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1922-2022: MEMORY, THE MEDIA, AND PRESENT-DAY MODERNISM

ABSTRACT: Jennifer Egan’s *The Candy House*, published in 2022, revisits the form and themes of two works that crowned the *annus mirabilis* of 1922: James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. What especially connects these works to each other is a shared interest in the relationship between individual and collective memory, as well as a reflection on the technological tools or means of communication that can be adopted to capture, externalize, and share past experiences.

KEYWORDS: James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Jennifer Egan, Memory, Digital culture.

The Collective Consciousness

In April 2022, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jennifer Egan published *The Candy House*, a paradigmatic example that, in both conceptual frameworks and textual practices, anglophone literary modernism still shows remarkable continuity even one hundred years after its *annus mirabilis*. Especially in the last two decades, literary features associated with the early twentieth century have increasingly resurfaced in what has been called, somewhat controversially, a new metamodernist sensibility, that is, “abandoning tactics such as pastiche and parataxis for strategies like myth and metaxis, melancholy for hope, and exhibitionism for engagement” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). Lisa Siraganian (2016, 204) chooses the more descriptive expression “neo rear-guard modernism”, where authors “use the tools they’ve been handed, along with the mass cultural tools available to them now, to define a way to make modernist poetic forms work anew”.¹ This definition is quite apt to describe Egan’s latest novel, which, as most of her previous production, adopts a fragmentary structure with varying styles, introduces creative typographic possibilities, and uses recent means of communication such as e-mails or tweets. In short, *The Candy House* is animated by an aesthetic legacy of modernist experimentation; technologies have changed, but the textual strategies adopted to capture elements of the contemporary seem to have undergone minor alterations since the introduction of cinema, the radio, and the gramophone.

Most of the ideas explored in *The Candy House* are the same that enthralled modernist writers one century ago, and concern especially means of communication, recording, and

¹ See also Vittorini 2017.

cultural representation. In particular, Egan describes the effects of an imaginary technological “memorevolution”, *Own Your Unconscious*TM, which allows externalizing the contents of one’s mind (including repressed or lost memories) in a Consciousness Cube. Thanks to the company Mandala’s machinery, users can revisit and relive their own perception of past occurrences, then share them with others by participating in a new social media environment called the *Collective Consciousness*. So, “[b]y uploading all or part of your externalized memory to an online ‘collective’, you gained proportionate access to the anonymous thoughts and memories of everyone in the world, living or dead, who had done the same” (Egan 2022, 56). This collective is indeed an irresistibly appealing but potentially deceitful candy house; temptation lies not only in the prospect of stepping outside oneself, although momentarily, but also in the near-Faustian opportunity to assimilate various and varied perspectives on the same event, thereby reaching an awareness of the past that is close to objectivity.

Yet, little or nothing gets recomposed when Egan’s characters access the data available in the shared collective, as their understanding of key moments in their lives remains fragmentary at best – just as fragmentary and non-linear as the narrative itself. Expanding one’s experience does not seem to bring about any feeling of enrichment, completeness, or maybe long-sought consolation; on the contrary, it causes heightened distress and a sense of loss. Probably, this loss can be understood in the light of Walter Benjamin’s notion of reproducibility: if the individuals’ uniqueness becomes technologically replicable, their authenticity and sacrality is compromised and the self is reduced to human material, a mere product. In addition, by projecting themselves into another mind, characters disrupt the boundaries of their own ego in a violent act directed towards both the self and the other, whose viewpoint is appropriated as one’s own.

The seductiveness (and danger) of the idea of a collective mind is well known to modernist literature, where the concept of individual or interior experience is constantly questioned. Minds can establish fleeting contacts, like the threads of Richard’s cobweb-like thoughts in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1992, 125) because their borders, to borrow W.B. Yeats’ words, “are ever shifting, and [...] many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy” (Yeats 1924, 33). A combination of stimuli lays at the foundations of this broadened conception of consciousness which includes contemporary theories regarding the sociological and psychological behaviour of crowds, theosophical beliefs,² and the impact of new broadcast networks, a factor to which I will devote special attention.

Far from being elusive, Egan’s allusions and references to the modernist tradition focus on two specific works. The first, published in 1922, is carried around by Bix Bouton, the developer of the ethically questionable *Collective Consciousness*, and a returning character from the author’s previous novel *The Goon Squad* (2010):

From his Walter backpack, he unearthed another disguise element: the copy of *Ulysses* he’d read in graduate school with the explicit aim of acquiring literary depth. [...] He’d kept *Ulysses* as a romantic

² See, for instance, Tratner 1995, and Terrinoni 2007, 56.

artifact, although its worn look derived more from the passage of years than rereading. He opened it randomly.

“– *Eureka!* Buck Mulligan cried. *Eureka!*” (Egan 2022, 17)

Joyce’s novel, mentioned twice in *The Candy House*,³ is misused and re-purposed: emptied of its meaning, it becomes a sort of relic which is kept only for extemporary and casual consultation. Bix opens it as if it were a bibliomantic device from which he expected revelations and suggestions; however, no illumination ensues, and the founder of Mandala is mocked by the same work that he actualized or translated into technology. Of course, Joyce’s writings, which cope with the “collective consciousness drawing upon the collective unconscious” (Tindall 1969, 19), are the ideal inspiration for a digital container of inter-mental thought.

Reference to *Ulysses* also helps reveal a minute network of connections among Egan’s works: Buck Mulligan’s “*Eureka*” is uttered in the library shortly after Stephen argues that our experiences reflect who we are, the same words that form the epigraph of Egan’s second novel, *Look at me* (2001).⁴ Apparently, *The Candy House* is part of a constantly expanding macro-novel, which quotes itself and its paratext, recalls its episodes, and restages old characters in a procedure that is very familiar to Joyce’s readers and scholars.

Among the recurring elements in Egan’s corpus are also allusions to another work published in 1922, *The Waste Land*, which is referenced in *Manhattan Beach* (2017),⁵ parodied in *The Goon Squad* (Coward 2015, 181), and implicitly at the heart of *The Candy House*. In fact, the latter text, like Eliot’s poem, shows violations of “the very notion of a private self” (Ellmann 1987, 15), stages a “tragedy of unreconciled voices” (Hart 2007, 184), and “attempts to reach outside the individual subject [...] even while acknowledging the painful and dangerous nature of such perspective shifting” (Sorum 2015, 162).

It is not surprising that *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* could be paired as Egan’s main sources of inspiration, given that Joyce’s novel had significant influence on the themes and style of Eliot’s then-evolving poem. For instance, Giorgio Melchiori (1954, 57) suggests that *The Waste Land* is so heavily indebted to *Ulysses* that we should not think of the two texts as actually emerging at the same time. In continuity with one another, the works propose (among other things) a reflection on the interplay between recorded past and personal experience, and they create worlds where thought, memory or perception belong to everyone and to no one simultaneously. As is well known, in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* the characters’ mental processes are in constant dialogue with a shared basin of knowledge and imagery deriving from cultural or archetypal dimensions. At the same time, individual minds connect, collide with each another, or even short-

³ In one of the final chapters of *The Candy House* (significantly titled “*Eureka Gold*”), Joyce’s book is mentioned again when Bix tries to convince his son Gregory that *Own Your Unconscious* does not pose an “existential threat to fiction” – and possibly to *Ulysses* in particular. See Egan 2022, 313.

⁴ Stephen says, “We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves” (Joyce 1986, 175).

⁵ See “To him, the ocean was a wasteland” (Egan 2017).

circuit, creating complex rhizomatic networks that enmesh both personal and collective experience.

Especially innovative is Joyce's representation of active and constant inter-mental thought regarding the characters of *Ulysses*, a process which has often been defined in terms of telepathic interaction. Telepathy, however, seems to be hardly adequate as a description of this phenomenon, for in *Ulysses* there is no direct mental influence of one mind on another, no acquisition of new information from other individuals, and no awareness of thinking somebody else's thoughts. To be specific, although characters remain oblivious of their mental connections, at times they suspect that they could be feeding on external sources. In this respect, Bloom conflates ingestion and cognition in "Lestrygonians" with the famous "Never know whose thoughts you're chewing" (1986, 140), a statement which betrays some resistance to receive or assimilate external thought and, at the same time, sounds like a metatextual warning regarding the difficulties that readers might encounter in distinguishing the character's voices and mental processes in the novel.⁶

Most inter-mental activity in *Ulysses* concerns the minutiae of everyday life, matters as irrelevant as a fleeting memory of the pantomime *Turko the Terrible* or the news that someone was "found drowned" (1986, 9, 47, 41, 101). The fact that thought connections take place even for trivial questions emphasizes that there are no private mental spaces, and the characters can claim ownership of their thoughts at no time. Ideas and memories seem to be externalized and wander as disembodied ghosts from one mind to another, ever-present and ever-absent like the evanescent algorithms in Egan's *Collective Consciousness*. The heterodiegetic narrator of *Ulysses*, as John Rickard suggests, acts like a sort of over-mind capable of collecting shared memories and perceptions (1999); like Mandala's social network, he absorbs and records various voices, creating a repository of consciousness where consultation can proceed linearly or jump from one connection to the next. After all, scholars have repeatedly noted that the novel is structured according to the logic of a modern-day database.⁷

The metafictional reflection on shared thought and memory is even more radical in *The Waste Land*, which contains shards of consciousness presented with the rotatory perspective of a Cubist painting, and where the fragmented characters and voices lack any unifying entity. In a note to the "The Fire Sermon", Eliot writes that "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest" (2001, 23); however, this claim sounds as "an *ex post facto* imposition of form" on a poem that is fundamentally polyglossic (Bolton 2011, 35). In practical terms, Eliot's supposed over-mind offers no guidance to distinguish among different speakers, or even between utterance and thought. The poem

⁶ For further analysis of this statement, see Pugliatti 1986 and Ruggieri 2011.

⁷ Pressman (2022, 223) remarks that the plot of "Ithaca" advances through a process of queries and responses; from this starting point, Emerson demonstrates that "comparison with databases allows us to define the logic behind the links throughout *Ulysses*" (2017, 43). As regards "Ithaca", one might add that the episode also resembles today's automated help desk systems and chatbots.

encompasses the anonymous views of “everyone in the world, living or dead” as in Egan’s collective (2022, 56), but the border separating these views is hazy and unstable. If Eliot’s method resembles an instance of data compression, as Paul Stephens suggests (2015, 11), then it lacks the metadata required to navigate it.

Consequently, readers are often puzzled as to who remembers and what exactly is remembered. For instance, in “The Burial of the Dead”, Madame Sosostri quotes Ariel’s song in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* 1.3 exclaiming, “(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)” (2001, 6). When the same words are repeated in “A Game of Chess”, the anonymous speaker seems to gain access to different repositories simultaneously, as “we don’t know if [he] remembers the line from *The Tempest*, the words spoken by the ‘famous clairvoyante’, or even the poem itself” (Ducroux 2011, 40) – or, I might add, all these things simultaneously. Eliot seems to propose that the character’s consciousness traverses the borders separating the cultural, fictional, and metatextual spheres, and that intersubjectivity can originate even between the speaker and the text of the poem.

There is more to the recursive elements in “A Game of Chess”, a section replete with both lexical repetitions within the same lines and cross-references or echoes from other sections of the poem, in a multi-levelled pattern of returns with variation:

“My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think”.

I think we are in rats’ alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

“What is that noise?”
The wind under the door.
“What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?”
Nothing again nothing.
“Do

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
Nothing?”
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
“Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?” (2001, 9)

The imperatives “Speak” and the questions “Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing?”, “Are you alive, or not?” repeat and refashion four statements in the hyacinth garden of “The Burial of the Dead”, respectively “I could not / Speak”, “I knew nothing”, “my eyes failed”, and “I was neither / Living nor dead” (2001, 6). Especially relevant for the present purpose is that even the formal structure and unconventional representation of the communicative acts is repeated or recalled from one section to another. In the above passage, as in “The Burial of the Dead”, differences in punctuation and the use of quotation marks suggest that some lines are not spoken aloud; yet, here both characters

seem to react and respond to each other's words, be they uttered or otherwise, as in a sort of telepathic connection. As such, readers may suspect that the exchange does not actually involve different poetic personas and that the (alleged) alternation of speech and thought stems from the same subjectivity.

Assuming that two figures are interacting, the impression is that the text without quotation marks belongs to an extradiegetic or disembodied speaker, whose presence recreates the effect of voice-over and voice-off in cinema, or a radio commentary. *The Waste Land* emphasizes, therefore, that representation of thought, memory, and communication are closely related to a reflection on technologies of transmission and media other than writing. In other words, Eliot explores what John Durham Peters defines as the contemporary "dream of telepathy" (1999, 16) brought about by broadcast networks, which "began to be conceived as a kind of collective consciousness, a nervous system or potential form of spiritual union for the community" (Feldman, Mead, and Topping 2016, 2). In addition, the above quotation does not neglect interart exchange, since sounds, punctuation, and the pace of phrasing mark a rhythmic pulse or beat that appeals to the reader as a score addresses a musician. The visual component, in turn, is dealt with through a special typographic setting of this passage in the first printed edition, where words cascade down the page "to convey [...] the anxiety of the speaker" (Van Mierlo 2013, 148).

Egan rearticulates Joyce and Eliot's ideas of disembodiment chiefly at the level of plot, by imagining selves that become projected everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Mandala's *Own Your Unconscious* and *Collective Consciousness* promise full comprehension of both self and others by breaking down any communicative barrier that provokes loss of information and misunderstanding, including disrupting noise, subjective perceptions, and even forgetfulness. Yet, pure connection reveals itself to be anti-utopian, as both internal and external dialogue depends on the possibility for error. For instance, eliminating difference implies levelling the field of interpersonal relations to the extent that the subjects lose themselves, or, borrowing Egan's terms, they become "subsumed" by an anonymous "wider sphere" of understanding (2022, 157).

The digital technologies described in *The Candy House* fulfil a long-standing dream of transcending the subject's physical limitations through self-expansion – indeed, the Cube makes Roxy feel "as if her brain has been released from a cell it outgrew" (2022, 157). But ever since the eighteenth century and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in particular (1790) it has been assumed that any attempt at self-empowerment comes at the cost of a concomitant sense of self-annihilation. Overcoming natural boundaries, as Roxy's case shows, proceeds chiefly from synecdochizing the subject, splitting it into parts, or otherwise transforming it. Since the Cube "contains the entire contents of [Roxy's] mind: all the things she can and can't remember, every thought and feeling she has had", one can only wonder whether it is appropriate to conclude that the piece of machinery "is her, in a way" (Egan 2022, 157).

Long-lost twins

It has often been claimed that the so-called “digital” thought – or “connective”, “hypertextual” thought, etc. – originated much earlier than the computer era, and this logic influenced the emergence of new means of communication as much as the opposite. Similarly, the literary aesthetics based on the confluence of different modes of communication typical of our age of global interconnectivity cannot be considered as being dependent on technological advancement per se. General consensus is that it took form especially during modernism, that is, “the classical period of our contemporary technological age” (Pressman 2014, 4), which saw the rise of the literature of technology. Many questions posed in 2022, therefore, are not dissimilar from those that emerged in 1922 in that they still concern the ways in which the workings of the mind define and are defined by new means of communication.

At this point, it seems clear that Jennifer Egan draws on modernism as much more than a traditional repertoire of forms. She conceives this period, to borrow Tom Gunning’s words, as the long-lost twin of our present age (2003, 51), which marks the first revolutionary changes in the means of cultural communication and signals a new awareness regarding the transfer of narratives between different media. Indeed, *The Candy House* renews and enriches the idea that human forms of cognition are not located within the individual, but situated at a crossroads of the self, culture, and the media. What Egan derives from modernist writers is especially an understanding of memory as media theory and a vision of the mind as a recording or archival tool, a means of representation and storage which is “haunted by loss, absence, or contingency as meaninglessness and excessive detail” (Nieland 2012, 582).

The idea of excessive detail deserves further attention. Starting with the early twentieth century, distraction has become not only a recurring literary theme,⁸ but also a technique to try the limits of the written word and give the impression that literature can borrow typical features from other media. For instance, Robert Escarpit notes that, when compared to written texts, animated images and voice broadcasting stimulate various human senses simultaneously, broaden the field of perception, and increase exponentially the amount of information conveyed to the public, who navigates an ocean of transient data studded with irrelevant detail (2000, 83). It is hardly coincidental that *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, written during the rise of film and radio, have been said to contain “an excess of information and sensory data that [...] the reader has inadequate resources to manage” (Diepeveen 2003, 55). Often defined as encyclopaedic or hyperdiegetic, they create vast narrative spaces which readers usually tackle through several re-readings, wondering, for instance, whether *Ulysses* needs to describe each step in the process of preparing tea, not only once, but twice, as if it were an outlandish ritual.⁹

⁸ See also Benjamin 2010, 33 and Moretti 2003, 128-132.

⁹ The first description of this “ritual” appears in the “Calypso” episode of *Ulysses* (1986, 51) and the second is in “Ithaca” (548). The chief function of these passages is conveying the satisfaction that Bloom derives from engaging in domestic activities.

Wolf's notion of intermedial reference is particularly useful to identify the kind of procedures at play in modernist works. Intermedial references do not actually incorporate distinct media but imitate their formal features to suggest their presence. The result, therefore, is (in Wolf's words) "medial and semiotic homogeneity" (2011), since the work only uses one medium and its sign system(s), while simultaneously it blurs the epistemological boundaries separating different channels of communication. *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, thus, evoke elements or structures of other media creating an illusion of shifting between different modes of articulation, in a fictitious intermedial dialogue.

In Joyce and Eliot's works, similar ideas and events are narrated, re-narrated, sometimes expanded from one section or episode to the next, while the style or mask of imitation changes. In fact, a chief feature of *Ulysses* is its "systematic refusal to assume one style as the privileged vehicle of expression" (Moretti 2005, 206). In this sense, I believe that some episodes of the novel give the illusion of remediating parts of the other sections, because events are not only re-told, but also revised and modified, as common in today's fictional universes created through media convergence (or divergence). For instance, readers experience Dignam's funeral in various forms: "Eumaeus" translates the ceremony first described in "Hades" into a dry, journalistic account full of clichés, implicit advertisement, and lists of names (1986, 529),¹⁰ which departs from the fictional reality of *Ulysses* or distorts it – Stephen is erroneously included among the attendees, Bloom's surname is explosively misspelled as "Boom", etc. In "Cyclops", this procedure is exasperated, as the parodic interpolations somehow translate the events related by the intradiegetic narrator not only into newspaper feature-stories, but also into Irish legendry, legal documents, nursery rhymes, accounts of spiritualist séances, medical reports, the minutes of the House of Commons, descriptions of illuminated manuscripts, and so on.

Because representational techniques differ, in *Ulysses* each repetition adds and subtracts something from the previous ones; as if subject to a process of mnemonic drift, retelling creates potential incongruity, contradiction, and variation, not just because of what is told, but especially because of what is not told. Notoriously absent in the novel is any indication that, in the morning, Molly and Bloom ever discussed the specific time at which Blazes Boylan, the woman's lover, would visit her that same afternoon. And yet, in "Sirens", Bloom counts the hours and the minutes until his wife's adulterous encounter, repeating obsessively "At four, she said", "At four", "At four she", etc. (1986, 214; 217; 219). When and where he acquired this piece of information remains a mystery to the reader, who starts mistrusting the seemingly meticulous narratorial over-mind, capable of failing to record such a relevant part of the couple's earlier conversation.¹¹ These tears

¹⁰ *Ulysses* also offers the perspective of Dignam's son on the funeral in Joyce 1986, 206-207; see also Fisher 2002, 605.

¹¹ This omission can also be seen as part of the Homeric parallel. In the *Odyssey*, what Ulysses learns from the Sirens' song remain a mystery; similarly, in the "Sirens" episode of *Ulysses*, Bloom receives new information in a mysterious way.

in the narrative fabric of the novel closely resemble what happens with remediated stories, which, Colin Harvey notes, are allowed to “remember, misremember, forget and even non-remember diegetic elements from elsewhere” (2015, 2).

If Joyce anticipates some aspects of today’s transmedia fictional universes and their semantic inconsistencies, Eliot recasts voice and sound recording as an ontological condition of *The Waste Land*. The fleeting and disappointing sexual encounter between an unnamed woman, known as “the typist,” and a clerk, her “young man carbuncular” may serve as a metareferential element in this regard: when the typist remains alone, she “smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone” (2001, 13-14). The typing hand, an “automatic” tool or piece of machinery, undergoes a sudden transformation and merges with the gramophone’s tone arm and needle as if to signify a smooth shift from one recording technology to another, from writing to sound playback. After all, *The Waste Land* is commonly said to rely on a musical organization since, in addition to exploiting the sonority of the spoken word, it borrows from symphonic structure. Rather than adding up to a choir, however, the individual voices featured in this musical piece clash due to sharp differences in tone, register, or accent, and often their relationship seems to be based on mere contiguity.

Marianne Thormählen emphasizes that “[t]he difficulty of deciding where one voice fades out and another is switched on can only be resolved on the basis of individual estimate; there are no stage directions suggesting identifications and re-emergences” (1978, 83). The idea that *The Waste Land* should need “stage directions” underlines that readers struggle with the discursive properties of the text; above all, they perceive clear departures from the conventions of poetry and some proximity with the dialogic part of dramatic texts, perhaps even with transcribed speech. Indeed, Eliot’s poem is structured as if it were meant to be performed, or better listened to, for only aural fruition would allow recognizing the shifts from one voice to another. I would argue that *The Waste Land* evades any expectation associated with literary categorizations because it mimes channels of transmission other than writing while lacking the metadiscursive indications guiding these shifts.¹² In particular, the poem transforms itself into some sort of recording device, containing not only conversations, but also – if they were physically recordable, as in Egan’s novel – impressions, thoughts, and memories.

Undoubtedly, the function of the gramophone goes well beyond contributing to the thematic structure of the poem and shapes its formal features. This is not surprising at a time when, as Lisa Gitelman notes, the first records were played imagining an author reading from his own work because “phonographs were [...] understood according to the practices of writing and reading, particularly in their relation to speaking, and not, for instance, according to the practices or commodification of musical notation, composition, and performance” (2006, 25). In addition, new acoustic technologies

¹² To be precise, *The Waste Land* incorporates metadiscursive information, just not especially useful information. Eliot’s notes allow the poem to be both a literary work and a commentary, each retaining its own dynamic, and force the reader into an ambiguous epistemological position, as they cause the collapse of two different modes of thinking and experiencing.

allowed reactualization of tokens from the past, as well as preservation and reconstruction of (public and private) experience, altering people's relationship with time and memory.

Accordingly, Egan's twenty-first century emphasizes an increasing discomfort with the idea of a static, fixed past. New digital systems further blur increasingly porous boundaries between different time periods and support society's compulsion to repetition and retelling by sparking a temptation to relive some life experiences. The radical forms of externalized memory imagined in *The Candy House* promise not only to give shape to the past, but also to bring part of that past alive into the present, where it is subject to new interpretation.

Jeff Pruchnic and Kim Lacey (2011, 474) explain that the concept of externalization of memory is by no means recent, for this cognitive capacity has been positioned as an interface "between the 'inside' and 'outside' of human subjectivity" since ancient times, acting as a bridge which connects subjective interiority with cultural exteriority. But continuity does not necessarily imply uniformity; the emergence of communicative media such as the telephone, the gramophone, and the radio brought about unprecedented opportunities of storing and retrieving material or sharing information with immediacy. High-speed direct contacts also imply enhanced authenticity and intimacy, that is, a renegotiation of the relationship between the individual and the collective dimension. What the modernist period emphasised is that collective thought or memory does not depend on shared representations of static imagery but on a dynamic and dialogic process of exchange.

To some extent, modernism explores cognition acknowledging not only its subjective nature but also its vulnerability as it shows a new awareness that some human faculties, once poured into external media, are at risk of being appropriated and manipulated. The preoccupations that authors such as Joyce and Eliot express about their own time of technological change have sensitized the age of networked computing, storage devices, and interactive ecosystems to potential dangers underlying the evolution of mechanisms for memory externalization. In this sense, I believe that *The Candy House* pays homage to "a formative movement in the looping cultural lineage of cybernetic thought" (Love 2016, 107) and to the first authors who recognized the implications of a relationship between the faculties of the mind and communicative media.

From a purely literary perspective, the changes that have occurred between 1922 and 2022 transpire from the function that *Ulysses* serves in Egan's latest novel. An idol rather than an icon, Joyce's book denies any epiphanic experience once Bix opens it; irremediably desecrated, it is subjected to the laws of reproducibility which characterise an era affected by high-tech amnesia. *Ulysses* acts as a *mise en abyme* of Bix's *Collective Consciousness* by being physically present in the story yet removed from the representative dimension and devoid of a symbolic halo – or an aura, to use Benjamin's terms. In a similar vein, *The Candy House* does not propose itself as a representation of a fragmented, hyper-digital reality because the epistemological condition that it should

expose has invaded the text itself: the novel has become a piece of that fragmented reality, a factual testimony of it.

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