How To Create Ecstatic Space: Zones of Care in the Films *The Secret Garden* and *Amelie*, in the Video Game *Wrath of the White Witch*, and Beyond

In the past few chapters we have begun to broaden out from an analysis of our three aesthetic forms to start considering the viewer's own empathetic prejudices and stances as well as actual history and specific place of setting. Even in minor forays such as our discussions of *The Third Man* (Chap. 5) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Chap. 6) revealed a triangle of interaction of which the three points are the stories, the receivers of stories, and the real world. We have also suggested in a number of places that our three aesthetic forms might also be emotive stances towards the world, as frames of reception embedded in different political, social and ethical. We suggested that these forms also apply to political communication, existing in recruitment videos for military adventurism, and we have suggested that Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* has some character parallels with the addicts of FPS (first person shooter) video-games. And in Chaps. 9 and 10 we have also suggested there are possibly some detrimental social and political aspects to Dantean space.

But so far suggesting is all we have done: we have not made a real investigation into just how empathetically sphinctered such forms are, nor have we asked ourselves if these should be understood as Geertzian symbolic systems holding together some social and political communities[1] and constructing in/out groups. Nor have we asked ourselves how we might use these insights, whether there are innovative mixtures or

alternatives to these forms in our culture that we might further exploit in order to offer greater social possibilities and new forms of community. That is our goal now: in this chapter we build upon the insights of the *St. Teresa* statue by Bernini as we look for ways to go beyond these limited cultures. Hopefully, however utopian this might sound, as artists and theorists we can now look beyond the social alienations of Dantean characters to find a doorway for escaping the horizon of our own cultural Dantean space.

Heaven: Can Active Characters Have Heavenly Arcs?

In direct contrast to the negative uses and implications of Dantean space discussed in the last six chapters (which focused in turn on guilt, grief, bitterness, pain, alienation and responsibility), we now focus instead on a specific and *positive*, highly social version of narrative space that was invented after Dante by artists and writers and that was designed specifically to battle alienation and create new social cohesion and connection. The films we examine here are *Amelie* and *The Secret Garden* (1911, 1949, 1993, all adapted for film from the 1911 novel by Francis Hodges Burnett). Unlike the many alienated Dantean spaces we have so far considered, which were all hellish or purgatorial, often alienating and all singular expressions of a character, these films promise a very different welcoming heavenly space: in these narratives a protagonist drags others against their will into a new, shared, somewhat magical, enchanted and enchanting space where each character's specific social conflicts, traumas, alienation and loneliness are all resolved. We will call this form of narrative space *Ecstatic space*.

This *ecstatic* space is a phantasmagoric projection of a protagonist's own evolved positive inner space and caring emotions. While the earliest example we have been able to identify is Bernini's statue of St. Teresa, discussed in depth in Chap. 10, we see this welcoming form of space in many modern examples. Consider the end of *Pleasantville*, or the famous barn-raising scene in the film *Witness* (1985).[2] These narratives have a unique ability to enfold others into spaces where they can connect with the protagonist and with each other on a positive emotional and social level.

We propose that this newer form of story space offers fascinating possibilities for the future because it strengthens one's social identity and bonds while simultaneously modeling an expansion of the social in a way that still preserves individual characters. We note that this category is also highly gendered: by contrast to dispassionate characters which skewed male, ecstatic characters are usually women or small children, and in

opposition to the practical tasks of invulnerable dispassionate characters, the vulnerability of ecstatic characters drives them to pursue the objectives of creating a space of healing and of constructing a community.

After detailing these examples, this essay connects three investigations. The first asks why ecstatic characters tend to be innocents, and what is the nature of innocence being invoked in all of these stories? How is it like ignorance, how is it about potentiality, how is it about hope, and why does it entangle us empathetically with characters? Secondly, why do we need innocent characters to repair rifts in the social fabric? This relates to the question of the unities among the enchanting atmospheres of Teresa's ecstatic memories, Amelie's Paris, Burnett's secret garden, *Witness*'s barn-raising and the video-game *The Wrath of the White Witch*. Here we point out that these narratives all combine the political and social power of re-enchantment that has been detailed by Jane Bennett and others (Bennett 2001; Redmond and Cinque et al. 2015) with the feminist ethics of care identified by Gilligan and explored in some depth by Tronto (Gilligan 1982; Tronto 2005). Lastly, in view of how this form of enchanting space is almost always a projection of an adult female character, we might ask why this form of projected innocence is associated with both male and female children and yet is far more female-gendered with older protagonists?

In the last chapter we briefly detailed the specific codification of cues of these ecstatic spaces in stories, pointing out how the air and atmosphere of innocence has become codified in a certain soft bounced-light lighting style and in the craft-treatment of surfaces, objects and spaces. We have explained how deep subsurface light scattering—the kind that happens with marble and with faces that contain baby-fat—is also usually deployed to convey innocence, while surfaces that have low subsurface scattering—such as concrete and old skin—convey a Bachelardian phantasmagoria of deadness and weight.[3] We pointed out that some of the signifiers here go back to the Western tradition's codification of innocence in the Renaissance, but there are other sources as well. All of these tropes also define the charmed and charming aesthetics of our examples of innocence and ecstatic space in this chapter.

Innocence Reconsidered

Guilt, bitterness and innocence are different cognitive stances towards the world, distinct forms of openness that determines an approach and a way of seeing relationships, morality and possibility. They are forms of

discernment, of ourselves and of the Other, leading to marked tendencies of what to expect and what to give in relationships. In these ways they are in a sense different character gyroscopes.

While our culture has many in-depth portraits of guilt and bitterness, we are a long way from understanding innocence. Perhaps at the moment, thanks to a culture that has historically deeply miscast innocence as purity, childishness, or plain old stupidity, we do not see innocence yet for what it is. As a result we now have no ways, means or even reasons to protect or cultivate it. Perhaps that has to change: perhaps these narratives suggest why and how it can be cultured in ourselves and in our social relations. We know instinctually that you must protect innocence when you see it in a child, but perhaps you also have to protect your own innocence. Perhaps this is where the urge to culture the self and the need to create a caring culture both meet.

Furthermore, the innocent is a viral figure of empathy in another way. In the last chapter we spoke of how an empathetic reading sometimes demands attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness, the training that Joan Tronto (2005) argues lies at the heart of an ethics of care. Of course, these are the very qualities we all instinctually bring when dealing with the innocent. We cannot casually lie, dismiss or be cruel to the innocent. Innocence provokes close reading and our careful and best behavior, and rewarding innocence with care brings us delight in ways that other social relations do not.

Let us look now at the cognitive and character implications of innocence. Unlike guilt and bitterness which seem so knowing and so implicated in ideas of maturity and dramatic arrival, innocence is often conflated with beginnings, with incompleteness, with ignorance and with lack of experience. While guilt creates a continual uncomfortable preoccupation and an urge to hide, and while bitterness is a defensive, sharply-focused form of disparaging attention, innocence is an open attentiveness that while it evaluates does not (yet) judge or distrust. It is also often an active state of character in a story's first act, a decaying state soon to be transformed, swept aside and broken by the conclusion of informative events: think not just of Daphne but for example of *Forbidden Games* (1952), *Los Olvidados* (1952), *Landscapes In The Mist* (1988), *The Official Story* or *Forrest Gump*. Alternatively, innocence is often passively deployed in narrative as it is in *The Pursuit of Happyness* as a form of defenselessness and dreaming. Here the innocent becomes the responsibility of the non-innocent: here the more knowing and responsible protagonist must protect and maintain the innocence of some secondary character, some child in his bubble.

But there are other innocents abroad in the world.

The Beauty of Being Frozen by Trauma: Heavenly Cities and Spaces in Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Other Narratives

An ecstatic space lies at the center of the classic childrens' novel *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The story of a little girl named Mary, it begins with a powerfully traumatic Dantean moment; when Mary is ten, both of her parents are killed in a cholera outbreak at their estate in India. She is abandoned on the empty plantation and nearly starves to death.

The small, undernourished, penniless, ugly and embittered girl is then sent to her neglectful uncle's estate in England. On the estate she discovers her uncle's son Colin, who is an equally neglected and embittered child whose mother died at his birth and who is thus rejected by his father.

She then discovers a secret garden, a construction of Colin's mother. The garden is now hidden; it was walled up years ago by Colin's still-grieving father. Thanks to the generous care of a working-class family that lives on the estate, Mary slowly comes out of her shell of bitterness and hatred. Mary's finding of the key to the garden, her healing there in the garden, and her project to heal the crippled Colin make for a purgatorial drama that takes up half the novel and marks her own transformation into a loving, happy, caring child. Interestingly, though, her dramatic arc ends before her entire story does. Her story's final act is a heavenly tale of her machinations to heal others, a strategy that leads to the regeneration not only of the garden, and not only of Colin and then of his father, but the healing even cuts across British class lines between bitter lords and servants and then even includes other species. It becomes a true utopia, a microcosm of heavenly conflict-resolution on earth.

It is important to see how differently this sentimental space works from the ones considered so far. Mary does not need to emotionally 'work through' the garden, the way that for example Ripley must face her monsters and Brody must enter his bunker. Mary does not need to face her fears or guilt in this space. Instead the garden is itself what is to be found, what she must herself cultivate and what should then be shared. It is what is given first to Mary so she can heal and regain her generosity and hope, and then it is what she can give to Colin and then give to his father. The garden, embodying her own innocence and lost mother's love, is opened by her to include this new family. Through her new-found innocence and hope, Mary expands her Dantean space of healing and love to include others.

As we have seen repeatedly, a Dantean character is often facing a trauma from childhood, and the same is true of many innocents. For example, consider the peculiarly–charming and enchanting world of *Amelie*: what underlies this film's nostalgic, innocent and enchanting air, so similar in some ways to *The Secret Garden*? The parallels are obvious: both *The Secret Garden*'s 8-year-old girl protagonist and the 8-year-old Amelie in the film's first acts share a sudden traumatic loss and abandonment by parents. As a result both characters are in a sense frozen at this age unless they can work through their traumas by building a space that represents the dead mother. And both succeed, Amelie by transforming Paris into a childlike zone of love and playfulness, a Dantean space that returns her father's love to her and produces her new lover. Similarly, Mary, the bitter little heroine of *The Secret Garden*, achieves this by searching for, then finding and then sharing the garden, this Dantean space which then grants her a new substitute loving mother, father and family. In the end Mary's Colin's and his father's bitterness has been melted, replaced with a contagious social circle of openness, trust and care.

Both examples suggest to us yet again that innocence is a crucial aesthetic category. Quite different from ignorance and immaturity, and somehow avoiding any of the older tropes of purity and timidity that earlier innocent women too often embodied, our two characters embody a newer form of *generative* innocence.[4] In these two narratives it is an active attribute, a form not just of hope but of potentiality, a freedom from cares that allows a character to be active in certain ways. This crucially allows them to craft, enact and bring into being the remarkable positive social agendas and social spaces of *Amelie* and *The Secret Garden*: it is central to their ability to create an empathetic space of community. And unlike our earlier spaces of empathetic compassion, these two rather unique examples offer Dantean spaces that more than one person can occupy at a time. Like Bernini's ecstatic version of St. Teresa, they are communally empathetic, open to be shared experiences, emblems of a body of empathetic social practices that should be adopted, and like all of our examples their actions and spatial projections are intended to be enzymatic, to be spread, to grow into a larger and more inclusive world.

And so it seems that certain kinds of Dantean space can perhaps have a positive social affect, helping us overcome alienation. Could we ever somehow harness the positive side of this spatialized empathetic machinery in our ethics, politics and social efforts? Could such narrative spaces help us overcome our own worst angels?

Innocence and Communal Empathetic Space in Video-Games

By now it is clear that ecstatic spaces can take place in literature, plays, movies and television, or really in any form of narrative that features characters in places. And as of 2013, ecstatic space has at last come to the world of video-games.

This marks a break. For the most part, one-dimensional characters anchor most first-person shooter video-games: these are dispassionate characters driven by external objectives like "kill all the monsters" with little of the real internal emotional conflict that is needed to build empathetic spaces. As we have noted, this is of course a masculinized form of character with a long history in the West. And yet Oliver, the protagonist of the 2013 video-game *Wrath of the White Witch*, may illustrate the most effective use yet of empathetic space in a video-game.

Oliver's story will sound a bit familiar by now. In the opening narrative, his mother is killed in a car accident that is partly his fault, and this trauma leaves him grief-stricken. But when his tears magically transform his doll into Drippy, the king of the fairies, Oliver is given a magical purgatorial offer. If he saves Drippy's world from its problems of depression, lack of enthusiasm and alienation then he may be able to bring his mom back to life.

Not surprisingly, Drippy's world turns out to be a wonderfully crafted Dantean space imbued with the longings he has for his dead mother. Moreover, Oliver's route through the world is all about doing good for the creatures he finds: he has to, for example, cheer up an animal king who is depressed, to not only make friends but to bring friends together. The world is all about creating community and our own communal empathy is triggered as Oliver advances through its levels and through his own grief. This video-game has gained the highest ranking by video-game critics, but what is more interesting is the unusual emotional effect it has had on its reviewers; many speak of how it is the first video-game to actually make them cry. But the machinery seems familiar to us: once again Dantean space is grafted onto a highly empathetic innocent. Having lost a parent, and feeling responsible for her death, he seeks purgatorial actions and to recreate the loving caring space of her arms. Elements of Bruce Wayne, of Amelie, of Mary and others are all here.

Escaping Dantean Space

We conclude by considering why and how all of these examples show a protagonist bringing other characters into an enchanting social space that is in fact a new form of social commons where they can bond in new, positive and social ways. We ask if and how stories with ecstatic space might engender actual ecstatic spaces in the world. Can actual places become productively enchanted? In other words, can they be granted a specific narrative meaning like the spaces we find in these stories? Can an ethics of care be spatialized via a certain kind of narrative architecture? Does *Amelie's* Paris somehow reflect or channel the situationist energies and dreams of the Paris Spring of 1968?

These may seem like impossibly utopian questions, perhaps even incoherent ones, until we consider a few facts. Today, even sixteen years after its release, *Amelie* still drives people to haunt Montmartre in the hope of re-experiencing the film. This and other examples from cinema tourism show directly how actual places can become entangled with and be enchanted by narratives that feature powerful Dantean spaces. When we then consider the emotions of *Amelie's* ecstatic spaces we remember how Amelie's Paris is enchanting and powerful precisely because it promises to its characters (and to the viewer) new relationships, new forms of human empathy and of human potential and a new richness of social capital.

What, then, are the limits of these forms of narrative enchantment in the actual world? Can actual spaces become ecstatic spaces? Can they then produce social bonds? Can a social commons become a shared secret garden? Is the mass ecstatic movement inspired by St. Teresa's diaries worth a closer look today? Might such forms of narrative architecture actually help transform our social and political world?

Examples of Innocence in Europe and American Stories

Let us step back and try to see the outlines of our complex tradition of the innocent.

The innocent has been empowered in our culture since at least the New Testament, which features a rather prismatic Jesus who is an innocent in at least three different senses. First, we have the open-hearted innocent figure who has no boundary to his empathy: this

version returns in later figures like St. Francis of Assisi who felt even the pain of small animals. However, Jesus's actions upending the money-lenders' tables embodies a second and entirely different kind of innocent figure; the revolutionary who can topple a corrupt culture. This tradition descends through the history of innocent warriors like Joan of Arc.

But Jesus also embodies a third kind of innocent, one we might call the remarkably-clear-eyed innocent; in the modern period this figure returns in the fable "The Emperor's New Clothes" fashioned by Hans Christian Anderson in 1837. When the boy in the fable cries out that the Emperor has no clothes, his cry spreads like wildfire across the entire crowd. Not understanding the power relationships that keep everyone else from pointing out that the emperor is naked, the innocent's observation indicts the tailors, the courtiers who promoted this blinkered lie, the cowardly adults who have acquiesced in it, the arrogant foolish emperor, and essentially the very idea of rulers. It is both a celebration of the innocent as a truth-teller and as the revealer of a potent anti-hegemonic, anti-monarchial truth that Anderson himself tried to walk back in later fables (Zipes 2005).

A mix of these kinds of innocents haunt the pages of nineteenth century European literature.

This innocent is usually a very active and inspiring figure, capable of selfless acts and comporting himself without judging others. He is often able thus to walk safely among very angry, vicious and torn human beings, doing small favors for them that they do not expect. And, being an unthreatening figure, he can inspire a form of sympathy and confession in twisted, lonely people. He can safely enter the dens of murderers where no-one else would survive, even as we empathetically fear the delicate glass of his innocence will be shattered by the horrors and meanness of such fallen places. Sometimes the innocent's very childlike comportment can remind a wizened, worldly character of an earlier time, a childlike moment when they weren't as tortured by anxieties and guilt as they now are, and this can give them moments of respite, reflection and sometimes even transporting them back to long-forgotten memories of an innocent time that they sorely need to recall, triggering a re-evaluation of their choices in life.

All of these facets make innocents great main characters for exploring fallen worlds, as we see with the main character of many Dickens' novels such as *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, but they also serve Fyodor Dostoevski, that adult version of Dickens, in the stories of Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Prince Myshkin of

The Idiot, the main characters in two of his most celebrated novels. In all of these examples, our innocent character is in some real sense pure and unspoiled by the crimes of the world, which means that all of our characters have in some sense had a highly-protected childhood before being tossed into their respective worlds.

Yet Dostoevski's open-hearted innocents are also often singularly clear-eyed, possessed of sight and insights that the non-innocent lack. Alyosha can see people's deeper wounds and fears while Prince Myshkin can see the traumas of some characters and thus love or care about them in ways that no-one else can.[5]

We lack such figures in the American tradition, where most of our famous 'innocents' are not only basically idiots in the dumb-as-a-post sense but who also lack any social ethic. Take, for example, the genial stupidity of Forrest Gump: his 'common-sense' conservative values, acts of bravery and good business sense by contrast reflect quite a shallow version of the social. Here is a character thrust by the screenwriter into highly charged historical situations like the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement, the treatment of veterans and the spread of drugs and AIDS, among which Gump deploys a bag of simple moralizations that guide him to right actions that are intended to throw everyone else into moral relief as selfish. If Gump is an innocent it is an innocence of the Reagan age, a stripped-down version of Heartland values that borders comically on the plain old dumb: even the dumb can succeed in America if they just stay clear of the embitterments of actual history, project a sunny disposition, stop complaining and show real grit. Another common illusion of innocence is found in Chauncey Gardner, the mentally diaphanous hero of *Being There* (1979), but this character is by contrast a pure cypher, a blankness onto which other project their hopes. These are ignorant, morally infantilized characters and not innocents in our sense.

This flattened sense of innocence in American storytelling goes back some way. The ignorant innocent is there in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and the cynical innocent is there in Gatsby. The realistic portrait of the destruction of innocents extends to at least Henry James, from his frail Daisy (*What Daisy Knew*) to his Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*. These characters lose their happy innocence to discover how soul-killing the world can actually be. No-one would ever strive to be one of them. Even Twain's Huck Finn shows a very fitful grasp of the innocent. Finn shows a brilliant coming-of-age arc halfway through the first half of the novel, exhibiting great moral courage and sense when he apologizes to

Jim on the raft and maturing as he witnesses the brutal feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, but all this story with its marvelous sense of character development is then thrown away as Huck soon collapses back into an inexperienced boy amusingly played as a fool by a wiser world, then shifts inexplicably back into a racist cruel boy, torturing Jim for no reason. Huck Finn's nonsensical character-arc resembles the unchanging innocent clown of Cervantes more than a modern character: not surprisingly, both novels have an episodic plot composed of brilliant clown-driven subplots.

None of these figures resembles the European tradition of the ecstatic innocent, which features a host of world-changing figures who bring salvation by presenting a radical new vision of how to comport yourself. Arguably descended from the preternaturally wise child Jesus, from the cult of Mary, and from later instantiations such as St. Francis, these open innocents change ordinary people who feel trapped in a life, showing them there is always another way to be. The sense of confederateship, of friendship and companionability, of joy and happiness that St. Teresa, Alyosha, Prince Myshkin and Amelie bring to socially-isolated figures is only part of it: the innocent also brings a sense of potential, a sense of different futures, of escape from being hated and judged as well as a release from being hateful and judgmental. The innocent brings and provokes care, returns the bitter and the guilty to a childlike time before life brought its withering moments. This is the socially infectious nature of such characters. Found across the tradition from Manzoni to *Game of Thrones*, they are often touchstone characters that transform the arcs of those they meet.

Game of Thrones begins as an innocent-killing, empathy-eating machine. Like *House Of Cards*, its Macchiavellian world initially tossed every empathetic character who cared about social bonds or offered social trust into a meatgrinder. Here innocence is a fatal ignorance. But in later seasons an axis of innocents rises. Among its wide-eyed leaders we might count Samwell Tarly, Jon Snow and the show's Joan-of-Arc Daenerys Targaryen. All three exhibit a plastic intelligence, an ethics of care, a reservoir of trust and other attributes of the knowing innocent that make them empathetic leaders in this bitter, guilt-laced world of precarity and cynicism. However, the show never uses Dantean space, tending instead to alternate between dramatic space and pure genre spectacle: committed to a naturalism punctuated by the fantastic, it rarely enters the emotional POV of any of its many characters, and so this world can never look ecstatically-innocent in the European sense.

And this hints at the division between the American innocent and the ecstatic innocent. American innocents cannot really project a Dantean space because there is a dearth of sensibility in them. Lacking a Dantean moment in childhood, they just seem simply inexperienced. Unlike Amelie, there is no sense of being frozen in a brighter social horizon: there is only a hangover of childhood, a lack of maturity, which is a radically different problem of character from that faced by the European innocent. The American innocent is simply lagging behind the wizened, bitter characters who surround him, but as the race continues he will surely catch up. By contrast, the ecstatic innocent stops the race. She is grounded in certain specific experiences and wisdoms and thus possesses the power to bend the world back towards herself.

Why do Americans have no real tradition of ecstatic innocents even if both traditions show great allegiance to the figure and model of Jesus, the ur-innocent? We can credit the difference to many causes but there is a distinct division in the Catholic and the Protestant traditions of innocents, perhaps in part because as we've noted the Catholic tradition also cultified the Mother Mary, another ur-innocent who was however more purely associated with healing, feeding, mercy and other specifically-caring actions and relationships. But aside from shearing away this proto-care-ethic, there are other related impulses in the protestant-leaning US culture such as its related commitment to individualism and a corresponding fear of the social, combined with an aesthetic impulse towards naturalism and an associated fear of sentimentalism. American culture has been awash in wars of empathy for generations. Though we saw glimpses of this quasi-Rousseauesque character in some of our ecstatic religious communities like the Shakers and the Oneida community, it is not until the counterculture appeared that dreams of a specifically *generative* innocence would reappear. Now innocence is raised again as a value, an aspect of character to be cultivated and protected, and once again innocents are seen as socially-positive agents of a socially infectious utopia.

We might argue that the stories of ecstatic innocents are marked by another commonality that separates them from the American literary tradition: a difference over clear oppositions. The stories of Dostoevski are marked by clear oppositions between good and bad and serve a pedagogical function. In some ways he seems very opposed to the morally-muddy aesthetic of modernism, which feels more observational and 'real' precisely because its worlds do not feature clear moral dichotomies. This contrast them with the nineteenth-century novels as it distinguishes them

from the simple oppositions of the children story genre, which Dickens never really escapes and where audience members are trained to identify with the inexperienced and the powerless as they gain power over their worlds. The innocent serves very different roles if he faces a world with a moral compass than if he is tossed into an amoral universe.

OUR EMPATHETIC ARGUMENT

And so our account of Dantean space ends by showing that this has not simply been a series of investigations about narrative architecture in film and television: instead, these interrogations actually lead us into many rich questions about the aesthetic construction of character and of the social. But looking back now, perhaps we might identify an overall argument with certain clear social and political imperatives. That overall argument can be summarized from start to finish as follows:

1. **The phenomenon**: In a Dantean space a character is surrounded by a physical-yet-metaphorical manifestation of the character's actions and life. Here the character is both within a space and simultaneously *within her- or himself* because the space itself is **a physicalized cage of the character's traumas, passions and conflicts.**

2. **Its construction**: This space is usually informed by a moment in the character's past which involves a deep trauma. Because the character's psyche is somewhat trapped or frozen psychologically in that moment of trauma, it inflects later dramatic experiences in life creating a double-lensed sense of narrative space. Thus in such spaces spectacle embodies the axis of the story present with the character's charged personal history, creating a storied sublime marbled with the deepest anxieties, hopes and fears of the character's psyche.

3. **History**: Though examples of Dantean space can be found across our trans-media experience, in novels, films, television, documentary, video-games and even sculptural tableaus, this aesthetic was codified by Dante in his *Inferno* through the memorable examples of Ugolino, Capaneus, Francesca and others.

4. **Its uses**: Such physical and sensupus expressions of the character's emotions serve as highly-powerful engines of the **empathetic machinery** of the plot. Now location, production design and other aspects of narrative place all communicate the character's immediate emotional perspective to the viewer. This has many uses in film and television because it provides:

(a) *Heightened empathy*: Because such spaces utilize spectacle to embody character, thus offering a powerful sublime marbled with the deepest anxieties of the character's psyche, this creates a mirrored emotional subjectivity where even the space of a scene helps bond viewers to protagonists. Because Dantean spaces entangle us sensuously with the fears and hopes of the character in a far more effective and empathetic way than other techniques—such as typical exposition or flashback—they suture us into the emotional point of view of the character in an immediate, non-verbal and uniquely-powerful way, making us cry and hope and fear and dream in unison with the protagonist. And because these films have this unique power to inscribe fear, hope and desire, they can often communicate and inscribe deep *social* hopes, fears and anxieties, which makes such sites of specific interest to researchers interested in the social implications of narrative.

(b) *Rising tension in story construction*: When they are not present throughout a narrative (as they are in *Amelie* and *Batman*) active Dantean spaces are usually **found in the ultimate or penultimate scenes** of the drama (*Aliens*, *Homeland*) As such cathartic scenes, they are often the conclusion of the rising action of a plot and thus the moment of the clearest expression of the story's antagonisms as well as the moment of greatest empathetic emotion in the viewers, the space of emotional catharsis.

(c) *Entanglement with actual places*: Because this account shows how location and place can become a powerful glue by which viewers are sutured to a protagonist, it also helps explain how and why viewers can become so deeply tied to a specific location or city by narratives that present them as Dantean spaces. For example, this explains the phenomena of *Amelie* and *The Third Man*, two films that for decades now have triggered continuous and strong waves of cinema tourism, driving large numbers of fans to their respective locations with the hope of repeating the intense experiences of those films.

5. **Social implications**: This account raises a number of further questions, not least of which is the implications of this model for the ideas of the personal and the social self and of the construction of the public commons:

(a) *Negative*: On the one hand, this account raises the question: Is Dantean space bad for us? As we experience narratives with Dantean space, a form of machinery with a specific historical and cultural pedigree in the Western tradition, are we also being inscribed with a particular form of self-interpretation, one with its own history of alienation and social atomization? Are such negative forces, so present in the roots of Dantean space itself, also an effect of this form of aesthetic participation? And does this model of narration carry forwards certain Western constructions of the self into other narrative traditions? Does Dantean space 'colonize' the self of the foreign Other who experiences it?

(b) *Positive*: On the other hand, are there developments within the tradition of Dantean space that offer social theorists and filmmakers a unique political and social tool? The examples of *The Secret Garden* and *Amelie* feature positive, socially–welcoming, enchanting Dantean spaces that in fact overcome social atomization and alienation. They do so by arguing for a new and gendered conception of innocence, an innocence of re-enchantment that is not about ignorance but about human potential and an ethics of care, an innocence that can be spatialized and imbue places and therefore entered into and socially shared. Can such hopeful, positive, welcoming spaces play a role in creating a new and empathetic form of the social commons, so under attack today in our globalized economy? Could ecstatic spaces be good for us?

Empathy Reconsidered

Threaded through this overall argument, we suggested that the history of our dramatic forms (and the empathies they offer) is twinned both with the construction of the Western self and with the history of our morality. This last history is perhaps easier to untwist than the more subtle question of the self, a construction that if it even exists is made of the material of the imagination, a material admittedly as delicate and hard to perceive as the wings of mayflies. Largely avoiding that active debate,[6] for now we have focussed on excavating the machinery of empathy, since this can serve as a mirror not only of the Self and what it sees in others but also a mirror of what it wants the Other to

be in its quietest and most buried dreams. This is socially and politically important because all empathetic machinery is designed to get us to draw analogies between others and ourselves. In fact, our moral traditions, which claim to be metaphysical revolutions of self-evident validity, are arguably to some degree based on the creation of specific narrative innovations for triggering and channeling empathy towards some topics, histories, identities and social groups and away from others. Arguably, the dominance of guilt or bitterness or innocence, and the chain of artistic tropes that each brings in its train, is also a signifier of deeper shifts in our culture, of deep shifts in social bonding or of the severing of bonds, just as the tropes of Dantean space, of alienated space or of ecstatic space themselves contain deep, emotionally-convincing empathetic propaganda about the need for individualism or for communal bonds.

Moreover, we might see our three categories of drama—dispassionate, dramatic and Dantean—as themselves often serving political movements. On the one hand we can draw analogies between a tendency towards dispassionate forms of narrative and being drawn towards an ethos and politics that wishes to simply banish empathetic reactions from our social calculus by labeling them irrational, fragile, infantile, feminine and childlike. Such movements might label their opponents "weak-minded," "woman-hearted", or "snowflakes" for their foolish calls for social empathy. Is this a conservative trope? Is there perhaps a reason that authoritarian rulers, who tend to speak of and set one clear dispassionate goal for their societies, tend to be memorialized by highly dispassionate monuments and iconography?

When considering such questions, we realize that both racism and sexism are also essentially deep forms of highly channeled compassionate and communal empathy. In fact while promising to deliver a deep and true community, they also confine empathy: they require that we become quite dispassionate towards the subjects that they determine are not to be experienced or narrativized. Like every narrative we have discussed so far, like all cultural efforts to create in- and out-groups, they too are confines on how to hear stories and what stories to hear: they are imaginative sphincters, channels of a subject's personal analogies, only here put on a tight laser-like beam that leaves whole groups in the dark.

For these reasons we have finally focussed on the unchannelled openness of innocence, which with all its risk of sentimentality and its elevation of childlike wonder, seems today a potentially more social form of empathy than guilt or bitterness. Perhaps this is why we find the call

for a re-enchantment of the world so convincing: theorists like Bennett and films like *Amelie* argue that that is needed for us to re-establish a healthy moral relationship with each other and with our world. As Bennett (2001) notes, modernity has been a project of disenchanting the world, of withering the subject's relationship to it and to each other, with dire results because in fact "the mood of enchantment may be valuable for ethical life". She observes that "in the cultural narrative of disenchantment, the prospects for loving life—or saying "yes" to the world—are not good. What's to love about an alienated existence on a dead planet?" In such a light these films and stories of re-enchantment, which carry in their train a longing to re-create affective bonds, now seem like a struggle to re-establish not only an escape from the modern but to also re-invent an ethics to resist the atomization of modernity. In ecstatic space the two efforts are joined through communally empathetic narratives.

But whether we embrace guilt, bitterness or innocence as gyroscopes for our character, we need to decide how empathetic we want our neighbors and our culture to be. And for that reason we need to focus on Dantean space. Its aesthetic implications must be explicated because just as this aging, rootless, embittered moralist intended some eight hundred years ago, Dantean space now extends into ours and enfolds us all. At the time he began writing *The Divine Comedy*, Dante was essentially a failure, a bitter man cut from his social roots and without a city, lost like the narrator is in his very first canto. It seems clear from his writing that Dante hated his time and wanted desperately to change it and that he felt that the 100 cantos of his *Comedy* could do exactly that.

And for once at least a poet has achieved his worldly wish: Dante's poetry has in fact changed the world. His inventions have had a remarkably outsized emotional and social impact because when we consume and imagine these emotionally powerful Dantean spaces, we also construct, self-inscribe and reinforce Dante's pre-Renaissance ideas about the self, responsibility and community. Dante's characters are the narrators of their lives in more than one sense: each story and its resulting punishment or reward illustrates Dante's idea of free will and of the self as a mechanism for achieving narrative cohesion over the course of a life. This is deepened by the empowering force of purgatorial self-understanding—in Purgatory your fate is constructed and narrated by your own willful acts, but you can change your arc by your own efforts. It is possible to sense the seeds of both the Protestant work-ethic and of

liberal capitalism here, and that is why one chapter of this book was titled "How *not* to think like Dante Alighieri".

Dantean moments are clearly real, a given aspect of being human. Dantean space, on the other hand, is not. It is instead a complex aesthetic invention that we use to make sense of our memories, our laws, our sense of responsibilities, and even the vagaries of life under late capitalism. Of course, by doing so, we existentially make Dantean space real. The modern self is to some degree a construct, a cultural collusion, a kind of software we use to make sense of our mental hardware, our culture's expectations, our neighbors, our loves and our laws. We can construct a Dantean space for ourselves and others, and this space will allow us to have many kinds of adventures and experiences: it is a life-logic that can give us a whole new realm of self-directed projects. In that sense Dantean space is real: it is certainly real to the extent that, as Blake succinctly said, the Altering Eye alters all. As a form of self-understanding it is an altering of our vision of ourselves, which then alters the world, it is a wire-frame that we use to sculpt our lives, and it is a very successful, infectious construction that now undergirds much of our social cohesion.

But once we examine the complex story architecture that Dante helped craft and that we now inhabit, once we know how he has altered our eyes and our world, we are left with some crucial questions. Whatever ontological status we grant it, we still ask ourselves: is Dantean story space actually the best way to make sense of ourselves? Or is it too wedded to alienating ideas of guilt, individualism and the self? Are these altered eyes revealing life in new, beautiful, and tragic detail, or is this an embittering, guilt-spreading form of moral, social and aesthetic blindness?

And so Part III of this book has necessarily been deconstructive. We have argued that Dante invented fundamental parts of the Neo-Aristotelian framework in which today's writers, filmmakers and video-game designers think and work. But perhaps this is exactly why Dante must be deconstructed: perhaps we should fear him for the very same reasons Bertolt Brecht says we should fear Aristotle, for their inventions of the protagonists and the building-codes and zoning laws of today's story space. What if Brecht is right? What if NeoAristotelian vehicles are themselves disempowering and alienating? What if they are destructive of our frayed social fabric? What if our protagonists are very bad for us? In short, should we enthusiastically celebrate Dante or should we instead purge ourselves of his dark machinery?

These questions are pressing because, thanks to its viral spread in our novels and films and video-games, for good or bad and whether we acknowledge it or not, Dantean machinery now clicks and clatters and rumbles along inside us all.[7] And yet so does the machinery of empathy. By using empathy in story to show how a better Space is possible, some artists and writers offer us a doorway for escaping Dantean space.

Notes

1. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), the anthropologist Clifford Geertz described culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."
2. This scene shows the protagonist glimpsing another community, one endowed with a feminized ethics of care. The barn being raised is in a sense her secret garden that she asks him to enter: because he will have to renounce violence to enter, it will change his character and heal him in certain ways if he accepts. In the end he realizes that it is a place where he with his violent ways does not belong.
3. Gaston Bachelard pioneered the phenomenological approach to architecture and materials, most notably in his lyrical classic text *The Poetics of Space*.
4. See Giaccardi and Magatti (2014), for an excellent discussion of their concept of generativity.
5. To judge from their work and writing, the painters Vincent van Gogh and Marc Chagall seem to be also striving for a kind of innocent-yet-social sensibility, even willing to risk sentimentality as they pursued an ethics of care and communal empathy. In this way they did not simply share that modernist drive of striving to see the world as a child does, the way for example a Paul Klee does. Klee has no obvious social commitments while they both were deeply committed to a sense of fighting prejudice, economic disparity and social hate. By striving not only to see the world with the fresh eyes of a child but to also behave with a childlike openness and vulnerability, they fit into this overall trend in European thought that Amelie also expresses.
6. See for example Goldman (2002, 2006) versus Gordon (1995a, b) and (2000), Heal (2003) and Stueber (2006, 2012). For the debate on intersubjectivity and mirror neurons, see Allen (2010), Borg (2007), Csibra (2009), Debes (2010), Goldman (2009), Hickok (2008), Iacoboni (2011), Jacob (2008) and Stueber (2012a). Some of this debate can be characterized as a philosophical one revolving around the question: is

empathy a resonance between the subject and the Other or is it a direct
perception of that Other's emotional states?

7. Dedicated to Anna Francesca, our creature of the future.

Bibliography

Alighieri, Dante. 2006. *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and ed. Robin Kirkpatrick.
    London: Penguin.

Aristotle. 1986. *Poetics*, trans. A. Sullivan. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North
    Carolina Press.

Augé, Marc. 2002. *In the Metro*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2004. *Oblivion*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2016. *Everyone Dies Young: Time Without Age*. New York: Columbia
    University Press.

Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *The Poetics of Space.* Boston, MA : Beacon Press.

Beeton, Sue. 2005. *Film Induced Tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View
    Publications.

Bennett, Jane. 2001. *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. New Jersey: Princeton
    University Press.

Burnett, Francis Hodgson. 1961. *The Secret Garden*. William Heinemann.

Cinque, Toija, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond. 2015. *Enchanting
    David Bowie*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press.

D'Adamo, Amedeo. 2013. Dantean Space in the Cities of Cinema. In *Media
    and the City: Urbanism, Technology and Communication*, ed. Simone
    Tosoni, Matteo Tarantino, and Chiara Giaccardi. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK:
    Cambridge Scholars Press.

D'Adamo, Amedeo. 2015a. The People Beyond Mars: Using Robinson's Mars
    Trilogy to Understand Post-Scarcity. *Thesis Eleven* 131 (1): 81–98.

D'Adamo, Amedeo. 2015b. Ain't There One Damn Flag That Can Make Me
    Break Down and Cry?: On Bowie's 'Young Americans. In *Enchanting David
    Bowie*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond. New York:
    Bloomsbury Academic Press.

D'Adamo, Amedeo. 2017. That Junky Funky Vibe: Quincy Jones' Title Theme
    for the Sitcom *Sanford and Son*. In *Music in Comedy Television*, ed. Liz
    Giuffre, and Philip Hayword. New York and London: Routledge.

Dickens, Charles. 2002. *Great Expectations*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dostoevski, Fyodor. 2003. *The Brothers Karamazov*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dostoevski, Fyodor. 2004. *The Idiot*. London: Penguin Classics.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures.* USA: Basic Books.

Giaccardi, Chiara, and Mauro Magatti. 2014. *Generativiti di Tutto Il Mondo.
    Unitevi!* Rome: Feltrinelli.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hollan, D.W., and C.J. Throop. 2011. *The Anthropology of Empathy: Experiencing the Lives of Others in Pacific Societies*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Noddings, Nel. 2002. *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education*. Vermont: Teachers College Press.

Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tronto, Joan C. 2005. An Ethic of Care. In *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Ann E. Cudd, and Robin O. Andreasen. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Zipes, J. 2005. *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller*. London: Routledge.