EXPOSING H. G. WELLS'S DURATIONAL *TRANSPARENCIES*

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Abstract. This article deploys Henri Bergson's concept of *durée*, which reconfigured the way in which time/space relationships are perceived, to re-contextualise H. G. Wells's innovative interests in the years between 1880 and 1920. In strategically conflating *transparency* and *invisibility* as different forms of non-being, Wells enabled free 'dilations' from one form of emergent subjectivity to another through the mediation of diaphanous 'carriers'. Wells's *The Invisible Man*, *The History of Mr. Polly*, *Ann Veronica*, and *Tono-Bungay* are located within a *fin-de-siècle* tradition that runs counter to the solid, developmental trajectory and bourgeois search for foundations characteristic of nineteenth-century *Bidlungsromanen*.

This article contends that Wells's *oeuvre* is more aligned with other literary, scientific, and cultural activity of the period, such as represented by the work of Walter Pater, Ferdinand de Saussure, Bram Stoker, the early Freud, Rodin. Wells retained both a personal and literary interest in the radical reconfigurations (real and illusory) of corporeal, material, proprietary and institutional bodies. His exploration of the making, unmaking, and imaginary re-making of all these bodies, enabled by sophisticated simulation(s), makes Wells a figure of enduring interest.

In *Time and Free Will*: *An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1888), Henri Bergson's conceptual *durée* (*duration*) reconfigured our perception of time/space relationships. Bergson suggested that when an attempt is made to measure the moment, that moment, similarly to H. G. Wells's Invisible Man Griffin, vanishes. Time is thus arbitrarily mobile and incomplete, which problematises the very notion of duration. Because it is inaccessible to traditional measurement, *duration* is conceptually neither a unity nor a multiplicity, nor an aggregate, but exists as a continually provisional trace.[1] This active, irreducible ineffability, resistant to easy cognitive 'capture', came to govern a number of 'presences', beliefs, narratives, cultural practices, and interests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For Bergson, 'pure duration' excludes 'all ideas of juxtaposition, reciprocal exteriority, and extension'; yet, perhaps

[1] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*: *An Essay on the Immediate Data of Human Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (Montana: Kessinger, 1910), 76-77, 142.

paradoxically, it is that to which everything is disposable, as each individual can potentially 'dilate' or 'enlarge' and move into other durations and thus, potentially, other communities.[2]

Alfred Polly of *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) is one of many Wellsian protagonists and material objects, like airships, to suffer from an excess of exteriority in his occupation as well as interior life. That is, until he sets the fire that destroys a meagre livelihood as a draper – wrapping people in colours, 'He had been muddled and *wrapped about* and *entangled*, like a creature born in the jungle who has never seen sea or sky. Now he had come out of it suddenly into a great *exposed* place.'[3] However, the arson that destroys Polly's livelihood along with those of his fellow merchants, an induced 'emptying out' of a neighbourhood in an early instance of urban renewal, enables a collective regeneration for his neighbours and a new life for him (under cover) thanks to insurance 'cover'. These unanticipated reconfigurations of the 'covered life' are differentially related, constituting a part of the perpetual heterogeneity crucial to the *durational*.

This imaginative and, occasionally, criminal hollowing-out of bodies and embodiments – manufactured transparencies – reconcile two apparently antithetical representations: a stifled life and collective redemption. This article will suggest a persistent dialectic in Wells's work between socially-covered, pigmented bodies and the radically-exposed body or consciousness that generates meaning through the mediation of various diaphanous figures capable of a dual, even amphibious existence, agents familiar to students of *fin-de-siècle* culture. An entropic degeneration – a movement toward disorder and destruction – embodies the potential for radically shared 'sympathies', even identification, with heterogeneous bodies.[4]

Heathcliff, Pip, Richard Feverel, Julien Sorel, and Will Ladislaw all begin their lives as socially invisible, insofar as they lack lineage and prospects. Self-definition and self-determination are thus aligned, potentially part of a heavier body, so long as it finds its social place and space. The trajectory – from invisibility to heightened visibility – concludes with substantial success, a bourgeois corporeal stability. Wells, by contrast,

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[2] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle B. Andison (New York: The Citadel Press, 1992 reprint), 164.

[3] H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, ed. Simon J. James, with an introduction by John Sutherland and notes by John Sutherland and Simon J. James (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), 179, italics added. Hereafter referred to as *HMP*, with page numbers in parenthesis.

[4] Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 18-19.

initially endows his characters with a latent heterogeneity. Often, they are not quite invisible, but have a curiously hybrid, hence potentially plural existence. Placed with relatives or friends for training in a trade guaranteed by bond against metaphoric or actual flight, these apprentices in an uncle's chemist shop or an outfitter (George Ponderevo, Alfred Polly) inhabit a multiple, *poly* domain. They are simultaneously free as part of a transparently replaceable labour market and bound for a specific, albeit elastic, temporal interval to alternative familial supervision.

A more mature version might be the Demonstrator, bound to a Professor (an ideological alternative father) with whom he disagrees at his own peril, as the Capes of *Ann Veronica* (1909) takes exception to the theories of Professor Russell (a fictional clone of T. H. Huxley). Yet, he is sufficiently free to 'moonlight', running his own experiments, with contained resentment: the 'educated oppressed', as a relatively invisible presence in a pseudo-father's achievements. Their incompletely wrapped life comes to the fore, most obviously, in the domestically entangled laboratory assistant Capes in *Ann Veronica* and Griffin in *The Invisible Man* (1897). The latter's namesake, 'Gryphon', is also a hybrid/composite, as well as a historically common presence on ancestral familial crests.

We almost (but not quite) see through the allusions – nominative, historical, thematic – which suggest that these assorted *near-transparencies* are tropes mediating between invisibility and the opacity of the 'most wrapped things in Ann Veronica Stanley's wrappered world'.[5] Her childhood house is iconic, as 'how can one put it? – in wrappers, like a house when people leave it in the summer' (*AV* 8), being simultaneously there and not there: 'The blinds were all drawn, the sunlight kept out, one could not tell what colours these grey swathings hid. She wanted to know.' (*AV* 8)

The Stanleys' suburban house with its heavily draped and stuffed furnishings is an architectural correlate of the more familiarly swathed, anonymous Invisible Man: it is simultaneously open and closed at the level of perception. Upon arrival at the 'Coach and Horses Inn' in the first chapter of *The Invisible Man*, Griffin 'laughed abruptly, a bark of a laugh, that he seemed to bite and kill in his mouth'.[6] It is simultaneously a laugh and an

[5] H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, ed. Sitta Schutt, with an introduction by Margaret Drabble (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), 37. Hereafter referred to as *AV*, with page numbers in parenthesis.

[6] H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, with an introduction by Christopher Priest and notes by Andy Sawyer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), 9. Hereafter referred to as *IM*, with page numbers in parenthesis.

interrupted laugh, muffled in a mouth that is the only visible part of a body covered in bandages, as if the covers both silenced the word while emitting a highly expressive, albeit truncated, utterance: a discontinuous wrap belonging to two vocal registers, silence and utterance, simultaneously.

The Invisible Man is initially constituted as an early scientific Black Hole – an opening in drapery and therefore a 'mouth effect' like Plato's cave: 'the centre of his face became a black cavity' (*IM* 36). A perpetual durational (and hence emergent) 'becoming', Griffin is both hidden (and hence menacing), yet bandaged, and simultaneously the opposite of social menace, the suffering victim of an explosion. His body is not consistently readable with its strategic alternation of black holes and white stripes. It is rather a body *in situ*, a locus of becoming or ending, rather than a definable Being; a body riddled by 'interstices' (*IM* 119) like the system of 'blinds' (*IM* 72) which regulate lighting at the pub 'The Jolly Cricketeers'.

This is not invisibility, but a generative, intermittent visibility induced by *transparency*: a de-noted body, alternately 'written down' and 'written up', inflated and deflated, simultaneously. Wells's oeuvre privileges a hybrid hollowed/filled status suggested in chromatically or pneumatically challenged bodies. These include figures either awaiting 'fulfilment' – airships (*Tono-Bungay*); deflating bicycle tyres (*The History of Mr. Polly*); a time machine that resembles a hollowed-out tricycle; the empty body of the Invisible Man; chronic flatulence (*The History of Mr. Polly*) – or excessively filled, like Marvel's 'copious flexible visage' (*IM* 43); Uncle Ponderevo's 'plumped up [...] flotation' after the premature success of Tono-Bungay;[7] or the full-figured patroness of the Potwell Inn, Flo, who draws Alfred Polly's enduring dedication.

Chromatically oppositional effects of lighting in *The Invisible Man* produce a kaleidoscopic pattern in which Ipping is mapped as an intermittent flickering induced by a 'network of windows, beaded gas-lamps and shops with black interstices of roof and yard that made up the town at night' (*IM* 76). This is an appropriate setting for Griffin's own theory in which the deconstruction of the subject proceeds by reducing the coefficient of resistance to light in a community mapped as 'a network of riddles, a network of solutions gleaming elusively through' (*IM* 89). Meaning, scientific as well as visual, is being thus generated by an interplay of presence and absence, which is also a network of revelation and opacity.

[7] H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder, with an introduction and notes by Edward Mendelson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), 209. Hereafter referred to as *TB*, with page numbers in parenthesis.

As a result of being born a near-albino, Griffin exists as a lack (awaiting colour) and potentially so full as to be an encompassing social threat. The meanings of Wells's specular novel are in part generated by a strategic confusion between *invisibility* and *transparency*. As light, white is the colour absence that would potentially contain all colours, save its opposite, which is black. Yet focusing on pigmentation, there emerge differentials in chromatic tone similar to the minimally differential white canvasses of the contemporary painter Robert Ryman: '"One could make an animal – a tissue – *transparent*! One could make it *invisible*! All except the pigments. I could be *invisible*."' (*IM* 92, italics added)

Invisibility is here being conflated with the intermittently readable (transparent) or incompletely decipherable due to some confusion between the materiality of the colour spectrum and its durational representations to which, uncannily, Bergson called attention in *The Creative Mind* (1946): 'Just as the colour orange is a real part of the colour spectrum – the light waves of orange on the contrary not being a component part but a partial expression – my own duration is a real part of the duration itself.'[8] Character, body, object, or text could resist (consistent) legibility for a variety of reasons, including displacement from a familiar social or chromatic context or spatial spectrum while continuing to remain perceptible but illegible:

> 'There are no diagrams?' asked Mr. Bunting. 'No illustrations throwing light –'
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> 'See for yourself,' said Mr. Cuss. 'Some of it's mathematical and some of it's Russian or some other language (to judge by the letters)….' (*IM* 52)

Representational discontinuity, occluded continuity, excessive or suspended 'pigmentation', or a vanishing presence in Griffin's scientific notebooks is not invisibility at all, but a fleeting, potential visibility, perhaps better described as diaphaneity or ephemerality. We look at it and through it and see no consistent inscriptive meaning, but a notational amalgam: victim/criminal; marked boundaries/holes; the covered (by Rev. 'Bunting')/uncovered. Although we may read these 'sets' in terms of binary opposition, the attentive reader of *The Invisible Man* might well take the view of the law as enunciated by Constable Jaffers, and read them as double negatives ('the ain't of a nothing') that generate value: '"What I'm after ain't no invisibility, – it's burglary. There's a house been broken into and money took."' (*IM* 40) Griffin's intermittently transparent body, as we shall see,

[8] Bergson, *Mind*, 170-1.

became an operative metaphor during the European *fin de siècle*, a kind of cipher, or even equivalent to the numerical place holder, zero, in generating meaning across a variety of cultural and scientific practices. This 'play' of transparency, by re-visualising a common trope of the Enlightenment mentality and allowing it to trope itself, quickly became incorporated into 'decadent' values. This new 'empty', yet functional, 'body' forms unique metaphysical and social bonds, enabling curious regenerative capacities readable simultaneously as information, emptiness, or magical transformation.

Once transparency is conflated with invisibility, however, there arises a confusion of two embodiments of the double nature of the negative: simple limitation and opposition. Transparency and invisibility (companionable negations) can thus be vulcanised into a 'set'. If we consider negative notions (say disorder or non-Being) from the starting point of order and Being as the limits of a deterioration in whose intervals all things would eventually come to exist, it is obvious that transparency, considered as a limitation of opacity, would resemble invisibility as the terminus of the deterioration of the body. But these deteriorations (decadences) differ not in degree, but in kind. In Wells's work, a medium is often abstracted into an immediacy that is inseparable from what is being mediated.

This grounds the curious bonds and duality which often makes Wells's work seem thematically synchronous with a period which produced *Dracula* (1897), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (wherein a picture comes to life as its model's life degenerates, aligning life and death as mutual dependencies); Madame Blavatsky's Chakras; Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra; and – some thirty years later – André Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*, 1925). The dissimulative substitutions of bodies, narratives, and species enable continuous temporal and spatial recurrence and alterations between and among them.

In all of these kindred *fin-de-siècle* texts, differences in kind must be thought of independently of all forms of negation and opposition, which can only be imagined in opposition to non-Being. Being, from one perspective, is conventionally posited as being like one (but only one) form of subjectivity: opaque, non-transparent, and sufficiently solid to enable character and identity-formation over time. Hence, the traditional *Bildungsroman* with its emphasis upon a character's coming-into-being, privileges subjectivity-formation, autonomy, and self-sufficiency, as befits a solidly bourgeois mode. But if the body is clothed, moves, and especially if it harbours secrets of a shameful genealogy, it is always already partially

obscured, as would be many of its anatomical and psychological functions. Hence a notion of progressive exposure (photographic or criminal) – a visual correlate of Bergson's iconic *duration*, insofar as each exposure is both internally (incrementally) different from itself and also from any imaginable Being – could be reimagined as a vehicle for the creation of virtual multiplicity.[9] Instead of illuminating any differences, one form of non-Being is strategically substituted for another. Wells's critique of bourgeois cultural icons involves the exposure of a defined, embodied (stuffed or wrapped) 'self' as an emptiness vulnerable to multiple alternative reincarnations.

Wells's endorsement of a perpetual coming into being (as opposed to actual Being) achieves at the visual level what *duration* does at the temporal register, in which every temporal increment is both different from itself and different from every other increment, perpetually. Transparency would mark the intersection of visual continuity and visual heterogeneity and hence a composite of both. This composite of visual continuity and heterogeneity grounds Bergson's model of duration as the movement of glass beads on a continuously moving string,[10] in which we are reflected in the beads. In *The Invisible Man* (as in *The Time Machine*) temporal 'transparency' is achieved early on, when, even before Griffin's arrival, Mr Henfrey, the village clock mender, 'took off the hands of the clock and the face' (*IM* 13), in preparation for a new measure of diachronic/synchronic time known as AIM (After the Invisible Man), as opposed to BCE. The possibility of arbitrarily determined temporal and spatial remarking enables belief in an alternative time and space characteristic of many utopian constructions. The destruction of the old modes of spatiality or temporality is a prelude to new, potentially infinite possibilities.

Underlying such spatial and temporal possibilities is a reduction in the coefficients by which time and space are traditionally measured instrumentally, and hence differentially defined. Accordingly, the principle of induced invisibility involves the reduction of an object (like glass) into infinitely small particles, lowering the coefficient of resistance to light ever further and then dissolving those particles into another transparent medium (say water) in such a way that transparency is squared, as it were. A lack or a negative is again being doubled, as with Griffin/Marvel or Polly/Jim: 'a transparent thing becomes invisible if it is placed in any medium of almost

[9] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 68-73ff.

[10] Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 21. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1988), 26-32.

the same refractive index' (*IM* 91). Emptied of opacity (as an index), the object becomes a transactional carrier through which some radically transformational value or field of values is carried. Becoming thus simultaneously both a channel and the resistance to a channel, the conveying agent belongs to two heterogeneous orders of Being which share the same time and space.

This 'play' of visibility, occluded visibility, transparencies, and emergent polyvalent 'bodies' and 'body-effects' constitutes a recurrent pattern in Wells's work. George Ponderevo's uncle, creator of the miraculous cure-all, Tono-Bungay, appoints his nephew as its director of advertising with a homespun aphorism: 'the reality of life ... is Chromatic Conflict ... and Form' (*TB* 140). In *The Invisible Man*, Griffin's double, the tramp Marvel, is a chromatic harlequin, a sartorial patchwork simultaneously highly visible, yet in terms of class identification, socially invisible and hence an appropriate repository of secret formulas. This class presents the community with arbitrary constructions of 'self' – prosthetic bodies, harlequins, itinerant performers and socially marginal, assorted, 'patched' types – resembling those featured in the early Picasso's *La famille des saltimbanques* (1905) or the harlequin Russian in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). One reads in *The Invisible Man*: 'The marn's a piebald, Teddy. Black here and white there – in patches. [...] He's a kind of half-breed and the colour has come off patchy instead of mixing.' (*IM* 20)

Surplus and fullness – a binary self-cancelling 'piedness', as well as invisibility, coexist as a perpetual pairing. The singular body is vulnerable to a variety of reanimations many of which depend upon an abstraction, a 'transparent medium of exchange'. This substantive permeability resembles Marx's analysis of the 'wrapper' of paper money in *The Grundrisse* (1858). Differing objects are dissolved (their coefficients of difference reduced to zero) by making them all equivalent in denomination, though different ontologically.[11] My shoes are my watch insofar as both are exchangeable at $200. In the plot of *Kipps* (1905), the appearance of money out of nowhere, its criminal disappearance, and then its reappearance as the realisation of an unrealised investment in performance, lends it a fugitive ephemerality resistant to semiotic capture as is.

In *Ann Veronica*, Peter Stanley, Ann's father, enjoys the late-Victorian hobby of amateur microscopy, 'rubbing down slices of rock to *transparent thinness*' (*AV* 11-12, italics added), then mounting the specimens as

[11] Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 198-201.

'conversaziones' at exhibitions. His elaborate mounting and backing occurs 'in all things classified without nuance' (*AV* 21), similarly to what the Victorian class system achieved socially. Ann is drawn to activities and ideas that are the antithesis of the coverings, wrappings, backings and boundaries. She rather prefers the company of the Widgetts whose conversation and household effects were invariably 'undisguised, fading visibly in an almost pitiless sunlight' (*AV* 37). Similarly, Ann is drawn to the academic Capes, who never mounts his specimens, 'so as to better see the nuclei' (*AV* 231), and who possesses a mind similarly 'illuminated by darting flashes and through light, even if it was momentary light, into a hundred corners that Russell left steadfastly in the shade' (*AV* 131). Capes's intermittently transcendent insights are different in kind from Professor Russell's self-centred guiding 'beacon' and its steadfast consistency.

As with the Invisible Man's strategic confusion of *transparency* and *invisibility*, Ann Veronica, upon emergence from Canongate Prison with her dermatological ailments attributed to coarse prison wrap, wonders if she 'shall ever shine like a light, like a translucent goddess' (*AV* 148). Political activism as a suffragette is apparently insufficient to alter a life lived 'as though I had bandaged eyes [...] wrapped in thick cobwebs' (*AV* 281), to be removed in the interest of mutual transparency, achieved during the elopement with Capes in the ascent of Alpine peaks.

Capes's hair is 'bleached nearly white' as the couple find themselves over 'a round pool of colour' (*AV* 278), a chromatic abyss whose terminus is sheer whiteness, a colourlessness so blinding that Ann contemplates submitting herself to the destructive element: '"Here we are," he said, "shining through each other like light through a stained-glass window."' (*AV* 238) Wells's novel seems prescient when we recall the failure of Gerald Crich to survive such a moment in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). Their new relationship, beyond civil law, involves faith in transparency, one that counters a 'through-the-glass-darkly' moment. The mutual abandonment of the itchy 'wrapped life', an 'unveiling' (*AV* 239), resembles Alfred Polly's rationalisation of his arson: 'we've burned the confounded rags' (*AV* 276). Read in this contrarian way, the Invisible Man, from one perspective, uses his rags (bandages) to hide an ultimately unsuccessful quest for mutual openness, achieving only an intermittent, potentially sympathetic illumination, a variable *transparency*.

The miraculous spiritual and corporeal transference of bodies and ideas have a resonance in Wells's career as author and public intellectual. Both Griffin and Capes are resentful of their respective professors, Oliver

and Russell, the 'master antecedents' from whom the underlings feel likely to steal their ideas without acknowledgment. Though fearful that his Professor will appropriate his research on light rays, Griffin easily cedes his notes to Marvel for safekeeping and possible reproduction. Even at the end of *Ann Veronica*, with Capes (having abandoned his career as a biologist) and Ann now living in luxury thanks to his newfound success as a popular dramatist, the former Demonstrator appears as the commercial adapter of the work of others rather than an originally creative talent. An unacknowledged inheritance (appropriationism?) is similarly at the heart of the plot of *Kipps*.

These derivative, commercial adaptations and appropriations, from one perspective, are variant simulations that disguise radical instances of sharing, common to characters in the novels of both Wells and his correspondent and critical admirer Joseph Conrad.[12] Wells had reasons for being sensitive to the theme, given a litigious life which included threatened libel suits, censorship disputes, and even accusations of plagiarism – offenses which abut boundaries of self-definition, social propriety, and creative property.[13] In *Tono-Bungay* (1909), Uncle Ponderevo lacks any insurance against unlawful appropriation and, in the end, loses his fortune: '"Writin' things down – I done something" [which the authorities] "*have* got…out."' (*TB* 350). Unacknowledged appropriation – as replicas and doubles involved in plagiarism, cloning, and assorted mimetic adapters – haunts Wells's work in very creative ways.

In *The History of Mr. Polly*, the protagonist, whose 'soul had been cramped and his eyes bandaged from the hour of his birth' (*HMP* 141), becomes transparent through the adaptations of a 'double', which could be thought of as a shared coefficient of singular identity, enabling the dilations into plural existences to which Bergson called our attention. After the habitual criminal, Uncle Jim, steals the wardrobe of his rival, Mr Polly assumes the latter's identity by dressing like his enemy (yet another Marvel-like 'double') made up of appropriated 'patches'. When the criminal's body

[12] David G. Smith, *H. G. Wells*: *Desperately Mortal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 162-3.

[13] One such instance involved a Canadian historian Florence Deeks, who claimed (unsuccessfully in court) that Wells had 'pirated' from her *The Web of History* (submitted to Macmillan and rejected in 1918) in his *Outline of History* (1920). Wells found himself accused of being both a plagiarist and a blatantly commercial 'adapter'. Although he was acquitted in court, Macmillan did request that future contracts have to include insurance 'cover' to indemnify the publisher against charges of unacknowledged appropriation. (Smith, 258-60.)

is found in the river wrapped in Polly's clothing, there emerge paired 'secret sharers' (to borrow from Conrad's work of the 1890s) in criminality: ex-arsonist and thief. Once deprived of his social 'covering', and capable of multiple identities, her former husband is encountered by the estranged Miriam as an unrecognisable ghost, a living *transparency*. The submergence of identity enables the pair to 'begin again' as friends. All circumstances can 'dissolve and change' even the 'walls of a prison cell' or the 'infirmary compartment' (*HMP* 159).

Dissolution is an appropriately operative concept here, as criminality and illness denote interchangeable phenomena. Max Nordau suggested as much in his infamous 1892 medico-moral catalogue, *Degeneration* (*Entartung*), with its illustrations of atavistic and misshapen criminal body 'types'.[14] A catalogue of atavistic bodies was used to generate future predictions of criminal behaviour in such a way that a degenerate body paradoxically generated a legible moral 'truth' to those who presumably knew how to read it. So-called regressive 'types' (high foreheads, protruding lips) were given a meaning in the same way that Freud gave other forms of repressed development a latently expressive meaning.

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Although conditioned to view corporeal opacity and invisibility as opposite valences, the presence of vehicles of transparent mediation allows us to see them as aligned, a model shared by other *fin-de-siècle* thinkers and scientific innovations. The death of the Invisible Man, apprehended after taking refuge in 'Omniums', the all-inclusive portmanteau emporium nominally combining singular and plural, lowers the coefficient of difference separating life and death. Witnesses to Griffin's end (or is it a beginning as the coefficient of death has been lowered to zero?), see 'faint and transparent as though it were made of glass' (*IM* 148) the 'outline of a hand' which grew from the 'invisible' to the 'cloudy and opaque, even as they stared' (*IM* 149). The transparent body in the act of chromatic resurrection comes alive when it is finally killed off at the novel's end. In Wilde's contemporaneous *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, upon the deaths of the sitter (Gray) and the painter (Basil Hallward), the previously 'closeted' portrait reverts (comes alive) to its initial representational value, the 'life' of the 'as is', rather than the 'living' cumulative record of Dorian's sins.

[14] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 48 and 67-9.

By the end of the nineteenth century, photography had moved from merely providing 'a record of experience' or the celebration of an occasion (as with Julia Cameron or Lewis Carroll) to become the most scientific proof of the reality of the invisible, by the production and application of chemically-induced transparent mediums, extrusive celluloid and silver nitrate solutions. Together with Roentgen's discovery of the X-ray and the Curies' wider applications, the 'living' body was exposed as simultaneously very alive and a skeletal mass: life and death were elided in a revelatory technology. The living body appeared as dead and the dead body was revivified.

If new cameras, cut lenses, and new wavelengths could expose what had previously been the body's secrets, the same techniques could also be enlisted for more spiritual purposes. Many theosophists believed that photography could reveal a heretofore individual supernatural world of spirits to the trusting eye in such a way as to blur the difference between natural and supernatural.[15] Lacking notation or rituals, Spiritualism came to be dependent upon a combination of demonstration and manifestation, perhaps subsumed under the notion of spectacle reflected in the French *séance*. The evoked spirits often left behind spiritual signs: musical instruments sailed through the air, candle flames appeared, or sounds could be heard. Photography became a handmaiden, a medium of manifestation blurring the distinctions between natural science and radical metaphysics. Extra-terrestrial 'spirits' seemed to appear in finished portraits of ancestors, so that on occasion, a technically sophisticated photographer (like the convicted fraud, William Mumler) became a 'qualified medium'. Mumler allegedly channelled supernatural influences into the camera in order to create a staged performance invoking various suspended 'states' for an audience, a hoax achieved by the 'superimposition' of multiple photographs.[16]

These sleights of hand, technology, eye, or philosophical categories came to assume the dimensions of performance or the exposure of some real or imaginatively foundational nucleus that could be repeatedly evoked. Both

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[15] See the essays collected in *The Perfect Medium*: *Photography and the Occult*, ed. Clément Chéroux [et al.] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), especially Andreas Fischer, '"A Photographer of Marvels": Frederick Hudson and the Beginnings of Spirit'.

[16] Simone Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments*: *Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 134-69.

Capes (with a newly found talent as a dramatist) and Kipps (through an investment in an aspiring actor's play) transform rough lives into popular, lucrative, performative art: 'stagings' dependent for success upon temporal representation and repetition. The culture of the period between 1890 and 1920 witnessed a variety of figures between some corporeal 'suspended animation' and an illuminating transparency, beginning perhaps with Jean-Martin Charcot's so-called 'hysterical', catatonic female patients, photographed and displayed in the lecture 'theatre'. For his recalcitrant student, the Freud of *Studies in Hysteria* (*Studien über Hysterie*, 1895), the body – under (what became) first hypnosis then psychoanalysis – behaves 'as though anatomy did not exist' or 'as though it had no knowledge of it',[17] a Griffinesque automaton. Freud posits, in effect, a 'second state of consciousness' wherein, once deposited, the experience can no longer be abreacted, but is rather stored, like Griffin's notebooks, with Marvel. Some initiatory 'secret agent' (the trauma) is thus simultaneously present and absent as an undercover presence. Freud's *agent provocateur* (as he termed the repressed trauma) is identifiable only after the physiological 'body' had been eliminated or suspended.[18]

As with the notorious *fin-de-siècle* Demonstrator-turned-Anarchist, the 'Professor' of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907, dedicated to H. G. Wells), the body has a latency that enables it to be simultaneously a terrorist and an informer. Like the initial trauma, all are double agents, under cover. Freud's sleight of hand allows for different phases of the 'attack' of the initiating trauma to be substituted, one for the other (displacement), in such a way that a physical symptom can be represented verbally and accessed by conversational analysis. The body, like Griffin's, comes to belong to two orders of existence simultaneously: 'Each phase of the attack or each separate portion of a phase may be isolated and may stand for the attack in rudimentary cases.'[19] An illness becomes (verbally) transparent when the 'symptom' functions as shared metaphor does in semiotics, endangered by the risk of seamless transference between analyst and patient.

Another advocate of *transparency* in our *fin-de-siècle* pantheon was Ferdinand de Saussure, whose major work, though not published until 1912,

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[17] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud in 24 Volumes*, ed. James Strachey [et al.] (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1966), vol. 1, 169.

[18] See Jan B. Gordon, 'Freud's "Secret Agent" and the *Fin de Corps*', in *Fin du Monde/Fin du Globe*, ed. John Stokes (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 117-38.

[19] Freud, 43.

was compiled from student notes of the 1890s (Marvel *in situ*?). Saussure equated exchange between the signifier and the signified (signification) in the verbal sign by proposing a radically miraculous phonetic 'carrier' belonging to two orders simultaneously that must (somehow) be read through, as we cannot project the semantic level from it alone, even though the semantic remains bound to phonemic units. In other words, the linguistic sign continues to be based upon the assumption of an exchange between sound and meaning. The convention of a transparent agent – the infamous 'see through' *feuille de papier* – was the operative representation of the heretofore unrepresentable: the continuous life of an abstraction/obstruction (like paper money) functioning as a transparent agent in the production of (structural) linguistic value. Similarly, Stéphane Mallarmé's unfinished book project *Le Livre* of the 1890s was supposed to consist of transparent pages on which a single word was to be printed, continuously reshuffled by backlit performers and dancers in such a way as to blur the distinction between reading, a game of cards, random composition, and dance.[20]

The transparent paper separating sound from sense becomes thin indeed when we listen to Alfred Polly's conversation, so peculiar in fact that John Sutherland uses the acronym APWS (As Polly Would Say) in his introduction to the Penguin Edition (*HMP* xii-xiv). This 'upside down way of talking' simultaneously 'helps and hinders' his conversation (*HMP* 208), lending it an expressive viscosity:

> New words had terror and fascination for him; he did not acquire them, he could not avoid them, and so he plunged into them. His only rule was not to be misled by the spelling. [...] He avoided every recognized phrase in the language [...] in order that he should be suspected of whim rather than ignorance. (*HMP* 24-25)

'Sesquippledan' and 'Eloquent Rapsodooce' (*HMP* 25) share a private dialect that we nearly see through, as with his zoological hybrid, the 'Chrystal Palace Labyrinthidon'.

What linguists term 'amphibious subjectivity' allows (or condemns) a speaking subject to articulate pleasure, description, desire, and critique – all in the same expression as opposed to the rational, syntactically bordered language of everyday use. A hybrid register permits the referent of a word or phrase to be confused with the experience of the speaker in using it. Polly

[20] Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé*: *The Passage from Art to Ritual* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 27-34.

often feels as if he (as befits an amphibian) is 'swimming in it' sufficiently to 'lead a double life' (*HMP* 76). The speaking body in the process of its linguistic 'plunge' is endowed with "'a sort of diaphanous feeling – just mellowish and warmish like"' (*HMP* 209). This sensation resembles a characteristic *fin-de-siècle* figure described by the aesthete Walter Pater as culturally borderless.

Pater's influential essay 'Diaphaneitè', although written in 1854, was published initially in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (1896), defining a new type of subjectivity:

> There is another type of character, which does not take the eye [...] by breadth of colour; rather it is that fine edge of light, where the elements of our moral nature refine themselves to the burning point. It crosses rather than follows the main current of life. [...] The world has no sense fine enough for these evanescent shades which fill up the blanks between contrasted types of character [...].[21]

This 'colourless, unclassified purity of life' lacks all utility, save as an airy sacrificial mediator immersed in contrary cultural values, illustrated best perhaps by the archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), who was murdered by a male companion while transporting the warm light of Hellenic Greek ruins to his native, austere Gothic homeland. Mediating between two cultures, their lives foreground the notorious 'hard, gem-like flame', to which Walter Pater refers in the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1877), as a persecuted passivity, invariably dying as it gives life to the new by lowering the resistances that separate life from death. This type recurs, among others, in the character study of 'Sebastian van Stock', which features in the well-named *Imaginary Portraits* (1886). All of these diaphanous types live on the edge of criminality or symbolic social persecution, just as do Wells's potentially disembodied figures who initiate cultural or historic renewal.

Similarly characteristic is Claude Monet's account (1903) of the process by which his initial observations of flora in the Eure River were allowed to 'settle' in his studio so that viewer, artist, and image would exist on the same wraparound mural, *Les Nymphéas* (*Water Lilies*), reassembled at L'Orangerie in Paris. According to the art historian Pierre Georgel, Monet

[21] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*: *Studies in Art and Literature*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 154.

termed his clearing technique *décantation*.[22] Particulate matter of direct observation (the *corps* in Monet's notebooks) was dissolved in water and paint, giving the viewer access to an imagined perceptual fluidity of the same transparent medium as that which entangles and liberates the pliant water lilies. Contemporaneously, Auguste Rodin, having already revolutionised sculpture by eliminating the base or pedestal as a foundational requirement, created a series of 'bleeding' sepia lithographs, wherein bodies are presented afloat in various transparently neutral states, no longer sustained by gravity.

These figural *transparencies* of *fin-de-siècle* culture have a flickering, confused materiality. Conan Doyle's infamous Professor Moriarty of 'The Final Problem' (1893) exists as stealth corporeality in his campaign against Sherlock Holmes, acting through an omnium of agents. 'Like a spider in the centre of a web', Moriarty is described as a 'deep organising power' whose existence is de-noted – like much of today's so-called Deep Web – as 'all plans'.[23] Bram Stoker's international Count Dracula (the blood of five nations flows through his veins even as he drains the veins of others) is so thin and deracinated that a blue light can be seen through him and he barely casts a 'shadder', to borrow from the village carter, perhaps accounting for his night life under cover.[24]

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Wells's delocalised ramblers and discursive amphibians seem at home in an early twentieth-century Europe where the choral 'Internationale' and the so-called 'International Style' of architecture (both appealing to mass ideological and stylistic universality) were simultaneously praised (in socialist circles) and condemned as sterile, anti-patriotic, globally inclusive, and threatening to the individuality of the bordered nation-state. Its material next-of-kin is surely the Oxford Street 'Omnium's' Department Store at the end of *The Invisible Man* – a relatively new European institution where dissimilar, brightly coloured objects and shopping activities are aligned on the same (often glass) display venues under a single, collective roof, so as to obscure differences between specialist proprietors, vendors, and producers. The cultural counterpart of the department store might be another collective, open potentially to all classes – the public museum as opposed to the private

[22] Pierre Georgel, *Les Nymphéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 7.
[23] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Short Stories*: *Five Volumes in One* (London: John Murray, 1929 reprint), 538-540.
[24] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983 reprint), 263.

collection, a dream of Henry James's Adam Verver of *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Similarly, characters in Wells's novels, such as Marvel, Polly, and even Capes, successfully convert their private lives and spaces into participatory public venues, with a potentially enlarged clientele.

Both *The Invisible Man* and *The History of Mr. Polly* conclude with previously local practices having become promotional (performative) museums, now a feature of so many British pubs and advertising historical patrons in tourist guidebooks. The nominal heir to Griffin's unreadable Notebooks, Marvel, transforms a pub into an archive where the volumes, after a few drinks, become a Sacred Text that sustains the community's belief in the Myth of Invisibility. Alfred Polly, in turn, prides himself, at the conclusion of *The History of Mr. Polly*, on converting the Potwell Inn into a *faux*-cosmopolitanism, defined as an occasional heterogeneity of venue and menu. In doing so, he affixes two creative hand-painted signs reading 'Museum' and 'Omlets' (*HMP* 201), where a misspelling betrays the attempt to go 'upmarket' as a commercial draw.[25] Advertising transforms a previously marginal local into a thriving regional attraction: a 'new and improved' business. These now multi-functional social arenas straddle the space between history, commerce, local legend, and aspirational marketing. A student of this relationship throughout his career, Wells had convinced Macmillan into such unorthodox publicity for *Kipps*: posters were put up outside Portsmouth Rail Station, announcing 'Kipps Worked Here'.

Simone Weil once asserted that both propaganda and advertising pretend to illuminate and clarify as a mask for the dissimulative persuasion of shadows and mirrors, the plural.[26] Tono-Bungay of the eponymous novel has strychnine as an active ingredient which gives the remedy its 'kick' (*TB* 153). The chemical had applications as a therapeutic stimulant, yet, at higher doses, it proved deadly – much like cocaine for both Freud and another *fin-de-siècle* fictional figure, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes in 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891). Originally, a remedy for the common cold, Tono-Bungay is so transparently fungible as to 'evolve' into lozenges, ointments, hair tonic, and antiseptics by virtue of a secret formula 'invariably weakening [...] as sales got ahead' (*TB* 153). Nonetheless, Ponderevo notes that the empty transparency of Tono-Bungay enables an architectural *décantation*: the

[25] Regenia Gagnier, 'Good Europeans and Neo-Liberal Cosmopolitans: Ethics and Politics in Late Victorian and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (2010): 591-614.

[26] Simone Weil, *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, trans. Simon Leys (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013), 16.

massively ostentatious but now unfinished and crumbling mega-houses like the weighty, redundantly named 'Crest Hill'. The rich 'try to make their fluid opulence coagulate' (*TB* 273) into the solidity of massive estates, only to see a reversion: a late (appropriated) unfinished retro copy of the heavy, *faux*-Gothic ruin becomes transparent and open to breezes. The 'broadening of taste', be it department store, pub-as-museum, patent medicine, or architectural design, reduces art and life to the formalist skeleton of near-invisibility-as-unanimity, a familiar pattern in modern cultural minimalism.

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Tono-Bungay, the 'empty-as-collective-remedy', advertised as 'like [...] mountain air in the veins' (*TB* 148), a therapeutic draining of the body, resembles Count Dracula's strategic transfusions. Thomas Mann's later, pneumatically challenged patients, breathe it in the Alpine heights of *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924). Unlike the successful therapy for Ann Veronica and Capes, transcendental cure for Mann's wrapped lives vanishes. There, spectrally thin 'carriers' share a death sentence in an internationally omnium institution: prison, clinic, brothel, resort, and museum – incorporating collective guilt, treatment, entertainment, waning physical embodiment(s), and utopian dreams.

Fredric Jameson has asserted that utopian projects became problematic fantasies upon recognition of the eternal recurrence of a residual materialism.[27] If so, Wells's flickering *transparencies* may have anticipated a feature of our conceptual and imaginative ideational dreams: disturbance by a materialism whose repressed figural representations are residually 'always-already' latently there. Transparently indeterminate, they are therefore simultaneously hidden and emergent. In *The Captive Mind* (1953), Czeslaw Milosz convincingly addressed this 'life' of a will-less, yet compliant, agential *transparency* in his assertion that modern man has become 'so plastic a being' (like Griffin) as to be able to evolve (like Marvel) into variable chromatically superficial attitudes – 'sporting a tail of coloured feathers as a sign of conformity to the world he lives in' – that renders him simultaneously variably 'full' and insubstantial.[28] Milosz provides an ideological trajectory to our (unmounted) *fin-de-siècle* gallery of functional transparent agents, extending chronologically from Pater's diaphanous

[27] Fredric Jameson, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2009), 345, 347.
[28] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), 19.

Imaginary Portraits through Bergson's analysis of vanishing presences, even perhaps to T. S. Eliot's *Hollow Men* (1925), and Alberto Giacometti's deracinated (albeit heavily metallically pigmented) walkers against prevailing cultural winds. Wells's 'transparent bodies' were both of his time and, in duration, our own.