Lagos and the Uncertain New Modernism of Teju Cole

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Abstract:
This article offers an innovative account of the work of the Nigerian American writer, Teju Cole, and argues that his fiction demonstrates an 'uncertain new' modernism of the city. In particular, the article analyses how *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007/14) and *Open City* (2011) draw upon the techniques and categories of earlier forms of modernist writing in order to depict the complexities of the urban experience. It focuses upon the representation of the Nigerian city of Lagos in *Every Day is for the Thief*, and argues that Cole's spatial stories of this city demonstrate a fascinating new development in the history of modernism and the city.

Keywords: Teju Cole, Nigeria, colonialism, metropolis

Arriving

The moment of arrival at a metropolis is a familiar scene in modernist fiction, particularly if the narrator or author is an outsider to that city. Take, for example, Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), where Anna Morgan arrives in London from Dominica just before World War I and experiences the geographical shift from the Caribbean to the supposed 'mother country' as one of profound visceral and affective disorientation: 'It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I

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had ever known. It was almost like being born again.' Colours and smells seemed different and 'the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. . . .a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy.'[1] The first extended description of the city is written in a rush of stream of consciousness prose that renders perfectly the disturbing 'difference' experienced by this outsider in the modernist city: 'this is London – hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along and the dark houses all alive frowning down one after the other all alive all stuck together – the streets like smooth shut-in ravines and the dark houses frowning down – oh I'm not going to like this place.'[2] The urban environment is one that produces spatial phobias in Anna, with streets that are 'shut in' and 'dark houses' that peruse you: it is a profoundly disorientating experience of place.

A variation on this scene can be found in a later text by another Caribbean writer in London, Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). Here the novel opens with Moses Aloetta taking a bus to Waterloo station to meet a new 'fellar' coming to Britain on the boat-train. The 'difference' of London to the eyes of the outsider is again apparent: 'One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet'.[3] London is thus 'strange' and 'unreal' for Moses, even though he has lived in the city for about ten years, as if it is a city in which he has struggled to belong. When Moses arrives at Waterloo he is overwhelmed by 'a feeling of homesickness' because the station 'is a place of arrival and departure [. . .] that sort of place where you have a soft feeling', which Moses identifies as an inchoate wish to travel back to the Caribbean.[4] In such moments the scene of arrival is always shadowed by that of departure, of the departure from the homeland, or the image of departing from the metropolis to home or to some other place entirely. Texts like those of Rhys and Selvon manifest the complexities of the 'voyage in' within colonial modernism, showing how the spaces of twentieth-century European modernist cities such as London and Paris were intrinsically connected to the wider geographies of empire. As Anna Snaith comments of colonial women modernists such as Rhys or Christina Stead, when they depicted London 'they were, inevitably, writing transnationally, writing the colonial space and refiguring the relationship in between.'[5] Such transnational writing about the city emphasises the mobile identities of figures whose affective experience of the metropolis is forever structured around experiences of arrival and departure. The 'voyage

in' is always shadowed by other possible travels: the 'voyage out', the 'voyage across', and sometimes the 'voyage back'.

This article argues that the work of the Nigerian American writer Teju Cole is marked by a twenty-first century version of this same colonial/post-colonial experience of the modernist city. In texts such as *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007/2014), *Open City* (2011), and *Tremor* (2023) we find similar tropes of arrival and departure, transnationalism, and the construction of fluid identities that move across, within, and between diverse geographies.[6] Cole's writing thus offers an 'uncertain new'[7] modernism that, in *Every Day Is for the Thief* especially, shifts to a radically different location to that of London or Paris: Lagos in Nigeria. Though some might wish to describe it as somehow a 'postmodern' city, it is clear from reading Cole that his texts disavow such a category and instead operate firmly within the categories of modernism.[8] After discussing *Open City* and its debt to earlier forms of urban modernism, this article turns to the representation of Lagos in *Every Day Is for the Thief*.

The sprawling megalopolis of Lagos, projected soon to be the third largest city in the world, and with a current population of over 20 million has received considerable debate in contemporary urban studies and can be variously categorised as a 'neoliberal city', a 'postcolonial city', or a 'metrocolony'.[9] Mike Davis has noted how the 'scale and velocity' of urbanization in places such as Lagos dwarfs the growth of European cities during the nineteenth century: 'London in 1910 was seven times larger than it had been in 1800, but Dhaka, Kinshasa, and Lagos today are each approximately forty times larger than they were in 1950.'[10] In the early twentieth century cities that exemplified the forces of modernity and modernization, such as Berlin, London, Paris, or New York, became important hubs for the various cultures of modernism; in the first decades of the twenty-first century the cities that perhaps best exemplify the contemporary urban experience are those of the Global South, such as Lagos, Mumbai, or São Paulo, where forces of modernity and modernization are intertwined deeply with the historical legacies of colonialism.[11]

One controversial study of Lagos was by the architect Rem Koolhaas, as part of his 'Project on the City' at the Harvard School of Design, an exploration into the nature of contemporary urban development.[12] In a brief lecture in 2002 Koolhaas noted that Lagos, along with the Pearl River Delta in China, indicates that 'the notion of the city itself has mutated into something that is no longer Western.'[13] He described his initial view of Lagos as a 'city of burning edges' with an 'aura of apocalyptic violence; entire sections of it seemed to

be smouldering, as if it were one gigantic rubbish dump', a deeply pejorative comment that seems initially to reveal the negative gaze of a white Western architect upon an African city.[14] However, subsequent visits by Koolhaas produced a revision in his interpretation of Lagos: what at first appeared as 'tragic manifestations of degraded urban life were actually intensely emancipatory zones', he writes.[15] Thus, the city's many garbage dumps were actually areas where groups sifted the rubbish for possible recycling, so that what appeared a 'chaotic city' on the surface contained a more structured engagement of people with their environment. Even the endemic traffic jams in the city – Koolhaas describes a helicopter trip over the city as revealing 'the greatest density of both traffic and human beings ever known to man' – are 'functional' in that multiple street vendors operate between the stationary vehicles.[16] Though Koolhaas is clearly aware of the immense problems the city faces – poverty, crime, gridlock, corruption – he also proposes that we recognise the 'impressive performance' of this 'city of processes' as 'evidence of how well Lagos might perform if it were the third largest city in the world.'[17] Another point of interest here is that in its crumbling infrastructure and chronic traffic problems, Lagos, for Koolhaas and the Harvard Project, represents the future of all modern cities: 'To write about the African city is to write about the terminal condition of Chicago, London or Los Angeles.'[18] However, for some critics, like Matthew Gandy, Koolhaas has simply turned the city into a 'living art installation', brushing aside the social and economic problems engendered by its rapid growth, and ignoring the ways in which the 'informal economy of poverty' celebrated by Koolhaas stems from specific economic policies developed by successive Nigerian political leaders (a number of them military dictators) under the guidance of the IMF and World Bank.[19] Another critic, Elise Dainese, argues that Koolhaas's account effectively dehistoricizes urban development in Lagos and thus 'disregards the role played by political forces' and the 'colonial and post-colonial legacy' of the city.[20]

Cole's exploration of Lagos in *Every Day* is, I would suggest, clearly aware of the complex politics of the city; but he also, like Koolhaas, celebrates some of the quotidian chaos of the city without ever succumbing to any simple glorification of mess and sprawl. Understanding Lagos as a modernist city, as I believe Cole does in *Every Day*, is to argue that it represents a twenty-first century urban modernism of the now, with distinct connections to earlier forms of Western modernist cities, but with quite specific features due to its location as a postcolonial city of the Global South.

Openings

Cole first came to prominence with *Open City* (2011), his melancholy account of a young Nigerian doctor named Julius whose episodic adventures revisit the figure of the modernist *flâneur* as he wanders around Manhattan and then takes a holiday in Brussels, where further *flânerie* takes place. Lagos is merely a ghostly presence in the novel, with Julius only briefly remembering some of his early life in the city. *Open City* commences not with a scene of arrival (Julius has been in the city as a medical student for a couple of years) but with a moment of intense engagement with the urban environment: 'And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city'.[21] Commencing *in media res* the opening pages detail how Julius extends his 'aimless wandering' until 'New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace' (*OC* 3). This is an interesting inversion: Julius does not work his way into the city, rather the city 'works itself' into his life, as if the urban inscribes itself into his very being. This might be understood as a strategy by the outsider to find a place in the metropolis, to overcome the feelings of 'difference' and 'unrealness' articulated by Anna Morgan and Moses Aloetta by surrendering to the fabric of the city, so that rather than trying to find a place to belong in the city, it is the city which articulates a place within Julius. However, this strategy is not an easy one to negotiate: Julius's walks take him into busy parts of the city, but the 'impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them' (*OC* 6). The alienated stranger in the crowd is, of course, a classic trope of the modernist city, as discussed by many thinkers from Georg Simmel to Raymond Williams.[22] In order to combat these gloomy feelings Julius walks for seven miles from the Upper West Side to Lower Manhattan and then takes the subway home, but cannot sleep and instead tries to make sense of what he experienced on his walk, 'sorting each encounter like a child playing with wooden blocks, trying to figure out which belonged where' (*OC* 6). Julius's experience here recalls the distinction between the map and the tour, introduced by Michel de Certeau in his classic account of walking in the city and the construction of 'spatial stories'.[23] Julius tries to cognise the city space he has just encountered, attempting to fit the parts together into the fixed form of a cartographic representation:

> Each neighborhood of the city appeared to be made of a different substance, each seemed to have a different air pressure, a different psychic weight: the bright lights and shuttered shops, the housing

> projects and luxury hotels, the fire escapes and city parks. My futile task of sorting went on until the forms began to morph into each other and assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city (*OC* 7).

Like Anna Morgan's awareness of how London differs from the Caribbean, Julius here tries to apply forms of difference as tools to map the city, using wonderfully intangible categories such as that of 'psychic weight'. But it is a 'futile' project and the failure here is partly because in trying to objectively map the city he forgets that he must also understand his own location within this geography and how the city has 'worked itself' into his life.

In the next paragraph he turns to what de Certeau would call a tour discourse.[24] Julius's walks are tours, in de Certeau's terms, related to the movement of individual subjects through spaces, and their relatively unstructured character 'met a need', writes Cole, as they were 'a release from the tightly regulated mental environment of work' and thus *flânerie* becomes a form of 'therapy' (*OC* 7):

> Every decision – where to turn left, how long to remain lost in thought in front of an abandoned building, whether to watch the sun set over New Jersey, or to lope in the shadows on the East Side looking across to Queens – was inconsequential, and was for that reason a reminder of freedom (*OC* 7).

Julius's spatial story here is characterised by the freedom not to fit the 'forms' of the city together in a mental map; as de Certeau notes, to 'walk is to lack a place… [t]he moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place'.[25] In one sense, Julius may 'lack a place' in the city because he is an outsider, and his *flânerie* only confirms this experience; but in another sense this does not seem to matter in the way that it did for Anna Morgan or Moses Aloetta. There is also a class dimension here, as both Morgan and Aloetta do not live economically secure or wealthy lives in London. Julius, by contrast, is an educated professional, able to afford a flight to Europe for a holiday without visible financial hardship. We must also acknowledge the different spatial histories of London and New York; while London has often not welcomed its various immigrant populations over the centuries, New York's image as a city constructed by the 'huddled masses' of its immigrant population over many years means that almost everyone in the city, like Julius, lacks a place to begin with.[26] Julius's arrival in New York is thus not the same as the colonial subject travelling to the imperial capital, even though the writing replicates some of the forms

of the encounter of the outsider with the modernist city. As Greer Hartwiger describes him, Julius is a 'postcolonial *flâneur*', drawing upon Simon Gikandi's use of the term to indicate the 'privilege' of the 'leisured postcolonial class'.[27]

Open City is also a text, like all of Cole's work, indebted to earlier forms of modernism, with many of his touchstones being canonical (white) modernists.[28] In his essay collection, *Black Paper* (2021), Cole discusses the influence on his work of the epiphany, noting how he openly drew upon James Joyce's 'The Dead', with its classic example of Gabriel Conroy's closing epiphany, for various moments in *Open City* and for his later book, *Blind Spot* (2016).[29] 'My literary interests', writes Cole,

> have been shaped in part by modernism, by Joyce and Woolf, by Mann, Musil, Broch: the flow of thoughts through minds, the blending of sensation into lyric passages. Far from having any anxiety of influence, I am skeptical of an originality that does not place itself in conversation with antecedents.[30]

Much of *Open City* does indeed draw upon these models, with Julius's 'flow of thoughts' being traced in moments where the sensations of urban encounters frequently produce more 'lyrical' passages of descriptive prose. Interestingly, Cole argues that he values epiphany more as a 'stylistic mode' than as a 'narrow narrative device' and cites examples from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Toni Morrison's *Jazz* that explicitly situate this epiphanic mode within cities.[31] As Cole puts it, it is a 'literary attitude' that deals with 'the thrum and possibility of city life, as in Woolf, Walter Benjamin, or Bruno Schulz. Cities are made of multiplicity, and they invite inventory. To list is, somehow, to love'.[32] Urban epiphanies of this kind, suggests Cole, are not moments of great narrative insight (as in Joyce's 'The Dead', when Gabriel realises that Gretta's love for Michael Furey surpasses their own), but are rather instances of a deep phenomenological engagement with the processes of the city. As Cole describes it, they are 'moments in which the story being told is deeply and almost mystically alert to the world' and where 'the density of a text', when producing an inventory of the city, offers a writing 'of what could be felt or seen but never fully described'.[33] Another way to put this is to say that Cole's writing on the city is driven by affects and emotions rather than by realist modes of representation, immersing his characters in the fabric of the city in order to capture those intense epiphanic moments when the rich nature of the city itself is disclosed. A city can never fully be 'described' or put into a map discourse, in de Certeau's terms, but it can be represented in a

tour discourse in which the 'density of the text' captures an epiphanic encounter with a particular aspect of the urban sensorium.

One key aspect of *Open City*'s affective depiction of the city is its stress – as with all of Cole's work – upon movement and mobilities. Cole is insistently a writer of travel and mobilities, exemplifying in fiction what Tim Cresswell has termed the 'new mobilities paradigm', scholarly work in urban studies and cultural geography which has tried to understand the politics of forms of movement ranging from 'the micro-movements of the body to the politics of global travel'.[34] Cities, suggests Cole's writing, are never static spaces but always spread out to connect with other cities, both spatially and historically. And cities are places where people are always conditioned by the experience of mobility, hence Cole repeatedly depicts journeys into and within cities: as well as walking in the city, we find journeys by subway in New York, by taxi and metro in Brussels, by bus in Lagos, and by plane to Africa or Europe. Frequently these are modes of public transport, where one subject brushes against the other, encountering features such as racial difference within the city, as when Julius becomes aware of how he might appear as 'the dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger' to those holding anti-immigrant views on the Brussels tram (*OC* 106). The trope of mobility also figures strongly at the start and end of the novel, with Julius becoming interested in the bird migrations he can observe from his apartment and which he connects to his 'aimless wandering' around the city (*OC* 3). These 'natural' migratory movements, as Hartwiger suggests, can be contrasted with the more restrictive practices facing human migration across the globe.[35]

Returning

In *Every Day Is for the Thief* the thematic of mobility is again central, with Lagos depicted as a city in perpetual motion, an urban whirl of multiple journeys by car or danfo (the yellow buses of Lagos). The text begins, like *Open City*, with the motif of a journey, but this is not the 'voyage in' of the migrant to the colonial metropolis, like Anna Morgan or Moses Aloetta, but a voyage of return. We learn that the unnamed narrator had left Nigeria suddenly for the United States and fifteen years later, in 2005, has undertaken this 'journey of return'.[36] As the plane lands the narrator feels (echoing V. S. Naipaul), 'the ecstasy of arrival, the irrational sense that all will now be well' (*ED* 10).[37] Lagos has been the subject of fictional treatment at least since Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) and then Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease (*1960).[38] More recently, the city has featured in novels such as

Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel (*2002).[39] Cole's work is distinct from these authors, however, in drawing more consciously upon earlier forms of modernism in his representations of the city. Like *Open City*, *Every Day* is an episodic encounter with a city that spawns many textual epiphanies.

The voyage of return that opens *Every Day* is a motif that also applies to the textual history of the book, for it was originally published in 2007 by Cassava Republic, a Nigerian press.[40] It was then published in a new edition by Faber/Random House in 2014. Cole's return to this text, some seven years later, saw him revise the book considerably, though without updating some of the contemporary references within it.[41] Most noticeable is that the twenty black and white photographs in the 2007 edition are entirely replaced by nineteen new images. Their placing in the text is also different: in the earlier edition the photographs are inserted between the text, never occupying more than a third of the page, while in the later edition most are placed on a single page free of text, and several are double page spreads.[42] The text/image relationships in both versions of *Every Day* are informed by Cole's work as a photographer, as detailed in his book *Blind Spot* and in several essays in *Known and Strange Things*. *Blind Spot* records multiple places visited by Cole, employing single-page colour images with facing text, which he characterises as attempts to represent the experience of particular places: 'I am intrigued by the continuity of places, by the singing line that connects them all. This singing line I have responded to in this book in the form of a lyric essay that combines photography and text'.[43] The photographs in both editions of *Every Day* are also lyric meditations on place and though some seem to refer directly to incidents in the text (as, for example, the images of a black goat or that of a danfo bus), most are more oblique representations of the city. In the latter edition the images are often blurred, with several taken through the windows of cars, emphasising again the idea of mobility and resisting the idea of a transparent, as a realist mode of representation.

Cole's return to *Every Day* also resulted in several emendations to the text. Mostly these are the minor changes of phrasing, though there is an interesting 'Author's Note' in the 2007 edition that is omitted in the latter edition:

> Writing about Lagos presents unique challenges. What could possibly be said about this most complex of cities that could compete with the reality? *Every Day Is for the Thief*, written after I revisited Lagos after a long

> absence, is a novel. I have sought to capture a contemporary moment in the life of the city in which I grew up.[44]

Cole continues to stress that he is not to be identified with the narrator, even though he is 'similar to me in certain ways', and that the book is thus a 'fictional story.'[45] *Every Day* is thus a 'novel' about a 'complex city', drawing upon a tradition of modernist writing about urban experience but updating it by depicting a city which rarely figures on earlier maps of modernism. Cole thus explores Lagos, we might say, through a lens borrowed from modernist fiction, placing himself in 'conversation with antecedents' such as Joyce, Woolf, or Benjamin.[46] In this respect his representation of Lagos insists that we view it too as a great capital of modernism and modernity, but one which requires us to revise our definitions of these terms.[47]

Cole is fond of an idea proposed in Italo Calvino's work of urban fabulation, *Invisible Cities* (1972): 'I like Italo Calvino's idea of "continuous cities"....He suggests that there is actually just one big, continuous city that does not begin or end'.[48] The task of the artist is thus to discern 'differences of texture' within this metropolitan continuity. In a section of *Blind Spot* concerning Lagos, accompanying a photo of a painted wall, Cole elaborates on this idea from Calvino:

> All cities are one city. What is interesting is to find, in this continuity of cities, the less obvious differences of texture: the signs, the markings, the assemblages, the things hiding in plain sight in each cityscape or landscape: the way streetlights and traffic signs vary, the most common fonts, the slight variations in building codes, the fleeting ads, the way walls are painted...the visual melody of infrastructure as it interacts with terrain: wall, root, plant, wire, gutter: what is everywhere but is everywhere slightly different.[49]

To demonstrate how *Every Day* interrogates these 'differences of texture' consider, for example, how Cole describes traffic in Lagos, another instance of his interest in mobilities. Near to where the narrator is staying is the Ojodu-Berger Bus Terminus (fig. 1), a major intersection in the north of the city:

> The Ojodu-Berger Bus Terminus is connected to the expressway by a steep dirt road. Hundreds of buses and cars cross at this narrow point every hour, much like a great herd fording a brook and clambering up the opposite slope. Driving south from there, the old toll gate into Lagos is only ten minutes away. On a day when the traffic is light, it does not take long to pass the districts of Alausa and Oregun. From the high bridge at Ojota, where the length of the Ikorodu Road stretches into the city as

Fig. 1. Albertoblaq, 'An evening in Ojodu Berger, Lagos state', 2023. Digital image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

> far as the eye can see, one has a panoramic view of the thickly populated area below: cars, molues, danfos, people. Perpetual movement. (*ED* 143)

Here the 'differences of texture' that define Lagos are evident: an expressway is adjacent to a 'dirt road', pointing to the uneven development of this African city, where rural modes of life (the 'great herd fording a brook') jostle alongside manifestations of contemporary urban modernity.[50] The highway system of Lagos was developed in the 1970s by the German engineering firm of Julius Berger, funded by revenues from the oil-boom that temporarily brought immense wealth to the elites of the country. The global recession of the 1980s, however, led to many of these infrastructure projects being abandoned or neglected, and not repaired.[51] This Lagos expressway is thus both like and unlike those one might find in New York, where something like the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, devised by city planner Robert Moses, is an image of 'perpetual' – but very slow – movement, predominantly of private cars (around 130,000 per day) and freight lorries (around 10%).[52] Both New York and Lagos roads share the propensity for traffic jams. Cole notes that 'traffic congestion. . . is a serious problem in Lagos', where 'ten-minute journeys that take forty-five minutes' are one of the 'cumulative stresses of Lagos life' (*ED* 67–68). However, unlike New York's subway system, public transport in Lagos revolves around the 'molues' and 'danfos' on the roads. The 14-seater yellow

danfo bus (the molue was a larger bus less frequently seen today) is a semi-private and unregulated form of public transport with a poor safety record that, according to one study from 2023, constitute 'the largest carrier of road passengers' in the city, accounting for around 45% of all vehicles on Lagos roads.[53]

The mobility represented by the danfo is thus a key 'difference of texture' in the 'visual melody of infrastructure' in Lagos and forms the backdrop for two early chapters in *Every Day*. In chapter 7 the narrator wishes to take a danfo from Ojodu-Berger through the city and onto Lagos Island, the central area for commerce, government, and cultural life. His aunt and uncle are strongly against the idea: 'The danfo is a death trap' and 'full of thieves' they say (*ED* 33) and try to persuade him to travel in a private car.[54] The narrator persists because 'being there on the danfo, being there on the streets, is the whole point of the exercise' (*ED* 34), the *flâneur* turned *voyageur* in the city: the 'degree to which my family members wish me to be separate from the life of the city is matched only by my desire to know that life' (*ED* 35). As with the perambulations of Leopold Bloom and Clarissa Dalloway in Dublin and London, the narrator here desires to plunge into the urban maelstrom rather than stand above it:

> The danfo, carrier of the masses, is the perfect symbol of our contest. The energies of Lagos life – creative, malevolent, ambiguous – converge at the bus stops. There is no better place to make an inquiry into what it was I longed for all those times I longed for home. (*ED* 35)

The division between the private individual and the crowd, the artist and the masses is another familiar modernist theme, and one that was associated with the spatial phobias about the modern city that arose at the start of the twentieth century, and which is echoed in the fears of the narrator's relatives in *Every Day*.[55] Cole's narrator, however, aligns himself with the more corporeal encounter with the other that occurs on mass transit. It is the energy of city life that he wishes to brush up against, which in a brilliant phrase is simultaneously 'creative, malevolent, ambiguous', a description apt for the 'complex city' of Lagos and one that recalls Benjamin's analysis of the crowd in Baudelaire and Poe.[56] It is also revealing that travel on the danfo represents the essence of the longing for home of the exile, as if it is the most mundane of mobile encounters with other citizens that captures such a nostos.

Danfos are operated by two people, a driver and a conductor, the latter known as a 'tout'. As Cole describes it, the touts call out at

terminals to try to fill the fourteen seats on their bus as quickly as possible:

> "Jotajota-jotajota". That's the man calling Ojata. "Kejakejakeja. Kejakeja-straight." That's the express to Ikeja bus stop. The sound that rises from the thrum of congested traffic is like a chorus of cantors or auctioneers. "Balende-CMS, Balende-CMS, Balende-balende-balende." (*ED* 35)

The correlation with earlier modernist cities is evident if we compare this moment with the opening of the 'Aeolus' episode in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Opening in the 'Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis' the location is the terminus for Dublin trams: 'Before Nelson's Pillar trams slowed, shunted, changed trolley started for Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey…' And like the danfo touts, the streets are full of the sound of the tram operators: 'The hoarse Dublin United Tramway Company's timekeeper bawled them off: – Rathgar and Terenure! – Come on, Sandymount Green!'[57] As both Joyce and Cole recognise, the density of city life invites 'inventory. To list is, somehow, to love.'[58]

Once the narrator has boarded the danfo, there occurs another moment familiar from earlier modernist city novels, that of the chance encounter with a stranger in the streets. The narrator sees a woman in Yoruba dress board the danfo at the Ojodu-Berger stop and notices that she is holding a book. On closer inspection he sees that the book is by Michael Ondaatje, to whom Cole has already referred admiringly in an earlier chapter.[59] The narrator is startled by this, finding it 'incongruous' to come across 'a reader of Ondaatje in these circumstances' (*ED* 41). He explains that though Nigeria's literacy rate is about 57%, what is surprising is not the fact of the woman reading on the danfo, but what she is reading: 'Magazines of various kinds are popular….But an adult reading a challenging work of literary fiction on Lagos public transportation: that's a sight rare as hen's teeth' (*ED* 42). Partly that is due to the cost of new books in Lagos as well as the difficulty of purchasing works by an author such as Ondaatje in the few bookshops in the city that might stock them.[60] As well as a reflection upon the cultural infrastructure of the city, however, the incident is another example of the lyrical urban epiphany of the sort outlined by Cole and discussed earlier. The 'mysterious woman' captures the narrator's interest:

> The questions come to my mind one after the other, and I cannot untangle them. I hunger for conversation with my secret sharer, about whom, because I know this one thing, I know many things.

> – What, lady, do you make of Ondaatje's labyrinthine sentences, his sensuous prose? How does his intense visuality strike you? But is it hard to concentrate on such poetry in Lagos traffic, with the noise of the crowd, and the tout's body odor wafting over you? (*ED* 43)

For the narrator, the reading of the book is intrinsically linked to the urban environment of the danfo, where musings on aesthetic style rub up against the sounds and smells of the journey. The narrator devises an internal monologue to the woman and hopes to think of a way to strike up conversation with her, mindful that 'Lagosians are distrustful of strangers, and I have to speak the right words to win her confidence' (*ED* 43). But as the bus stops after crossing onto Lagos Island she exits the danfo: 'She disembarks, at Obalende, with her book, and quickly vanishes into the bookless crowd. Just like that, she is gone. Gone, but seared into my mind still. That woman, evanescent as an image made with the lens wide open' (*ED* 43). It is a fleeting urban encounter, a lyrical epiphany with no overwhelming narrative revelation, but just another snapshot – as the reference to the lens emphasizes – of life in Lagos. It is within the tradition of Edgar Allen Poe's 'Man in the Crowd' and many other modernist *flâneurs*, but quite different from, for example, the woman described as 'black, but enchanting' that Peter Walsh follows through the streets of central London in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.[61] While Walsh's encounter has a more sinister sexualised quality and is bound up with racial and gender power structures, it also does not represent a moment of urban epiphany as in *Every Day*. As the woman goes into her house Peter merely sums up this 'escapade with the girl' as '"Well, I've had my fun"'.[62] In *Every Day* the epiphany with the woman reader demonstrates the interlinked nature of culture (the information on readers and reading), aesthetics (Ondaatje's style, the 'evanescent' photograph-like image of the woman), and the brute materiality of danfo travel in Lagos (the rush-hour congestion, the close proximity of others on the bus).[63] In such 'differences of texture' we grasp the new modernist form of Cole's representation of Lagos.

Another important 'difference of texture' is the way in which Cole's text depicts the spatial history of Lagos, showing how all cities contain sedimented traces of the past. In *Every Day* Calvino's notion of the 'continuous city' takes on a different hue, as Cole interrogates the place of Lagos in the transatlantic network of cities that sustained the slave trade. When the narrator visits the National Museum on Lagos Island he notes how the 'legacy of foreign rule is visible' in the buildings on the island, seeing them as 'a combination of the

borrowed old and the uncertain new' (*ED* 71), a testimony to how modernity and colonialism are intertwined in the very fabric of the city. The actual museum is a 'crushing disappointment' (*ED* 74) for it contains very little of the African art that the narrator has seen in Western collections, despite attempts by the Nigerian authorities over the years to have items returned that were plundered by the colonial powers.[64] He is also disappointed that there is more information in the museum about the 'alleged achievements of each military ruler' (*ED* 79) of the country than there is about the Atlantic slave trade. How the city remembers its history thus weighs upon the mind of the narrator and, in a later chapter, as he wanders around the older part of the city, his 'mind makes a heavy and unexpected connection':

> The secret twinship this city has with another, thousands of miles away. The thought is of the chain of corpses stretching across the Atlantic Ocean to connect Lagos with New Orleans. New Orleans was the largest market for human chattel in the New World. . . .The human cargo that ended up in New Orleans originated from many ports, most of them along the West African shore. And here was another secret: none of those ports was busier than Lagos. (*ED* 112-113)

The narrator further considers the history of this 'secret twinship' between transatlantic cities before noting starkly that this 'history is missing from Lagos. There is no monument to the great wound. There is no day of remembrance, no commemorative museum. . . .in Lagos we sleep dreamlessly, the sleep of innocents' (*ED* 114). Again, a comparison could be made with the representation of city monuments (or their lack) by Joyce in *Ulysses* or Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where depictions of statues of Lord Nelson or Charles Gordon indicate how the spatial history of colonialism has shaped, respectively, Dublin and London.[65]

The spatial history of Lagos and Nigeria is thus one that Cole interrogates in *Every Day*, showing how the 'continuous cities' of transatlantic modernity are linked by a 'chain of corpses'. In an interview Cole elaborates upon what Nigeria means to him personally:

> Nigeria haunts me in terms of being a space of unfinished histories. But my identity maps onto other things: being a Lagosian (Lagos is like a city-state), being a West African, being African, being a part of the Black Atlantic. I identify strongly with the historical network that connects New York, New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro, and Lagos.[66]

These four 'continuous cities', Cole later adds, were the 'vertices of a sinister quadrilateral', significant 'nodes in the transatlantic

slave trade'.[67] Cole's aim in *Every Day* is thus to bring to light the 'repressed violence' (*ED* 111) of this aspect of Lagos's spatial history, demonstrating how the contemporary geography of the city has occluded the past mobilities (here the slave trade) that have shaped this location, as well as others in the 'sinister quadrilateral.' Cole's spatial history also raises the question of how European modernist cities (London, Paris, New York) and their expressions of modernism might be further understood within the framework of the history of slavery.

Endings

The 'repressed violence' of Lagos's spatial history also offers a way to understand the final, epiphanic, chapter of *Every Day*. Arrivals in cities are often foreshadowed by ideas of departure or return and now the narrator is back in New York, but is suddenly caught by a memory of Lagos, a reminiscence that, like the Proustian madeleine, 'stands out of time' (*ED* 159). He recalls wandering 'with no particular aim' around the Iganmu area of the city and starts to become lost: 'Losing my geographical bearings in this way always brings ambiguous emotions' (*ED* 159). In one sense it opens him to unknown dangers, but in another sense 'letting go of my moorings makes me connect to the city as pure place' (*ED* 159). As in previous incidents the intention is to experience fully the urban essence of Lagos as 'pure place', rendering a conflictual set of emotions and affects. To return to de Certeau's terms the narrator articulates a tour discourse freed from the 'geographical bearings' of a map discourse. Echoing many earlier modernist depictions of the city, such as Joyce and Benjamin, the narrator states: 'I am in a labyrinth' (*ED* 159). He contrasts the labyrinth as urban trope with that of the maze: while the latter is full of dead ends, the labyrinth has a 'meaningful center'. He thus enters an alley in the 'heart of the district' that is full of boats in storage, with prows peeping out from the buildings and experiences 'an intentionality to my being here. It feels like a return, like a center, though it is not a place I have ever been before' (*ED* 159). It is a brilliant example of the urban epiphany outlined by Cole, where the 'thrum and possibility of city life', its labyrinthine quality, produces a text 'almost mystically alert to the world'[68] (the 'intentionality' of being of the narrator) which renders the 'pure place' of Lagos on the page.

But there is more to this epiphany, another manifestation to be revealed. As the narrator ventures further along the alley he loses his agency and feels 'pulled, into the little street, as one might be

pulled by the broad strength of a receding tide' (*ED* 160). At this moment he becomes aware that what he thought were boats are actually coffins, and the street is full of activity, as carpenters busy themselves in shaping the wood into the finished products. The narrator ponders the meaning of this street, hearing the sounds of children playing, and the sight of a woman stirring some food: this is the street 'to which the people of old Lagos, right across the social classes, come when someone dies' (*ED* 162). In the centre of the labyrinthine life of the city we find a reminder of death, an image that recalls the modernist epiphanies concluding Joyce's 'The Dead' and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, where news of the death of Septimus Smith in the latter disturbs Clarissa Dalloway's celebrated party. The 'ambiguous emotions' that the narrator in *Every Day* experienced upon entering this location are continued here: he feels that it is an 'uncanny place, this dockyard of Charon's, but it also has an enlivening purity' and that it is a street with 'dignity' (*ED* 161). The ambiguities and the uncanny quality here, I would suggest, also arise because of what this epiphany of coffins perceived as boats does not state openly: that it might refer symbolically to the 'repressed violence' of the slave trade, where boats departing from Lagos across the Atlantic often became mobile coffins for those that perished on the voyage. The final page of the book contains a photograph of a watery lane lived in by the Makoko community, a floating settlement built on stilts in Lagos lagoon. It is a brilliant image that speaks to the sense of the uncanny in the text: two boys are standing on a small boat that drifts past buildings on stilts. One boy is dressed in white robes, alternatively religious or ghostly in meaning, while the second boy points at the photographer and, thus, at us the reader and viewer of the image. Is the second boy's gesture accusatory? Or does the boy in white represent an image of redemption, perhaps from the 'repressed violence' of Lagos and its history, a redemption that echoes the 'enlivening purity' of the carpenters working on the coffins? Whichever way we interpret the image it is another instance of Cole's lyrical model of modernist epiphany, 'mystically alert' to the complexities of Lagos.

In *Black Paper* Cole writes that Julius engages in a kind of 'emotional archaeology of the city' when wandering around New York.[69] This is an excellent description of the experience of colonial migrants depicted in the works of writers such as Jean Rhys and Sam Selvon, articulating the enigmas of their arrivals in twentieth century modernist cities. It is also apposite for the epiphanies presented by the unnamed narrator of *Every Day*, epiphanies alert to the multifaceted spatial stories of Lagos and how they connect to a

longer global history of urban modernity. Not just arrivals, as in Rhys or Selvon, but movements between and across locations become the subject of Cole's transnational texts. In these fictions Cole offers a kind of uncertain modernism, uncertain because it tries to balance past models with the forging of new modernisms. We might also say that this uncertainty is a strength rather than a weakness of his work, because it acknowledges that the imbrication of modernism, modernity, and modernization that we think of as characteristic of Anglo-European cities in the early twentieth century will be differently configured in a postcolonial city of the Global South like Lagos. Tracing the 'difference of texture' of a place like Lagos is, therefore, an uncertain, but fascinating new development in the history of modernism and the city.

Notes

1. Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.7. I am grateful for the attentive comments of the editors and readers of earlier versions of this article.
2. Ibid., pp.15–16.
3. Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.3.
4. Ibid., p.5.
5. Anna Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.12.
6. I do not have the room here to consider *Tremor* (2023), other than to note the remarkable polyphonic depiction of Lagos in chapter 6 of the novel that seems, yet again, a fascinating updating of earlier forms of urban modernism, such as Joyce on the voices of Dublin in *Ulysses*.
7. This phrase is used by Cole to describe the modern architecture on Lagos Island: 'a combination of the borrowed old and the uncertain new'. Cole, *Every Day Is for the Thief* (London: Faber, 2014), p. 71.
8. Indeed, given the virtual disappearance of the notion of 'postmodernism' within current critical discourse it seems much more productive to understand Cole's representation of Lagos as part of the on-going debates around the continuing legacies and new variations of modernism.
9. For Lagos as example of a 'neoliberal city', see Oluwafemi Olajide and Taibat Lawanson, 'Urban paradox and the rise of the neoliberal city: Case study of Lagos, Nigeria', *Urban Studies* 59:9 (2022), pp. 1763–1781. For the concept of a 'postcolonial city' (though Lagos is not discussed), see Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2011) and Caroline Herbert, 'Postcolonial Cities' (where Lagos is briefly discussed) in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. by Kevin R. McNamara (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 200–215. Caitlin Vandertop's *Modernism in the Metrocolony: Urban Cultures of Empire in Twentieth Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) considers how cities such as Lagos are examples of 'a peripheral history of the modernist city' (p.4) in which the contradictions of 'colonial modernity' become 'visible in metrocolonial locations' (p.5).

10. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 2. For studies of the city see Margaret Peil, *Lagos: The City is the People* (London: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991) and Kaye Whiteman, *Lagos: A Cultural and Historical Companion* (London: Signal Books, 2012).
11. See Faranak Miraftab and Neema Kudva, *Cities of the Global South Reader* (Routledge, 2014). For a classic account of modernism, modernity, and modernization in the city see Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982).
12. The film Koolhaas produced from the project, *Lagos Wide and Close*, can be seen here: *Lagos Wide and Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City* <http://lagos.submarinechannel.com> [accessed 12 March 2025].
13. Rem Koolhaas, 'Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos' in *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, ed. by Okwui Enwezor and others (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002), pp. 173–183 (p.173).
14. Ibid., p.175.
15. Ibid., p.176.
16. Ibid., p.177.
17. Ibid., p.178.
18. *Mutations*, ed. by Rem Koolhaas and The Harvard Project on the City et al (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), p.653.
19. Matthew Gandy, 'Learning from Lagos,' *New Left Review*, 33 (May/June 2005), pp. 37–52 (p.42). To be fair, Koolhaas does address, briefly, some of these issues, noting that 'a series of dictators plundered the country and the city' ('Fragments', p.182). For a more recent assessment by Koolhaas see his 2016 discussion with the Nigerian architect Kunlé Adeyemi: 'Lagos shows how a city can recover from a deep, deep pit', *The Guardian* 26 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/26/lagos-rem-koolhaas-kunle-adeyemi> [accessed 12 March 2025].
20. Elise Dainese, 'Investigating the African City: Rem Koolhaas, Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, and Others' in *Shaping New Knowledges*, ed. by Robert Corser and Sharon Haar (New York: ACSA Press, 2016), p. 214.
21. Teju Cole, *Open City* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 3. Future references to this will be given in the main text by *OC* followed by page number.
22. See Georg Simmel, 'The Stranger' (1908) in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. by Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp.402–8; Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), p. 77.
23. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 118–122; and for a reading of Cole's work that draws closely upon de Certeau's ideas see Monika Mueller, 'Walking in New York City and Lagos: Spatial Memory in Teju Cole's Novels', *Atlantic Studies*, 18:3 (2021), pp. 316–330.
24. For de Certeau a map discourse aims to order space as a visual tableau, whereas a tour discourse is more experiential, based on 'spatializing actions' that 'organise movements'. De Certeau, *Practice*, p. 119.
25. De Certeau, *Practice*, p. 103.
26. See, for example, the brilliant opening scenes of Henry Roth's 1934 novel, *Call it Sleep* (London: Penguin, 2006) which depicts the arrival of 'natives from almost every land in the world' (p. 9) at Ellis Island in 1907, prior to disembarking in New York City.

27. Alexander Greer Hartwiger, 'The Postcolonial Flâneur: *Open City* and the Urban Palimpsest', *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2016), p.6; Simon Gikandi, 'Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality' in *Re-Routing the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. by Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 22–35.
28. However, in other essays and interviews Cole acknowledges the deep influence of many non-white writers upon his work, such as Michael Ondaatje and James Baldwin; see, for example, his essay on Baldwin, 'Black Body', published alongside Baldwin's essay 'Stranger in the Village' in a French edition, *Leukerbad 1951/2014*, trans. by Marie Darrieussecq and Serge Chauvin (Geneva: Éditions Zoé, 2023).
29. Cole acknowledges T. S. Eliot's injunction that 'mature poets steal' as his model in both instances, where he substituted some of Joyce's words with his own: 'No longer are we alone: they are with us now, have been all along, all our living and all our dead' reads the penultimate entry in *Blind Spot* (London: Faber, 2016), p. 320.
30. Teju Cole, *Black Paper: Writing in a Dark Time* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021), p.182. One obvious point of reference, given the role of photography in Cole's work, is that of W. G. Sebald. However, Cole says that his 'interest in Sebald came late, only after I had written *Every Day is for the Thief*'; the idea of using photos in a book came from reading Ondaatje, Orhan Pamuk, and Roland Barthes. Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things* (London: Faber, 2016), p. 82.
31. Cole, *Black Paper*, p.183.
32. Ibid., p.185.
33. Teju Cole, 'Teju Cole on The Wonder of Epiphanic Writing', *Literary Hub*, Oct 26 2021, pp.4; 9. This is a slightly different version of the chapter on 'Epiphany' in *Black Paper*.
34. Tim Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 28 (2010), pp. 17–31 (p.17).
35. Hartwiger, 'The Postcolonial Flâneur', pp. 11–12.
36. Cole, *Every Day*, p. 119. Future references to the 2014 edition of the text will be given by page number in the main text, preceded by *ED*.
37. The echo here is, of course, to V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), his autobiographical account of leaving Trinidad for England. Cole's essay, 'Natives on the Boat', describes meeting Naipaul at a party in New York and discusses his admiration for *The Enigma of Arrival*; see Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, pp. 17–24.
38. For a discussion of the latter see Liam Kruger, 'Literary Setting and the Postcolonial City in *No Longer at Ease*', *Research in Africa Literatures* 52:3 (Fall 2021), pp. 62–86.
39. See Rita Nnodim, 'City, identity and dystopia: Writing Lagos in contemporary Nigerian novels', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44:4 (Dec 2008), pp. 321–332 and Sarah K. Harrison, '"Suspended City": Personal, Urban, and National Development in Chris Abani's *Graceland*', *Research in African Literatures*, 43:2 (2012), pp. 95–114.
40. Cassava Republic was established by Bibi Bakare-Yusuf in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, in 2006. A much earlier version of *Every Day* appeared online as a blog in 2006; for more on its textual genesis see *Known and Strange Things*, p. 89.
41. Only an attentive reader of the 2014 Faber edition might realise, for example, that President Obasanjo, discussed in the context of problems with the economic infrastructure of the country (p. 140), had not been President of Nigeria since 2007.
42. For an analysis of the photographs in the book see Gabriele Rippl, 'Picturing Lagos: word-photography configurations in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007/2014)', *Social Dynamics* 44:3 (2008), pp. 472–484.

43. Cole, *Blind Spot*, p. 324.
44. Teju Cole, *Every Day Is for the Thief* (Abuja: Cassava Republic, 2007), preface. Other textual changes include an additional six pages in chapter 20 of the 2014 edition detailing an encounter with a policeman and an old friend. Yoruba terms in the earlier text are now italicised in the later version, acknowledging the different readership.
45. Cole, *Every Day* (2007), preface. Cole was born in the United States in 1975 but returned to Nigeria, his parents' home, when only five months old. He was schooled in Lagos, returning to the US for university in 1992,where he is now based. Asked in an interview why he termed *Every Day* a fiction he replied: 'I made a sideways move from art history into writing, and I think this, in part, is why I also find the stern distinction between fiction and non-fiction odd. It's not at all a natural way of splitting up narrated experience', *Known and Strange Things*, p. 79.
46. Cole, *Black Paper*, p. 182.
47. For some of the recent revisions of 'modernism' to include the 'global' see Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Peter Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global* Context (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
48. Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, p. 227. 'Continuous Cities' is the name of several chapters in Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (*Le città invisibili*), trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974).
49. Cole, *Blind Spot*, p. 200.
50. A similar mixture of urban and rural is noted later in the book: 'Out here, at the spreading edge of the gigantic metropolis, there is a feel of busy village life. It is an urban density' but 'life is languid' (p. 133).
51. Gandy, 'Learning from Lagos', p. 45. For another consequence of the oil boom in Nigeria see Rob Nixon's chapter on the execution of environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 103–127.
52. See 'The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, New York', *PIRG*, 8 November 2023 <https://pirg.org/resources/the-brooklyn-queens-expressway-new-york/> [last accessed 17 March 2025]; for the car-centric redesigning of New York by Moses, see Berman, *All that is Solid*, pp. 290–312.
53. Uche Nwaedozie, Ogochukwu Ugboma, Hassan Abdulsobur, and Emmanuel Mogaji, 'Danfo in Lagos, Nigeria: Unregulated, Unsafe, and Unreliable, Yet Meeting the Growing Transport Needs', *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2023), 1–19.
54. Due to their poor safety record one nickname for the danfo is 'flying coffin'; see Davis, *Planet of Slums*, p. 132.
55. On spatial phobias and modern cities see Paul Carter, *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia* (London: Reaktion, 2002).
56. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol.4 1938–40*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 3–92.
57. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 112.
58. Cole, *Black Paper*, p. 185.

59. There is an earlier intertextual reference to Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (*Every Day*, p. 23). Cole wrote of his admiration for Ondaatje in a 2012 article: Cole, 'My Hero: Michael Ondaatje', *The Guardian*, 17 Feb 2012.
60. In a later incident in the novel the narrator visits a rather dispiriting bookshop on Lagos Island (pp. 114–116).
61. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 57.
62. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 59.
63. Another European modernist antecedent here might be that of Charles Baudelaire's poem on a similar fleeting encounter, 'À une passante' in *Charles Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. by Joanna Richardson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 170.
64. Cole discusses the case of the Benin bronzes, sixteenth and seventeenth century bronze heads that were plundered by the British in 1897 (*Every Day*, pp. 76–77). Many found their way into Western museums and galleries and have been the subject of long-running disputes around their return to Nigeria. Cole also discusses the Benin bronzes in *Tremor* (London: Faber, 2023), pp. 107–112. See also Paddy Docherty, *Blood and Bronze: The British Empire and the Sack of Benin* (London: Hurst, 2021).
65. For discussion of statues in *Ulysses* see Vandertop, *Modernism in the Metrocolony*, pp. 78–84 and Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 115–151. Woolf notes the statues of three military imperial heroes that Peter Walsh walks past in Whitehall: Lord Nelson, Charles George Gordon, and Henry Havelock (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 56).
66. Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, p. 84.
67. Ibid., p. 86. In *Open City* Julius comes across the site of an African burial ground in Lower Manhattan, the site of a memorial to 'some fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves',which makes him aware of 'the echo across centuries, of slavery in New York' (pp. 220–221).
68. Cole, *Black Paper*, p. 185; Cole, 'Teju Cole on The Wonder of Epiphanic Writing', p. 4.
69. Cole, *Black Paper*, p. 63.