'Cosmonaut of Inner Space': An Existential Enquiry into the Writing of Alexander Trocchi

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Abstract

This thesis is the first to argue that existentialism is the very crux of Alexander Trocchi's work and his self-fashioning as a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. Using a lens of existential enquiry, it determines how and why being a 'cosmonaut of inner space' shaped Trocchi's *oeuvre*. This thesis makes use of a variety of sources – some previously unpublished – from archives including the Trocchi Papers at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Chapter One contextualises Trocchi's developing interest in existential philosophy, first catalysed by his studies at the University of Glasgow, to his relocation from Glasgow to Paris in the early 1950s. The chapter highlights the notable impact that this relocation had on Trocchi's sensibility of radical subjectivity, and argues that existentialism became not an abstract philosophy but a strategic means to achieve existential freedom from authoritarian systems.

Chapters Two and Three consider Trocchi alongside two of his most notable contemporaries, R. D. Laing and William Burroughs. All three men shared a profound belief in the authenticity and freedom offered by inner space, and in Chapter Two, I explore how this manifests in, and impacts upon, Trocchi's fictional characterisation using R. D. Laing's seminal existential theories. In Chapter Three I argue that Burroughs' and Trocchi's radical experimentalism – in both narcotics and literature – saw them break with the past practice of three writers with whom Trocchi self-identifies: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Baudelaire, Jean Cocteau. The chapter also asserts that Trocchi is even more extreme, or 'far out', than Burroughs because he continually sought to idealise and propagandise drug addiction throughout his multifaceted *oeuvre*.

Chapter Four considers Trocchi's fictional work alongside Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia – a space of dualism and displacement – to determine how Trocchi's characters spatially experience the world around them in existential and, through incorporating Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological terms.

For Eleanor, Alistair, and Isla Tasker

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I knew Trocchi quite well […] What was he? Brilliant, wayward, charming, alarming, passing exams on Benzedrine, starting up a pig farm shortly before his finals. Everyone knew he would make his mark sometime, somehow, somewhere. […] This 'invisible insurrection of a million minds', as the [sigma] portfolios were planned to be, cheaply cyclostyled and now a rarity on the market, comes across as a paradigmatic Sixties phenomenon, with its emphasis on revolt, liberation, alternative lifestyles, anti-universities, and worldwide cultural networking. Was all this swept away? Not quite. These are strange, half-derelict sites which are today revisited and re-discussed. I see Alex cocking a quizzical eyebrow and looking down his long nose at those who talk of his 'failure', his few novels, and the silence of his later years. He sometimes looked devilish, and there are some who thought he <u>was</u> devilish. I don't know. I retain a certain affection for him, probably because I knew him when he was young. I acknowledge him as a Glaswegian risk-taker. He ripped the tent-flap apart – I don't want to see it – oh yes you do – look – look –

- Edwin Morgan, 14 January 2002[1]

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[1] Edwin Morgan, *The Midnight Letterbox: Selected Correspondence 1950–2000*, (Manchester: Carcanet, 2015), p. 487.

'Cosmonaut of Inner Space': An Introduction

On the platform of the Writers' Conference in Edinburgh in August 1962, Trocchi made the following announcement: 'I said this morning at the press conference that I regarded [the importance of] exploration into the inner self. I rather sensationally described myself as a cosmonaut of interior space'.[1] This thesis uses a lens of existential enquiry to determine how, and why, being a 'cosmonaut of inner space' shaped Alexander Trocchi's literary *oeuvre*.[2] The cultural backdrop of the 1960s helps to elucidate Trocchi's initially somewhat ambiguous stance as a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. Robert Hewison acknowledges that 'the conquering of inner space became a common theme in the alternative ideology of the underground', and he traces this throughout the Sixties, from Trocchi and William Burroughs in 1962, to R. D. Laing and others in the countercultural underground, and even to the Beatles in popular culture, whose 1967 song 'A Day in the Life' signified a radical musical aesthetic 'not just from black-and-white to extravagant, piercing colour, but from outer, to inner space'.[3] As I go on to explore later in this introduction, while living in London during the 1960s, Trocchi was a significant countercultural figure, and indeed, Hewison's definition of Sixties underground sensibility is wholly applicable to Trocchi's fundamentally existential 'inner space' credo:

> As a system (or rather an anti-system) of aesthetics, the counter-culture wished to destroy artistic categories altogether. It wished to destroy the distinction between art and life by turning art into a life-style, and vice versa, for it recognised that cultural categories are also social definitions. Thus its arguments would necessarily be at the same time political and aesthetic. The convention was to ignore all boundaries and conventions, and as far as possible to escape the imposed

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[1] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962,* (Glasgow: Cargo, 2012), p. 108.
[2] Although the transcript specifies the phrase 'cosmonaut of interior space', 'cosmonaut of inner space' has become more widely associated with Trocchi; for this reason I use the latter throughout the thesis.
[3] Robert Hewison, *Too much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75,* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 85, 143. I examine Trocchi alongside R. D. Laing and William Burroughs in Chapter Two and Chapter Three respectively.

definitions of material reality by exploring inner space.[4]

Hewison associates inner space with a radical retreat away from the restrictions inherent in social systems; for Trocchi, this equates with what he described at the Edinburgh Writers' Conference as his 'commitment of the exile'.[5] The inner space sensibility adopted by Trocchi early on in the Sixties, and which developed throughout the artistic avant-garde, was cultivated aesthetically and politically as an attempt to escape from conventionality and exist as a self-willed 'exile', away from authoritarian systems.

Hewison uses R. D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (1967) to explain why the counterculture sought to cultivate a radical and subjective sensibility of inwardness: 'We are far more out of touch with even the nearest approaches of the infinite reaches of inner space than we are now with the reaches of outer space'.[6] The alienation that Laing addresses echoes Trocchi's Edinburgh speech, in which he spoke of feeling 'threatened all the time' by 'the vast concepts that are entailed in the opening up of outer space'.[7] Like Trocchi, Hewison suggests that Laing's acknowledgement of outer space is 'not accidental' but a purposeful reference to 'the international politics of the decade [which] were dominated by the race to the Moon between Russia and America'.[8] The Sixties space race prompted what Hewison calls 'angst in space' and indeed, as Trocchi's speech indicates, being an explorer of the inner space of the individual self was a means of opposing the world of 'international politics', such as the race into outer space.[9] Indeed, it is significant that Trocchi introduces the phrase publicly, both at the press conference and on the platform. This suggests that Trocchi perhaps used the phrase politically: describing his 'commitment of the exile' he

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[4] Ibid., p. 86.
[5] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, p. 108.
[6] R. D. Laing qtd. in Robert Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 85.
[7] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, p. 108.
[8] Robert Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 85.
[9] Ibid., p. 85. In *Too Much* Hewison also suggests that, 'the retreat from the world into silence also implies a retreat from contingency and technology into the inner spaces of the imagination' (p. 85).

declares that he is 'against all forms of oppressive Socialism'.[10] It is however difficult to align Trocchi directly with any political ideology, because he does not situate himself with any particular party.[11] Instead, I wish to suggest that the notion of being a 'cosmonaut of inner space' was political for Trocchi, but instead of aligning himself with any 'outer' political system (Communism, Socialism, Totalitarianism, Capitalism etc.), he forged his own system based on existentialism and inwardness: as this thesis goes on to argue, for Trocchi the personal was inherently political, and vice versa.

Yet through adopting 'cosmonaut', the Soviet term for astronaut, Trocchi also hints at self-alignment with the American enemy. Choosing to imply a Soviet connection in 1962 was highly controversial because Cold War tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union were increasingly fraught. Writing in the 1960s sigma portfolio, however, Trocchi destablises the concept of cosmonaut signifying political subversion: he outlines his vision of sigma associates being 'astronauts of inner space'.[12] Certainly, the inconsistency of cosmonaut and astronaut is intriguing, and the oscillation functions to yet again distance Trocchi from a detectible political alignment. Perhaps, then, 'cosmonaut' was fundamentally an oratorical and rhetorical choice, used to denote other more covert yet significant associations. Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet pilot and cosmonaut, was the first man to travel into outer space when his spacecraft orbited the Earth in 1961; for Trocchi, publicly fashioning himself as an inner space cosmonaut a year later, it seems highly feasible that he wanted to imply that he too was essentially a heroic pioneer, as he set out to explore a different, yet still other-worldly, realm. This central idea of groundbreaking exploration also links into Trocchi's artistic sensibility: in a 1963 editorial, he suggests that in order to attack 'established canons now deemed totally

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[10] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, p. 108.
[11] I explore this concept in detail in Chapter One.
[12] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 186.

suspect', 'the exploratory nature of art should be welcomed, for it may reveal an answer'.[13] Indeed, like Gagarin, Trocchi opted to travel into a largely unknown territory, a concept which is in keeping with the countercultural coinage 'far out': writing in 1959, Trocchi's contemporary Lawrence Lipton acknowledges that the term signifies '[the] avant-garde, on the experimental frontiers of any art or experience'.[14] Like Gagarin, Trocchi similarly sought to go 'far out' from conventional experience, and while cosmonauts are highly trained and skilled professionals, it is also plausible that Trocchi's stance was cultivated to suggest that he was suitably qualified for the exploration of inner space; I return to this concept directly in chapters two and three.

Hewison further suggests that during the Sixties the fundamental 'point at issue between the underground and the culture it opposed was no more and no less the definition of reality'.[15] For Trocchi and the other inner space explorers of the 1960s, it is clear that the most meaningful and authentic mode of reality was found in the private and subjective space of the self; indeed, the concept of existential retreat into inwardness recurs throughout the thesis and will be explored in detail in Chapter Two. Like the many others involved in the countercultural underground, Trocchi saw inner space as a radical alternative to society because inner space meant existential freedom, a concept explored directly in chapters one, two and three.[16] It is important to emphasise that Trocchi's self-

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[13] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial: Towards the Ethics of a Golden Age', in Richard Seaver, Terry Southern and Alexander Trocchi (eds), *Writers in Revolt*, (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1963).

[14] Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, (New York: Martino, 2009; 1959), p. 316.

[15] Robert Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 83.

[16] It is significant that for Trocchi space – both internal and external – had long-standing existential significance. In an unpublished poem 'The Broken Ikon' written in 1947-8, a twenty-two year old Trocchi asks in the final stanza "What is the individual after all?" before answering:

    A frantic comet spinning at the rim of civilization
    A cosmic accident
    Align only the empty conversation
    Which is not communication-
    We have lost communication in the universal causerie.

(St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 6 Fol. 103, ll. 100-105, un.pag). The poem shows Trocchi's significant interest in ideas surrounding human identity; referring to the big bang – 'a cosmic accident' – the poem shows Trocchi's speaker grappling with the

portrayal as an inner space traveler is implicitly linked to his lifestyle as a heroin addict: 'in my own experience, voyages into inner space through drugs can be every bit as meaningful as the voyages of the ancient explorers were to their contemporaries and descendants'.[17] John Pringle aptly adopts 'far out' to suggest that if Trocchi were to go too 'far out', in terms of geography and psychology, this would be detrimental to his critical reputation as it would lead to his 'permanent exile';[18] while suggesting an avant-garde approach to creativity, 'far out' was also commonly used in the 1960s to describe the psychological experience of being under the influence of narcotics and is implicitly associated with the 'turn on, tune in, drop out' mentality advocated by Timothy Leary.[19]

Yet for Trocchi's self-described 'commitment of the exile', being 'far out' on narcotics became a literal way of removing himself from social and cultural conventionality. In an unpublished diary entry dated 20 February 1968, Trocchi alludes to Leary's phrase but dismisses it. He writes: 'But when I am serious, when I am at go, "plugged in", [I am] "turned on" […] but not, NOT "dropped out"'.[20] Like Pringle, Campbell uses 'far out' to explore Trocchi's 'cosmonaut' psychology: 'Trocchi, the cartographer, the flag-planter, shunning horror in his own country, opened frontiers for fellow travellers. He went far out, and then farther; he went so far that inner space swallowed him up'.[21] Campbell equates inner space with pioneering outer space

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ideas of existence and the meaning of the individual in relation to the universe. It is also intriguing that he uses space to consider individual being, and this early alignment of the individual with the concept of space arguably anticipates Trocchi's declaration at the Edinburgh International Writers' Conference in 1962.

[17] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs', in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Pyschadelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain*, (London: Turnaround, 1997), p. 117.

[18] John Pringle, 'Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (New York: Grove, 2003), p. 4.

[19] Lawrence Lipton's *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Martino, 2009; 1959) features a glossary of countercultural terms including 'far out' in which the definition reads: 'If it sends you and you go, you may swing far out, if no one bugs you and you get drugg [*sic*] – or go *too* far out and flip your wig. (p. 316).

[20] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 120.

[21] James Campbell, *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), p. 212.

exploration, but like Pringle, he somewhat bleakly suggests that inner space wholly consumed Trocchi. Trocchi's UK publisher John Calder similarly remarks that Trocchi 'might have become the outstanding British writer of his generation but he was destroyed by his addiction'.[22] In America however, Jeff Berner was so impressed by Trocchi's phrase 'cosmonaut of inner space' that he named his edited anthology of countercultural texts and manifestos *Astronauts of Inner Space* (1966) in direct homage to Trocchi; it is however intriguing, and perhaps unsurprising, that Berner, an American citizen, chose the American term astronaut rather than Soviet cosmonaut.

John Calder directs some cautionary words at scholars hoping to pin down 'the facts' in Trocchi's life and writing:

> Even the only Trocchi biography […] has difficulty assessing his extremely complex character. [...] If the facts, looked at many years later, do not seem to bear that out, it must be because the man's actions and his manifest intentions were at odds which each other and that he himself never quite discovered who the 'cosmonaut of inner space' really was.[23]

There is no doubt that Trocchi had what Calder calls an 'extremely complex character'. Indeed, this thesis aims to highlight and theorise the many ambiguities and contradictions that continually arise throughout Trocchi's life and writing, and which are inherent in, and perhaps even exemplified by, 'cosmonaut of inner space'. For the purposes of this thesis, I take 'cosmonaut of inner space' to mean that Trocchi considered himself to be a pioneering explorer of the inward realm – or 'space' – of the existential subjective self, and that Trocchi consciously cultivated this stance as a means to escape from, yet also oppose, the authoritarian systems in society which aim to influence and ultimately restrict individual freedom. These ideas are considered in detail throughout the four chapters of this thesis.

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[22] John Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 32-35, p. 35.
[23] John Calder, *Garden of Eros*, (Alma: Richmond, 2014), p. 89.

Chapter One suggests that Trocchi used subjectivity strategically throughout his life and writing as a means to achieve existential and artistic freedom and authenticity. Using published and unpublished primary sources, the chapter establishes Trocchi's interest in existentialism and shows how existential subjectivity, as a means of subversion, shaped Trocchi's philosophical, socio-political, and artistic vision from an early stage in his career, as well as affecting his literary practice through the cultivation of a radical and 'engaged' aesthetic. Building on these aesthetic considerations, the chapter situates Trocchi alongside the ethos and practice of the Beat Generation and with the pioneering *nouveau roman* movement in France. The chapter also foregrounds Hewison's concept of the quintessentially Sixties 'cosmonaut of inner space' by discussing Trocchi's early editorial writing undertaken for publications, including *Merlin* in Paris, to suggest that the relationship between the individual self and social systems was highly contentious in the 1950s. Furthermore, the chapter analyses the tension between Trocchi as an 'engaged' and radical existentialist thinker seeking social influence and action, and his ultimately apolitical standpoint.

Building on the importance of subjectivity to Trocchi's work, Chapter Two investigates the concept of existential fragmentation using R. D. Laing's theory of the self as outlined in the seminal *The Divided Self* (1960). Laing's ontological model is examined, while Trocchi and Laing's biographical relationship is acknowledged. The countercultural ideologies of the 1960s are also highly relevant to Trocchi's life and writing and these ideas are explored in detail by suggesting that Laing's pioneering concept of a dualistic self was symptomatic of widespread psychological sickness during the 1950s and 1960s, when Laing and Trocchi were living and writing. The concept of the 'divided self' will then be applied to *Young Adam*, *Cain's Book*, and the

unpublished 'The Long Book' to explore the extent to which Trocchi's characters can be viewed as 'existentially gangrenous': Laing uses 'existential gangrene' to describe a severe ontological malaise catalysed by profound ontological self-division between 'inner' and 'outward' human experience.[24] The chapter also explores the tension at the heart of Trocchi and Laing's relationship; despite appearing to be close in terms of their personal and professional friendship, I suggest that this is perhaps not the case. I also explore the ontological oscillation experienced by Trocchi's characters, whom often appear to be concomitantly objective and subjective in their complex individual identity. The chapter will end by considering the findings alongside Trocchi's own experience of living as a 'cosmonaut of inner space' in the 1960s.

Chapter Three argues that – through comparative analysis with the work of William Burroughs – Trocchi's and Burroughs' *oeuvres* pioneered a new approach that saw the writers break with tradition, whereby drugs tended to function at a purely textual level. Indeed, Burroughs and Trocchi ultimately aligned narcotics with politics, creativity, and existentialism, and this treatment of drugs saw the writers narrate narcotics differently to Trocchi's self-acknowledged literary influences of Jean Cocteau, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Charles Baudelaire. The impact of Trocchi's striking pro-drug perspective and his status as a heroin addict will also be analysed alongside Burroughs to argue that, even in a contemporaneous context of literary experimentalism, Trocchi still went further in his propagandist approach, which ultimately sought to portray drugs as beneficial to mankind, and to radically overturn the derogatory social attitudes towards addiction.

The final chapter uses the heterotopic model of spatiality to, firstly, determine how Joe Taylor and Joe Necchi in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book* experience, and

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[24] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, (London: Penguin, 1960), p. 133.

secondly, whether they are able to positively relate to, the external space of the world around them. Heterotopic space was first theorised by Michel Foucault in 1967, and due to the nautical settings of the canal barge in *Young Adam* and the river scow in *Cain's Book*, the chapter begins by examining how the protagonists experience the spatiality of Foucault's 'heterotopia *par excellence'* – the ship – and then analyses how they experience the land, or more accurately, what Paul Farley, Michael Symmons Roberts and Marion Shoard theorise as the 'edgeland'.[25] Highlighting how subversion is intrinsic in the heterotopia as 'a spatial dimension of difference', the chapter argues that the hybrid and decentered spatiality of the heterotopia affects the characters' ability to fully engage with the external world; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model of 'existential space' is applied to Trocchi's texts to elucidate and support this central conceit.[26]

Although the chapters all have different focal points, they are united by the use of philosophy, psychotherapy, and literature in an existential framework, in order to investigate how Trocchi and his characters respond to what he calls the 'state of being in the world' and to determine how and why being a 'cosmonaut of inner space' shaped Trocchi's *oeuvre*.[27]

'Art and life are no longer divided': Trocchi's Life and Work

At the 1962 Edinburgh Writers' Conference Trocchi announced that 'all art can be considered as man's expressive reaction to his state of being in the world'.[28] Suggesting that all art is implicitly existential, this echoes another important statement

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[25] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), p. 27.
[26] Ibid., p. 22.
[27] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, p. 140.
[28] Ibid., p. 140.

made by Trocchi a year later, that 'art and life are no longer divided'.[29] This fundamental reciprocity between Trocchi's art and life has however meant that his notorious cult of personality has tended to overshadow the somewhat sparse volume of critical work dedicated to him. Andrew Hodgson's observation, that 'Trocchi is surrounded by vague anecdotal mythology' is particularly pertinent, as is Greil Marcus' comment: 'As you read [*Cain's Book*], it is loud enough to silence the chatter of Trocchi's merely personal legends. Let them go'.[30] The approach of this thesis echoes that of Marcus; rather than setting out to comment on Trocchi's widely sensationalised life, biographical references instead aim to contextualise his literary *oeuvre* and to explore and elucidate the existential concept of being a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. To my knowledge, writing in 2015, this thesis is the first full-length doctoral scholarship focusing solely on Trocchi.[31] It is consequently important that this introduction includes a biographical overview of Trocchi's life to support the existential enquiry of the thesis, while enabling chronological understanding of how his inner space exploration developed by tracing a trajectory from Trocchi's initial experimentation with narcotics to his acute heroin addiction. Following the biographical overview, I will then survey the existing Trocchi criticism by considering

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[29] Alexander Trocchi, 'sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 199.

[30] Andrew Hodgson, 'Between the Tundra and the Ocean', *Equus Press*, <http://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/between-the-tundra-and-the-ocean/> [accessed 15 November 2012]; Greil Marcus, 'Foreword' in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, (London: Calder, 1992), p. x.

[31] Trocchi has been discussed in a number of doctoral theses but these either focus on a specific element of his life and writing for example, on the relationship between the Situationist International and project sigma, how Trocchi's work fits with avant-garde literary culture, or they are not single author studies. These include Neil Livingstone McMillan, 'Tracing Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Scottish Men's Fiction', (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Glasgow, 2000), Christian Volker Kurt Weigelt, 'Rediscovering Addicts: Constructions of the Drug Addict in English and American Narrative Literature (1822-1999)', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Technische Universität Carolo-Wilhelmina Zu Braunschweig, 2004), Paul Ferguson, 'Embracing Alienation: Zombies, Rebels and Outsider Culture in British Literature from 1945 to 1963, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Lancaster University, 2008), Ronald James Elliot Riley, 'Avant-garde Literature and the Recording Process', (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Cambridge, 2010), and Samuel Martin Cooper, ''A Lot to Answer for': The English Legacy of the Situationist International', (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Sussex, 2012); Hannah Van Hove, 'Displaced Voices of Dissensus: Situating Anna Kavan, Alexander Trocchi and Ann Quin', (forthcoming doctoral thesis, The University of Glasgow).

how critics have tended to view Scotland, France, and America as the overarching literary contexts for Trocchi's work. I will question whether this approach is in fact wholly relevant, due to his profound preoccupation with the intangible inner space of the self. The introduction ends with a note on methodology.

Alexander Whitelaw Robertson Trocchi was born in 1925 in Glasgow. His mother was Scottish and his father of Italian parentage, and his early years were spent living in Glasgow's South Side before the family relocated to Bank Street in the West End to run a guesthouse. Trocchi's mother died suddenly when he was sixteen, an event that lowered Trocchi 'into a grave that was my extinction'.[32] After briefly enlisting in the Royal Navy during World War Two, Trocchi enrolled at the University of Glasgow to read English Literature and Philosophy. Edwin Morgan was Trocchi's tutor at the university and remained a life-long supporter and friend. In 2002, Morgan reflected on Trocchi as a student, describing him as 'Brilliant, wayward, charming, alarming, passing exams on Benzedrine, starting up a pig farm shortly before his finals. Everyone knew he would make his mark sometime, somehow, somewhere'.[33] Although Morgan regarded Trocchi as a student with 'tremendous potential' and it was widely thought that he was capable of gaining a First Class degree, he was in fact awarded a 2:1.[34] He reportedly fell asleep during his Philosophy final from miscalculating a dose of prescription drugs.[35] Upon graduating in 1950, Trocchi was awarded a Kemsley Travelling Scholarship from the University of Glasgow and, after touring around Europe in 1951, he settled in Paris in 1952 with his first wife Betty, whom he had married while a student in Glasgow, and his two young daughters. A

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[32] Alexander Trocchi qtd. in Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi: The Making Of The Monster*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 15.

[33] Edwin Morgan, 'Letter 3' in Alec Finlay and Ross Birrell (eds), *Justified Sinners: An Archaeology of Scottish counter-culture (1960-2000)*, (Edinburgh: pocketbooks, 2002), un.pag.

[34] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel, *A Life: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Rebel Inc.: Edinburgh 1997), p. 25.

[35] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 25.

poem by Trocchi appeared in the prestigious Rome-based literary journal *Botteghe Oscure, heralding the start of Trocchi's international career*. He did not return to Scotland until 1961.

The appeal of the newly liberated City of Light, what Trocchi called 'a city given over to delight', was obvious.[36] James Campbell portrays the city as a hub of literary and philosophical activity:

> The situation in Paris in the early 1950s, where Trocchi went after taking his finals at Glasgow University, was comparable to that of the 1920s: a catastrophic war had recently ended, the city was cheap for foreigners, and artists were attracted by its reputation for freedom from social and sexual restraints. London in the 1950s was witnessing the evolution of the Angry Young Man, but in Paris there were Sartre, Camus, Cocteau, and Trocchi's mentor, Beckett… not to mention Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and others. Compared to this, Glasgow offered square sausage and the work ethic.[37]

Away from Scotland – 'a cultural desert with damn few oases' – Trocchi immersed himself fully in the many opportunities inherent in postwar Parisian life; he attended the Sorbonne to study film, after which he went on to guest-edit *Paris Quarterly*.[38] He also conceived and edited *Merlin*, a postwar literary magazine which was stocked in Amsterdam, London, New York and Paris, and which published many influential writers, including Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Albert Camus, Pablo Neruda, and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as first publishing Samuel Beckett's *Watt* in English.[39] At this time, Trocchi made a deal with *Merlin's* publisher Maurice Girodias (founder of the Olympia Press, whose avant-garde catalogue included Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*) to write some 'd.b.'s' – dirty books. Trocchi was prolific and published a number of these during his Parisian years under a variety of pseudonyms, and his first novel *Young Adam* was also published by Girodias in

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[36] Alexander Trocchi, 'La Vie Parisienne', *Scots Review*, 11 (1951), p. 204.
[37] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 202.
[38] Alexander Trocchi, 'Don't Ask Your Grannie', *Scotsman*, 13 July 1963.
[39] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 35.

1954. Described as 'the first of Olympia's all-out literary stallions' and immersed in

Parisian cultural life, Trocchi befriended many key figures on the avant-garde art

scene such as Samuel Beckett, James Baldwin, Jean Cocteau, and George Whitman,

owner of the bookshop Le Mistral which housed *Merlin*'s early headquarters.[40]

Trocchi also joined the Lettrist International and later co-founded the Situationist

International, two radical collectives that sought cultural revolution as a means to

overcome the alienation inherent in the Western capitalist system; I discuss the

Situationist International in chapters one and two.[41] As Trocchi implies, life as a

'cosmonaut of inner space' also began around this time: 'Paris, 1952. I was twenty-

seven years of age. […] I remember writing on a piece of paper: drink, drugs, sex. I

crossed out drink, I put a question mark after drugs, I put a tick after sex'.[42] While

living in Paris, Trocchi was introduced to opium by associates such as Cocteau; at

first he used opium recreationally, but this experimentation gradually led Trocchi to

heroin addiction, which Calder claims 'did not obviously surface until 1956'.[43]

Trocchi's marriage also ended in Paris, resulting in Betty and their two daughters

permanently relocating to New Zealand.

After the demise of *Merlin* in 1955, Trocchi departed for the United States of

America in 1956. Upon arrival in New York, he found employment as a scow captain

on New York State's waterways, transporting waste in and around the Hudson River.

Now fully dependent on heroin, Trocchi used heroin and scow life as inspiration for

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[40] John De St. Jorre, *Venus Bound*: *The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press*, (London: Random House, 1996), p. 69. Whitman later renamed Le Mistral to Shakespeare and Company, in reference to Sylvia Beach's original Paris bookshop of the same name. For more on the history of Shakespeare and Company see *Books, Baguettes and Bedbugs: The Left Bank World of Shakespeare and Co* by Jeremy Mercer (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006).
[41] Ibid., p. 35.
[42] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia Britannica,* p. 117. This was later affirmed by Trocchi in a BBC interview transcribed in James Campbell and Tim Niel's *A Life in Pieces* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc,. 1997): 'I had started taking drugs in Paris early in 1951, '52' (p. 144).
[43] John Calder, *Garden of Eros,* p. 81.

Cain's Book, and the following year Trocchi and his new wife Lyn, whom he had met through friends in New York, wintered in Venice West, California. They settled within the alternative 'drop-out' community that had formed on the beachfront, and Trocchi continued to write *Cain's Book.* Trocchi's life at this time is documented by fellow Venice West resident Lawrence Lipton in *The Holy Barbarians,* a fictionalised account of life in 'the slum by the sea' in which Trocchi is detectably (though somewhat unflatteringly) characterised as 'Tom Draegan'.[44] In 1958 Trocchi left Venice West with Lyn, who was now pregnant, and they returned to Manhattan, living in the city's notoriously gritty Lower East Side. In New York Trocchi continued to work on *Cain's Book,* described by Richard Seaver as 'radical, even in the context of the Sixties'.[45] Indeed, with themes of narcotic and sexual experimentation, *Cain's Book* was deemed 'a book to corrupt young people'[46], sparking an obscenity trial in Sheffield in 1964 based on the view that it was 'a vicious and appalling document'.[47] Trocchi's New York years were dominated by heavy narcotic use and his life in the United States came to an abrupt end in 1961 after he was allegedly caught supplying drugs, a charge which he vehemently denied.[48] With many international connections, Trocchi went on the run to Canada with a false passport, declaring that he was escaping 'from the hysteria of the United States'.[49] Arriving in Montreal he was met by Leonard Cohen – then a young and largely unknown poet – who later noted

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[44] Lawrence Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, p. 15. John Arthur Maynard in *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (Piscataway: Rutgers, 1993) also recognises Trocchi as Tom Draegen: 'Under the name "Tom Draegen", Trocchi had appeared in the early chapters as a representative of the international hip scene who could even recall going pub-crawling with Dylan Thomas' (p. 98).
[45] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life*, p. 103.
[46] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 198.
[47] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 2.
[48] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life*, p. 141.
[49] Alexander Trocchi, 'Potlach', *Sigma Portfolio* 4 (1964), p. 2.

Trocchi's 'self-characterisation as a […] messianic figure'.[50] Unnoticed by the authorities, Trocchi successfully escaped by boat to Aberdeen.

Writing in the third person under a fictional persona, Trocchi described his movements at this time:

> He had returned via Montreal, the Newfoundland ice breaks, round the north tip of Scotland, to the ancient granite city of Aberdeen, and thence via Glasgow (city of his unfortunate birth) to London, a thin grey figure, lamp-post of ghost, the idea of sigma written thus, close under his eyelids, an electronic load, an unwritten book, a plan in four dimensions…[51]

Settled in London, where he would remain until his death, Trocchi became 'a fixture of the sixties counterculture'.[52] In 1964 Guy Debord resigned Trocchi from his membership of the Situationist International by letter because Trocchi had founded sigma, an international network of artists and radical thinkers that was heavily indebted to the Situationist International, and because Debord disapproved of Trocchi's London associates.[53] 1960s London was a focal point for fellow countercultural Scots who 'were so active in the London underground' such as 'Trocchi, [R. D.] Laing, [Tom] Telfer, [Michael] McCafferty, [Tom] McGrath'.[54] However Trocchi was one of the most active: in 1965 Trocchi used his links with international writers to successfully organise and compere what was commonly called the First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall, 'a mythical event in the annals of the British counterculture'.[55] Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Harry

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[50] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life*, p. 133.

[51] Alexander Trocchi, *'Potlach'*, *Sigma Portfolio* 4 (1964), p. 2.

[52] Stewart Home, 'Introduction to White Thighs', *Bookkake*, < http://bookkake.com/2008/09/27/stewart-homes-introduction-to-white-thighs/> [accessed 4 June 2010]

[53] Letter from Guy Debord to Alexander Trocchi dated 12 October 1962 at < http://www.notbored.org/debord-12October1964.html> [accessed 13 May 2012]

[54] Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, (London: Paladin, 19671; 1968), p.128. Stewart Home also acknowledges the men's countercultural connections in London. See *Mister Trippy* <http://blog.stewarthomesociety.org/2009/04/03/phil-green-the-lost-world-of-londons-beatnik-hipsters/> [accessed 21 October 2012].

[55] Stewart Home, 'Walk on Gilded Splinters: In Memorandum to Memory 13 April 1969. Alex Trocchi's State of Revolt at the Arts Lab in London', *Stewart Home Society*, <http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/luv/splinters.htm.> [accessed 2 November 2009]

Fainlight, Simon Vinkenoog, and Michael Horowitz were just some of the many writers who read to seven thousand people during the sold out 'happening'.[56] Trocchi's seemingly vital contribution to London's counterculture has been acknowledged by many publications, including Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* (1968), Michael X's autobiography *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X* (1968), Stewart Home's fictionalised biography of his mother *Tainted Love* (2005), and Barry Miles' *London Calling* (2010).

In later life Trocchi was involved in various different projects: he had plans to collaborate with John Lennon on a film of *Cain's Book*, he traded antique and rare books while completing a number of translations, and he lectured in Sculpture at St Martin's College and at the radical 'Anti-University'. This period in London was however marred with tragedy: Trocchi's wife Lyn died from a hepatitis-related illness, and his eldest son died at the age of eighteen from cancer. By this stage in his life, Trocchi was dependent on high doses of cocaine and heroin, and he struggled to write. After *Cain's Book,* his only literary publication was *Man at Leisure* (1972), a poetry anthology that was largely ignored upon release, and although he had received an advance for 'The Long Book', Trocchi's last full-length work to be contracted by John Calder, this was never published.[57] Trocchi died in 1984 at the age of fifty-nine from pneumonia, after an operation for the treatment of lung cancer.

At the time of his death, Trocchi had published no new fiction for twenty-three years. *Cain's Book,* published in America in 1960 and in the UK in 1964, was his last full-length original work. Despite lacking a substantial body of work, in 1983 the Scottish literary magazine *Cencrastus* published an issue dedicated to Trocchi, and

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[56] Barry Miles' 'The Albert Hall Reading' from *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London since 1945* (2010) describes the event in detail. Peter Whitehead's film *Wholly Communion* 1965, now archived and released by the BFI, also documents the Albert Hall poetry event.

[57] For more on this period in Trocchi's life see chapters nine and ten of Andrew Murray Scott's *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster*.

since his death there have been various attempts to reappraise him and bring his writing back into recognition. The majority of these efforts have been in Scotland: in 1985 the *Edinburgh Review* published an issue largely dedicated to Trocchi and his work, and in the mid-1990s Edinburgh's Rebel Inc. (an imprint of Canongate) re-published the novels *Young Adam* and *Helen and Desire*, with new critical introductions from John Pringle and Edwin Morgan respectively. Writing in *The Herald* in 1999, Rebel Inc. founder and publisher Kevin Williamson also remarked that in comparison to 1992, Trocchi was 'a writer whose work is now back in the public domain where it belongs'; Rebel Inc. went on to publish a 'biography of sorts' entitled *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi* in 1997, collated by editors Allan Campbell and Tim Niel.[58] Designed to reflect Trocchi's far-reaching cultural connections and influence, it features contributions outside a literary-specific realm from figures such as Leonard Cohen and Patti Smith, and a BBC documentary of the same name was also broadcast to coincide with its release. Although Michael Gardiner described this renaissance as 'a high-profile rediscovery in Scotland', all of the Rebel Inc. editions are presently out of print and Williamson's claim, that Trocchi was 'back in print with a vengeance', is now inaccurate.[59] Another significant attempt to reinstate Trocchi occurred in 1991 when the Scottish journalist and writer Andrew Murray Scott published *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster*. To coincide with the release of the biography, Murray Scott also edited an anthology of previously unpublished work entitled *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader* (1991); the Edinburgh-based publisher Polygon released both titles, but at the time of writing the latter is out of print. In 1996 *Chapman* published an edition

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[58] Kevin Williamson, 'Scottish cosmonaut of inner space is back on the beat', *Sunday Herald,* April 11 1999, p. 12.
[59] Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 75.

dedicated to Trocchi and Hugh MacDiarmid, and in 1998 Akros published Gavin Bowd's extended essay *The Outsiders: Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth White*. More recently there have been other attempts to reinstate Trocchi: in 2003, independent director David Mackenzie adapted *Young Adam* into a film featuring Ewan McGregor, Peter Mullan, and Tilda Swinton. This received critical acclaim worldwide while simultaneously prompting some small-scale attempts, mostly in the popular press, to reappraise Trocchi and establish *Young Adam* within literary and film frameworks. In 2009 Trocchi's slim anthology of poetry, *Man at Leisure*, was re-published by John Calder, and in April 2011 *Cain's Book* was also re-issued by Calder via the Alma Classics imprint, though this went largely unnoticed by the press. In 2013, Trocchi and *Cain's Book* received renewed attention in Scotland when the text was boldly adapted for stage by writer and director Alan McKendrick, after being specially commissioned by the Glasgow-based experimental theatre company Untitled Projects. Premiering in Glasgow, the success of this run prompted a second staging in the spring of 2014, which saw the original production extended to a three-hour-long performance.

Critical Context

Having established his writing career away from his Scottish homeland, Trocchi has been predominantly situated – both biographically and artistically – in relation to three main areas of geographical place: Scotland, France, and the USA.[60] Being his place of birth, it is fitting to take Scotland as a starting point to examine the critical response to Trocchi. The majority of criticism acknowledges Trocchi's Scottish roots but critics also often depict Trocchi as displaced because he spent most of his writing-

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[60] Presumably London has not been acknowledged as a major critical context for Trocchi's *oeuvre* because he did not publish any fictional writing while living there.

life living and working elsewhere. Gavin Bowd affirms this, claiming that 'Trocchi was outside contemporary Scottish culture' and that he was 'very much an exile from contemporary Scotland'.[61] Similarly, Stewart Home has written that 'he'd come a long way from his native Glasgow', and Andrew Murray Scott has described him as an 'exiled Scots novelist'.[62] Some critics, including Neil Livingstone McMillan, claim that his move away from Scotland has meant that Trocchi has been largely forgotten: the 'Italian Scot is possibly little remembered because of his physical detachment from Glasgow'.[63] Conversely, Irvine Welsh has noted that Trocchi was 'an internationalist and an empowering figure for those trying to escape the shackles of Scottishness',[64] while James Campbell, a Scot who knew Trocchi personally, also felt that Trocchi 'appeared to us [Scots] as a colossus, bestriding a narrow world. He was forging his own myths – and he was one of ours'.[65] Andrew Murray Scott, who to date is Trocchi's only biographer, has also suggested that Trocchi's tense and ambivalent relationship with Scotland has had a significant cultural impact: '[Trocchi] came to feel that he was not merely a Scot, he was the only Scot with a true sense of the value of Scottishness. His theme of being an exile within was an important direction for [Scottish] fiction'.[66] This suggests a conflicting yet crucial tension: while Trocchi is undoubtedly Scottish, he also resists the boundaries of national Scottish identity. Murray Scott claims that 'Trocchi's place amongst Scotland's writers is non-existent' and 'Scottish critics seemed to view him as *not Scottish* or *not Scottish*

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[61] Gavin Bowd, *The Outsiders: Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth White*, (London: Akros, 1998), p. 20.
[62] Stuart Home 'Walk on Gilded Splinters: In Memorandum to Memory 13 April 1969. Alex Trocchi's State of Revolt at the Arts Lab in London', *Stewart Home Society*, <http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/luv/splinters.htm.> [accessed 2 November 2009]; Andrew Murray Scott (as 'Andy Scott'), 'Alexander Trocchi: A Portrait of Cain', *Cencrastus*, 2 (New Year 1983), pp. 16-8, p. 16.
[63] Neil Livingstone McMillan, 'Tracing masculinities in twentieth-century Scottish men's fiction'. (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Glasgow, 2000), p. 239.
[64] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds)*, A Life*, p.18.
[65] James Campbell, *Syncopations,* p. 198.
[66] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 164.

enough for inclusion', a 'strange attitude' that he believes directly stems from Hugh MacDiarmid's influence on Scottish Literature.[67] During the 1962 Edinburgh Writers' Conference, MacDiarmid, an advocate of a distinctly Scottish literary tradition, dismissed Trocchi, along with William Burroughs and Ian Hamilton Finlay, as 'cosmopolitan scum'.[68] MacDiarmid's comment was printed in the *New Statesman* in the aftermath of a heated debate earlier that day; as panel members discussing 'Scottish Writing Today', Trocchi and MacDiarmid had clashed spectacularly in their seemingly conflicting stances, prompting Magnus Magnusson's headline on the front page of *The Scotsman* to proclaim, 'Scottish Writers stage their civil war – Nationalism vs Internationalism'.[69] Although this was one of many public attacks Trocchi encountered throughout his career, it has remained particularly significant in terms of his reception as a writer; in 2002 Morgan described the Writers' Conference disagreement as 'genuinely significant as a turning-point in Scottish culture'.[70] It is telling that the Trocchi-MacDiarmid clash has continued to affect Trocchi's reputation in Scotland: 'Perhaps the cantankerous spirit of MacDiarmid continues to exercise, from beyond the grave, a censorious influence over Trocchi's posthumous reputation. Maybe the Scottish critics can still feel the point of that awesome claymore between their ribs!'[71] Most Trocchi criticism continues to acknowledge MacDiarmid's now infamous 'cosmopolitan scum' remark; this repetition suggests that MacDiarmid identified something about the Scottish literary tradition that still endures, and continues to intrigue critics today; perhaps that Trocchi's lack of connection to place,

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[67] Andrew Murray Scott, 'Where Extremists Meet', *Chapman*, 83 (August 1996), p. 36.
[68] See Andrew Murray Scott's *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster*, p.108.
[69] For more on the Writers' Conference, including a transcript of Trocchi and MacDiarmid's exchange, see Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell's *The International Writers' Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962* (Glasgow: Cargo, 2012).
[70] Edwin Morgan, *Scottish Left Review,* <http://www.scottishleftreview.org/li/ index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=338&Itemid=5> [acessed 1 November 2010]
[71] Andrew Murray Scott, 'Extremists', p. 36.

and for MacDiarmid to Scotland specifically, remains an obstacle to how Trocchi has been, and continues to be, received.

Although it has been claimed that 'Trocchi did not find any analogous Scottish literary figures to which he could look', it is significant that a number of critics have situated Trocchi in relation to Scottish literature.[72] In what is still the only attempt to discuss the entirety of Trocchi's fictional *oeuvre*, Morgan's 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey' (1995) significantly situates Trocchi contemporaneously within Scottish literature by claiming that one of Trocchi's translations, the novel *I Jan Cremer* (1965), includes 'a passage uncannily reminiscent of Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place*'.[73] Paul Shanks also identifies an analogy with Hind, writing that '*The Dear Green Place,* was, like *Cain's Book,* about the difficulties in fictionalising one's life and culture'.[74] Hind and Trocchi bear an additionally significant parallel because both writers explore, and emphasise, the existential struggle of the writer in the heavily industrial hub of Glasgow. Morgan also believes that another of Trocchi's novels, *Thongs*, which is set predominantly in Glasgow's Gorbals but written while Trocchi lived in Paris, 'has a strong Scottish and specifically Glasgow connection'.[75] Morgan expands this claim by stating that *Thongs* suggests further Scottish similarities to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* through the use of a fictional 'editor', a device that Trocchi repeatedly employs in his books for the Parisian Olympia Press. Morgan reiterated his belief in Trocchi's contextual connection to Hogg in 2002 in a letter to Alec Finlay and Ross Birrell who were collating writings for a collection to be entitled *Justified Sinners: An Archaeology of Scottish Counter-Culture (1960-2000);* Morgan wrote that Trocchi 'fits your title

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[72] Paul Shanks, 'Cain's Burden: Trocchi and Beckett in Paris', *Journal of Irish Scottish Studies*, (2:1, 2008), p. 168.
[73] Edwin Morgan, 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey' in *Edinburgh Review,* 70, (1985), pp. 48-58, p. 56.
[74] Paul Shanks, 'Cain's Burden', p. 169.
[75] Edwin Morgan, 'A Survey', p. 56.

[*Justified Sinner*] neatly, as apart from biography, he nods back in several of his books to the Hogg of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*'.[76] Morgan also acknowledges that Trocchi's Scottish connection extended beyond his novels; he suggests that Trocchi's poetry collection *Man at Leisure* prefigures Tom Leonard and Alan Jackson and that the short story 'Peter Pierce' was 'strongly reminiscent of James Kelman' through the narrative's 'certain obsession with naturalistic detail'.[77] Neil McMillan similarly regards Kelman's work as being in tandem with Trocchi; he states that he is 'the one Scottish male writer of the twentieth century whose engagement with existential masculinism precedes the work of Kelman'.[78] Furthermore, Morgan firmly situates Trocchi within the Scottish canon by again acknowledging that Trocchi's literature 'links back to Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and forward to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*'.[79] Hogg is perhaps the most common comparator to Trocchi within Scottish literary criticism; Michael Gardiner has noted that 'Trocchi is an obvious descendent of James Hogg, the critical writer on Scotland's Calvinist inheritance, Puritanism and the Protestant ethic of the Enlightenment'.[80]

McMillan similarly sees that Trocchi's writing predates later Scottish literature. He suggests that not only do Trocchi and Irvine Welsh have 'shared intertextual space' but that Welsh also responds to Trocchi through the theme of heroin addiction which is at the heart of both *Cain's Book* and *Trainspotting*.[81] Sean O'Hagan, writing in the *Observer Review,* positions Trocchi as anticipating Welsh, Alan Warner, and Duncan McLean, who he believes write 'in the kind of graphic prose and narcotic induced nihilism that earned Trocchi his initial infamy in the

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[76] Edwin Morgan, 'Letter 3' in Alec Finlay and Ross Birrell (eds), *Justified Sinners,* un.pag.
[77] Edwin Morgan, 'A Survey', pp. 55-56.
[78] Neil Livingstone McMillan, 'Tracing Masculinities', p. 155.
[79] Edwin Morgan, 'Letter 3' in Alec Finlay and Ross Birrell (eds), un.pag.
[80] Michael Gardiner, *Trocchi to Trainspotting*, p. 72.
[81] Neil Livingstone McMillan, 'Tracing Masculinities', p. 240.

Sixties'.[82] More recently, in 2011 Alistair Braidwood acknowledged Trocchi's current literary relevance by stating that *Young Adam* 'doesn't feel the need to justify its "Scottishness", something that has finally come to pass in the best contemporary Scottish fiction'.[83] It is also significant that Scott believes that, despite being predominantly set in New York, *Cain's Book* is 'Trocchi's contribution to defining a living Scottish identity'.[84] Shanks has also described *Cain's Book* as 'one of the greatest Glasgow novels ever written', which places Trocchi not only within the wider Scottish canon, but also in a Glasgow-specific fictional milieu.[85] Angus Calder has gone so far to suggest that 'with the publication of *Cain's Book*, Trocchi was established as one of the main Scottish writers of the twentieth century', while Hamish Henderson has written that 'no one could read his [Trocchi's] work without realising that his relation to his Scottish background was a matter of deep concern and importance to him'.[86] From this criticism, which positions Trocchi alongside writers as diverse as Hogg, Hind, Gray, McArthur, Long, Leonard, Jackson, McLean, Kelman, Warner, and Welsh, it is clear that Trocchi's writing responds to both Scotland's literary past and has influenced its present development. Although Williamson wrote in 1999 that Trocchi remains 'the forgotten man of Scottish literature', these critical connections not only demonstrate that Trocchi does have a place within Scottish Literature, but that his writing has been both influential and important.[87]

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[82] Sean O'Hagan, 'Smack Aleck of the Beat Generation', *Observer*, 10 December 1995, p. 15.

[83] Alistair Braidwood, 'Indelible Ink: Alexander Trocchi's 'Young Adam'', *Dear Scotland*, <http://dearscotland.com/2011/08/01/indelible-ink-alexander-trocchis-'young-adam'/> [accessed 1 April 2012]

[84] Andrew Murray Scott, 'Extremists', p. 36.

[85] Paul Shanks, 'Cain's Burden', p. 169. This Glasgow context also includes Trocchi's novel *Thongs*, which Morgan believes parallels elements of McArthur and Long's novel *No Mean City* (1935).

[86] Angus Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60219> [accessed 20 October 2010]; Hamish Henderson qtd. in Andrew Murray Scott, 'Extremists'. p. 36.

[87] Kevin Williamson, 'Scottish cosmonaut', p. 12.

Although many critics have alluded to Trocchi's French connection, this is yet to be explored in depth. Alan Riach and Ian Brown address this in their claim that 'French crossovers [with Scotland] have been unexamined, despite the importance of Laing and Trocchi',[88] and although Trocchi was isolated in his move to France at the time, Gardiner and Bowd have since viewed Trocchi's relocation within a wider trend of Scottish writers who later chose to settle in France, such as Kenneth White. Morgan suggests that because Trocchi was 'desperate to deparochialise' he was consequently 'swept into the new internationalism of the later 1950s and the 1960s, especially on its French-American axis'[89], while Gardiner points out that there was 'a slight puzzlement in France over why Trocchi was not more widely read in his native land'.[90] Calder similarly states that 'Trocchi has remained a literary hero to the dissident young men in many parts of Europe'.[91] Reflecting the notion of Trocchi's European appeal, Tom McGrath's insight into his writing style is also interesting: 'there was something about his [Trocchi's] writing that was European. It was an ironic intelligence which informed the words, which had a hard, tactile feel to them, like carving. I did not know then that he was a Scot'.[92] Critics have often read Trocchi's writing as a response to the French literary tradition. James Campbell has also referred to Trocchi's 'Divine Marquis mode', and Richard Seaver claims that Trocchi 'set out if not to corrupt but certainly to shock, precisely as de Sade had two centuries before him'.[93] Campbell believes that 'Alex was a Francophile',[94] and indeed, Trocchi was predominantly connected with Paris, which prompted Campbell to read *Cain's*

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[88] Alan Riach and Ian Brown (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 190.
[89] Edwin Morgan qtd. in Paul Shanks, 'Cain's Burden', p. 168.
[90] Michael Gardiner, *Trocchi to Trainspotting*, p. 72;
[91] John Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review,* 70 (1985), p. 36.
[92] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 36-47, p. 36.
[93] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 208; Richard Seaver, 'Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, (London: Calder, 1998), p. xvi.
[94] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 211.

Book as a response to 'the then-fashionable topic, the death of the novel', a critical conception first formed in France through the *nouveau roman* experimentalism of writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and which I turn to in Chapter One.[95] Critics have commonly recognised that philosophy, particularly existentialism, was paramount to Trocchi's Parisian experience, but again this connection is yet to be explored in any depth. As a student of philosophy at the University of Glasgow, Trocchi was already familiar with existentialism, and as I will demonstrate in Chapter One, in 1950s Paris he was able to associate with those who were at the very heart of this new and exciting movement, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Trocchi's American connection is also yet to receive significant critical attention despite the fact that Trocchi has been frequently fashioned as 'the Scottish Beat' in numerous newspapers including *The Guardian*.[96] This label recurs in literary criticism too: Stewart Home has written that Trocchi is 'considered by many to be the most dissolute of the beats',[97] while Gary Hentzi regards him as 'Scotland's answer to the Beat Generation'.[98] Trocchi's 'Beat' lifestyle of nomadism and sexual and narcotic experimentation, in combination with the personal relationships that he forged with key Beat figures such as William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and Allan Ginsberg, have furthered these claims, while Trocchi himself acknowledges his Beat affiliation writing in the sigma portfolio: 'There was our own experience in Venice, California, where our pilot shop-conversion became the seed of the so-called "beat-scene" of

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[95] Ibid., p. 204.

[96] Tony O'Neill, 'The junky genius of Alexander Trocchi', *Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/aug/23/thejunkygeniusofalexander> [accessed 15 November 2011]

[97] Stewart Home, 'Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (Richmond: Oneworld, 2008), p. 7.

[98] Gary Hentzi, 'Counterculture Revisited: Young Adam, Then and Now', *Scottish Studies Review*, 9 (2008), p. 21.

Venice West.'[99] Indeed, Murray Scott suggests that: 'While Burroughs has come to be

regarded as the "reclusive genius" of the international underground with Ginsberg as

its "high priest", it was undoubtedly Trocchi who was its leader and pivotal figure'.[100]

In addition to Trocchi's lifestyle, critics have also placed him within the Beat context

in purely literary terms. Tom McGrath, the former editor and founder of London-

based publication *International Times*, associated Trocchi 'with Burroughs and

Kerouac and other American Beat writers at the time', and John Calder regards *Cain's

Book* as 'the prime example of British Beat writing'.[101] Moreover, Sue Wiseman

suggests that *Cain's Book* demonstrates 'alliances with the American Beats and with

Beckett'.[102] Although I explore Trocchi's affiliation with the Beat Generation in

chapters one and three, James Campbell does however rightly acknowledge the

difficulty with wholly applying 'Beat' to Trocchi's multifaceted *oeuvre*: 'Trocchi

accompanied Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg and others on the new roads taken in the

1950s, but he wrote with a cerebral sophistication shared by none of the other

Beats'.[103] Indeed, while there are some obvious stylistic correlations between Trocchi

and the Beats and while 'Scottish Beat' seems a fitting enough term to describe

Trocchi's controversial and cosmopolitan lifestyle, it is inaccurate to talk of Trocchi

solely in this literary context due to the various literary frameworks in which he can

be – and should be – considered: Chapter One contextualises Trocchi with the French

nouveau roman movement as well as the American Beats, while Chapter Three further

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[99] Alexander Trocchi, 'The Second Impression', sigma 5 (1964), p. 4.

[100] Andrew Murray Scott (as 'Andy Scott'), 'Portrait', *Cencrastus*, p. 91.

[101] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), p. 36; John Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), p. 35.

[102] Sue Wiseman, 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde: Heroin Addiction and Narrative in Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book*' in Tim Armstrong, Matthew Campbell and Sue Vice (eds), *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pp. 256-266, p. 260.

[103] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 198.

considers some of the ways in which Trocchi can be aligned with the Beat literary sensibility.

From surveying the existing criticism, it is apparent that repeated but brief attempts have been made to contextualise Trocchi within the different literary trajectories of all three countries. This transnational perspective suggests that Trocchi's writing is somehow always displaced from any fixed sense of place. Angus Calder's response to *Cain's Book*, that it 'displays Trocchi's range, intellectually evoking existentialism, the beats, surrealism, a species of revolutionary socialism, and a Beckett-like ideology', acknowledges his multifaceted cross-cultural sensibility and influence.[104] Consequently, in terms of criticism it seems that Trocchi's writing is neither wholly Scottish, French, or American: rather, he responds to all three milieux, sometimes simultaneously. While Murray Scott has acknowledged that Trocchi 'rebelled against being described as "Scottish" or "British" or a "Beat" writer, styling himself as "an international cultural entrepreneur"', such a wide-ranging cosmopolitan aesthetic suggests that that Trocchi's writing essentially negates any distinct sense of place.[105] Indeed, through surveying the various critical responses that attempt to place Trocchi's writing within a specific physical location and its relative artistic framework, Trocchi nevertheless is still geographically exiled; his work is never wholly rooted anywhere. Although Trocchi undoubtedly responds to the established critical contexts of Scotland, France, and the USA, I wish to argue that any attempt to situate Trocchi firmly within any particular place is further problematised by his profound preoccupation with inner space.

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[104] Angus Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60219> [accessed 20 October 2010]
[105] Andrew Murray Scott, 'Extremists', p. 36.

Despite a recent increase in scholarly attention, Trocchi remains under-examined in both academic and popular milieux and his critical reception remains polarised.[106] To some he was an international inspiration who broke through the conventional boundaries of nationality and literature, while to others he was a relentless junkie whose heavy heroin habit wasted his early literary talents. This survey of existing criticism also highlights some significant gaps in Trocchi scholarship and criticism: while Trocchi's Scottish, French, and American connections have been acknowledged, they have not been explored in any great detail. Although this thesis does not set out to theorise Trocchi within a fixed place due to its focus on the notion of inner space, it does aim throughout to align Trocchi with aspects of Scottish, French, and American literary contexts.

It should also be noted that this research is not intended as a chronologically ordered literary-historical study of Trocchi's *oeuvre*. Rather, I have chosen a theory-based and concept-driven approach for the thesis, which I believe is a more fitting and productive framework for analysing Trocchi's existential and literary experimentalism as a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. This thesis also makes extensive use of The Trocchi Papers held in the Modern Manuscripts Collection at Washington University in St. Louis' Olin Library: the majority of the primary archival sources used in this thesis have never been published before or used in a scholarly realm. Throughout the thesis I

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[106] Seven articles on Trocchi have appeared in an array of different publications in the last few years. In order of publication these are: 'Alexander Trocchi: Glasgow through the Eye of a Needle' by Gary A. Boyd in Jonathan Charley and Sarah Edwards (eds), *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture, Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 2011); Walter Metz, 'A Dreary Life on a Barge: From L'Atalante to Young Adam', *Weber: The Contemporary West*, 27.2 (2011); '*Cain's Book* and the Mark of Exile: Alexander Trocchi as Transnational Beat' by Fiona Paton (2012) in Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl (eds), *The Transnational Beat Generation*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan); Duncan Petrie, 'From the Rive Gauche to the New Scottish Cinema: Alexander Trocchi, David Mackenzie, and Young Adam', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 53.2 (2012); 'More Than a Metaphor: Fictive Privilege in Trocchi's *Young Adam*' by Simon Cooper in *Exegesis* 1 (2013); Sylvia Bryce Wunder 'Through Expatriate Eyes: Muriel Spark, Alexander *Trocchi*, and the Empowerment of Scottish Literature during the 1960s', and Alistair McCleery 'Late News from the Provinces: the trial of *Cain's Book*' in *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?*, Eleanor Bell and Linda Gunn (eds), (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 2013).

also aim to situate Trocchi's *oeuvre* within the avant-garde artistic and ideological environment in which he was writing. Accordingly, the theoretical source materials throughout have been chosen specifically because they are contemporaneous to Trocchi, a method which I believe enhances understanding of his cultural and historical context, while also creating valuable new connections with key ideas of the time.

'*Engagé* as an outsider': Subjectivity as Strategy

This chapter examines four key areas of Trocchi's thought. Referencing Sartre, the first section, 'Subjectivity must be the starting point' outlines how Trocchi understood, and responded to, existentialism's emphasis on individual experience and self-determination. In 'Existential Engagement' it will be argued that while living in Paris Trocchi sought to emulate Sartre's model of *littérature engagée.* Although Sartre's engagement implies direct political association, I will suggest that Trocchi used its emphasis on the existentially subjective self to instead justify and promote his stance against the totalitarian politics of the Cold War.[1] This section ends by suggesting that Trocchi's ideas anticipate the radical ideologies of the 1960s, when the personal became political. 'Sigma: Existential Consultants' determines how the sigma project enabled Trocchi to envisage 'cultural revolution' in the 1960s. Tracing sigma's roots in the Situationist International, it will be argued that personal subjectivity was central to Trocchi's vision of a cultural rather than political reawakening as a means to undermine and avoid capitalist conformity.[2] Finally,

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[1] Sartre's somewhat ambiguous politics are difficult to determine. Although he greatly admired communism he never joined the Communist Party of France and Alan Sinfield has acknowledged this in his claim that rather than communism, 'Sartre proposed commitment to the progressive building of socialism' (see Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, (London: Continuum International, 2004; 1989), p. 99).

[2] Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton acknowledge the pioneering relevance of Trocchi's vision of 'cultural revolution' in the postwar period, which they see as being in-keeping with, and in-part catalysing, a wider countercultural shift:

> The transition from Old to New left – a move away from the conceptual and practical dead-end style of old-style Marxist mass politics toward a new realm of personal subjectivity carried by new actors with new concerns – was only the barest part of the realignment. Equally important was the emergence of an international culture for which Trocchi, as an inheritor of the mantle of existentialism and a key figure in the 'left wing of the Beat Generation', was a formative influence. The counterculture was shaped by two complementary forces. One was the rise of a distinctive youth culture, arising in the unprecedented prosperity of the postwar era and expressing itself at the level of daily life in new forms of sociability, and new choices in consumption, music, fashion, and lifestyle. The other was the intervention of artists and intellectuals like Trocchi, inspired by utopian projects for both remaking art and altering the shape of daily life. Trocchi's own Project Sigma was only one among many projects that conceived of 'cultural revolt' [as] the necessary underpinning, the passionate substructure of a new order of things.

'Existential Aesthetics' explores how subjectivity also became an aesthetical means to subvert artistic convention. Elucidating Trocchi's views on the role of the writer, it will be suggested that experimentation enabled Trocchi to forge a new literary aesthetic based on life as it was experienced, a practice that aligned him with the Beat Generation in the United States and the *nouveau roman* in France. The chapter concludes by proposing that being '*engagé* as an outsider' enabled Trocchi to come into contact with many other like-minded individuals who similarly sought to exist outside hegemonic communist and capitalist systems.

Trocchi was greatly influenced by Parisian postwar existentialism. He read English Literature and Philosophy at Glasgow University and after graduating with Second Class Honours he received a Kemsley Travelling Scholarship, which enabled him to visit Paris.[3] Stemming from his studies at university, existentialism became conceptually central to Trocchi's life and writing. This profound and life-long interest is evident in an unpublished notebook entry entitled 'Transcategorical Method' in 1965, in which Trocchi describes himself as an 'existentialist' while also acknowledging the difficulty that the label 'existentialist', or any other label, causes:

> We invent words to clear up a problem, to expose it in 'its essence' – and we are constantly forgetting no symbols could ever do that – they would have to be it. Existence precedes essence. This is the attitude of we 'existentialists'. It is fine to accept certain denominations in a relative sense – we are all scared of admitting we are any 'ist'. And it is true, of course, that we are not, that we are all men in a world of men, the existence prior to all denomination.[4]

It is telling that Trocchi claims that 'we are all scared of admitting we are any 'ist'': although ambiguous, this could be a reference to socialism, communism, capitalism,

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Taken together, these developments represent a key aspect of the post-1945 period: the interpenetration of the cultural and the political.
(Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton (eds), 'Introduction', in *Between the Avant-garde and the Everyday: Subversive Politics in Europe from 1957 to the Present*, (New York: Berghahn, 2011), p. 1).
[3] For more on this see Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi:* The *Making of the Monster*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 25.
[4] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', un.pag.

fascism, or indeed more generally totalitarianism, all of which were ideologies during the 1960s. If this is the case, it is significant that Trocchi positions 'existentialist' as on a par with such overtly political systems; while others' lives are governed by such political ideologies – or 'ists' – Trocchi presents existentialism as not an abstract philosophy but an alternative to these dominant social systems. Describing himself as an existentialist in 1965 also exemplifies the importance of existentialism to his life; after first visiting Paris to experience being at the heart of existentialism in 1950, it is evidently still conceptually central to Trocchi fifteen years later. To Trocchi existentialism became a strategy to react against the total politics of the Cold War era, and Sartre's philosophy comprises what I believe to be the key concepts of postwar existentialism to which Trocchi responds: the importance of the individual, subjectivity and choice, the meaning of life, authenticity, and freedom. I have chosen to focus on Sartre's atheistic existentialism not only because in the 1950s 'he was the most significant intellectual currently writing',[5] but because Trocchi was familiar with his theories; Trocchi published extracts of Sartre's essay 'Baudelaire' in the edited anthology *Writers In Revolt* (1963) and Trocchi's biographer Andrew Murray Scott claims that Trocchi and Sartre were friends and that they had an agreement 'that *Merlin* could reprint whatever it wanted from Sartre's magazine *Les Temps Modernes*'.[6]

'Subjectivity must be the starting point'

Existentialism as a school of philosophical thought emerged from the ruins of postwar Europe with Paris as its philosophical epicentre. Arriving in Paris in 1950, Trocchi wryly

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[5] Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture,* p. 98.
[6] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 42. Trocchi was also undoubtedly influenced by his theories; Cairns Craig in *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1999) acknowledges that 'the thought of Sartre can be traced' to Scottish writers including Trocchi (p. 107).

remarked that 'everyone is writing a thesis about Jean-Paul Satrte',[7] and although it is difficult to define, Sartre writes that, 'by existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity'.[8] Søren Kierkegaard (whom Trocchi had read) is often considered to be the founding father of existentialism. Although existentialism developed after Kierkegaard to include both theistic (e.g. Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Radner and others) and atheistic readings (e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and others), all reflect upon the existence of the human individual in the world and echo Kierkegaard's basic belief that subjectivity leads to truth which, in turn, leads to an enlightened, or more authentic and therefore meaningful, existence.[9] Existentialism urged humanity to see in a new way – 'in "inwardness"'[10] – and addressing both the theistic and atheistic tradition of existentialism, Sartre suggests that, 'what they [the theistic and atheistic existentialists] have in common is that they think that existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point'.[11] Sartre's existentialism proposed a radical subjectivity based on the primacy of the individual's choice and action: rather than being connected to God through faith Sartre argues (via Nietzsche) that 'God is dead'.[12] Because of this, man is alone in the world and is solely responsible for his being, or his making. Sartre identifies

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[7] Alexander Trocchi, 'La Vie Parisienne', *Scots Review*, 11 (1950), p. 169.

[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, (New York: Citadel, 1994; 1957), p. 10.

[9] In a diary entry dated 2nd May (the year is unspecified but the archival box is dated 1947-1952) Trocchi quotes Kirkegaard: 'the entire essential content of subjective thought is essentially secret, because it cannot be directly communicated'. In another entry dated two days later he quotes Kirkegaard again: 'to allow thoughts to emerge with the umbilical chord of their first fervour'. (St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 8 Fol. 157, un.pag).

[10] Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989), p. 21.

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Emotions*, p. 13.

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Gay Science', in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche*, (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 108. In the opening of the 'Introduction' to the edited anthology *Writers In Revolt* (New York: Grove, 1963), Trocchi, writing either alone or with Richard Seaver and/or Terry Southern (the other editors) acknowledges this 'existentialist' concern explicitly:

> In existentialist thought, the death-of-God concern is not with the wisdom of abandoning the god-idea but the acknowledgement that the role of this idea is no longer one of dynamic force in Western culture. (p. 11).

the first principle of existentialism as 'existence precedes essence', which means that man has no innate essence or being, and that he is not assigned to any pre-determined project that will define or shape his existence:

> What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is in-definable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust towards existence.
> Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism. It is also what is called subjectivity.[13]

Sartre's explanation shows how existentialism implicitly stems from subjectivity, because as Trocchi also acknowledges in 'Transcategorical Method', existence precedes essence. To the atheistic existentialist, everything is possible because 'there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom' therefore 'if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimise our conduct'.[14] Therefore, in a Godless world, the atheistic existentialist believes that man must choose his own course of action and make himself, thus, the individual's human existence precedes their essence.

Building on the fundamental belief that there is no God, postwar existentialism implicitly associated this idea with freedom. Freedom is another key term of existentialism because 'man makes himself. He isn't ready made at the start'.[15] In a Godless world, man is free to choose his own life's project, and to make himself whatever he wills himself to be. Sartre acknowledges this notion directly, writing that 'we are alone, with no excuses',[16] and that consequently 'man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet, in other

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[13] Jean-Paul Sartre, Emotions, p. 15.
[14] Ibid., p. 23.
[15] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Gay Science', p. 108.
[16] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Emotions,* p. 23.

respects, is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does'.[17] Echoing Heidegger's claim that we are 'thrown into the world' at birth,[18] Sartre recognises that the only predetermined element of a human life is its inherent freedom, because by existing in the world, humans are freely engaged in the world. Indeed, rather than seeing this freedom as purely positive, existential philosophers are quick to recognise that freedom is also highly problematic. Sartre's word choice 'condemned' conveys negativity because such human freedom is granted through being born into the world, rather than actively choosing to be born. This notion of being free in the world from birth is not an easy concept for man to existentially accept because 'from the instance of my upsurge into being, I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anyone or any person being able to lighten it'[19]. In the posthumously published early work 'Fragments from a Diary of a Man Found Gassed in a Glasgow Slum', Trocchi comments directly on this existential concept of inherent responsibility:

> Not to decide – even that is a decision. I am again involved. My existence spreads beyond itself. Affected. Affecting. Absurdly born. My slightest movement provokes a chaos of reactions. Like a stone dropped into water I am dropped into existence. I watch the ripples move away from me.[20]

Through the image of the stone being suddenly dropped into water, Trocchi draws attention to the fact that through birth man is engaged or 'involved' in the world where existence, like ripples in the water 'spreads beyond itself'. Also using water as an analogy, Sartre expounds on this concept:

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[17] Ibid., p. 23.
[18] Ibid., p. 23.
[19] Ibid., p. 57.
[20] Alexander Trocchi, 'Fragments from a Diary of a Man Found Gassed in a Glasgow Slum', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 45. The original date of this is unknown but it was written while Trocchi was still living in Glasgow; the text comprises episodes set in Glasgow from an unpublished autobiographical novel which describes his childhood and early romances.

> I am responsible for everything, in fact, for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore everything takes place as if I were compelled to be responsible. I am abandoned in the world, not in the sense that I might remain abandoned and passive in a hostile universe like a board floating on the water, but rather in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant.[21]

Sartre writes that we are 'abandoned in the world' and this abandonment, combined with the responsibility for oneself which is implicitly connected to the freedom of being in the world as a self-determined subject, can cause what the existential philosophers call anguish, catalysed when the individual cannot bear the burden of his freedom and responsibility. Trocchi's autobiographical narrator from the Glasgow 'diary' is grappling with such feelings of anguish as he attempts to rationalise his own 'absurd' and 'affecting' existence with its inherent responsibility.

These deeply philosophical issues continually preoccupied the young Trocchi. A lengthy unpublished diary entry dated '4th May' sees him attempt to grapple with what Sartre calls existential 'engagement' in the world:

> Existence brings us up against irrationality. It is a fact for which we can give no reason. Of this fundamental irrationality the existentialist has a painful sense. As far as conduct is concerned, there is no ideal human type towards which one ought to approximate. We find ourselves 'engaged' in the world (without having engaged ourselves) and finding ourselves thus engaged, we are compelled to engage ourselves, and are unable to remain neutral or passive, because, being free beings, not to engage ourselves is only another form of engaging. Further, our personal engagement engages us beyond envisaged limits, our acts gowing [*sic*] beyond us into an unknown future.[22]

The passage shows Trocchi desperately trying to rationalise human existence but he realises that this is problematic from the outset because existence in the world is essentially irrational – it is 'a fact' that cannot be logically explained. Trocchi had pondered these ideas a few days previously, writing in another unpublished diary dated

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[21] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Emotions*, p. 57.
[22] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 8 Fol. 157, un.pag. Although the year is not specified, another diary entry in the same notebook mentions Trocchi going into Paris. It can be consequently surmised that the diary was written between 1950-56.

'2nd May' entry that existentialism was 'confessedly irrational'.[23] The 'diary' entry

suggests that Trocchi is suffering from a degree of existential angst; he seems

overwhelmed as he struggles to accept the premise of implicit existential engagement in

the world from the moment of birth.[24] Sartre suggests that as a result of such typical

existential anxiety, most men attempt to live an inauthentic life without engagement and

without actively acknowledging and grasping their own freedom.[25] Despite initially

having trouble accepting the premise of existential engagement, in another unpublished

notebook jotting Trocchi recognises that 'the existential subject, [is] the sole agent

capable of self-transcendence'.[26] Trocchi acknowledges that the world is indeed Godless,

a concept that emphasises the importance of subjectivity and self-will to existential

freedom.

Existential Engagement

These early sources make it clear that Trocchi was undoubtedly interested in the

existentialist premise that subjectivity enables mankind to be in control of, and

actively direct, their lives. It will now be argued that, while in Paris in the 1950s,

existentialism became not just an interest to Trocchi but also a detectable influence, in

his vision of subjectivity as a means to create individual difference against the

totalitarian politics of the time. Although Sartre's philosophy is absolutely rooted in

individuality, which could suggest isolation, it does however encompass wider

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[23] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 8 Fol. 157, un.pag.

[24] Albert Camus called this feeling absurdity and Martin Heidegger called it dread.

[25] Sartre suggests that, 'most of the time we flee anguish in bad faith' (*Emotions*, p. 59), by which he means that man is more inclined to turn away from freedom and instead live through self-deception; bad faith is an inauthentic mode of existence that humans often live through in an attempt to mask the authentic mode of anguish. Sartre writes that 'the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project it is to be God' (*Emotions*, p. 63) and this ultimately powerful position of God-like self-determination is too much for most men to accept and to live through.

[26] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', un.pag.

humanitarian thought, or what Maurice Cranston calls 'the notion of community'.[27]

Sartre writes that where 'man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is

responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men', meaning

that in addition to being responsible for himself, man is responsible for all men on

earth because 'in choosing myself, I choose man'.[28] Alistair Braidwood has also

acknowledged the concept of community in his claim that 'Sartre's existentialism is

primarily concerned with the potential of the apparently alienated subjective

individual to influence and affect wider society'.[29] In tandem with this notion of

existentialism connecting all of mankind, Sartre also argued that existentialism is 'a

doctrine of action', and although this notion of action primarily relates to the

individual because they must actively choose their own existence, it also had wider

social implications, particularly in the context of postwar Paris in which Sartre and

Trocchi were living and writing.[30]

Richard Seaver, Trocchi's colleague at the Paris-based journal *Merlin*,

conceived to exist in friendly rivalry with the *Paris Review* and which Trocchi

founded and edited from 1952-55, reflects on this time claiming that 'Paris may have

been our mistress, but the political realities of the time were our master'.[31] The first

issue of *Merlin* was published on 15 May 1952,[32] and Seaver also acknowledges that

the magazine 'bore the weight of the early Cold War world on its meagre

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[27] Maurice Cranston, *Sartre*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), p. 80.

[28] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Emotions*, pp. 16, 18

[29] Alistair Braidwood, 'Iain Banks, James Kelman and the Art of Engagement: An Application of Jean Paul Sartre's Theories of Literature and Existentialism to Two Modern Scottish Novelists', (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Glasgow, 2011), p. i.

[30] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Emotions*, p. 51.

[31] Richard Seaver, 'Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, (London: Calder, 1992), p. xxi. For another personal account of Trocchi and *Merlin* see Christopher Logue's 'Alexander Trocchi and the beginning of Merlin' in *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 59-65.

[32] John Calder, *Garden of Eros: The Story of the Paris Expatriates and the Post-War Literary Scene*, (Richmond: Alma, 2014; 2013), p. 64.

shoulders'.[33] Further insight from Seaver reveals that Paris' political context is essential to understanding *Merlin*'s existence and its ethos:

> We were not just different from our Paris-based elders who had filled the cafes in Montparnasse in the twenties, we were the extreme opposite: pure literature in the sense that a Joyce or a Stein understood it, experimentation as an end in itself, seemed impossible.[34]

Seaver reveals that *Merlin* rejected the absolute aestheticism of the 'art for art's sake' attitude and instead sought to embody a new socio-political consciousness alongside a fundamentally existential approach:

> There was no way we could remain neutral, for neutrality was the death of the soul. In a debate between Camus and Sartre that rent the European literary establishment in those days, we clearly sided with the political scrapper over the detached philosopher, the *engagé* over the *non-engagé*.[35]

Alluding to the debate surrounding *littérature engagée*, which had led to the public and long-lasting fallout between Sartre and Camus, Seaver shows that *Merlin* 'sided' with Sartre, 'the political scrapper'. When asked in an interview 'was Trocchi a radical?', Seaver's answer acknowledges the influence that existentialism had on Trocchi as a young writer living in Paris:

> There was a great ferment after World War II. You had Sartre and Camus who were in rebellion against the French establishment, both politically different but trying to forge something new, both in literature and in politics, and I think Alex saw himself as the equivalent in the English language. When I first met him there were no drugs in his life. His radical stands were concentrated on literature.[36]

In 'Letter from Paris' published in the London-based little magazine *Nimbus* in the summer of 1953 (and coinciding with the duration of *Merlin*), Trocchi used the opportunity to publicly expound his pioneering views on literature.[37] Contextualising

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[33] Ibid., p. xiii.

[34] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 61

[35] Richard Seaver, 'Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, (London: Calder, 1998), p. xiii.

[36] Richard Seaver, in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 60.

[37] Trocchi also published some poems in *Nimbus* in 1952. Conceived to support new writing, *Nimbus: A Magazine of Literature, the Arts, and New Ideas* was first published in London in December 1951.

Sartre's 'attack' on Camus, he begins the letter by outlining the importance of the

postwar context to the emergence of existentialism and the notion of 'engaged'

literature:[38]

> To understand the present literary situation in France it is necessary to go back
> to the defeat of Nazism. At that time the N.R.F. [*Nouvelle Review Francais*],
> which had remained in existence throughout the German occupation and was,
> to say the least, suspect, ceased to appear, and at that time it must have
> appeared to the resistance heroes that there was no question of its
> renaissance.[39] Céline, Montherlant, Giono, Cendrars, Chardonne, Drieu, to
> name only a few who were denounced as collaborators at the time of the
> liberation, were all in varying degrees discredited; Sartre and existentialism
> replaced Breton and Surrealism as the most powerful single force in French
> letters.[40]

Trocchi emphasises the extent to which existentialism changed the Parisian cultural

realm by replacing Surrealism as the fashionable and dominant practice in the

aftermath of World War II. He describes existentialism as 'vibrant' and, mirroring

Sartre, 'a philosophy of action' before explaining that with Sartre at the philosophical

helm, any writing that was not politically engaged 'amounted to little more than

intellectual masturbation' because 'in short, "creative" writing was no longer a force

that counted'.[41] Trocchi then writes that 'it was such considerations as these which led

Sartre, with a ruthlessness which is characteristic of him, to condemn all writing

which was not *engagé*'. Trocchi's letter rallies for existentialism, and particularly for

Sartre, to continue thriving despite its recent troubles and misrepresentation:

> I have heard it said recently that Existentialism is dead; the only meaning that
> can be given to such a statement is that tourists are no longer amused by the
> moth-eaten but wistful big-busted girls in tight black trousers who
> conglomerate in the Mabillon on the Boulevard St. Germain. Sartre is more

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[38] A 1954 promotional pamphlet for *Merlin* boasted the following endorsement from Albert Camus:
'The assertion of independence, so rare today, makes *MERLIN* necessary and worthy of support'.

[39] The N.R.F. was founded by a group of French intellectuals including Andre Gide in 1909. It
continues today, though it is now published as a quarterly rather than monthly title.

[40] Alexander Trocchi, 'Letter from Paris' in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life In Pieces:
Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 51-54, p. 51.

[41] Ibid., pp. 52, 51, 52.

active than ever – he has to be – and both Camus and Sartre will tell you that Camus was never an Existentialist.[42]

Trocchi's letter clearly conveys the historical emergence of 'engaged' literature with Sartre as leader, while also showing the intensity of the influence of existentialism at the time in Paris. Most significantly, although Trocchi critiques Sartre for his 'sudden and uncompromising attack' on Camus (conflict which cultural historian Alan Sinfield recognises 'became explicit in 1952' after publication of Camus' *L'Homme Revolt* and his refusal to make an overt political commitment), it is significant that Trocchi's sympathies ultimately lie with Sartre's political-literary engagement and in the importance of existentialism as a 'philosophy of action'.[43] Sinfield has also acknowledged that between 1952-57 (Trocchi was in Paris from 50-56) Sartre 'moved closer to the Communist Party than he had envisaged', which makes Trocchi's support of Sartre particularly intriguing given his apparently apolitical sensibility and focus on what Seaver termed 'radical literature', rather than on politics.[44]

In the *Nimbus* letter Trocchi aligns himself with the 'ruthless' notion of 'engaged' literature. He writes that such Sartrean statements like ''a man is what he does' or 'a man defines himself through his acts' […] have vital significance at a time

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[42] Ibid., p. 55.

[43] Alan Sinfield in *Literature, Politics and Culture* usefully summarises Camus' argument in *L'Homme Revolt*:

> Camus envisages two threats to freedom: communism and the 'human condition'. The first renders political action futile and throws the absurdist back on the capitalist West. The second acknowledges that all is not well there either, but shifts the flaw from the economic and political order to humanity. When considering capitalism, there is no choice. Amidst this confusion, socialism disappears altogether. Indeed, the rebellion of the artist makes political change unnecessary (p. 103).

[44] Ibid., p. 105. Despite publicly siding with Sartre in *Nimbus*, in private Trocchi was often critical of Sartre's existential theories. This is evident in a variety of unpublished notes, such as a diary entry dated '3rd May. 11 am' the year is unspecified but from the diary's content it is clear that is was written while Trocchi was living in France in which Trocchi questions how Sartre in *La Nausee* equates value with 'things', and the next day in a diary entry dated '4th May. Afternoon' he dismisses Sartre for 'reacting emotionally to words, trying to make philosophy out of poetry' which Trocchi considers to be 'abortive'. He concludes the entry by writing that the 'moral' to be learned from Sartre's unconvincing practice is 'don't use words metaphysically'. In another entry dated the following day, Trocchi goes on to contest in detail many of Sartre's quotes from a variety of sources, predominantly *Being and Nothingness*: it should be noted that Trocchi uses the original French title which implies that he had read the text in French. (St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 8 Fol. 157, un.pag).

when the ancient certitudes, authorities and functions have reached an extreme depth of decay'.[45] Trocchi believes that Sartre's existential doctrine of radical subjectivity is more meaningful in life and literature than the outmoded impersonal systems of 'ancient certitudes' and 'authorities'; continuing his support of *littérature engagée*, Trocchi argues that 'the writer is not 'above' politics; he is not even 'out' of them' before explaining that 'in France after the war, the *engagé* writer came into fashion and has more or less remained there ever since'.[46] While Sartre used the concept of engagement to further his own political alignment with what has been somewhat ambiguously described as 'libertarian socialism',[47] Trocchi's position is less clear-cut despite the fact that he explicitly aligns literature with a political agenda: 'the fact is that politics pervades the existence of every man, circumscribing action, defining and limiting personal possibilities, and to say that one is not interested in politics is tantamount to saying one is not interested in life'.[48] Somewhat conflictingly, on one hand Trocchi positions the writer as absolutely central to the Cold War's political context, but on the other he does not use the article to define, or propagandise, his own political position. Yet Trocchi's insinuation that all politics define and limit 'personal possibilities' is revealing: Trocchi hints towards an apolitical position that is in-keeping with the fundamental existential premise, that subjectivity allows the individual to make up their own mind and shape their own future. By refusing to publicly commit to a concrete political position, it is apparent, then, that Trocchi uses the model of Sartrean engagement as a means to promote an escape from political systems altogether, where existentialism then becomes a 'philosophy of action' for the individual, rather than for furthering hegemonic social and political ideologies.

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[45] Alexander Trocchi, 'Letter from Paris', p. 52.
[46] Ibid., pp. 54, 55.
[47] Thomas Flynn, 'Jean-Paul Sartre', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/sartre/> [accessed 4 November 2013]
[48] Alexander Trocchi, 'Letter from Paris', p. 54.

Merlin's mission statement declared that 'MERLIN will hit at all clots of rigid categories in criticism and life, and all that is unintelligently partisan'.[49] Although Trocchi's *Merlin* editorials similarly propose a critique of all political systems, they do however echo some of Sartre's rhetoric. Writing of the role of the 'engaged' writer, Sartre states 'he knows that words, as Brice-Parrain says, are "loaded pistols". If he speaks, he fires'.[50] Trocchi adheres to this model by wielding his 'loaded pistols' in the provocatively entitled 'words and war' editorial in which he posits subjective literary theories to be 'an extremely subtle and effective type of moral armament' against the culture of objective, or impersonal, total politics.[51] Trocchi's unwavering belief in the authenticity of existential subjectivity is clear, and he believes that this approach of inwardness must be implemented to influence

> certain aesthetic theories [which] have become widely accredited, and which, in their attempt to impose arbitrary structure on history and on cultural processes, past, present, and future, represent an imminent threat, parallel and confederate with the same kind of thinking in politics, to our civilisation.[52]

Echoing Sartre, Trocchi believes that the writer has the potential to highlight and even change 'cultural processes' by influencing society. 'Words and war' develops to become a lengthy essay that positions *Merlin*'s content at the heart of the Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Trocchi comments on the misleading nature of statements, which, he argues, when wielded in a political arena can be dangerous because they purport to be absolute truths:

> A statement, to be historically effective, need not necessarily be true. For example, the bare statement, 'All men are equal', has no doubt been reiterated to great effect for several hundred years, but as it stands, and without a great deal of clarification it is neither true nor false. Its power is purely psychological. What we wish to suggest, what from the beginning we have been labouring to point out, is that the realisation by some that such statements are meaningless *is itself an historical fact*,

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[49] Alexander Trocchi, *Merlin Collection*, 2.1 (1952), p. 57.
[50] Jean-Paul Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, (Cambridge: Harvard College, 1998; 1949), p. 38.
[51] Alexander Trocchi, 'Words and War', *Merlin*, 3.2 (1954), pp. 141-3 cont. 209-227, p. 209.
[52] Ibid., p. 209.

and, if printed, a very important one. That is the historical importance of the neutralist in the society of our time: his function will be to untie the semantic knots that priests and politicians have contrived to make permanent, in whatever interest.

Put another way: a true statement is always to be preferred to an apparently affective one because, if it is not, the principle of verification is itself threatened. When that goes under, the range of thought will have narrowed; the nightmare of *1984* will have arrived.[53]

The bold editorial argues for political neutrality by purporting that objective and historical truths are 'meaningless' because they are often 'purely psychological' rather than being wholly true. In a tone that is reminiscent of post-structuralism, he argues that such rhetorical use of language functions as 'semantic knots', which he believes is wholly inaccurate because such statements have the potential to lead to a totalitarian society where objective truths are accepted unequivocally. To further illustrate his point, Trocchi alludes to Orwell's *1984* which Alan Sinfield acknowledges was 'incorporated into Cold-War ideology'.[54] Significantly, Trocchi sets forth subjectivity as a strategic remedy for the Orwellian situation of absolutism; later in the editorial Trocchi claims that, 'we must learn to look at facts and to counter ideologies' before concluding that, 'We have contended that many in the West have accepted this language and posture of the absolutist. Our attack is directed against them'.[55] Trocchi's editorial adopts a didactic tone by instructing readers to challenge objective and absolutist ideologies, and the violence inherent in the word choice of 'attack' also explicitly echoes Sartre's suggestion that words are 'loaded pistols'.

Mirroring 'words and war' Trocchi uses another *Merlin* editorial as an opportunity to strike out against what he calls 'fixed categories' and to assert subjectivity as a weapon against the political absolutism of the Cold War:

It is symptomatic of the Orwellian situation which exists in the world today

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[53] Alexander Trocchi, *Merlin*, 3.2 (1954), pp. 141-3 cont. 209-227, p. 226.

[54] Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture,* p. 111. Although it is often assumed to be a Cold War critique, *1984* was in fact devised in 1943 according to Orwell (See Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture,* p. 113).

[55] Alexander Trocchi, *Merlin*, 3.2 (1954), pp. 141-3 cont. 209-227, p. 227.

that politicians on both sides of the iron curtain cry indignantly for 'justice'; both sides claim to be 'right' and think that they are describing a fact when they call the other 'wrong', the east in the name of Marx or the 'historical necessity', the west even more ambiguously in the name of 'humanity' of 'God' or 'democracy'. It is the uncritical acceptance of such categories as these (Jew, Nigger, American, Bolshevik – and others) that allows men, always liable to act in accordance with stock responses, to be herded into armies keyed up to destroy 'the enemy'.

Here man is at the mercy of words. And it is precisely here that the writer has a vital social function to perform. If he is not alive to the snares of language he is a more dangerous fool than his audience.

We know that it is attitudes which are important. It is attitudes that are effective.

In what way can a literary magazine most effectively combat that tendency in the human being to form rigid and uncompromising attitudes? For if it does not combat that tendency it merely panders to those forces which will explode the world for a third time. Obviously, as was suggested in MERLIN Number Two, it must proceed by hitting at fixed categories, by persuading men to analyse their own attitudes, to suspend their responses, to think critically, and then, in the historical context, *to act*.[56]

While Trocchi acknowledges that *Merlin* is 'a literary magazine', he dismisses a purely 'literary' function by instead portraying it as an independent and radical publication that aims to influence its readers into thinking and acting. In this way, Trocchi argues that the writer is inherently engaged because they have a 'vital social function to perform', and this affirms Sartre's social vision, that 'the writer is, *par excellence*, a mediator and his engagement is meditation'.[57] Moreover, Trocchi suggests that 'man is at the mercy of words', which again warns of language's dangerous or corrupting potential, when used inaccurately. Alluding again to the Cold War, Trocchi critiques the practice of politicians identifying and portraying 'the enemy' in their misleading propaganda, rhetoric that was executed by both the Soviet Union and the United States. Trocchi also aims to destablise 'rigid and uncompromising attitudes' by calling to readers to 'analyse their own attitudes' in opposition to the fixed nature of apparently absolute categories: Trocchi suggests that subjectivity *must* be used strategically to bring about action to secure existential freedom and truth for individuals away from objective – and therefore false – politics. Crucially,

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[56] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial', *Merlin Collection,* 3.1 (1952-1953), p.117.
[57] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, p. 77.

he urges readers 'to think critically' and to use their subjectivity 'to *act*'. The Spring/Summer 1955 *Merlin* editorial also exemplifies Trocchi's vision of social engagement through literature:

> For literature, the most authentic literature, is obligatorily *engagé* in this sense: it is charged with energy and with life only as long as it stems from a critical appreciation of what is real, of what determines its forms and possibilities; and of what, secretly and apparently, concerns and preoccupies the changing men who read it.[58]

Trocchi explicitly aligns *Merlin* with the 'obligatorily *engagé'* cause and in this regard Trocchi seems to share Sartre's vision that existentially-rooted and 'authentic' literature has the potential to change the 'men who read it'. Moreover, Gavin Bowd has recognised that *Merlin*'s alternative engagement 'rejected […] the words which underpinned the threat of nuclear annihilation',[59] and indeed, Trocchi is apparently aligned with Sartre's belief that 'literature should not be a sedative but an irritant, a catalyst provoking men to change the world in which they live and in doing so change themselves'; for *Merlin* this meant opposing the United States' and the Soviet Union's nuclear agendas.[60]

The notion of freedom from social conformity that Trocchi establishes in his editorials during the 1950s continued into the 1960s. Trocchi's introduction to *Writers in Revolt* uses similar rhetoric to *Merlin* ten years before: 'the writer still struggles for the freedom to use his tools – language – without restriction'.[61] This call for freedom of speech is particularly significant because *Cain's Book* was tried for obscenity in Sheffield

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[58] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial', in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 76.

[59] Gavin Bowd, *The Outsiders: Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth* White (London: Akros, 1998), p. 4.

[60] David Caute, 'Introduction', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. xi.

[61] Alexander Trocchi, 'Introduction: Towards the Ethics of a Golden Age', in Richard Seaver, Terry Southern and Alexander Trocchi (eds), *Writers In Revolt*, (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1963), pp. 11-7, p. 16. Trocchi wrote 'Censorship and Virtue' while living in Paris in the 1950s to expound his views opposing literary censorship. Coinciding with his association as author with Maurice Girodias' notorious Olympia Press, he dismisses the practice that 'any book which is courageous and not obscure seems to be branded as obscene without the justification of literary merit' and emphasises what he regards as an inadequate culture of ignorance surrounding literature, rather than of knowledge. He closes the article by declaring that '*there is no virtue in the Censor*' (See 'Censorship and Virtue' in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 80).

in 1964, a year after Trocchi argued for such literary freedom in this introduction.[62] Indeed, Trocchi was writing within a highly controversial social context, and consequently, the role of literature and the role of the writer were questioned as part of the court proceedings.[63] Trocchi told the jury that *Cain's Book* 'was written in America as a protest against the whole American system. Just before the period before the junkie became a leper, the Communist had been the leper' which implies that the text was written with a political motivation.[64] This notion is however inconsistent with a statement Trocchi made when on the panel on the 'Commitment' day of the Writers' Conference in Edinburgh in 1962: 'I would not think politically and then filter it into my novels'.[65] Rather than capitalist, socialist, communist, or even anarchist, he is instead (by his own admission), 'existentialist', and in this way, it is perhaps tempting to view Trocchi's rhetoric as a kind of political posturing because although he immerses himself in the debates of the time, he does not directly take any notable action or adopt any concrete political stance.[66] On the other hand, perhaps Trocchi's statement at the Writers' Conference was not properly thought through; in his speech immediately afterwards he made the following admission: 'I am afraid I am not a... really here with you at the moment... but my commitment is rather more private this afternoon and as I said, I was

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[62] After publication in the UK in 1963 after initial publication in the USA in 1960, Trocchi's text was seized and taken to court in Sheffield a year later on charges of obscenity. Defended by John Calder, Trocchi's UK publisher, he described the book in court as 'a very important book', and as 'the first book written by a British author with a great affinity to the Beat movement'. Calder continued: 'It expresses a certain revolt against convention; to some extent against conventional social values, against moral values, and also very much against conventional literary values' archive. Calder contextualised this artistic 'revolt' by acknowledging that 'there has been revolt in the arts, recently particularly in literature' archive, and later in the court proceedings he also claimed, 'I would say that the book is written about the Beat Generation'. Although Trocchi rejected Calder's labeling, Trocchi's text was written during a time of significant social change, and it is intriguing that Calder attempts to align *Cain's Book* with what he terms 'the Beat movement'. (St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 2 Fol. 18, p. 9).

[63] The 1959 Obscene Publications Act saw that 'drugs, rock music, tough talk and ostentatiously relished sex scenes were absorbed into a cloudy new definition of 'obscenity' (John Sutherland, *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain, 1960-1982*, (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 3).

[64] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 2 Fol. 18, pp. 2-3.

[65] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *The International Writers' Conference: Edinburgh, 1962*, (Glasgow: Cargo, 2012), p. 108.

[66] I return to Trocchi and anarchism in the next section, in relation to the Situationist International.

not expecting to be called... it was rather sudden'.[67] Moreover, while Trocchi's public

siding with Sartrean engagement in *Nimbus* saw him reject Camus, the apparently

apolitical stance adopted in the article and in his Paris writings generally is in fact

arguably more aligned with Camus' reluctance to commit to any political ideology.

Writing that 'alternative to Sartre's idea of artistic [and therefore political] freedom was

the belief that the intellectual preserves his or her freedom by avoiding political

attachments', Alan Sinfield sees such apolitical standpoints as part of a wider shared

sensibility in the postwar years.[68] Considered overall, perhaps Paris should be regarded as

a formative period in Trocchi's intellectual development, as a time in which he, through

his various writing roles, attempted to work out his own ideas regarding existentialism,

politics, commitment, and literature, and which consequently saw him flirt with

seemingly contradictory ideas in order to develop his own self-knowledge. Indeed, while

such nuances make it difficult to pin down or make sense of Trocchi's creative and

political positions, it is nonetheless clear that Trocchi's basic principle was that

subjectivity – as an implicitly and explicitly existential standpoint – had the potential to

shape far more than just aestheticism; it was creative, philosophical, and a means to

oppose the dominant political order. In his polemical and 'engaged' writing for

publications such as *Merlin*, subjectivity is presented as an agent for social change;

Trocchi encourages individuals to use subjectivity and self-will to become in charge of

their own existential fate, rather than have their destiny dictated by totalitarian systems.

Tom McGrath, a fellow Scot and friend of Trocchi's during the 1960s through his

role as editor of the *International Times*, claims that 'Trocchi had no patience for

Marxism or any other political approaches, which he regarded as outmoded. Instead his

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[67] Ibid., p. 108. For additional insight into Trocchi's ideas on politics and literature see the transcripts from the Conference reprinted in Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962*, (Glasgow: Cargo, 2012).

[68] Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, p. 100.

revolution began in inner space, within human consciousness itself'.[69] Trocchi directly addresses this notion – of revolution through the subjective self as an alternative to the 'objective' manipulated masses – in a letter to his family in Scotland from Paris in 1955:

> I reject the entire system [...] the answer is *revolution*. Not in the objective, idealistic sense, but there in the heart of every man [...] a new attitude [...] the Revolution has already taken place in me. I am outside your world and am no longer governed by your laws.[70]

It is significant that in the letter Trocchi speaks of 'a new attitude' of revolution through 'the heart of every man'. In his particular vision of subjectivity as means to create difference, Trocchi describes himself as an outsider: he is 'outside *your* world' of laws and politics. Todd Gitlin has termed such radical apolitical sensibility as 'the impulse to go it alone' which sought 'a heady truth in this image of self-creation', and which later became typically associated with the 1960s despite being rooted in, and consequently stemming from, 1950s political systems.[71] Gitlin further contextualises this anticipatory concept:

> With left-wing politics in a state of collapse [in the 1950s], most of these oppositional spaces were cultural – ways of living, thinking, and fighting oneself free of the affluent consensus. Most were indifferent or hostile to politics, which they saw as yet another squandering of energy. But even the antipolitical enclaves opened a space for later and larger oppositions, both the New Left and the counterculture, oppositions compounded – however contradictorily – of politics and culture.[72]

For Trocchi in the 1950s, the personal became a way out of the dominant political ideologies. In this way he can be regarded as anticipating the apolitical ethos of the counterculture in the 1960s through his belief that the way out of the status quo was through moving inwards into the subjective self. In tandem with Gitlin's claim, that in the 1950s the space of political opposition was cultural rather than political, Trocchi's time in Paris also brought him into contact with a group of radical thinkers who used

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[69] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 36-47, p. 37.
[70] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 64.
[71] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (London: Bantam, 1993), p. 27.
[72] Ibid., p. 28.

their subjectivity strategically to achieve authenticity and freedom against totalitarian politics. The group was the Lettrist International (henceforth abbreviated to the LI) which Trocchi described as a 'closed society, a clandestine group, which was to be my whole world',[73] and which forced him to sever contact with friends and associates.[74] Trocchi's LI affiliation lead him to attend the 'Italian First World Congress of Free Artists' in 1956, after which Trocchi and eight others including Guy Debord founded the Situationist International (henceforth abbreviated to the SI) in 1957. The extent of Trocchi's involvement with the SI is somewhat difficult to determine because at the time of the SI's formation Trocchi had moved away from Paris and relocated in the United States.[75] It is however vital to acknowledge the SI in order to trace the trajectory of Trocchi's use of subjectivity as a strategy to achieve existential and artistic freedom against the conformity of the political and social status quo.

sigma: 'Existential Consultants'

The 1960s saw Trocchi channel his previously established ideas regarding radical subjectivity and existential autonomy into a new venture, the sigma portfolio. Trocchi initially introduced sigma in 1960 in an article entitled 'project sigma: Cultural Engineering' which was printed in a special edition of the SI's journal *Manifesto*

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[73] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 64.

[74] Gavin Bowd, *Outsiders,* p. 8. Lettrism was founded by Isodore Isou in Paris. Existing from the mid 1940s, it ideologically stemmed from Dada and surrealism. Like the Situationist International, Lettrism sought to integrate all art forms into their radical cultural-political theory, and Guy Debord joined in 1951. Debord then covertly started the Lettrist International in 1952; Trocchi joined in October 1955.

[75] Although Trocchi was an absent member of the SI in terms of his physicality, when he was arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting and dealing narcotics to a minor in 1960, *Internationale Situationniste #5* published 'Resolution of the Fourth Conference of the Situationist International Concerning the Imprisonment of Alexander Trocchi' which specifically stated that Asger Jorn, Jacqueline de Jong and Guy Debord must 'take immediate action on behalf of Alexander Trocchi' who is 'England's [*sic*] most intelligent creative artist today'. 'Resolution of the Fourth Conference of the Situationist International Concerning the Imprisonment of Alexander Trocchi', *Situationist International Online*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/resolution.html>, [accessed 9 January 2015]. Having fled from America due to the impending drugs charges, the SI continued to support Trocchi well into his relocation in London until Debord 'resigned' him from the SI's Central Council via a letter in 1964.

Situationiste.[76] Sigma's idea of revolution in inner space was undoubtedly indebted to the

SI's philosophy, which is explicitly evident in Trocchi's writing and principles in sigma,

despite the fact that in 1964 Debord resigned Trocchi from the SI.[77] Gavin Bowd echoes

this assertion, while also acknowledging that sigma's apolitical stance jarred with the SI's

Marxism:

> If Sigma [*sic*] did not attribute a messianic role to the proletariat, it nevertheless had close affinities with the Situationists: the desire for a collective organisation overthrowing separations between culture and everyday life; the refusal of existing hierarchies; the importance of town-planning and the organisation of space.[78]

Sigma's official headed paper boldly proclaims 'SIGMA GENERAL INFORMATION

SERVICE EXISTENTIAL CONSULTANTS LONDON PARIS NEW YORK'.

Although somewhat ambiguous, sigma was fundamentally a transnational network of

associates – Trocchi termed these associates sigmaticians and described sigma as an

'international index' – and the project was mainly administered and promoted through

publication of pamphlets. Produced under the title 'the sigma portfolio', pamphlets were

a popular mode of publication at the time due to being relatively inexpensive to produce.

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[76] For more on Trocchi and the SI see the following: Michael Gardiner, 'Alexander Trocchi and Situationism' in Gavin Grindon (ed.), *Aesthetics and Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008); 'Alexander Trocchi's Invisible Insurrection' in Samuel Martin Cooper, *'A Lot to Answer For': The English Legacy of the Situationist International'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Sussex, 2012); 'Trocchi and Project Sigma' in Gavin Bowd's *'The Outsiders': Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth White*, (London: Akros, 1998).

[77] Debord felt that sigma was moving in too different a direction from the SI; his letter of resignation to Trocchi is dated December 1 1964 and it reveals Debord's concern that 'the SI might find itself discomforted if certain aspects or collaborators on this project were compared to the SI's other declarations' (Letter to Alexander Trocchi dated 12 October 1962, <http://www.notbored.org/debord-12October1964.html> [accessed 13 May 2012]). However, an 'Editorial Note' written by Trocchi in number eighteen of the sigma portfolio entitled *Manifesto Situationiste* originally written in 1960 and published by Debord blatantly demonstrates that sigma's ideological lineage lies with the SI:

> For many years now we have been to some extent involved in the theoretical evaluation of that dialectic which goes under the name 'situationiste': the manifesto which follows is based on the *Manifesto Situationiste* of 1960. But as all situationist documents have been at all times provisional in the sense that they are to be understood as tactical maneuvers of 'happenings', we have taken the liberty now at the end of 1964 of making certain changes. Thus, although the original was faithfully translated by our collaborator Phillip Green, we have proceeded to develop some of the original theses, always, nevertheless, in accordance with the natural evolution of the situationist point of view. The fact that we are able to do this without perverting the original bears out our contention that the invisible insurrection is happening in many places simultaneously…..NOW. (sigma Portfolio 18 (1964), un.pag).

[78] Gavin Bowd, *Outsiders*, p. 9.

Proclaimed as 'an entirely new mode of publishing', Trocchi explains why this method

was chosen: 'the writer reaches his public immediately, outflanking the traditional trap of

publishing-house policy, and by means of which the reader gets it, so to speak, "hot"

from the writer's pen, from the photographer's lens, etc'.[79] Trocchi, as founder and

leader, wrote many of sigma's pieces himself, and consequently his contributions best

convey its radical ethos. Indeed, 'sigma was Alex and Alex was sigma' and between

1964 and 1967 a total of thirty-nine issues of the 'sigma portfolio' were produced.[80]

Trocchi explains the rationale for choosing the project's name: 'We chose the word

"sigma". Commonly used in mathematical practice to designate all, the sum, the whole, it

seemed to fit very well with our notion that all men must be eventually included'.[81]

Sigma officially launched in 1962 with publication of the seminal 'Invisible Insurrection

of a Million Minds', which was followed by 'sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', which sought

to 'inspire and sustain self-consciousness in all men' by catalysing an 'international

association of men who are concerned individually and in concert to articulate an

effective strategy and tactics for this cultural revolution'.[82] Trocchi was keen to clarify

that sigma's revolution 'must be in the broad sense cultural'; here culture signifies both

society *and* creativity.[83] Although Trocchi's ambitious proposal emphasises the

revolutionary potential of the individual, which seems at odds with sigma also being a

collective network, this is conceptually similar to Sartre's vision of engagement, whereby

individual self-consciousness evolves to become subjectivity to be shared amongst like-

minded individuals as a means to subvert the capitalist status quo. Rather than

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[79] Alexander Trocchi, 'Subscription Form', *Sigma Portfolio* 12 (1964), un.pag.
[80] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 128.
[81] Alexander Trocchi, 'sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 193.
[82] Ibid., pp. 192-93.
[83] Alexander Trocchi and Phillip Green, 'Project Sigma: Cultural Engineering', in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds.), *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 189.

constructing praxis that focused on the lives of the elite, like the SI, sigma instead sought

to critique and change everyday life.[84] In an attempt to break down cultural and classical

divisions and in their focus on the everyday lives of men, sigma rallies for 'man in the

streets' to be involved,[85] because 'all men must eventually be included' in sigma's

proposed cultural transformation.[86]

Sigma centred on the principle of subjectivity as a strategy of defiance against

state-led political dictate. In its ambitious vision of a '*coup de monde*',[87] Trocchi used the

sigma portfolio to propose his idea of a worldwide cultural revolution through the power

of individuality:

> Subversion. […] The so-called 'seat-of-power' must shift. We must stop
> externalising it so absolutely. The power is in us, and we can use it together if
> we use our heads. We must do everything to attack the 'enemy' at his base
> within ourselves. We must take nothing for granted. Certainly not what men
> call the 'state' […] The word 'state' was well-chosen. It is an existential
> absurdity.[88]

Trocchi suggests that subversion is necessary to 'shift' the "so-called 'seat of power'"

away from the impersonal rule of the state, and it is clear that he believes subversion can

only be achieved through subjectivity: he correlates power with individual inwardness

writing 'the power is in us if we use our heads' and the attack comes from 'within

ourselves'. The 'technique of subversion' outlined here is a means to achieve existential

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[84] The 'everyday' was particularly conceptually central to writing in the Parisian postwar context onwards. SI member Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) both demonstrate how a focus on the everyday was vital to critiquing the established order.

[85] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 181.

[86] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p. 193. Ruth Kinna's book *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005) argues that the SI is detectable and indeed influential in the trajectory of anarchism, particularly within the areas of ecology, alienation and creativity (see pp. 23, 65). Although Trocchi never declared himself an anarchist, or explicitly aligned himself or sigma with anarchism, it is however significant that in 'sigma: A Tactical Blueprint' he acknowledges the anarchist Peter Kropotkin:

> Our university must become a community of mind whose vital function is to discover and
> articulate the functions of tomorrow, an association of free men creating a fertile ambiance for
> new knowledge and understanding (men who don't jump to the conclusion Kropotkin carried a
> bomb because he was an anarchist), who will create an independent moral climate in which
> the best of what is thought and imagined can flourish. (pp. 200-201).

[87] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 181.

[88] Alexander Trocchi, 'Potlach', *Sigma Portfolio* 4 (1964), p. 4.

freedom in opposition to the 'the 'enemy': impersonal, and absurd, political systems. In 'project sigma: Cultural Engineering' Trocchi (with co-writer Philip Green) makes it clear to the reader that sigma exists outside this milieu:

> we propose immediate action on an international scale, a self-governing (non-) organisation of producers of the new culture beyond, and independent of, all political organisations and trade and professional syndicates which presently exist; for there is not one of those which does not have the fogs and vapours of ataxia in its own basement.[89]

Trocchi emphasises that sigma is international, self-fulfilling, and ideologically autonomous. Writing in an explicitly existential style in the aptly titled 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', Trocchi rallies for everyone to awaken and assert their individual subjectivity as a strategy to oppose 'paralytic' politically dictated existence:

> The individual has a profound sense of his own impotence as he realises the immensity of the forces involved. We, the creative ones everywhere, must discard this paralytic posture and seize control over the human process by assuming control of ourselves. We must reject the conventional fiction of 'unchanging human nature'. There is in fact no such permanence anywhere. There is only *becoming*.[90]

Just as Sartre believed that 'subjectivity must be the starting point' for an authentic and free existence, in sigma Trocchi similarly outlines his vision of subjectivity as a strategy to overturn the 'immensity of the forces involved' in Cold War politics. Trocchi also alludes to the existential premise that in a world without God, nothing is permanent or predetermined; there is 'only becoming' through subjective self-determination.

In direct lineage from the SI, whose slogans included Debord's 'Never Work', Trocchi also furthered these anti-industry ideas in sigma.[91] In 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', Trocchi outlines his radical vision of a society based on leisure, or what he calls 'play', rather than work:

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[89] Alexander Trocchi and Phillip Green, 'Project sigma', p. 192.
[90] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 178.
[91] Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, (London: Verso, 2009), p. 84.

> A great deal of what is pompously called 'juvenile delinquency' is the inarticulate response of youth incapable of coming to terms with leisure. The violence associated with it is a direct consequence of the alienation of man for himself brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Man has forgotten how to play.[92]

Sigma, like the SI before them, believed that there was no teleology to work; they argued that through capitalism individuals had become alienated from each other and from themselves by being subsumed into the economically driven consumerist masses. '*Homo ludens'* (generally translated as 'man the player' and a reference to the title of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's 1938 text), is recurrent throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre*: indeed, the protagonists in both *Cain's Book* and *Young Adam* actively reject the working mentality. While Trocchi rejected capitalist structures, he was also against communism's ideology of mass-oriented labour: both systems encouraged conformity through state-led, rather than self-led, control. To overturn the monotony and lethargy of the 'poor working man', sigma, like the SI, suggested that art and leisure enabled man to transcend banal consumerist conformity and experience a fuller and more meaningful existence by encouraging individuals to re-engage with, and ignite, their own subjectivity and creativity. Trocchi propagandises these ideas in sigma:

> So much for hard work. Which is fit for machines only. And always was, except in the mouths of hypocrites who found it profitable to make a virtue of others' underprivilege. Work does not ennoble and beer did. Experience ennobles. Living fully. Applying oneself to life. And that is art and craft and consciously becoming, not work […] This attitude, these thoughts, are at the bottom of the contemporary interest in the 'happening', an existential situation in which the protagonists adopt a metacatagorical posture and play at discovering themselves, together, at leisure, freedom unrestrained by external constraints.[93]

Trocchi's dismissal of work and his playful preference for 'applying oneself to life' was a reaction against the dehumanising industrial construct of the man-machine. Rather than being brain-dulled through the impersonal mode of relentless capitalist production,

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[92] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 180.
[93] Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: General Informations "Third Impression"', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 3.

Trocchi instead saw art as a route to 'consciously becoming', or in other words, as presenting the opportunity for subjectivity through individual consciousness to enlighten human existence. Emphasising the subjective nature of creativity, Trocchi defined 'art' in sigma as 'the products of all the expressive media of civilisation', whereby art is *the* agent for overcoming capitalist alienation, not *an* agent.[94] The absolute centrality of art to Trocchi in sigma marks a departure from the earlier ideology and praxis of Debord and the SI, which attempted to tackle the 'more broadly philosophical themes of time, society, and history'.[95] Although aestheticism played a significant part in Debord's overall praxis, sigma arguably elevated art to become almost the *entirety* of their vision of subjectivity as strategy. This shift has been acknowledged by Coverley who claims that in the SI, 'Debord […] became increasingly preoccupied with Marxist revisionism [so] that he had little time for the unfettered Romanticism that Trocchi had so fondly recalled'.[96] This is also evident in Debord's disapproval of Trocchi's association via sigma with R. D. Laing, Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Colin Wilson whom he collectively described as 'mystical cretins' due to their highly subjective and somewhat Romantic sensibilities.[97]

Furthering his stance against capitalist conformity, in the sigma portfolio Trocchi critiques the role of literature directly. Echoing Sartre's model of *littérature engagée*, in

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[94] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 188.

[95] Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*, (London: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 102.

[96] Ibid., p. 101.

[97] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 125. Another way in which sigma departed from Debord's increasingly hard-line political philosophy is evident in Trocchi's playful use of language: Trocchi returned to the term 'potlatch', meaning giving away or donation, and 'Potlach' was first used by the LI for the title of their pamphlet. As a political-philosophical-cultural collective, the LI were notably more playful than the SI, and indeed, this at times light-hearted approach was part of Trocchi's practice in sigma; Trocchi proposed the use of what he comically called 'expressive toiletrolls' as an experimental method of communication. In *International Times* dated February 27 - March 13 1970, Trocchi proclaims in a feature entitled 'Alex Trocchi M.O.B.' 'My own prediction is still for the expressive toiletroll' because 'the lavatory might be thought to be where the writings of an 'obscene' writer like myself belongs' (p. 8). Biographer Andrew Murray Scott claims that the somewhat juvenile idea of the toilet roll as a subversive symbol stemmed back to Trocchi's teenage years. In 1943 Trocchi traveled to Canada where he completed his pilot training; Andrew Murray Scott claims that as a joke Alex and a colleague 'bombed the airbase with toilet rolls' and since then 'the free movement of toilet rolls, whether thrown or dropped from a great height, remained, for Trocchi, a symbol of rebellion and anarchy.' (*Making*, p. 16)

which literature must perform a social function, Trocchi warns of the danger of all writing essentially being 'an economic act with reference to economic limits' and argues that if literature is written within the confines of capitalist society it is by default 'an economic act'.[98] Trocchi claims that this construct renders literature as 'business', a concept which sigma appeared to oppose, despite the fact that Trocchi charged a subscription fee for the sigma portfolio and was always appealing to readers for monetary donations.[99] Albert Camus claims that 'the society based on production is only productive, not creative', and although Trocchi singles out literature as the artistic medium for his attack, the point he makes is generally applicable to all creativity: in order for freedom to be achieved through revolution, *all* art must escape being part of commerce-driven production and consumption.[100] In order to achieve this, subjectivity is again used by Trocchi as a means to achieve differentiation: Trocchi argues that 'the conventional spectator-creator dichotomy must be broken down' and that 'the traditional 'audience' must participate'.[101] Trocchi's ideas regarding art in sigma are reminiscent of those later expressed by Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which proposed that rather than being a passive and alienated spectator caught up in impersonal economic politics, man must be an active and subjective participant in order to break free from, and overcome, the isolation inherent in the capitalist system.

To instigate collective yet still subjective action against such existential lethargy, sigma conceptually adopted the SI's 'situation'.[102] According to Debord, the 'situation'

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[98] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p 194.

[99] Ibid., p. 194. In his article 'Between the Tundra and the Ocean with Alexander Trocchi' Andrew Hodgson also acknowledges this tension, arguing that Trocchi executes a business model through sigma because it essentially 'commodified the concept'. See *Equus Press*, <http://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/between-the-tundra-and-the-ocean/> [accessed 15 November 2012]

[100] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 237.

[101] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p 194.

[102] For more on the situation in relation to sigma and the SI see Howard Slater's article 'Towards Situation' in *Variant* <http://www.variant.org.uk/14texts/Variant_Forum.html> [accessed 6 April 2012]

was the 'central idea' of the SI: 'Our central idea is that of the construction of situations, that is to say the concrete construction of momentary ambiences of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality'.[103] Rooted in individual subjectivity, the 'situation' was an act of subversion against the capitalist, and objective, commoditisation of life and art; because the 'situation' was not a tangible product it thus transcended capitalism. As it linguistically suggests, the situation was a passing moment, as Debord acknowledges: 'Our situations will be ephemeral, without a future. Passageways.' because Debord believes that 'Eternity is the grossest idea a person can conceive of in connection with his acts'.[104] In his own attempt to form a new society, or what he called a 'true Situationist culture', Trocchi proposed the formation of the 'spontaneous' university or 'sigma-centre'.[105] The spontaneous university was to exist at counterpoint to traditional university education, which Trocchi dismisses because 'universities have become factories for the production of degreed technicians'.[106] The fundamental ethos behind the 'spontaneous university' was an attempt to make permanent the ephemeral 'situation' conceived by the SI: this radical place of alternative learning would be modelled on the avant-garde American institution Black Mountain college in North Carolina which existed from 1933-57, which Trocchi described as being 'in short, a situation constructed to inspire the free play of creativity in the individual and the group'.[107] Ambitiously, it was hoped that the 'spontaneous' university would 'be the nucleus of an experimental town', and through this notion of unconventional urban planning, sigma's 'spontaneous university' shares ideological lineage with the SI because

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[103] Guy Debord, *Bureau of Public Secrets*, 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organisation and Action' (1957), <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/report.htm> [accessed 5 June 2013]
[104] Ibid.
[105] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible, p. 191.
[106] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p. 197.
[107] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 188.

urban planning was one of a central strand of the SI's *dérive*.[108] In Trocchi's particular vision of subverting economic production in sigma, urban planning through the *dérive* was re-imagined so that the transnational sigma associates would come together to participate in their experimental township and participate in what Trocchi termed a 'cultural "jam session"',[109] allowing sigma's 'cosmonauts' or 'astronauts' to 'either congregate or be in contact'.[110] As I will argue in Chapter Three of this thesis, Trocchi also used sigma to promote his pro-drug perspective, and consequently, Trocchi's drug-addled vision of shared subjectivity in sigma appears to be synonymous with Timothy Leary's quintessentially 1960s countercultural coinage of 'tune in, turn on, drop out'. Writing just after the demise of sigma in 1968, the Paris-based artist Jean-Jacques Lebel equates the 'happening', or the 'situation', with the use of narcotics, which situates Trocchi's proposed methods within a larger countercultural context:

> The only reality in art is furnished by the hallucinatory experience, around which crystallise (ephermal) rites, and around which our mystical thoughts express themselves. The communication of this experience is essential to the life of the mind, yet it is clear that it has been interrupted. Every possible means must be used to re-establish it. The era of hallucinogenic drugs ushers in a new state of mind, breaks with industrial preoccupations, in order to develop itself to the revolution of being. Cubism, dadaism, surrealism, expressionism, or abstract impressionism, or even 'kinetic' or 'op' paintings have (timidly) tried to approximate certain aspects of hallucinatory experience. Now, it is no longer a matter of representing it, but of living it, and making it possible for others to live it.[111]

Lebel's rhetoric can be read as an almost direct defence of sigma's principle of the 'spontaneous university' as a place for drugged-up inner space cosmonauts to congregate and 'live' the hallucinogenic experience concomitantly together *and* individually. Lebel

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[108] Ibid, p. 189. Because the SI 'did not believe that 'revolution' should be limited to the mere seizure of power' they were also 'interested in the urban spaces in which people had to live' (Gavin Bowd, *Outsiders*, p. 6). Consequently, the *dérive* as praxis sought to critique and reconceptualise the city and to reclaim it as a space of creativity rather than of conventional capitalist function. The SI promoted walking randomly, or drifting, through the city without any economic or 'useful' purpose whilst musing upon the effect of the surrounding geographical environment on their individual, or subjective, psyches. The term psychogeography was coined from this experimental concept.

[109] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 186.

[110] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p. 194.

[111] Jean-Jacques Lebel, 'On the Necessity of Violation', *The Drama Review*, 13 (1968), pp. 89-105, p. 94.

positions drug taking in direct opposition to industry and capital and argues that drugs are implicit in 'the revolution of being' by emphasising 'mythical thoughts' and 'a new state of mind' based on exploring the individual's inner subjective consciousness. This subjectivity-enhancing narcotic practice can be viewed as analogous to Lebel's radical view: by emphasising the Cartesian *cogito*, drug taking in the 1960s was often a strategic attempt to subvert such dominant social systems through heightening the individual's subjective experience, and emphasising what Lebel describes as the 'revolution of being'.

Existential Aesthetics

Trocchi's passionate editorials for the Paris publications and sigma imply that he believes that all writing should be existential; rather than being purely aesthetic, it must be socially 'engaged' by commenting directly upon life as it is experienced. Indeed, for Trocchi literature is absolutely existential; it *is* life. This concept is explored in *Cain's Book* in which its protagonist, Joe Necchi, describes the book he is writing – also called 'Cain's Book' – as the following: 'It is, I suppose, my last will and testament, although in so far as I have choice in the matter I shall not be dying for a long time'.[112] To Necchi, and by extension to Trocchi, the novel *is* life by being 'my last will and testament'. In *Cain's Book* again Necchi conveys this highly subjective vision of literature as rooted in reality, purporting that one should 'judge it [literature] solely in terms of his living'.[113] Commenting on this concept, Edwin Morgan has written that, 'such existential beliefs help to account for the formidable amount of energy Trocchi put into editorial and publicistic writing',[114] while Andrew Murray Scott also emphasises the 'existential beliefs' that underpin Trocchi's *oeuvre*:

From the outset it had been clear to him that writers should be involved in defining

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[112] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 239.
[113] Ibid., p. 131.
[114] Edwin Morgan, 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 48-58, p. 54.

in human terms the reason and function of writing; what did it mean, what was the point of it all? For Trocchi, writing had already become a process of defining and exploring his own identity.[115]

Scott's claim ties in with the literary methodology of Sartre, for whom the very act of writing is also absolutely aligned with what it means to exist in the world: he claims that, 'a fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics'.[116] To Sartre too, all writing is a method of existential action because writing is existential. Trocchi's authorial approach further corresponds with Sartre; at the 1962 Writers' Conference he declared on the platform that 'the question of human identity is the only central question' that he attempts to answer in his writing.[117] Later at the Conference, he expanded upon this concept, stating that, 'all art can be considered as man's expressive reaction to his state of being in the world'.[118] For both Trocchi and Sartre, even fictional writing is an expressive extension of the subjective self. Furthering Trocchi's existentially engaged aesthetic in a fictional framework, *Cain's Book* and *Young Adam* both set out to critique ideological power systems. Certainly, *Young Adam* has also been repeatedly viewed as a response to Albert Camus' seminal *L'Etranger*, a text that puts issues of existential freedom, death, and life into play in the narrative.[119] *Cain's Book* critiques America's anti-narcotics agenda, and in this way, Trocchi's authorial approach can be seen to

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[115] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 33.
[116] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner', *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Trans. Annette Michelson, (London: Rider, 1955), pp. 79-88, p. 79.
[117] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, p. 71.
[118] Ibid, p. 140.
[119] Critics have continually connected *Young Adam* with existentialism: Richard Seaver's introduction to Cain's Book (London: Calder, 1998) described the novel as 'that existentialist novel, as grim as the times in which it was written' and Walter Metz in 'A Dreary Life on a Barge: From L'Atalante to Young Adam', *Weber: The Contemporary West*, 27.2 (2011), similarly described it as 'a relentless existential critique of human disconnection' (p. 56). Sean O'Hagan writing also declared that the novel was, 'part Scottish murder mystery, part existential critique' (see 'Smack Aleck of the Beat Generation', *Observer*, 10 December 1995, p. 15.). In particular, it is significant that generations of critics have argued that it displays a strident intertextual relationship with Camus's *L'Etranger* 1942; this connection has been made in a scholarly realm by Neil Livingstone McMillan, Edwin Morgan, Paul Shanks and Gary Hentzi, while Angus Calder also claims that *Young Adam* was 'treated respectfully by critics who noted its close relationship with Camus's *L'Etranger*' at the time of publication in 1954 (see Angus Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60219> [accessed 20 October 2010]

correspond with the concept of *littérature engagée* both in its actual practice and its existential orientation; Trocchi undoubtedly hopes to influence his readers through his belief that America's hardline anti-drug policy infringes on basic human rights – to have the existential, or subjective choice, to decide whether to use heroin – rather than the decision be pre-determined by the political elite. Such socially conscious authorial concerns demonstrate that even in fiction Trocchi recognises the merit of subjectivity as a strategy to defy the established political order.

In addition to his existential and *engagé* emphasis, it is significant that Trocchi also envisages a deeply creative literary sensibility rooted in subjectivity. In a 1952 *Merlin* editorial, Trocchi outlines the absolute importance of emotional individualism in an aesthetic milieu:

> The poet is situated beyond the problematical in a personal cosmos whose vital centre he is and which grows away from him on all sides into the warm flanks of *mystery* [...] The cosmos which contains it is, figuratively, the shadow of the poet himself; it is the colour, to complex vibration of his own emotions. It is a private *expressional* cosmos.[120]

Trocchi correlates individual subjectivity with creativity, and the imagery and tone of the passage is arguably reminiscent of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840). Trocchi suggests that in the public sphere creativity is stifled, whereas in the private sphere of subjective consciousness it is elevated, emotional, and expressive. This existential approach is again highlighted in the editorial's conclusion: '*Merlin* is for any innovation in creative writing which renders creative writing more expressive'; it is clear that Trocchi believes that there is reciprocity between the physical act of writing and the writer's emotional inner consciousness.[121] In the 'words and war' *Merlin* editorial, Trocchi again promotes the link between emotional subjectivity and consequent creativity by theorising that art establishes 'contact primarily with the emotional furniture of the

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[120] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial', *Merlin Collection*, 2.1 (1952), pp. 55-7, p. 56.
[121] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial', in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 42.

individual', and it also responds to his claim that: 'Art, presenting as it does symbols of emotively significant psychological states, seeking to exteriorise thereby the *affective* potential of the inner experience'.[122] Although Trocchi's aestheticism appears initially at odds with his socially 'engaged' practice, they are however united in that Trocchi sees that both have potential to influence social change. This notion is echoed in Trocchi's article from the sigma portfolio in issue number four entitled 'Potlach' in which he writes that he was 'calling at last, finally for poets' rule',[123] which is again reminiscent of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840) which claimed that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World'.[124] Rather than being absolutely aesthetic, Trocchi believes that art is rooted in subjectivity – what he terms 'the affective potential of the inner experience' – to bring about transcendence from mass conformity, and to instigate a revolutionary cultural shift.

It is also significant that Trocchi's poetic aesthetic led him to repeatedly reject the traditional form of the novel. Reacting against the novel's bourgeois origins, his speech 'The Future of the Novel' during the 1962 Writers' Conference argues that the novel is now 'insignificant' because it had been born of the middle classes during the industrial revolution:

> Categories die hard. Born of experience, invented to fit experience, to give form to our knowledge […] Such categories, scientific, economic, aesthetic, become armour against experience eventually, a barrier between mind and understanding. I believe the novel to be such a category.[125]

As an alternative to the outdated form of the novel and to the restrictive categorisation of art, Trocchi claims that contemporaneous art instead 'begins with the destruction of the object', a new practice which enables the 'twentieth century artist' to 'pass freely beyond

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[122] Alexander Trocchi, 'Words and War', *Merlin*, 2.3 (1954), pp. 141-3 cont. 209-227, pp. 142, 143.
[123] Alexander Trocchi, 'Potlach', *Sigma Portfolio* 4 (1964), p. 3.
[124] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in Vincent B Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (New York: W. W. Norton), 2001, pp. 699-717, p. 717.
[125] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference*, pp. 146, 145.

non-objective categories': this radical literary vision is strikingly similar to that of the *nouveau roman*, a concept that I will address directly later in the chapter.[126] To demonstrate his point, he then read an extract from *Cain's Book* aloud on the platform, which ended with the following:

> No doubt I shall go on writing, stumbling across tundras of unmeaning, planting words like bloody flags in my wake. Loose ends, things unrelated, shifts, nights nor journeys, cities arrived at and left, meetings, desertions, betrayals, all manner of unions, adulteries, triumphs, defeats, these are the facts.[127]

Trocchi's reading publicly demonstrates that his writing is implicitly existential; it not only reflects his life but it is absolutely rooted in it. Most significantly however, by proclaiming his own personal (and therefore highly subjective) experiences as 'the facts', Trocchi opposes the 'objectivity' inherent in the traditional novel's narrative, and in conventional history and society. Trocchi also used the sigma portfolio to expound against what he believed to be 'useless' novels: 'we feel this category [the novel] has outlived its usefulness' because, being conformist in origin, it exists within a capitalist system.[128]

Alan Swingewood explains why capitalism was problematic for intellectuals or artists seeking to subvert the established order:

> The capitalist division of labour continually refines this distinction between material labour and intellectual labour and with the evolution of modern civil society and the growth of mass media, of newspaper publishing, magazines and pulp fiction, mass political parties and educational institutions, the role of the intellectual becomes increasingly significant in the genesis and transmission of bourgeois ideology.[129]

Swingewood's depiction of the modern intellectual – as inherently caught up in capitalism and functioning as a mouthpiece for bourgeois values – is precisely what Trocchi refused. Stewart Home has acknowledged this notion while writing about the

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[126] Ibid., p. 146.
[127] Ibid., p. 146.
[128] Alexander Trocchi, 'Tactical', p. 194.
[129] Alan Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture,* (New Jersey: Humanities, 1977), p. 76.

radicalism underpinning the narrative of the pornographic novel *White Thighs*, which

Trocchi wrote for Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press:

> Trocchi despised the bourgeois cultural order and in his pornographic works such
> as *White Thighs* he mocks it by using his mastery of literary technique for the
> ends of pastiche and parody […] In terms of prose style, *White Thighs* is better
> than one might reasonably expect a work of sado-masochistic pornography to be.
> That said, Trocchi doesn't bother to construct a credible story or attempt 'proper'
> characterisation; since such things would undermine his revolutionary
> intentions.[130]

Seeking subversion against the capitalist tradition of literature, the following jotting from

Trocchi's unpublished personal papers reveals a similar anti-aesthetic in order to reject

convention: 'There is no choice for the modern artist. He must abandon the traditional

crutches of form, structure and plot, or cease to be an artist. No alternative. He must learn

to walk without crutches, go back to the beginning, create continuously'.[131] Reading

almost like a manifesto, the jotting is taken from a selection of fragmented early works

collected loosely under the title of 'Early Autobiographical' held in the Trocchi Papers.

At such an early stage of Trocchi's writing career it is intriguing that he already

consciously sought to rally against all notions of narrative conventionality; Trocchi's

anti-aesthetic suggests that it is the element of rebellion that specifically enables a writer

to be considered as 'an artist', and it is also significant that he sees an abandonment of

'the traditional crutches of form, structure, or plot' as implicit to such an ideal of artistry.

Trocchi implies that the writer must be a pioneering creator rather than a traditional

emulator with a quest for authorial authenticity. Moreover in *Young Adam* the protagonist

Joe passionately proclaims: 'I don't have a plot. I don't have characters. I'm not

interested in all the usual paraphernalia. Don't you understand? That's literature, false'.[132]

Joe's girlfriend Cathie then retorts, 'No, I don't understand […] I don't understand why

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[130] Stewart Home, 'Introduction to White Thighs', *Bookkake,* <http://bookkake.com/2008/09/27/stewart-homes-introduction-to-white-thighs/>[accessed 1 November 2009]

[131] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 3 Fol. 25, p.3.

[132] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 129.

you can't write an ordinary book, one people can understand'.[133] Moreover, in his private

papers Trocchi also describes *Cain's Book* as having 'an 'anti-literary' attitude',[134] and

correspondingly, its protagonist, Joe Necchi, reveals a radical authorial vision that is

rooted in subjectivity as strategy to subvert convention: 'For a long time now I have felt

that writing which is not ostensibly self-conscious is in a vital way inauthentic for our

time'.[135] Like Trocchi himself, Trocchi's various protagonists aim for literary authenticity

and artistic freedom by reacting against traditional literary form and function. An

unpublished notebook jotting by Trocchi validates this notion and also reveals why he

repeatedly chooses to narrate in the first person:

> In stories written in the first person narrative [he cites Miller, Poe and Camus as
> examples] the author is incapable of interfering with the characters pt. [*sic*] of
> view simply because he is identical with the character. So far as technique is
> concerned, thus, many problems are neatly eluded, and first person narrative gives
> an air of authenticity.[136]

Trocchi's biographer Andrew Murray Scott claims that both *Young Adam* and *Cain's*

Book 'are autobiographical'.[137] Indeed, in his claim that character is 'identical' with

author, Trocchi takes subjectivity to a narrative and creative extreme by striving to create

a realistic, and thus more meaningful, narrative aesthetic. In these texts, and in his entire

oeuvre, Trocchi sets up artistic and philosophic subjectivity as a means to critique and

overturn tradition in order to undermine the impersonal nature of the establishment.

Existential Experimentation

In his anti-aesthetic it is clear that Trocchi's vision of literature comprises underlying

social consciousness and critique through its implicitly existential ethos. Addressing the

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[133] Ibid., p. 129.
[134] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 14 Fol. 204, un.pag.
[135] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 59.
[136] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 9 Fol. 167, un.pag.
[137] Andrew Murray Scott (as 'Andy Scott'), 'Alexander Trocchi: A Portrait of Cain', *Cencrastus*, 11 (1983), p. 17.

role of the writer at the 1962 Writers' Conference, Trocchi stated, 'I think that there is no doubt about it that the most vital questions today are being discussed by young American writers, and young French writers'.[138] The 'young American writers' to which Trocchi alludes are those associated with the American Beat Generation, and it is significant that Eric Mottram's description of the Beats equates their controversial aestheticism with a political agenda:[139]

> the Beats were a criticism of American complacency under the Ike-Nixon regime, an expression of new forms of prose, and poetry and an exploration of conscious-ness, which joined the dissent of existing Bohemias [...] to produce a distinct style of literature and living, based on disaffiliation, poverty, anarchic individualism and communal living. A relaxation of 'square' (puritan, middle-class, respectable) attitudes towards sex, drugs, religion and art became the opposing uniformity of Beat.[140]

The Beats wielded their particular subjectivity as strategy to react against the downtrodden state of postwar America. While they employed 'beat' as an adjective because it accurately described the beaten-down hopelessness of the American youth, they also believed that this state could be transcended to become 'beatific' through fostering an unconventional lifestyle of drugs, sex, and jazz, which they typically channeled into their writing both stylistically and thematically. Although they are primarily understood as a loosely associated literary group, the Beats largely came together due to their similarities in lifestyle and through thematic parallels in literature; indeed, it is important to note that the actual writing of Burroughs and other central beat writers such Ginsberg, Corso, and Kerouac, vary significantly when linguistically compared. The Beat aesthetic was similar to Trocchi's in that it intentionally defied established literary values and instead prioritised empirical

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[138] Ibid., p. 17.
[139] Eric Mottram was a contemporary of Trocchi in London; Mottram had affiliation with Trocchi's sigma project, he also wrote extensively on the Beat Generation, and he was a personal friend of William Burroughs.
[140] Eric Mottram qtd. in *The Penguin Companion to American Literature*, Malcolm Bradbury, Eric Mottram, Jean Franco (eds), (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), p. 23.

experience and experimentation. Indeed, their literary practice sought authorial authenticity, a trope that is also recurrent in Trocchi's writing; during the *Cain's Book* trial, Trocchi described his text in court as 'a book about the truth',[141] and Allen Ginsberg, defending *Naked Lunch* during its Boston trial in 1965 because Burroughs was in absentia, claimed that the text was the 'truthful expression of exactly what is going on inside his head, with no holds barred'.[142] Although not directly aligned with existentialism, this notion of narrative nakedness through truth, which I examine further in Chapter Three, is perhaps best exemplified by Ginsberg's claim that 'the point of beat is that you get beat down to a certain nakedness',[143] while John Clellon Holmes, one of the lesser known New York-based Beat writers, also stated that 'beat' 'implies a sort of nakedness of mind […] a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness'.[144] The Beats, like Trocchi, positioned subjectivity and real life at the forefront of their 'search for authentic experience': Gregory Stephenson notes that the Beats promoted 'knowledge of the Self, and the discovery or recovery of a true mode of perception' and through 'intrepid exploration of frontiers of consciousness' they also promoted self-conscious subjectivity.[145] Trocchi's Beat-affiliation has had him labelled 'the Scottish Beat' in popular and scholarly sources, but the title of the

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[141] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 2 Fol. 18, p. 33.

[142] Allen Ginsberg, 'The Boston Trial of Naked Lunch', *Reality Studio*, <http://realitystudio.org/texts/naked-lunch/trial/> [accessed 16 July 2013]

[143] Allen Ginsberg qtd. in James Campbell, *This Is The Beat Generation*, (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 269.

[144] John Clellon Holmes qtd. in Edward Halsey Foster, *Understanding The Beats*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1992), p. 7. Norman Mailer's controversial essay 'The White Negro' (1957) positions the black jazz musician, and consequently through purposeful association the Beats, as having a fundamentally existentialist mentality. 'Existentialism and the Beats: A Renegotiation' by Erik Ronald Mortenson in *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature*, 1.1 (2004), pp. 26-48, also further considers the connection between the Beats and existentialism.

[145] Gregory Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys*: *Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2009), pp. 8, 10. Although Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman were profound American influences on the Beats, it was William Blake who was particularly prevalent due to his 'combination of visionary ideology and political and artistic radicalism'. See Christopher Gair, *The Beat Generation*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), p. 33. To Ginsberg especially, Blake was such a profound authorial influence that he even admitted to seeing 'visions' of him, and significantly, Gregory Stephenson's edited collection of critical essays on the beats entitled *The Daybreak Boys* is eponymously indebted to the imagery of Blake's poem 'Morning'.

anthology *Writers In Revolt* was originally 'Beyond the Beat' because, as editor, Trocchi felt that literature and criticism had to move beyond the (then highly fashionable) Beat-centric milieu. Despite his aversion to Beat as a literary context, Trocchi's unquestionably 'Beat' biography began when he relocated to America from Paris in 1956 and moved to the beachfront beat stronghold at Venice West.[146] Venice West exposed Trocchi to the American literary underground, and connections lead to him and his wife Lyn contributing to the 1957 edition of the independent magazine *Semina*. Founded and published by the Los Angeles experimental photographer Wallace Berman, the pioneering publication later featured a plethora of Beat writers including William Burroughs, who I return to consider in Chapter Three. After Venice West, Trocchi became based in New York, the city that had seen the birth and rise of the Beat Generation in the 1950s.

Although in many ways the Beats promoted a quintessentially American aestheticism, they did however have some parallels with another group of 'young writers' who concomitantly emerged in France. The *nouveau roman*, like the Beats, had an existential agenda; they attempted to write about life as it was actually experienced, and it was this radical practice that lead Trocchi to profess his admiration for both movements during the Edinburgh Writers' Conference. Although the *nouveau roman* and the Beat Generation did not regard themselves as associates, their bold existential experimentalism and their application of subjectivity as a strategy to disrupt the literary norm unites them. Theorising the *nouveau roman*, Alain Robbe-Grillet acknowledged that literature had to change because it

> continued to face the same dilemma which all serious authors have had to face since Romanticism, how to reconcile literature with metaphysics and how to make peace with an objective world existing apart from man whilst using an essentially

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[146] For more on Trocchi's time in Venice West specifically see John Arthur Maynard's *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California*, (Piscataway: Rutgers University, 1993).

subjective vehicle of human expression.[147]

Robbe-Grillet traces a theoretical root to Romanticism, which as a cultural movement embraced individuality and subjectivity, and thus, like the Romantics, the Beats, and indeed Trocchi, the *nouveau romanciers* agreed that art was inherently subjective and expressive. However, in 'The Use of Theory', Robbe-Grillet breaks from Romanticism by defining the *nouveau roman* as a group of writers who aimed to create 'new forms for the novel, forms capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and the world'.[148] Many critics have associated Trocchi with the *nouveau roman* including Howard Slater, who describes Trocchi's *Young Adam* as 'a precursor of the *nouveau roman*';[149] Trocchi's authorial technique arguably parallels some of the tropes of the *nouveau roman*, which similarly promoted a deft defiance of 'traditional norms, and on playing against the expectations established on the reader by the novelistic methods and conventions of the past'.[150] Coined 'l'ecole du refus', like Trocchi, the *nouveau roman* similarly rallied against the seemingly useless and outdated novel. They reacted against the classical nineteenth century novel and the writer that they particularly sought to defy was Balzac because 'the 'Balzacian' novel thus stands for everything the *nouveau roman* is concerned to call into question'.[151] Indeed, the *nouveau romanciers* thought that 'the twentieth century imitators of Balzac […] are perpetuating a false picture of reality they aim to represent'.[152] Consequently, in defiance, they set out to narrate a truer picture of reality by critically questioning 'Balzacian' practice and 'the habitual forms in which we

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[147] James Murray, 'Mind and Reality in Robbe-Grillet and Proust', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8 (1967), pp. 407-420, p. 420.

[148] Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'The Use of Theory', in *For a New Novel* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1965), p. 9.

[149] Howard Slater, 'Alexander Trocchi', in *A Life In Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), p. 20.

[150] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (Boston: Thomson, 2005), p. 203.

[151] Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing*, (London: Elek, 1972), p. 29.

[152] Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman: Fiction, Theory and Politics*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 8

live and write our lives'.[153] As an alternative, the *nouveau romanciers* were intent on 'creating the world [in literature] instead of reflecting it'.[154]

One way in which the *nouveau roman* refused the 'Balzacian' novel was through their formal experimentation. It is significant that Robbe-Grillet defined the *nouveau roman* as 'those who know that lack of formal innovation is dangerous';[155] Robbe-Grillet's choice of the word 'dangerous' within the context of literary experimentation mirrors an unpublished essay by Trocchi cryptically entitled 'If a gallows is clean what more can a criminal expect?'.[156] In the essay Trocchi positions subjectivity as an essential aesthetic choice for writers wishing to break free from tradition: 'It is not surprising that many writers, shying away from the painful consciousness of their own subjectivity, yearn to be immersed in what is safe, in what is objective. It is dangerous to be free'.[157] Trocchi and Robbe-Grillet acknowledge the 'danger' in *not* experimenting while also recognising that this avant-garde approach *is* dangerous because it positions them against established convention. The *nouveau romanciers* reflected upon political and poetical concerns in their radical and new aesthetic: they rejected the traditional structure of the novel as false, because it did not accurately, or authentically, represent what life was actually like. Life, as they experienced it and as they perceived it, was disordered and arbitrary – it was not neatly structured into a seamlessly continuative narrative arc, as the traditional novel repeatedly lead the reader to believe. This fundamentally false belief system is 'dangerous' if it remains unconsciously uncontested; as Ann Jefferson acknowledges, the customary novel placed such an emphasis on the end, because 'the end determines all that precedes it'; the end of the novel was traditionally a formal, neat

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[153] Stephen Heath, *A Study*, p. 33.

[154] Katy Masuga, *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), p. 2.

[155] Celia Britton, *Fiction, Theory and Politics*, p. 30

[156] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 14 Fol. 204, un.pag. In addition to appearing in *Cain's Book*, this ambiguous phrase is also recurs throughout Trocchi's unpublished notebooks.

[157] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 14 Fol. 204, un.pag.

finale, and such justification or *telos* is precisely what the *nouveau romanciers* rejected because traditionally 'it is always the end which determines the significance of the whole'.[158] This notion is particularly pertinent in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*, both of which do not end in any conventional sense: *Young Adam's* closing words 'the disintegration was already taking place' mirrors the way the narrative also disintegrates or almost cinematically fades out,[159] while *Cain's Book's* closing words 'nothing is ending, and certainly not this' similarly displays an absolute lack of closure and finality.[160]

Trocchi and the *nouveau roman's* aversion to conventional endings in literature can also be viewed as a reaction against totalitarian politics. The playwright Arthur Miller explains the extent to which the Cold War's nuclear agenda shaped how the future was regarded:

> [After the triumph of Soviet Russia and bureaucratic trade unions] power itself was now the spook, and the only alternative, if humankind was to show a human face again, was to break the engagement with the future and, above all, the psychic power upon people which the future had – and that was submission itself. You lived now, lied now, loved now, died now. And the thirties people, whether radicals or bourgeois, were equally horrified and threatened by this reversal because they shared the same inner relation to the future, the same self-abnegating masochism which living for any future entails.[161]

Miller emphasises that living during the Cold War era catalysed the fatalistic mindset of *carpe diem*: through the United States and Soviet Union's development of the atomic bomb, the future was no longer safe and predictable but dangerous and volatile. Miller's insight into this uncertain time also explains how power became the enemy to artists who sought to represent truth, and who consequently felt that that humanity must change the

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[158] Ann Jefferson, *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980), p. 11.
[159] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 153.
[160] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 252. I address the ending of *Cain's Book* again in Chapter Three.
[161] Arthur Miller qtd. in Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 23.

established mentality and instead 'break the engagement with the future' which felt false in the uncertain circumstances. Todd Gitlin, like Miller, similarly remembers that in the 1950s 'the future was necessarily more salient than the past. The Bomb threatened that future and therefore undermined the ground on which affluence was built'.[162] Paralleling Miller and Gitlin's dissatisfaction with the status quo, Trocchi also rejected narrative *telos* in sigma, which regarded history as 'a perpetual state of incompletion'.[163] Against the established social order and the tradition of objectively linear history, sigma instead sought on-going revolution in their praxis rather than finite revolt as Trocchi explains: 'we are confident it [sigma] would not be like the Jacobite campaign, for example. Our "1715" would, we feel certain, be followed by a successful '45.[164] The Jacobite uprisings to which Trocchi refers is commonly viewed as emblematic moments of Scottish revolt, but as Trocchi points out, unlike the Jacobites, sigma will not fail to catalyse an entire cultural revolution. Trocchi begins 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', widely thought to be sigma's manifesto, with the following:

> Revolt is understandably unpopular. As soon as it is defined it has provoked the measures for its containment. The prudent man will avoid his definition which is in effect his death sentence. Besides, it is a limit. […]
> Political revolt is and must be ineffectual precisely because it must come to grips at the prevailing level of political process.[165]

Trocchi here echoes what he implies in his allusion to Jacobitism. The Jacobite revolt was a failed attempt at revolution, and in contrast, sigma seeks on-going revolution rather than a one-off revolt, a '*coup-du-monde*' rather than a '*coup-d'etat*' that is not restricted by categorisation and predetermined *telos* from the dominant political process.[166] Indeed, the *nouveau roman*'s vision of narrative revolution and sigma's vision of cultural revolution

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[162] Ibid., p. 23.
[163] Howard Slater, 'Alexander Trocchi and Project Sigma', *Variant*, <http://ia700707.us.archive.org/ 9/items/VariantIssue7/V7_All.pdfp. 27> [19 March 2014]
[164] Alexander Trocchi and Phillip Green, 'Cultural Engineering', p. 193.
[165] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible', p. 175.
[166] Ibid., p. 175.

are both rooted in the belief that art, mirroring existence, is not objective but subjective: because nothing in life is predetermined by God or history, it is up to the individual to set their own life's structure in order to achieve authenticity through asserting their own freedom because the end does *not* determine all that precedes it, especially in the unstable era of the Cold War.

Further theorising the *nouveau roman*, Robbe-Grillet advocated that conscious-ness was implicitly connected to creativity; he argued that continual awareness of, and reflection on, the writing process by the author was the 'moteur' for creativity.[167] This notion of self-reflectivity was fundamental because the *nouveau roman* emphasised the conscious nature of writing fiction, what Stephen Heath terms a 'bringing to consciousness', and this metafictional and psychological approach is clearly demonstrated by Trocchi who throughout *Cain's Book* has his protagonist self-reflexively muse upon the act of writing: Necchi's authorial admissions are often painfully self-conscious as he struggles to write an authentic and existentially meaningful narrative.[168] However, it is important to note that although also it was deeply concerned with existential subjectivity, the *nouveau roman* aimed to ultimately move outwards. James Murray has noted that although Robbe-Grillet 'sends the mind off in a radical direction', the direction is 'outwards'; Murray acknowledges that the *nouveau roman*'s interest in consciousness mainly manifests in a preoccupation with perception, rather than in the inner experience of emotion.[169] Indeed, this is evident in Robbe-Grillet's writing through the 'strict reliance on external details dispassionately reported to the reader',[170] and Abrams has also commented upon this aesthetic by stating that Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*,

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[167] Alain Robbe Grillet qtd. in Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman,* p. 25.
[168] Stephen Heath, *A Study,* p. 34.
[169] James Murray, 'Mind and Reality', p. 417.
[170] Ibid., p. 417.

an exemplar text of the *nouveau roman,* 'left out description of states of mind'.[171] This

absence of emotion in the *nouveau roman* also invites another comparison with Trocchi's

authorial method whereby his writing undoubtedly reflects some of these emotionally

detached elements: his style is notably rather minimal, and is arguably more akin to the

pared-down *nouveau roman* than the somewhat chaotic free flowing 'spontaneous bop

prosody' that, via Jack Kerouac, signifies what is typically (though not always

accurately) considered as 'Beat' writing.[172] Moreover, the *nouveau roman* did not

embody Sartre's model of *littérature engagée* despite their radical aesthetic because, like

Trocchi, they sought to avoid explicit political association completely. Despite these

parallels with Trocchi, James Murray has however acknowledged that the *nouveau roman*

ultimately developed an 'objective' aesthetic, which he suggests was devised to

'accentuate the divorce between the consciousness and the world'.[173] In this way the

nouveau roman diverges from Trocchi's approach, because as this chapter has argued, he

typically employs an overtly subjective and psychological aesthetic in his fictional

writing.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that existentialism was a life-long influence that, in its emphasis

on individual choice and self-determination, enabled Trocchi to form and justify his own

opinions and which lead him to oppose the totalitarian political regimes of the Cold War.

In Trocchi's own words, this apolitical position meant that he was an 'outsider', but the

many contexts explored throughout this chapter indicates that this outsider stance also

connected Trocchi with many who shared his vision of subjectivity as a strategy to

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[171] M. H. Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 203.

[172] Allen Ginsberg heralded Kerouac's loose and fast paced poetic style, calling it 'a spontaneous bop prosody'. For more on this see Regina Weinreich's *Kerouac's Spontaneous Poetics: A Study of the Fiction*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1987).

[173] James Murray, 'Mind and Reality', p. 417.

achieve difference from the status quo. From writing for *Merlin* and *Nimbus* in Paris in the 1950s, through to the SI and sigma in the 1960s, and by cultivating an experimental aesthetic rooted in authenticity which parallels elements of the Beats and the *nouveau roman*, it is clear that Trocchi's views and existential aestheticism can be considered as part of a wider radical sensibility. Indeed, while subjectivity through existential inwardness became a strategy for Trocchi to get out of totalitarian political control, it also gave him a way in towards a multitude of alternative communities that were formed by others who similarly sought to exist outside the hegemonic political ideologies of the time. The chapter has also suggested that, in his emphasis on the inner self, Trocchi's political aversion anticipated the 1960s: the next chapter further considers the importance of subjectivity by considering the socio-cultural backdrop of the 1960s alongside Trocchi's portrayal of the existential self in his fictional and factual writing.

‘Existential Gangrene’: Self-division in Trocchi’s Fiction

This chapter argues that, like Trocchi himself, Trocchi’s protagonists are aware that subjectivity enables a more authentic and free existence. Firstly, I will argue that in Trocchi’s fictional *oeuvre* this sensibility of subjectivity becomes increasingly inward and extreme. Tracing the developmental trajectory of ‘existential gangrene’– conceived by the radical Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing to describe an extreme case of self-division whereby the self’s psychological experience overrides the physical to the extent that the ‘outer’ self is experienced as dead – the chapter also acknowledges the deep tensions at the heart of Trocchi’s subjective sensibility.[1] While Chapter One highlighted the collective sensibility at the heart of Trocchi’s ‘engaged’ vision, contrastingly, I will suggest that in Trocchi’s fiction his characters are often absolutely alone and isolated due to their predominantly inward existence.

Secondly, paralleling Trocchi’s belief that ‘art and life are no longer divided’, it will also be argued that the characters’ increasing development of inwardness – as symptomatic of ‘existential gangrene’ – develops in tandem with Trocchi’s own addiction to heroin.[2] *Young Adam* (1954) was largely drafted before Trocchi’s experimentation with narcotics, while *Cain’s Book* (1960) and the unpublished ‘The Long Book’ were both written when Trocchi was heavily addicted to heroin.[3] By tracing the developmental trajectory of ‘existential gangrene’, it will be suggested that Trocchi’s offbeat characterisation is a direct result of his own heroin-fuelled psychology, which became more and more inward over time as his addiction increased. As John Calder recognises:

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[1] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1960), p. 133.
[2] Alexander Trocchi, ‘sigma: A Tactical Blueprint’, in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 199.
[3] In *Garden of Eros* (Richmond: Alma, 2014), John Calder’s testimonial supports this notion: he asserts that Trocchi’s heroin addiction did not become apparent until 1956 (p. 81).

> Trocchi was to talk much about the *coup de monde* [in the sigma portfolio], a world revolution to be brought about by a massive international change of heart. The kernel of the idea first appears in his writing in *Merlin*. At the time he was all in favour of art questioning itself, and using its influence to create challenge, the old argument of the expressionists, who felt that if you do not like the world about you, you change it, if necessary by revolution.[4]

Calder traces radical thought from Trocchi's early editorial role with *Merlin* through to his later aims publicised by sigma. Yet while Trocchi sought worldwide revolution in his polemical writing, by the time he turned to write 'The Long Book', he instead creates a character that, conversely, does not – and more tellingly cannot – engage with the world at all. Consequently, I will suggest that what culminates in Trocchi's fictional *oeuvre* in the unusual and uncanny character of the 'Existential' in 'The Long Book' is a direct result of his own increasingly insular and addicted psychology.

To contextualise my later analyses, the chapter begins by biographically introducing Trocchi's relationship with Laing before comprising three sections that chronologically explore the three different stages of 'existential gangrene' in three works of fiction: onset, development, and crisis. In '"Existential Gangrene": Onset in *Young Adam*' I analyse how Joe responds to Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of inauthentic existence – 'bad faith' – as a means to escape from an authentically engaged existence. The combination of Laing and Sartre is in tandem with Laing's own methodology: he frequently cites Sartre as a means to elucidate his own existential theories. My analysis will argue that existing in 'bad faith' creates a dualism between Joe's true 'inner' and false 'outer' selves, and by catalysing Joe's existential angst, this self-fragmentation leads him to experience the symptomatic onset of 'existential gangrene'. In '"Existential Gangrene": Development in *Cain's Book*', I argue that 'existential gangrene' is self-willed by Necchi as a means to exist authentically, a heroin-fuelled pursuit which also sees him existentially seek what Sartre terms

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[4] John Calder, *Garden of Eros*, p. 76.

'objectness'.[5] In '"Existential Gangrene": Crisis in 'The Long Book"' I finally argue that by existing in a self-willed state of acute and absolute self-division in his attempt to exist authentically, the character of 'the Existential' in the unpublished 'The Long Book' takes 'existential gangrene' to the extreme.

Cosmonauts of Consciousness: Laing and Trocchi

Tom McGrath claims that of all Trocchi's collaborations 'the most fruitful relationship was between Alex and Ronnie Laing […] He and Laing were daring'.[6] This relationship has not been extensively investigated biographically or intertextually, yet the at times striking parallels between Trocchi and Laing not only enable further insight into the culture of shared ideas within London's 1960s counterculture, but also highlight the men's contemporaneous and profound belief in subjective inwardness as a means to achieve existential authenticity.[7] According to his son Adrian, like Trocchi Laing was, 'obsessed with experience, with phenomenology, with existentialism, with life itself',[8] interests that culminated in what Laing termed 'existential phenomenology'.[9] As analogous to the radical rooting of Trocchi's sigma project, Laing similarly saw the significance of a communal-subjective ethos and

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[5] In his study of human ontology, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay On Phenomenological Ontology* (London; Routledge, 2003; 1943)*,* Sartre defines 'objectness' as 'not quite objectivity but rather the quality or state of being an object', (p. 652).

[6] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), p. 41. As editor of the influential London-based magazine *International Times*, Tom McGrath – also a fellow Glaswegian – knew Laing and Trocchi personally in London in the 1960s.

[7] Prior to the development of their 'fruitful' relationship, it is intriguing that Laing and Trocchi share many biographical parallels: both were Glaswegian from similar social backgrounds, and being of a similar age, they also attended Glasgow University at the same time where Laing read Medicine. Despite their Glasgow upbringing, it is surprising that the men first met in London, as Laing explains to biographer Bob Mullan in Bob Mullan (ed.), *Mad to be Normal: Conversations with R.D. Laing*, (London: Free Association, 1996):

> I got in touch with Alex when I read some sigma papers that he had put out. We developed a friendly camaraderie. We had a lot in common; he came from Hillhead in Glasgow, and was a very cultivated guy with a very good literary critical sensibility. He had a very good ear for poetry. (p. 185)

[8] Adrian Laing, *R.D. Laing: A Life*, (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 15.

[9] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 17.

sought new forms of shared experience.[10] With Dr. David Cooper, Laing set up the experimental Kingsley Hall in 1965 to house, treat, and care for people with schizophrenia in a non-clinical environment, and it soon became 'one of the "in" places of London – a refuge for left-wingers, radicals, poets, philosophers and people who feel under the all-embracing term "artists"'.[11] Paralleling Laing's writing, 'self-awareness and self-discovery was all' at Kingsley Hall, and its 'philosophy was to find one's true and authentic self, to let go of the preconceived ideas of one's false self as imposed by the family and society at large'.[12] Described as a 'paradigm of psychiatric revolt', Kingsley Hall attracted Trocchi who would occasionally attend the weekly social dinners, conceived to allow the residents to socialise with Laing and his guests.[13] Adrian Laing claims that at Kingsley Hall 'a plethora of mind-altering substances were floating around',[14] yet when asked about his memories of the early days of Trocchi and Kingsley Hall, Laing recalled the following:

> Alex Trocchi came round to Kingsley Hall and pulled out a needle in a public sitting-room and started turning on to heroin – no, I said. What we were doing was far more important than you fucking-well making a political demonstration about drugs and consciousness. No way. There was a tremendous influx of that sort of thing with Trocchi and his crowd.[15]

Although the men clearly share a profoundly similar vision of forming alternative communities based on shared subjective experience, Laing attempts to distance

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[10] Describing life in the 1960s, Jeff Nuttall attests to the agony of living in a world where one could only passively wait 'in humiliation for the end of man' (Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, (London: Paladin, 1971; 1968), p. 105). He directly correlates social fear instigated by the H-bomb culture to the onset of mental illness – the 'sickness' – on a culturally significant scale. Specifically linking the horrifying Moors murders by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley to 'the widespread rash of sadomachism in the arts', he also aligns 'sickness' with the conception of London's countercultural movement writing that 'sickness was, then, for many, a will to enact some definitive ceremony of violence that would spend the aggression inherent in the subconscious, exorcise it and thus leave society cleansed of fear' (pp. 129, 133). Nuttall believes that Trocchi's response to this situation of fear was his attempt to bring people together through the circulation of pamphlets such as the sigma portfolio, through communal events such as 'happenings', and in plans to build interactive sigma centres and a spontaneous university.

[11] Adrian Laing, *Laing*, p. 110.

[12] Ibid., p. 108.

[13] Ibid., p. 108.

[14] Ibid., p. 108.

[15] R. D. Laing in Bob Mullan (ed.), *Mad to be Normal: Conversations with R.D. Laing*, (London: Free Association, 1996), p. 176.

himself from Trocchi's apparently deviant company and his blatant narcotic agenda.

Despite Laing's reluctance to situate himself as part of Trocchi's social circle, the men did however undoubtedly share a strong interest in inner space: Laing even went as far to describe himself as 'a specialist, God help me, in events in inner space and time'.[16] Throughout his psychotherapeutic practice and writing, Laing fundamentally argues that the human experience is split into the realms of 'inner' and 'outer', and I adopt this terminology later in the textual analysis. The 'inner' refers to the authentic and psychological realm of subjective human experience as Laing explains:

> By 'inner' I mean our way of seeing the external world and all those realities that have no 'external', 'objective' presence – imagination, dreams, phantasies, trances, the realities of contemplative and meditative states, realities that modern man, for the most part, has not the slightest direct awareness of.[17]

Drawing upon his expertise, Laing was appointed by Trocchi to work on an anthology entitled *Drugs and the Creative Process* with William Burroughs, and although never published, it has since become one of the best-known 'unwritten books of the Sixties'.[18] Moreover, Laing claims to have introduced Trocchi to acid,[19] McGrath attests that the men frequently took mescaline together 'in the best Aldous Huxley tradition',[20] and this mutual interest in narcotics also led Trocchi to organise a meeting at Brazier's Park in Oxfordshire between sigma and a transnational collective of radical psychiatrists centered around Laing called 'The Philadelphia Foundation'.[21]

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[16] R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*, (London: Penguin, 1990; 1967), p. 50.

[17] R. D. Laing, *Politics of Experience*, p. 115.

[18] Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75,* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 128. Trocchi signed a contract with Heinemann on behalf of Burroughs and Laing who replaced the original collaborator Henry Charles Hatcher (an associate of Trocchi from *Merlin*) on 9 June 1964, for the advance sum of £1000.

[19] R. D. Laing in Bob Mullan (ed), *Conversations*, p. 220.

[20] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), p. 40.

[21] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 140. Jeff Nuttall describes this meeting in detail in *Bomb Culture*, pp. 211-17, while Tom McGrath details his experience of it in 'Remembering Alex Trocchi' in *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), pp. 40-3. I return to examine the Brazier's Park meeting in more detail in Chapter Three.

Based on their collaboration on *Drugs and the Creative Process* and the decision to come together for an intensive weekend-long exchange of ideas on (amongst other topics) the role of narcotics in existential psychiatry, it seems highly likely that Trocchi and Laing were familiar with each other's work.[22] Trocchi's biographer Andrew Murray Scott has however queried this:

> Their closeness was undeniable, but in reality, they had little in common. Laing did not read any of Trocchi's material, nor did Trocchi read any of Laing's writing. It was their image of each other that was important in their relationship'.[23]

Scott's claim that Trocchi and Laing did not read each other's work can be challenged. In 1964, Trocchi published an article by Laing entitled 'The Present Situation' in the sigma portfolio and his editorial note declares that the article 'seems to us to be precisely sigmatic in its approach' which implies familiarity with, and knowledge of, Laing's work.[24] Another article by Trocchi published in the sigma portfolio entitled 'Second Impression' repeatedly references – and praises – Laing and David Cooper's *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960* (1964). Trocchi cites Laing and Cooper to campaign for new, revolutionary ways, of thinking and being:

> It is happening all over the world. As Engels said: Men make their history themselves, but in a given environment which conditions them. Only those who are able to comprehend those conditions and exploit them are responsible for their own biographies. It is to those we address ourselves. 'We have the theoretical instruments and we can establish a method.' (R. D. Laing and David Cooper) A metacategorical method. […] It is the fact that I could go on listing happenings instinct with the same principle amongst men of many professions everywhere that is the basis of our tentative optimism.[25]

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[22] The sigma portfolio had a deep interest in radical psychiatry and their readership represented this. Issue 17 (1964) comprised a 'list of people interested', which includes nine psychologists or psychiatrists including R. D. Laing.

[23] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 140. This notion of image was undoubtedly paramount to Trocchi's interest in Laing: Laing's status as a doctor 'meant protection' for Trocchi who according to Nuttall somewhat bizarrely admitted 'I hate doing anything outside the law' (Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, (London: Paladin, 1971; 1968), p. 210).

[24] R. D. Laing, 'The Present Situation by R.D. Laing', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 4.

[25] Alexander Trocchi, 'Second Impression, Sigma Portfolio 5 (1964), p. 5.

Paralleling my findings in the previous chapter, Trocchi's reference to writing 'their

own biographies' is an appeal to the reader to use their subjectivity strategically in a

Sartrean framework; rather than adhering to the impersonal grand narrative of history,

the individual must reject historical objectivity by self-reflexively creating their own

personal, and therefore meaningful, biographical narratives. Trocchi's citing of Laing

and Cooper's claim – 'we have the theoretical instruments and we can establish a

method' – also emphasises the notion of strategic subjectivity; Laing and Cooper's

'theoretical instruments' is a reference to Sartrean existentialism, and in the article

Trocchi implies that he sees existentialism not just as an abstract theory but as a

practical methodology to bring about cultural change, particularly through Laing's

post-Sartrean methodology.[26]

Laing also publicised the fact that he was aware of Trocchi's stance as a

fellow advocate of inwardness and exploration. In an article included in the sigma

portfolio, Laing recognises that Trocchi (along with William Burroughs and Gunter

Grass) had recently become enlightened, or as he terms 'awakened' to the 'inner'

realm, which he believes will destroy the existential 'alienation' inherent in the

condition of modern humanity:

> I said that we are all implicated in this state of affairs of alienation. To me this
> context is decisive for the whole practice of psychotherapy. Only a few
> psychotherapists have explicitly stated this, although it has been common
> knowledge for some thousands of years. To those that have awakened, that is.
> In Europe, two minutes ago – Herman Hesse, Antonin Artaud, Samuel
> Beckett. And now – William Burroughs, Gunter Grass, Alexander Trocchi.[27]

In another lengthy article, again published in the sigma portfolio, Laing rallies against

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[26] Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: General Informations [*sic*] "Third Impression"', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 4. In Laing's personal papers, archived in Glasgow University Library's Special Collections, a list of titles from Laing's personal library is included. Trocchi's poetry anthology *Man at Leisure* (1972) with a foreword by William Burroughs is recorded; it therefore seems probable that Laing had in fact read Trocchi's text.

[27] R. D. Laing, 'The Present Situation by R.D. Laing', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 5.

the traditional practice and theory inherent in psychotherapy.[28] Instead, like Trocchi,

he highlights the importance of subjective interiority to achieving existential

authenticity:

> the Dreadful has already happened […] As a whole generation of men, we are
> so estranged from the inner world that there are many arguing that it does not
> exist; and even if it does exist, it does not matter. […] Quantify the heart's
> agony and ecstasy in a world in which, when the inner world is first
> discovered, we are liable to find ourselves bereft, and derelict. For without the
> inner the outer loses its meaning, and without the outer the inner loses its
> substance.

Laing's article argues that inwardness has the transcendental potential to liberate

humanity from sickness in society, or from what Laing (via Heidegger) calls 'the

Dreadful'.[29] Laing believes that, through such widespread sickness, 'modern man' has

become disengaged from his psychological 'inner' self, and he makes clear that a

crucial synthesis between the 'inner' and the 'outer' must be achieved for existential

wellbeing. He campaigns for men to rediscover their forgotten inner space, which he

believes will free humanity from such 'dreadful' existential sickness, and they will no

longer be 'a half-crazed creature in a mad world', or what he commonly terms 'the

divided self'.[30] Laing's seminal *The Divided Self* (1960) expounded his radical vision

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[28] Although Laing draws upon what Trocchi terms his 'Glasgow connection', it was in fact sigma that
brought about their first meeting (Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 140). While both men lived in
London in the 1960s, they were considered figureheads of the counterculture that emerged in the city at
that time: their friendship mostly manifested through experimental projects such as Kingsley Hall, the
Anti-University of London founded in 1968 and which listed both Trocchi and Laing as faculty
members, and Jim Haynes' Arts Lab, where Trocchi would sometimes throw parties which on one
occasion featured Laing, William Burroughs, and the musician Davy Graham. Despite Trocchi and
Laing's apparent camaraderie, their relationship is however difficult to wholly determine. In
conversation with Bob Mullan, Laing does not consider himself to be part of Trocchi's core social
group; he considers 'the crowd' – Trocchi's crowd – as comprising 'the sculptor John Latham, Barbara
Latham, Alex, Alex's wife, Jeff Nuttall' (*Conversations*, Bob Mullan (ed.), p. 216). For factual
treatments of Trocchi's involvement in London's counterculture see Barry Miles' *In the Sixties* and Jeff
Nuttall's *Bomb Culture*. Stewart Home's *Tainted Love* addresses the subject in hybrid form as part-
fact, part-fiction, and Jim Haynes' memoir *Thanks for Coming!* also provides insight into Trocchi's
London circle.
[29] R. D. Laing, 'The Present Situation by R.D. Laing', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 5. Earlier in the
article, Laing explicitly states that his use of 'the Dreadful' refers to Heidegger's 'the Dreadful has
already happened', taken from 'The Bremen Lectures; Insight Into That Which Is' (1949). See *The
Heidegger Reader*, by Gunter Figal (ed.), (Bloomington: Indiana, 2009), p. 254.
[30] Ibid., p. 5.

of self-division. Focused on schizophrenia, the quintessential psychological condition of ontological incompatibility and conflict, Laing demonstrated a radical understanding of this state of existential sickness, and proposed groundbreaking psychological treatment: he argued that by acknowledging the vital importance of the self's 'inner' reality, the self can become enlightened, and then achieve unification of the 'outer' and the 'inner'.[31]

Building on this key notion of self-fragmentation, throughout his *oeuvre* Laing also sought to redefine schizophrenia and free it from its purely medical usage: he argued that it was labelled as a 'social fact' which had become 'a political event' through the invention of the H-bomb. Laing believed the H-bomb created widespread cultural malaise and had catalysed the alienation of the individual, from both society and themselves.[32] Against the backdrop of such existential instability – what Laing bleakly termed the 'inevitability and desperation' of the 1950s and 60s – Laing formed his central theory: 'I began to understand that the Self was not one person, or another person, but was somehow a collective, or expressed itself collectively, and this collective expression of Self was in some terrible agony'.[33] Furthering his key concept of 'terrible' self-division, Laing coined 'existential gangrene'. Although it is

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[31] The transcendental potential of the 'inner' is furthered in Laing's *The Bird of Paradise*, an intense prose poem exploring the oppositional tension between the self and social structures. He writes: 'Light. Light of the World, that irradiates me and shines through my eyes Inner sun that emblazons, brighter than ten thousand suns' (*The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin, 1990; 1967), p. 149). By positioning the 'inner sun' as the 'Light of the World', Laing makes a distinction between the psychological inner world of the speaker and the physical outer world. Furthermore, the poetic speaker's claim that their 'inner sun' is brighter than 'ten thousand suns', whilst again affirming this distinction, also suggests that inwardness can ultimately eclipse the outer sun ten thousand times: thus, the inner is spiritual and absolutely elevated. The imagery of the light – as spiritual and bright and subjective – is reminiscent of Kenneth White's 'whiteness', which also elevates inwardness as a means to achieve transcendental potential. White, like Trocchi and Laing, was Glaswegian and he similarly shared a profound interest in existentialism, which he demonstrates in articles published in the *Sigma Portfolio*. See 'Jargon Paper No.1' in the December 1964 edition and 'Jargon Paper No. 2' in the February 1965 edition. For further consideration of Trocchi and White, see Gavin Bowd's *The Outsiders: Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth White*, (London: Akros, 1998).
[32] Ibid., p. 100.
[33] Hanspeter Gschwend, 'Variations on my theme: An interview with R. D. Laing', in Theodor Itten and Courtenay Young (eds), *R. D. Laing: 50 Years Since The Divided Self,* (Ross-On-Wye: PCCS, 2012), p. 6.

not extensively developed throughout his *oeuvre*, it is specifically used in *The Divided Self* to illustrate the case of a particular patient. Laing writes that the patient, Peter, 'had tried to be nobody by not living in and through his body' and that because of this 'his body became, in a sense, dead'.[34] Suffering from low self-esteem to the extent that he had lost any sense of himself, Peter created a schism between his 'outer' or physical experience of the world and his 'inner' or psychological experience, which lead to him exist as an acutely schizoid or 'divided self'. Laing explains Peter's existential crisis:

> [Peter's body] forced itself on his notice as he was recalled to it as something musty, rancid, uncanny – in fact, unlived and dead. He had severed himself from his body by a psychic tourniquet and both his unembodied self and his 'uncoupled body' had developed a form of existential gangrene.[35]

Peter's 'outer' body had become disassociated from his psychological 'inner' self, to the extent that he felt as though it didn't actually exist. In the passage, Laing explains that through the process of intensive psychotherapy Peter once again experienced his body but by this stage in his existential crisis it was effectively 'dead'.

'Existential gangrene' conceptually embodies the disconnectedness that Laing warns against in 'The Present Situation' published by Trocchi in the sigma portfolio in 1964, of 'Bodies half-dead; genitals dissociated from heart; heart severed from head; heads dissociated from genitals'.[36] Although it is a figurative phrase, 'existential gangrene' fittingly describes Peter's situation because it emphasises the extreme self-division between what he experienced as his living self (his 'inner' psychology) and his dead self (his 'outer' physicality). Gangrene is a physical disease of decay through which the diseased body part disassociates from the rest of the body through numbness or coldness (gangrene is typically catalysed by frostbite, burns etc.).

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[34] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 133.
[35] Ibid., p. 133.
[36] R. D. Laing, 'The Present Situation by R. D. Laing', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 5.

Through degeneration, the affected body part – usually an extremity – becomes cut off from the rest of the body and due to this disconnection, the body cannot regain its unity prior to the infection, and consequently the diseased body part breaks down to the point that it literally becomes dead. Peter symptomatically experiences this: his deadened 'outer' body no longer connects with his 'inner' self, and as a result, his sense of self is fundamentally fragmented. Furthering Laing's definition and conceptually applying it to *Young Adam*, *Cain's Book*, and 'The Long Book', 'existential gangrene' will be used to signify severe ontological malaise whereby, at its most extreme, the 'inner' realm of experience overrides the 'outer' realm, to the extent that the individual's 'outer' experience is rendered ontologically dead and non-existent.[37]

'Existential Gangrene': Onset in Young Adam

Trocchi's debut novel *Young Adam* (1954) was the first of a series that he published with Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press in Paris, originally under the pseudonym Francis Lengel.[38] Although Trocchi had experimented with narcotics since 1952, at this stage in life, his drug taking was more recreational than dependent: in comparison to his later works, narcotics are notably absent thematically from the narrative of *Young Adam,* and although the protagonist Joe Taylor is undoubtedly inward, as my analysis will now show, he was not however a narcotics-influenced 'cosmonaut of

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[37] Laing defines his use of 'ontology': 'Despite the philosophical use of 'ontology' by Heidegger, Sartre, Tillich, especially, I have used the term in its present empirical sense because it appears to be the best adverbial derivative of "being."' (*Divided Self*, p. 39). When I refer to 'ontology' it follows this Laingian model – as a means to linguistically denote the human experience of 'being' – rather than to engage in the many philosophical treatments of the word.

[38] For further insight into Trocchi and the Olympia Press, see John St. Jorre's *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyage of Maurice Girodias and the Olympia Press,* (London: Faber, 2009; 1994). See also John Calder's *The Garden of Eros: The Story of the Paris Expatriates and the Post-War Literary Scene* (Richmond: Alma, 2014), in which Calder writes that 'Trocchi became a constant companion to Maurice Girodias' (p. 59).

inner space'.[39] Joe is a drifter: after unsuccessfully attempting to be a writer of fiction,

he takes a job crewing an industrial barge carrying cargo around the waterways of

central Scotland.[40] Stewart Home claims that Joe 'cannot be an existential protagonist

because the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre […] is predicated on notions of

authenticity'.[41] In Home's view, 'Joe is not even an authentic bargeman, he is a

university drop out who works on the canals for at most a few months', yet I believe

that Joe should still be regarded as an existential protagonist: rather than creating a

character that simply affirms existential philosophy's fundamental premise of the

subjectively engaged self-made man, Trocchi instead uses the complex and morally

dubious character of Joe to explore mankind's struggle to achieve such an authentic

state of existence. [42]

The novel's action begins with the gruesome discovery of a young woman's

corpse in the River Clyde by Joe and the barge's skipper Leslie. The body is later

identified as Cathie Dimly; it is also later revealed to the reader that the corpse is

Joe's ex-girlfriend, and that he had been with her on the night that she died. Split into

three parts, the second section of the novel begins with Joe's startling declaration: 'I

killed Cathie', yet despite this apparent confession, whether Joe actually killed Cathie

is never clarified. [43] Cathie's death haunts the entire narrative and it is particularly

significant because it catalyses Joe's existential crisis which leads to the onset of

'existential gangrene'. Joe describes the moment of her death in the following

flashback:

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[39] Although it is later revealed that this is not in fact his actual surname, Trocchi never does disclose what it actually is. The unreliability of Joe's name makes the reader aware of the unreliability of his first-person omniscient narrative point of view.
[40] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003; 1954), p.110.
[41] Stewart Home, 'Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam* (London: Calder, 2008), p. 11.
[42] Ibid., p. 11.
[43] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 87.

> Perhaps some people would say I was to blame because my reactions were so slow. I must have willed her death. I don't think so […] She was gone suddenly [….] I became breathlessly curious, and then a wave of fear that was almost nausea came over me. If only she had broken the surface, even for an instant, I might have moved.
>
> […] I felt very alone then, an alien, an exile, society already crystalizing against me, and only my own desperate word for what had happened.[44]

The passage highlights Joe's absolute inaction and his isolation, and existential sickness is implied through Joe's allusion to the wave of nausea caused by fear: Joe implies that he had no control over the event itself and, as the narrative develops, it becomes clear that he has no control over its ramifications either. This sense of profound passivity instigates Joe's existential crisis: in the account of Cathie's death, Joe details how he meticulously removed any evidence of his involvement that night in order to 'destroy scientifically the absurd complex in which I had become involved'.[45] By the end of Joe's account of the incident, which highlights his ghostly invisibility, it is as though he had never been present at all. Discussing his patient Peter's onset of 'existential gangrene', Laing suggests that this 'meant widening the existential distance between his self and the world': this disconnection saw Peter 'operate with a false-self system' which exacerbated the dichotomy between his 'inner' and 'outer' existence.[46] In this sense, Cathie's death – what Joe chooses to view as an external and therefore uncontrollable set of circumstances – instigates the onset of Joe's 'existential gangrene' because from then on he surmises that he must only exist inwardly in such a state of existential inauthenticity, in order to avoid detection 'in the world' by the authorities because his 'own position was dangerous':[47]

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[44] Ibid., p.91.
[45] Ibid., p. 93.
[46] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, pp. 127, 126.
[47] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 90.

> The anonymity of the men who at that very moment might be working against me not because they had a personal grudge against me but because they were part of an impersonal machine whose function it was to maintain order […] was horrifying. […] There was something nightmarish about it – my nightmare, for the machine might include me in its intricate pattern-making at any moment.[48]

Comparing the legal system to a machine, which highlights the lack of humanity that Joe feels he is up-against, Joe is aware that his individual freedom is threatened; he must lie low in order to remain undetected.

In the immediate aftermath of Cathie's death, Joe also admits that although he 'wanted to act […] there was nothing to do but wait'.[49] Joe's inaction suggests that he succumbs to being a victim of circumstance, rather than choosing to shape his own destiny. Instead, he chooses to be controlled by the fact that he was involved, and thus that he may – or may not – be responsible.[50] In this way, Joe can be seen to act in what Sartre terms 'bad faith' because, by existing inauthentically, 'bad faith' gives Joe 'the possibility of denying himself' which masks his existential anguish and eradicates any sense of responsibility, either to himself, or indeed to others.[51] Rather than acknowledging the centrality of his involvement in Cathie's death, Joe instead repeatedly alludes to it as though it was more akin to an extraordinary natural occurrence: 'it was as unreasonable as an earthquake on an English lawn', and 'as surprising as forked lightning.[52] Such allusions to nature highlight Joe's continuous attempts to distance himself from the actual reality of his direct involvement, and the fact that he is therefore partly responsible. Sartre explains how the individual operates under 'bad faith' in order to negate responsibility: 'The subject deceives himself about the meaning of his conduct, he apprehends it in its concrete existence but not in

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[48] Ibid., p. 99.
[49] Ibid., p. 97.
[50] Ibid., p. 71.
[51] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 71.
[52] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, pp. 89, 91.

its truth, simply because he cannot derive from it an original situation and from a psychic constitution which remain alien to him'.[53] Indeed, Joe feels as though he has no choice in deciding his own fate, claiming that 'the situation' was 'forced upon me without logic, like Mexico and Maximillan; it was up to me to accept my predicament and to free myself of the implications'.[54] Operating through self-deception, he convinces himself that he alone must consent to this 'predicament' and that he must retreat inwardly in order to remain invisible; the externally-imposed situation allows him to convince himself that he is doing the right thing by striving to remain undetected.[55] He believes that this situation of anonymity will enable him to 'free' himself, but in this mode of cowardly and prolonged passivity he is living what Sartre calls 'a pretense of existence': in juxtaposition to the existential premise that 'we *make ourselves* what we are',[56] Joe's negation of subjective agency only enables him to exist as 'a passive object among other objects'.[57] By existing objectively and inauthentically as a means to refuse his own subjective agency, responsibility, and destiny, Joe negates existential freedom in Sartre's terms.

Although operating through 'bad faith' and passivity, Joe does however attempt to cling onto his 'inner' identity while also trying to continually establish himself as a being-in-the-world with others. Although undoubtedly misogynistic, Joe's one-sided representation of women is perhaps partly symptomatic of the onset of his 'existential gangrene', which is catalysed by the complete lack of control he has over his own destiny. Sartre has extensively theorised human interaction through the act of looking and *Young Adam* is absolutely full of references to observing,

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[53] Ibid., p. 73.
[54] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 92.
[55] Ibid., p. 93. The use of 'absurd' here, and elsewhere in *Young Adam*, can be viewed as a reference to Albert Camus' popular work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942).
[56] Ibid., p. 93.
[57] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 81.

particularly in the opening chapters.[58] Sartre claims that a basic ontological duality manifests through the everyday act of looking, where one becomes aware, through what he terms 'the gaze', of the divisive dualism of the *en-soi* (In-itself) and the *pour-soi* (For-itself). The *pour-soi* is reflective and reflexive consciousness which functions like a mirror, and oxymoronically, the *en-soi* is 'being in itself'.[59] Consequently, being as an *en-soi* is self-contained and absolute as it 'knows no otherness', unlike the *pour-soi,* which operates entirely through interaction with, and reflection of, otherness.[60] Attributing power dynamics to the very act of looking, Sartre affirms that 'the fact of being-looked-at is the 'alienation of myself'' because by being looked at rather than being the person who actively looks, the self is rendered as a passive *en-soi,* or, in other words, as an ontological object.[61] Furthering this concept, Sartre defines the act of looking as 'fixing the people whom I see into objects; I am in relation to them as the Other is in relation to me. In looking at them I measure my power'.[62] For Joe who is forced to become increasingly inward due to the externally imposed onset of existential gangrene, the act of looking becomes a way for him to execute, and thus to realise, the continuous presence of his increasingly-absent 'outer' existence. In existential terms, Joe is fundamentally powerless due to his choice to give up control of his fate after Cathie's death, and consequently, the everyday act of looking becomes a small but still significant way in which he attempts to exercise his own 'outer' agency as a being-in-the-world, and to be reminded of his own external presence and power through his dominance over others.

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[58] In Chapter One, which is twelve pages in length, there are eleven mentions of 'looked' or 'looking', two 'watched', two 'see', and two 'glanced', most of which are initiated from Joe's perspective.
[59] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 22.
[60] Ibid., p. 22.
[61] Ibid., p. 22.
[62] Ibid., p. 290.

In Part One of *Young Adam*, it is significant that Joe equates power with being passive in terms of 'the gaze':

> it meant, after all, that she [Ella] was aware of me, and from that I derived a powerful sense, a vindication of my own existence. To exercise power without exerting it, to be detached and powerful, to be there, silent and indestructible as gods, that is to be a god and why there are gods.[63]

In his inward state of 'bad faith', which marks the beginning of 'existential gangrene', Joe is clearly suffering from delusions of grandeur in his repeated references to being god-like: rather than seeing himself as passive by being the recipient of Ella's gaze, he instead feels 'detached and powerful' and 'silent and indestructible'. There is little doubt that this elevation of power and silence is directly related to his own silence surrounding Cathie's death. Significantly, Sartre also defines 'the look' as an act of judgment that is mediated through the eyes through which 'the appearance of the Other leads to a lack of control, to a situation where I am not master'.[64] The word choice of 'master' connotes authoritative control and acknowledges the power play that the process embodies. In this instance, Ella functions both as the 'master' and as Joe's external mirror to affirm his own 'outer' sense of self, which, due to his potentially gangrenous situation, suggests that he is reliant on others to make him feel that he exists externally in the world. This concept, of the-other-as-mirror, reaches an existential extreme because Joe's entire identity in the novel is shaped by a fundamental 'outer' situation: that he is either guilty or innocent of Cathie's apparent murder.

It is also clear that Joe is highly aware of the fact that when he is looked at he is consequently rendered as passive, which furthers his state of existential fragmentation. Indeed, in contrast to the elation that Joe appears to feel having had his

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[63] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 49.
[64] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 289.

'outer' existence affirmed by Ella, as the narrative progresses and the 'murder' trial commences, he feels anxious when his 'outer' self is acknowledged: 'Ella watched me but said nothing. She was withdrawn in a different way now, and it was I who was being looked at. That made me uncomfortable'.[65] This concept, of 'uncomfortable' passivity due to receiving Ella's gaze, is also reminiscent of Sartre's claim:

> When Pierre looks at me, I know of course that he is looking at me. His eyes, things in the world, are fixed on my body, a thing in the world – that is the objective fact of which I can say: it is. But it is also a fact *in the world*. The meaning of the look is not a fact in the world, and this is what makes me uncomfortable. Although I make smiles, promises, threats, nothing can get hold of the approbation, the free judgements which I seek; I know that it is always beyond.[66]

Sartre highlights that by being looked at by Pierre, he is automatically being judged; it is this act of judgement – the meaning of which can never be known to Sartre because he is not Pierre, much like Joe's discomfort comes from the fact that he is not Ella – that creates existential angst because it cannot be transcended through his own, and therefore isolated, subjectivity. Using the example of Pierre's eyes looking at his body, Sartre explains that unlike facts that are objective (and which can therefore be understood in terms of meaning), the other's subjectivity always remains separate, ambiguous, and ontologically threatening.[67] In this regard, there is a detectable and significant shift: in Part One of the novel, Joe is portrayed as predominantly in control because he is often the subject who looks at others, yet in Part Two, which opens with

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[65] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, pp. 105-6.

[66] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 85.

[67] Other literature contemporaneous to Trocchi similarly uses 'the gaze' to highlight the struggle for subjective power and the consequent loss of identity. Françoise Sagan's controversial *Bonjour Tristesse*, published in Paris the same year as *Young Adam* 1954 and written under blatant Sartrean influence (this is acknowledged by the translator of Penguin's 2013 edition, Heather Lloyd). The novel portrays the humiliation of Cécile, the novel's protagonist, as she is scrutinized by her father's fiancée:

> Anne, suddenly no longer aloof, was watching me intently and with no hint of a smile. At that moment [...] all that remained was Anne's gaze. [...] Anne's harsh, interrogating gaze was bearing down on me.

(See *Bonjour Tristesse and A Certain Smile*, (London: Penguin, 2013; 1954) p. 66).

Joe's admission of his involvement in Cathie's death, he is predominantly rendered as passive through being the objectified recipient of the look:

> She [Ella] opened her eyes and looked at me […] She put out her arm and drew me down to her again. I resisted slightly but she was determined. Her mouth was soft but too wet. I closed my teeth against her tongue. But without exerting myself I couldn't get free and so I closed my eyes and allowed her to go on kissing my neck and my cheeks.[68]

In contrast to Joe feeling 'god-like' power in Part One, Ella is now clearly dominant over Joe, who is rendered wholly passive both physically and in terms of 'the gaze'. Moreover, by being unwilling to 'exert' himself in order to resist Ella's insistent affections, this indolent attitude of submission reflects his larger decision to remain passive while the situation surrounding Cathie's death develops.

Continuing the notion between what Sartre calls 'the gaze' and the onset of Joe's 'existential gangrene', the novel opens with Joe (although at this point he is anonymous, perhaps a deliberate decision by Trocchi to covertly yet instantly introduce the character as an ambiguous 'I') looking in the mirror: 'this morning, the first thing after I got out of bed, I looked in the mirror'.[69] Joe then goes on to meticulously study his appearance, describing how it had changed 'unperceptively during the night' and noting:

> Nothing out of place and yet everything was, because there existed between the mirror and myself the same distance; the same break in continuity which I have always felt to exist between acts which I committed yesterday and my present consciousness of them.[70]

This opening immediately highlights Joe's narcissistic nature and it hints at the notion of self-division through his allusion to his fragmented experience of the past and the present. Joe also acknowledges that a distance exists between the physical-self and the image-self in the mirror: he is highly aware that the mirror disrupts continuity and that

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[68] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 103.
[69] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 85.
[70] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 19.

his experience of self-disassociation is brought on by the uncanny nature of the mirror. By beginning the novel's narrative with this scene of startling introspection, Trocchi instantly introduces the notion of fragmented identity because it implies the physical and psychological disconnection that Joe feels when presented with his mirrored-self. It also covertly implies that the lack of continuity between the past and present that Joe feels when presented with his mirrored-self is also linked directly to Cathie's death. Trocchi achieves this through repeating the phrase 'break in continuity': 'I felt vaguely like the whole incident had taken place out of time, that there had been a break in continuity, that what had happened was not part of my history. It was pervaded with the unreality of fiction, dream. I would wake up soon'.[71]

Trocchi uses the mirror as an existential emblem throughout *Young Adam* to acknowledge the 'longstanding correlation between mirrors and the construction of the self'.[72] Like Narcissus who looks into the water and fails to recognise that the face reflected is his own, Joe struggles to simultaneously identify with, and connect, his perceiving-self and his image-self. Laing explains Narcissus' existential crisis: 'Narcissus fears men, their judgments, and their real presence; he wishes only to experience an aura of love for himself, he asks only to be distanced from his own body, only for there to be a light coating of otherness over his flesh and over his thoughts'.[73] Narcissus is ontologically insecure in relation to others because he 'fears' men and their judgments, but he also fears himself: he 'asks' to be 'distanced from his own body'. Indeed, for Joe whose 'outer' invisibility must be maintained due to fear of what he calls 'social syllogisms that I wished to deny',[74] the mirror provides a means for him to attempt to overcome the onset of his existentially gangrenous status

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[71] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 96.
[72] Danielle Manning,'(Re)visioning Heterotopia: The Function of Mirrors and Reflection in Seventeenth-Century Painting', *Shift*, 1 (2008), p. 6.
[73] R. D. Laing, *Self and Others*, (London: Penguin, 1987; 1961), p. 54.
[74] Ibid., p.148.

and reconcile his 'outer' appearance with his 'inner' self. Yet this does not happen: looking in the mirror he muses 'I don't ask whether I am "I" who looked or the image which was seen'. [75] Trocchi uses wordplay to suggest Joe's dual-status as subject/object: the 'I' (subject) is set against the conflicting notion of 'I' as the 'image' (object), however, images become objects through being seen, and therefore, the image comes into existence through the eyes. It is clear, then, that Joe experiences an existential crisis of identity in the mirror: he is simultaneously subject (the looking 'I') *and* object (the looked at 'image'), which again parallels Sartre's claim that in the instance of looking the individual's sense of self is both affirmed and eclipsed. In this sense, Joe still experiences himself as a divided rather than unified self: fundamentally, Joe's subjective 'I' is disconnected from his objectifying eyes, and thus, he remains unable to unify his 'inner' and 'outer' separation.

Trocchi develops the motif of the mirror throughout the narrative to highlight the onset of Joe's 'existential gangrene'. This full-circle technique emphasises its symbolic significance: in the denouement the mirror functions as an illustrative device to further highlight Joe's deepening existential dichotomy. Propelled by a conflicting mixture of guilt and curiosity, Joe attends the penultimate court trial:

> As soon as I was seated I began for some reason or another to think of my shaving mirror. I remembered on more than one occasion I had dropped it and I was being continually surprised by the fact that it didn't break. No matter how often I repeated to myself that it was made of metal I could not rid myself of the response to expectation that it would break. Why did I think of that then?[76]

While Joe is aware of the mirror's duplicative nature, he is also aware of its potential frailty: he worries that his secret will be revealed, and that he might mirror the mirror's brittleness by unexpectedly breaking. Moreover, the mirror's fundamental

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[75] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 19.
[76] Ibid., p. 143.

doubleness literally reflects Joe's fundamental doubleness as either guilty or innocent, and it is apparent that Joe's awareness of his precarious position is heightened through looking at himself in the mirror: Joe is highly aware that he could (or should) be on trial instead of local plumber Daniel Goon. The mirror can also be seen to further reflect Joe's fragmented identity, as both Cathie's ex-boyfriend but also as Cathie's possible killer. Joe has a hidden double-identity, and by self-consciously probing, 'why did I think of that then?' it can be suggested that he, perhaps subconsciously, acknowledges that the mirror highlights his self-division, and indeed his self-deception.

Joe's apparent invisibility in the courtroom also further emphasises his lack of outer agency as a 'being-in-the-world'. Goon is falsely charged with Cathie's murder, a ruling that renders Joe completely passive and powerless. The text overtly highlights Joe's inability to influence the judicial system: Joe sends an anonymous letter to the judge of the trial stating that he was with Cathie when she died, and that Goon was not, and therefore should not be found guilty. Despite this attempt 'to sow a seed of doubt in the mind of the judge', Goon is however still declared to be guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.[77] Joe's 'outer' self is once again rendered as dead because he continually has no influence on the external systems of society, a situation which perpetuates his outsider status, or what he describes as being 'alien' and an 'exile'.[78] In his own words, Joe always feels 'on the margins of things' and 'isolated from it all', and consequently, the lack of external influence that Joe has on the court again renders his 'outer' existence as ontologically absent, an existential state of fragmentation and self-worthlessness that is in-keeping with symptoms inherent in

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[77] Ibid., p. 143.
[78] Ibid., p. 143.

'existential gangrene'.[79] Indeed, Trocchi covertly develops this existential invisibility throughout Part Two and Three: Joe refers to the fact that he is 'nameless' in relation the false court case or what he terms 'a convenient social fiction' against Goon, and while on the barge he increasingly 'felt myself robbed of my identity' though he admits that 'I had come to identify my safety with inaction'.[80] This concept of safety in inaction is directly aligned with Joe's existentially gangrenous 'outer' decay: as his inwardness heightens and his 'outer' invisibility and projection of bad faith becomes more acute, his crisis furthers. Furthering these ideas, Joe feels as though he is losing himself in the confusion brought on by Cathie's death:

> I had a strange feeling of having lost my identity. I had become part of a situation which seemed to protect me against another less enviable one, *the* one in which I would have been involved had I gone to the police [italics in original].[81]

Having submitted to having his fate dictated by Cathie's death, and operating under bad faith to avoid the other 'less enviable situation' involving responsibility, Joe admits to feeling existentially lost. In tandem with the onset of 'existential gangrene', Joe will not overcome such self-division unless he engages in what Sartre calls radical 'self-recovery' which can only be achieved through 'authenticity', yet throughout the narrative Joe becomes increasingly incapable of instigating self-reunification to remedy the beginnings of existential sickness.[82] This situation presents an existential conundrum: the more Joe exists in 'bad faith', the more he is ultimately lost. Although Joe is not yet existentially gangrenous in the extreme sense theorised by Laing, whereby the individual's sense of self is definitively split to the point of extreme 'uncoupling', his inability to live an authentic existence after Cathie's death has

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[79] Ibid., p. 128.
[80] Ibid., pp. 98, 110, 111.
[81] Ibid., pp. 109-10.
[82] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 88.

alarming ramifications for his own existential status as he struggles to see himself, and indeed operate, as an ontologically harmonious being.

'Existential Gangrene': Development in *Cain's Book*

While Joe in *Young Adam* experiences the onset of 'existential gangrene' due to being caught up in, and submitting to, the external circumstances instigated by Cathie's sudden death, *Cain's Book* portrays a markedly different scenario of self-division. *Cain's Book* is Trocchi's most known – and most infamous – work. Centered on the theme of heroin addiction, it narrates the existence of Joe Necchi, a struggling writer who is drafting his own 'Cain's Book'.[83] Necchi's characterisation is largely based on Trocchi's own experience of writing, heroin addiction, and scow life: Necchi works as a captain of a scow, an industrial cargo ship based in Manhattan.[84] Although fragments from what later became *Cain's Book* were drafted from as early as when Trocchi lived in Glasgow, Trocchi was heavily addicted to heroin when writing it, and this habit is similarly evident in the characterisation of Necchi from the very outset of

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[83] Joe Necchi is created to represent the biblical figure of Cain: he is in Trocchi's words 'a symbol of the book'. (St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 12 Fol. 2, p. 37). By referencing Cain, who exists in the bible as always, and only, in relation to his brother Abel, Trocchi covertly acknowledges the duality of identity. The bible tells of Cain murdering Abel, and being exiled and condemned to wander the earth whilst bearing 'the mark of Cain': as a junkie, Necchi is similarly condemned to exile, both psychologically and physically, and he also bears needle marks, which brand him as a social outcast. Trocchi's use of a Beat-style narrative persona – Necchi – also highlights the notion of fragmented identity; Trocchi is represented both a fictionally and factually which is put into interplay in the roman à clef narrative. Necchi experiences his identity as fragmented, and I believe that he consciously sought this divided ontological state as a means to explore – and then establish – his radical identity as a heroin-fuelled 'cosmonaut of inner space'.

[84] In *Garden of Eros* (Richmond: Alma, 2014), John Calder explains the appeal of the scow for Trocchi:

> Trocchi was paid about $100 a week as captain of the scow, but there was little to do other than to caretake, keep the boat clean and let it be towed. The scows were basically small floating apartments and the captains, if so inclined, could take aboard – as well as food – women, drink, drugs, and whatever else they needed or could afford for the trips around Manhattan or up Long Island Sound. [...] Trocchi became even more isolated on his, free to inject himself unobserved, free to have his reveries and occasionally write, while he contemplated the lights of Manhattan. He kept his heroin in a watertight jar, dangling below the waterline (p. 225).

the novel: on the opening page he unapologetically states 'half an hour ago I gave myself a fix'.[85]

In contrast to *Young Adam* in which the mirror offers the possibility of unification for Joe's unstable sense of self, in *Cain's Book* Necchi makes a haunting self-observation:

> my former identity paled and disintegrated like the reflection of a receding face on the broken surface of water. If I had looked in a mirror and seen no reflection there I feel I wouldn't have been unduly startled. The invisible man.[86]

Paralleling *Young Adam*, Trocchi again evokes the myth of Narcissus. However, while Narcissus fails to recognise that the face he sees is his own, this is taken further in *Cain's Book*: Necchi's 'invisible' absence of self-recognition is disturbing, and this representation of Necchi's body (or more accurately the *lack* of representation) can be read as an inversion of Lacan's 'mirror stage' – the definitive moment of self-recognition in a child's development.[87] As an adult whose sense of 'outer' self is typically established, Necchi's failure to affirm his own self-recognition in the mirror is abnormal: like a gangrenous limb, his invisibility implies that his 'outer' self has completely severed from his 'inner' sense of self.[88] Necchi's inability to see himself in the mirror also directly parallels William Burroughs' uncanny portrayal of the self/addict in *Junky* (1953), in which the nickname of his persona in the heroin

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[85] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 9.

[86] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 63. Necchi's invisibility parallels the 'existential gangrene' of Laing's patient Peter, who had a desire to be 'anonymous, or incognito' (see R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 128).

[87] See Jacques Lacan's essay 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalythic Experience' (1949).

[88] Paralleling *Young Adam*, Trocchi uses the mirror as a motif to introduce Necchi's complex ontology in *Cain's Book*: at the very start of the narrative, Trocchi introduces the notion of fragmented identity with the short epigraph 'Cain at his orisons, Narcissus at his mirror' (p. 10). The epigraph's placement appears to be random because the prose that follows does not appear to be directly related to the statement. Covertly, however, through alluding to the mirror, the epigraph introduces the importance of inconsistent identities to the reader: when Necchi looks in the mirror later in the narrative he experiences an inversion of Narcissus' attempt to self-unify.

narrative is 'El Hombre Invisible – The Invisible Man'.[89] Laing acknowledges the

profound connection between existential invisibility and the mirror by observing one

of his patients' reactions: 'if he could not see himself there, he himself would be

'gone'; thus he was employing a schizoid presupposition by the help of the mirror,

whereby there were two 'hims', one there and the other here'.[90] The disconnect

between this patient's self-image is blatant in this clinical case, and like Trocchi,

Laing highlights that the lack of mirrored self-image led to the patient thinking he was

existentially 'gone' or dead.[91] Furthering this notion, Laing acknowledges that the

body problematically implies an uncertain position in ontological terms: 'The body

clearly occupies an ambiguous transition position between 'me' and the world. It is,

on the one hand, the core and centre of my world, and on the other, it is an object in

the world of the others'.[92] Indeed, it is apparent to Necchi (though not to others) that

his 'outer' self has disappeared completely: like a diseased and gangrened limb, his

sense of self has consequently divided and his 'inner' self is totally dominant over his

'outer' self to the degree that they have essentially split off from one-another.

Laing suggests that when the self operates through a more dominant, and

hence 'real', mode of psychological fantasy over physicality, a hypothetical scenario

could be the following: 'I think of me being inside my body and at the same time the

inside of my body being somehow 'inside' my private space […] However since I am

inside my body, my body is also outside me in some peculiar sense'.[93] This applies to

Necchi, who feels so disconnected from his 'outside' body that he struggles to

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[89] William Burroughs, *Junky*, (London: Penguin, 1977; 1953), p. 63. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was published in 1952, the year before Burroughs' novel.
[90] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 117.
[91] Laing also cites psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs in *Self and Others* to demonstrate the ontological opposition between mind and body:
    the inner world of the mind in contrast *to the external world of the subject's bodily development, and hence of other people's minds and bodies*
    mind in contrast to *body* (pp. 23-4).
[92] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 131.
[93] R. D. Laing, *Self and Others*, p. 33.

acknowledge its physicality in its existentially gangrenous state of self-division. I return to, and expand upon, this relationship between the body and the world in Chapter Four. 'Existential gangrene' is particularly apt to apply to explicate the self-division that heroin catalyses: the deadening of a gangrenous limb's physicality parallels the physical numbness brought on by heroin's pain-killing properties.[94] By situating Necchi in an overwhelmingly subjective and psychological realm, I will now argue that heroin specifically leads to the development of 'existential gangrene' because, by problematising his ability to identify with, and relate to, his physical self, Necchi's heroin use undoubtedly creates and amplifies a developing dualism between the psychic mind and physical body.

Necchi's body is represented as complex and contradictory: on the one hand, his body is a physical vessel, like a ship's hull or an empty shell that functions to contain the heroin in the bloodstream, but on the other, its physicality is so ambiguous and insignificant that it is presented merely as a physical pincushion. Indeed, it is revealing that there is only one description of Necchi's physical appearance in the entire lengthy novel:

> I also am tall. I was wearing my heavy white seaman's jersey with a high polo neck, and I sensed that the angularity of my face – big nose, high cheekbones, sunken eyes – was softened by the shadows and smoothed – the effect of the drug – out of its habitual nervousness. My eyes were closed.[95]

This depiction establishes that Necchi's bodily physicality has been shaped by heroin. Moreover, the absence of further acknowledgement of Necchi's 'outer' appearance emphasises the overwhelmingly cerebral nature of his characterisation. The physical tangibility of Necchi's body – an addict's body – has somewhat ruptured: essentially functioning solely to receive junk through a needle as an impersonal 'instrument' or

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[94] Heroin is the street name for diamorphine, the most powerful painkiller devised.
[95] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 21.

human pincushion, the body then prompts the vital and visceral move inwards deep into the intangible realm of inner psychological space.[96] Marcus Boon calls the state of narcotic-induced self-division 'the man-machine' whereby 'a body whose soul has vacated it, a body that has become subject to a will – either the owner's or somebody else's'.[97] This notion of a body 'that has become subject to a will' is key to understanding Necchi's divided and complex ontology: he believes that 'to live within one's imagination is brave, necessary', which conveys the idea that he self-consciously wills himself to live out immersive and intense introspection.[98] Necchi continually acknowledges his isolation: 'I might have laughed. But I always found it difficult to laugh alone'; '*I am sitting alone*. It had occurred to me that I was mad. To stare inwards. To be a hermit, even in company'; 'I am alone'; 'with an acute sense of being an exile wherever I went'; 'I had been overcome by the sense of isolation, from time to time almost nauseous in intensity'; 'I was alone, like an obscene little Buddha, looking in'.[99] Through his heroin addiction, it is clear that Necchi is psychologically 'far-out': self-reflexively linking his addition to his alienation, he believes that heroin is 'borne of a respect for the whole chemistry of alienation'.[100] In contrast to Joe in *Young Adam* whose gangrenous disconnect with his 'outer' existence stemmed from the trauma of Cathie's death and which led him to exist in 'bad faith', Necchi conversely inverts this by using the heroin hit as a conscious means to heighten his

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[96] This notion is reminiscent of Baudelaire's belief that under opium 'the body, that earthly part of man' is reduced to 'a state of perfect submission' (see 'An Opium-Eater' in Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, (New York: Citadel, 1996) p. 117) and unembodiment also responds to Burroughs' representation of the body being a 'boneless mummy in *The Ticket That Exploded*, where skin is a uniform that can be taken off' (London: Penguin, 2014; 1962, p. 60). Burroughs' image is a striking parallel to Laing's example of Peter's 'existential gangrene' whereby the skin was 'uncanny […] unlived and undead' (*Divided Self*, p. 133): the body/skin is experienced objectively rather than subjectively.

[97] Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002), p. 216.

[98] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 113.

[99] Ibid., pp. 56, 71, 116, 185, 193, 237.

[100] Ibid., p. 33.

inward existence, and to attain an authentic existential status. Unlike Joe in *Young Adam* who became a 'being-for-others' due to his lack of ontological self-control, Necchi's self-willed alienation means that he operates autonomously and authentically as a 'being-for-himself'.

Aided and amplified by his addiction, Necchi retreats into a self-willed state of existentially gangrenous interiority whereby he is reluctant to engage with the external world at all, only doing so when he absolutely *has* to. Indeed, when intoxicated Necchi feels 'out of the external world',[101] and he strives to live inwardly as much as possible:

> Whatever increase of entropy in the external world, my response was relevant. The universe might shrink or expand. I would remain aware, a little pocket of coherence in the city of dreadful night. Or would I? The drug can be treacherous, leading through all hollow recesses and caves of panic. An identity slips away and one can no longer choose to be immersed in it, voluptuously duped. I was forced to lie down and close my eyes.
> I was unable to return to my thoughts, whatever they were, and my former identity paled and disintegrated like the reflection of a receding face on the broken surface of water.[102]

The intertextual reference to James Thomson's nightmarish vision of alienation – in the modern city *and* in the mind in his epic poem 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1874) – mirrors the psychology behind Necchi's claim, that in his isolation, his heroin-heightened consciousness offers 'a little pocket of coherence in the city of dreadful night'.[103] Yet it is significant that Necchi also directly questions this notion of being a little 'pocket of coherence' before describing how heroin can also lead to the chaos of

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[101] Ibid., p. 71.

[102] Ibid., p. 70.

[103] For more on James Thomson see Tom Leonard's biography *Places of the Mind: The life and Work of James Thomson* and for more on the poem in particular, see part four, which is entitled 'The City of Dreadful Night' (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993). There are some significant similarities between *Cain's Book* and Thomson's poem. Like Trocchi who creates an ambiguous sense of place in *Cain's Book* through his allusions to both New York and life back in Glasgow, Thomson's poem is also ambiguous: it is a city of the mind that undoubtedly references London, and possibly Glasgow, and Port Glasgow. Indeed, for both Trocchi and Thomson, physical place is secondary to psychological space. Moreover, according to Edwin Morgan's introduction to the poem in the Canongate Classic edition (1993), Thomson's speaker is 'clearly a projection of Thomson himself' which parallels Necchi being a projection of Trocchi.

'hollow recesses and caves of panic'. Paralleling Joe in *Young Adam* whose identity slips away due to external circumstances, and who is rendered passive as a result, Necchi seems unusually concerned that heroin has the capacity to render him absolutely submissive to its effects. In this instance, heroin subsumes his identity and stops him from thinking: this loss of Cartesian subjectivity means that he is no longer subjectively engaged and in control, and from this passage an important contradiction emerges – heroin heightens both subjectivity *and* objectivity. Trocchi's choice to liken this state of ontological doubleness to Thomson's 'dreadful' city of the mind is also reminiscent of what Laing (via Heidegger) called 'the dreadful' – a state of existentially gangrenous separation which creates an existential crisis, 'for without the inner the outer loses its meaning, and without the outer the inner loses its substance'.[104] Indeed, like Trocchi's characters and like Laing's theory of existential crisis instigated by self-division, Thomson's speaker also splits into two irreconcilable selves:

> As I came through the desert: I was twain,
> Two selves distinct that cannot join again;
> One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
> And watched the other stark in swoon and her;
> And she came on, and never turned aside,
> Between such sun and moon and roaring tide:
> And as she came more near.
> My soul grew mad with fear.[105]

Edwin Morgan claims that Thomson's poem fundamentally addresses 'the difficulty of escaping from a despairing state of mind', which suggests that Thomson's speaker – 'far out' through intoxication by opium and alcohol – is unable to return to the 'outer' world and to reconcile his two 'selves'.[106] By alluding to such severe separation depicted by Thomson's poem, Necchi shows that he is aware of the danger

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[104] R. D. Laing, 'The Present Situation by R.D. Laing', *Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 5.

[105] James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), ll. 70-8.

[106] Edwin Morgan, 'Introduction' in James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), p. 16.

he faces in his consciously willed state of heroin-fuelled interiority; through his ever-developing existential self-division, he too could be separated eternally and lost in his own inward city of dreadful night.

Following on from the contradictions inherent in this potentially dangerous dualism, Laing acknowledges the profound passivity of the inner world. In an apparent contradiction to inwardness typically signifying subjectivity and active agency, Laing claims that in the person in the 'inner realm' 'will find himself going, or being conducted – one cannot clearly distinguish active from passive here'.[107] It is significant that Necchi specifically addresses the passivity of the heroin experience: while intoxicated, he muses that 'for a indefinite time I existed as passively as a log', and he also 'find[s] heroin useful to give me the passivity to give myself over to thought. Then I am able to attain a flow'.[108] By conveying the idea that heroin enables him to 'give' himself 'over to thought', passivity appears to be combined with the contradictory heightening of thoughts, or consciousness. The narrative in *Cain's Book* arguably affirms this concept, whereby Necchi again connects ontological objectivity with passivity during the heroin experience:

> under the influence of heroin […] one is no longer grotesquely involved in the becoming, one simply is. I remember saying to Sebastian before he returned to Europe with his new wife that it was imperative to know what it was to be a vegetable as well.[109]

Intoxicated by heroin, Necchi believes in the importance of negating his human subjectivity in order to achieve the object, or 'thing', status of 'a vegetable', which suggests that he experiences a loss of his subjective self through this process.[110] In this desire to 'be a vegetable' I believe that Necchi demonstrates a will to passivity,

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[107] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 104.
[108] Ibid., pp. 71, 104.
[109] Ibid., p. 11.
[110] The passage echoes Jean Cocteau's claim, that 'Opium is the only vegetable substance which communicate the vegetable state to us' (*Opium: Diary of a Cure* (London: Icon, 1957), p. 77).

because the only example of his active agency is to bring about such inaction.[111]

Laing's insight is useful here:

> the self, in order to develop and sustain its identity and autonomy, and in order to be safe from the persistent threat and danger from the world, has cut itself off from its own direct relatedness with others, and has endeavoured to become its own object: to become, in fact, related directly only to itself.[112]

Laing affirms that in extreme cases of ontological insecurity, the retreat into the inner self enables the human subject to 'become its own object'. Although the notion of Necchi as a highly subjective inner space explorer seems at odds with the notion of ontological objectification, Laing's radical proposition brings these together by positioning the object-status of the self as a means to 'develop' and 'sustain' its subjective autonomy and identity. To be outwardly perceived as an objectified 'vegetable' but to be inwardly entirely self-sufficient was perhaps a stance of ambiguity that was cultivated by both Trocchi and Necchi as a means to truly escape society, and to instead exist on their own, autonomous terms. Heroin enables both Trocchi and Necchi to drop out of conventional society through combining two extreme, unconventional, and fundamentally unproductive, modes of divided existence: pure Cartesian consciousness and a vegetable state.[113]

Necchi's negation of subjective agency can be further elucidated by Sartre's theory of 'objectness'. Although 'objectness' is applied by Sartre to describe the act

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[111] Victor Brombert similarly connects alcoholic and narcotic inebriation to what he terms the 'structured depersonalization' of the speaker's subjective self, whereby 'the poem functions as a specular system allowing for the subject to disappear in the object'. (See 'The Will to Ecstasy: The Example of Baudelaire's 'La Chevelure'', *Yale French Studies*, 50 (1974), 'Intoxication and Literature', pp. 54-63, p. 58).

[112] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 137.

[113] Neil Livingstone McMillian suggests that in *Cain's Book,* Necchi's 'valorisation of the 'inviolable' drugged self tends towards embracing the ideology of the libertarian, valuing private and autonomous experience over societal coercion' from section' ('Tracing Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Men's Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000), p. 173). In Barry Miles' *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London Since 1945* (London: Atlantic, 2013; 2010), a quote from the writer Ned Polsky, who knew Trocchi in New York, also acknowledges the notion that heroin shaped Trocchi as a social outlaw: 'Heroin became the focus of all his [Trocchi's] anarchistic existentialist objections to the powers that be and anything he could do to promote it, he did' (p. 135).

of looking, which he defines as 'fixing the people whom I see into objects', when taken as a wider existential concept it is applicable to Necchi's quest for self-administered 'objectness' in his wish to 'be a vegetable'.[114] 'Objectness' is defined by Sartre as 'not quite objectivity but rather the quality or state of being an object' and Necchi's unconventional desire to 'be a vegetable' arguably parallels the Sartrean In-itself *(en-soi)*, an all-encompassing and absolute being: of the In-itself Sartre writes, 'being is. Being is In-itself. Being is what it is'.[115] I would also like to argue that to be an object, or a vegetable, is to exist as an unquestionable whole because as Sartre affirms, an In-itself is only ever '*just* being'. Indeed, as an In-itself, there is no consciousness and therefore no human subjectivity or nothingness, unlike Sartre's conventional ontological model which simultaneously comprises both *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, and in which nothingness is consequently ever-present. In this way, by negating the nothingness inherent in the *pour-soi*, Necchi can be viewed as seeking existential completeness because as Sartre writes, the in-itself is 'solid'.[116]

Furthermore, in a poignant conversation with his father, Necchi also remarks that 'strictly speaking, I never began', a notion that again implies the Sartrean *en-soi* or vegetable state because, by never 'beginning', Necchi avoids engaging with the subjective self-consciousness that existential thought maintains is inherent to creating, shaping, and developing, one's life in a Godless universe.[117] Indeed, as Necchi later acknowledges '*I* am the ground of all existence. God said it. Say it after him', and although he demonstrates that he is acutely aware of the existentialist premise – that man creates his own destiny through subjectivity engagement – he undermines it.[118] This attitude is exemplified by Necchi's following admission: 'the phrase "*ex nihil*

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[114] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 652, 290
[115] Ibid., p. 290.
[116] Ibid., p. 290.
[117] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 96.
[118] Ibid., p. 224.

nihil fit" had just come to me. It seemed that nothing would be beginning, ever'.[119] To recap, then, in contrast to Joe in *Young Adam* whose existential ambiguity stems from his lack of control of external events which see him forced into passivity in order to remain unconnected to the police enquiries, Necchi instead actively wills and cultivates his ontological ambiguity as subject and/or object, oscillation which is enabled by, and directed through, his heroin addiction. It will now be argued that the complex connection established in *Cain's Book* between identity and addiction is taken even further in 'The Long Book', Trocchi's final work of fiction.

'Existential Gangrene': Crisis in 'The Long Book'

Andrew Murray Scott explains that the title 'The Long Book' 'was itself a misunderstanding between author and publisher. Asked what he was working on, Trocchi replied '"a long book", and didn't bother to correct the assumption that this was the title'.[120] 'The Long Book' was Trocchi's last fiction project and this negligent attitude continued: receiving an advance from John Calder – paid by an unconventional page-by-page arrangement to aid Trocchi's cashflow which was largely spent on heroin – he failed to produce a finished manuscript despite Calder scheduling it for publication in 1966.[121] By this stage in his life, Trocchi had grown tired of writing fiction. He hints at this in a comment on 'The Long Book': 'What this book is about is something I know not. When my publisher asks me for my "next novel" he is inviting me to enter into his complex of definitions. For this I am offered a cash reward'.[122] Although an excerpt from 'The Long Book' was published by Peter Haining in *The Hashish Club Volume 2: The Psychedelic*

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[119] Ibid., p. 96. Necchi alludes to this again in his claim that through heroin's vegetable state 'one simply is' (p. 11).
[120] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 131.
[121] Ibid., p. 131. Despite being registered as an addict on the NHS, Trocchi still consumed more than his daily administered dose.
[122] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 2.

Era: From Huxley to Lennon (1975), the excerpts in this chapter are taken from the

Trocchi Papers held at Washington University in Saint Louis.[123] As a notebook dated

1965-68, it comprises short scribbles, character jottings, and general musings: it is in fact

neither long nor a book. While *Cain's Book* is a roman à clef and detectably draws upon

Trocchi's own experiences, 'The Long Book' mixes characterisation with comment that

appears to stem directly from Trocchi himself; Trocchi affirms this narrative blurring by

writing that it is 'another atomic particle in the process of my behavior'.[124]

Trocchi uncharacteristically narrates 'The Long Book' in the third person as a

means to 'move beyond identity' with a narrator that is 'anyone' and 'everyone'.[125]

Intriguingly, this narrative ambition to transcend identity echoes number four of the

sigma portfolio entitled 'Potlach', which was written contemporaneously alongside

drafts of 'The Long Book'. Erratically alternating between using 'I' and 'he', while

integrating comment from the bizarrely named the 'Existential' (the protagonist of

'The Long Book'), Trocchi directly addresses the role of the writer in relation to

anonymity:

> I began writing the other day on sigma paper (I am now composing directly on
> the stencil). This decision pertained to some thoughts I had some time ago
> about anonymity. I quote: 'The ideal practical posture: concerning writing and
> the writer today: always to use the company stationary for manuscripts, to
> remind him that when he is writing seriously, he is being written 'through' by
> something that is independent of his will, is a funnel (however individual) for
> a wisdom which only becomes his as he articulates it, for something
> transcending himself, the 'company' (God).[126]

The passage reveals that Trocchi believes serious writing stems from outside willed

consciousness, whereby the writer functions as a channel rather than the source of

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[123] All excerpts in this chapter are from an unpublished notebook entitled 'The Long Book' archived at Washington University Saint Louis' Olin Library.

[124] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 3.

[125] Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, pp. 131-32.

[126] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 3.

inspiration. In this way, pure and absolute subjectivity appears to be problematised: in this method the writer transcends himself because he is writing through a higher cause, which enables the writer to move closer to anonymity and objectivity. Reminiscent of Romanticism (particularly Coleridge's concept of the 'divine spark'), the notion of heightened yet diminished individual subjectivity seems contradictory when considered alongside the ideology of the sigma portfolio, which repeatedly calls for men to awaken to their own subjectivity as a means to subvert inauthentic and objective political systems.

Despite Trocchi's desire to create a character that would represent every man, the 'Existential' is far from conventional:

> Now, the 'Existential' was hardly human you would have thought. For he was without legs and arms. He communicated with the world from a chocolate-box or coffin. Lying at a perpetual 'tilt'. An unplayed pin-ball machine. An unsung hero of the Portsmouth latrines.[127]

It is not coincidental that in his insular and addicted state Trocchi creates a character that cannot get outside of his own consciousness due to severe physical incapacity.[128] While in *Cain's Book* Necchi 'found it more and more difficult to get outside my own skull', this inward-oriented characterisation is taken further in 'The Long Book': by existing in a box that he cannot get out of, 'the Existential' is fundamentally divided from the outer world.[129] Indeed, he is literally unable get out of his own skull, and this unusual characterisation is reminiscent of Colin Wilson's 'Existential Monster' and Samuel Beckett's characters, who to Trocchi are 'so inactive, so vegetable, that they

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[127] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 10.

[128] In an extract from what Trocchi named 'Cain's Book, Vol. 2' in *Evergreen Review*, the protagonist – presumably Necchi again – narrates how 'the Existential' was in fact the 'pseudonym' of an un-named friend: 'each year he lived incognito under the pseudonym of 'the Existential' […] derived from the fact that half of one thigh was miraculously left to him when the explosion of a landmine removed the rest of his limbs and sight', (p. 49). The excerpt also states: 'Strapped there […] was the Existential', (p. 50). (*Evergreen Review*, 5.19, (1961), pp. 44-54).

[129] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 218.

are also in a queer and disquieting way in revolt'.[130] Analogous to Laing's patient

Peter's 'psychic tourniquet' which created a barrier between his physical body and

psychological self, and which catalysed his 'existential gangrene', the 'Existential's'

box (although tangible rather than purely psychological) functions in the same way by

absolutely separating Trocchi's protagonist 'inner' existential experience from the

'outer' world. The spatial separation of the box, and its heightened interiority, also

parallels that of the barge and scow in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*; I examine these

concepts further in Chapter Four. An epigraph in *Cain's Book* clearly anticipates this

later 'Long Book' characterisation:

> When I was four I fell from a swing and broke my arm. When it was set in plaster I asked for a big box with a lid on it, like the one the cat slept it. I put it in a corner near the fire in the kitchen and climbed into it and closed the lid. I lay there for hours in the dark, hearing sounds, of my mother's moving about, of others coming and going from the kitchen, and inside sensing the heat of my own presence. I was not driven from my box until after my arm was healed, and then at my father's insistence. It was a stupid game, he said. And the box was in the way. A boy needed fresh air.[131]

The box's coffin-like depiction further suggests a connection to the 'outer' realm as

being dead, or as Laing describes it in Peter's case, as 'unlived'. The character's

limbless state is also reminiscent of the physical condition of gangrene, which literally

leads to the deadening, and subsequent loss, of limbs through the process of the

disease. Although Trocchi's protagonist is physically limbless and in Peter's case

'existential gangrene' implies a psychological limb loss that he experienced as

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[130] Trocchi qtd. in James Campbell, *Paris Interzone: Richard Wright, Lolita, Boris Vian and others on the Left Bank 1946-60*, (London: Minerva, 1995; 1994), p. 65). Colin Wilson defined the 'Existential Monster' as 'a creature of nightmare who is no longer the *Homo Sapiens*' (p. 53) in reference to Herman Hesse's *Demian* (1919). In-keeping with this monstrous notion it is interesting to note that an early working title for *Cain's Book* was in fact 'The Making of the Monster', and indeed, Trocchi's language and existential ideas undoubtedly echo Wilson's vision:

> He reaches forth beyond prohibitions, beyond natural instinct, beyond morality. He is the man who has grasped the idea of freeing himself, on the other side, beyond the veil, beyond principium individuationis, of turning back again. The ideal man of the Karamazovs loves nothing and everything, does nothing and everything. He is primevil matter, monstrous soul-stuff. He cannot live in this form; he can only pass on.

(See *The Outsider*, (London: Phoenix, 2001; 1956), pp. 2-3).
[131] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 85.

physical during his existential crisis, the concept of severe separation from the 'outer' world is undoubtedly similar, and like Trocchi's protagonist, Peter also experiences his body as 'dead' in his existentially gangrenous state because he does not 'live through his body'.[132]

In terms of 'being in the world' the 'Existential' does not exist. Confined to the box and unable to move around, he is essentially dehumanised whilst also being ontologically 'dead' because he is unable to interact, and therefore exist, in the world with others. Accordingly, he passively exists as 'a speck of consciousness on the tide of unbeing', which emphasises his dehumanised and deadened status.[133] Yet despite being physically unable to exist in the world with others which increases his inward state of 'existential gangrene', it is oddly implied that this has not hindered his sense of self: '"Since I have been in here," said he, "I haven't continually had to stop in my tracks (occasionally) and ask myself where I am at. I know where I am. I am"'.[134] The implication of being limbless is that because the 'Existential' has no 'outer' experience, he has no choice but to get in touch with his 'inner self' and to find out who he is: although in 'outer' terms he exists 'on the tide of unbeing', he is however still inwardly engaged as pure Cartesian consciousness. Commenting upon this notion directly, 'The Long Book' proclaims that, "MEN ARE AFRAID TO KNOW WHO THEY ARE": as analogous to the ontological security Necchi (mostly) finds in the inner realm in *Cain's Book*, the 'Existential' similarly appears to associate his absolute inwardness and isolation with thoroughly knowing himself.[135] Laing suggests that in an extreme state of self-division such as 'existential gangrene', the

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[132] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 133.

[133] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 1.

[134] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 10.

[135] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 24.

sufferer 'cultivates the splits in his being'.[136] This conscious self-manipulation consequently positions the self on 'the fringes of being', which conceptually echoes the 'Existential''s claim to feeling as though he exists 'on the tide of unbeing'. Due to an aversion to 'social mechanics', Laing warns that this prompts a deep desire for self-isolation whereby the schizophrenic individual 'is greatly in danger of passing over into psychotic alienation'.[137] Trocchi repeatedly acknowledges an analogy between the addict and the schizophrenic's exiled social status in the aforementioned sigma article, in which he used the schizophrenic's social plight to fight for a change of public opinion towards addiction, and this analogy with exile can be extended further using Laing's 'divided self'.[138] Theorising the link between social exile and the schizophrenic, Laing writes: 'Immersion in inner space and time tends to be regarded as anti-social withdrawal, a deviancy, pathological per se, in some sense discredible', and in these terms, the 'Existential' is arguably 'pathological'.[139] In

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[136] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 140.

[137] Ibid., pp. 144, 140.

[138] In his non-fiction writing Trocchi appears to affirm Laing's model of schizophrenia as a means to elucidate (what he regarded as) the plight of the heroin addict in society. In a call for conscious social change in 'Second Impression' published in the sigma portfolio Trocchi again alludes to schizophrenia writing that only the 'personal' can combat 'spiritual ignorance breeding fear, hysteria, schizophrenia' (*Sigma Portfolio* 5 (1964), p. 2). It is highly plausible that Trocchi, referring to schizophrenia in his article in 1964, was responding to Laing's earlier study of schizophrenia *The Divided Self,* a notion that is strengthened by the fact that Trocchi directly cites Laing (although not *The Divided Self*) in the article. Furthermore, in another article entitled 'The Junkie: Menace or Scapegoat' in *Ink* magazine (1970) Trocchi again references schizophrenia:

> The imposition of the fixed addict-image on an individual placed him in a situation in which, by virtue of the new laws governing addiction and the conventional attitudes of which these laws were an expression, he was all but condemned to respond in a stock way. This process is well known to modern psychiatry. The fact, for example that schizoid tendencies can be intensified by hospitalization has lead to the idea of the 'anti-hospital'. (p. 213)

Trocchi highlights schizophrenia to argue against the traditional view of the addict as criminal, which responds to Laing's argument against the traditional view of the schizophrenic as clinical patient. Indeed, without directly naming him, Trocchi undoubtedly references Laing whose name became synonymous with the 'anti-psychiatry' movement (despite Laing's personal aversion to the label) and Kingsley Hall was also conceived as an 'anti-hospital'. Trocchi positions the addict as analogous to the schizophrenic in terms of treatment, but also in terms of social marginalisation, and negative institutional attitudes. In doing so, Trocchi suggests that like the schizophrenic, the addict implicitly exists outside the societal 'normal'.

[139] Ibid., p. 140. This notion corresponds to Trocchi's early story 'Tapeworm' in which the narrator states 'men call me mad' (Alexander Trocchi, 'Tapeworm', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p.31). In 'Pages of an Autobiography' Trocchi also writes, 'Perhaps I'm pathological' (Alexander Trocchi, 'Pages of an Autobiography' in

Laing's case study of the existentially gangrenous Peter, his self-division developed to the extreme extent that his imaginative life was much more 'real' to him than his own body.

In the 'Existential''s experience as a 'cosmonaut of inner space', the physical, inward motion of the hit itself also emphasises, and indeed elevates, the psychological realm of inwardness. Laing states that access to inner space can be 'through the eye of the needle' and it is apparent that, literally and symbolically, Trocchi's character affirms this in his absolutely inward isolation.[140] Reflecting back on his 'unembodied' experience, Peter explained the following to Laing: 'I've been sort of dead in a way. I cut myself off from other people and became shut up in myself. And I can see that you become dead in a way when you do this. You have to live in the world with other people'.[141] In tandem with this idea, the 'Existential' is like the Laingian schizophrenic: existing on the margins of society like Peter, the 'Existential''s 'existential gangrene' further dehumanises him. Due to his lack of contact with others in the world, he loses touch with his 'outer' or human identity completely, which renders him as 'dead in a way'. Yet inwardly – as pure Cartesian consciousness – it is revealing that he concomitantly feels very much alive.

Kafkaesque in his metamorphosis, the 'Existential' describes himself as "Limbless, more of a plant than an animal, I have developed a plant's cunning and a plant's patience but that doesn't prevent me from sprouting limbs in my dreams".[142] In this dehumanised self-vision, the 'Existential again appears to existentially mirror Necchi's desire in *Cain's Book* to 'be a vegetable', and thus, to be essentially

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Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 16).
[140] R. D. Laing, *Politics of Experience*, p. 104.
[141] R. D. Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 133.
[142] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 110.

objectified. Furthering this idea, it is also significant that Trocchi directly identifies a theoretical link between the narcotic experience of inwardness and Sartre's In-itself (*en-soi*) in 'The Long Book': 'Under hashish, when one learns its ways, one can explore new worlds. The way of hashish can be the way of empathy: one can attain the undivided state of the "en-soi"'.[143] Trocchi suggests that hashish, mirroring the heroin experience in *Cain's Book*, allows the user to achieve what Trocchi (explicitly echoing Sartre and perhaps alluding to Laing) calls 'the undivided state' of being an 'en-soi'. Trocchi's attempt to align himself ontologically with an *en-soi* is likely a ramification of his radical authorial direction, which in his own words attempted to move 'beyond identity', and which consequently saw his characters become increasingly objectified.

Echoing Necchi in *Cain's Book* (and indeed Trocchi himself), the 'Existential' appears to be caught between subjective and objective identity, where he is simultaneously an unconscious vegetable *en-soi* and pure Cartesian consciousness. In this way, the ontological contradictions inherent in his complex status render him as a simultaneous subject-object, or what Laing terms a 'divided self'. Although this contradictory characterisation is evident throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre* from *Young Adam* through to 'The Long Book', it is undoubtedly taken to a surreal extreme in the latter because – both physically and psychologically – the 'Existential' is curiously conceptually aligned with Laing's model of 'existential gangrene'.

Conclusion

Having traced the stages of 'existential gangrene' from onset, to development, and to crisis in these three key texts, it is clear that the protagonists' 'outer' existence lessens

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[143] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 6.

chronologically as their inwardness increasingly dominates. In *Young Adam*, although operating inauthentically in 'bad faith', Joe attempts to still establish himself as a 'being-in-the-world', and in *Cain's Book* Necchi has a minimal 'outer' presence and predominantly exists in a self-willed state of interiority. Yet in 'The Long Book', the 'Existential' has absolutely no 'outer' existence in the conventional sense, and while becoming increasingly inward and thus subjective through narcotics, it is clear that Necchi and 'the Existential' concomitantly become more self-objectified through their own will to achieve the status of a vegetable. It is also apparent that this trajectory develops in tandem with Trocchi's own heroin-fuelled sensibility. Furthering this concept, it is significant that Trocchi explicitly aligns drug-taking with escape: 'I have usually rid myself of any impulse to go out in the world, often availing myself of one drug or another, or of a few at the same time, heroin, hashish, cocaine, LSD; what ever is at hand and whatever I think I need'.[144] Trocchi's admission parallels his creation of an almost pathological character in 'The Long Book' who is so detached from everything that there is absolutely no 'outward' interaction: being utterly inward, the world is totally irrelevant to the 'Existential''s self-sufficient existence, as it is to Trocchi when he is intoxicated.

It is also revealing that a notebook entry of Trocchi's directly addresses the issue of identity: 'Sometimes I thought I was in search of an identity […] At other times […] an identity was precisely what I was concerned to evade'.[145] This conflicting statement highlights the complexity of individual identity: because Trocchi's art was absolutely fused with his own life, his dualistic mindset provides an insight into the many contradictions that haunt the issue of identity explored in this chapter, and which prevent any neat or simple conclusion being determined. James

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[144] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 108.
[145] Ibid., p. 108

Campbell describes Trocchi as 'a philosopher, one who invites you to consider the contradictions inherent in the statement that reads: "This statement is not true'''.[146] The concept of philosophical paradox is absolutely at the heart of Trocchi's complex representation of identity, which I believe is fundamentally hinged upon, and heightened by, existentially gangrenous self-division fuelled by his heroin addiction.

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[146] James Campbell, *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), p. 201.

Narrating Narcotics: Addiction, Resistance, Aesthetics

This chapter considers the relationship between Trocchi's narcotic addiction, his experimental *oeuvre*, and countercultural resistance. It begins by outlining how Trocchi links drug taking with countercultural activity, before connecting his *oeuvre* with the Situationist International in section one, and to the Beats in section two. Both the Beats and the SI set out to oppose the dominant social, literary, and cultural orders, and by considering Trocchi's form, style, and function alongside comparative analysis with William Burroughs' *oeuvre* – who can, and should, be considered as Trocchi's most immediate contemporary – I assess how heroin specifically impacts upon the writers' radical artistic practice and vision within the framework of resistance.[1] Trocchi's views on authorship will also be explored to consider how he responds to Burroughs' pioneering experimentalism, and I also argue that Trocchi and Burroughs politicised drugs – specifically addiction – as a means of social critique. Yet while Burroughs' drug writing responds to this concept by typically equating addiction with sickness, consumerism, and control, Trocchi deviates from this stance by overwhelmingly portraying the junkie as an existential hero, using his writing to promote, or more aptly to propagandise drugs, by repeatedly portraying them as inherently beneficial.

Drawing upon these connections between resistance, narcotics, and aesthetics, the final section uses close readings to examine how both writers represent and narrate the experience of addiction while analysing how their treatment diverges from the historical trajectory of drug writing with which Trocchi self-identifies – of Samuel

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[1] Sean O'Hagan, writing the *Observer*, claims that Trocchi 'was Scotland's answer to William Burroughs' (see 'Smack Aleck of the Beat Generation', *Observer Review*, 10 December 1995, p. 15), while Peter Haining indicates a hierarchical relationship in his comment that Trocchi 'considers himself in many ways to be a disciple of William Burroughs' (*The Hashish Club: An Anthology of Drug Literature. Volume 2. The Psychedelic Era: From Huxley to Lennon,* (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p. 109).

Taylor Coleridge, Charles Baudelaire, and Jean Cocteau. Indeed, as the following

excerpt demonstrates, by identifying a direct relationship between his use of drugs

and literary influence and by placing himself within a literary-specific historical

framework, Trocchi considers himself to be following a distinct literary lineage based

on narcotics and creativity:

> I have needed drugs to abolish within myself the impulse to get to my feet, leave the room to go into the world and act, do: go and assert my right over those of others (or alongside them), or over the external world, for it is not people that I hate: it is insanity. (That is why) I take drugs. To learn something of the outer reaches of my mind. At least that was my original idea. I wanted to escape the prison of my mind's language. (Last century was still possible to explore). I knew that Coleridge had written 'Kubla Khan' under the influence of opium, that I agreed the poem was one of the greatest in the language: that after Baudelaire (and possibly long before) drugs could no longer simply be dismissed as pernicious. His essay *Les Paradis Artificiels* is another masterpiece. I obtained Cocteau's book, another masterpiece.
> "Il est dommage qu'au lieu de perfectionner la desintoxication, la medicine, n'essaye pas de render l'opium inoffensive," he wrote in 1929, but few took him seriously. I did.[2]

Despite some similarities with the writers that Trocchi admires, it will be argued that

Trocchi's *oeuvre* – like that of Burroughs – does in fact fundamentally break with the

tradition that the writers specified established. Arguing that this divergence was

profoundly shaped by the writers' relationship with narcotics, I propose that their

treatment of drugs – as existential, aesthetic, and inherently political – signifies a

distinct break away from how narcotics traditionally feature in the drug literature

trajectory.[3] I end by evaluating the findings of the chapter to suggest that drugs were

in fact advantageous to Trocchi's countercultural creativity.

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[2] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', pp. 3-4. The following translation from the original French is in Antonio Melechi (ed), *Psychedelia Britannica*: *Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain*, (London: Turnaround, 1997): 'It is a pity that instead of perfecting the method of disintoxication, medicine doesn't try to render opium inoffensive', (p. 109).

[3] It is however revealing that by describing *Cain's Book* as 'a classic of addiction like De Quincey', Burroughs views Trocchi's writing within a distinct literary tradition centered upon drug taking, which corresponds with Trocchi's own view. See William Burroughs in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life in Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1997), p. 163.

Resistance and Addiction

Throughout his *oeuvre,* Trocchi continually aimed to highlight the existential importance of drugs as a means of resistance against hierarchical systems of authority:

> I am involved in a revolution whose implications go far beyond the legalisation of this or that drug. When we are successful in shifting some of the conventional sediment from vital places, such reforms as the rationalisation of the public attitude and the law towards drugs will be carried out from the top.[4]

For Trocchi, narcotics were a revolutionary means to challenge and bring down 'The Man', who ultimately aimed to restrict and control individual freedom. Trocchi's further claim that 'the identity of the junkie was consciously chosen' corresponds with this notion, and demonstrates that he actively cultivated the controversial status of the addict in order to fashion himself as the *homme revolte* who turned on, tuned in, and dropped out of conventional society.[5] This anti-societal stance of rebellion is inherently political for Trocchi because his fundamental belief was that addicts should not be marginalised for their addiction: instead the negative and hysteric social attitudes towards the 'junkie', and what he calls in *Cain's Book* 'barbarous laws', must be overturned so that the addict is granted rights and recognition. Indeed, by becoming a 'junkie', a pejorative term that Trocchi feels 'was imposed on me', his position of alienation through addiction enabled him to challenge governmental

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[4] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs', in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 117.

[5] Alexander Trocchi qtd. in James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 206. Specifically commenting upon Trocchi and Burroughs, Irvine Welsh acknowledges that their work follows a longer-established 'bohemian' tradition centred upon narcotics:

> The junkie in Trocchi and Burroughs was by and large a culturally middle-class figure – a member of the intelligentsia, a rebel who saw society as not having done anything for them, so they're into this drug that's their own, a symbol of their own rebellion. There's always been that sort of bohemian drug type sub-culture.

(Irvine Welsh qtd. in Aaron Kelly, *Irvine Welsh*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 37).

policy surrounding narcotics in his mission to defy, and consequently change, social attitudes that restrict the individual's behaviour and choice.[6]

While Trocchi draws attention to the grim plight of the addict in *Cain's Book* by highlighting that their existence is typically defined by 'prison, madhouse, morgue', it was the sigma portfolio that particularly enabled him to expound, and promote, his alternative vision.[7] Many of sigma's associates including William Burroughs and R. D. Laing were drug users themselves, and the most important drug-related piece that the sigma portfolio published was Trocchi's 'Problems and Pseudoproblems concerning Dangerous Drugs', a lengthy article written in July 1966 in response to Lord Brain's government-commissioned report of the same year. In opposition to the enquiry which centered upon the dangers inherent in drug taking, Trocchi presents himself in the article as 'I, the articulate "addict"' and explains the background to his response: 'the point of view expressed in the following pages, while it is based on full fourteen years of experiences […] will undoubtedly, because of the subject, provoke a veritable torrent of protest'.[8] Trocchi presents one of the most fundamental elements of his views on drugs: that as a drug user, he is in constant conflict with what he regards as the unrelenting intolerance of the addict by both the government and the societal status quo. Trocchi writes that due to these derogatory attitudes he is 'condemned' to wear 'the mark of Cain' because 'in fighting for the

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[6] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 110. Leonard Cohen's poem 'Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Prié Pour Nous' highlights how Trocchi's ultimate agenda was to change society's negative attitudes, and overturn laws pertaining to drug addiction:

> Under hard lights
> with doctors' instruments
> you are at work
> In the bathrooms of the City
> changing The Law

(Leonard Cohen in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel, *A Life*, p. 137, ll. 18-22).
[7] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 13.
[8] Alexander Trocchi, 'Problems and Pseudoproblems concerning "Dangerous Drugs": Notes concerning the recommendations of the committee under the chairmanship of Lord Brain', *Sigma Portfolio*, 40 (1966), p. 1.

adult and responsible exploration of various chemical ways of bringing about changes in states of consciousness, I have been insulted, molested, imprisoned, and branded dope-fiendish obscenity-writer'.[9]

Highlighting his struggle to overturn public attitudes and laws surrounding narcotics, Trocchi continuously attempted to use his influence as a countercultural figurehead to draw attention to what he believed to be the plight of the addict, who he likened to the marginalised schizophrenic or psychopath in their struggle for social acceptance.[10] Concluding his diatribe against Lord Brain, Trocchi writes, 'We must let the light into what has traditionally been a dark area of human experience'.[11] By representing drug taking as an essential, enlightening, and existential endeavor, Trocchi again emphasises the 'human experience', which he positions at the heart of drug taking. In the article, Trocchi radically proposes that drugs are vital to uncovering – and aiding – existential insight into humanity, and he suggests that drugs are ultimately capable of advancing humankind.

In his mission to oppose society's negative perception of the addict and addiction, James Campbell has noted that Trocchi 'made heroin sound positively

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[9] Ibid, p.1. In the sigma portfolio Trocchi echoes this rhetoric by calling Coleridge a 'dope-fiend' when rallying against the lack of press coverage of 1964 Edinburgh Festival's "unofficial poetry conference" in an article dated 'Edinburgh, September 2, 1964: 'For the Edinburgh press, poetry is poetry and should be kept under wraps. And let's keep it clean like the poets always did, Chaucer and Villon and Shakespeare and Baudelaire. And no dope-fiends like Coleridge, please' (Alexander Trocchi, 'Supplement to Moving Times', *Sigma Portfolio* 7 (1964), un.pag).

[10] Commenting on the court trail of *Naked Lunch* in Boston on January 12th 1965, Frederick Whiting highlights how 1960s society assumed an implicit connection between drug addiction, deviance, and psychopathy:

> […] ultimately, deviant sexuality and drug addiction were explicable in identical terms: they indicated individual pathology rather than admitting of social or systematic causes. Thus, the deviance exhibited by addicts, as a species in the genus psychopath, was a matter of identity rather than practice.

(Frederick Whiting, 'Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52.2 (2006), pp. 145-174, p. 152).

[11] Alexander Trocchi, 'Problems and Pseudoproblems concerning "Dangerous Drugs": Notes concerning the recommendations of the committee under the chairmanship of Lord Brain', Sigma Portfolio 40 (1966), p. 10.

beneficial'.[12] A BBC Scotland interview in 1962 reflects this particular portrayal;

Trocchi argues that drug taking has an existential as well and humanitarian

foundation:

> I wanted to, of course, escape […] we all must escape. We all do escape. My mother-in-law imbibes much more poison in two hours, in a morning, at church, in a […] little church in Connecticut and comes back entranced and ready for a week's evil after two hours in […] Well, I take a much more quick drug. It doesn't take me two hours![13]

Trocchi justifies heroin as a method of 'escape', which he controversially suggests is

comparable to his mother-in-law attending church. He then goes on to describe

himself as 'one of the […] discoverers in the realm of human emotions' and states

that he has 'a bounden duty to go out and experiment with strange and unknown states

of mind'.[14] In the same interview, he describes himself as 'very sensitive to … things

that are going on in the world, that sometimes I am inundated with anxieties and

worries – from the atom bomb to what is going on outside in the street';[15] he then

describes how heroin transports him 'into a world where I am immune from all these

worries which besiege me'.[16] In *Cain's Book*, Necchi confirms this notion of inner

protection from the outer world in his belief that heroin catalyses what he terms 'my

transcendent immunity' from the intolerance of society.[17] Indeed, it was the

transcendental pleasure of otherworldly escape and exploration that saw Trocchi in

'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds' propose plans for sigma associates to build

a 'spontaneous university' for 'astronauts of inner space', which would strategically

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[12] James Campbell, *Syncopations*, p. 200.
[13] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel, *A Life*, p. 145. By equating heroin – his 'poison' – with church-going, Trocchi's religious rhetoric is reminiscent of Rimbaud's speaker in 'Drunken Morning', who claims 'we have faith in poison' (*Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, Trans. By Paul Schmidt, London: Harper Perennial, 2008, pp. 254-256 (p. 255), ll. 29).
[14] Ibid., p. 145.
[15] Ibid., p. 146.
[16] Ibid., p. 147.
[17] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 101. In *The Garden Of Eros: The Story of the Paris Expatriates and the Post-War Literary Scene,* (Richmond: Alma, 2014), John Calder makes an insightful claim about Trocchi's sense of his 'transcendent immunity': Trocchi 'believed he was so strong in his natural health and will power that he was above addiction: nothing could harm him' (p. 76).

enable Trocchi to gather support for his campaign from the students – the 'astronauts' in attendance – and together they would travel through inner space to an enlightened state of drug-fuelled intoxication.

Considering the role of drugs in Trocchi's fictional *oeuvre,* Sue Wiseman fittingly suggests that in *Cain's Book* specifically 'an ambivalent stylistic and political commitment to the power of heroin combine to place his [Necchi's] 'book' at the interstices of experiment in addiction, prose and politics'.[18] Wiseman also describes *Cain's Book* as 'literary-psychic-political polemic' in style, which highlights the concept of *Cain's Book* being a fusion of literary aesthetics and politics.[19] Wiseman's article does not go far enough however, because, as I will now argue in this chapter, Trocchi used heroin as the basis for his *entire* experimentalism, which fuses politics with aesthetics, and where addiction is the continuous binding thread. This concept of politics and literature coming together is evident in the cyclical narrative of *Cain's Book*, which although an aesthetic device, is conceptually rooted in Trocchi's earlier involvement with the Situationist International in Paris in the 1950-60s. As I discussed in Chapter One, the SI attempted to disrupt normal – or capitalist – time with the subjective time of the 'situation', a radical practice that Trocchi actively sought to emulate in sigma. McKenzie Wark has claimed that the SI believed that 'timeless love, like God, like Art, is dead', and as a reaction against the traditional art, the narrative anarchy of *Cain's Book* can also be seen to echo the ideology of the situation, which sought to break with the past and establish a new and radical practice that brought together the traditionally separate spheres of art and life.[20] SI member Raoul Vanegeim echoes Guy Debord in the following critique of capitalist culture: 'Man is not now the centre of time, he is merely a point in it. Time is composed of a

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[18] Sue Wiseman, 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde', p. 257.
[19] Ibid., p. 257.
[20] McKenzie Wark, The *Beach Beneath the Street*, (London: Verso, 2011), p. 81.

succession of points, each taken interdependently of the others like an absolute, but an absolute endlessly repeated and rehashed'.[21] In opposition to what Vaneigem termed 'Commodity-time. Survival time', the SI's situation consequently advocated 'crystalline' time, enabling individuals to engage in 'direct experience without dead time'.[22] In such subjective space-time – what Vaneigem termed the 'privileged moment'– a more authentic lifestyle of play and creativity could consequently flourish, and Trocchi integrated this vision in his plans for sigma's aforementioned spontaneous university.[23] The attempt to create what Vaneigem terms 'crystalline experience' – a heightened yet transitory situation to disrupt dead capitalist time – is also reminiscent of the Romantic sublime, which was similarly an ephemeral moment of subjective emotional intensity and which was also regarded as ultimate, authentic, and free. Indeed, the 'space time' of the SI and sigma is reminiscent of Romanticism, in which 'time is out of joint. It favours the wave, the vibration, the curlicue. It mixes forms, detaches symbols from myths, and puts them into play against all that is legitimate': Romantic time is sublime and cyclical, as Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' conveys, and which, like the situation, is dynamically constructed upon contrasts and conflicts.[24] I return to Coleridge and 'Kubla Khan' in the final section of this chapter.

In *Cain's Book,* Trocchi synthesises time with Necchi's addiction to ultimately reject productivity and capitalism: although Necchi's addiction situates him in a cyclical existence that is structured by acquiring and consuming heroin, his particular rendering of time aims to overturn and undermine the notion of work. Necchi's cultivation of cyclical time is to ensure he lives through 'play' time rather than productive work time, a notion which is in again tandem with the SI and sigma's 'situation' and which is also

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[21] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life,* Trans. Donald Smith (London: Rebel, 2006), p. 92.
[22] Ibid., pp. 226, 227.
[23] Ibid., p. 227.
[24] McKenzie Wark, *Beach Beneath*, p. 106.

reminiscent of Romanticism. Indeed, Trocchi directly aligns the 'situation' with Necchi's

heroin addiction: 'The fix: a purposive spoon in the broth of experience. (*Il vous fait*

construire les situations.) *(you build the situations)*',[25] and Necchi gives further insight

into the connection between drugs, heightened creativity, and the importance of what he

terms 'play postures':

> it is perhaps the principal effect of marijuana to take one more intensely into whatever experience. I should recommend its use in schools to make the pleasures of poetry, art, and music available to pupils who, to the terrible detriment of our civilisation, are congenitally or by infection insensitive to symbolic expression. It provokes a more sensual (or aesthetic) kind of concentration, a detailed articulation of minute areas, an ability to adopt play postures.[26]

Even when he is working on the river scow, Necchi's time is primarily narcotic-time

which, as 'play time', is analogous to what Vaneigem terms 'the privileged moment'. In

this sense, then, the cyclical underpinning to both Necchi's characterisation and the

structure of the text can be considered as constructs that enable Trocchi to reject capitalist

and traditional time, and instead promote his sublime aesthetic of near-constant play in an

attempt to attain individual freedom.

Burroughs' starkly represents what he terms 'junk time' in *Naked Lunch* – 'The

addict runs on junk time. His body is his clock, and junk runs through it like an hour-

glass. Time has meaning for him only with reference to his need'.[27] This juxtaposes

Trocchi's implicit suggestion that narcotics lead to subjective and transcendent time;

indeed, for Burroughs, 'junk time' is founded on basic physiological need rather than

suggesting any sense of elevation through play, and there is a notable absence of

subjective agency in Burroughs' depiction which contrasts with Trocchi's elevated

central concept of cerebral inner space exploration. I return to these further consider these

portrayals later in this chapter. Addiction also shapes Trocchi's texts on a formal level

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[25] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 236.
[26] Ibid., p. 123.
[27] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 170.

whereby the structure mirrors addiction's cyclical structure. Echoing how each day in the life of the addict is dominated by the acquisition and consumption of heroin, the texts' structures are also manipulated and mirrored by the addictions of the narrative personae.[28] In further rejection of traditional linear narrative and in a style that is reminiscent of post-modernism, Trocchi takes the reader on an intensely intimate and wayward journey through time, place and space, spanning Necchi's childhood in Glasgow, through World War II, Paris, and New York, whilst simultaneously plunging the reader into the depths of his deeply subjective and drugged consciousness.[29] Indeed, the non-linear structure of the narrative mirrors drug consciousness, of drifting in and out of various states of mind without any apparent order or reason, as Necchi explains:

> Reading what I have written, now, then, I have a familiar feeling that everything I say is somehow beside the point. I am of course incapable of sustaining a simple narrative… with no fixed categories… not so much a line of thought as an area of experience… the immediate broth.[30]

The ellipses demonstrate the disjointedness of Necchi's thoughts, which is also highlighted by Necchi's ruminations on why he negates the conventional linear narrative: he prefers the fluid and unpredictable flux of the moment which best conveys the immediacy of experience.

Necchi also tellingly describes *Cain's Book* as 'my little voyage in the art of digression' and this notion of 'the art of digression' is particularly significant: by acknowledging the art, i.e. the aesthetical element of Necchi's narrative, Trocchi implies that this non-linear technique is not merely arbitrary but consciously chosen.[31] Trocchi's word choice of 'voyage' is also revealing in this context, because it

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[28] See Sue Wiseman's 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde' for more on how heroin shapes the narrative.

[29] Stewart Home claims that Trocchi is important as 'a proto post-modernist' ('Introduction', in *Young Adam*, (London: One World, 2008), p. 8).

[30] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 230-231. The ambiguity of Necchi's narrative in this paragraph is again reminiscent of post-structuralism's intent to destablise the concept of a singular narrative, or a text having a singular, or ultimate, meaning.

[31] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 232. The notion of cultivated ambiguity in Trocchi's narrative is again reminiscent of post-structuralism's attempt to subvert traditional literary convention by challenging the concept of a singular, and ultimate, meaning.

connects such divergence from the narrative norm with associations of discovery, exploration, and pioneering travel. Trocchi's digressive narrative in *Cain's Book* conveys his position as a cosmonaut of narrative space, and Ihab Hassan's acknowledges this notion of outer-space exploration in tandem with Burroughs:

> [Burroughs is] ready to travel on right out of this world […] An urban writer like Burroughs has inhaled the flowers of evil which have grown on the pavements since the time of Baudelaire. He has tasted or inhaled little else. Like man, nature is corrupt. Nature is out. Society is out.[32]

Hassan acknowledges the important influence that writers such as Baudelaire had on Burroughs' metropolitan aesthetic, but he also demonstrates that Burroughs has broken with the past – and indeed the present – by being 'ready to travel right out of this world'. The same could certainly be said of Trocchi who, while conveying an urban-centric aesthetic in *Cain's Book*, fundamentally seeks to achieve an alternative to the conservative and restrictive conventionality of society in his life and literature. To Trocchi, drugs are not merely literary but existential and political: in a society shaped by conformity and governmental control which ultimately threaten his individual freedom, Trocchi's consciously chosen identity as an 'junkie' propels him to continually highlight what he regards as the inherently positive nature of narcotics, which he utilises in his on-going campaign to overturn the widespread negativity surrounding drug addiction.

Aesthetics and Addiction

Before I go on to further consider how Trocchi's and Burroughs' *oeuvres* overlap, it is useful to contextualise this analysis by briefly biographically outlining the men's friendship. Trocchi first met Burroughs travelling by aeroplane from London to

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[32] Ihab Hassan, 'The Subtracting Machine', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 53-67, p. 66.

Edinburgh in 1962; both were official delegates of the Edinburgh Writers'

Conference. As Andrew Murray Scott acknowledges, the two men 'got on well

together',[33] and in an interview, Burroughs stated that he had felt that they 'had a lot

in common immediately'.[34] Burroughs had read *Cain's Book* and he felt that Trocchi

'was a sort of an ally at the conference'.[35] The men also shared some striking

biographical parallels. Both were heroin addicts, they had lived in Paris (although at

different times) where they were published by Maurice Girodias' infamous Olympia

Press, they had lived in New York where they had mutual Beat Generation

acquaintances, and they had both been published in underground American titles

including *Semina* and the *Evergreen Review*. In a sigma-related letter dated 30

September 1964, it is revealing that Trocchi writes 'Believe me Bill, the wheel is

rolling and if only I could get together even for twenty-four hours with you to explain

the vast potential which really is at hand, I am sure it would be the kind of shot in the

arm that our common poison never provided'.[36] Trocchi clearly regarded Burroughs

as a confidante, and in the context of sigma, as a fellow member of his cultural

revolution-seeking alternative community. The sigma portfolio also enabled Trocchi

to publicly align himself with Burroughs as the following editorial note demonstrates:

> I and a whole lot of other "i's" and some I know now where are an anonymous
> and as yet unstructured pool of power… some of us have played with the
> concept: pool cosmonaut. And the actual existence of this all-pervasive ghost-
> mob… Burroughs' invisible generation, my own invisible insurrection… is in
> theory and practice the basis of all that follows, and solid ground of our
> tentative optimism.[37]

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[33] Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 106.
[34] Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life*, p. 159.
[35] Ibid., p. 159.
[36] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 15 Fol. 220, p. 10.
[37] Alexander Trocchi, 'Editorial Note', *Sigma Portfolio* 37 (1966), p. 1. The reference to Burroughs' 'invisible generation' relates to a 1962 experimental essay of the same name, in which Burroughs encourages readers to create new ways of engaging with, and communicating with, the traditional media believing that this will 'bring you a liberation from old association locks' whereby 'the invisible brothers are invading present time'. See William Burroughs, 'The Invisible Generation', *The Ticket That Exploded,* (New York: Grove, 1967), pp. 36-8, p. 36. It is worth noting that Trocchi kept a copy

Trocchi clearly responds to both the style *and* content of Burroughs' subsequent article entitled 'Pool Cosmonaut':

> MY OWN BUSINESS… M.O.B… MOB… assumes the right of every
> individual to possess his inner space, to do what interests him with
> people he wants to see. In some areas this right was more respected
> a hundred years ago than it is in the permissive society.[38]

Burroughs' publication in the sigma portfolio shows the ideological alliance over inner space exploration in art and life that he shared with Trocchi, as well as highlighting their mutual ambition to challenge top-down authority by 'invisible' rebellion. I return to these concepts in more detail later in this chapter.

Contemporaneous to sigma's publication of 'Pool Cosmonaut', Trocchi and Burroughs' friendship burgeoned in London. Burroughs featured Trocchi in his experimental cut-up film *Towers Open Fire* (1963), and Trocchi, as editor of the anthology *Writers in Revolt* (1963) with Richard Seaver and Terry Southern, included excerpts of *Naked Lunch* along with an accompanying critical article by E.S. Seldon. Moreover, *Cain's Film* (1969) by Jamie Wadhawan comprises footage of an Arts Lab evening with Burroughs, Trocchi, and the musician Davy Graham, and in 1972 Burroughs wrote a highly personal introduction to Trocchi's volume of poetry, *Man at Leisure*. Entitled 'Alex Trocchi Cosmonaut of Inner Space' Trocchi is praised for having the 'courage so essential to a writer', and Burroughs also fondly remarks that, 'the poems in this book are buoyant with the vitality and the hope which is so much part of Alex's personality. One always feels better after seeing Alex and that is indeed a precious gift'.[39] It is clear that the men had a great deal of respect and affection for each other and perhaps this sentiment is encapsulated in Burroughs' reflection on

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of this article in his personal papers, which I came across at the Trocchi Papers in Washington University in Saint Louis' Olin Library.

[38] William Burroughs, 'Pool Cosmonaut', Sigma Portfolio 37 (1966), p. 1.

[39] William Burroughs, 'Introduction, *Man At Leisure*, p. viii.

Trocchi after his death: 'he was an individual… that's it. They just don't make 'em like that anymore.'[40] Burroughs and Trocchi were also direct contenders for being named 'the world's most famous junkie' by Barry Farrell in *Life* magazine in 1967; Farrell wrote that it was Trocchi's 'misfortune' to be 'the world's second most famous junkie' because 'the first is William Burroughs'.[41]

Stewart Home suggests that Burroughs was to Trocchi 'a fellow beat generation stalwart', and initially meeting Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg in New York in the 1950s when the Beat Generation began, Burroughs is certainly widely regarded as one of the movement's key writers.[42] Like the SI in Paris, across the Atlantic, the Beats saw subjectivity as a means to reject impersonal ideologies such as capitalism: instead of mass conformist values they ultimately sought autonomy and individual freedom, which they expressed in both lifestyle and literature. Christopher Gair explains how tension between the individual and social systems was key to the development of alternative attitudes in 1950s America:

> […] it is notable that the Beats and associated countercultural movements of the 1950s seemed (with a few notable exceptions) largely uninterested in major political campaigns. Instead they tended to appeal to what they identified as genuine American values, such as individual freedom or choice, as alternatives to a corporate capitalism that they perceived to be corrupting American ideals'.[43]

In tandem with the existential concept of authenticity in life and literature that I established in chapters one and two, Burroughs reveals that the title of his infamous novel *Naked Lunch* means 'a frozen moment when everyone sees what it is on the end of every fork'.[44] Ginsberg's poem 'On Burroughs' Work' similarly encourages the reader to embrace the pure chaos of reality:

[40] William Burroughs in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel, *A Life*, p. 164.
[41] Barry Farrell, 'The Other Culture', *Life*, February 17 (1967), pp. 87-102, p. 97.
[42] Stewart Home, 'Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam* (London: Calder, 2008), p. 7.
[43] Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2007), p. 26.
[44] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 7.

> A naked lunch is natural to us,
> we eat reality sandwiches.
> But allegories are so much lettuce.
> Don't hide the madness.[45]

Marshall McLuhan also parallels this notion by claiming that the title of *Naked Lunch* is meant to suggest that 'the drugged state gives access to a special vision of the truth – that the junkie, like Conrad's Kurtz, is an inverted hero of the spirit who truly sees 'the horror, the horror' that ordinary, conforming humanity refuses to face'.[46] This notion of heightened insight through drugs is particularly important, and Burroughs' protagonist concludes *Junky* with the following statement, 'kick is seeing this from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the chains of aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh'.[47] Trocchi employs similar rhetoric in *Cain's Book* where drugs are equated with freedom from the conventional, and restrictive, societal norm: 'to get at its structure one must temporarily get outside it. Drugs provide an alternative attitude'.[48] Trocchi again acknowledges this notion in the statement that heroin 'simply removes the normal metaphysical props, and allows us to see, as it were, raw'.[49]

Commenting on the long-established connection between narcotics and literature, Marcus Boon suggests that for writers such as Baudelaire in the nineteenth century 'opium provided a new mythology on which to base aesthetic practice'.[50] Building on this concept, I believe that Trocchi and Burroughs absolutely infused their aestheticism with heroin, arguably the twentieth-century equivalent of opium.

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[45] Allen Ginsberg, 'On Burroughs' Work', in *The Portable Beat Reader*, ed. by Anne Charters (London: Penguin, 2002), p.101, ll. 9-12.
[46] Marshall McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 69-73, p. 77.
[47] William Burroughs, *Junky*, p. 152.
[48] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 236.
[49] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 8.
[50] Ibid., p. 45.

The association between authenticity and aestheticism was linked to imaginative exploration through narcotic consumption, which Burroughs and Trocchi believed impacted upon their creative consciousness.[51] The visionary notion of truth – where one is able to see life as it really is – corresponds to the Beats' homage to Rimbaud, who believed that the poet is 'a seer' through what he termed the 'systematic disordering of the senses', a phrase that Trocchi directly jotted down in a personal notebook.[52] Furthermore, this notion of the poet as visionary was also in homage to William Blake, to whom many of the Beats, and in particular Ginsberg, were indebted.[53] It is also significant that in a poem entitled 'A Beginning' from Trocchi's only published poetry collection, *Man at Leisure*, he uses imagery to suggest reciprocity between nakedness and beginnings: although the poem opens with the explicit suggestion that 'naked is a beginning' it is the second stanza that, when considered figuratively, indicates the importance of nakedness to Trocchi's authorial vision:

> Naked is
> > bright, bright
> > flesh
> fresh as flowers
> > flesh
> as powers, towers
> all mind of
> our sure kind [54]

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[51] It is however worth noting that in *Young Adam*, Trocchi puts ideas surrounding authorial authenticity and narrative believability into interplay, and doing so he acknowledges the notion of what Joe terms 'the naked truth' (p. 141). This indicates that narrative truth for Trocchi did not stem solely from his narcotic experimentation: *Young Adam* was written before Trocchi became fully addicted to heroin, and narcotics are entirely absent from the text.

[52] In a letter to Paul Demeny dated 15 May 1871, Rimbaud outlined his radical vision of artistry: 'A poet makes himself a visionary by a long, boundless, and systematizes disorganization of all the senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons, and preserves all their quintessences' (*Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, Trans. by Paul Schmidt, (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 116).

[53] For more on the relationship between the Beats, Rimbaud and Blake, see Christopher Gair's *The Beat Generation* (Oxford: One World, 2008).

[54] Alexander Trocchi, 'A Beginning', in *Man At Leisure* (London: Oneworld, 2009), p. 24, ll. 10-17.

Naked is 'bright', 'fresh', it is linked to 'powers', and it is also cerebral: in this sense, Trocchi proposes that such nakedness is illuminating, enlightening, and potentially influential, a sensibility which is reminiscent of sigma, particularly the concept of a covert revolution based on the principles of truth and authenticity in what Trocchi terms 'the invisible insurrection of a million minds' against state-led mass conformity and control.

Marcus Boon also suggests that 'the Beats appropriate the junkie or addict into their outsider mythology' and there is little doubt that Trocchi's and Burroughs' aestheticism is indeed implicitly connected to heroin.[55] On a quest for authenticity, to Necchi, 'authentic' writing stems directly from the subjective self by being 'ostensibly self conscious', much like Trocchi's intense self-reflexivity when writing *Cain's Book*.[56] *Naked Lunch* also self-reflexively considers and critiques the role of the writer: Lee states, 'I am a recording instrument… I do not presume to impose "story" "plot" "continuity"'[57], just as in *Cain's Book*, Necchi's authorial admissions are sometimes painfully self-aware: 'I must go on from day to day accumulating blindly following this or that train of thought, each in itself possessed of no more implication than a flower or a spring breeze or a molehill or a falling star or the cackle of geese'.[58] Both writers' characters describe themselves as being, respectively, a 'recording instrument' and 'accumulating blindly', which suggest that there is a crucial link between life and literature in the writers' role. However, they also suggest that both characters question their agency *as writers* because it is implies that the characters receive information, or inspiration, externally, which they then

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[55] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess*, p. 75.
[56] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 59.
[57] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 174.
[58] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 147.

'accumulate' and 'record'.[59] Trocchi and Burroughs appear to problematise the notion

of subjective creativity in a way that is reminiscent of 'Kubla Khan', which Coleridge

claims was less actively written and more passively dreamt with him receiving the

poem through a laudanum-induced vision rather than consciously writing it.[60] Marcus

Boon has linked this practice directly to narcotics: 'Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' gave

first expression to one of the fundamental tropes of drug use, that the words or

thoughts are being dictated to the writer by some unknown agency, without conscious

effort on his or her part'.[61] Boon's claim responds to the (highly Romantic) notion

that Coleridge, Burroughs, and Trocchi's methodology is essentially the result of

narcotic consumption. Moreover, it is also important to Burroughs and Trocchi that

literature stems directly from life: Trocchi demanded that 'art must inform the

living'.[62] Echoing Trocchi, Necchi also admits that, 'I look pruriently over my

shoulder as I write and I'm all the time aware it's reality and not literature I'm

engaged in'.[63] Trocchi emphasises this again in Necchi's resolute belief that a writer

must 'refuse to consider what he wrote in terms of literature' and instead 'judge it

solely in terms of his living; the spirit alone mattered'[64]. As Sue Wiseman claims, this

aesthetic emphasis on reality is linked to heroin because 'heroin carries the weight of

the book's desire to disrupt mere novelistic aesthetics in tandem with producing a new

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[59] For more on this notion in relation to Burroughs specifically, see *Shift Linguals: Cut-up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present* by Edward S. Robinson (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2011). Robinson claims that *Naked Lunch* was the first attempt by Burroughs to produce a text 'with a reduced degree of authorial input, contributing to what Roland Barthes terms 'the death of the author'' (p. 38).

[60] See the original preface of 'Kubla Khan' for Coleridge's description of this process; the preface can be viewed online via The University of Glasgow's Special Collections <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/teach/romanticism/kublapref1.html> [accessed May 14 2014]

[61] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess*, p. 35. Although the notion of writing 'unconsciously' is reminiscent of Romanticism, it also invites parallels with one of Trocchi's twentieth-century predecessors, Henry Miller. In *Sexus* (1949), the first of *The Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy, Miller's protagonist muses, 'To write, I meditated, must be an act devoid of will. The word, like the deep ocean current, has to float to the surface of its own impulse' (*Sexus* (London: Grafton, 1970; 1949), p. 19).

[62] Alexander Trocchi, *Tactical*, p. 199.

[63] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 232.

[64] Ibid., p.131.

psycho-political consciousness'.[65] This acute emphasis on life as it is consciously experienced and its artistic representation is also furthered by the fact that both Burroughs' and Trocchi's writing is often detectably autobiographical, a practice which again echoes the practice of the Beat Generation, whose writers also often wrote under thinly veiled pseudonyms and who frequently drew upon real life experience in their attempt to make writing as authentic as possible. Indeed, in the semi-autobiographical *Cain's Book*, Trocchi's real life experiences are somewhat seamlessly melded together with Necchi's fictional narrative.

Furthering the issue of literary authenticity, it is significant that Trocchi aligned drug taking directly with the problem of language. Through drugs he wanted 'To learn something of the outer reaches of my mind. At least that was the original idea. I wanted to escape the prison of my mind's language'.[66] In his quest for truth in *Cain's Book*, Trocchi directly juxtaposes the visceral authenticity of the heroin experience with what Necchi believes to be the inaccuracy of language; he feels that 'the inauthenticity was in the words, clinging to them like barnacles to a ship's hull, a growing impediment',[67] and later he also senses that 'The words, even their meanings, were in a sense superfluous. I remember wondering at that, how the fact of laughing together nullified the inauthenticity'.[68] Trocchi suggests that Necchi views language as inadequate in his quest for truth and in his belief that literature must be rooted in life rather than in abstract art. Despite the correlation made in *Cain's Book* between Necchi's heroin addiction and the concept of visionary truth, the text was however not the first instance that Trocchi had

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[65] Sue Wiseman, 'Addiction in the Avant Garde', p. 260. Despite the obvious correlation between addiction and aesthetics in *Cain's Book*, it is however significant that the character of Joe in the earlier *Young Adam* (1954), is also a struggling writer who is 'not interested in all the usual paraphernalia' because 'That's literature, false. I've got to start with the here and now', p. 129.

[66] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 11 Fol. 176, 'The Long Book', p. 3.

[67] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 24.

[68] Ibid., p. 153.

questioned the authenticity of language. *Young Adam* (1954) opens with the protagonist

Joe, who similarly distrusts language when it is used to represent reality:

> I don't ask whether I am the "I" who looked for the image which was seen, the man who acted or the man who thought about the act. For I know now that it is the structure of language itself which is treacherous. The problem comes into being as soon as I begin to use the word "I". There is no contradiction in things, only in the words we invent to refer to things. It is the word "I" which is arbitrary and which contains within it its own inadequacy and its own contradiction.[69]

Joe draws the reader's attention to the gap that exists between reality (what he

specifies as 'things' and the self as the existential "I") and literature. Using the word

"I" to show that language is unreliable or – as he terms it "contradictory" – in a way

that is reminiscent of Ferdinand de Saussure's claim that 'the linguistic sign is always

arbitrary'.[70] Moreover, Joe in *Young Adam*, like Necchi in *Cain's Book*, believes that

language distorts truth by distancing the 'thing', and that this method is therefore

dangerous. Indeed, Trocchi subtly yet effectively demonstrates this in the narrative by

creating confusion over Joe's name: he is known as Joe Taylor to others including

Cathie, but this is not his actual name, and the reader does not find out what his name

is. Consequently, in both texts, Trocchi problematises the very function of language

by highlighting its fundamental ambiguity, and critiques its implicit inadequacy to

convey the direct and absolute truth: it is significant that when Trocchi's initial

narcotic experimentation developed into addiction, heroin intoxication becomes the

absolute bedrock of what Trocchi regards as authentic existential experience.

Burroughs also acknowledges the problematic nature of language, and like

Trocchi in the early *Merlin* editorials that I considered in Chapter One, he chose to

actively highlight how power relations are at the very heart of language. Jeff Nuttall

explicitly acknowledges this connection between language, power, and state control:

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[69] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, pp. 19-20.
[70] Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Course in General Linguistics', in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (London: Norton, 2001; 1916), p. 964.

'The first step was the dislocation of the word, the main line of power control. A writer, Burroughs was well situated to sabotage language'.[71] Indeed, Burroughs acknowledges that the 'cut-up' method sought to specifically subvert this hierarchical, and thus inauthentic, convention: 'No one can conceal what is saying cut-up… You can cut The Truth out of any written or spoken words'.[72] At the 1962 Edinburgh Writers' Conference, Burroughs outlined his 'fold-in' method, describing it as a means to manipulate time whereby like 'the flash back used in films for many years' the fold-in enables 'the writer to move backwards and forwards on his time tract'.[73] Presenting the 'fold-in' as representative of the 'space age', and having aligned himself publicly with Trocchi's claim to being a 'cosmonaut of inner space', Burroughs saw that such experimentation with narrative time echoed the notion that 'to travel in space is to travel in time' where the writer is 'a mapmaker, an explorer of psychic areas'.[74] Writing in 1984 in an article entitled 'My Purpose is to Write for the Space Age', Burroughs reveals that his 'purpose in writing has always been to express human potentials and purposes relevant to the Space Age'.[75] Susan Zeiger has acknowledged that 'the hallucinatory inner space of subjectivity is engaged in the

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[71] Ibid., p. 144. The deep distrust of language and the critique of language's capacity to control set forth by Burroughs and Trocchi echoes Ezra Pound's earlier views in *Make it New: Essays* (1934):

> Language is not a mere cabinet curio or museum exhibit. It does definitely function in all human life from the tribal state onward. […] As language becomes the most powerful instrument of perfidy, so language alone can riddle and cut through the meshes. Used to conceal meaning, used to blur meaning, to produce the complete and utter inferno of the last century […] against which, SOLELY a care for language, for accurate registration by language avails. ((London: Faber and Faber), 1934, p.7).

Like Pound, both writers similarly advocate, and demonstrate, a 'care for language' in their different methods, which also aimed to make language more authentic and to defy the traditional status of language as 'the most powerful instrument of perfidy'. Interestingly, in *Merlin Collection* 2.1, Trocchi commissioned Alan Neame and Christopher Logue to write a commentary on the 'Sixth Canto of Ezra Pound' (pp. 104-109).

[72] Alexander Trocchi qtd. in Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb*, p. 144.

[73] For more on Burroughs' 'fold-in' at the Edinburgh International Writers' Conference, see the official transcript printed in Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *The International Writers' Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962*, p. 149.

[74] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell, *International Writers' Conference*, p. 149.

[75] William Burroughs, 'My Purpose is to Write for the Space Age', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 265-268, p. 268.

tropes of travel, exploration and conquest that governed nineteenth-century conceptualisatons of geographic space', but it is notable that in the 1960s Burroughs – and indeed Trocchi – exchange earthly exploration for inner space exploration.[76] This disruption of traditional narrative time for an aesthetic of space is arguably shaped by Burroughs' heroin addiction; in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs writes that the junkie 'can look at his shoe for eight hours' and while this makes it clear that drugs disrupt and manipulate any sense of normal time, it is also implies that time becomes spatial – the 'eight hours' are spent and also measured by looking through space at the shoe.[77] In *Cain's Book*, Trocchi also acknowledges this interplay between drugs, space, and time:

> I opened the drawer and found the pill bottle in which I kept my marijuana. I hesitated. It was not that there was anything ominous in the thought of turning on; it was, vaguely expressed, a feeling into the possibility of the possibly profound transition the drug represented, the transition in space, in time, in consciousness.[78]

The notion of a 'possible profound transition' that the drug enables through space, time, and self-awareness is particularly important: it directly responds to Trocchi and Burroughs being 'cosmonauts of inner space' because the emphasis on space suggests that the drug trip is too transcendental or authentic for mere earth. Instead, the user is elevated through heightened consciousness and thrust into inner space to be 'far out' or far removed from the material world.

Necchi similarly conveys connectivity between possibilities, transitions, and drugs in the unconventional closing lines of *Cain's Book*:

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[76] Susan Zeiger, 'Pioneering Inner Space: Drug Autobiography and U.S. Imperialism', *PMLA,* 122 (2007), pp. 1531-47, p. 1531

[77] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 41. Cocteau in *Opium* similarly writes that opium is 'speed in silk' and that opium 'changes our speeds, procures for us a very clear awareness of worlds which are superimposed on each other, which penetrate each other, but do not even suspect each other's existence', (pp. 73-4).

[78] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 70.

>   This, then, is the beginning, a tentative organisation of a sea of
> ambiguous experience, a provisional dyke, an opening gambit.
>   Ending, I should not care to estimate what has been accomplished. […]
> Only at the end I am still sitting here, writing, with the feeling that I have not
> even begun to say what I mean, apparently sane still, and with a sense of my
> freedom and responsibility, more or less cut off as I was before, with the
> intention as soon as I finish this last paragraph to go into the next room and
> turn on. Later I shall phone those who have kindly intimated their willingness
> to publish the document and tell them that it is ready now, or as ready as it
> will ever be, and I surprise myself at feeling relieved, as I once surprised
> Moira at feeling relieved one New Year, knowing again that nothing is ending,
> and certainly not this.[79]

This experimental passage conveys reciprocity between Necchi's rejection of

narrative *telos* and Trocchi's heroin addiction, as implied by Necchi's forthright

admission that after finishing 'the last paragraph' he will immediately go and 'turn

on'; it is significant that this mention of drug taking is structurally embedded within

Necchi's self-reflexive musings about the narrative of 'Cain's Book'. Through this

technique, Trocchi suggests that drugs and the narrative are inseparable: the cyclical

structure of the text as a whole is mirrored in the prose of this paragraph, where

beginnings merge with ends and ends merge with beginnings. In this way the

structure of the text can be seen to mirror Necchi's existential structure: he states

'Strictly speaking, I never began' and as Trocchi implies, if the end of *Cain's Book* is

also 'the beginning', then what does that make the beginning of the novel?[80]

Moreover, much like the endlessly cyclical nature of addiction, the lack of any sense

of closure also echoes the earlier idea of 'possibilities' in time and space through

drugs: each trip is a new voyage into the uncharted territory of inner space, and it is

possible that Necchi's unwillingness, or inability, to end the text conventionally is

because of the seemingly infinite possibilities that he knows lie ahead of him.[81] The

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[79] Ibid., pp. 251-52.

[80] Ibid., p. 96.

[81] Although a link between the narrative of *Young Adam* and Trocchi's drug taking is not detectable, it
is however worth nothing that it also ends without closure: the reader is left unsure as to whether Joe

connection between intoxication and cyclical narrative also echoes the ending of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', of 'weaving a circle round him thrice' due to the speaker drinking 'the milk of Paradise', and Burroughs' addiction also arguably impacts the form of *Naked Lunch,* which has a similar circular structure, and an anarchic and erratic sense of time.[82] Having established how both Burroughs and Trocchi subverted convention by developing their own narcotic-infused aestheticism which was implicitly linked to countercultural resistance against hegemonic ideologies, comparative close readings will now be used to determine how the writers represent and narrate the experience of addiction.

Narrating Narcotics

Leonard Cohen has acknowledged Trocchi's status as a 'public junkie'[83] and called him 'the contemporary Christ'.[84] Indeed, junk is undoubtedly Trocchi's religion and this notion is a leitmotif throughout much of his characterisation, particularly Necchi's narration in *Cain's Book*. Necchi describes himself as being 'like an obscene little Buddha',[85] and his description of the hit often has overt religious overtones:

> I find myself squirting a thin stream of water from the eye-dropper through the number 26 needle into the air, cooking up another fix, prodding the hardened cotton in the bubbling spoon […] just a small fix, I feel, would recreate the strewn ramparts of Jericho.[86]

This detailed depiction of the fix borders on the fetishistic and the reader is forced by the intensity of the prose to observe the scene like a voyeur. By demonstrating the transcendental potential of the heroin experience through the biblical allusion to

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really did kill Cathie, and throughout the narrative, Trocchi confuses the reader by using flashbacks to disrupt and subvert linear narrative time.
[82] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', in Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark (eds), *The New Dragon Book of Verse*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982), pp. 201-202 (p.202), ll. 54-6.
[83] Leonard Cohen in Allan Campbell and Tim Neil, *A Life*, p. 136.
[84] Leonard Cohen qtd. in Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi:* The *Making of the Monster* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 147.
[85] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 161, 237.
[86] Ibid., p. 14.

rebuilding the walls of Jericho, Trocchi introduces the concept that heroin has the God-like power to reconstruct, and to render order from chaos. This emblematic connection between intoxication and creation can be furthered: Trocchi states that during the narcotic experience 'one is female in one's lust to be impregnated',[87] and this representation of drugs as essentially life-giving is echoed by Necchi in *Cain's Book*: 'when a man fixes he is turned on almost instantaneously […] you can speak of a flash, a tinily murmured orgasm in the bloodstream, the central nervous system'.[88] Heroin literally and metaphorically moves Necchi's blood by turning him 'on': it leads to a climactic yet subtle moment of stimulation whereby the heroin hit is explicitly associated with sex, and consequently, with creation.

Trocchi repeats this orgasmic representation in the 'dirty book' *School for Sin*, which narrates how two young girls, Peggy and Doreen, escape from rural Ireland to a life of travel, sexual debauchery, and narcotic excess. In the text, Trocchi explicitly aligns heroin with the protagonist Peggy's sexual experience to depict an absolute and transcendental state of sexual and narcotic bliss:

> Things were misty, vague [...] She was sure of one thing only, that her present condition had something to do with the injections they gave her periodically. Already, she was beginning to live for them. Each time she felt the needle prick the taut skin of her left buttock she was moved to moan for joy. Each time she felt it slide out again from between the willing muscles she felt herself carried away above everything, as though some huge, tender lover dragged her skywards.[89]

Neal Oxenhandler suggests that through the hit 'the addict attains what Sandor Rado calls "pharmacotoxic orgasm" – distinguished from the genital orgasm, this is a heightened state of 'euphoria, stupefaction, exhilaration'.[90] This physiological state of

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[87] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 110.
[88] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 34.
[89] Alexander Trocchi, *School For Sin*, (New York: Masquerade, 1991), p. 98.
[90] Neal Oxenhandler, 'Listening to Burroughs' Voice', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 133-147, p. 135. In 'The White Negro' (1957) Norman Mailer associates

orgasmic bliss is arguably what keeps Necchi and Peggy on heroin because it gives him the keys to what Oxenhandler scientifically shows is an artificially-induced state of paradise. Burroughs' *Junky*, originally published as pulp fiction by Ace Books under the sensationalist title *Junky: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* (1953), also depicts drug use as orgasmic and life-affirming: 'Coke hit my head, a pleasant dizziness and tension, while the morphine spread through my body in relaxing waves. "Was that alright?" asked Ike, smiling. "If God made anything better, he kept it for himself", I said.'[91] It is intriguing, however, to note that this positive portrayal is not continued throughout Burroughs' *oeuvre*, as Richard Kostelanetz recognises: 'Continually [in the later novel *Naked Lunch*] Burroughs remarks that contrary to popular belief heroin dampens rather than stimulates sexual appetite'.[92]

Within the historical drug literary tradition with which Trocchi self-identifies – of Baudelaire, Coleridge, and Cocteau – it is significant that the religious and pleasurable element of intoxication is highlighted. Indeed, Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (1798) also acknowledges the religious and transcendental potential of the opium experience: the speaker witnesses visionary scenes of 'sacred rivers' and of 'a stately pleasure-dome' in his intense journey into drugged inner space and Xanadu.[93]

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orgasm with nihilism in a way that arguably corresponds with the portrayal of narcotic addiction for Burroughs' and Trocchi's protagonists: 'At bottom, the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic that the one which preceded it'. See Norman Mailer, 'The White Negro', in *Advertisements for Myself*, (Harvard: Harvard University, 1992; 1959), pp. 337-358, p. 347.

[91] William Burroughs, *Junky*, (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 141-2. Although this portrayal contradicts my later argument, that Burroughs largely portrays drug taking as negative, it is worth noting that *Junky* was the first of Burroughs' novels to be published. I would argue that the negative portrayal furthers over time, developing chronologically throughout his *oeuvre*. Moreover, in *Junky* itself, it is also important to note that Burroughs' protagonist's opinion of drugs also oscillates between positive and negative.

[92] Richard Kostelanetz, 'From Nightmare to Seredipity: A Retrospective Look at William Burroughs', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 11. 3 (1965), pp. 123-130, p. 125.

[93] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', in Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, (eds), *The New Dragon Book of Verse*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982), pp. 201-202 (p.201), ll. 3, 2. Taking into account the self-acknowledged influence of Coleridge on Trocchi's drug taking and drug writing, it is revealing that Coleridge's 'The Wanderings of Cain' is essentially a drug narrative, as Peter Haining acknowledges: "is a legendary fantasy written in 1798, which, as several authorities have

Continuing this religious imagery, Baudelaire describes opium as 'just, subtle, and mighty opium!... thou hast the keys of Paradise...!'[94] , while in the opium-inspired poem 'Parisian Dream' from *Artificial Paradises*, Baudelaire's intoxicated speaker experiences 'Babel of arcades and stairways / It was a palace infinite'.[95] However, considering the drug literary tradition, Marcus Boon suggests that:

> De Quincey and Coleridge did not consciously aestheticise self-destruction; they were genuinely bewildered by what was happening to them under the influence of opium. Baudelaire lacked even the pretense of innocence. With him, for the first time, drugs became a 'guilty pleasure'.[96]

With their focus on the pleasurable element of drug taking, Trocchi and Burroughs can be seen to diverge from the 'innocent' treatment of, and experimentation with, drugs by De Quincey and Coleridge; they are much more aligned with Baudelaire's systematic drug-taking which sought to explore and analyse altered states of consciousness. [97] Unlike Baudelaire however, whose poetic speaker of 'The

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pointed out, clearly shows the influence of an opium 'vision' and reflects the poet's own attitudes towards laudanum" (*The Hashish Club: An Anthology of Drug Literature. Volume 1: The Founding of the Modern Tradition: From Coleridge to Crowley*, (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p. 110). Due to Trocchi's indebtedness to Coleridge, it is possible that 'Cain's Book' was written as a conscious and deliberate response, or perhaps continuation, of Coleridge's poem; indeed, given the poem's subsequent status as a drug narrative, there are certainly thematic similarities at a textual level and also creatively at a conceptual level.

[94] Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, p. 33.

[95] Charles Baudelaire, 'Parisian Dream', *The Flowers of Evil,* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993), pp. 205-9, (p. 205), ll.13-16.

[96] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess*, p. 57.

[97] Like Trocchi, Baudelaire was no stranger to controversy; as analogous to *Cain's Book* being banned in Sheffield on the ground of obscenity, Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* (1857) caused similar controversy upon publication in Paris and it was also later banned. Moreover, in a tape recording transcribed by Antonio Melechi entitled 'Trocchi on Drugs', Trocchi declares 'Baudelaire was not one to be "afraid of his addictions". He had felt the battering ram of the absolute at the doors of his soul' (Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi, *Psychedelia,* p. 110). Trocchi alludes to Baudelaire before he expounds on such observations about heroin and hashish, and thematically, Trocchi's article is highly reminiscent of *Artificial Paradises*. Providing a study of the effects of drugs on the mind, as the title implies, it suggests that the drug user is elevated to a spiritual realm of transcendental inner space through drug intoxication. By Trocchi's own admission a 'masterpiece', *Artificial Paradises* deeply impressed him; originally written as a response to De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, hashish and opium are 'the two most potent substances, those which are most accessible and the easiest to use' and provide its main focus. As the title suggests, *Artificial Paradises* proposes that intoxicants could benefit mankind by enabling access to an elevated state of blissful psychological inwardness and heightened aesthetic appreciation. Baudelaire termed this state the 'Artificial Ideal'. Baudelaire proposed the 'Artificial Ideal' which suggested that intoxication lead

Irremediable' describes drugs as 'Satanic graces' and 'Evil aware of itself',[98] with

Trocchi there is no sense of guilt or explicit acknowledgement of evil: instead,

Trocchi argued that his addiction was a fundamental human right and believed that it

should be recognised and supported by the legislative and judicial social systems.

Peter Haining specifies that the 1950s particularly catalysed these different attitudes:

> The men who established the very modern tradition took drugs as a private,
> personal act. In their writings they describe the pains as well as the pleasures
> of drug taking, and there is usually no attempt to actively encourage the reader
> to take drugs himself. […] However, in the 1950s and thereafter one detects a
> sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, change of emphasis […] Suddenly it has
> become *good* to take certain drugs.[99]

When considering Trocchi's *oeuvre* in its entirety, drugs are predominantly rendered

as 'good' and the drug experience as positive. Trocchi typically – and radically –

portrays narcotics as beneficial to himself and to humanity: 'In spite of contemporary

drug hysteria, or because of it, we should scream from the rooftops that drugs are

amongst the greatest blessing of our times'.[100] One of the ways in which Trocchi

portrays and maintains this elevation in his novels is by highlighting the sensory

dimension of the narcotic experience. Burroughs acknowledges that Trocchi presents

a highly sensory narrative in *Cain's Book*: 'the barge the dropper the heroin you can

feel it or see it',[101] and indeed, Necchi states that 'At times I am living at the tip of my

senses. I am near flesh, blood, hair'.[102] Burroughs portrays a similar sensibility by

emphasising the sensory space that heroin occupies just under the skin:

> The body knows what veins you can hit and conveys this knowledge in the
> spontaneous movements you make preparing to take a shot […] Sometimes

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to an escape from reality, and that in this heighted and idealised state, the individual was capable of
experiencing an enhanced aesthetic appreciation, (see *Artificial Paradises*, p. 33).

[98] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Irremediable', in *The Flowers of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993),
pp. 158-161, (p. 161), ll. 38, 40.

[99] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess*, p. 14.

[100] Ibid., p. 111.

[101] William Burroughs, 'Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi, *Man At Leisure* (London: Oneworld 2009;
1972), p. viiii.

[102] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 218.

the needle points like a dowzer's wand. Sometimes I must wait for the message. But when it comes I always hit blood.[103]

Burroughs endows the hit with spiritual and indeed human qualities: the protagonist's body is usually an inanimate object but here it is has consciousness because it 'waits for the message' from the personified needle. Such visceral description is similarly conveyed in *Cain's Book,* but Trocchi's prose is even more intense than Burroughs':

> The mind under heroin evades perception as it does ordinarily; one is aware only of contents… the perceiving turns inward, the eyelids droop, the blood is aware of itself, a slow phosphorescence in all the fabric of the flesh and nerve and bone; it is that the organism has a sense of being intact and unbrittle, and, above all, *inviolable*.[104]

Like Burroughs, Trocchi shows how everything is directed inward, and the heroin experience is portrayed as all-encompassing: rather than having any external awareness outwith the body and the mind, inwardness is heightened to such an extreme that even blood is completely endowed with consciousness by being 'aware of itself'. This notion of complete self-control and self-governance is also key to Burroughs, who ultimately imagines that 'heaven consists of freeing oneself from the power, of achieving inner freedom'.[105] Commenting on Burroughs' *oeuvre*, Marshall McLuhan acknowledges the importance of sensory self-awareness, highlighting how it has implicit existential importance: 'Burroughs disdains the hallucinatory drugs as providing mere 'content', the fantasies and dreams that money can buy. Junk (heroin) is needed to turn the human body itself into an environment oneself […] The world becomes his 'content''.[106] Seeking to spurn the impersonal external world, Burroughs

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[103] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 62.

[104] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 10-11.Trocchi uses linguistic techniques to highlight that the body parts – the eyelids that 'droop' and the blood that is 'aware of itself' – are not inanimate but are rather the agents of the active verbs in the sentence.

[105] William Burroughs qtd. in Eric Mottram, *William Burroughs: The Algebra Of Need*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 40.

[106] Marshall McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 69-73, p. 70.

instead wishes to use narcotics to create – and most importantly to control – his own autonomous and subjective world of heightened bodily awareness and enhanced inner space.

In *Cain's Book* Necchi similarly seeks to create an alternative world of freedom through heroin-fuelled subjectivity and inwardness. Indeed, his heightened sensory awareness becomes so self-contained that he feels indestructible; he describes how, after fixing, he is like an impenetrable fortress, 'Castle Keep', and he reiterates this image of self-containment again, believing that after the fix 'the jungle could encroach no farther than the tips of my senses'.[107] Trocchi uses similar language in *School for Sin* to demonstrate how the protagonist Doreen is overwhelmed with the intensity of sensory interiority during her first heroin fix:

> It seemed as though strands of tingling electric wire, whose current was almost imperceptible, had penetrated her flesh. [...] The bed, her nude body, the warmth, the complete sense of being carried away, of being so secure with the two men whose expressions were so kind and loving, all intoxicated her. She was... beyond – there was no other word for it.[108]

Intoxicated by heroin, Doreen is catapulted into an otherworldly state of artificial paradise where she feels ultimately inviolable. The reference to the hit feeling like 'strands of tingling electric wire' echoes the imagery used in *Cain's Book,* when Necchi memorably describes the hit as 'a slow phosphorescence in all the fabric of the flesh and nerve'.[109] Indeed, there are numerous examples when Necchi appears to be absolutely transfixed by the sensations brought on by the heroin hit: 'for the past year I have found it difficult to sustain even an approximate attitude without shit, horse, heroin. […] I became fascinated by the minute to minute sensations'.[110] Necchi is captivated by sensation, which implies that heroin enables him to hone in, and

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[107] Ibid., p. 31.
[108] Alexander Trocchi, *School For Sin*, p. 122.
[109] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 11.
[110] Ibid., p. 12.

absolutely focus on, the pleasurable sensations brought on by the fix, which is then relayed in detail to the reader.

Cain's Book's emphasis on inwardness, sensation, and self-sufficiency makes it clear to the reader that heroin is at the very the heart of Necchi's existence, and similarly, in *School for Sin*, heroin becomes what Doreen lives for. Referencing the 'beauty' of the hit, Trocchi portrays an elevated and aesthetically-oriented depiction of the fix: 'No, she remembered very little. Nothing except the beauty of the situation she was in now–that was the word for it, "beauty"–mattered at all'.[111] This depiction is however in marked contrast to Burroughs' *Junky*, which instead often focuses on the basic practicalities of addiction: 'life telescopes down to junk, one fix and looking forward to the next, "stashes" and "scripts", "spikes" and "droppers"'.[112] While he occasionally acknowledges the orgasmic dimension of the fix, as I go on to highlight, for Burroughs there is no aesthetic beauty in addiction: in his own words, his authorial concern is 'with addiction itself (whether to drugs, or sex, or money, or power) as a model of control'[113]. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs states that control is 'cancerous',[114] and this disturbing metaphor of disease is extended in *Naked Lunch* in which *everyone* is fundamentally an addict: 'junk yields a basic formula of "evil" virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of "evil" is always the face of total need'.[115] Burroughs believes that junk symbolises the all-consuming battle for control in capitalist society, in which 'junk and pocket money is all they want, and they don't care how they get it'.[116]

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[111] Alexander Trocchi, *School For Sin*, p. 99.
[112] William Burroughs, *Junky*, p. 22.
[113] William Burroughs, 'My Purpose is to Write for the Space Age', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl, (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), p. 266.
[114] Letter from William Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg (dated 5 May) in Ann Charters (ed.), *The Portable Beat Reader,* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 125.
[115] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 8.
[116] William Burroughs, *Junky,* p. 57.

By connecting drugs with capitalist critique, Burroughs' writing does however contrast with Trocchi's representation of heroin. In *Cain's Book* addiction is arguably capitalist in its individualistic pursuit of constant consumption, but rather than critique, the fix is instead typically portrayed and elevated as 'the ritual'. The majority of Necchi's fixing is when he is solitary, which contests the traditional notion of ritual as a communal, or bonding, experience; as he admits, 'the ritual' represents the isolation inherent in the consumption of heroin which is 'born of a respect for the whole chemistry of alienation'.[117] However, later in the text Necchi does allude to the notion of shared behaviour and ritual: 'Tom always fixes before me. He simply observes a common ritual which I have always refused to observe'.[118] Later, Necchi asks Tom 'why the ritual is so important to him. His answer is the usual one. "You never know when the Man will bust in. If they come, I want to have the shit in me"'.[119] Rather than the ritual being based on fraternity heightened by shared experience, Tom's motivation is absolutely selfish.[120] Necchi admits that 'This kind of promiscuous creation of tension in a situation which is God knows far too intense already makes me very angry. Unless I am in material pain it is immaterial to me who goes first'.[121] Sue Wiseman's observation that 'heroin plays perhaps *the* central role as the object of desire, for both the narrator and the reader, is revealing: in capitalist New York City, even junkies are competitive and deeply individualistic in their seemingly sacred consumption, and consequently, the heroin ritual in *Cain's Book* is

[117] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 33-4.
[118] Ibid., p. 74.
[119] Ibid., p. 74.
[120] For more on ritual see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* (London: Ark, 1989).
[121] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 74-5.

far removed from the ancient drug-taking rituals of tribes based on collective solidarity.[122]

Christopher Gair has acknowledged that 'lifestyles of alcohol and narcotic use' were 'essential aspects of the counterculture' in America in the late 1950s,[123] and he equates escapism via drug taking with a wider countercultural sensibility: 'Trips were either an individual experience or part of a shared happening involving the like-minded. While civil rights or anti-war protest sought to change the world for all, LSD offered the promise of transcendence from that world'.[124] Choosing transcendence through heroin, for Tom and Necchi in *Cain's Book* intoxication is undoubtedly a pursuit of escapism away from 'that world', and their experience at times is concomitantly solitary and shared – while each intoxicant is on their own cerebral voyage, they often fix, or practice the 'ritual', in the company of fellow junkies, or what Gair calls 'the like-minded'. This notion of shared yet individual experience is also reminiscent of the SI's situation that I explored in detail in Chapter One, which similarly sought to undermine capitalism through moments of collective playful subjectivity – praxis that was fundamentally unproductive in economic terms. Tom Tear's defensive rhetoric also implies that the inner world of subjective heroin intoxication opposes the external world of authority, rules, and regulation, as symbolised by the ominous figure of 'the Man': if he is caught, Tom desperately – and defiantly – wants to be already intoxicated, a stance that dismisses the dominant capitalist order of promoting and maintaining constant productivity. In 'The White Negro' (1957), Norman Mailer links capitalism with countercultural rebellion: 'the

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[122] Sue Wiseman, 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde: Heroin Addiction and Narrative in Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book'*, in Tim Armstrong, Matthew Campbell and Sue Vice (eds), *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pp. 256-266, p. 252.

[123] Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture*, p. 62.

[124] Ibid., p. 135.

crisis of capitalism in the twentieth century would yet be understood as the unconscious adaptations of a society to solve its economic imbalance at the expense of a new mass psychological imbalance'. Like Laing's theory of schizophrenic society and the 'divided self' that I analysed in Chapter Two, Mailer acknowledges that systems such as capitalism catalyse and perpetuate existential angst and psychological alienation. For Necchi and Tom, intoxication was a way in which they, like Burroughs' characters and and the wider counterculture, could assert their individual subjectivity to self-medicate and protect themselves – by being inwardly inviolable – against such existentially destructive economy-led mass conformity, endless consumerism, and total control.

To return to how Burroughs represents addiction, it is clear that he depicts a more ambivalent relationship to his junkie identity than Trocchi does in his *oeuvre*. *Naked Lunch*'s description of the addict's life as 'suspended between two ways of being' gives the reader insight into the protagonist Lee's unstable flux between being high and sober,[125] and Sue Wiseman rightly suggests that 'Trocchi never denounced heroin in the way Burroughs has repeatedly'.[126] Indeed, unlike Burroughs, Trocchi remained an addict at all times, and accordingly, he did not experience the excruciatingly painful physical battles that Burroughs underwent when he attempted to become clean. The imagery of 'rancid ectoplasm swept out by an old junky coughing and spitting in the sick morning' highlights how degeneration is inherent in Burroughs' junk experience, which is far removed from the blissful and cerebral transcendentalism of Trocchi's heroin high.[127] The following passage from *Naked Lunch* further highlights the ambivalence, and the disgust, that Burroughs' protagonist feels towards junk addiction:

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[125] Ibid., p. 56.
[126] Sue Wiseman, 'Addiction and the Avant-Garde', p. 260.
[127] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 29.

> I tied up for a shot, my hands trembling with eagerness, an archetype dope fiend.
> 'Just an old junky, boys, a harmless old shaking wreck of a junky.' That's the way I put it down. As I had hoped, Hauser looked away when I started probing for a vein. It's a pretty wildly unpretty spectacle… I hit a vein right away. A column of blood shot up into the syringe for an instant sharp and solid as a red chord. I pressed the plunger down my thumb, feeling the junk pound through my veins to feed a million junk-hungry cells, to bring strength and alertness to every nerve and muscle.[128]

Although similarities to Trocchi are evident in the intense description of the stages of the fix – particularly the detailing of the movement from vein to blood to plunger – Burroughs' image of the addict is resolutely negative; he is described as physically ruined which notably contrasts to the regenerative and constructive capabilities of heroin celebrated in *Cain's Book*, and his acknowledgement of the 'spectacle' is ironic.

Like Burroughs, the wider trajectory of drug literature sees Trocchi's acknowledged literary influences also repeatedly reject the notion of wholly positive narcotic celebration. In 'Kubla Khan', Coleridge's speaker quickly experiences terror after the magnificent and oneric opulence he encounters at the start of the poem. Xanadu becomes a 'savage' place that is 'as holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted': a woman wails a terrifying lament for her 'demon-lover' and the once splendid 'pleasure-dome' is cast in shadow.[129] Moreover, the poem ends with a startling and terrible vision:

> Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.[130]

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[128] Ibid., p. 169.
[129] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', pp. 201-202 (p.201), ll. 14-15, 16.
[130] Ibid., p. 202, ll. 49-54.

The 'holy dread' that the speaker feels is directly connected to his intoxicated state from drinking 'the milk of Paradise' (likely to be literally the milky substance laudanum that Coleridge consumed), and thus, the speaker's terror, and his fall from wonder, warns of the dangers of such artificial and pleasurable paradises. The reader, like the speaker, should 'Beware! Beware!' of such a state of intoxication. Moreover, Baudelaire's 'Parisian Dream' similarly depicts the negative side of drug taking by describing the comedown after the wondrous opium high: after the luxurious illusion of intoxication, the speaker finds himself back in his 'wretched hole' where 'The clock proclaimed the time was noon / In accents brutal and perverse'.[131] Jean Cocteau's *Opium* comprises many horrifying illustrations of his comedowns, and the following description of opium renders it as fundamentally dualistic: 'It [opium] reassures. It reassures by reason of its luxury, its rites, the anti-medial elegance of its lamps, furnaces, pipes and the age-old perfection of this exquisite poisoning'.[132] Whilst these examples are not extensive, they do however demonstrate that drugs are typically represented as both detrimental and beneficial throughout the drug literature tradition. It is apparent, then, that Trocchi's pro-drug perspective aligns with the historical trajectory to a certain extent, while his repeated portrayal of narcotics as sacred distinguishes him from even Burroughs, his most immediate contemporary. John Calder acknowledges the extremity of Trocchi's pro-drug perspective:

> It must be remembered that at no time while in America, or later in his last years in the UK, did he ever agree that drugs were bad for him, or for other people. His line was always that everyone should be free to make his or her own decisions about drugs and not be hindered by the law.[133]

Indeed, Trocchi cultivated his addiction to achieve *cause célèbre* status, portraying the addict as a gallant and admirable countercultural figure: 'New York, 1960. The

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[131] Charles Baudelaire, 'Parisian Dream', *The Flowers of Evil,* p. 209, ll. 54, 57-8.

[132] Jean Cocteau, *Opium: Diary of a Cure* (London: Icon, 1957), p. 41.

[133] John Calder, The *Garden of Eros*, (Richmond: Alma, 2014), p. 233.

hero as junkie, confounder of conformities, sinker of moral ducks, alone with his twilight detergent in ever shuddering act, in his original posture, he resists the times'.[134] Contrastingly Burroughs states that 'you don't decide to be an addict. One morning you wake up sick and you're an addict',[135] and once again, there is a marked contrast between Burroughs' blunt depiction of the basic physiology – and indeed the inherent sickness – of addiction, and Trocchi's reciprocity between heroism and heroin.

A further way in which Trocchi sought to propagandise his pro-drug campaign was through commissioning and editing an anthology entitled *Drugs and the Creative Process*. Heinemann contracted Trocchi to work with R. D. Laing and Burroughs as his co-editors; at this time all three men were friends and at the centre of London's countercultural movement. As I argued in Chapter Two, Laing and Trocchi both advocated that, aided by intoxication, the individual must go inwards into the inner space of the self, to achieve existential authenticity and freedom. Although in Burroughs' novel *Junky* the protagonist Lee moves to Mexico to escape from the 'nationwide hysteria' against the junkie which he describes as being 'like anti-Semitism under the Nazi's', rhetoric which undoubtedly parallels Trocchi's in *Cain's Book*, Burroughs states that 'junk narrows consciousness'.[136] He furthers this perspective in an interview with *Fact* magazine in 1965: 'They [drugs] do lead to new, nonverbal insights but you soon reach a point of diminishing returns. I have seen people go through anxiety states which could have led to suicide if they had not been

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[134] Alexander Trocchi, 'Cain's Book, Vol. 2', *Evergreen Review*, 5.19, (1961), pp. 44-54, p. 47.
[135] William Burroughs, 'Prologue', *Junky*, p. xv.
[136] Conrad Knickerbocker, 'The William Burroughs Interview', *Paris Review* <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4424/the-art-of-fiction-no-36-william-s-burroughs> [accessed 17 January 2014].

restrained'.[137] While this negative portrayal is evident throughout Burroughs' *oeuvre*, the surreal and grotesque narrative of debauchery and degeneration in *Naked Lunch* is particularly disturbing. The setting of interzone is a veiled but magnified version of the real world, and it frenetically feeds every citizen's addiction: 'the broken image of Man moves in minute by minute and cell by cell… Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of the human virus'.[138] In *Junky*, Lee also explains how he ultimately wanted to come clean: 'I knew that I did not want to go on taking junk'.[139] Burroughs' brutal insight into narcotics and addiction again markedly contrasts with Trocchi's frequent elevation of junk itself and the lifestyle of the addict.

Drawing upon the apocalyptic negativity of Burroughs' narcotic representation, Marcus Boon claims that in the 'self sufficient body of the narcotics user is a source of a much more intimate apocalypse than Burroughs', but no less extreme'.[140] Boon warns that existential poisoning of the individual – what he terms the 'intimate apocalypse' – lies at the dark heart of every junkie's experience, and while this is frequent in Burroughs' work, it is telling that throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre* there is only one instance whereby he appears aware that his addiction could really risk annihilation or 'intimate apocalypse'.[141] In an ironic reference to Cocteau's

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[137] William Burroughs interviewed by Ronald Weston, 'William Burroughs: High Priest of Hipsterism' *Fact*, 2.6 (1965), p. 17.
[138] William Burroughs, *Naked*, p. 136.
[139] William Burroughs, *Junky*, p. 125.
[140] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess,* p. 82.
[141] *Cain's Book* does however see Trocchi sometimes deviate from this positive portrayal of heroin. Fellow junkie Fay is unpleasantly described as 'a yellow female pigdog', a 'yellow ferret', and as 'smiling like a yellow idol', intriguing juxtapositions that at once acknowledges the poisonous and paradisal experience of the heroin hit (p. 22). Her eyes are also described as having 'in their yellowish depths ecstasy' (p. 36).[141] The use of yellow, to convey sickness and decay, is also employed by Burroughs in *Junky* to describe when an addict's 'complexion faded from brown to mottled yellow' (William Burroughs, *Junky*, p. 36).

Opium: Diary Of A Cure,[142] in 'Diary of a Cure' Trocchi writes: 'About six weeks ago, with the pressure of events, the intensity of my interest and involvement therein, I found I was using what, under non-experimental conditions, was an excessive amount of heroin and cocaine'.[143] Concerned that he was now rendered an '*unconscious* victim', Trocchi admits that he 'began to feel that my consumption of drugs was irresponsible, dangerous, and perhaps potentially fatal!'[144] Admitting that his addiction is life-threatening and irresponsible, he then goes onto to describe how he left town and 'set myself up at the seaside with drugs for about twenty-four hours after arrival at normal consumption that is heroin'.[145] Then, using the 'Diary' as an opportunity for critique, Trocchi attacks the drug laws of 'hysterical' society before ending his essay by promoting 'a tactical use of drugs in the tentative changing states of mind'.[146] As part of 'Diary of a Cure', it is clear that at that particular moment he felt his drug taking had gone beyond this 'tactical' remit: he had gone just too 'far out'. By explicitly acknowledging the deadly dimension of addiction in his 'Diary', this portrayal momentarily aligns Trocchi with the work of Burroughs and the wider drug literature tradition, which typically acknowledges the darker side of addiction.

Again in 'Diary of a Cure', Trocchi logs his drug consumption in a style that is highly reminiscent of Thomas De Quincey's meticulous drug dose calculations in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.[147] Such scientific treatment is common throughout drug literature, whereby writers often report to readers from their experimental drug laboratory. Trocchi's 'Diary' reads as follows:

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[142] Trocchi writes 'Diary of a Cure, Cocteau, no. I refuse to regard it in this way, and I believe that Cocteau did likewise, despite the publisher's subtitle? To do so would be to accept the hysteria surrounding the subject as a meaningful response'. (Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs', in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia Britannica*, p. 113).

[143] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs', in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 113.

[144] Ibid., p. 113.

[145] Ibid., p. 113.

[146] Ibid., p. 119.

[147] In his *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), De Quincey details, like Trocchi, how he reduces his dose of opium grains from 320 to forty grains, (p. 55).

> I find I have, 9 PM, 28 x 1/6th grain tabs, which is rather less than five grains, or a very thin twelve hours, and instead of cocaine (I have none any longer), I have a very small dose of liquid dexedrine. So tomorrow with the dawn, other things being equal, I shall begin the experiment with LSD, 150 micrograms, and we shall see what we shall see, indeed, no doubt, too soon.[148]

By methodically logging and examining the drugs that surround him, Trocchi is reminiscent of Dr Jekyll in his laboratory brewing up his lotions and potions to aid his self-transformation. Like Jekyll, the notion of an unpredictable and perhaps even ambiguous or dangerous outcome is also suggested when Trocchi states that 'we shall see what we shall see' what comes from his test.[149] Continuing this connection between drug taking and science, Boon also claims that 'Farrere was one of the first writers to introduce elements of physics into his descriptions of drug use. A smoker was no longer an individual but an 'ultimate particle of matter''.[150] Although it is not known whether Trocchi was familiar with Farrere, physics are indeed integrated into his drug descriptions: in *Cain's Book*, Necchi states that heroin enables him to distance himself from 'whatever increase of entropy in the external world',[151] and he also describes fellow-addict Geo as 'an organism'.[152] However, Trocchi again goes further than the drug literature tradition because he envisages that art and narcotics would – and should – come together in an existential milieu. Trocchi's 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', published in the sigma portfolio, specifies that the proposed 'spontaneous university' would function as 'a vital laboratory'.[153] This collaborative conception highlights the interplay between drug experimentation, creativity, and scientific exploration that Trocchi continually propagandised

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[148] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs' in Antonio Melechi (ed.)*, Psychedelia*, p. 114.

[149] In *Cain's Book* Trocchi references Stevenson in his description of Fay who cooks up her fix 'silently at the sink, like Dr Jekyll brewing his potion' (Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 168).

[150] Marcus Boon, *Road of Excess*, p. 58.

[151] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 70.

[152] Ibid., p. 105.

[153] Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible Insurrection Of A Million Minds, in Andrew Murray Scott, *Making*, p. 186.

throughout his *oeuvre,* as a means to assert existential freedom away from established authority and to render drug taking as a legitimate endeavor.

Trocchi also sought to render drug taking as scientific rather than recreational in order to further promote the 'benefits' of narcotics. Trocchi describes himself along with R. D. Laing, and William Burroughs as 'experienced investigators' of narcotics,[154] and claims that drugs 'will be for the study of the human soul what the microscope has been for biochemistry, what the various scopes have been for science'.[155] By framing his drug taking in this scientific milieu, and by equating drugs with human advancement and scientific discovery, he attempts to depict drugs as an area of serious scientific and humanitarian scholarship. Although this professional stance appears to herald a move away from the image of Trocchi as a countercultural pioneer of inner space exploration, nevertheless, Trocchi's technique still emphasises what he regards to be the positive element of drugs: they are ultimately advantageous to the 'human soul', they are capable of improving mankind, and they merit credible study.

As a heroin addict, Trocchi also experiments on his body and mind in a process that he *himself* controls and administers. This method is apparent from the very outset of Trocchi's heroin experimentation, as he explains: 'I already had my degree and two post graduate fellowships and a couple of wild years in Paris before I took my first fix. When I began to take stuff I was very canny in the way I got around to using it'.[156] It is clear that Trocchi's experimentation is completely premeditated,

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[154] Alexander Trocchi, 'Trocchi on Drugs', in Antonio Melechi (ed.), *Psychedelia*, p. 116. The notion of the drug-taking writer as a scientific investigator was fashioned by Baudelaire's *Artificial Paradises*. Upon publication, Gustave Flaubert wrote to Baudelaire and praised him for writing 'a work that is the beginning of a science, in a work of observation and induction' (see Stacy Diamond's 'Introduction' to *Artificial Paradises*, (New York: Citadel, 1996; 1860) p. ix). This rhetoric is paralleled in *Cain's Book*: Necchi states that he is interested in 'the study of drugs'. (p. 41).

[155] Ibid., p. 111.

[156] Alexander Trocchi, in Chris Robbins, 'Alex Trocchi: A Cosmonaut of Inner Space', *Time Out*, 23 November 1972, pp. 20-22, p. 21.

and consequently, he is simultaneously both the experimenter and the experiment.

Writing about Burroughs, Alfred Kazin makes a similar observation: 'experiment is indeed the great thing in and behind all his work. He is the subject; he is the performing surgeon; he is the paper on which the different stages of the operation are described; he is the result'.[157] Moreover, in a draft of 'The Long Book' Necchi is described as an 'inventor of numberless identities' which suggests that Trocchi himself was aware of the self-fragmentation involved in being both the experimenter and the experiment in narcotic testing.[158] This existential conflict is reminiscent of Stevenson's dual characterisation in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and also of Baudelaire's '*Heautontimouroumenos*' in which the speaker cries,

> I am the wound, and rapier!
> I am the cheek, I am the slap!
> I am the limbs, I am the rack,
> The prisoner, the torturer![159]

It is also apparent that in Trocchi's 'ritual' the addicts' technical apparatus – the spoon, the flame, the syringe – are more important than the users themselves. This representation is rendered in the following passage from *Cain's Book*, which conveys the ceremonial administration of the fix in striking detail by acutely emphasising how the various physical objects input into the process:

> when one presses the bulb of the eye-dropper and watches the pale, blood-streaked liquid disappear through the nozzle and into the needle and the vein it is not, not only, a question of feeling good. It's not only a question of kicks. The ritual itself, the powder in the spoon, the little ball of cotton, the matches applied, the bubbling liquid drawn up through the cotton filter into the eye-dropper, the tie round the arm to make a vein stand out, the fix often slow because a man will stand there with the needle in the vein and allow the level

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[157] Alfred Kazin, 'Wild about Writing', in Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl (eds), *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 115-118, p. 117.

[158] Alexander Trocchi, 'The Long Book' in Peter Haining (ed.), *Hashish Club Volume 2*, p. 109.

[159] Charles Baudelaire, '*Heautontimouroumenos*' in *The Flowers of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993), pp. 155-157, (p. 157), ll. 21-4.

in the eye-dropper to waver up and down, up and down, until there is more blood than heroin in the dropper.[160]

Boon's earlier assertion, that writers from the 1950s onwards differed from the past portrayal of drugs in literature due to a lack of 'innocence', is certainly true here: the list-like style of the prose in combination with the striking level of detail highlights the fact that Necchi is acutely aware of the process leading up to what he ultimately – and tellingly – describes as 'feeling good'. Indeed, for writers such as Trocchi who unapologetically acknowledge the pleasurable element of intoxication, and to a lesser extent Burroughs, drugs are no longer unintentional but an existential and artistic choice.

Conclusion

Trocchi and Burroughs' *oeuvres* fundamentally fuse life, literature, and addiction, seamlessly together. Most significantly, drugs have an existential underpinning for these writers, which contrasts with the treatment of narcotics in the work of Trocchi's acknowledged influences, Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Cocteau: whether in narrative, aesthetic, and in particular political frameworks, Trocchi and Burroughs go further than these writers because drugs and intoxication are not solely literary explorations. Yet by self-consciously connecting addiction with existential issues such as freedom, resistance, and authenticity, this approach even distances Trocchi from Burroughs, despite the fact that Brodie Beales equates Burroughs' writing with outward engagement:

> Burroughs makes the world bolder, madder, louder and more bleak, but by leaking these amplifications into the reality set he is making it bigger, annexing his inner space to the rest of the world and encouraging people to open theirs and join the riot he has begun.[161]

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[160] Ibid., pp. 33-4.
[161] Brodie Beales, 'The Way OUT is the way IN': Junk and the Subversion of the Nation/Symptom in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch'*, *Transnational Literature*, 1.1 (2008), p. 7.

Like Trocchi, Burroughs aimed to bring the freedom of inner space exploration into the outside realm to challenge and counteract authority. However, unlike Trocchi, this radical ambition was not inherently linked to drug addiction to the same extreme extent: connecting addiction with socio-political critique, Burroughs did not set out to propagandise drugs as inherently positive, or fight for the addict's social acceptance and freedom. Differences are also apparent in the men's representation of narcotics: while the heroin experience is occasionally rendered positively in Burroughs' work, intoxication is almost always ritualistic in Trocchi's, a one-sided and extreme portrayal that tends to emphasise, and elevate, the cerebral and transcendental high. As Trocchi explains, 'I think that for me at a certain time it was necessary to take up this attitude and go far out', and indeed, his addiction is absolutely self-willed and consciously cultivated, more so than even Burroughs.[162] Heroin shapes everything in Trocchi's fictional writing, from theme, to characterisation, to form, and even function. Trocchi's associate Tom McGrath acknowledges the centrality of creativity to Trocchi's explicit drug agenda, which he regards as daring and even admirable:

> Alex was primarily involved in the use of drugs in relation to creativity [...] this was and continues to be a valid area of concern and I salute the brave and uncritical openness with which Alex acknowledged his own use of drugs, much preferring it to the pious lamentations of so many ex-addicts, including, on occasion, myself. The present acceleration in heroin addiction throughout Europe only bears out what Trocchi asserted in the sixties, that the 'hysterical' response of successive governments to the problems of drugs only contributes further to the problem. Alex needs no sculpture in his memory – he made his own. But an open forum where people spoke openly about the creative use of drugs would please his ghost immensely. How many would have the courage?[163]

McGrath attests to Trocchi's relevant and radical experimentalism, which marks him out as a pioneer even within the countercultural context of the 1960s. Although John Calder believes it is 'not as a cosmonaut of inner space that Trocchi has a chance of

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[162] Alexander Trocchi in James Campbell, 'Alex Trocchi', *Glasgow University Magazine*, October 1973, un.pag.

[163] Tom McGrath, 'Remembering Alex Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review,* 70 (1985), pp. 36-47, p. 47.

being remembered'[164], and while critics often claim that Trocchi's decline as a writer was due to his ever-increasing addiction,[165] it is however apparent that his small yet significant *oeuvre* was absolutely infused with, and perhaps even benefited by, his experience of heroin, which catalysed a distinct, defiant, and creative 'alternative attitude'.[166]

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[164] John Calder, 'Alexander Trocchi', *Edinburgh Review,* 70 (1985), pp. 32-35, p. 35.

[165] Stewart Home writes that 'for a time it looked like he [Trocchi] was more likely to be remembered as "The Lord of Junk" than as a writer' ('Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (London: One World, 2008), p. 7). Irvine Welsh has dismissed Trocchi by calling him 'a Scottish George Best of literature' (Allan Campbell and Tim Niel, *Life*, pp. 18-19) to imply that just as Best's once great career was ruined by his alcoholism, Trocchi's potential to be a seminal writer was destroyed and denied by his addiction.

[166] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 236.

Spatial Subversion: Heterotopia in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*

This thesis has so far emphasised the acute interiority of Trocchi's protagonists and analysis of Trocchi's characters' existential relationship to outer space has been largely absent. Using the heterotopic model of spatiality, this final chapter considers how Trocchi's protagonists experience, and respond to, external space. Hetero-topology was first theorised by Michel Foucault in his 1967 lecture 'Of Other Spaces' ('Des espaces autres'), delivered at the Cercle d'Etudes architecturales (later published in his *Dits et Ecrits* in 1994). Deriving from a medical term referring to 'tissue that is not normal where it is located, or an organ that has been dislocated' heterotopia's connection to space implies a more abstract meaning.[1] 'Hetero-topia' means 'other-place', and these places of otherness are 'spaces of alternate ordering'.[2] Moreover, as 'a spatial dimension of difference', discordance is also integral to the function of the heterotopia which 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.[3] The uncanny nature of the heterotopia, its hybrid spatiality, and its intrinsically subversive disruption of social norms, make it particularly relevant to Trocchi's texts.

The chapter begins by assessing how the spatiality of the ship is experienced by Trocchi's protagonists, while establishing how this responds to Foucault's 'heterotopia *par excellence*'.[4] The chapter then argues that by functioning as a heterotopia, the canal in *Young Adam* is a rendered as a place of simultaneous sex and

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[1] Christine M. Boyer, 'The Many Mirrors of Michel Foucault and their Architectural Reflections', in Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (eds.), *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 56.
[2] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27, p. 22.
[3] Ibid., p. 22.
[4] Foucault, 'Other', p. 27. Andrew Hodgson pertinently suggests that 'the drifting scow in *Cain's Book* speaks of a total detachment from the phenomenal world; a detachment that is apparent as early as *Young Adam*'. See 'Between The Tundra and the Ocean', *Equus Press*, <http://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/between-the-tundra-and-the-ocean/> [accessed 15 November 2012]

death. Georges Bataille's contemporaneous *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1957) will be introduced to this analysis to expand upon and elucidate the heterotopic canal's inherent subversion, both existentially and spatially, in terms of sex and death. The chapter then considers how Trocchi's protagonists experience land, by combining Marion Shoard's essay 'Edgelands' (2002) with Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands: Journeys Into England's True Wilderness* (2011), to determine how deviance is further rendered in the space of the 'edgeland' in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*. The final section examines the effect of heterotopic spatiality on Trocchi's characters' experience using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the individual as a 'body-subject'. Merleau-Ponty's particular phenomenological method enables me to consider whether the fluid spatiality of the heterotopia problematises the characters' ability to engage positively with the space around them in both bodily and psychological terms.[5] This phenomenological method compliments and furthers the chapter's earlier focus on the relationship between the heterotopia and existential experience, and together with my earlier findings, it will ultimately determine the extent to which the subversive nature of the heterotopia affects Trocchi's characters'

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[5] Critics have previously noted that Trocchi's texts diverge from the conventional model of phenomenological affirmation, yet this has not yet been explored in any great depth. Tom McCarthy in has written that 'Trocchi's sensibility is totally *spatial*' [italics in original], while Gary A. Boyd claims that, 'much of Trocchi's work […] presupposes alternative spatial practices at a series of scales from that of the body and mind to that of the city and beyond'. Boyd also argues that Trocchi's life comprised 'conscious attempts to occupy the extreme edge or interstices of mainstream space', while McCarthy similarly states that, Trocchi 'has to go out to the edge of things'. (See Gary A. Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi', p. 146, pp. 146-7, and Tom McCarthy, 'Foreword', p. vi). Gary Hentzi's insight into *Young Adam* also acknowledges the importance of phenomenological sensibility to Trocchi's *oeuvre*:

> Trocchi wants to suggest that the registering of physical detail forms a kind of bedrock experience, prior to any attempt to impose meaning on it. For these writers [Trocchi, Camus, Lawrence, Hemingway] it is the experience of the body in contact with its environment that gives it the feeling of being fully alive.

By being rooted in exploring 'the experience of the body in contact with its environment', Hentzi suggests that *Young Adam* is essentially a phenomenological narrative. Continuing this concept, Hentzi also writes that Trocchi 'wants to suggest that the registering of physical detail forms a kind of bedrock experience'; 'bedrock' is particularly fitting because it emphasises the connection between Joe's existentialism and the physical world. (Gary Hentzi, 'Counterculture Revisited: Young Adam, Then and Now', *Scottish Studies Review*, 9 (2008), pp. 21-32, p. 23).

experience of, and response to, the external world around them.

Ships and Sea in *Cain's Book* and *Young Adam*

Ships feature throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre*. They are absolutely central to the setting of *Cain's Book* and *Young Adam*, and to a lesser extent in *Helen and Desire*, *School for Sin*, and *Sappho of Lesbos*, 'dirty book' titles commissioned and released by Olympia Press. Necchi's scow in *Cain's Book* is described as 'a low-slung coffin on the choppy-grey water', and a motor-tug is described as being 'like a terrier pushing floating coffins'.[6] This notion of closure, connoted by the coffin imagery, is further evident in *Cain's Book* because Necchi's heroin hit often takes place within the secret space of the scow's cabin.[7] This is immediately established in the opening page: 'Half an hour ago I gave myself a fix. I stood the eye-dropper in a glass of cold water and lay down on the bunk'.[8] Necchi's audacious admission indicates that in the process of the heroin hit he doubly seals himself off from the outside world. Firstly, Necchi enters the self-isolated psychological sphere, and secondly, he is also physically isolated, by being situated in the closed and clandestine space of the scow. In this way, Necchi's relationship with the exterior world outside the barge is problematised because his existential experience, like the spatiality in which he is situated, is predominantly inward: as previous chapters have argued, Necchi's sense of self is almost wholly directed inward and into himself, rather than outward towards the world; indeed, he is willingly situated in a self-administered space – and state – of

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[6] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 116, 181.
[7] Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) renders the ship as being comparable to a coffin, stating that in certain circumstances 'the ship then is no longer a box', and he also states that 'the ship may well be a symbol for departure; it is, at a deeper level, the emblem of closure'. (*Mythologies*, (London: Vintage, 2000; 1957), pp. 27, 26). Gary A. Boyd's insight is also useful: 'The carceral significance of the boat is not lost on Trocchi who describes it in *Cain's Book*, as a "retreat into abeyance' and whose alternatives were 'prison, madhouse, morgue'" ('Alexander Trocchi', p. 154).
[8] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 9.

isolation, which affects his ability to engage with the world outside the scow. Cocooned in the cabin for days on end and cut off from the outside world, Necchi reveals that he is often unable to distinguish between day and night: 'Time on the scows… Day and night soon became for me merely light and dark, daylight or oil-lamp, and often the lamp became pale and transparent in the long dawns'.[9] Heightened by narcotic intoxication after administering the fix within the enclosed and private space of the scow, Necchi cultivates his own inward existential alienation. This portrayal is in tandem with Foucault's 'heterotopia *par excellence*' – the ship – which implies freedom through its association with 'the infinity of the sea' while also being 'closed in on itself' as Foucault explains: 'the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.[10]

The barge in *Young Adam* can also be considered in tandem with the concept of the heterotopic ship. The barge is unable to take advantage of 'the infinity of the sea'; instead, it is confined to carrying loads on the Forth and Clyde canal between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Joe is aware of the freedom that the combination of the ship and open sea signifies: at the start of the narrative he makes the following observation, which emphasises the closed and restricted feeling he has on the canal: 'Beyond it on the far bank, a network of cranes and girders closed in about a ship. "To sail away on a ship like that," I thought, "away. Montevideo, Macao, anywhere. What the hell am I doing here? The pale North."'[11] Furthering this notion, Joe also reveals that, 'A feeling of constriction descended on me one morning as I was touching up the

[9] Ibid., p. 13.
[10] Michel Foucault, 'Other', p. 27.
[11] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 22. In *School for Sin*, one of the protagonists Doreen equates a yacht with longing and freedom in a way that is strikingly similar to Joe's observation in *Young Adam*: 'The yacht represented freedom, freedom to flee beyond the horizon to an exciting new life and land' (p. 111).

paintwork of the barge […] The feeling of constriction remained with me all morning'; Joe finds life on the barge stifling and the repetition of 'a feeling of constriction' emphasises this.[12] Joe also confesses that 'I couldn't keep my eyes off the ships on the river, especially those which I knew would sail over the horizon into the southern hemisphere' and he is also distracted by 'the claustrophobic atmosphere' which was 'still constricted and yellow, drawn in on all sides by the black spokes of the dock'.[13] Joe is psychologically trapped on the artificially constructed canal, which parallels how he is trapped by his controversial role in Cathie's death.[14] In tandem with the notion of a lack of self-autonomy, Joe feels that, 'The more I became involved in the small world of the barge, the more I felt myself robbed of my identity'; Joe's intense isolation and lack of control over his external environment reflects the constrictiveness of the canal, which mirrors his trapped state of mind.[15] Joe's inaction on the barge is further represented: 'Often when I woke up I had a feeling that I was in a coffin'.[16] The barge as 'coffin' is clearly aligned with the heterotopic ship as Barthes 'emblem of closure', which pushes Joe towards existential death through his loss of self.[17]

While Joe in *Young Adam* is absolutely confined by the barge, in contrast, the closed and clandestine nature of the cabin in *Cain's Book* functions as a private, safe haven for Necchi. Trocchi covertly implies this at the start of the text:

when I reflected I did so repetitively and exhaustingly (often under marijuana)

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[12] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 109.

[13] Ibid., pp. 110, 111.

[14] Trocchi's text is comparable to Camus' *The Fall* (1957), which is set in the canal-centric city of Amsterdam. Interestingly, both novels were published around the same time, and the texts bear striking thematic parallels: *The Fall* is a first-person narrative monologue, which also portrays Jean-Baptiste Clemence psychological self-struggle after he witnesses a young woman jumping to her death off a bridge in Paris. Clemence, like Joe, does not attempt to save her, and Camus' canal setting reflects Clemence's constricted psychological state – he remarks, 'have you noticed that the canals of Amsterdam are like the circles of Hell?' ((London: Penguin, 2006; 1957) p. 10).

[15] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 110.

[16] Ibid., p. 67.

[17] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 66.

on the meaningless texture of the present moment, the cries of gulls, a floating spar, a shaft of sunlight, and it wasn't long before the sense of being alone overtook me and drained me of all hope of ever entering the city with its complicated relations, its plexus of outrageous purpose.[18]

Necchi's sense of space extends to the immediate surroundings of the scow cabin, but significantly it does not extend to New York's environment of productivity. Rather, Necchi's spatiality responds to his immediate, and indeed largely inward, sensory experience. Moreover, spending the evening aboard the scow with a female companion, Necchi comments, 'We talked for hours, the ambiguous presence of rain and night silence seeming to hold us closer together within the small wooden shack'.[19] Necchi rejects the outside world and outer society by forming his own alternative world on the scow: in the closed cabin he is a writer, dreamer, and junkie, but in the open space of the deck, he is a scow captain.[20] Jim Carroll's claim in his semi-autobiographical *The Basketball Diaries* (1978) – 'Ever notice how a junkie nodding begins to look like a foetus after a while?' 'That's what it's all about, man, back to the womb' – connects the space of the cabin with being, or with life, whereby it functions like the safe and intimately enclosed space of the womb.[21] This notion, of a deeply private and literally inward space, is particularly applicable to the cabin in *Cain's Book*, which functions as Necchi's womb-like retreat. Barthes claims that, 'most ships in legend or fiction are, from this point of view […] the theme of cherished seclusion'. Trocchi's narrative in *Cain's Book* parallels this typical nautical

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[18] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 12. *Plexus* is the name of a Henry Miller novel which was first published in 1953; it is possible that the use of 'plexus' in the passage is an allusion to Miller's text, which, like *Cain's Book*, was based in New York and provides a fictionalised account Miller's life in Brooklyn as he struggled to become a recognised writer before he departed for Paris in 1928.

[19] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 130.

[20] The phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard acknowledges the existential importance of what he terms 'the hut dream' whereby 'a dreamer of refuges dreams of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole' (*The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon, 1994), p. 31). Barthes' *Mythologies* also emphasises the inherently homely spatiality of the ship: 'To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one since it is unremittingly closed […]: a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport' (p. 66): the portrayal of the ship in *Cain's Book* is undoubtedly in-line with this 'homely' environment.

[21] Jim Carroll, *The Basketball Diaries*, (London: Penguin, 1978; 1963), p. 210.

portrayal.[22]

The dialectical nature of heterotopias determines that, although they are restrictive and inward, they are simultaneously places of liberation. In addition to functioning as a safe haven for Necchi's heroin use in *Cain's Book*, the scow also functions as a space for transgressive sex; Necchi spends the night with a man and on another occasion with a married woman. Necchi initiates the affair with Jake – the married woman – in the safety of the scows, and Jake herself acknowledges the protectively inward, secretive space: 'I kind of like it, the rain I mean. It isolates us. Makes you feel the rest of the world can go to hell'.[23] Trocchi also further emphasises the clandestine nature of the cabin in the narrative: Necchi describes the night with his male companion, personifies the cabin, believing that it was 'infecting us with its own secrecy', and he then admits that 'it occurred to me that it was better that way'.[24] The notion that heterotopic space enables and permits behavioural deviance is outlined by Foucault's example of the American motel as a heterotopia: 'a man goes with his car and his mistress where illicit sex is both absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden, kept isolated without ever being allowed out in the open'.[25] It is apparent that, as analogous to the motel, the isolated space of the scow consequently allows similarly secluded, 'absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden' sexual freedom. By being formed from conflicting elements, the heterotopia's unique and contradictory spatiality destabilises what is conceived as the behavioural norm in stratified society, and the scow in *Cain's Book* mirrors this by permitting otherwise 'deviant' behaviour.[26]

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[22] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 67.
[23] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 131.
[24] Ibid., p. 65.
[25] Michel Foucault, 'Other', p. 27.
[26] Robert J. Topinka, 'Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces', *Foucault Studies*, 9 (2010), pp. 54-70, p. 59.

Although the barge in *Young Adam* is primarily portrayed as restrictive, it also crucially functions as a safe space away from conventional social systems, allowing Joe to lie low and avoid the police inquiries surrounding Cathie's alleged murder. Disruption of the social norm mainly manifests in the text through the narrative of infidelity: Joe has an illicit affair with Ella, the wife of the barge's skipper Leslie, and in doing so the space of the barge (the recurrent site of the affair) consequently challenges how space typically functions in society, as aiding and embodying regulated and above-board behaviour. Moreover, by conducting the affair primarily on the site of the barge, this also allows Joe and Ella to effectively hide their passion in plain sight: on the one hand the space of the barge is so small and enclosed that Leslie can't fail to know about their affair, but on the other hand, the space is so intimate that it becomes increasingly difficult for Leslie to directly address it.

As a space of heterotopic deviance, the scow in *Cain's Book* de-bunks the traditional portrayal of the ship as a site of industry. Although Necchi is employed as a scow captain, he rarely engages in any actual labour and he is portrayed as almost always lying around: 'lying on the bunk'; 'I had been lying in the bunk for over an hour'; 'I found myself lying on my bed'; 'we lay down on the bed'; 'I spent most of my time lying on the roof of my shack'.[27] The scow is not a place of productivity but a place of idleness and experiment; it is where Necchi smokes, indulges in illicit sex, philosophises, and gets high. This portrayal of the scow responds to the conflicting duality of the nautical heterotopia, whereby 'the space of the ship is the heterotopia of modernity as crisis'.[28] On the one hand, this dualism reflects the ship's role in maintaining power and control (colonialism, imperialism etc.) while acknowledging, on the other, that the ship is also a symbol of cultural, and indeed mythical,

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[27] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 10, 65, 123, 132, 183.
[28] Casare Casarino, *Modernity At Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2002), p. 34.

imagination and freedom.[29] In *Young Adam*, Joe is similarly lazy – he and Leslie are described as frequently feeling 'a bit uncomfortable there on deck and doing nothing because Ella never seemed to stop working'.[30] Both texts' protagonists are well aware of the importance of being idle: the detached and largely autonomous space of the scow and the barge further breaks with norm of productivity and labour in capitalist society.

In heterotopological terms it is also significant that there is a fairground in *Young Adam*:

> As evening approached, Clowes came in sight: another small canal town, more industrial than Lairs.
> We noticed the fair immediately. The marquees were pitched in the fields to the left which bordered the canal, and the hurdy-gurdy music was suspended in the atmosphere for a long time before we saw them, or the stalls or the brightly painted caravans and lorries.[31]

The fairground has an odd and dreamlike quality: the music is uncannily described as being 'suspended in the atmosphere for a long time', which contrasts with the immediacy of the 'real' time in which the Joe and the others 'noticed the fair'. The fair is hinged between day and night – 'as evening approached' – adding to the strangeness of the scene, as does the double heterotopia of the barge and the fair. Indeed, Foucault outlines another type of heterotopia in 'Of Other Spaces' which specifically embodies temporal discontinuity: these 'function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time', and such heterotopias, he suggests, are cemeteries, fairgrounds, 'primitive' vacation villages, museums, and libraries.[32] The time of the fair appears analogous to what Foucault calls 'time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, […] time in the mode of

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[29] Michel Foucault, 'Other', p. 27.
[30] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 27. In 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault suggests that retirement homes are exemplars of what he terms 'heterotopias of deviation' 'since in our society where labour is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation'. (Michel Foucault, 'Other', p. 27).
[31] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[32] Ibid., p. 26.

the festival'.[33] Foucault proposes that fairgrounds are specifically heterotopic because they are 'marvellous empty sites on the outskirts of cities that teem once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclite objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers, and so forth'.[34]

To return to the passage from *Young Adam*, it is significant that after Ella 'came up from below' because 'she had heard the music', the novel immediately moves the focus from the fair to Joe's existential angst:

> Ever since she [Ella] had come on deck to hang the towels up, that feeling that she was sliding away from me had persisted like toothache all afternoon, and now her glance and the way she turned away again without a sign and without speaking confirmed my doubt.[35]

As analogous to the dislocated 'hurdy-gurdy music' in the background, Joe feels similarly 'suspended' because he is unsure of Ella's feelings towards him, and consequently he is unsure how to act. In this way, the novel again creates a subtle yet detectable dynamism between characterisation and setting; this fusion is furthered when Joe leaves the Clowes fair:

> And now suddenly, as soon as I left the others, I was conscious of being coerced no longer, and the world came to exist for me again, not as a foreign element to be looked at, but as a climate in which I could become immersed, whose parts were merely the extension of myself, or, the same thing, were continuous with me and I with them.[36]

When he is alone Joe feels that the world becomes an all-encompassing environment – or 'climate' – with which he is absolutely involved. Rather than 'a foreign element', he experiences the world as 'merely the extension of myself, or the same thing'. Joe's profound synthesis with the space of the world around him seems self-evident and reassured, but this instance is however somewhat atypical in the text: it is more often apparent that Joe experiences an unstable and ambiguous flux between self and space,

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[33] Ibid., p. 27.
[34] Ibid, p. 26.
[35] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 72.
[36] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

as echoed by the uncanny heterotopia of the fairground, and implied by Joe's apparent lack of existential security in these situations. This notion is in keeping with my findings from Chapter Two: experiencing the threatening onset of 'existential gangrene' due to his involvement in Cathie's death, Joe is forced to live inwardly and inauthentically on the barge, which in turn redefines, and problematises, his relationship with the external world.

Trocchi repeats the strange space of the fairground in *Cain's Book* in order to convey another existential moment of heterotopic flux:

> 5 a.m. Tug came for three of us before midnight. We moved line ahead over the dark water past Brooklyn towards Coney Island. My scow was at the stern of the tow. The ferris wheel was still alight. I felt rather than saw the activity as we drew nearer. Faint sounds. Suddenly round the point on our starboard side the unutterable night of the Atlantic, big, black, and menacing; there was no more light from the Jersey coast. From now until we gained the lee of Rockaway Point we were in open sea.
> I'd heard about it from some of the other scowmen but I hadn't thought much about it, how a flat-bottomed scow loaded down almost to the gunwales with a thousand ton of stone, and slung in a chain of scows behind a tug, moves when it is suddenly struck broadside by the black Atlantic.
> It struck me as funny tonight that it should take place off Coney Island in sight of the ferris wheel and all that crazy-motion machinery.[37]

The lights of the famous Coney Island ferris wheel brutally and uncannily remind Necchi that he is alone on the 'big, black, and menacing' open sea while also adding to the unsettling atmosphere. Like Coney Island, which is removed from New York's immediate vicinity in its location on the far side of Brooklyn, Necchi's placement on the scow means that he is similarly removed from civilisation: he is positioned on the outskirts. Against the backdrop of the frivolity of Coney Island, Necchi goes on to describe having 'the impression of tottering at the night edge of a flat world. Then I was going down like you go down on a rollercoaster'.[38] He then becomes 'aware of the Atlantic rising like a sheet of black ink high on my starboard and blotting out even

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[37] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 141.
[38] Ibid., p. 143.

the night sky' and admits then that 'it occurred to me that I might be about to die'.[39] Trocchi directly aligns the experience of the fairground with Necchi's terrifying on-board experience; the out-of-time and surreal spatiality of the fairground is mirrored by, but also emphasised by, Necchi's intense existential ordeal. Necchi, like the fairground that he hauntingly sees on the land, experiences a similar disruption of 'traditional time' because he is positioned so close to death aboard the scow during the storm. This notion of being suddenly close to death, is an integral element of the fairground rollercoaster experience too; the rider is aware that they are entering a potentially precarious danger zone of intensity and unpredictability. The three-way reciprocity that Trocchi renders between Necchi's experience of the storm, the scow, and the fairground, works well in the text by also furthering both characterisation and setting: as analogous to *Young Adam*, the combination of the double heterotopia of the scow and the fairground effectively emphasises Necchi's precarious and vulnerable spatially.

Aboard his mastless and engineless vessel in the ambiguous space of the sea, Necchi is unable to take control during the storm. Instead he is at the mercy of the elements because he is entirely reliant on the tugboat to which he is tied; he is however aware that the lines to the tug are also unreliable and if they failed he would be left 'without power' after which 'my scow would be so much flotsam in the Atlantic'.[40] Acknowledging that the tug must take another turn in order to secure his scow, Necchi saw that there was 'Not much of his line left, after which I in my weighted coffin would drift off alone into the night'.[41] In this way, the out-of-control scow is perhaps positioned as less akin to Foucault's elevated 'heterotopia *par excellence*', and more akin to the Ship of Fools. The Ship of Fools was first conceived

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[39] Ibid., pp. 142, 143.
[40] Ibid., p. 218.
[41] Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 144.

by Plato in Book VI of *The Republic* as a parable warning of the dangers of democracy being rendered powerless. Using the example of a ship's mutiny, Plato highlights how the usurped captain loses control over his intoxicated and unruly crew as they sail onwards whilst failing to determine their own direction: 'befuddling the worthy master with mandrake, or alcohol, or something else, they [the crew] take control of the ship and as they sail use up everything on board and drink and gorge themselves as you'd expect men like this to do'.[42] Perhaps Necchi, who is almost always intoxicated on board, is here voyaging in the manner of a 'befuddled' heroin addict: like an addict who is absolutely reliant on the drug to stabilise them and to provide their daily direction to get their fix, the scow is similarly absolutely reliant on the tugboat as its lifeline because without it, the scow is completely powerless and consequently directionless. Indeed, Necchi 'had the sense of being totally adrift', and this wordchoice is repeated when Necchi surmises that the tug ahead of him 'was prepared to risk casting me adrift'.[43] Moreover, Necchi appears to acknowledge this lack of control in direct relation to himself, while perhaps also making an indirect reference to Plato's parable: looking over notes from his work-in-progress 'Cain's Book' he reads, 'I am alone again and write it down to provide anchorage against my own mutinous winds'.[44]

Aboard the scow in *Young Adam*, Joe is a self-acknowledged 'rootless kind of man'.[45] However, it is intriguing that he connects his sense of self to the canal:

> Of all the jobs I had been forced to do I think I liked being on the canal best. You are not tied up in one place as you are if you take a job in town, and sometimes, if you can forget how ludicrously small the distances are, you get

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[42] Plato, *Republic Books 6-10,* (Harvard: Harvard College, 2013), p. 21.

[43] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 143.

[44] Ibid., p. 230. Gary A. Boyd has also identified an analogy between the barge in *Young Adam* and the 'ship of fools'. He uses Foucault's example of the *stultifera navis* from *Madness and Civilisation* to argue that the barge mirrors 'the constrained and austere environment of a late nineteenth-century institution of confinement' (see 'Alexander Trocchi' p. 52).

[45] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 110.

the impression that you are travelling. And there is something about travelling.[46]

Necchi's chaotic and intense experience of the open sea contrasts with Joe's existential lack of direction, which is partly remedied by his job on the barge. The barge continually moves him from one place to another through what Gary A. Boyd aptly calls 'the unrelenting horizontality of the canal'.[47] Indeed, it is apparent that the physical fluidity *of* the water gives Joe an essentially fluid lifestyle *on* the water – he constantly travels and is very rarely stationary – much like water itself. In contrast to Necchi's scow being rudderless and engineless, Joe's barge is propelled by power, and it is apparent that the movement of the characters, and accordingly the degree of their existential angst, is shaped by these spatial factors. The connection between Joe's identity and the water is furthered by Joe's discovery of Cathie in the Clyde. Sartre has acknowledged the connection between water and ontology: 'water is the symbol of consciousness – its movement, its fluidity, its deceptive appearance of being solid, its perpetual flight – everything in it recalls the For-itself'.[48] This is particularly true of Joe's consciousness, which is absolutely connected to the water because it is a constant reminder of Cathie: 'under the dirty lens of the sky, Leslie was looking intently towards the quay from which we had just pulled away, marking in his memory, I suppose, the stretch of water from which we had pulled the woman's corpse'.[49] Significantly, with water's symbolic properties the suspension of form is always present. This notion of formlessness is echoed by Yve-Alain Bois who suggests that, 'Liquid, even when it is sticky or consists of paste, is not elastic […] liquid does not rebound, never moves into reverse'.[50] Caught between being guilty

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[46] Ibid., p. 42.
[47] Gary A. Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi', p.150.
[48] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 631.
[49] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 41.
[50] Yve-Alain Bois, qtd. in Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1987; 1985), p. 129.

and innocent, and experiencing the onset of 'existential gangrene' that was theorised in Chapter Two, Joe is indeed formless. Like the water, which 'does not rebound, never moves into reverse', Joe is similarly unable to reverse because he is unable to change the course of events that lead to Cathie's tragic death. Consideration of heterotopias of the scow and barge in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book* has highlighted the complex relationship between the characters that dwell within these nautical spaces, as well as their relationship to the space itself. While these radical heterotopias offer Joe and Necchi an element of freedom away from society's typical rules and regulations, they can also be places of restriction and danger that, in existential terms, make the characters feel trapped and even close to death. This relationship between space, life, and death, will now be further examined by analysing how the novels' setting further reflects, and arguably shapes, the characters' sexual behaviour.

Erotic Environments: Heterotopias of Life and Death

John Pringle correctly states that 'sex is never far from death' in Trocchi's *oeuvre*; this concept is rendered in heterotopic terms by the canal's spatiality in *Young Adam*, which connects sex and death simultaneously.[51] Joe frequently observes chimneys and church towers rising up into the sky; a brick factory stack is described as 'enveloped in a stagnant mushroom of its own yellow smoke' and this use of phallic imagery figuratively suggests life, although the image also implies decay through the yellowness of the stagnant smoke – to refer back to Chapter Two, the yellowing smoke mirrors Joe's own existential impotence and stagnation.[52] Phallic imagery is repeated when later Joe sees 'the church tower of Lairs in the distance, a black cone

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[51] John Pringle, 'Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (New York: Grove, 2003), p. vi.
[52] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 41.

against a red-flecked sky':[53] in addition to the blackness which implies decay, Gary A. Boyd's insight – that Cowlairs is a Scots word to described a cemetery burial-plot – supports the concept of the canal's uncannily dualistic spatiality.[54] The canal is also eerily personified: 'Now it was dark and the water was there as a witness. It forced itself upon me, a sound, a smell, present as we walked'.[55] The canal's dominance is depicted by the description of its synesthetic qualities, and although its description as 'a witness' seems an innocent enough observation at this point in the narrative, when it is later revealed that Joe was involved with Cathie's death this has highly sinister undertones; the water was the sole witness to what actually happened between Joe and Cathie. Disturbingly, Joe also relates the industrial landscape to first finding Ella sexually attractive, revealing that, 'She had come to me suddenly, a woman hanging out washing with a vacant lot and a factory chimney in the background'.[56] The phallic image of the factory chimney again connects Ella with sex and the topography of the canal, allowing Trocchi to again fuse landscape with the physicality of the body.

This sexual association with death is developed further through the peculiar 'brainwave' that Joe experiences on day that the he discovers Cathie's corpse: 'I wanted to talk about Ella, about how she suddenly came to me, like a brainwave, on the very day we dragged the dead woman from the river'.[57] Trocchi covertly highlights Joe's lack of agency because Ella is the active subject – she 'came to him' which repeats the earlier instance where Ella 'had come to me suddenly' – phrasing which implies that aboard the barge, Joe is indeed metaphorically and literally

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[53] Ibid., p. 49.
[54] Gary A. Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi', p. 149. Moreover, it is likely that 'Lairs' is used by Trocchi to linguistically suggest 'liars'.
[55] Ibid., p. 59.
[56] Ibid., p. 35.
[57] Ibid., p. 87.

directionless and, as Chapter Two suggested, perhaps even close to existential death.[58] His admission also more than merely hints at necrophilia and is reminiscent of Georges Bataille, who has written that 'the idea of death may play a part in setting sensuality in motion'.[59] This is true of Ella and Joe's illicit affair which starts shortly after Cathie's corpse is discovered: they have sex on the barge and on the banks of the canal, which further fuses the spatiality of the canal with life, death, and subversion. Trocchi explicitly aligns sex with death in the text: 'I'm not talking about the corpse – but a kind of excitement at the edges of me. I was aware of a kind of prenatal odour in things'.[60] Georges Bataille's *Erotism* elucidates this concept, arguing that through eroticism, life and death are absolutely interwoven. On one hand, the fundamental reproductive function of sex aligns eroticism with life-giving, but on the other, Bataille argues that during sexual activity 'the personality is dead' and because of this 'man […] calls his being into question'.[61] Consequently, this act of self-annihilation and the consequent loss of ego brings those engaged in eroticism closer to death because it overrides the norm of existential estrangement from one another, what Bataille terms as 'discontinuous being'.[62] In this way, by taking humanity closer to the existential edge between life and death, sex can be viewed as a form of self-annihilation.

Sex is certainly never far from death in *Young Adam*, and this is almost immediate: 'As I leant over the edge of the barge with a boathook I didn't think of her as a dead woman, not even when I looked at the face. She was like some beautiful white water-fungus, a strange shining thing come up from the depths'.[63] The reader

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[58] Ibid., p. 35.
[59] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1987; 1957), p. 107.
[60] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 32.
[61] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, pp. 106, 29.
[62] Ibid., p. 12.
[63] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 20.

first encounters the canal under these horrifying and macabre circumstances, which clearly connects the canal, the barge, and the human flotsam; it is apparent that the canal is rendered as an uncanny and subversive space, where life and death are intimately fused. Cathie's corpse is also eerily portrayed as hinged between life and death: rather than being 'a dead woman' Joe instead sees her as alive with a degree of agency – she had 'come up from the depths' – but her 'whiteness' is undoubtedly ghostly.[64] This fusion is further symbolised by Cathie's corpse: Joe and Cathie have sex on the night she dies and it is also later revealed that she was pregnant – as Joe remarks, 'It gave me a strange feeling to know that I would never know whose child died with her in the river'.[65] Bataille argues that sex comprises an existential 'crisis' because it 'calls into question the feeling of self', and he also claims that 'death is the result of the sexual crisis only in exceptional cases', but the significance of these is admittedly striking, so much so that the exhaustion following the final paroxysm is colloquially coined 'little death' in French.[66] Expanding this concept of the orgasm, Bataille explains: 'Inevitably linked with the moment of climax there is a minor rupture suggestive of death'.[67] Although corresponding to Bataille's model of eroticism as 'assenting to life up to the point of death', Cathie goes even further by

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[64] Throughout *Young Adam* all of the female characters are rendered ghostly white: Joe remembers 'the whiteness of her [Cathie's] hips against the dark wood' (p. 95) on the night that she dies. Ella is described as clambering 'bigly and whitely from the bunk […] the flesh I thought I knew […] was presented anonymously as an amorphous mass of grey-white, yellowing at its edges and pitted like a pumice stone' (p. 108). Ella's sister Gwendoline has 'thin white legs', her breasts are 'long and white and pulpy' (p. 114), and her hair's 'auburn colour made her face appear very white' (p. 118). This imagery is extended:

> Even in the spring sunshine she had that damp white look about her which some women have, so that you think that if you brushed the palm of your hand over her skin it would come away quite wet, the kind of pallor which makes you think of sickrooms and flannel underwear […] She would be white all over, white with a few pink parts where she had sat down or where her belt chafed, a long white root with a tuft of brittle auburn fuzz at the centre' (p. 118).

In addition to connoting illness and degeneration, it is also possible that white imagery is used to suggest the women's innocence, perhaps particularly in the case of Cathie, whose surname is the rather unflattering Dimly. The repeated white imagery also makes the women seem somewhat indistinguishable to the reader while implying that they are interchangeable to Joe.

[65] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 101.

[66] Ibid., p. 20.

[67] Ibid., p. 107.

becoming a literal embodiment of this; she experiences the orgasmic 'minor' or 'little death', and afterwards, actual death. Furthering the importance of death, Bataille has also written of the relationship between murder and eroticism:

> the Marquis de Sade in his novels defined murder as a pinnacle of erotic excitement […] Eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous existence is not condemned in spite of Sade; it is only jolted. It has to be jarred and shaken to its foundations.[68]

Cathie's death or murder (it is not made clear to the reader which it is) undoubtedly corresponds to the Marquis de Sade's perverse sensibility, which conceives murder as the ultimate and climactic act of erotic stimulation.[69] Subversion of what Bataille calls 'established patterns' and 'regulated social order' is therefore doubly evident through the heterotopic space of the dockside where Cathie dies, and also through her possible murder, which occurs immediately after 'a man [Joe] has sexual intercourse with a woman [Cathie] in somewhat unseemly circumstances'.[70]

Like the space of the heterotopic canal, Cathie and Joe's relationship is fundamentally hinged upon the dangerous dynamic between life and death that Bataille describes. Indeed, he also claims that 'erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea'.[71] Trocchi represents this almost literally in the text, by creating a reciprocity between 'the waves of a stormy sea' and the lovers' sexual relationship. When Joe describes Cathie's death, he explains why he 'knew she couldn't swim' by describing a past experience:

> A summer's day perhaps, not far from shore somewhere off the west coast, and we would be lying naked on the bottom boards under the seats. She was more passionate that way than any other, because she knew she couldn't swim, because our erotic struggle in the drifting boat represented for her a life and

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[68] Ibid., p. 18.
[69] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 87.
[70] Ibid., p. 87.
[71] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, p. 87.

death matter. It was not only her body which prostrated itself in the flimsy shell of the dinghy. It was her life she gambled with, uttering little screams of delirious pleasure when a chance wave decapitated itself on the gunwale and splashed like quicksilver about her buttocks.

[…] Undoubtedly it was because of the kind of compact which had always existed between our mating and water. She attained an ectacsy through terror of it, on more than one occasion she said, even if thereby she was simply giving into her penchant for melodrama, she felt that was how she would die, overtaken in sex by water. She was not entirely mistaken.[72]

Joe's flashback renders a direct interplay between Cathie's sexual experience and the outer environment: the waves are part of her erotic pleasure, and her inability to swim heightens not only the danger but also her desire. Indeed, this connection between water and desire evokes Joe and Cathie's very first encounter on an unspecified beach on Scotland's west coast.[73] In the dinghy it is clear that Cathie experiences an erotic thrill by being pushed to the existential edge between life and death, and Bataille once again renders a connection between orgasm and death that can be applied to Cathie's experience: 'fear of dying makes us catch our breath and in the same way we suffocate at the moment of crisis'.[74] The surreal spatiality of the dinghy, which encompasses elements of Foucault's quintessential heterotopia, also emphasises and validates the fusion of life and death that the lovers experience on the water. It is clear that the subversive spatiality of the heterotopia is often connected to the characters' behaviour within such space; indeed, a notable synthesis is apparent, whereby the space seems to support 'deviant' behaviour involving narcotic and/or sexual excess, which, when taken to their extreme, are connected to the existential extremes of life and death. These ideas will now be further analysed by taking into account how the characters experience the land, or, more aptly, the 'edgeland' in

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[72] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 90.

[73] This particular scene is arguably reminiscent of the pivotal murder on the beach in Camus' *L'Étranger* (1942) and it is revealing that Joe continually describes himself on the beach as a stranger to Cathie: 'I was a stranger', 'As a stranger I was afraid of going too fast' (p. 47), and 'we were strangers again' (p. 48). If this intertextuality with Camus is intentional, then it further evidences how sex and death are fused in Trocchi's narrative.

[74] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, p. 104.

Young Adam and *Cain's Book*.

'Untranslated Landscape': Exploring the Edgelands

In *Young Adam* Joe makes a revealing observation about life on the canal:

> It was good to be standing there at the wheel with the flat green and brown fields stretching on either side as far as the horizon. At that point the landscape was almost treeless and the view across the fields was uninterrupted. The sun was strong and the yellow-black canal water reacted to it, glowing behind us as it peeled off the bilges in long, black flakes. The wheel was warm with the sun. Everything seemed far away, events as well as things, and I almost forgot the plumber and the dead woman and Leslie and even the two women who were below.[75]

In this characteristically descriptive passage, Trocchi draws attention to the notion of the canal as diverging from the norm. Joe feels that 'everything seemed far away, events as well as things' and due to its dense multi-clause structure, the prose's slow feel, coupled with the dreamlike imagery, furthers the notion of the canal somehow existing out of normal time. Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' recent study *Edgelands* parallels this notion of the canal breaking with the norm: fundamentally, their text translates what they believe is widely regarded as the 'untranslatable', in a series of studies focusing on various examples of edgelands; canals, landfill sites, wasteland, woodland, bridges, and more. Farley and Symmons Roberts claim that 'life on a canal seems to offer an escape from convention and restriction' and this is undoubtedly what Joe seems to experience in the edgelands.[76] For Joe, the canal appears to provide some sort of refuge, in which he 'almost forgot the plumber and the dead woman': this representation of the edgeland is particularly disturbing, because 'the plumber' is in fact Daniel Goon, the innocent man on trial for the

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[75] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 117.

[76] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 118.

"murder" of Cathie, 'the dead woman'.[77] The emotionally detached reference to both

Goon and Cathie also functions to emphasise the dreamlike canal, which in spatial

terms, is detached from Glasgow where the trial is taking place.

In further consideration of the passage from *Young Adam*, it is significant that

the text subtly creates menace in what appears to be an otherwise idyllic scene: the

'yellow-black canal water' hints at decay and darkness below the surface, as does the

sun's rays which 'peeled off the bilges in long, black flakes'.[78] Farley and Symmons

Roberts have also examined water in the edgelands, and they similarly associate water

with menace and mystery:

> Deep standing water fascinates because of what it might contain, because of the
> riddle of depth and a corresponding, deep-seated idea of the bottomless. […]
> The surfaces that give back only our leaden, flake-white skies seem to be hiding
> something, thoughts that lead us down, down.[79]

The possibility of something lurking below the surface in the water parallels the

dramatic beginning of the *Young Adam*, when Joe fishes out Cathie's corpse from the

River Clyde. It is significant that Cathie died on the edge of the Clyde in Glasgow,

which mirrors Farley and Symmons Robert's haunting description of edgeland water:

> Perhaps an hour had passed since Cathie had disappeared in the water. If not at
> the beginning, it was certainly too late now. In my hesitation did I commit
> murder?
>   I stepped closer to the edge for the last time and looked down at the water.
> Still no sign of her. The water was smooth and black with lights like fish scales
> glimmering where a street-or bridge-lamp was reflected, smooth as though
> smoothed by a plasterer's trowel.[80]

The imagery employed further emphasises this notion of menace: the water is

impermeable yet also mirror-like, and the allusion to the plasterer's trowel implies

that the 'smooth' surface of the water conceals the terrible mystery below. It is also

significant that Trocchi seamlessly merges Joe's existential experience of Cathie's

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[77] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 117.
[78] Ibid., p. 42.
[79] Paul Farely and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, pp. 73-4.
[80] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 95.

death with physical description of the dockside: just as Cathie had spatially stepped over the edge to her death, Joe describes how in his consequent confusion, he existentially *and* physically 'stepped closer to the edge'. The reciprocity between the edge of the dock (a double edgeland), and Joe's existential crisis is both haunting and effective, adding to the intensity of the situation.

Farley and Symmons Roberts also highlight the ramifications of the edgelands being inherently invisible:

> At their most unruly and chaotic, edgelands make a great deal of our official wilderness seem like the enshrined, ecologically arrested, controlled garden space it really is. Children and teenagers, as well as lawbreakers, have seemed to feel especially at home in them, the former because they have yet to establish a sense of taste and boundaries, and have instinctively treated their jungle spaces as a vast playground; the latter because no one is looking.[81]

As the authors argue, the edgelands are 'jungle' places that exist outside civil society precisely 'because no one is looking'. This lack of recognition, and thus of regulation, has meant that 'lawbreakers' have frequently sought out these 'invisible' places for protection and refuge away from the law. Marion Shoard, who first coined the term 'edgelands', has echoed this, acknowledging 'the subversiveness of interfacial land' which she also describes as 'a vaguely menacing frontier land hinting that here the normal rules governing human behavior cannot be altogether relied upon'.[82] This reciprocity, between the invisibility and criminality of the edgeland, is particularly pertinent to *Young Adam*: through Cathie's death at the Glasgow dockside, Joe is such a 'lawbreaker' who finds invisibility in the wild of the edgelands. In the actual instance of her death, Joe is indeed unseen, and later, on the canal, he is able to get away from Glasgow. He again muses on life on the canal:

> Now, it is boring when you get used to it to crawl along a canal, to wait for a lock to open, for water to level, but you see some interesting things too, like the

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[81] Paul Farely and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 8.
[82] Marion Shoard, 'Edgelands', p. 9, Marion Shoard <www.marionshoard.co.uk>, [accessed 12 September 2013].

cyclists on the footpath where a canal runs through a town, and kids playing, and courting couples. You see a lot of them, especially after dusk, and in the quiet places where there is no footpath and where they have had to climb a fence to get to. Perhaps it's the water that attracts them as much as the seclusion, and of course the danger. […] You seldom see them: just voices.[83]

Once again the canal is geographically portrayed as an ambiguous edgeland: it is a 'quiet place' on the edge of civilisation offering uncharted space and the appeal of seclusion and danger. The invisibility of the edgelands can also be connected to the generic quality of these spaces: it is striking how similar the edgelands in Northern England set forth by Farley and Symmons Roberts are to the central Scotland edgelands in *Young Adam*. In *Cain's Book*, which as I will argue is also set largely on edgelands, it is revealing that Necchi actually acknowledges this notion by remarking that Port Aboy, New Jersey, 'reminded me of the North Sea in a fog, of Hull or Sheerness, places like that on the east coast of England'.[84] Also in the pornographic novel *Thongs*, Trocchi's description of Glasgow's docks as 'the rambling metropolis of shipyards, engineering works, mining and construction companies, and endless factories' is analogous to the New York dockland descriptions in *Cain's Book*.[85] Indeed, as Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires assert, 'it is not spaces which ground identifications, but places' and by being detached from any tangible or rooted sense of place, the edgelands are rendered as strangely universal 'non-places': they could in fact be anywhere.[86]

These portrayals are in tandem with Trocchi's reflections upon scow life in New York: 'We were the lowest form of animal life on the waterfront. It was regarded as a job into which no-goods and all kinds of vagabonds from the sea were washed up on

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[83] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 41.
[84] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 149.
[85] Alexander Trocchi, *Thongs*, (Disruptive, 2004), pp. 5-6.
[86] Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds), 'Introduction', in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. xvii.

this particular beach'.[87] Indeed, edgelands also appear frequently in *Cain's Book* and

Necchi can also be viewed as a 'lawbreaker': as a heroin addict, he is absolutely

alienated and exists on the outside of society. This sense of isolation permeates

Necchi's description of the edgelands:

> At 33rd street Pier 72. At the waterfront there are few buildings and they are
> low. The city is in the background. It has diners at its edge, boxcars abandoned
> and stored, rails amongst grass and gravel, vacant lots. The trucks of moving
> and storage companies are parked and stunted under the tunnels of an area of
> broad deserted shadows, useful for murder or rape. The wharves jut forward
> into the Hudson River like the stunted uneven teeth of a prehistoric jaw. The
> George Washington Bridge is in the north. After eight, when the diners close,
> the dockside streets are fairly deserted. In winter the lights under the elevated
> roadway shine as in a vast and dingy shed, dimly reflecting its own emptiness.
> An occasional car moves in from the dark side of the crosstown streets, turns
> into the feebly-lit dockyard area, travels ten or twenty blocks south, and then
> moves out, outwards again into the city.[88]

The dockyard is a desolate and menacing no-man's land after 8pm, useful only for

violent attack. Although it is separated from normal time and rendered as absolutely

dislocated from city life, the imagery employed by Trocchi lacks the dreamlike

descriptions of the canal in *Young Adam*. Instead, through the allusion to the bridge as

the dinosaur, the dockland is described as being almost prehistoric, implying that it is

a place far removed from time and from life. Farley and Symmons Roberts' claim that

the edgelands are merely passing places is also paralleled by Trocchi by the instance

of the car, which briefly enters the docklands before heading back towards the city: it

is indeed a place 'seen, but not looked at'. The dockland is also more viscerally and

literally an edgeland than the *Young Adam* canal because the dock is literally on the

edge of the land and the sea.

Farley and Symmons Robert's officially include docksides as edgeland by

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[87] Alexander Trocchi, in Chris Robbins, 'Alex Trocchi: A Cosmonaut of Inner Space', *Time Out*, 23 November 1972, pp. 20-22, p. 21. Although he is commenting upon his actual life, Trocchi's allusion to a body washing up on a beach arguably evokes the narrative of *Young Adam*. In this regard, I would suggest that Trocchi seeks to narrate a blurring of art and life in this interview.

[88] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 15.

asking, 'So where do the edgelands end? […] As an island people, we have our own ideas of edges, and […] we have developed our own very particular coastal edgelands'.[89] *Cain's Book* responds to the concept of 'very particular coastal edgelands':

> sitting on the handpump on the port quarter of the scow whose starboard side is swinging just free of the docks, and the dung-coloured water sliding away smoothly, horizontally, before your eye. On it, a tanker. Beyond it, and to either side of it, low brown and green countryside, low bridges, concrete piles, elevated roads with automobiles like little ladybirds running across them, and squat and strutted things, trucks, gas-tanks, telegraph poles, scows, gravel, endless concrete, low, flat, dispersed, representing, dear reader, man's functional rape of unenviable countryside, marginal flat and bogland.[90]

The word choice of rape further conveys the violence of the edgelands, and as before, the docklands are absolutely empty of humanity. The long list of things emphasises Necchi's alienation by highlighting the absolute absence of anything human, and rather than feeling an affinity with the landscape, the reportage-style prose suggests that Necchi is simultaneously overwhelmed and underwhelmed with the surrounding industrial chaos. In existential terms, the passage also draws attention to Necchi's problematic subject status: there is a distinct lack of engagement from Necchi towards the external environment, i.e. things that he perceives. Indeed, the passage posits Necchi as a passive spectator, and, as a heroin addict, Necchi's body does indeed lack existential energy (and, as I argued in Chapter Two, physical self-identity), which affects his ability to fully engage with the external world. Marion Shoard has written of the disconnection between and self and surroundings:

> These jungles of marshaling yards and gasometers, gravel-pits, water-works, and car scrapyards seem no more than repositories for functions we prefer not to think about. Their most obvious components are things we have brought up to think of as blots on the landscape. The apparently random pattern in which they

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[89] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 261.

[90] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 148. Trocchi's passage also explicitly emphasises the 'horizontal' axis of Necchi's perspective of his environment, which responds to Tom McCarthy's statement that space for Trocchi is indeed 'always flat' ('Foreward' p. vi). Indeed, Necchi goes on to describe the scene as 'flat and deserted' (see Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 48).

are assembled seems to defy the concepts of orderly planning by humans and in harmony of nature.[91]

It is perhaps unsurprising that Necchi fails to relate positively to his surroundings when faced with a landscape that Shoard theorisies as fundamentally inhuman; indeed, Trocchi's prose undoubtedly depicts the industrial landscape as dehumanised 'blots'. The description also renders Necchi on the edge of the 'dung-coloured water' on one side and 'low brown and green countryside' on the other. In this sense, Necchi is in a non-place; the scow is suspended between land and sea, with both seeming as impersonal and alienating as the other.

By focusing on the unusual spaces of the barge and scow, the canal, and the edgelands, this chapter has argued that the subversion implicit in the heterotopia reflects, and sometimes even supports and shapes, the characters' behaviour within these complex spaces. This reciprocity between radical space and nonconformist behaviour responds to what Foucault outlines as 'heterotopias of deviance: those [spaces] in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed'.[92] In both *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*, the space of the heterotopia is typically bound up with deviant conduct such as illicit sexual acts, narcotic intoxication, and perhaps even murder: while these acts are subversive in-themselves, it is significant that they take place in 'heterotopias of deviance' which not only house, but even facilitate, such rebellious behaviour. Yet heterotopic space is not always portrayed as existentially advantageous in the texts. Although the canal, the edgelands, and the barge in *Young Adam* enable Joe to lie low away from police enquiries, in the these subversive spaces he often fails to experience meaning in existential terms, while similarly in *Cain's Book*, the endlessly brutal landscape of the

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[91] Marion Shoard, 'Edgelands', p. 2.
[92] Michel Foucault, 'Other Spaces', p. 25.

edgeland docks and Necchi's 'Ship of Fools' experience on the scow fail to positively impact upon his existential experience because they push him further towards an alienated existence, and even death.

'Existential Space': Reading Heterotopias Phenomenologically

The inner existential experience of the characters has been theorised in this chapter by examining the relationship between the characters' subversive behaviour and the heterotopic space in which they are situated. Yet Casare Casarino suggests that 'if heterotopias are particular conceptualisations of space, then […] a heterotopia will necessitate a reconfiguration of specific social practices of space, that is, of specific articulations of bodies in space'.[93] Casarino highlights the role of the body in the redefinition of space from the stable space of the status quo to the subversive space of heterotopic flux. In order to investigate how Trocchi's characters experience heterotopic subversion in bodily terms, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's model of phenomenology – which emphasises how the 'body-subject' experiences the world – will now be used to further examine the existential impact and ramifications of Joe and Necchi's heterotopic spatiality in *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1948), Merleau-Ponty suggests that, through perception, human experience is implicitly active, which emphasises the primacy of the first-person subject – what he calls the 'body-subject' – to his overall method: this makes his ideas particularly interesting because, for Joe in *Young Adam* and Necchi in *Cain's Book*, their status as 'body-subjects' is problematised. Joe is on the run from the law for his involvement in Cathie's death, and this situation forces him to live an existentially 'inauthentic' existence by hiding out on the barge which limits how he

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[93] Casare Casarino, *Modernity At Sea,* p. 35.

physically and psychologically experiences the space around him, while Necchi's intensely inward sensibility of willful intoxication renders him an alienated 'divided self' because he often fails to recognise his own body.[94] Drawing upon these ideas, it will now be argued that the destablised spatiality of the heterotopia furthers the characters' existential alienation because their experience of the subversive and heterotopic spatiality is rooted in the body, as well as in their mind.[95]

Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'space is existential; we might just as well have said that existence is spatial'.[96] Both Merleau-Ponty's and Foucault's models of space highlight the link between the 'space in which we live' and existential experience, yet Foucault's model potentially problematises Merleau-Ponty's because discordance rather than harmony is central due to heterotopia's inherently dichotomised spatiality. Foucault's heterotopic space is implicitly connected to the 1960s being 'the epoch of space', which he defines as 'the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed'.[97] Foucault's theory proposes a relationship between self and space based not on fixed synthesis but on dynamism and flux, whereas in contrast, Merleau-Ponty's basic proposition is of 'embodied perception', the notion that space and perception are vitally and harmoniously experienced by the body, or the human subject's 'bodily being': 'Space and perception generally represent, at the core of the subject, the fact that his birth, the perpetual contribution

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[94] Please return to Chapter Two for more on these points.

[95] John Pringle acknowledges the centrality of phenomenology to Trocchi's university education:

> [Trocchi] was a brilliant student of English and Philosophy at Glasgow University at a time when its Philosophy department was more in touch with continental philosophies of identity and subjectivity – existentialism and phenomenology – than its English counterparts.

('Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, (New York: Grove, 2003), p. vii).
Trocchi's interest in phenomenology as a philosophical framework is also evident from an undated and unpublished essay, entitled 'Knowledge and Perception', which sets out to question 'the epistemological status of perceptual experience' (St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 5 Fol. 53, un.pag.). Although this is undated it is written on the back of biology handouts on bacterial infections; it can consequently be surmised that the essay was written while Trocchi was at school or at university.

[96] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 2002; 1945), p. 342.

[97] Ibid., p. 22.

of his bodily being, [is] a communication with the world more ancient than thought'.[98]

In a radically anti-Cartesian stance, this 'bodily being' enables the subject to connect with, and experience, an affirmative relationship with the environment. As he explains, 'the system of experience is not arrayed before me as if I were God; it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator, I am involved'.[99] Addressing the relationship between what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'body-subject' and the world, Merleau-Ponty suggests:

> In so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and into which draws my body. I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space or time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.[100]

Merleau-Ponty emphasises that human existence is fused with space and time to the extent that they 'belong' to the 'body-subject', rather than being experienced consciously. Phenomenology is therefore crucially rooted in the following idea: 'I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself'.[101] Merleau-Ponty argues that being is positively affirmed when the subject diverges away from the inner psychological realm and 'moves out towards' the external environment through bodily interaction. This kinetic notion implies that bodily energy is part of the basic existential exchange between the self and space, and indeed, he expands on this concept, claiming that 'in so far as the natural space talked about by traditional psychology is by contrast reassuring and self-evident, this is because existence rushes towards it, and being

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[98] Ibid., p. 296. Merleau-Ponty was primarily influenced by an array of thinkers including Husserl, Bergson, Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre (see Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 423).
[99] Ibid., p. 354.
[100] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 162.
[101] Ibid., p. ix.

absorbed in it, is unaware of itself'.[102] The importance of energy once again emphasises the notion that being comes from an active engagement with the world, where one is implicitly 'involved'.

On the night that Cathie drowns in the River Clyde, Joe describes the water as 'inscrutable'.[103] In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological terms, the ambiguity inherent in how Joe perceives the water indicates that his existential experience is the opposite of the typically positive relationship between the individual as the 'body-subject' and space. Writing of the relationship between the subject and the world, Merleau-Ponty claims that 'only ambiguous perceptions emerge as explicit acts: perceptions, that is, to which we ourselves give significance through the attitude which we take up, or which answer questions we put to ourselves'.[104] Joe's impression of the water as unknowable is not an actual property of the water as an object in the world; rather, it is his own subjective *perception* of the water due to the 'question' that is on his mind at that time – what has happened to Cathie *in* the water and whether he is responsible.[105] Merleau-Ponty further explains:

> If the world is taken in itself everything is determined. There are many unclear sights, as for example a landscape on a misty day, but then we always say that no real landscape is in itself unclear. It is only for us. The object, psychologists would assert, is never ambiguous, but becomes so only through our attention.[106]

Consequently, the water in itself – like Ponty's example of the landscape in itself – is not inherently unknowable because its essence is already determined: it is only ambiguous to Joe because he perceives it, and therefore experiences it, to be so.

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[102] Ibid., p. 335.
[103] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 95.
[104] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 328.
[105] Merleau Ponty furthers this idea of reciprocity between landscape, perception, and subjectivity: 'A schizophrenic patient, in the mountains, stops before a landscape. After a short time he feels a threat hanging over him, as if a question were being put to him from outside to which he could find no answer. […] Hence the schizophrenic questioning: everything is amazing, absurd or unreal, because the impulse of existence towards things has lot its energy, because it appears to itself in all its contingency and because the world can no longer be taken for granted' (Maurice-Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 335).
[106] Ibid., p. 7.

Farley and Symmons Roberts have written that the edgelands 'often contained decay and stasis, but could also be dynamic and deeply mysterious', and this heterotopic doubleness, where edgelands can simultaneously be stagnant yet also in flux, certainly corresponds with the representation of the canal as indeterminate in *Young Adam*:[107]

> By the time I reached the canal everything was silent except for the ambiguous presence of the canal itself. There is a noise peculiar to inland water at night, a kind of radiation that is not exactly sound and not exactly smell; it is closer to touch; its being touches one at the pores.[108]

Adding to the already established dreamlike realm of the canal where menace is covertly suggested by the allusion to radiation, the highly kinaesthetic imagery – kinaesthesia being the sense through which bodily position, weight, or movement is perceived – again signifies Joe's confusion and existential disconnection, which is mirrored by 'the ambiguous presence of the canal itself'. In phenomenological terms, Trocchi's kinaesthetic prose is particularly significant because Merleau-Ponty also argues that by being a 'body-subject' with the ability to engage with the external world through the senses, this sensory interaction allows us to know both the world and ourselves because fundamentally we are subjects in the world.[109] Merleau-Ponty states: 'Man is in the world' whereby 'the theory of sensation, which builds up all knowledge out of the determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute'.[110] Accordingly, the description of the canal water problematises Merleau-Ponty's proposition, because rather than Joe being 'a subject of touch', the canal is instead rendered as the subject (or as Joe terms it a 'being'), which 'touches' the objectified Joe.[111]

To recap, then, Joe has lost his connection with the world because he is

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[107] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 7.
[108] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 80.
[109] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology,* p. xii.
[110] Ibid., p. 13.
[111] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 369.

rendered as a passive receiver rather than an actively engaged 'body-subject'. Consequently he perceives, and thus experiences, the opposite of the phenomenologically affirmative premise whereby 'objects [are] purged of all ambiguity'. Further theorising the concept of severed connection between the 'body-subject' and environment, Merleau-Ponty claims that when 'the thing holds itself aloof from us and remains self-sufficient […] it is then hostile and alien, no longer an interlocutor, but a resolutely silent Other, a Self which evades us no less than does intimacy with an outside consciousness'.[112] In this way, the canal – 'the thing' – does indeed evade Joe, who struggles to comprehend it and his relation to it. Merleau-Ponty writes, 'I am the source', but this is not the case with Joe; on the heterotopic edgeland, his subjective status as an active being in the world is inherently destabilised.

The hanged man is an important leitmotif throughout Trocchi's writing trajectory to the extent that Edwin Morgan identifies that it is one of Trocchi's 'incidental similarities'.[113] While the symbol of the hanged man in-itself is not heterotopic, the unusual spatiality of the body in a hanged position fundamentally is. By being suspended in an unnatural position between earth and sky, the atypical spatiality of the body corresponds with what Foucault outlines as 'crisis' heterotopias: spaces of ritualistic practices 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'.[114] Trocchi undoubtedly executes the hanged man to symbolically suggest the fate of the criminal sentenced to death, and hanging is indeed an ancient and ritualistic practice. Where the hanged man connotes the brutal fate of the criminal, the unique spatiality of death

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[112] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 376.
[113] Edwin Morgan, 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey' in *Edinburgh Review,* 70 (1985), p. 56. The symbol of the hanged man also appears in *Cain's Book*, but its inclusion is less obvious than in *Young Adam*.
[114] Michel Foucault, 'Other Spaces', p. 24.

by suspension relates to Foucault's concept of the individual being situated in a ritualistic heterotopic space – and existential state – of 'crisis'.

Trocchi implies the notion of hanging early on in *Young Adam*, which he then later develops to explicit effect. It is first suggested in part one of the text, when Joe makes a seemingly standard observation from the deck of the barge: 'I could see a boom raised ahead in the distance. It looked very awkward perched there in mid-air like a sign that meant nothing but was black in the thin meagre afternoon light'.[115] Joe acknowledges the uncomfortable, 'awkward' position of the ship's boom in its suspension half way between sea and sky. This heterotopic position has an eerie significance; although Joe thinks at the time that it looked 'like a sign that meant nothing', the boom's position is arguably analogous to that of a body on a noose. This 'sign' then, if taken to suggest hanging by the gallows, ironically turns out to have a horrible connection; in addition to its destablised spatiality, the hanged man as a symbol covertly highlights the impending sense of doom that Joe feels as he struggles to come to terms with the trial of the innocent Daniel Goon for the alleged 'murder'. Therefore, by hinting towards 'crisis' heterotopic spatiality, the boom's liminal position reflects into Joe's own immediate phenomenological disconnection and his larger existential predicament.

This synthesis is continued when hanging is implied again through Trocchi's covert use of imagery in Part Three, when Joe finally abandons Ella and leaves the barge. He rents a temporary room in Glasgow, which he describes as follows: 'the bits of furniture seemed to be suspended in mid-air and I had the impression that I was within a shaft with unsubstantial furniture around me, and that below, where no floor

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[115] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 42.

was, the shaft continued downwards without sensible bottom'.[116] Joe's bizarrely sinister vision of the room-as-gallows occurs on the night before the first court date, and it arguably reflects his anxious, guilt-ridden state of mind because he is aware that Goon, if found guilty, would be sentenced to death. The following day, propelled by a mixture of guilt and a perverse curiosity, Joe consults an issue of the *British Medical Journal* at an unspecified 'large public library', in which he reads the entry on hanging.[117] As akin to the boom that Joe somewhat innocently saw on the canal, the entry on hanging also implies a heterotopic spatiality because in its hanged position, the corpse is suspended in an uncanny and unsettling state that subverts the normal spatial order of the body. Existing in a space of heterotopic 'crisis' by rejecting the normal grounding of the body on terra firma, the disturbing spatiality of the hanged man's body in its suspended position responds to Joe's own unstable existential position: he too is suspended as he waits to find out the fate of Goon, and indeed, this is consistent with the novel's narrative development, which climatically builds to the final court scene when Goon is found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, then, the suspension inherent in Joe's psychological state, implied by the recurrent symbol of the hanged man, shows how Joe is caught in a cycle of ambiguity where what he perceives – as a passive and destabilised 'body-subject' – is fundamentally a direct projection of his own anxious and heightened subjectivity.

When Necchi acknowledges the external world in *Cain's Book* it is usually to pass critique: 'a man is contradicted by the external world when, for example, he is hanged'.[118] Indeed, Trocchi highlights the complex relationship between external space and existential disconnection in the following example, when Necchi narrates

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[116] Ibid., p. 137.
[117] Ibid., p. 49.
[118] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 39.

how in Manhattan he saw a man go into an alleyway to urinate, which through

'external stimuli; the lane, the man, the pale light, the flash of silver' pushed him to

'the ecstatic edge of something to be known'.[119] The silver knife blade, Necchi

reveals, came 'from earlier; it was a long time ago in my own country'.[120] Trocchi

then uses flashbacks to detail how, back in Glasgow, Necchi had similarly seen a man

go into a lane, which made him experience 'faint lust at my belly'.[121] Tom McCarthy

describes the instant in the lane as 'a kind of Proust-moment of perception',[122] and

indeed, Necchi is described as being 'like a piece of sensitive photographic paper,

waiting passively to the shock of impression'.[123] Despite such apparent 'longing' for

phenomenological engagement with, and consequent understanding of his

environment, it is revealing that rather than acting on his desire with the man, Necchi

is instead passive:

> If I had had the nerve I might have approached him there and then instead of
> following him into the bar but there was no kinetic quality in my hesitation. It
> lay on me like an impotence, cloying, turning my feet to lead. It was my
> cowardice which shattered me.[124]

Merleau-Ponty asserts that the relationship between subject and space is utterly

dependent on the 'energy with which he [the 'body-subject'] tends towards a future

through his body and his world'.[125] Necchi's utter lack of 'kinetic quality' – and

therefore energy – means his body is unable to properly experience what he perceives,

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[119] Ibid., p. 44.

[120] Ibid., p. 44. In the pornographic novel *Thongs*, Trocchi renders an even more explicit fusion between Glasgow's violent knife culture, sex, and death; his protagonist Gertrude Gault is the daughter of 'the Razor King'. When Gertrude leaves Glasgow to become a 'pain mistress' in Spain, the link between violence, death, and eroticism is furthered again.

[121] Ibid., p. 46.

[122] Tom McCarthy, 'Foreword', p. viii. McCarthy also aptly calls this passage 'Phenomenology in action' because 'what drives him [Necchi] is a longing for the world to unpack itself before us, to take form and resolution, like an image looming into view from murky liquid in a dark room'. Through this figurative image, McCarthly fittingly uses the photographic negative to tie in with what he calls Trocchi's utterly negative […] space' ('Introduction', in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. viii).

[123] Ibid., p. 46.

[124] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 46.

[125] Ibid., pp. 329-30.

which leaves him feeling 'impotent' while disconnected from himself *and* the environment. This passivity is exemplified by his objectification of being like photographic paper, and in the presence of the knife blade which risks violence and death, Necchi's lack of affirmative synthesis with the environment makes him feel disappointed and dehumanised. The ambiguity of the experience is further suggested when Joe asks, 'Did I invent the glint of silver?': he cannot remember.[126] The instance of the man in the lane perfectly exemplifies how Necchi avoids existential action by avoiding any phenomenal interaction with the space around him. Accordingly, the environment is represented as a reflection of Necchi's disconnected state of body and mind: after describing the 'darkening indigo' sky he feels that 'on such a night as this werewolves were abroad and the ambulances of death run riot in the streets'.[127]

Necchi's rejection of bodily engagement with the world markedly contrasts with Joe's experience in an earlier unpublished draft of *Young Adam*. Although Joe appears to experience a loss of phenomenal identity that is connected to the heterotopic space around him (the barge), it is revealing that he regards kinetic engagement with his surroundings as the means to combat his sense of dislocation:

> I'd been thinking of the sea under a hot sun and I'd written a sentence something like 'It's only when you plunge your hand into the sea that you know that it is living and deathless even against the sun.' Now, whatever merits that sentence had, it set me thinking. I read it over and over again. And then something struck me. I don't know whether anyone has ever remarked upon it before, but at that moment I was struck by the fact that sight is hypnotised by the surface of things, more than that; within narrow limits it was compelled to have intercourse only with surfaces – with flatnesses at a distance, with meagre depths at close range. I said to myself when I looked at the sea I thought it was dead but that I knew it was still living because I felt its life in my hand. Why did

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[126] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 46. Addressing Trocchi's *oeuvre*, Andrew Hodgson claims that 'rather than meet the ambiguous space he [Trocchi] inhabits, the dosshouses, the rundown neighborhoods, the scenes of death and decay; he attempts to escape them'. See Andrew Hodgson, 'Between the Tundra and the Ocean', *Equus Press*, <http://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/between-the-tundra-and-the-ocean/> [accessed 15 November 2012]

[127] Ibid., p. 46.

> I trust the sense of touch rather than the sense of sight? I could quite easily have said that when I touched it I thought it was alive but when I saw it I knew it was dead. But that wouldn't have been true. I knew that it was alive as surely as I knew that I existed. It was then I realized that the eye could never get to the centre of things, there was no intimate connection between my eye and the kitchen table. Sight presupposed some sort of medium through which the outside world forced itself on me. With touch it was different.[128]

Joe is obsessed with the ambiguity inherent in the surface or appearance of things, believing that 'the eye could never get to the centre of things' because 'there was no intimate connection between my eye and the kitchen table'. Instead, he believes in the authenticity of touch: touch alone allows him – the 'body-subject' – to experience phenomenological understanding of the external world. Joe's distrust in sight, or in appearances, is directly relatable to his own existential experience: Daniel Goon is wrongly tried for, and later found guilty of, Cathie's death. Indeed, just as Joe is 'hypnotised' by the sight of the water, so too are the jury and public, who are entranced by, and believe in, what Joe disparagingly calls the 'convenient social fiction' – the framing of Goon – wrongly imposed by the legal system.[129] Joe's unwillingness to trust the sight of the water propels him to touch it, and in phenomenological terms, this suggests that only physical kinaesthetic interaction with the external environment can

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[128] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 1 Fol. 1, pp. 4-5. In the published version of *Young Adam* the passage is modified to read as follows:

> Touch convinced me in a way in which sight did not. I was struck by the fact that sight is hypnotised by the surface of things; more than that, it can know only surfaces, flatnesses at a distance, meagre depths at close range. But the wetness of water felt on the hand and on the wrist is more intimate and more convincing that its colour or even than that flat expanse of the sea. The eye, I thought, could never get to the centre of things; there was no intimate connection between my eye and a plant on the windowsill or between my eye and the woman to whom I was about to make love. (p. 43).

This depiction of the sea is also reminiscent of Trocchi's poem 'The Water Spout' in *Man at Leisure* which employs similar imagery:

> It is evening. The flat sea
> draws in its edges from the serrated coast.
> one's voice is lost, well-lost
> down here in the Midi
> hanging, a ridiculously silent cannon
> on a promontory
> somewhere between Nice and Monte Carlo (ll. 1-7, p. 6)

[129] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, p. 98.

lead to phenomenological affirmation or truth. In-keeping with this concept, Andrew

Hodgson makes a valid suggestion:

> In the act of observing Joe Taylor (Alex Trocchi) objectifies the phenomenal universe and though feeling its 'hypnotising' force, feels a distance between the observer and the flatness of the distant objects; the flatness of the ink on the page; a two dimensional reality.[130]

By equating flatness with 'two dimensional reality', Hodgson's claim further

emphasises the disconnection between Joe and his surroundings when he is merely

observing: by touching however, Joe is able to change two-dimensional into three-

dimensional reality, and thus, transcend the 'distance'. Although Joe wonders whether

'anyone has ever remarked upon it before', his experience here can in fact be read as a

response to Merleau-Ponty's 'kinaesthetic situation':

> If I draw the object closer to me or turn it round in my fingers in order 'to see it better', this is because each attitude of my body is for me, immediately, the power of achieving a certain spectacle, and because each spectacle is what it is of appearances to the kinaesthetic situation, this is not in virtue of any law or in terms of any formula, but to the extent that I have a body, and that through that body I am at grips with the world.[131]

Merleau-Ponty's 'kinaesthetic situation' answers Joe's question, 'Why did I trust the

sense of touch rather than the sense of sight?'. Joe engages his body – through his

ability to *touch* the water – in an attempt to come to 'grips with the world'. Unlike

sight, which Joe feels 'forces' the outside world onto him and consequently

dehumanises him, touch instead allows Joe to experience a tangible, and therefore

more meaningful, understanding of his environment, which in turn functions to affirm

his own existence. The 'kinaesthetic situation' fundamentally rejects any subject-

object distinction; rather than binary opposites, they are in synthesis through the

bodily act of touch. Merleau-Ponty argues that 'it is through my body that I go into

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[130] Andrew Hodgson, 'Between the Tundra and the Ocean', *Equus Press*, <http://equuspress.wordpress.com/ 2014/06/12/between-the-tundra-and-the-ocean/> [accessed 15 November 2012].
[131] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Perception*, p. 353.

the world', and indeed, it is clear that Joe's 'I' is brought into being by touching the water – he says, 'I knew that it [the water] was alive as surely as I knew that I existed'.[132]

The phenomenological concerns of the passage are also reminiscent of the absurdity of existence that Roquentin experiences in Sartre's *Nausea* (1938). Looking at the root of the chestnut tree in the park, Roquentin reveals the following: 'Even when I looked at things, I was miles from thinking that they existed: they looked like stage scenery to me'.[133] By attempting to understand himself as subject, the 'I', through the external world around him, Trocchi's prose places Joe in an implicitly phenomenological situation, and like Joe, Sartre's Roquentin is detached from what he perceives in the park. Yet unlike Roquentin, who experiences further existential absurdity after touching his surroundings, touch allows Joe to become 'open to the world' because instead of being passive, engaging with the water allows him to reassert his agency and affirm his status as an existential 'body-subject' in the world.[134]

To return to *Cain's Book* for a final example of spatial subversion, Trocchi introduces conflict between the existential self and external environment at the start when, reading a page plucked from a pile of notes for 'Cain's Book', Necchi narrates:

> It was the warmth of the sun that came on my cheek and on my hand through the open window which made me get up and go outside and find the sun already far overhead and the skyscrapers of Manhattan suddenly and impressively and irrelevantly there in a haze of heat. And as for that irrelevance… I often wondered how far out a man could go without being obliterated. It's an oblique way to look at Manhattan, seeing it islanded there for days on end across the buffering water like a little mirage in which one wasn't involved, for at times I know it objectively and with anxiety as a nexus of hard fact. Sometimes it was like trumpets, that architecture.[135]

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[132] St. Louis, Washington University Olin Library, Alexander Trocchi Papers, Box 1 Fol. 1, p. 5.
[133] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, (London: Penguin, 2000; 1938), p. 182.
[134] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Perception*, p. xix.
[135] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 13.

Positioned on the edge of the city at the pier, the heterotopic scow symbolises an inner world of heightened subjectivity, contrasting with the external world of objectivity symbolised by Manhattan's looming landmass. The passage reveals that Necchi feels 'far out', and this carries a double conceptual meaning. Firstly, it links to Necchi's psychological space of the heroin-hit; 'far out' was a 1960s countercultural coinage used to signify the mental experience of narcotic experimentation, or as Trocchi termed it, as being a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. Secondly, in terms of space, an existential relationship between Necchi and the environment is implied because 'far out' also refers to the distance of the scow from land, which acknowledges the space between the scow and Manhattan society. Necchi is alienated from the urban scene that he perceives: indeed, the passage describes the iconic Manhattan skyline as 'suddenly and impressively and irrelevantly there', which demonstrates the deep sense of detachment that Necchi feels for everything but his own immediate environment. Trocchi's word choice of 'far out', 'obliterated', 'oblique', and 'objectively', and the repetition of 'irrelevance' function to further highlight Necchi's isolation, as does the image of the city as a 'mirage'. Necchi's belief in the truth of inner self, or of inner space, is acknowledged here; 'mirage' implies that Manhattan could in fact be false, and although he knows it *is* there 'objectively' as 'a nexus of hard fact' this makes him anxious, because it is only through subjectivity that Necchi believes any truth can be mediated, or found.[136] The poetic imagery of the architecture being 'like trumpets' also conveys Necchi's detachment whereby the city is abstract and incomprehensible: it is more like sound than anything tangible and concrete. Necchi's disconnection is furthered again; Manhattan is described as 'the alien city'

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[136] *Nexus* is the name of another Henry Miller novel, which along with the aforementioned *Plexus* and also *Sexus*, comprised 'The Rosy Crucifixion' trilogy. As I suggested previously, it is possible that Trocchi's word choice of 'nexus' is an allusion to Miller's New York-set novel.

because he is 'abstracted from it all'.[137]

Aboard the 'far out' scow, it is clear that only interiority – spatially *and* existentially – offers Necchi wellbeing because his ultimate desire is to 'annihilate the physical'.[138] In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological terms, this extreme interiority, whereby Necchi avoids any kinaesthetic engagement with the environment, means that he is unable to experience the external world positively because he is unwilling to recognise himself as a 'body-subject' capable of instigating affirmation with his surroundings. Instead, his existential status parallels what Merleau-Ponty terms the 'schizophrenic' experience: 'The schizophrenic no longer inhabits the common property world, but a private world, and no longer gets as far as geographical space: he dwells in "the landscape space", and the landscape itself, once cut off from the common property world, is considerably impoverished'.[139] By being utterly devoid of meaning to Necchi in his intense and cultivated state of existential isolation, Manhattan is indeed rendered as 'landscape space'; Necchi's cultivated disconnection from the environment undoubtedly manifests through his inherently inward stance as a heroin addict, which in its very essence also problematises Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian standpoint.[140]

Conclusion

Erica Carter, Judith Squires and James Donald specify that space differs from place because it is inherently more ambiguous:

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[137] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, pp. 230, 181.

[138] Gary A. Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi', p. 160.

[139] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 335.

[140] Using a suitably apt nautical metaphor, Drew Leder in *The Absent Body* suggests that 'In Cartesianism, the human mind is viewed as an island of awareness afloat in a vast sea of insensate matter' ((Chicago: Chicago University, 1990) p. 8). As Chapter Two's exploration of 'existential gangrene' highlighted, Trocchi's psychological inwardness became so absolutely Cartesian that by the end of his writing career he had almost eradicated the external world, and indeed the body, as exemplified by the extreme characterisation of the 'Existential' who lived in a box and was utterly detached from anything external.

> How does space become place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed.[141]

For Carter and Donald, place is fundamentally anthropomorphic: it is *lived* space that becomes place through populating and naming, which together generate meaning. In contrast, the multiple examples from *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book* all show that heterotopias on water, land, and in-between – the ship, the fairground, the canal respectively – are not defined or 'named' places but more abstract, remote, or 'meaningless' spaces. It is however apparent that in these indefinite spaces Necchi and Joe are capable of experiencing some (at times strong) synthesis with the external environment: in both texts Trocchi implicitly associates outer space with the protagonists' behaviour, which is often intense and disturbing, like the heterotopic spaces that they experience. In this way, the heterotopia functions as a safe space for transgression, whereby sexual experimentation, drug taking, and idleness become standard within, and are supported by, these alternative environments. Despite this reciprocity between the characters' selves and the space they inhabit, it is however also clear that protagonists' existential experience is at times so absolutely inward-oriented that their ability to experience phenomenological harmony as 'body-subjects' in the external world is stymied, particularly in terms of kinaesthetic engagement. As the last section argued, Joe's and Necchi's typical inability to engage positively in phenomenological terms with their surroundings is exacerbated by the heterotopic space in which they chiefly exist: the dockside and canal in *Young Adam*, the alleyway and scow in *Cain's Book*, and the symbol of the hanged man, all emphasise – and indeed effect – the characters' disconnected existential status. It is however likely that Trocchi purposefully sought to represent such existential and spatial

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[141] Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds), 'Introduction', p. xii.

ambiguity in the narratives; the dualistic nature of the heterotopia allows it to be both a space that responds to phenomenological affiliation and that rejects it, and it is consequently clear that the characters' inward experience is heightened by the heterotopias' subversive outward spatiality which, when at their most extreme, further facilitate the characters' experience of life and death. Ultimately, by being built on extremes and conflict, the atypical and radical nature of the heterotopia ensures that space in the narrative is never fixed or wholly secure, much like the characters themselves.

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to consider Trocchi's *oeuvre* through an existential lens of enquiry, in order to determine the extent to which being a self-proclaimed 'cosmonaut of inner space' impacted upon his work. This phrase is revealing because it shows the degree to which Trocchi regards inner space, and inner space exploration, as integral to his identity; as this thesis evidences, his highly experimental and subjective model of inwardness permeates his life and writing on almost every level. As Chapter One argued, existentialism is a continuous belief system that permeates Trocchi's philosophical and aesthetical thought, and it drove his intense desire to innovate and experiment in both literature and in life, and, as this thesis has repeatedly maintained, Trocchi's central vision of art and life being 'no longer divided' means that the two areas are essentially inseparable.[1] Existentialism is the crux of Trocchi's philosophical, aesthetical, and experimental sensibility: whether in his polemical or fictional work, he sets out to explore his claim that, when writing, 'the most important thing is oneself, one's identity'.[2]

This thesis also highlights that it is productive, and indeed illuminating, to consider Trocchi alongside the cultural climate in which he was writing because, in many ways, his writing and lifestyle are implicitly connected to the 1950s and 1960s. The ever-increasing prominence of existential philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s affirmed Trocchi's developing interest in subjectivity, and in this postwar context, Trocchi then saw that subjectivity could be used as a strategy against the totalitarian political systems of the Cold War. This emphasis on subjectivity also permeated Trocchi's fiction, and his experimentalism in creative practice and form invites

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[1] Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', in Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 199.
[2] Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *The International Writers Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962*, (Glasgow: Cargo, 2012).

further parallels with the American Beats and with the French *nouveau roman*, as I argued in Chapter One. As Chapter Three theorised, Trocchi's public endorsement of, and affiliation with, contemporaneous figures such as Jean Cocteau and William Burroughs, further roots Trocchi's life and work within this particular era. As Chapter Three also specified, Trocchi's drug addiction is also very much in-keeping with the wider sensibilities of the 1960s countercultural explosion in both Britain and the United States of America, where narcotic experimentation was consciously adopted as a means to defy and question authority, to achieve new and profound insight into the subjective self, and to break the boundaries of traditional writing theory and practice.

It is also significant that Trocchi responds to many contemporaneous theories of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to Chapter One highlighting how, as editor of *Merlin*, he admired and emulated Jean-Paul Sartre's model of *littérature engagée*, the chapter also acknowledges how ideological connections between Trocchi, Guy Debord, and Raoul Vaneigem are apparent in the sigma portfolio. As Chapter One also outlined, in the early 1960s, the founding of sigma stemmed from Trocchi's earlier involvement with the Situationist International, where the central aim of worldwide revolution through 'invisible insurrection of a million minds' fits contemporaneously with other movements that similarly sought to defy political and social hegemony and peacefully challenge the stifling top-down conservatism of the status quo. Comparison in Chapter Two between Trocchi and R. D. Laing revealed that, despite having a somewhat ambiguous personal relationship, they professed public respect for one-another based on their shared radical vision of inner space navigation. Chapter Four's contextualisation of Trocchi's work alongside another two key theorists of the time, Michel Foucault and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, makes clear that, while Trocchi's work doesn't always wholly correspond to either

phenomenologist's theses, it is however clear that he was writing at a time when philosophical ideas surrounding identity were at the forefront of his mind, and that he was aware of, and to a degree influenced by, these key ideas.

Although Trocchi's *oeuvre* typically features characters who are isolated and alienated, as Chapter Two particularly acknowledges, it is however clear that Trocchi was in fact rather popular and well connected, to the extent that he was at the heart of many key creative and avant-garde movements of the time. Despite such rooting in the 1950s and 1960s, this thesis has however also found that there is an enduring quality to Trocchi's *oeuvre*. In addition to being a writer who sets out to critique the issues of his day, such as the postwar 'bomb culture', Cold War totalitarian politics, and the 'hysterical' attitudes surrounding narcotic addiction, Trocchi has shared intertextuality with the work of writers such as Coleridge, De Quincey, and Baudelaire, as I argued in Chapter Three. Although Trocchi's *oeuvre* encapsulates many contradictions, including being concomitantly chronistic while connecting to the literary past and future, I believe that these ambiguities reflect his own ambition to break boundaries and avoid categorisation, which he regarded as restrictive, ineffective, and ultimately misleading.

While this project has argued that Trocchi elevates, and portrays, a strong sense of space, it is however clear that his work repeatedly rejects connection to a solid sense of place. Indeed, while place is largely insignificant to Trocchi's cosmopolitan sensibility and creative practice – the analyses undertaken in chapters two and four also demonstrate the substantial degree to which Trocchi's characters continually fail to feel an existential affinity, or experience a meaningful relationship, with place – space and time are instead absolutely crucial to his radical sensibility and his self-styling as an explorer of inner experience. As analogous to the Russian

cosmonaut Yuri Gagrin, Trocchi similarly sought to enquire into, and redefine, how humanity understands the world through pioneering exploration into new and uncharted areas of experience; rather than Gagarin's outer space, Trocchi consciously chose inner space whereby narcotics were his method of transportation, and writing the means to convey his existential voyages to the world.

Although this is the first thesis to make Trocchi's work its sole central focus, there remains much to be investigated. A welcome area of further scholarship would be a feminist or female-centred reading of Trocchi's *oeuvre*. While the work of Trocchi's acknowledged influence Henry Miller has been viewed as highly misogynistic by a number of critics including Kate Millett in her seminal *Sexual Politics* (1970),[3] Katy Masuga's *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (2011) takes a different stance whereby she purposefully does not 'interrogate the ways in which Miller can be read as a misogynist' and instead aims to re-contextualise the violence of Miller's *oeuvre* alongside what she terms 'modernist concerns'.[4] While it would be timely to see Trocchi scholarship follow a female-focused line of investigation, it would also be interesting to see whether Trocchi's work catalyses a comparably dynamic debate to that surrounding Miller's contentious *oeuvre*. Another potential line of enquiry could be in-depth examination, and further contextualisation, of Trocchi as a writer who left Scotland to further his career in France; this concept of Franco-Scottish symbiosis spans from as far back as the Enlightenment, with David

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[3] In an interview with James Campbell for Glasgow University Magazine, Trocchi says that his 'earliest influence was Joyce […] and later Miller, Sartre and Camus' (see 'Alex Trocchi', *Glasgow University Magazine*, October 1973, un.pag). Millett starts with a feminist critique of Miller's novel *Sexus*, which displays 'a male assertion of dominance over a weak, compliant, and rather unintelligent female. It is a case of sexual politics at the fundamental level of copulation' (*Sexual Politics*, Champaign: University of Illinois, 2000; 1970) p. 6).

[4] Katy Masuga, *The Secret Violence Of Henry Miller*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), pp. 5, 6. She argues that 'to say Miller's writing is violent […] is not to say his writing is about violence', and she states that she is keen to avoid blurring 'the line between 'textual violence and personal violence' (p. 5). Masuga defines 'modernist concerns' as 'alienation, representation, mechanization, and interpersonal relations' (p. 6).

Hume and Adam Smith, through to the present with Kenneth White.[5] In addition, through more widely tracing the trajectory of '*Scoti vagantes*', Trocchi could be situated alongside past writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson and perhaps Irvine Welsh today.[6]

While this thesis has highlighted some specific areas, it is clear that there certainly remains scope for further study of Trocchi's small yet significant *oeuvre*. Through analysing how inner space manifests in, and affects, Trocchi's work, I hope that this project has identified and opened up some new key areas of thought: Trocchi's long-lasting belief in the authenticity of the private existential realm of experience both inspired, and actively informed, his life and writing, and his profound interest in existentialism and inner space spans philosophic, literary, aesthetical, behavioural, and psychological frameworks.

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[5] Kenneth White describes his way of life as that of the 'intellectual nomad' (see *Ideas of Order At Cape Wrath: The Tentative Contours of a Political, Intellectual and Cultural Paradigm*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2013), pp. 8-9). In *Ideas of Order at Cape Wrath* (Aberdeen University Press, 2013), Kenneth White places himself in the same tradition as 'John Erigena, Duns Scot, George Buchanan, David Hume and Robert Louis Stevenson' because they exemplify what White 'takes to be the high outward line of Scottish endeavour in the intellectual and literary field' (p. 40). As Scots who left Scotland but continued their intellectual careers elsewhere, White argues that this is part of an important Scottish tradition of travel and knowledge-exchange. Therefore, Trocchi could be considered within this historical framework.
[6] Kenneth White, *Ideas of Order at Cape Wrath: The Tentative Contours of a Political, Intellectual and Cultural Paradigm*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2013), p. 40.

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