have often fixated on the city's state of constant flux, its constantly shifting neighborhoods and demographics, its

[9] This will be further explained in later sections.

ever-different facades and skyline (Vahnenbruck 2-5). It is in a sense a city in a constant state of disappearance; since its early days as a colonial trading post and through centuries of increasing prosperity and explosive population growth never once has its expansion stagnated or plateaued, and with each new wave of progress and growth, more of the old city is lost, buried, or transformed. As such, its thematization as an object of nostalgia is not a new phenomenon. Nostalgia implies a kind of wistful longing for a disappeared home, and as a concept used within the study of memory, is taken here to mean that which

> desires to turn history into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, [...] not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future. The consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. (Boym 452)

Boym´s concept of *prospective nostalgia* is one which is especially critical in the discussion of gentrification storytelling. Nostalgia for a disappeared (or disappearing) city is inevitably concerned with the future, given the city's state of constant change. In the context of this thesis, the theoretical toolkit of nostalgia can be applied to these five narratives in order to make apparent the processes of dealing with loss in storytelling and aesthetic representations of a gentrifying city. Nostalgia as a response to urban change and to gentrification, at least in the case of the representations thereof analyzed in this thesis, is based primarily in this prospective nostalgia, but also in several other types of nostalgia which it would be an oversight to exclude.

Boym recognizes two types of nostalgia: the reflective and restorative. Whereas the former is a kind of self-critical and often humorous or ironic look at the individual past (Boym 454), the latter is much more serious and often revanchist,[10] and seeks to re-establish what has been lost—or is perceived to be lost—to the present; it occurs when "the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has just been

[10] Much in the same way that populist political movements—from first-wave fascism to empty Trumpian promises to restore the US to 'greatness'—seek to evoke a return to an idealized, often largely fictionalized past, restorative nostalgia often relies on the perception of violent loss of home or homeland, or a narrativized Other as an enemy conqueror (Boym 455).

renovated and gentrified beyond recognition" (Boym 455). Both types of nostalgia have the potential for prospection: the restorative usually seeks to shape the future actively, mirroring the idealized past, while the reflective is often more critical and nuanced, seeking rather to learn from the past in order to determine the future. Boym (452) recognizes the utopian nature of nostalgic discourse, as does Mitja Velikonja, who sees nostalgia as "a mourning for the irreversible loss of the past, a longing for it, and notes that it frequently involves a utopian wish and even an effort to bring it back. [...] By glorifying the past, it criticizes the present, telling us more about what is wrong now than what was better in the past" (27-28). The emphasis here is rightly on nostalgia being more concerned with the present (and by extension the future) than with the past.

What is at stake in this analysis is the way in which representations of gentrification mobilize nostalgia in their depictions of the city in flux—prospective nostalgia comes into play here in the uncertainty faced by many working-class residents as larger and larger swaths of the city become closed off. This nostalgia can highlight the ways in which the representations dealt with in this thesis engage with collective remembrance as a means of processing the loss which occurs when cities gentrify. The ways in which the arts (in this case, especially film and literature) contribute to the production of memory, as well as to that of space, have been extensively explored, and nostalgia by definition necessitates a sense of loss. Besides simply *depicting* loss or the lost, nostalgic works of fiction can provide a space for the collective *processing* of loss. "Fictions, both novelistic and filmic, possess the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations" (Erll, 2008, 389). It is well established and documented how film and literature are an integral part of the shaping of collective and cultural memory.

By embedding images and narratives into the collective imaginary, film and literature can provide engagement with the past on a cultural level, which is important in the coping process. Fictional representation of the past can propose an active challenge to commonly-held beliefs about the past: "Indeed, literature and the other arts often appear specifically as a privileged medium of *oppositional* memory, as a 'counter-memorial' and critical force that undermines hegemonic views of the

past" (Rigney 348). As such, literature and film are uniquely poised to offer critical re-evaluations of canonical historiography—which often serves vested political or economic interests—by rewriting popular history. An example of this re-evaluation is the shift that has occurred in the Western film genre: whereas earlier depictions of the American West (in, for example, the John Wayne 'golden era' of the genre) portray it as a backdrop for the adventures of gruff yet ultimately honorable and chivalrous heroes, more recent productions tend to be bleaker, with the line between hero and villain blurred.[11] Because of the multidirectional (Rothberg 523-524) nature of media and memory, there is a constant interplay between memory-producing narratives and collective memory itself: the one informs the other. In the case of the Westerns, the shift in popular depiction of the semi-historical period called the "Wild West" is both cause and effect of changing perceptions of the period itself.

What takes place, then, when gentrification is represented in popular media, is a sort of *monumentalization* (Rigney 349) wherein representations and works which depict the city before and during gentrification become monuments to the changing city and its inhabitants. This is especially important given the way in which gentrification reconfigures urban spaces to serve the purposes of wealthier inhabitants: the traces of the former residents are erased or transformed into kitsch, and sold as commodity. Because the development buries or co-opts the old in service of the new, representations of space are crucial in testifying to the sense of loss felt by gentrified populations. By giving substance to the disappeared, works of fiction about the gentrifying city inform a powerful narrative in the shared remembrance of affected peoples: a sort of 'here we were' and 'so it was,' an affirmation of those impacted by the process which the economic-political powers-that-be insist is a positive one. Gentrification literature and film which enters the collective imaginary does so as a monument: "[t]heir memory-making effect lies not in the unity, coherence, and ideological unambiguousness of the images they convey, but instead in the fact that they serve as cues for the discussion of those images, thus centering a memory culture on certain medial representations and sets

[11] Examples of films in the former camp are the Spaghetti Westerns of the 1960s or those based on Akira Kurosawa's "jidaigeki" films. In the latter camp are, for example, *Unforgiven* or *Django Unchained*.

of questions connected with them" (Erll, 2008, 396). Reflective nostalgia is a key tool in the creation of representations which engage critically with the legacy of gentrification. By inviting reflection on the loss of the past it allows the viewer or reader to mourn but also to engage with the future of the changing city.

Memory is not, however, the sole force in the production of urban space—meaning-making in cities is a complex and multidirectional system, not only of memory production but also of everyday actions, interpersonal interactions, and economic transactions: it is profoundly based in everyday *practices*, the unassuming daily acts which constitute human behavior, and which are central in the production of urban space. De Certeau roots the production of social space in everyday practice—walking, talking, reading, etc.—these are the formative elements of place and space in the city (117). These practices are defined as "the systems of operational combination (les combinatoires d'opérations) which also compose a 'culture,' [...] models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers.' Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others" (De Certeau xi-xii). Practice is, in this regard, a creative act, or one of *making* rather than one simply of *consuming*, a reconfiguration of products' and productions' *use* in social space—consumption, on the other hand, occurs when a *use* of production is imposed by the hegemonic order (xiii), i.e. the advent of the supermarket at the detriment of discrete butchers' shops, greengrocers, bakeries, and so on. The act of *using,* or 'ways of operating,' which De Certeau highlights as being subsumed to *consuming* in capitalist social spaces, refers to "the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production. [...] Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline" (De Certeau xiv-xv). The creation of socio-political space is not simply a phenomenon which takes place within the production and mediation of memory, but also within everyday and cultural practice, the clandestine engagement of groups or individuals with the omnipresent interventions of economic-political power structures in the everyday (i.e.

consumption and marketing), and the ways in which the production of social spaces needs must circumnavigate (or build upon) the disciplinary.[12]

The everyday nature of practice must be especially underlined. What De Certeau underlines is not an insurrectionary model of cultural production, but something which is outwardly profoundly mundane and banal. The practice and production of urban and social space, according to De Certeau, is located in the quotidian engagement of individuals and groups with the likewise quotidian structure of hegemon, and to grapple with it creatively, the practice of *use*, of *making*: "[a] rich indetermination gives [city walkers], by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning" (De Certeau 105). Here he is referring to the act of walking the city, at which point the multidirectional interplay of meaning-making between social and individual occurs; the creation of cultural *meaning*, and the production of urban space, is rooted in the practice of *using* a *place*, of touching the other: "to practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be other and to move toward the other"* (De Certeau 110). These *places* are in turn "fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here': the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice" (De Certeau 108). Moreover, De Certeau sees the relationship between space and place as produced and maintained first through practice but also through storytelling and representation: "[s]tories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces" (117). This is indicative of how social spaces' production and the creation of shared meaning in urban spaces is deeply rooted in storytelling—especially in this case on the scale of interpersonal practice—but also on the larger scale of representation in film and literature.

Walter Benjamin's analysis of mechanical reproducibility is particularly interesting as regards the development of urban space, especially in light of his

[12] De Certeau in this regard is indebted to Foucault's *Surveiller et punir*.

concept of *aura*. Although Benjamin wrote extensively on cities and the qualities which make them compelling spaces for analysis, this thesis will rely more on his reflections on art and mechanical reproduction than his inquiries into urban spaces, such as in his *Passagenwerk*. His analyses of art lend themselves with ease to the study of the city and of the making of shared social meaning. His conceptualization of certain artworks as *unique*—this is to say, mechanically unreproducible—or authentic, is especially interesting if applied to the city, and mechanical reproduction compared to gentrification; these two phenomena cause the work of art and the city respectively to lose their *aura*. This aura is "[a] strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be" (Benjamin 23), whereby this distance from the viewer is what grounds the object as spatially and temporally individual, *unique.* In the practical sense of this concept's application to gentrification, the *aura* of New York is its cosmopolitanism, its draw as an artists' and writers' paradise, the diversity and lifestyles which have over time made their way permanently into the collective imaginary. Benjamin himself saw this type of *aura* in the cities he wrote about, before the age of gentrification and global neoliberalism, in light of which "it seems possible to utilise Benjamin's account of mechanical reproducibility to suggest that cities themselves are becoming increasingly interchangeable, so suggesting that his romantic, auratic, conception of urbanism has lost its resonance in the age of postmodernised urban landscapes. [...] The rise of mechanically reproduced cities, with their interchangeable fast-food restaurants, road systems, airports, hotels, and shops, has meant that the aura which Benjamin detected in the urban realm has disappeared" (Savage 213). The shift occurs when anthropological places become subject to the commodifying forces of capitalism, which transform these spaces into empty simulacra—artificial copies of the city's auratic qualities, these spaces' commodification having stripped them of their aura. The gentrified city, like the work of art in the age of mechanical reproducibility, reproduces all the outward characteristics of the original, but lacks the *aura*—it takes on aspects of the *non-place*, having been split from what Benjamin considers the *authentic* (similar to his concept of *aura*): founded on "the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day, [...] the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its

physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it" (Benjamin 21-22). The aura is what separates city as anthropological place from the city as contractual space—the non place; this is to say that the stripping of the city's aura transforms it into a contractual space: one defined not by its qualities of organic growth but by the domination of capital in its relationships. Like the copy of a Greek sculpture—and as in the epigraph to *10:04*, the original text of which is attributed to Walter Benjamin—it is "as it is now, just a little different."

A final consideration, then, is the concept of authenticity. The concept as used here is twofold, in the sense that, first: authenticity is used when discussing fiction's role in producing and influencing cultural memory, whereby authenticity is taken to mean "images of the past which resonate with cultural memory," (Erll 389) a representation of past events which rely more on the emotions evoked by the remembrance of events rather than on actual historical facts. That which is *perceived to be* authentic is accepted as such because of its engagement with deeply culturally embedded narratives of memory: "'inauthentic' versions of the past may end up with more cultural staying power than the work of less skilled narrators or more disciplined ones who stay faithful to what their personal memories or the archive allow them to say" (Rigney 347-348). Second: there is the more anthropological sense of cultural 'authenticity,' which is the perception of a culture that is co-opted by gentrifiers (or on a larger scale, majority populations in the global north) as a commodity (Smith 9). It takes those elements of otherness, the 'relics' of culture (Lindholm 334), which are of novel aesthetic, gastronomic, or cultural value and subsumes them into the socio-cultural hegemon; for example, the commodification of rowhouses and brownstones built as tenements as "authentically Brooklyn" and their subsequent marketing by real estate agents (and in mass media) as high-end housing (Schulman 27): "[a]s cities become ever more similar, so people search ever harder for genuine urban distinction, and so such urban specificity becomes artificially constructed by speculative and booster interests" (Savage 213), in this case referring to Benjamin's *aura* as a unique quality of the city. In both cases—first, its role in the cultural memory and second, its anthropolical value—'authenticity' has less to do with accurate representations, either in the case of the past or in that of a culture, than it does with the emotional and memorial response to those

representations, and whether or not they fit into canonical narratives of the past or hegemonic conceptions of culture.

Gentrification: Chronology and Mechanisms

Gentrification is, as previously mentioned, a frequently contested concept. Within the realm of public discourse gentrification is most frequently understood as the migration of wealthier residents into a disaffected urban district, usually in post-industrial city centers. However, this thesis is not primarily concerned with gentrification as a sociologically measurable phenomenon, but rather with the ideological and conceptual underpinnings which are at work in quantifiable gentrification. As an analytic concept gentrification is taken here to mean the process through which majority working-class and/or ethnic or cultural minorities in ultra-cosmopolitan urban spaces are displaced by wealthier and relatively homogeneous migrants, and the resulting imposition of a hegemonic system of values. It is historically rooted in ideals of urban renewal and city planning which became popular in the 19th and into the 20th century, during which certain city centers, especially those of capital cities in imperial powers, were undergoing intense state-prompted revitalization after centuries of overcrowding and neglect—for example Haussmann's extensive renovation of Paris in the late 19th century or the construction of the Eixample in Barcelona or Friedrichshain-Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin. Large-scale projects to clear out crowded and low-income neighborhoods have been a consistent trend in the emergence of global cities across the world, especially in the development of financial areas, administrative centers, and downtowns. In most cases, gentrification is not solely a government-initiated project or even a process undertaken by the conscious decision of individual city planners, officials, or private interests. It is more often than not spurred by a number of coinciding factors, not least of which are the lifting of caps on rents and the loosening (often under pressure from lobbies representing landlords or housing conglomerates) of regulations and city ordinances regarding housing and renter's rights. These changes occur in concord with cultural patterns in the representation of cities which make places desireable to live in (Goldfield 302). They include, for example, the depiction in media and popular culture of Greenwich Village

as a neighborhood with a strong tradition of bohemianism leading to its commodification and eventual commercialization (Goldfield 305). This chapter will provide an overview and chronology of the historical processes of urban change in New York throughout the 20th and 21st centuries as a backdrop to the works analyzed in this thesis.

New York's serious public works projects and urban renewal schemes—an ideological antecedent to gentrification—began in earnest with Robert Moses, whose immense construction projects in the period between the 1920s and the '60s dramatically changed the face of the city. Moses, an unelected official who came to wield immense power, often through intimidation, blackmail, and bribery, left a visible legacy on the city in the shape of its thoroughfares and highways, as well as of Lincoln Center and the United Nations building (Caro 40). However, a less visible (albeit traceable through a series of once-flourishing neighborhoods[13] bisected by superhighways and left gradually to decay into slums) facet of this legacy was the displacement of tens of thousands (Caro 38), (some claim hundreds of thousands) of working-class residents of New York, more often than not people of color and hispanophone communities. Moses' vision for New York, one which has by and large been realized, was very much in line with the idealized vision of the American post-war city: one which was centrally automobile-oriented with amenities accessible mainly to car owners and thus primarily geared towards use by the affluent. In a geographically expansive city like New York where the vast majority of residents (especially working-class) rely on public transportation in the everyday, Moses' public works and vision for the city's future is not difficult to see as elitist at best, and downright discriminatory at worst, especially so in light of the disdain in which he purportedly held working people and particularly black Americans (Caro 38).

Practically however the public works of this era had a number of important, tangible repercussions. First and foremost was the disruption of several communities

[13] The Cross-Bronx Expressway and Long Island Expressway, both ultra-congested superhighways designed to alleviate traffic, cut through neighborhoods, then thriving, which were primarily populated by hispanophone and black Americans, as well as a series of lower-class white neighborhoods. Due to continually falling property value, noise and exhaust pollution, as well as poor access to public transportation, these areas have often seen long periods of decay, and many are still in a state of strangulation. Anecdotal evidence though it might be, in the experience of this paper's author, the vast majority of New Yorkers harbor very strong feelings about such structures and even more so their creator—feelings which are very rarely even remotely positive.

and neighborhoods where buildings were cleared to make way for tunnels, highways, and bridges—Moses' projects frequently relied on the use of eminent domain laws[14] in order to evict residents before razing a neighborhood, such as the Little Syria neighborhood of lower Manhattan, a diverse enclave of Levantine Christians and other immigrants primarily from former Ottoman Palestine, which was demolished to make room for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel entrance portal (Benson & Kayal 18). Many such communities were dispersed by these public works projects, whereas others were isolated (for example Red Hook, Brooklyn), cut off from the rest of the city by highways which often also limit access to public transportation.

Sarah Schulman's seminal *Gentrification of the Mind* examines the origins of the gentrification process in Manhattan in the wake of the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s following the "white flight" period and deindustrialization of the 1950s and 1960s, during which middle-class Anglophone-American whites left the cities en masse for the suburbs to live out the idealized prosperous lifestyle of the American Dream in the postwar boom:

> In the 1970s New York City faced bankruptcy. The remaining poor, working class, and middle-class residents simply did not provide a wide enough tax base to support the city's infrastructure. It was a place of low rents, open neighborhoods, and mixed cultures. City policy began to be developed with the stated goal of attracting wealthier people back to the city in order to be able to pay municipal bills. However, now in 2011 the city is overflowing with rich people and continues to close hospitals, eliminate bus lines, and fire teachers. So the excuse presented for gentrification forty years ago is revealed by historic reality to have been a lie. We now know that real estate profit was the motive for these policies. Tax breaks were deliberately put in place to attract real estate developers to convert low-income housing into condominiums and luxury rentals to attract high-income tenants. Among those most responsive to the new developments were the children of white flight—those who had grown up in the suburbs, with a nostalgic or sentimental familial attachment to the city. (Schulman 25)

After the 1970s a demographic shift began to take place, with gradually more and more white and upper-class residents coming to the city—a process which in and of itself is not a negative phenomenon. But what Schulman rightly underlines here as the core process of gentrification is the transformation of low-income housing into luxury living (and its re-branding as a lifestyle commodity, a purchasable piece of the

[14] *Eminent Domain* is the name in the United States for the legal power of expropriation by which governing bodies from a municipal to the federal level may seize property for public purposes, although it is often abused by developers (not least among whom in the New York area is Donald Trump) who lobby the government to invoke eminent domain on the developer's behalf.

authentic ‘New York experience’), with the displacement of original residents as a result. Schulman cites the rent for certain apartments in her own neighborhood rising from around $200 to over $2000 per month (Schulman 26). The AIDS epidemic, as Schulman correctly points out, played an important role in the process by significantly increasing the rate of turnover in apartments that were becoming more and more desireable. In ‘up-and-coming’ hip neighborhoods in Manhattan such as Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side, particularly known for their vibrant gay culture, rent-controlled apartments were being vacated at unprecedented speed due to the death toll of AIDS among gay men—and since gay couples had no protection under the law, this often meant the eviction of cohabiting partners of the deceased, and the re-listing of their apartments at much higher rates (Schulman 28). New York has been steadily gentrifying ever since as each successive decade brings increases in wealth disparity and cost-of-living hikes, especially since the post-Reagan era of failing social nets and crumbling inner cities (Goldfield 317). This legacy is easily traceable in the works which will be analyzed in this thesis in depictions of monuments, structures, and public spaces. This includes, as Schulman remarks, the shift of available housing toward luxury condominiums and business which over time tend to cater solely to the wealthy (Schulman 28).

But the most easily visible urban markers of gentrification are consistently physical, as well as demographic; gentrification can be traced through the renovation of parks (and expulsion of the homeless), the destruction of older buildings in favor of modern apartment blocks, the disappearance of ethnic restaurants and their replacement by “fusion” cuisine restaurants which cater to a wealthier demographic and subsume distinct cuisines to an American palate (Smith 5-7; Schulman 26-28). This has often culminated in anti-gentrification protests and riots, for example the Tompkins Square riots in 1988, and the vandalization of new luxury high-rises throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Smith 4). Gentrification is also visible in the renaming of neighborhoods and areas in order to increase their marketability and attraction: in recent years, for example, the Lower East Side has been renamed “Alphabet City,” Harlem below 125th Street as “SoHa,” Bushwick as “East Williamsburg.” These are reflective of a larger trend in the citywide real-estate market to rebrand neighborhoods targeted by gentrification to increase appeal and

settlement by wealthier professionals willing to pay much higher rent. These areas are moreover consistently characterized as a "new frontier" of settlement, eerily echoing the justifications for the American colonial project, even paraphrasing the tropes and folklore of that time, replete with "Indian country", Custer references and the like (Smith 7-8).

Following 9/11 a large surge in intra-American migration to Brooklyn as well as from Manhattan to the city's outer Boroughs[15] occurred (Buchanan 52). This was a second 'white flight', with different, more sinister roots than the one which took place some fifty years earlier,[16] when, pushed by fear of further attacks on the city, Manhattanites left in droves, especially for the perceived relative safety (at least from terrorist attack) of Brooklyn. The trend of migration from Manhattan in favor of the outer boroughs had existed for some time, especially given the cost of living in the former, and indeed many Brooklyn neighborhoods were already in the incipient stages of gentrification before the 1990s; however 2001 marked a turning point in the process.[17] Whereas before the turn of the millennium Manhattan was the favored destination for yuppies[18] with disposable incomes looking to live in New York's trendiest milieux, Brooklyn has become a progressively more important destination for many self-described creatives and young adults with plenty of spare cash and a taste for the countercultural.

Another contributing factor has been the crisis of mass incarceration: like the AIDS epidemic, the large-scale imprisonment of especially black men and other low-income, often minority groups, and the dramatic expansion of the prison-industrial complex since the beginning of the catastrophic War on Drugs, has encouraged rapid turnover in housing and facilitated expulsions of (oftentimes

[15] Of the five boroughs of New York, all but Manhattan (i.e. Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island) are considered the Outer Boroughs.
[16] That is, the migration of middle-class whites to the suburbs in the post-Second World War economic boom.
[17] NYU Furman Center, 2016.
[18] It should be noted that *yuppie*, slang for young urban professional (or young and upwardly mobile, depending on the speaker), has bounced back and forth between insult and mark of pride. In any case the phenomenon of *yuppies* as a distinct demographic of the city dates to the 1980s and more often than not does not simply refer to one's social status, but also to participation in specific fads and lifestyle choices which require a certain level of income to maintain. Among others, yuppies are often (though not necessarily) associated with the fitness and health foods craze, cocaine use, designer clothing, and luxury apartments.

African-American) households below the poverty line, for which the loss of an income source is usually disastrous (Kellogg 179). This is exemplified by the process of gentrification which took place in the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan in the 1970s and 1980s, which showcases the interrelational (and even cyclical) aspect of ghettos, mass surveillance, incarceration, and gentrification:

> White middle-class residents moved in, rent increased, police presence increased, and surveillance cameras were installed outside businesses and on street corners, which ultimately resulted in the displacement of long-term residents from lower classes. Another effect common to gentrification was the criminalization of cultural behaviors. In a study by Cahill (2006), the largely Puerto Rican residents commented that they felt judged and misunderstood by the incoming gentry. They felt that their schools were becoming militarized and young men were being stopped frequently and unfairly by the police. (Kellogg 190)

The phenomenon of discriminatory policing and harassment of minority communities is reflected in recent years by the much-vilified "Stop and Frisk" policy of the New York Police Department, instituted following 9/11, which was rightly criticized as a discriminatory practice that unfairly targeted young men (aged 14-24) of color: between 2002 and 2016, of all individuals stopped, approximately 82 percent were black or Latino, and nine out of ten were innocent.[19] Harassment is a common tactic to entice residents to leave their properties and neighborhoods, and is used by police as well as landlords and business owners to encourage turnover and open space for higher-paying tenants (Kellogg 179).

These mechanisms are the primary parts of a larger process—a profoundly complex and multifaceted one—which mobilizes many different phenomena and gradually takes effect over a number of years. The neoliberal state is the primary actor in the downfall of the diverse city, and the reality of the city in the twenty-first century is that "the billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, is reshaping the city along lines favourable to developers, Wall Street and transnational capitalist-class elements, and promoting the city as an optimal location for high-value businesses and a fantastic destination for tourists. He is, in effect, turning Manhattan into one vast gated community for the rich" (Harvey 38). In the present day, gentrification continues in New York at unprecedented rates, with more and more central

[19] New York Civil Liberties Union. Online: https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data

neighborhoods becoming progressively homogenized due to rising prices and aggressive development; historically-black portions of Harlem have seen a drop in African-American residents over the past years, Manhattan's Chinatown has likewise been steadily losing sinophone inhabitants in favor of wealthy white professionals.[20] Other neighborhoods across the city face the same problems: Greek enclaves in Astoria, Afro-Caribbean communities in Crown Heights, Puerto Rican and Dominican areas of Bushwick (which real-estate agents market as "East Williamsburg").[21] On many fronts, long-standing communities are being pushed out to make space for development and wealthier residents.

Moving forward, the following chapters of this thesis will concern themselves with representations of gentrification rather than with gentrification itself, as has been the case heretofore. As mentioned earlier this thesis's corpus is analyzed in chronological order, beginning in the early 1980s and ending in the mid 2010s. The next chapter is therefore concerned with the represented city of the '80s, and the fast-paced world which *Bright Lights, Big City* presents its reader. It is important to note the connection between gentrification and "Wall Street", not the street itself but the euphemistic reference to those who work for the financial institutions of Manhattan's downtown. The 1980s were a period of intense globalization, and New York, which moreover experienced intense corporatization at that time, is no exception. This is a part of the spark which kicked off gentrification: the influx of wealthy, well-educated individuals required to man the banks' and megacorporations' offices are the very same who, eager participants in unprecedented lifestyle trends and fads, prompted developers to open up further areas of the city to this new market. So while it might seem that *Bright Lights, Big City* is primarily concerned with corporate and yuppie culture or the effect of globalisation on New York, it is important to note that these phenomena are profoundly interrelated, and that they allow one another to flourish.

[20] NYU Furman Center, 2016.
[21] ibid

II. *Bright Lights, Big City*

> You are the stuff of which consumer profiles—American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model—are made. *When you're staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn't it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theater in your private limousine?* (McInerney 144)[22]

Bright Lights, Big City (1984) begins with the nameless protagonist brain-deep in a pile of cocaine, and most of the novel follows in similar suit. He traipses up and down Manhattan, which he apparently considers to be the entirety of New York City, only leaving the borough once (and then by accident), and narrates endless sequences of carousing and cokey hootenannies or booze-soaked limousine rides between high-society parties and murky nightclubs, taken in tow by his primary enabler Tad and an endless series of fashion models and heiresses. It describes in vivid detail the party lifestyle of the city's elite of the 1980s, interspersed with scenes of the protagonist's failings as a writer and in his work as a fact checker for a renowned magazine (also unnamed). Although the novel is ostensibly about cocaine and parties, about being a writer, and about the protagonist's recent desertion by his (now ex-) wife, Amanda, the constant thread that the novel follows is the overbearing presence of the city, its all-encompassing and far-reaching influence on everything the protagonist does. Concerned as he is with himself—and seeing in the city only what he wants to see—the narrator's vision and experience of New York is extremely limited. He is, by his own admission, slumming, under the pretext of garnering experiences for his writing, and despite his tunnel vision, despite his inability to see the city as more than a collection of vagrants, drag queens, clubbers, and stockbrokers, it is possible to just see the beginnings of gentrification in the background of the story. In any case, although *Bright Lights, Big City* is not an especially nostalgic representation of the city,[23] it exemplifies the attitudes and

[22] N.b.: the entire novel is narrated in the second person. Usage of "you" refers to the narrator.
[23] Although nostalgia is a theme throughout the book, it is never nostalgia for a lost city. The protagonist is not native to the city and has no desire to become a local, nor any interest in the diversity of people which makes the city a unique place, choosing rather to spend his time with interchangeable people from a single 'high society' clique. Despite the title of the book, the New York he experiences is exceptionally small.

cultural practices of the gentrifier and sets the stage for nostalgic depictions in later works, such as in *Blue in the Face* and *Smoke*, or *25th Hour*.

The first and only outright mention of gentrification occurs rather late in the book, in a limousine, the 'office' of a cocaine dealer named Bernie, who, discussing the Lower East Side,[24] claims: "'Used to be,' Bernie says, 'this was your basic greaseball sector of the economy. You're dealing with your South American spics and your New Jersey dago element. [...] Now we're seeing a different kind of money moving into the neighborhood. I'm talking to three-piece bankers with P.O. boxes in Switzerland" (McInerney 111-112). Despite this being the only occasion on which gentrification is directly addressed, the novel is replete with backdrop references to the changes taking place in the city. Gentrification is not immediately visible, for the main reason that the narrator/protagonist of the novel does not often venture far out of his small bubble of wealthy elites, but its traces float beneath the surface throughout the novel. There are several ways in which it is manifest: first, in the descriptions of the physical city, the spaces which the narrator occupies, and in his assessments and depictions of what and whom he sees. Second, there is the oppositional thematization of the city throughout, i.e. *the city* as opposed to *the country* or the suburbs, which is a constant conflict in the narrator's experiences of New York and his peers. Third, there is the narrator's view of society itself, at least of the society he frequents, and his opinions of it. These last two—analyses of the protagonist's engagement with the spaces he traverses—are especially telling when read as a self-assessment on the part of the gentrifier.

Space and the City

The urban space described by the protagonist stretches over roughly half of the island of Manhattan (and once, very briefly, an apartment in Queens). It encompasses his apartment, until recently shared with Amanda, party spaces, the subways and the streets he walks, often on the way home from parties, and his place of employment. The novel opens with a blurry club scene, from which the narrator emerges into a bleary early morning and, walking past familiar haunts,

[24] In this case, he is referring first to the neighborhood, but also to the cocaine business which, according to him, largely takes place there.

settles on the banks of the Hudson river and looks away from the city. This first description of the city sets the tone for the rest of the novel: it is a thoroughly nostalgic description—although in this case, the narrator's nostalgia is not for a city that has changed beyond recognition, but rather for a time in his life before the city changed him—passing by the first apartment he shared with Amanda, he evokes bygone days when "you would go out to buy the paper and maybe pick up a couple of croissants" (9), having just described himself as "the kind of guy who wakes up early on Sunday morning and steps out to cop the *Times* and croissants" (4), as opposed to the kind of guy who finds himself, at six AM on a Sunday morning, having run out of cocaine and having failed to pick up any women, leaving a nightclub for home. This is indicative of how urban space works throughout the novel: they appear in the narrator's inner monologue as representative of aspects of his life. Urban spaces intervene in this case much as do *lieux de mémoire*—memorial sites which "are established institutionally when the environments of memory, the *milieux de mémoire,* fade" (Boym 453)—which in this case are naturally not institutionally established, but within the private remembrance of the narrator. Within the personal mythology of the narrator, certain representational spaces in the physical city function as private monuments and are vested with symbolic power. This is also however the case with regards to the collective mythology of the city: there is a systematic opposition between descriptions of the sterile, fast-moving world of cocaine and high society and of the slower rhythms of family life and of a traditional lifestyle. This often overlaps with descriptions of the new and the old sides of the city, of the upper-class and the more proletarian[25] elements of the city and his entourage—or at least, those he perceives to be more authentic and auratic. The narrator's personal struggles and his conflation of these with different urban spaces parallels the reconfiguration and thematization of spaces under threat from gentrification.

The aforementioned first image of the city is emblematic of the highly negative representations of urban space which characterize the narrator's experiences of the haut monde of New York:

[25] The narrator greets his co-workers as "fellow proles" (15), only half-jokingly.

> The sidewalk sparkles cruelly [...] The dog is rooting in the cracks of the sidewalk, but as you approach he stiffens into a pose of terrible alertness. The woman looks at you as if you were something that had just crawled out of the ocean trailing ooze and slime. [...] a lone hooker totters on heels and tugs at her skirt as if no one had told her that the commuters won't be coming through the tunnels from Jersey today. [...] you can see the black, fetid water underneath. (McInerney 8-9)

The narrator does not mince words in his evaluation of the city, and this is the case throughout the novel: vagrants sit on old women on the subway (11), every corner is plastered with missing persons posters (63), the subways "smell of wet clothes and urine" (82), women are sold by the pound in the meatpacking district (83). The city is "all this ugliness and pain" (169). It is not difficult to glean the narrator's feelings toward the city from his descriptors—this is the city he associates with the high society, with his ex-wife and the social sphere of fashion, literature, and of the wealthy and famous—and it is profoundly in opposition with the person he wants to be.

The parallels between the narrator's experiences and his descriptions of the city are best exemplified by his relationship with two women in the novel: on the one hand, there is Megan, his co-worker in the fact-checking department at 'the famous magazine,'[26] and on the other, there is Vicky, the philosophy PhD student and cousin of Tad Allagash, his partner-in-crime and instigator of many of the coke-binge-and-champagne escapades throughout the book. The narrator's relationships with these two women stand in stark opposition to the rest of the social relationships he entertains throughout the novel with the exception of those with his immediate family. This will be explored at further length, but first it is important to establish the differences between the respective urban spaces which these relationships occupy. These spaces are diametrically opposed to the spaces of parties and nightclubs and of the bustling city on the narrator's lonely walks: in their composition and in the themes they evoke, and especially in the way they represent the city and its effects on the psyche, they emphasize the thematic dichotomy between the soul-crushing and the wholesome which is characteristic of the

[26] It is all but spelled out that the narrator works at *The New Yorker* but refrains from using the name of the magazine, instead referring to it by this euphemism.

narrator's depiction of New York. The first of these scenes (that with Megan) paints a gentle picture of the city:

> The evening is cool. You find yourself walking the Village, pointing out landmarks and favorite townhouses. Only yesterday you would have considered such a stroll too New Jersey for words, but tonight you remember how much you used to like this part of the city. The whole neighborhood smells of Italian food. The streets have friendly names and cut weird angles into the rectilinear map of the city. The buildings are humble in scale and don't try to intimidate you. (89)

The city is no longer something to be conquered lest one be conquered oneself: in this case it is something comforting, to be embraced. The friendliness of the street-names and the non-intimidating character of the buildings is consistently countered in the rest of the book by harsh buildings and dingy light. There is also the motif of food to consider, which reappears at key points in the novel: in relation to Vicky and Megan, especially also in relation to the narrator's late mother, and at the very end of the novel.[27]

The second such scene takes place while food-shopping with Megan; the description is of a bustling, living neighborhood, instead of one whose life is dead-eyed and plastic, devoid of aura. The narrator mentions small, old shops by name: Ottomanelli's, Zito's Bakery,[28] (127-128), as if to contrast the charm of small family businesses with the anonymity and alienation inherent to the businesses patronized by his haut monde acquaintances—Ottomanelli's is compared to the stuffy, pretentious establishments preferred by his arriviste ex-wife: "[a]lready she was aspiring to the Upper East Side, where the butchers dress their wares in paper replicas of designer outfits" (127). In this case, local establishments, for example the bakery, and a Korean grocer whose brightly colored fruits are the subject of a brief passage (128), are marked out by the intense sensory impression they leave on the narrator: the reds, yellows, and oranges of fruit, the smell of fresh bread. This is in stark contrast to the featureless, sterile, and seemingly endless clubs and bars which the narrator visits in company of Tad, distinguishable only by their names: Heartbreak, the Lizard Lounge, Odeon, Danceteria, the Red Parrot, the Lion's head,

[27] Light and food as themes will be further explored later in this chapter.
[28] These two real locations have been fixtures of the neighborhood for the better part of a century. Whereas the former is still in business, the latter has closed doors since *Bright Lights, Big City*'s publication.

(1-4, 85-86) and so on. Just as in the earlier scene with Vicky, the description of the neighborhood—in both cases, Greenwich Village—is opposed to the Upper East Side, and the two neighborhoods are symbolically referred to as representative of the two sides of the protagonist's personality. Most interestingly, in both passages, the narrator refers often to *the neighborhood* or *your neighborhood* (again referring to himself in the second person), than in the rest of the novel: in scenes of urban anonymity and despair, the city is usually referred to as a whole—as "the city" or "New York City"—instead of by the name of any particular area which finds itself the impassive backdrop for these feelings. This again emphasizes the oppressiveness and immensity of the megacity as emblematic of what Lefebvre cites as the intervention of hegemonic power structures, and what the narrator all but chalks up to the tyranny of capital. His smaller, niche neighborhoods are depicted as divorced from this, as territories suspended in an ideological void where consumer and material culture have no clout, untouched by the culturally flattening forces of global capitalism.

Bread and Light

The narrator's great interior conflict, his failure to live up to the standards he would like to set for himself, is repeatedly characterized as an interplay between urban and non-urban values. He vacillates between wanting to retreat to the countryside, to an idealized sort of Thoreauvian writer's hermitage deep in some New England wood, and pining for his parents' lifestyle, replete with sprawling Connecticut suburban home, nuclear family, dog, and car. In any case, the city is repeatedly and vehemently made out to be a corrupting influence, the cause of Amanda's 'transformation' as well as his current state of emotional decay. Opposition between urban and non-urban[29] values is a continual battle being fought in the narrator's assessment of his place in the world and continued presence in the city. Despite the

[29] I will use the term non-urban for lack of a better word, since the phrase "rural and/or suburban" risks rather clunky sentences, and "provincial" has a condescending element that is not the intent of this concept. What is meant in this case by 'non-urban values' is the idealized suburban American life, which flourished in the decades following the Second World War, and which emphasized traditional family structures, de facto (often also de jure) racial and cultural segregation, and conspicuous consumption. These phenomena naturally also exist in cities, but to a lesser extent—especially in New York, which has long been a bastion of cosmopolitanism and counterculture. I refrain from simply using the word 'suburban' since the narrator refers to rural as well as suburban space.

insistence with which he asserts that the city, in fact, the root of all his problems—including many comparisons to a warzone (10) with MIAs[30] instead of vagrants (11) and where the home is a fortress to ward it all off (34), and for all his reveling in his urban misery and wishing to be elsewhere, it is not truly the city he is critiquing. Rather the value system and society of the upper crust which always leaves a bad taste in his mouth (and usually also a stuffy nose).

Throughout the novel, the themes of food and light intervene only in the brief moments of healthy interaction with the city and with the narrator's community. Food is associated with better times, with family and friends and meaningful social interaction. Predictably, it is nowhere to be found in any of the cocaine and party scenes, and only occurs in a handful of passages: memories from before Amanda became famous and the narrator developed a knack for snorting the night away, memories of the narrator's late mother, the episodes with Megan and Vicky, and the very end of the book.[31] Few of these describe food as more than *sustenance*: it is only in four scenes that it is shown as *nourishing,* a positive force which is set in contrast is the overbearing presence of the city and the narrator's party lifestyle. The single meal he eats of his own accord—coffee and eggs—immediately follows his night out with Vicky, whose memory he relishes the next day, on his sole non-hungover morning of the entire novel (94). The only other meal that the reader is shown is the one cooked for him by Megan. Visceral depictions of food's colors and aromas (128) and of the intimacy of cooking together (133) take precedence over the food itself. Food and the social ritual of breaking bread together is depicted as a process which humanizes him: "[a] few minutes ago you were colleagues headed out for a bite to eat. Now you are a man and a woman alone in a room with a bed" (130). What happens here (and what the narrator wrongly interprets as a desire on Megan's behalf to sleep with him) is a reconfiguration of the space embodied by the relationship between two people—what was previously a relationship defined by their productive value is now rather defined by their interpersonal connection. The

[30] "Missing in Action."

[31] Besides these scenes, food is almost completely absent from the novel, with the exception of the occasions on which the narrator goes out to lunch, for example with an aged writer at the 'famous magazine,' although I will not analyze this scene for the reason that the narrator, full-nosed as he is, apparently does not eat (or at least does not mention eating), and simply watches the old writer ash an entire cigar onto an untouched steak throughout the 'meal' (61).

narrator makes an unsuccessful pass at Megan, which she dodges, instead holding his head in her lap and comforting him. Megan is strongly portrayed in a motherly fashion here: cooking for him, offering a loan and to help him find work, and comforting him: “She strokes your hair. ‘Calm down,’ she says. ‘Calm down’” (136). Food is strongly associated with the narrator’s mother; the narrator smells bread on the street, which evokes this memory, and “[t]ears come to your eyes, and you feel such a rush of tenderness and pity that you stop beside a lamppost and hang on for support. The smell of bread recalls you to another morning. [...] When you walked in, the kitchen was steeped in this same aroma. [...] She said that she had to find some way to keep herself busy now that her sons were taking off. You said that you hadn’t left, not really” (173). The novel both opens and closes with the narrator smelling fresh bread in the street, and both times this smell is associated with an earlier, healthier time in his life, with the comfort of home and, in the latter case, of his mother.

Light is also referenced extensively throughout the novel—especially in the passages during which, dazed and bleary-eyed, the narrator crawls out of some nightclub and is scorched by the wee hours’ first rays: “the harsh angling light will turn you to flesh and bone. Mortality will pierce you through the retina [...] the glare is like a mother’s reproach” (6-8). Again, the subtext of this is that the ‘unnatural’ lifestyle the narrator leads divorces him from his ‘natural’ origins (his mother) represented by food and light. Light is, as with bread, later associated with the narrator’s mother, specifically with her death. She dies in the lone presence of her son, likewise in the early hours of the morning: “[t]he bedroom window was filling with light. [...] ‘The pain is going away,’ she said. You said that was good. The light seemed to have entered the room all at once” (161-162). The reproach in the earlier chapter reflects the narrator’s guilt—”I tried to block her out of my mind. But I think I owe it to her to remember” (171)—at repressing the memory of his mother, and not dealing with his grief, rather throwing himself into the party and cocaine lifestyle—much as he does when Amanda leaves him. The memory of his mother, of

where he is from,[32] his past (and his self-image as a result) are essentially in conflict with his present lifestyle, and this inner conflict is symbolically projected onto the city.

The novel ends with the narrator trading his sunglasses away (thus opening himself to natural light, as opposed to the artificial light of the city) for a bag of bread upon which he gorges himself. It is described in quasi-purificative terms: "[t]he smell of warm dough envelops you. The first bite sticks in your throat and you almost gag. You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again" (174). The almost religious significance of this ritual (i.e. the association of light with the power of God and that of bread with the Eucharist) is hard to miss: the narrator seeks escape (in this case personified by Vicky) from the lifestyle he has been leading with Amanda and following their split. This scene follows the narrator's first face-to-face meeting with his ex-wife since their split—and discovery that Odysseus, the "Mediterranean hulk in a white silk shirt" (166) and Amanda's purported fiancé is in reality a male escort from a service called *Rent-A-Hunk*—as well as a cathartic phone conversation with Vicky, over the course of which he reveals to her that he is still reeling from the death of his mother and that he had been married to Amanda. It is in this context that the final scene, and the narrator's emergence from the cocaine-binge depths of night into the early morning, and the potential for redemption (or at least for a different way of life) is open to him. "The first light of the morning outlines the towers of the World Trade Center towers [...] There are cobbles on the street where the asphalt has worn through. You think of the wooden shoes of the first Dutch settlers on these same stones. Before that, Algonquin braves stalking game along silent trails" (172). Suddenly the narrator is no longer alienated from the city but feels rooted to the place by the momentum of the collective remembrance he has inherited, and feels himself an essential part of its history. It is as he leaves behind the 'bright lights, big city' lifestyle (returning to the Village and the smell of bread and Vicky) that he sees his future coming together, now as finally being connected to the past, here represented by his acceptance of the loss he feels from his mother's death and Amanda's departure: he is able to confide in Vicky about the

[32] He repeatedly runs away from his brother Michael in the street, whom he has not seen since their mother's death and who has come to New York to try to bring the narrator home. Michael eventually ambushes him at his apartment.

former (168) and feel sympathy and genuine pity for Amanda (167), who is inextricably deep in the world that he so reviles and wants to escape from.

Slumming and Schmoozing

The turn at the end of the book is indicative of the narrator's long-standing criticisms of his lifestyle, and is certainly painted as a redemption—but is the narrator truly redeemed? By the narrator's own admission he is out of place in both worlds he travels through: too stuck-up and (in his own eyes) intellectual to feel at home in the working-class strata of the city—which he mainly sees on walks in the street—and too sentimental to truly be a part of the societal upper crust, his part in which he insists is nothing more than moonlighting. He wants to tell "the girl who wouldn't et cetera you"[33] (4) that "you are slumming, visiting your own six AM Lower East Side of the soul on a lark" (ibid). He frequently insists that his experiences in the party circuit and the haut monde are his way of slumming, that he is "a fraud, an impostor in the social circle" (45), under the pretense that he is "gathering experience for a novel. [...] Saving it all up. Waiting for the day when you would sit down and write your masterpiece" (38). This revulsion towards high society and (by the invocation of the concept of 'slumming') his self-conception as superior to his peers is in line with his fetishization of working-class lifestyles, which he sees as simpler, more 'authentic' and 'essential', *auratic.* This fetishization is especially visible in his many moments of crisis during early-morning come-downs and upon emerging from clubs into the light: "[t]he righteous people who sleep at night and eat eggs for breakfast" (173) of which he desperately wants to be a part; this is an obvious throwback to the earlier chapter when, the morning after meeting Vicky, he awakes at six thirty and has eggs and coffee for breakfast.

How then, are this character and the two city spaces he is torn between emblematic of gentrification? The passage cited in this chapter's epigraph,[34] snide though its intended effect is, encapsulates the socio-political space inhabited by the

[33] A description of a fictional ideal woman whom the narrator fantasizes about in the book's first passage and whose description just happens to perfectly describe Vicky.

[34] Reprinted here: "You are the stuff of which consumer profiles—American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model—are made. *When you're staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn't it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theater in your private limousine?*" (144)

gentrifier: the narrator prefaces this passage with the quip "you seemed to be arriving at the premiere of the movie which was to be your life" (143) and remarks in hindsight that "[t]oday [...] you cannot believe your dreams were so shallow" (144). Throughout the novel and in the narrator's immediate past (i.e. his time in the city before Amanda leaves), he has consistently conceived of *the city* as a commodity, with which one is capable of engaging as a singular act—this is to say that, in pursuing a type of meaning-making based on his preconceptions of what in the city is 'authentic,' he reduces the spaces which he traverses to something simple and two-dimensional, which can be consumed. This is profoundly based in his self-identity as a writer, because of which *New York* (as a concept rather than an actual city) is a space which he enters and with which he engages solely as a means of personal enrichment, not of the material kind but of the (supposedly) cultural—just as gentrifiers fetishize the spaces of gentrified communities as something which can be bought. He himself admits this: "You went to parties with writers, cultivated a writerly persona. You wanted to be Dylan Thomas without the paunch, F. Scott Fitzgerald without the crack-up. You wanted to skip over the dull grind of actual creation" (38).

However by the time of the novel's events he has become disillusioned with this lifestyle and as a result offers the critique which is interwoven with his narration of events. Despite the frenetic bile with which he depicts the city and its vices, this critique is not one of New York itself. Rather it is directed at the vapid culture of luxury and excess which characterize the social life of the city's elite—and to which he 'lost' Amanda. It is this space which he sees as having divorced him from his past, and while it stops short of any indictment of capitalism—indeed the narrator seems to float in an ideological void[35]—the basic foundations for a Marxist social critique exist in the text but are not elaborated upon. On the one hand, there is the obvious and scathing indictment of the material culture of New York elites, but on the other hand, there is a more nuanced depiction of capitalism at work in this novel; this is especially evident in the two city spaces the narrator describes—the 'local' and the

[35] This is to say that, for all his kvetching about the culture he is part of and the orgiastic decadence of neoliberalism's prodigal sons and daughters partaking in the spoils of late Empire, he never connects the material culture with the political-economic climate of his world. This is perhaps a strength of the novel, as it leaves the work of interpretation to the reader.

'global' spaces which he projects onto the city and uses as symbolic spaces for processing his inner turmoil. This is to say that his vision of the city is simplistically divided into 'good' spaces and 'bad' spaces: the former characterized by organic cosmopolitanism and auratic authenticity, and the latter by drab, stifling regularity and oppressiveness. There are the two conflicting spaces that the narrator occupies throughout the novel: the comforting space of the *neighborhood*, thematized in food, light, family, diversity, and the presence of Megan and Vicky—and the oppressive space of the *city*, associated with drugs and hangovers, dead-eyed pedestrians and vagrants in the streets, and the presence–and then absence–of Amanda. This is essentially the conflict between *place* and *non-place*, the *traditional* and *modern*, the perception of *authentic* and *inauthentic.* The novel's representation of the space of the city in capitalism is in opposition to the concept of *anthropological place*; instead it takes on select attributes of the *non-place*: the city is no longer a place of meeting and collective meaning-making, of community and social exchange, but rather one which has been reduced to a space of transit defined by individual anonymity. The nondescript interiors of the novel's parties, clubs, and bars, their suffocating featurelessness, are typical of the non-place—reminiscent of the sleek blandness of airports, rest stations, and shopping malls. In the space of the non-place, the relation of individual to physical space has been reduced to the contractual, to the economically quantifiable—this is visible in the narrator's constant state of alienation in the novel's street scenes. Moreover, it is manifested in his separation from his origins, his inability to process the past and the loss he has felt. Much as he depicts the late-capitalist urban space as stripped of many of its individuating social functions, so too does the narrator show his inability to engage with the past as a symptom of the representational space he inhabits. This is effectively a stripping of the city's auratic qualities which the narrator sees embodied still in Greenwich Village. His criticism of the city's corporatization and the suppression of local distinctions draws attention to one of the functions of gentrification, much as in neoliberal globalization where cultural imperialism and influence reduce local differences. That gentrification and globalization go hand in hand is a given: as it was in 19th and 20th century Paris, so it is with the modern New York. The increasing corporatization of city and its regular encroachments upon the neighborhoods which

the narrator portrays as *anthropological place* are treated only in passing—so pressed is he to escape these facets of his life that he does not pay much attention to the fact that the neighborhood he so cherishes will within a few decades' time become more and more a stomping ground for the people he reviles

The narrator is ultimately unable to see the novel's two female protagonists as more than plot elements in the 'movie of his life': Vicky takes on the role of the romanticized dreamgirl who has come to liberate him from the drudgery of his existence, and Megan that of a mother, who provides emotional support in his time of need—and whose own needs and feelings the narrator repeatedly forgets—after standing her up for lunch for the nth time "[s]he looks up 'you're always sorry' [...] I have feelings too, you know" (123). Both women represent for the narrator an escape from the oppressive present: on the one hand, Megan's evocation of his mother provides some semblance of the comforts of the past, and on the other, Vicky offers a window onto a potential future—he inserts himself in fantasy into the image she provides him of her past: "[y]ou see yourself watching from the bluff, through a time warp, saying: *Someday I will meet this girl*" (90). The simplification of these two individuals[36] into two-dimensional figures in the movie of the narrator's life is a reflection of the capitalistic conception of gender which he criticizes: despite his indictment of the commodification of women: "[a]bove Forty-second they sell women without clothes and below they sell clothes with women" (83)—comparing the role of women in the fashion industry and high society to prostitution and referencing the reduction under capitalism of women's bodies to means of (re)production—he nonetheless is unable to break from this mindset, assigning the novel's principal female characters to symbolic values, whose only relevance as characters is their relation to the men in their lives, be it husband, son, or employee.[37]

Regardless of the narrator's critique of the social space he describes in the novel and his desire for a more 'wholesome' experience of New York, his engagement with the urban space he traverses is revelatory of the exploitative

[36] And indeed, these characters are visible as fully-formed individuals despite the narrator's skewed image of them.

[37] Clara Tillinghast, the narrator's manager at the 'famous magazine,' is noted to have no love lost for the narrator. This, he tells us, is due to her loneliness: "[i]t's not your fault that she never married. Since your own marital Pearl Harbor, you have understood that sleeping alone goes a long way toward explaining nastiness and erratic behavior" (19).

nature of gentrifiers' interaction with and production of social spaces. The vain search for the 'authentic' in the city, and the fetishization of its aura and what Augé and De Certeau refer to as *anthropological place* result in the transformation of urban space and communities into commodity. This is the ideological foundation upon which gentrification is built. It opens urban spaces for exploitation by developers and the imposition of hegemonic systems of value, and the effective transformation of those spaces. By borrowing the vocabulary of the non-place, this depiction of the city differs from typical representations of the city as a place of alienating anonymity and existential woes—which is an image as old as the industrial city itself—instead what occurs here is a disconnection of urban space from anthropological place: the cityspace of *Bright Lights, Big City* is one which has been separated from collective memory—urban space, relegated to the status of non-place, has been divorced from temporal continuity in the same sense that historical time does not exist in places of transit. The narrator, having been broken from his origins and repressed the memories of his mother, experiences time only in a 24-hour cycle, like a sequence of train departure and arrival times which resets at midnight. The story consists largely of blurry late nights turning into early mornings in nondescript clubs, days swallowed by hangovers, missed meals and alarms slept through. Contiguous time has lost its hold on the narrator, and what takes its place is the indistinguishable limbo-esque temporal cycle of the non-place. This is the telltale blandness of the postmodern city, where "[a]s cities become ever more similar, so people search ever harder for genuine urban distinction" (Savage 213). The image he evokes of the city is one in which he both searches for the authentic and displaces it simply by seeking it out. The narrator's exploitative attitudes to those around him—be it the women in his life whom he takes for granted, the city he inhabits, his family and peers, or the many victims of the cocaine trade—persist in spite of his criticism of the late-capitalist city. Gentrifiers employ the toolkit of capital and vocabulary of non-place to impose hegemonic valuation systems on working-class urban space and reconfigure *lieux de memoire* and the anthropological place of the city as quantifiable commodity.

In this regard it is clear that the narrator misunderstands the nature of the social spaces he inhabits. He wrongly attributes the more reprehensible elements of

his lifestyle and the uglier side of the city to people around him, rather than understanding the gentrified, corporatized city as a result of the dictatorship of capital. He fails to see the city's fringe and working-class elements subsumption to the needs of the ruling class as a symptom of a larger problem, rather than as simply a problem in itself. This false consciousness, outwardly manifested as nostalgia, and coupled with his sometimes exploitative attitudes, does not lend itself favorably to the portrait made of the narrator's place in the city. By fetishizing the urban spaces of working people and socially excluded peoples (i.e. LGBT people, ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities, bohemians, and so on) as a commodity he can *use* to improve himself as a writer or change his lifestyle, he is effectively a member of the gentrifying class. As a result of this, his critique of society falls short of revealing the roots of the things he criticises (that is, capitalism).

This is typical of early gentrification in New York, and especially of the 1980s: the commodification of certain spaces by members of the ruling class seeking to live more 'authentic' lifestyles resulted in their moving to spaces they perceived as more organic, and chasing after areas with certain aurae that had not yet been suppressed. This marks a shift in trends which historically occurred in and after the 1980s, when the conspicuous-consumption lifestyle of previous decades slowly lost ground to trendier modes of urban living, which more and more masked their users' wealth, i.e. inconspicuous consumption. This included a strong focus on physical health (the health craze of the 1980s having sparked the organic food revolution which transformed the city's food-landscape, but more on this later) and on 'artisanal' goods, rather than the mass-produced. In the wake of this trend, mechanically mass-produced objects are now often made with a weathered or used appearance, an attempt to manufacture an *aura*. Among the best-known examples of this model is Pottery Barn, a retailer of high-end furnishings, which experienced a boom in the 1980s and 1990s. Their catalogue employs a carefully-curated vocabulary, designed to imitate a sense of *aura*, and is replete with words such as "distressed, antiqued, reclaimed," and so on. The objects they offer fetishistically replicate a rustic or working-class aesthetic, but through their luxury branding (and their astronomical

prices) are ideologically scrubbed of the 'impurity' of association with labor.[38] This is the same phenomenon which takes place in gentrified neighborhoods, whereby tenements are renovated and marketed as high-end housing for wealthy new arrivals.

This type of aesthetic and ideological mechanisms are largely absent from the works analyzed in the following chapter. Unlike *Bright Lights, Big City*, the protagonists of *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* are for the most part members of the groups whose spaces are subject to commodification and exploitation. They offer more of a perspective on the experiences of those affected by gentrification, although not one which is valid for all affected groups. But they present a diverse, multiethnic and multicultural Brooklyn, which finds itself under threat from the same trends enjoyed by *Bright Lights, Big City*'s narrator and his friends.

[38] Featuring, but not limited to, tables made from repurposed barn doors, cast iron fencing turned into frames for desks, and furniture 'artisanally' distressed by being beaten with an anchor chain.

III. *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*

> 'The whole neighborhood comes in here, it's a hangout. And it helps to keep the neighborhood together. Twenty blocks from here, twelve-year old kids are shooting each other for their sneakers. I mean, you close this store and it's one more nail in the coffin. You'll be helpin' [sic] to kill off this neighborhood' (*Blue in the Face* 00:46:10).

Smoke and *Blue in the Face* are centered on the same character: Auggie Wren (Harvey Keitel), the manager of the Brooklyn Cigar Company, a small shop on the corner of 16th Street and Prospect Park West. *Blue in the Face* developed from the shooting of *Smoke*: it is a series of vignettes, largely made up of unused material from *Smoke*, ad-libbed scenes, improvisations between actors, and snippets of interviews with assorted unnamed Brooklynites (and Lou Reed, playing himself). *Smoke*, on the other hand has a far more distinct story, and besides focusing on Auggie, follows the relationship between Paul Benjamin (William Hurt), a writer with some resemblance to Paul Auster (who co-wrote the script) and Thomas (Harold Perrineau), a youth from Boerum Hill. This chapter will focus mostly on *Blue in the Face*, but draw material from *Smoke* as well—the latter adds some nuance to those characters common to the two films, especially to Auggie. In any case, it should be noted that *Blue in the Face* is the more relevant of the two to this case study, due to the way in which gentrification figures in the film, which is far more central to the plot than it is in *Smoke*, which concerns itself less with this theme.

Before moving on to an analysis of the film's content, it is important to consider its form: it consists of several 'chapters', in turn composed of a sequence of vignettes and snippets of what appears to be television images (from the 1980s and 1990s) of the city as well as interviews with various individuals from Brooklyn. There are, moreover, several short snippets showing a diverse cast of individuals in traditional dress from various cultures offering the viewer facts and figures about Brooklyn, from population statistics to the number of potholes in Brooklyn.[39] The interviews usually are on the topic of the "Brooklyn attitude" and what makes the borough and its residents distinct, and many of their reflections—especially Lou

[39] Three million, two hundred sixty-eight thousand, one hundred and twenty-one, apparently.

Reed's—relate to their childhood experiences of the city. A consistent theme throughout the film (the momentum of which is only built by these scenes of reflection) is that of the changing city. Gentrification rears its head—but the topic's treatment is far from critical. It is present, but the film dances around the subject, and the future it envisions for the neighborhood in light of gentrification is rather optimistic.[40] For this reason it is rather emblematic of the optimistic political moment

of the mid to late 1990s: a period of *relative* peace and affluence, at least in the United States. Gentrification is never mentioned by name, but rather (and especially compellingly) is put into contrast with the previous changes which wracked the Borough: specifically the departure of the Brooklyn Dodgers, the baseball team which played at Ebbets field in 1957, as well as the disappearance of the foods of one's childhood, in the case of several characters in *Blue in the Face*, the American diner's take on Belgian Waffles.[41] It is here that nostalgia comes into play; gentrification is conflated with the disappearance of the city of one's youth: the

[40] Naturally in retrospect, given the extreme acceleration of gentrification in the 21st century on Park Slope, the neighborhood depicted in these films, this 'happy ending' is a rather bittersweet one. In the twenty-plus years since the films were made, the neighborhood has become almost unrecognizable.
[41] It is a point of contention in the film what makes a Belgian Belgian Waffle distinct from its cousin the American Belgian Waffle—though the consensus seems to be that it has to do, as is the case with many things American both good and bad, with a Hollywoodesque tendency towards the extravagant.

carefree days and pleasures now gone—or in Lou Reed's case, a miserable, unhappy childhood in Brooklyn, and the later realization that elsewhere was "infinitely worse."

Jackie Robinson & the Dodgers

In *Blue in the Face*'s very first scene the viewer is greeted with a cigar-chewing Lou Reed behind the smoke shop counter, explaining his reasons for staying in the city, where, as it turns out, he lives only out of habit. He further claims "I don't know very many people from New York who don't also say, 'but I'm leaving.' And I've been thinking of leaving for, uh, thirty-five years now. I'm almost ready" (*Blue in the Face* 00:01:21).[42] Besides setting the humorous tone characteristic of the film, this scene is also emblematic of *Blue in the Face*'s treatment of gentrification: instead of focusing on the people who arrive in a neighborhood, on the outcome of change, the viewer's attention is directed toward those who leave—on that which is changed. 'Leaving' is a central theme in the film, and that which is mourned in this film (as well as that which is lost when neighborhoods gentrify) is not destroyed, but scattered, displaced—whether that be the Dodgers leaving for Los Angeles, Belgian waffles and the tastes of one's childhood going out of style, the taste of cigarettes changing as one ages, or the possibility of a popular neighborhood shop being replaced by a health foods store. The Dodgers' departure from Brooklyn is cited by several characters in the film as the great trauma of their childhood—Lou Reed's take on it is that it is the reason Brooklynites are so cynical—and the loss of the sense of community which stemmed from the Dodgers' departure is especially underlined. Incidentally the borough owes this abandonment, at least in part, to Robert Moses, who refused to use eminent domain to sequester land for a new stadium in Brooklyn, and instead offered the future site of Shea stadium in Queens to the Dodgers' owner, who, due to his desire to be the sole owner and proprietor of the team and its revenue stream, decided to move to Los Angeles instead.[43] The ghost of Jackie

[42] All further timestamped citations in this chapter refer to *Blue in the Face*, except when otherwise indicated (e.g. for *Smoke*).

[43] This was not because of any humanitarian or otherwise noble instinct on Moses's behalf, since he intended to seize the properties in question (near the Brooklyn rail yard) regardless to build a new highway, but rather was due to a desire for the city to own a stake in the wildly financially successful

Robinson chalks the reason for the move up to “dollars and cents” (00:48:09), but more on this later.

The baseball team’s departure is woven into the film and recurs at several key points, and through the thematization of the Dodgers’ departure from Brooklyn, gentrification is indirectly represented as a traumatic event. This theme first appears in the second snippet of the Reed interview: “there was probably a childhood trauma that I had other than the Dodgers leaving Brooklyn, which if you think about it is a reason why some of us are imbued with a cynicism that we never recovered from” (00:28:52). This is repeated at several points throughout the film—once in an interview with an unnamed Brooklynite and again by Vinnie (Victor Argo), the proprietor of the Brooklyn Cigar Company. The Dodgers fandom is not depicted simply as a pastime or childhood fancy—rather they are characterized as part of the living, beating heart of Brooklyn, an integral part of that which held the borough together as an urban *community*. The implication is that following the Dodgers’ departure, this integral fabric of the community suffered a blow. One of the unnamed Brooklynites describes the Dodgers’ community:

> “the ballpark was like a little old country club. The fans all knew each other, and the Dodgers’ Symphony was a group of workin’ [sic] guys that went out, played the trombone, the trumpet, the drums, and just generally made fools out of themselves, and everybody loved them and they didn’t care. The ballplayers all lived in Brooklyn! The weren’t all from Brooklyn but they lived on Bedford Avenue, and they used to rent apartments right around the stadium, right around Ebbets Field. Everybody knew ‘em in the neighborhood. ‘Hey, Duke Snider! Jackie! How’re you?’ You know, whatever. It was like a family thing. Now? No more baseball in Brooklyn” (00:43:00-00:43:30).

Whether or not this was actually the case is unimportant; the film puts special emphasis on the remembrance of the sense of community and family centered around the Dodgers, and though the team is gone, the memory of the unity it caused among Brooklynites persists—and most importantly, Brooklyn persists; after a scene showing newsreel footage of Ebbets Field being demolished and making way for apartments (00:52:24), the viewer is shown a montage of several grocers’ storefronts: Polish, Cantonese, kosher, Vietnamese, Indian markets, followed by a

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baseball franchise. Given Moses’s famous corruption (Caro 38), it is not hard to put two and two together.

shot of the plaque on the Ebbets Field Apartment complex, marking the site of the former stadium. As a figure representing Jackie Robinson's ghost puts it: "what happened there lives on in the mind. That's where it counts, Vinnie. Mind over matter. There are more important things in life than baseball. But Brooklyn looks good. More or less the same the last time I saw it" (00:48:30). The implication is that Brooklyn's strength is not what brings its residents together, rather that which marks their differences. Either way—the film places a heavy emphasis on the community of diversity as a defining feature of the city—and as the above snippet from the interviews indicates, the focus is put on the coming together and sharing of urban & representational space between working people of diverse origins and backgrounds.

Jackie Robinson is an important part of this thematization: he is mentioned several times throughout the film, and his 'ghost' visits Vinnie in a moment of crisis. Robinson is especially notable, not only in the history of Brooklyn but also in that of the United States, as he was the first black major-league baseball player (previously, black players could only play for segregated "Negro League" teams). Robinson's ghost states "I was the man that changed America, Vinnie. And I did it all right here, in Brooklyn. Oh they spat at me, cursed me. Made my life a never-ending hell. And I wasn't allowed to fight back. It takes its toll, being a martyr. [...] Things changed after

me. not just for black people, for white people too. After me, well, white people and black people never looked at each other in the same old way anymore. And it all happened right here, in Brooklyn." (00:47:39) In the film, Jackie Robinson appears in a dream-sequence like scene, where Vinnie is debating whether to sell the store. In the previous scene, he attempts to justify the sale to Auggie, who tries to dissuade him: "[Auggie:] 'After nineteen years you're just gonna walk away, I can't believe it.' [Vinnie:] 'It's dollars and cents'" (00:44:04). During Robinson's visitation, Vinnie asks the ball player "Yeah and then the moved the team away. Almost broke my heart. What'd they do a dumb thing like that for?" (00:48:09) to which Robinson replies "Dollars and cents, Vinnie'" (00:48:14).

Nickels and Dimes, Dollars and Cents

The symbolism in the Dodgers/gentrification parallel is very plainly spelled out for the viewer: what is at stake when Brooklyn faces gentrification is an erasure of the legacy of Robinson and of Brooklyn's communal histories and sense of family. The parallel between Vinnie's sale of the cigar shop and the Dodgers leaving town is especially strong given Auggie's insistence on the shop's role as a common space for the neighborhood's many residents: "everybody comes in here. I mean, not just the smokers. The kids come in, the schoolkids for their candy. Old Mrs. McKinna comes in for her soap opera magazines. Crazy Louie for his cough drops. Frank Diaz for his *El Diario*. Fat Mr. Chin for his crossword puzzles" (00:45:18). This scene continues on in the passage cited in this chapter's epigraph. It reads: "The whole neighborhood comes in here, it's a hangout. And it helps to keep the neighborhood together. Twenty blocks from here, twelve-year old kids are shooting each other for their sneakers. I mean, you close this store and it's one more nail in the coffin. You'll be helpin' [sic] to kill off this neighborhood" (00:46:10). Particular emphasis is put here on diversity once again by the variety of surnames Auggie lists. The threat of disappearance of this communal urban ecosystem is framed in the context of the nostalgic remembrance of the Dodgers and Jackie Robinson. In this way, the film makes a significant symbolic connection between the social bonds of shared participation in a social group—Dodgers fans—and the social practices (De Certeau)

which are rooted in the cigar shop. *Blue in the Face* situates the bonds of urban community in the social spaces of neighborhood stores and in the Dodgers fandom. The comparison is especially noteworthy due, on the one hand, to the legacy of racial inclusion and working-class "solidarity"[44] which, according to the film, characterized the Brooklyn community of the Dodgers. On the other hand, it is likewise potent in its representation of the space of the cigar shop, which as Auggie demonstrates (and as the film shows on several occasions by the shots of people entering and exiting the shop), is an auratic communal space that through the practice of its diverse users maintains the fabric of the neighborhood as an anthropological place.

Thus the threat to the Brooklyn Cigar Company depicts gentrification as a serious threat against that very diversity, by evoking the loss of the Dodgers and the legacy of unity and diversity by they are remembered. In this film, nostalgia—in the form of collective remembrance of the Dodgers' community—is mobilized prospectively[45] as a means of drawing attention to the phenomenon of gentrification. The film correctly points to greed as the underlying cause of both events—"dollars and cents"—the Dodgers moved to California for a more lucrative location, and gentrification is caused by predatory landlords' relentless pursuit of profit. Nostalgia as a result draws attention to the film's depiction of urban space and what stands to change in gentrification. This space is depicted in the film most notably in two ways: first, through the shots of the shop's exterior and the variety of people which frequent it. Also part of this is the series of "Brooklyn facts" shots, wherein the same people who enter and exit stand in front of the shop and, looking into the camera, list off various figures such as the number of mosques, synagogues, and churches, in Brooklyn, or various demographic facts and figures. The second space is depicted inside the smoke shop: a place of interaction, and as Auggie puts it, of a neighborhood coming together.

Incidentally, Lou Reed in his interviews shows some awareness of the practices which are productive of social space: "I couldn't have been unhappier in

[44] Not class solidarity but the fraternal feeling of association with a common in-group.
[45] In that the departure of the Dodgers caused damage to the sense of community in Brooklyn, so too is the threat to the shop a threat to the fabric of community in the neighborhood.

the eight years I spent growing up in Brooklyn. But I say that, uh, not having realized what it would then be like being on Long Island which was infinitely worse. [...] Long Island was terrible, absolutely terrible. At least in Brooklyn you could walk around" (00:29:37). The film clearly represents the space of walking the street as a central piece of the urban mosaic and that which makes the place particular. The street is especially stressed both in *Blue in the Face* and in *Smoke* as a central place of urban life. This is further visible in *Smoke*: Auggie explains his 'life's work' to the writer Paul Benjamin. Auggie's work consists of a book of photographs taken every day at eight AM for twelve years of the street corner where the Brooklyn Cigar Company is located. It is a portrait of a living neighborhood, more, as he points out, of the passersby and the changing fashions, changing street scenes, than of the shop itself. This ties back into Auggie's insistence in *Blue in the Face* that the neighborhood is defined not by its shops and public spaces but by the coming together of people and the sharing of diversity which can occur in those spaces.

Auggie's project of tracking the neighborhood's past becomes especially compelling in light of the nostalgic representation of pre-gentrification Brooklyn and the comparison of gentrification to the Dodgers leaving town. The threat of loss sparks the instinct of preservation, and the cultural effect of this is shown in the film to be important: Paul Benjamin, while looking over Auggie's photographs, falls upon a shot of his late wife, who died a bystander to a bank robbery. *Smoke* does not focus so much on the changing city, but the possibility of gentrification made evident in *Blue in the Face* nuances the plot of *Smoke* and the way it depicts the city. Auggie's project is a means of preserving his city, his neighborhood, and in doing so he manages to capture an accurate portrait of it and its inhabitants: one which triggers an emotional response in Paul. Interestingly, the sight of his wife in a street photograph in Auggie's album is a more intense experience for him than the photographs of her in his home. While it is impossible to know for certain the inner workings of a fictional character to whose mind the viewer has no access, it is not too much to imagine that the sight of her in the lived space of the street is more evocative of an earlier time in their shared lives than a photo of her suspended against the void of the plain background. This is the advantage of Auggie's photographic project: the photo he takes of her is not staged or composed, rather it

is organic and genuine in its representation of the street space and of its unintended subject. She holds an umbrella above her head and looks at the ground before her, presumably on her way to work (an everyday practice)—and image of the city as a product of everyday practice (and with a history traceable through time: an aura) is reflected in the two films' depictions of urban space. The city as shown in *Blue in the Face* and *Smoke* is *lived*, inhabited space, and as opposed to *Bright Lights, Big City*, it explores this by exploring the city's inhabitants. In these films the city is not a backdrop onto which the protagonists project their personal struggles and woes but rather the opposite: the city in all its complexity and multiplicity is reflected in its inhabitants.

Race Barriers in Brooklyn on the Eve of 9/11

Although they were made together the two films have different outlooks on race. *Blue in the Face* is more lighthearted and comic, and its take on race and class and the future of gentrification is likewise more optimistic. *Smoke*, on the other hand, is more complex, subtler, and with much clearer racial lines. While *Blue in the Face* stops short of depicting the city as a utopian space of racial cooperation, it does not do justice to the de facto racial segregation which is for the large part the reality in New York. Despite the city's diversity and cosmopolitan character, neighborhoods and social spheres are still largely racially delineated: hispanic, black, and white neighborhoods, schools, churches, and so on, are often separate, though not always. Outside cosmopolitan areas (usually defined by a strong shared non-racial or cultural identity, i.e. artists' districts or gay neighborhoods) and mixed areas, race is even today a dividing factor in urban demographics. This is of course reflected in the films, and the resulting depiction of race is one that is especially interesting considering the historical moment at which the films were made, or rather considering the direction that American history has taken in the following decades and its effects on the city.

In *Smoke*, Paul Benjamin befriends a young black man, Thomas Jefferson Cole,[46] after he saves Paul's life. Paul allows Thomas (who is still a teenager and

[46] Thomas introduces himself to Paul as 'Rashid' and to his estranged father, Cyrus, as 'Paul Benjamin.' The play of identity is a favorite of Auster's, as evidenced in *The New York Trilogy*, in

hard up for money) to stay in his apartment for a few nights and eventually lands him a job with Auggie at the Brooklyn Cigar Company. Thomas, of all this, says "people don't do that kind of thing in New York" (*Smoke* 00:08:06). A friendship develops between Thomas and Paul which is subtly characterized as representative to some extent of racial relations—and tensions—in Brooklyn on the eve of the third millennium. Thomas spends some time hiding at Paul's after bearing witness to a robbery in his neighborhood a mile or so away, to which Paul reacts with surprise, given the proximity of the hiding place; Thomas's reaction and the exchange which follows is perhaps the most important scene of the film: "it's not that far away, but it's another galaxy. Black is black and white is white. And never the twain shall meet. [Paul:] Looks like they've met in this apartment. [Thomas:] Let's not get *too* idealistic" (00:55:33).

After this scene the two smoke cigars and watch a Mets game on television. Despite the meaningful encounters which individuals can have in the shared space of the city (i.e. the friendship between Paul and Thomas), New York is represented as a profoundly divided city, a city of cities. However, as Thomas makes clear, the

which a central plot point is the confusion between the (possibly non-existant) detective Paul Auster and the fictionalized version of author Paul Auster—both characters in the flesh-and-blood Auster's work.

possibility for this to be changed exists, and it is precisely in the encounters with the narrativized “Other” such as the friendship he and Paul share that this is made possible: by citing the Rudyard Kipling poem the “Ballad of East and West” he plays on a verse by now idiomatic, “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” but leaves out the last two lines of the refrain ”But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!” Ironically Paul, the famous writer, seemingly misses this reference and the symbolism of Thomas’s words, although he comes to the conclusion that Thomas hints at by referencing the poem. The implication of this scene is that despite the long-standing de facto division of racial groups in the United States (with regards to which New York is unfortunately no exception), the city has unique potential as a space for engagement between disparate groups and communities which elsewhere in the country or further abreast in the world would never have a space, let alone a chance, to engage with each other. This is highly indicative of the hopeful political moment of the late 1990s in the U.S.—before 9/11, hurricane Katrina, the collapse of the housing bubble, and the threat of climate change—when, if only for a moment, lasting prosperity and peace were thought possible: the sharing of representational and urban spaces.

This image of friendships developing across cultural, racial, and ethnic lines (which is further developed in the two films via Auggie’s relationship with Violeta, a woman of unspecified Latin American origin), is precisely what is shown to be at stake in resistance to gentrification. The multiethnic neighborhood is shown as one of Brooklyn’s strengths, and one which is under siege and at risk from being dispersed to the winds of change. This represents a continuation of the processes just beginning to take root in the New York of *Bright Lights, Big City.* Ultimately however these two films have a rather optimistic outlook on the future of the city, and present gentrification as something which can be combatted by those whom it affects. This is a mood which vanishes by the time of *The 25th Hour*, as will be seen in the following chapter.

IV. The 25th Hour

> You're a New Yorker, that'll never change. You've got New York in your bones. Spend the rest of your life out west, but you're still a New Yorker (*The 25th Hour* 02:05:21)

In the opening scene of *The 25th Hour* (2002), the names of the cast and crew fade in and out, superimposed on the image of searchlights shining upwards and the beams of light they cast into the sky, filling the gap left by the fallen World Trade Center towers.[47] The ghostly towers of light and the open wound of ground zero are a recurrent motif which is woven into the film's story, the absence of the towers dominating the skyline and the atmosphere of the city. *The 25th Hour* is based on a novel (2001) of the same name by David Benioff. Given that it was written before the September 11th attacks, there is obviously no mention made of them or of any similar event in the novel. The film, however, plays on this motif extensively, and the mood which results—tense, confused, wounded, semi-apocalyptic—is a powerful addition to the film's story. The feeling produced by the events of the real-life attack and those lived by *The 25th Hour*'s protagonist, Montgomery "Monty" Brogan (Edward Norton), blend together. The film covers Monty's final twenty-four hours in New York before a seven-year stint in Otisville federal prison. The city's open wounds at ground zero and the deeply felt aftershocks of the attacks—a less visible kind of wound—are a fitting backdrop to the emotional and physical wounds of the cast of characters, although it is at times unclear which is the film's focus—the city or the individuals it follows. While the immediate post-9/11 city atmosphere is a fitting backdrop for the story's events, the opposite is also true; Monty's last 24 hours in New York are as telling about the city post-9/11 as the city is about him and his last day at home.

Much of the film is dedicated to Monty trying to determine who betrayed him, especially whether it was his girlfriend Naturelle (Rosario Dawson). Part of this self-interrogation and the plotline of his former drug-dealing is a sequence of scenes

[47] These lights are part of an art installation, "Tribute in Light," which now runs annually as a commemoration of the September 11th attacks.

(of questionable plot relevance) with “Uncle Nikolai” (Levan Uchaneishvili), a Brooklyn Russian mafia boss. There is moreover a second subplot concerning Monty’s childhood friend Jacob (Philip Seymour Hoffman), a high school English teacher with a crush on one of his students. These elements of the story are not of particular interest to the depiction of urban space in the film; rather the representations of the city and the social space of the city in the shadow of the 9/11 attacks are the noteworthy aspects of *The 25th Hour* for the purposes of this thesis. The conflation of Monty’s personal struggle with his rapidly approaching sentence and the recovering city are, on the surface, not overtly connected with gentrification. In fact, gentrification figures least in this film out of all the five works analyzed in this thesis. However, the film’s treatment of urban space with regards to the transformation of the space of New York due to the attack on the World Trade Center are extremely compelling with regards to the representation of gentrification. Moreover, an understanding of the mediatization of 9/11 is central to one of gentrification in the New York of the 21st century. September eleventh, 2001 has had a profound impact on the collective American psyche—due only in part to the attacks themselves. Because of this, the film’s representation of the city and the general post-9/11 mood has exceptional foresight into what would come in the nearly two decades since the attacks. What *The 25th Hour* shows as the uncertainty of the future, the great unknown which seven years of prison represents for Monty personally, is comparable to the attitude which has defined the zeitgeist of the post-9/11 United States, especially following the (misplaced) optimism of the 1990s: increased surveillance and privacy violations due largely to the Patriot Act,[48] police militarization, nonstop warfare in the Middle East and Central Asia, drone strikes and bombing causing ever-mounting civilian deaths and ‘collateral’ damage abroad, rising domestic unrest, mass deportations, the normalization and legitimization of ultranationalism and fascism, crumbling infrastructure and receding social safety

[48] Officially the USA PATRIOT (an absurd acronym standing for “**U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism”) Act of 2001, effectively gives many law enforcement agencies carte blanche in domestic espionage (wiretapping, warrantless searches, etc.) and indefinite internment of “suspected terrorists.”

nets, a larger prison population than any other country on the planet,[49] and ever-looming ecological collapse.

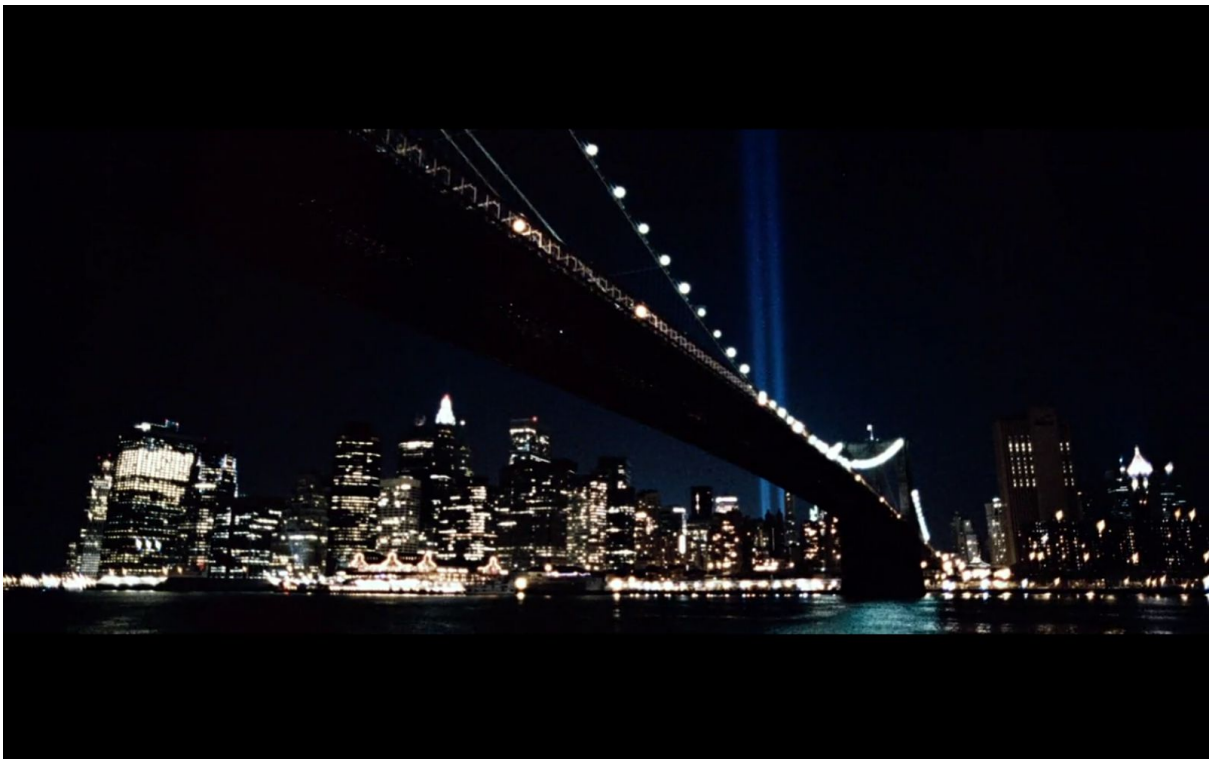
Ground Zero and Urban Wounds

The presence of the 9/11 attacks is a lingering, haunting one throughout the film. It occurs in photographs of dead firefighters in Monty's father's bar, in memorials and flower arrangements on the streets, in the omnipresence of the American flag (even more so than usually, which—granted—is quite a lot), and especially in the great gaping wound of ground zero, seen from the apartment window of Francis (another of Monty's childhood friends, a stockbroker) directly across the street from the site. The depiction of ground zero is twofold: on the one hand, it is empty space, space being cleared of debris and twisted metal by bulldozers; on the other hand it is the ghostly space of the "Tribute in Light" searchlights—two spectral beams of light which both occupy the space of the towers and do not—an overbearing almost-presence which haunts the city through illumination, by practicing the dead space of the fallen buildings, like "a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again" (Derrida 10). The physical wound runs parallel to the social wound, to the tentative attempts to process the loss of life and the destroyed spaces, the now-gone urban spaces. This presence haunts the city, and its telltale traces appear here and there in the film, peeking between the cracks in the story, surging up from the backgrounds of shots and the like—and like the towers of light, there and not there. They are the forcible intercession of urban aura, the history of an object or place overbearing its present.

Because of the attacks' absence from the novel and the film's timing (released just over a year after 9/11) it is especially difficult to ignore this presence, as it constitutes a deliberate (and powerful) decision by Spike Lee to adapt this film to the post-9/11 timeframe, rather than setting it before or in an alternate-universe type situation. Despite the fact that this setting adds much in the way of gravitas to the film's story and its protagonist's travails, it also makes the film profoundly *about* 9/11, although, as is the case with *Bright Lights, Big City* and gentrification, largely through allusion and comparison, rather than directly. The first indication of the attacks is in

[49] Both per capita, and total number of incarcerated persons.

the credits sequence, the second scene following a short one of Monty rescuing a dog with Kostya (Tony Siragusa), a Ukrainian mobster and Monty's (literal) partner-in-crime. As mentioned before, the names roll over images of the searchlights and of the beams among the lower Manhattan skyline seen from Brooklyn, accompanied by a (rather dramatic) piece of music, a leitmotif of ground zero heavy with the plaintive singing of a chorus. This music recurs at several points in the film and is usually associated with the towers' former site (and the attack) or a



thematization of "the city" (more on this conflation between the two later on). As Spike Lee's name rolls, the "Tribute in Light" beams fade out, and the gap in the skyline is empty once again.

The second occurrence of this theme is in the portraits of dead firefighters in the bar owned and run by Monty's father James. The many memorials and flags, bunches of flowers and portraits of the dead are scattered across the film, often half-hidden or seen in passing behind the protagonists in the street, but obtrusive and saturating every shot they are in with their presence, with the gaze of the dead. This haunting presence persists even in those shots where memorials are nowhere to be seen, and this is partially what is responsible for the semi-apocalyptic mood of the film: everywhere the city is filled by the reminders not only of the dead but of the

change in the air, of Monty's insistence that going forward nothing will be the same, that "it's all over." The faces of the dead, as is the case with the towers of light, draw attention to the disappeared, the lost. As Derrida, referring to *Hamlet*, puts it in *Specters of Marx*, the ghosts of the dead impel the living. What exactly the dead firefighters' memorials and the red-white-and-blue bunting impels New Yorkers to is

another question entirely—and one which is not necessarily well-answered in *The 25th Hour*. In any case, given the historical moment at which the film is situated, it seems to beg the question of how wounded urban spaces commemorate loss—especially in the changing nature of the post-9/11 American city. In the above image, the memorial to fallen firefighters in a bar (James, Monty's father, is a former firefighter) seems to incorporate engagement with the legacy of the 9/11 attacks into the everyday practice of the city. In this scene, Monty and James eat and discuss the future as well as the men who are commemorated in the portraits on the wall. Part of the shared meaning-making for residents of the city is now the practice of the memory of 9/11 and its reshaping of the city's shared representative space.

The third and perhaps most dramatized appearance of the 9/11 theme is in the abovementioned scene when Jacob and Francis watch the former site of the towers being cleared. The two men look out the window at the open site, illuminated

from all sides by construction floodlights, the piles of wreckage by now mostly cleared away, revealing concrete foundations, half-demolished sub-basements, and the exposed rails of the PATH train. Their reflections look back at them in the glass, themselves a ghostly appearance in the presence of ground zero, the insecurity of the future. Francis mentions not wanting to leave even should more neighboring buildings be bombed and their conversation leads directly into how to approach Monty given his sentence.

In these scenes there are effectively three types of hauntings taking place: the dual presence and absence of the ghostly towers of light, the memorials (which in the weeks and months following the attacks became ubiquitous throughout the city) staring out at passersby, and the reflections of Francis and Jacob looking back on themselves, superimposed over the scarring wound at ground zero. The first two presences are lingering ones which haunt the whole movie, especially given Monty's worries for his future and the general attitude of uncertainty and insecurity which plagues all the film's characters. The second two are more contained: in this five-minute scene, the two discuss the future in the presence of the attack site and their reflections, speculating about the uncertainty of Monty's future and the changes faced by the city. However the most compelling part of this scene is the

superimposition of the reflected figures and ground zero, in the sense that these New Yorkers see themselves in the vast emptiness of the once-occupied space.

What relevance do these hauntings bear to gentrification? As mentioned, *The 25th Hour* does not outright mention gentrification, and indeed given the social climate of the city and the cast of characters it almost seems that the film occupies an alternate timeline where gentrification is not a concern. But its representations of space in the city and this fraught social climate are precisely what make it such a compelling object of analysis: the changing space of the city following the September eleventh attacks is profoundly implicated in the similar changes wrought by gentrification. Lee, who is one of the most outspoken anti-gentrification popular figures in New York at the present moment, often makes at least some reference to gentrification in his films—in *Do the Right Thing,* for example, this is visible in the scene where the unnamed character played by John Savage scuffs Buggin' Out's (Giancarlo Esposito) new sneaker.[50] But there is no such scene in *The 25th Hour*. However, the film is so concerned with the future in all its uncertainty and the concept of loss and disappearance, that all the things Monty (threatened as he is with seven years of prison) looks upon as constituent of 'his' city are depicted as themselves essentially under threat of disappearance. Rather than Monty being lost to the city, it is the city that is being lost. The ghostly presences in the city are clues to this (especially in light of the "fuck New York" monologue and all the parts and populations of the city that Monty enumerates): the spaces marked by 9/11 are the same spaces marked by gentrification, those which are represented in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*; it is in the bars and streets, on the murals and monuments, in the shared spaces of the city that meaning-making takes place. The haunted (or haunting) spaces, those which are marked by the lingering presence of the past, be it the former sites of destroyed buildings or populations displaced, are the loci of gentrification.

[50] In this scene, the white character scuffs the shoe of "Buggin' Out", who is black, which prompts the latter and his friends to interrogate the man as to what he is doing in this neighborhood. He replies that he has just bought a building and refuses to apologize for the sneaker incident, which nearly ends in a fight. The significance is clear: new arrivals, white and (as becomes clear in the interaction) well-educated, buy up land in black neighborhoods and literally step on the toes of the black residents. The man's justification for moving into this neighborhood is that "it's a free country."

The "Fuck New York" Monologue

The monologue opens with Monty staring into the mirror (onto which someone has written in permanent marker "fuck you!") of his father's bar, framed by NYPD and FDNY stickers, and one of the Twin Towers' silhouettes against the American flag. It is in this context, with the poignant reminder of the recent attack that Monty's reflection in the mirror launches into his diatribe: "Fuck you and this whole city and everyone in it" (00:37:08). He rails against—in chronological order—panhandlers, squeegee men, Sikhs, Pakistanis, taxi drivers, Chelsea gay men, Korean grocers, Brighton Beach Russians, Hasidim, Wall Street brokers, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans,

Bensonhurst Italians, rich Upper East Side wives, uptown black men, the corrupt police, the Catholic church, Jesus, Osama bin Laden, his friends Jacob and Francis, his girlfriend Naturelle, and his father James. He finishes off the rant (as the music rises) with "fuck this whole city and everyone in it. From the row houses of Astoria to the penthouses on Park Avenue. From the projects in the Bronx to the lofts in Soho. From the tenements in Alphabet City to the brownstones in Park Slope, to the split-levels in Staten Island. Let an earthquake crumble it. Let the fires rage. Let it burn to fucking ash. [...] No. No, Fuck you, Montgomery Brogan. You had it all and you threw it away." (00:37:10-00:42:08). It is the film's most powerful scene, due in

no small part to Norton's emphatic delivery of the lines, but also to the sequence of images which accompany it: of the groups he curses, some smiling, some threatening (especially the bat-wielding Bensonhurst Italians), some yelling on the phone, some quietly drinking their tea, some playing basketball. Many of them look directly into the camera as Monty hurls insults and slurs at them,[51] straight at Monty and at the viewer, and the entire scene has an overexposed, color-saturated tinge to it (in opposition to the relative darkness and moody lighting of the rest of the film). It is an intimate, literally glowing portrait of the city, and despite the vehemence and prejudice of Monty's words, it has profoundly hymnal qualities (aided by the crescendoing soundtrack), a sort of city symphony in spite of itself. Monty spits and gnashes his teeth but ultimately it is clear that all his rage and frustration is directed not at the city but at himself for having lost it, for having to leave New York behind. The monologue is at once a celebration and an indictment of, and an elegy to his native city—it is a cross-section of New York, frozen in time, furious at bin Laden and Enron and Bush and Cheney and the police and the church, and despite all its racial epithets and insults the visual portrait of each of the groups lambasted is relatively positive: smiling people in front of shops, children laughing and holding baseball gloves and basketballs, and sunny streets.

Monty invokes all these groups, all these places, his friends, his father, and Naturelle, in a nearly-frantic attempt to hold onto it all. It is at its core thoroughly nostalgic: on the eve of it all being taken from him, by clinging to the past he is holding onto the future he could have had, which is now cut off. This is essentially the same as what takes place when communities are subjected to gentrification, and what Mitja Velikonja highlights as being the driving force of nostalgia in post-socialist countries: not necessarily the loss of the past as it was, but the loss of the past's projects for the future—in the case of formerly socialist countries, of the utopian projects of the old regimes—in Monty's case, the loss of seven years of his life, of his future with Naturelle, of his city and community. Monty does not actually lose his family and friends (of course they can visit him in prison and promise to do so) but

[51] Including over forty uses of the word 'fuck' and its variations in five minutes, and a variety of other slurs and swear words, including a suggestion that Osama bin Laden "kiss his royal Irish ass," a reference to Mike Moran, an FDNY firefighter who made the same suggestion at a Madison Square Garden benefit concert.

the ability to build a shared space with them, and reap the benefits and joys of community, of shared anthropological place. What remains, like after neighborhoods gentrify, is the ghostly presence of a once-inhabited space, transformed by the loss of the old (be it the place's inhabitants or its physical buildings) into something different and new—but the presence of the vanished lingers in these haunted places, compelling the living or those who remain to bear witness to the disappearing or disappeared city, rewritten urban spaces testifying to their dispersed aurae.

The film's comparison of 9/11 with gentrification is established through gentrification's effective omission from the film. It is, as is the case with the Twin Towers, present in its utter absence: since it is through the commemoration of the 9/11 dead that the legacy of gentrification is reinforced in New York, through a prioritization in the memorialization of deaths which are considered to be more important. Schulman explains the mobilization of 9/11 symbolism as a final solidification of gentrification (especially with regards to grief in the face of the immense death toll of the AIDS epidemic,[52] theretofore not ignored so much as erased):

> [i]t is the centerpiece of supremacy ideology, the idea that [...] one person deserves representation that the other cannot be allowed to access. That one person's death is negligible if he or she was poor, a person of color, a homosexual living in a state of oppositional sexual disobedience, while another death matters because that person was a trader, cop, or office worker presumed to be performing the job of Capital (Schulman 46-47).

Monty's monologue invokes all the things he stands to lose when he loses the city: the groups and individuals which make up the mosaic of his personal New York—this much is clear in his final rejection of all the vitriol and hatred in the monologue when he responds to his reflection in the mirror—and it is here that the comparison to gentrification becomes apparent. Moreover the nearly-unspoken comparison to 9/11 implies an *attack*—a theme which is brought up in other works and talks by Spike Lee (Blake 215-217)—which is certainly in line with Schulman's view of the matter.

[52] Schulman cites 81 542 New Yorkers dead of AIDS as of 16/08/2008 (Schulman 46).

Race and Class After 9/11

The monologue leads to an important question with regards to this film, 9/11 and gentrification—the representation of race and of class in the film's image of the post-9/11 city. Monty's vicious stream of anger and intolerance (whether or not it is deeply felt by him or simply a symptom of his self-disgust for having become greedy) is unfortunately representative of the hysteria which has dominated American culture and politics since September 2001. In any case, *The 25th Hour* depicts a city which is extremely racially stratified, not only overtly in its depictions of relations between individuals of different backgrounds but also in the references it makes. Monty in his monologue says "[f]uck the uptown brothers [...] they wanna turn around and blame everything on the white man. Slavery ended 137 years ago. Move the fuck on! Fuck the corrupt cops with their anus-violating plungers and their 41 shots, standing behind a blue wall of silence. You betray our trust" (00:39:31).

I will return to the juxtaposition of Monty's apparent criticism of black men and anti-police anger; here Monty refers to two famous, recent cases of police brutality in New York: the first is the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo (a recent arrival to New York from Guinea), when police officers in the Bronx fired 41 shots at the unarmed

Diallo in the entranceway of his apartment building. All four officers were acquitted on all charges. The second is not a single incident but rather a string of incidents, most famously the brutal assault of Abner Louima, a Haitian man who in 1997 was famously, beaten viciously and sodomized with a broomstick or plunger handle (in the following weeks the accused officers were nicknamed the "Plunger Cops" by protesting New Yorkers) while being held in NYPD custody.[53] One of the officers involved was sentenced to 30 years in prison although three others were found not guilty.

The clearly visible directorial choices made in this scene—by Spike Lee, who is an outspoken critic of police brutality (which in the United States, disproportionately targets people of color, especially black men)—highlight the place of race in 21st century New York and the United States as a whole. The dissonance in imagery which support, on the one hand, Monty's attacks on particular ethnic or racial groups and, on the other, groups such as the police, large exploitative corporations, or the church, is indicative of Lee's perspective shining through: in spite of Monty's apparent anger towards black men, Koreans, Puerto Ricans, Sikhs, Pakistanis, etc., all these groups are shown smiling into the camera, laughing, celebrating, playing games together, etc. In contrast, the police are shown (as in the image above) sallow-faced and leering, with sinister grins and malevolent eyes. The same goes for the representation of the stockbrokers, who are shown gel-haired and shouting, cold and distant, not looking at one another or the viewer but with downcast eyes as they bark into their cellphones' mouthpieces. They are described as "finding new ways to rob hard-working people blind" (00:38:39). Monty moreover mentions the names of several companies which in the early 2000s were caught up in fraud and corruption scandals (i.e. Enron). In any case, the immediate follow-up of the line (about black men blaming 'the white man' for their woes and how slavery is long-gone) with the snide faces of these two police officers and with Monty's reference to widespread police violence is clearly a connection to the actual problems faced by minority groups (and especially black people) in the United

[53] Further incidents include the 2008 arrest of Michael Mineo, who was allegedly pinned to the ground in a subway station in Brooklyn and sodomized with a police baton by several officers, all of whom were found not guilty.

States. The association of slavery with the memory of two black men's brutal assault and murder at the hands of police makes it very clear that although chattel slavery has ended, its legacy is far from gone, and that this is a very real part of living in New York. Moreover this hearkens back to Schulman's point about which deaths and which communities' losses are valorized and institutionally memorialized. While those dead in the service of Capital (Schulman 47) are commemorated by the city and the nation at large, the death and the assault of Diallo and Louima respectively, as well as the deaths of the many more people of color subjected to systemic state violence or their displacement by gentrification, are exclusion from official narratives of mourning: they are subjected to smear campaigns by police departments, their assailants and murderers—who usually remain on the government payroll—are often acquitted, and no memorials are built in their names.[54]

Furthermore, beyond highlighting police brutality, the monologue draws attention to the rising islamophobia (and general xenophobia) which has characterized the post-9/11 political moment in the United States: "Fuck the Sikhs and the Pakistanis bombing down the avenues in decrepit cabs, curry steaming outta [sic] their pores, stinking up my day. Terrorists in fucking training. Slow the fuck down!" (00:37:23). Not knowing or caring that Sikhs are not Muslim, applying the label terrorist as if both groups (or any cultural, religious, or ethnic group as a whole) were responsible for the attacks, Monty's vitriolic insults are emblematic of the mood of much of the American populace. But again, the images paired with the monologue negate this: the men shown are well-dressed and smiling, holding cups of coffee, standing in front of clean yellow cabs, one of which is emblazoned with a flashy sticker with loud red-white-and-blue lettering: "I'm a Sikh and an American."

Finally, in the last scenes of the film, Monty leaves New York in the passenger seat of his father's car, covered in wounds of his own (having asked Francis to "make him ugly" in order to reduce his chances of being assaulted in prison). As he looks out the window, his last glimpses of New York are not the skyline, the Brooklyn Bridge, ground zero, or Times Square. Instead, he sees the same smiling faces that

[54] If memorials are built, it is usually unofficially or illegally so, and erected by the victims' communities. For example, the makeshift memorial to Eric Garner on the spot in Staten Island where he was choked to death by police officers in 2014.

he had railed at in the monologue (accompanied, it should be noted, by the same musical motif): he sees the Korean grocers, holding fruits and flowers, the Pakistani cab driver, nodding approvingly, his hands on the steering wheel, the black basketball players outside a Harlem food market. This is a confirmation once again of what makes the space of New York unique and compelling, as well as establishing what stands to be lost. It is a valorization of the city not solely as a playground for stockbrokers and the like, as a site of mourning those whose mourning

the state sanctions and monumentalizes, but rather a cosmopolitan space inhabited by many groups and communities, whose own meaning-making and interaction are the basis for the city's existence as, at its core, a shared and procedurally remembered and produced space. As a result of this the representation of the city shows it as being in a precarious balance between ethnic/racial strife and solidarity: the things which make the city a unique and compelling place are at risk of disappearance—this is represented by Monty's nostalgic concern with the parts of the city he holds dear—and his seeming rejection in the monologue of all this. The utopian element of the film's nostalgic discourse occurs just after the scene passing by the city's smiling faces. Monty's father offers to take him westward, out to some small town in the desert, where he can start a new life, away from prison and the city

he is losing, a flight from the doomed city, but ultimately he does not answer, and the two continue driving northward to the Otisville federal prison. The parallel with American westward expansion—and its utopian discourse of Manifest Destiny and the American Dream—is palpable: as the flag on his car waves in the desert wind, James tells Monty "these towns out in the desert, you know why they got there? People wanted to get away from somewhere else. The desert's for starting over" (02:02:20).

However Monty chooses not to flee, and the film ends with he and his father making their way north. Monty and New York (this is to say, the narrativized conceptualization of the city as a whole that is presented in the film) are symbolically conflated: Monty is depicted as representative of the city in the post-9/11 era and on the verge of intense social change, due in part to global politics but largely to gentrification. Just as is the case in changing urban spaces due to development for higher-income residents, the city's future has been compromised by the quest for profit, much as Monty has lost his future due to his greed. The city, wounded in the 9/11 attacks, reflects on the loss of its potential futures, and in this case, is embodied by Monty,[55] who, in his frustration and pain, lashes out against the very things that he celebrates in life. Nostalgia is, in *The 25th Hour*, profoundly and earnestly concerned with the city that is to come, and underlines this by depicting the city that is disappearing. Since the film is not ostensibly about gentrification, it makes reference to gentrification through subtle allusion and comparison, but the underlying theme is an omnipresent current which is a lingering force among the other haunting presences which make the film such a compelling representation of the city. Like the specters of the dead, the specter of gentrification fills the social spaces of New York with its imposing absences, the haunting traces of formerly-occupied spaces compelling the city's residents to remember. These haunting aspects of the film are carried on in *10:04*, which epitomizes the post-9/11 period, eerily foreshadowed by *The 25th Hour*.

[55] Monty and New York are frequently described with the same kind of language, replete with characterizations as "tough" and "bouncing back", one on the verge of a prison sentence and the other reeling from the largest attack in its history.

V. *10:04*

> Another historic storm had failed to arrive [...] Except it had arrived, just not for us. Subway and traffic tunnels in lower Manhattan had filled with water [...] Hospitals were being evacuated after backup generators failed; newborn babies and patients recovering from heart surgery were [...] placed in ambulances that rushed uptown, where the storm had never happened. Houses up and down the coast had been obliterated, flooded, soon a neighborhood in Queens would burn. Emergency workers were fishing out the bodies of those who had drowned during the surge; who knows how many of the homeless had perished (Lerner, 2014, 231)

As in *Bright Lights, Big City*, although in contrast to Ben Lerner's first novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*, *10:04*'s narrator is ostensibly nameless. However, in this case the narrator is a fictionalized version of the author himself.[56] The novel follows the narrator Ben through the act of writing the novel. It is set largely in New York—the "sinking city" (Lerner, 2014, 4)—but also briefly in Marfa, Texas, and most importantly, it is set in several overlapping or parallel worlds, all sharing a common representational space: part of what makes *10:04* such a compelling work of fiction is the play that Lerner engages in with the various planes of fiction which are open to the reader, and which often interact with each other. There is, most immediately, the semi-fictional world if *10:04*, in which Ben Lerner narrates writing *10:04*, with fictionalized events and plot points, "a work that, like a poem, is neither fiction nor nonfiction, but a flickering between them" (195). This plane of fiction makes reference to events in the non-fictional world, such as the publication of *Leaving the Atocha Station*.[57] The second layer of fiction is in the stories and poems written by *10:04*'s narrator-Lerner, which take place (like *10:04*) in a semi-fictional world based on the experiences of their author, although with key differences and artistic liberties

[56] Certainly it could be argued that McInerney's protagonist is likewise partially based on McInerney's own experiences working at the *New Yorker* and living in the city, but this is another question entirely. Lerner makes explicit the fact that this narrator is based on himself, although the narrator is never called by name, and has several defining characteristics which make it clear that he and Lerner are not *quite* the same person.

[57] Which is mentioned several times though as with the narrator, never by name. It is however clear in the narrator Lerner's description of 'his first novel' as a work about a fictionalized version of himself set in Madrid (where the real Lerner spent a year on a Fulbright scholarship), that he means *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Being confused with the narrator of his first novel is a worry of the narrator of his second novel.

taken. Finally, there is a last layer within these stories and poems (since their narrator is a fictional writer, based on a fictional writer, based on a fictional writer based on a non-fictional writer), and which is only fleetingly addressed.[58] In this layer the narrator (the writer at the deepest circle of Lerner's metafiction) attempts to falsify his e-mail correspondences to famous writers in an attempt to sell them to a university archive, and creates a whole fictional world filled with fictionalized versions of writers who corresponded with him and with each other—into which fortunately Lerner does not delve, for fear perhaps of venturing too deep into the layered funnel of his metafictional worlds and emerging back into his own—our own—universe.

10:04 is a complex and multilayered novel, not simply due to its self-referential and meta-fictional structures, but also due to its intricate web of cultural, historical, literary, or scientific references to the world it inhabits.[59] It draws on Lerner's clearly extensive knowledge of American poetry, and often weaves this semi-unobtrusively into the narrative: e.g. frequent mentions of octopuses' proprioception (or lack thereof), a reference to Charles Olson's essays and poems on proprioception, or mentions of the ghostly presence of Robert Creeley in Marfa. In any case, what is especially compelling in the novel are the narrator's observations of the city he lives in, his ultra-gentrified neighborhood of Boerum Hill, the consistent "unseasonable warmth," and the looming threat of global warming. The novel is filled with the narrator's considerations on his social position and place in the city of the twenty-first century: facing problems such as his complicity in gentrification and in the apparatus of American late empire and global capitalism, the rising oceans and heating atmosphere, the inevitability of droughts and wars and famines increasing as resources become ever scarcer and the climate sours. Throughout it all, the narrator struggles to justify to himself his lifestyle and his writing (any and all doubts worsened by his many anxieties and insecurities). Simultaneously he criticizes and revels in the luxuries and the way of life of his milieu; like McInerney's narrator both a part of and apart from his society—and this makes for an extremely appealing

[58] I had the pleasure of attending a talk by Lerner in Amsterdam in 2017 and can confirm he is largely real, or at least appeared to be so.
[59] Moreover there is a complex system of recurring themes and subtle details, due to which the entertainment value of the novel appreciates with each re-reading.

portrait of the gentrified city "into the future, a future I increasingly imagined as underwater" (40).

Gentrification and Climate Change

There are a number of important themes which run throughout the novel and tie its narrative and its more poetic or introspective passages together. There is an important thematization of time—specifically how it collapses and, in the narrator's case, how it can be experienced simultaneously and nonlinearly. There also are several historical events which play into this, such as the Challenger disaster, and finally also themes of (social) proprioception and navigating society. Some of the novel's persistent themes I will not treat in this chapter (there are too many to them all justice), but the two to which special attention must be paid are those of gentrification and climate change. The former is a strong consideration in Lerner's prose writing,[60] and the latter is of special interest here because of the overlap between gentrification and the effects of global warming—not only in *10:04* but in the non-fictional city as well. The events of *10:04* span the period of time between just before Hurricane Irene's landfall (2011) and just after Hurricane Sandy's (2012). The second of these two storms cause large-scale destruction in New York's coastal and low-lying neighborhoods, as well as widespread flooding in tunnels and subways across the city (and further damage along much of the Northeast coast and into the mainland). The conflation of gentrification (or rather of wealth inequality in cities, the phenomenon of which gentrification is both a symptom and a cause) with ecological crises has been a prevalent discourse in the United States since the botched response to Hurricane Katrina: wealthy neighborhoods in New Orleans were largely spared damage due to being higher above ground (and received preferential relief treatment), whereas disaster relief to poor (and *especially* black) neighborhoods was anything but readily forthcoming. In any case, in *10:04*, the two issues are depicted as problems in the same vein: "I did not say that our society could not, in its present form, go on, or that I believed the storms were in part man-made" (220).

[60] While gentrification is not explicitly discussed in *Leaving the Atocha Station*, Lerner frequently reflects on the sociopolitical implications of his presence in Madrid (and his relation to Spanish people and their culture) as an unwilling representative of the American imperial hegemon, and there are many intertextual parallels between this and his reflections on gentrification in *10:04*.

The novel effectively begins and ends with the two storms, and the presence of climate change, expedited by manmade pollution, is a looming one throughout: the whether is almost insistently qualified as "unseasonably warm" or "unseasonable warmth" (1, 32, 63, 66, 107, 164, 231, etc), and the narrator makes several references to the New York of the future being underwater (40, 132, 216). The uncontrollable heating of the planet is a constantly felt presence (a haunting one, not quite unlike the ghosts of *Blue in the Face* and *The 25th Hour*). The treatment of ecological collapse in *10:04* borders on the apocalyptic: its protagonist is rather doom-and-gloom on the subject and it is an issue that overshadows all his other worries and decision: his writing process, his decision with his best friend Alex to bring a child into the world, and most notably, his social and economic role in the city, i.e., his role played as a gentrifier in a gentrifying land.

In the novel's final storm scene, the inequality of which communities are affected is made especially clear:

> we went to the co-op and bought food to donate—there was a relay set up between the co-op and the Rockaways, in part facilitated by "my" students. We talked constantly about the urgency of the situation, but were still unable to feel it, as the festive atmosphere in the higher-elevation areas of Brooklyn recalled a snow day: parents and kids staying home from work and school, playing in the park; the only visible damage within six blocks of us was a large tree that had crushed an empty car. There were no shortages of food or water in the local stores; the restaurants were full (231).

The "co-op" referenced is the Park Slope Food Coop, of which the narrator is a member, and of whose others members he is extremely critical: "the co-op's population was largely made up of gentrifiers of one sort or another [...] you hurried to distinguish yourself from the zealots who, while probably holding investments in Monsanto or Archer Daniels Midland in their 401(k)'s, looked down with a mixture of pity and rage at those who'd shop at Union Market or Key Foods. Worse: *The New York Times* had run an exposé about certain members sending their nannies to do their shifts" (96).[61] The narrator correctly highlights the fact that it was not the poorest

[61] I will return to this passage later on. The Park Slope Food Coop is a notorious entity in its neighborhood, mercilessly mocked by some (in my own experience), not for its well-intended principles but for the general snootiness of its members, who can be identified by their bright reflective vests. Union Market is a high-end grocer (which targets a similar demographic) on the same street, and Key Foods an affordable supermarket that has been in the neighborhood for some 35 years (now targeted for development and scheduled to be demolished & replaced by high-rise condominiums).

neighborhoods of New York which bore the brunt of the storm—as a matter of fact quite the opposite. As was the case in the aftermath of Katrina nearly ten years earlier (although—and this cannot be overstated—the damage done by Hurricane Katrina to the city and people of New Orleans was and has been worse on all fronts), damages to wealthy central areas were quickly dealt with, but many working-class and geographically marginal areas remained ravaged for months: rubble uncleared, trees left fallen and decaying, frequent power and running water outages. As is the case with gentrification, the effects of climate change are felt first and foremost by the working class, and this is reflected in *10:04*: "[n]ormally the sonogram is conducted by a tech, not the doctor herself, but the tech, the doctor explains, lives in the Rockaways—or at least she did before the hurricane" (233). The hurricane makes explicit and visible the kind of disappearances which are likewise the product of gentrification. By explicitly setting the hurricane's aftermath in the gentrifying city (and not simply focusing on the 'snow day' atmosphere in certain neighborhoods), the disappearance of those affected gentrification is made more immediate and visible by that of those affected by the storms. This is especially true given the overlap between both groups. In this case, what has happened to the technician is unknown: is she dead or missing? Has her house been flooded, burnt down, or swept away? Just so, the question is never asked of where people displaced by gentrification go, and the narrator draws attention to this disappearance by setting against the unresolved disappearance of this invisible woman. In this scene, the just-kindled new life of the narrator's unborn child emerges from the destruction of the unnamed technician's neighborhood—and the narrator notes that "[a]s the doctor measures the diameter of the child's head, I can't avoid thinking of the baby octopuses" (ibid).

Besides the constant tugging thread of unseasonable warmth, the motif of octopuses is a persistent and often-recurring force; the narrator often compares himself to an octopus. This begins in the first scene and recurs occasionally in several scenes throughout the book: the narrator mentions here and again, most overtly in the scene of his first medical exam of the novel (6), at a gallery opening (29), at a later point in New York (156), and again in Marfa (192). In the opening passage of the novel, the narrator has just eaten baby octopus massaged to death

with his literary agent (having celebrated receiving an advance on *10:04*), and over the course of the next few pages, the line between octopus and narrator is frequently blurred: "It can taste what it touches, but has poor proprioception, the brain unable to determine the position of its body in the current, particularly my arms" (7). This comparison which is especially relevant to this narrator's personal experiences of the city due to the theme of proprioception upon which he frequently touches: the narrator "felt subject to a succession of images, sensations, memories, and affects that did not, properly speaking, belong to me: the ability to perceive polarized light; a conflation of taste and touch as salt was rubbed into the suction cups; a terror localized in my extremities, bypassing the brain completely" (1). He feels strong guilt at eating such a decadent and morally questionable meal. The comparison with the octopus, lacking a permanent sense of its body relative to its surroundings, is one which in this passage is framed by meetings with his agent, walks on the High Line.[62] This comparison establishes a theme of the narrator's self-professed lack of proprioception with regards to the society and mode of production in which he lives, and this returns again and again later in the novel. The narrator is unable to negotiate his social status and position against what he knows to be true about the effects of gentrification in the city, of conspicuous consumption on the climate. He is unable to situate himself within the representational space of gentrifiers. What is meant by 'social proprioception' is that the narrator—despite his frequent moments of self-awareness, despite the painful knowledge of his complicity in the economic phenomena he describes with growing horror and the fear he has for the future—is unable to pinpoint his own role in the web of gentrification, capitalism, climate change, and empire. The narrator is a figure profoundly split between feelings of disdain for—and belonging in—the world he inhabits.

The (Un)apologetic Gentrifier

10:04 is the only work of fiction analyzed in this thesis which actually uses the words "gentrification" and "gentrifiers." The aforementioned line about distinguishing oneself

[62] A park built on a defunct elevated railway on Manhattan's West Side, which has been frequently critiqued by its opponents as a playground for the gentrified neighborhood's wealthy residents and tourists.

from other gentrifiers (96) is a very ironic one, but a very important one. The passage in the Food Co-op offers a scathing analysis of the ideological mechanisms behind the self-justifications and reasonings of gentrifiers:

> a new biopolitical vocabulary for expressing racial and class anxiety: instead of claiming brown or black people were biologically inferior, you claimed they were—for reasons you sympathized with, reasons that weren't really their fault—compromised by the food and drink they ingested; all those artificial dyes had darkened them on the inside. Your child, who had never so much as sipped a high-fructose carbonated beverage containing phosphoric acid and E150d, was a more sensitive instrument: purer, smarter, free of violence. This way of thinking allowed one to deploy the vocabularies of sixties radicalism—ecological awareness, anticorporate agitation, etc.—in order to justify the reproduction of social inequality. It allowed you to redescribe caring for your own genetic material—feeding Lucas [the aforementioned "your child"] the latest in coagulated soy juice—as altruism: it's not just good for Lucas, it's good for the planet. But from those who out of ignorance or desperation have allowed their children's digestive tracts to know deep-fried, mechanically processed chicken, those who happen to be, in Brooklyn, disproportionately black and Latino, Lucas must be protected at whatever cost (98).

This is especially reflective of the doublespeak in the narratives which support real-life gentrification, both officially and unofficially: a neighborhood is neglected, so it must be redeveloped and renewed (which effectively erases the supposedly preserved neighborhood culture) in order to 'preserve' its culture.[63] It is very clear what kind of judgement Lerner's narrator is making here; he is very critical of the people who unknowingly perpetuate the power struggle of gentrification, especially those who do so under the pretenses of taking the moral high ground. More complicated, however, is his attitude towards individuals such as himself, who are complicit in gentrification but aware of their participation in it, as well as in the more harmful trends of global capitalism—this self-awareness is present here and there throughout the novel, but nowhere more so than in the passages where the narrator describes his presence in the city relative to less well-off others and working people. He attempts to negotiate his position in relation to his surroundings, and at times is

[63] Slavoj Žižek explores this ideological phenomenon in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), examining the way in which certain acts of consumption are narrativized as containing a prepackaged act of charity or altruism. Žižek uses the example of Starbucks coffee, which claims with each purchase of a coffee to support charities or sustainable development in the countries where its coffee suppliers are located, as a result of which the consumer is buying not only a commodity, but also—supposedly—a charitable act. In this way, ethical consumption pretends to justify itself, and it is upon the foundation of this mechanism that gentrification is perpetuated.

able to, insofar as the internal monologue he presents the reader is critical of his own role within gentrification. But a different portrait emerges from the locales he frequents, the businesses he patronizes, the people with whom he surrounds himself, and the lifestyle he leads.

This tendency is just short of hypocrisy: it is more of an inner struggle (not dissimilar to that experienced by the narrator of *Bright Lights, Big City*), a kind of moral dilemma on behalf of the gentrifier who recognizes the consequences of his patterns of consumption. In this way Lerner (the non-fictional author) draws attention less to the harmful elements and trends of gentrification than to those of the individual gentrifier. Whereas *Blue in the Face* and *Smoke* look more at the process of gentrification and focus on the plural communities which suffer from the process, *10:04* concentrates rather on the singular gentrifier, and the destructive economic trends in which gentrifiers and other urban elites are complicit. This is evident from the beginning of the novel—the narrator discussing eating octopus, "an animal that decorates its lair, has been observed at complicated play" (1), questioning the morality of eating animals which are intelligent enough to have aesthetic preferences—but throughout the book makes frequent, concrete references to gentrification and destructive trends. While briefly hosting a young man from the "Occupy Wall Street" protests, the narrator, cooking, muses "I was disturbed by the contradiction between my avowed political materialism and my inexperience with this brand of making, of *poesis*" (46). Cooking (in an interesting though likely coincidental reflection of *Bright Lights, Big City*) is depicted in this passage as something which is a profoundly communal act, especially in light of the narrator's view of himself (with regards to cooking) as someone who contributes nothing to his community; rather he wants to imagine himself as "a producer and not a consumer alone of those substances necessary for sustenance and growth within my immediate community" (ibid). The narrator views food as a community-building tool, and later describes the food politics of his community: "Brooklyn's boutique biopolitics, in which spending obscene sums and endless hours on stylized food preparation somehow enabled the conflation of self-care and political radicalism" (46-47). Following this line of thought on food as an object of production and consumption, the narrator broaches the topic of rearing a child for the first time; one of the central plot points of the novel is his

ethical dilemma as to whether or not to bring a child into a rapidly warming world, "to reproduce your own genetic material within some version of the bourgeois household" (47) and the morality thereof.

The narrator's internal drama is not limited to participation in or critique of the food politics of the urban elite of Brooklyn. He examines his role within the entirety of the "system of great majesty and murderous stupidity" (ibid). The narrator's failure to contribute anything to a community is a theme which recurs throughout the novel, playing in part on the narrator's desire to father a child and in part on his insecurities and feelings of isolation. Is this simply the crisis of a man in his early thirties, feeling the biological urge to reproduce and a classic case of urban alienation? The answer is somewhat complicated by the narrator's representations of the city and especially of *community*, which is often depicted as absent from certain spaces in the city, or represented in such a way as to appear morphed and alien. In any case, the presence of community is stressed:

> [o]nly an urban experience of the sublime was available to me because only then was the greatness beyond calculation of the intuition of community. Bundled debt, trace amounts of antidepressants in the municipal water, the vast arterial network of traffic, changing weather patterns of increasing severity [...] I resolved to become one of the artists who momentarily made bad forms of collectivity figures of its possibility, a proprioceptive flicker in advance of the communal body (108-109).

The narrator frequently employs quasi-academic language (or oftentimes, just dense sentence structure) to represent the space he inhabits. This blending of linguistic registers and normally disjunct representational spaces is part of the aforementioned play that he makes between fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry. In any case, the narrator here is referring indirectly to Benjamin, who is quoted in the novel's epigraph, and whose work Lerner personally admires.[64] Moreover within the novel there is a reproduction of Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint *Angelus Novus* (accompanied by a Benjamin quote) which Benjamin takes up as the figure of "the angel of history" in *On the Philosophy of History*. In referring to the urban sublime, the narrator touches on Benjamin's *aura* concept: "The notion of aura allowed Benjamin to strip the ideological and idealist elements of this romantic conception, which had the

[64] Lerner, Ben. "Gidslezing in de Rode Hoed." *De Gids* Lecture, 9 May 2017, de Rode Hoed, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

effect of fixing sublimity to specific objects transhistorically, through 'naturalising' them, and to allow 'sublimity' itself to be examined historically" (Savage 210). In paraphrasing Benjamin, the narrator here establishes the city's community as its auratic element, one which, as he makes clear, is increasingly under threat from climate change—he "imagined a future surge crashing over the iron guardrail" (Lerner, 2014, 108)—and by comparison (often also explicitly stated) from gentrification.

Benjamin's *aura* is even more explicitly mentioned much earlier in the novel—in the scene of the first great storm (19). The narrator and his friend Alex wander the aisles of a Whole Foods store on Union Square, which has been largely emptied by shoppers in anticipation of the hurricane. Due to this, the narrator experiences what he describes as the separation of an object from its commercial value, which make visible the underlying relations of production which go into its creation, and which normally are concealed: "The relative scarcity was strange to behold: in what were typically bright aisles of superabundance, there were now large empty spaces" (18), and later, the narrator, holding a jar of instant coffee, remarks that

> it was as if the social relations that produced the object in my hand had begun to glow within it as they were threatened, stirred inside their packaging, lending it a certain aura—the majesty and murderous stupidity of that organization of time and space and fuel and labor becoming visible in the commodity itself now that planes were grounded and highways were starting to close (ibid).

The narrator is here openly referring to Benjamin's aura—that which is non-reproducible in an object. This theme returns later in the "Institute for Totaled Art", where the narrator describes art that has been liberated from its value as a commodity due to its having been declared damaged for insurance purposes (legally worthless): the narrator refers to this separation of art from capital as "messianic" (134)—a reference again to the 'angel of history'—but also apocalyptic (133). What the narrator references here is essentially a de-gentrification of art. It is possible to read this within the logic of the place/non-place dialectic: the "totaling" of each artwork imbues it with a special aura, not only in the sense that its historical traceability is increased, but also in that it becomes divorced from the entire structure

of production and reproduction: since it is without value, it is un-reproducible. The same phenomenon occurs during the storm scenes: in the space of the supermarket in the first storm, characterized especially by the jar of instant coffee, and again in the second storm, during which the narrator and Alex wander the city and time warps (this is a recurring theme to which I will later return), the barriers between metafictions collapse. The hurricane-battered city is transformed into a liminal space, "the felt absence of the twin towers now difficult to distinguish from the invisible buildings. I had the sensation that if power were suddenly restored, the towers would be there, swaying a little" (237): split from its usual rhythm, the narrator depicts a city that is cast out of its time—not quite place or non-place.

As the narrator walks the city in the hours before the storm hits, he "moved to Fifth Avenue to avoid all the fencing and construction walkways where the new condos were going up on Fourth, 'the latest in urban living'" (221); gentrification is a constant and subtle undercurrent, separating his neighborhood from that of Roberto, the young Salvadoran boy he tutors, which "now seemed a country away" (146). He describes a series of bars and restaurants which epitomize the endeavor to achieve "genuine urban distinction" (Savage 213), a practiced sense of artificial and highly-curated authenticity in the homogenizing city: "[t]he carefully selected ephemera on the walls dated from before the Civil War; there seemed to be a competition among hip bars to see who could travel back in time the furthest. We sipped our drinks under Edison bulb sconces" (Lerner, 2014, 136-137). The differences between gentrified, gentrifying, and non-gentrified spaces are clearly demarcated, and the spaces representationally differentiated. Gentrified spaces are represented as having a calculated, constructed sense of authenticity, an approximation of urban *aura*. In these hip bars authenticity is manufactured through the presence of objects of authentic value; it is with clear irony that the narrator highlights the similarity between them all despite their efforts to distinguish themselves via the appropriation of items with perceived authenticity, i.e. with a clearly visible historical traceability.

Projecting into Several Futures

One of the most persistent themes in the novel is that of time, which functions somewhat differently within *10:04* than in the embodied, nonfictional universe. The narrator experiences the multiple metafictions within the novel as several possible futures (and by extension, several parallel presents); these metafictions or "versions of himself" are consistent currents which occasionally float to the surface narrative of the novel but otherwise are persistent presences underlying the text, dormant parallel worlds in which the novel's events and characters are ever so slightly more fictionalized. His description of what he will do in *10:04* as he narrates the novel's inception is "I'll project myself into several futures simultaneously" (4), and, as later becomes clear, into several pasts as well. Part of the collapse of time is connected to the ecological theme, underwater futures ever a looming implication in the novel's more apocalyptic passages. This is visible in certain sections, which draw on utopian nostalgia, a longing for a more innocent time when the extent of climate change was not yet known and different futures were open to the narrator and the human race as a whole, all now profoundly different. But it is especially connected to the different paths taken by the narrator, the author, and the various degrees of fictionalized selves which constitute the novel's cosmology, the multilayered and ever-diverging possibilities of different pasts and futures. An important element of this is the narrator's focus on personal remembrance and writing as methods of temporal engagement: in one instance, remembering an event means it never happened, and in another, writing an event transports its writer, makes the world ever so slightly different: "everything will be as it is now, just a little different."

The play of past and future is especially of interest given Lerner's affinity for the work of Walter Benjamin, and the depiction of the storm-affected city as a space separated from time. It is also compelling due to the way in which *10:04*'s narrator represents time in a manner which conforms with neither model of *place* put forth by Certeau and Augé: it is neither the organic rhythm of anthropological place, nor is it the cyclically structural and highly-regimented time of non-place. The novel's special temporal spaces exist neither in the flow of history per se, nor in the strict contractual nychthemeron of non-places (the cyclical 24-hour time which exists on repeat in non-places). This is due to the fracturing of their discrete timelines, tied together only

by their nominal overlap in the parallel space of the shared 'present,' that is to say of the common nonfictional lived elements shared by all versions of the author-narrator figure in all layers of fiction, nonfiction, and metafiction. The narrator is mentions being frequently confused with the narrator of his unnamed first novel (referencing *Leaving the Atocha Station*, Lerner's début novel, also based on a fictionalized version of Lerner's experiences, though in Spain), whereupon he is frequently asked which elements of the novel were autobiographical. It is more visible—as well as more elaborated—in the included short story "The Golden Vanity" which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 2012. This story, like the novel in which it is featured, plays upon the fictionalization of a real-life writer, and the confluence of several events: in *10:04* the author is diagnosed with Marfan, a rare genetic disorder localized, in his case, in the aortic valve of the heart, whereas in "The Golden Vanity" it is discovered that the narrator has a *possibly* benign mass in his sinus, revealed by a routine extraction of wisdom teeth—which itself is a theme referenced in the fictional world of *10:04,* as Alex has two of her wisdom teeth removed.

Thus begins a persistent series of intraplanar borrowings and fictionalizations, whereby the respective writers of each plane of Lerner's fiction fictionalize themselves into the narrators of their own works by borrowing elements from their lived worlds. *10:04*'s narrator plays with this phenomenon to create in these superimposed semifictions a series of worlds which are not quite parallel but rather intersect each other and occasionally collapse upon one another. It is for this reason that these stories are spatially extremely compelling: on the one hand they constitute textbook representations *of* space, but they also, on the other hand, uniquely occupy *representational* space as well. This is to say that they are "embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms" (Lefebvre 42), in the sense that they (the deeper layers of fiction in *10:04*) are 'authentic' representations of spaces. But they are also representational in that their primary function within the novel is not to complicate the plot or introduce character development. Rather they intervene in the symbolic within the novel's space, since what happens *within* the metafictions is irrelevant in terms of its bearing on the space of the novel's story, they instead function as powerful focal points of signification, highlighting the narrator's representations of time and spatial

dynamics as metafictionally multidirectional, as well as the intercession of possible futures (and disappearance of some others), hence the narrator's "projecting [him]self into several futures simultaneously" (Lerner, 2014, 4).

What then is the bearing of these complex spatial politics and superpositioned representational spaces on the aesthetic depiction of the gentrifying city? Lerner uses his narrator's self-projection and the multiplicity of the 'several futures' to highlight the uncertainty of the city's future in the face of gentrification and especially facing impending ecological collapse (which, as mentioned earlier, is thematically linked back to gentrification). Like in Monty's monologue in *The 25th Hour*, this draws on the sense of lost potential futures, a loss of the ability to grow and develop on one's own, as it were. This is most frequently embodied by the threat of rising water submerging the city, but it takes other forms, notably the fear Roberto (the narrator's tutee, who is undocumented) has of deportation. It is also present in the narrator's anxieties due to his heart condition, or Alex's fears for her mother, who is dying of cancer. All of these are moreover embodied in the narrator and Alex's ethical dilemma of bringing a child into a world which will be wracked by scarcity and warfare due to the hedonistic consumption of the narrator's peers. The representational space which the narrator mobilizes to highlight the diverging paths taken by these possible futures creates a kind of 'zero hour', the element of the nonfictional which is shared by all layers of fiction in the text.

As a result of all of this and the many more recurring themes which are woven into the text of the novel the novel is a story which takes place on the personal, the urban, and the global scales. This also takes place due to the short story and excerpts of poetry embedded into the novel. *10:04* is as much a novel about writing a novel as it is about navigating the ever more striating social space of the city, and about the last glory days of consumption and enjoying the fruits of global capitalism before ecological collapse. By superimposing these themes—and especially the concurrent semi-fictions and various versions of the narrator—the narrator's personal anxieties and self-consciousness take on a global scope: it seems to say that the novel of the 21st century (and indeed the citizen of the 21st century as well) cannot permit itself to be anything but critical of the space it inhabits, or at least to grapple with the immensity of the threat which faces the human race, and on the smaller

scale, the threats which face communities, neighborhoods, cities, and the individuals of which they consist.

Conclusion

It seems that with the passage of time and each successive representation of the city, with each passing era of its history and every great upheaval, New York's population of haunting figures of memory and ghosts increases, and it is not unforeseeable that in the coming era of ecological collapse and as many of the city's neighborhoods become gradually homogenized by gentrification, the city will consist more of specters, so haunted will its streets be by the impelling presence of the disappeared, the lingering faces and spaces of the past. These looming presences however require a space in which to live on, and generally the task of creating that space falls to those who represent the city: the past continues to be monumentally represented in the lived urban spaces which have not been razed or redeveloped beyond recognition, but for the large part it is in these representations of space that the city as it was is mediated and remembered. In this sense representations of space are important in that they confirm the existence of a city faced with drastic change or disappearance. Thus the importance of nostalgia, especially of the reflective kind: these works, by considering the disappearing city of the past, perform a type of criticism. In some cases it is bordering on the vengeful (for example in Monty's monologue in *The 25th Hour*). However in other cases it is thoughtful and reasonable, taking stock of the things which make the past a compelling object of reflection when considering the present situation. This is the case in *Blue in the Face*, for example. The film lightheartedly appraises the positive elements of the disappearing city as it exists in the collective imaginary and remembrance of its residents. By doing so it is not an indictment or accusation of gentrification or the gentrifier, but rather one which seeks to tell a story, reflecting the way in which storytelling is for De Certeau an important practice in the production of of city space. Reflection on gentrification also takes other, less nostalgic forms, as is the case in *10:04*. In this case the kind of reflection deployed by the narrator is a nostalgia for the era before the inevitability of climate change was widely known. All the representations of the city analyzed by this thesis are concerned with the city's future. Nostalgia that is applied prospectively reflects on the uncertainty of the future

by describing the past. The consideration of what is good in the disappeared is by its nature a critique of what is bad in the persistent.

This thesis's analysis however has its flaws; the primary texts chosen for this thesis are extremely male-dominated ones, not only in terms of their authors and directors but also in the characters they depict. As mentioned earlier, it would very much strengthen this analysis to further explore other representations of the city, which concern themselves equally with the experiences of people other than heterosexual white males or people from middle-class backgrounds. For this reason, and for the added benefit of diversifying the types of representations, it would be interesting to add some television series to this thesis's corpus, in particular the aforementioned three series: *Girls, Broad City*, and *Sex and the City*. Each of these three series depict a very different subset of city residents, although in all three cases, demographically speaking they tend to be very white and *very* middle- or upper-class. There is a genuine lack of prioritization of the voices of people affected by gentrification in the representative media. This is in no small part due to extreme inequality in access to education and to the resources required to publish literature or make films. Although this is perhaps also due to the fact that people affected by gentrification work much more and commute much further, simply to survive in the overpriced city, than those by whom they are priced out, and as a result have far less time to write a novel. For those without only a tenuous ability to pay rent, writing a book or giving voice to one's experiences is perhaps little more than yet another unaffordable luxury; and more often than not, it seems that to make art in the New York of the 21st century one requires a "'strong six figure' advance" (Lerner, 2014, 4), [65] or a 'small loan of a million dollars.'

The type of stories manifested in this corpus more often than not focus less on communities than on individuals, and while this is perhaps simply a byproduct of the type of stories prioritized by films and novels, which tend to focus on individual characters more than large groups, it is hardly representative of the impact of gentrification on communities; then again, this not being an inquiry into the city-space from the perspective of sociology or urban geography, it is not this thesis'

[65] The amount of money *10:04*'s narrator receives in advance of the publication of *10:04*. The amount is never disclosed but the narrator frequently refers to this "strong six figure" sum.

intent to gauge this impact. Rather what has been at stake over the course of these past chapters is to determine some of the ways that the changing space of New York is represented in literature and film in the gentrifying, neoliberal city, and how forms of collective remembrance and meaning-making are mobilized in these representations. This kind of memory is produced first and foremost by the mediatization of historical fact and collective remembrance, but also through their inscription upon the physical space of the city (i.e. in monuments, buildings, and in the visual markers of a place's history). Works of fiction moreover play upon memorial schemata, both informing and being informed by patterns of remembrance. Thus shared memories are formed, and the spaces which they inhabit inscribed with the unique inheritance of collective remembrance. The type of space onto which memory is inscribed is transformed as the city is itself transformed by gentrification. Urban spaces unchanged by widespread gentrification, imbued with the auratic qualities of traceable history and continuity, occupy a more organically developing space than gentrified places, where the social spaces of neighborhoods are subsumed to contractual relationships and everyday practice dominated by hegemonic modes and relations of production.

The shift towards this kind of space—not quite what Augé refers to as *non-place* but with several central elements in common with that concept—is increasingly endemic not only in cities in the developed world but ever more in global cities of developing countries as well, as service economies blossom in urban centers and extreme wealth inequality (coupled with intense redevelopment) pushes poor residents into slums, into suburban isolation, or into shanty towns, much as was the case in the colonial city where settler enclaves were segregated and often walled off from the slums populated by autochthonous servants. Furthermore the city's neighborhoods constituted as *anthropological place*, are transformed and subsumed to the powers that be by the imposition of the rigid contractuality and strictness of spaces dominated by capital, sublimated as commodities in the service of the hegemon. In the case of New York this is both a consequence and a catalyst of globalization, of the corporatization of the city as the service and finance industries become ever larger, to the detriment of small neighborhoods and long-standing urban communities. The organic element of cities: their aurae, the traceable history

of a city inscribed on its physical place as much as in its social spaces, become commodities for purchase, the experience of a city mechanically reproducible, just as the city itself.

Each of the five works analyzed in this thesis says something different on this subject, and each one has a different outlook on the future of the gentrifying city: in *Bright Lights, Big City*, *Smoke*, and *Blue in the Face*, the vision of the city's future is hopeful, marked by a pre-millennial insouciance. The first seems to offer redemption to its protagonist, and the latter two claim that as long as we cling to our values—that which makes Brooklyn Brooklyn and always has—things won't be so bad. After 9/11 and in the age of austerity and climate change, the view of the future is somewhat more bleak: the city is haunted by spectres of the the disappeared, the palpable presence of the absent, and the ever-looming threat of storms and flooding on a biblical scale materialize and become a real threat. Throughout all of this the thread of gentrification ties each representation of the city to the next, sometimes barely visible but like the ghostly towers always present, even when not perceived. It is highlighted in these representations by nostalgia, that wistful yearning for the past, which takes a different form in each of these works: sometimes melancholy, sometimes angry, sometimes fearful. When depicting the uncertainty of the future these texts turn to the past to root themselves, and to perpetuate the auratic quality of the city, since it is by tracing its history and that of its inhabitants that the city that the a place or artwork is uniquely constituted, unreproducible.

Each of these works has its own, individual appeal in examining the gentrifying city. *Bright Lights, Big City* is set just over the cusp of gentrification, in a liminal city where the urban intelligentsia and élite is becoming a seemingly inescapable presence for the narrator, as in the background more and more of the city's spaces are transformed to meet the needs of this group. Just as in later texts food is an important theme which distinguishes between the two types of space: in *10:04* this is attributed to the act of giving to a community, sustaining one's peers. In *Smoke*, food solidifies the friendship between Paul and Thomas, and ultimately it is by breaking bread together that Thomas is reconciled with his father Cyrus. *Blue in the Face* refers repeatedly to Belgian waffles as an emblematic taste of one's childhood, and the food is used to represent the bygone Brooklyn of the past era as

a whole. *The 25th Hour* features several scenes of shared meals, but the most compelling depiction of food is in the departure scene, when Monty, staring out the window of his father's car, is met by the sight of the Korean grocers (mentioned earlier in his monologue), smilingly holding out fruit towards him. In the non-fictional gentrifying city, food is a fraught topic which often can serve as the linchpin of a neighborhood's transformation; this is what Lerner's narrator touches on in his description of "Brooklyn's boutique biopolitics" (46). Access to affordable food and the availability of 'specialty' ingredients (that is to say ingredients, used in certain cuisines, which are not typically found in standard American fare) are of special importance in communities at risk of being priced out due to gentrification.

It is through the disappearance of shops which provide affordable and culturally particular foodstuffs that gentrification is most effective in dispersing a community. It is not uncommon to find that grocers in a particular neighborhood have been replaced by overpriced organic markets and that shops carrying an array of, for example, Central American products have disappeared (or worse, that these same products are sold with flashier labels at thrice the price in boutique supermarkets), the only options to continue having access to the staples of one's diet are either to travel increasing distances to shop in other neighborhoods, or simply to leave and move elsewhere. This replacement of amenities is usually accompanied by the justification (as made visible in Lerner's narrator's critique of the Food Co-op) that the quality of organic foodstuffs is higher, that it is more ethically produced, that the workers producing it are more fairly compensated. These are admirable goals, but the fact of the matter is that these products are often affordable only to a select few, and that health food shops and organic grocers often harm working-class communities more than help. Shops change their business model to reflect the demands of more affluent customers which leaves lower-income people with fewer options and eventually at the mercy of predatory profiteers, who raise prices (knowing that wealthier groups can afford to pay), assuring that those without the ability to go elsewhere to acquire food are forced to meet every-increasing prices simply to sustain themselves and their families. Representations of these processes (as is the case in *10:04* and *Blue in the Face*) draw attention to the minutiae of

gentrification and as a result allow for broader popular engagement with phenomena which are de facto verboten in political discourse on the municipal and federal level.

There are naturally significant differences between each of these texts and the strategies they employ in representing the living city; this is evident both in the ways which they subtly invite the readers' or viewers' engagement with the narrative. In *Bright Lights, Big City,* the second-person narration impels the reader to enter the city conjured by its narrator. This has the effect of drawing the reader into the whirlwind lifestyle of the city's upper class as represented by the novel's unnamed narrator. From his perspective, with the added benefit of critical distance from the other side of the page, the reader is able to grapple both with the city's space and with the narrator's conceptions of it. This is dramatically different from the style of narration and representation which is used in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*. The latter is nominally narrated by Auggie (it is framed at the beginning and ending by his commentary, but only in those two places), but focuses its attentions on the city in a series of vignettes. This is similar to how *Smoke* depicts the city, although this is a more plot-driven depiction than *Blue in the Face* is. Because of the two films' focus on multiple characters' perspectives, it is possible to see it as a more representative film of the city's community, rather than as in *Bright Lights, Big City*, a narrow image of the city from a single perspective. *The 25th Hour* is not as complex in terms of perspectives or multiplicity of modes of address. However its gloom and semi-apocalyptic mood do an excellent job of drawing the viewer into Monty's personal drama and that of the city as a whole. Especially during the "fuck New York" monologue, where Monty's reflection yells as much at him as at the viewer. In this regard the film reflects fraught emotion and attitudes of its public, mirroring the popular discourse of jingoism and xenophobia in immediate post-9/11. Finally, *10:04* calls on its reader to engage in the play of metafiction and temporality, and by reflecting on the multiple possible futures and the collapse of barriers between past and present, offers a sobering reflection on the fate of the city face to gentrification and climate change.

The space of any large city is multitudinous, complex, and ever-changing. The nostalgia which is evident in the texts which make up this thesis's corpus is not necessarily one which is opposed to change (naturally it is different in each instance

of nostalgia across the corpus) but rather one which, fearful for the future of the communities represented, seeks to change the present, not necessarily seeking to reclaim the past, but rather staking a claim to the city space of the future. As a result of this, prospective nostalgia in representations of the city can allow marginalized people to assert their own right to the city (Lefebvre), a claim which is often invoked by gentrifiers seeking to justify their presence in the city spaces of marginalized groups. The texts analyzed in this thesis represent the city's spaces in such a way as to highlight the sense of loss which emerges from this: nostalgia both celebrates and mourns the idealized past, the city not as it was but as it is remembered. By focusing nostalgically on this past they implicitly critique the present as well as express concern for the future, and stress the potential futures from which communities are now cut off. Moreover, it is possible to trace through each representation of the city the two types of spaces which are typical of the gentrifying city. These two types borrow from Augé's conceptions of non-place and anthropological place, and represent first the organic spaces of everyday life, the spaces of users and producers, people engaging meaningfully with community and so on, and second the contractual, rigid spaces of colonized neighborhoods, where social space is reduced to a commodity, and auratic elements of the city co-opted and labelled as 'authentic' objects through which gentrifiers can culturally 'enrich' themselves without meaningful engagement or singular contact with the Other.

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