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Curry Alice (2010) The 'Blind space' that lies beyond the frame : Anne Provoost's *Falling* (1997) and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006). *International Research in Children's Literature*. Volume 31, Page 61-74.

**Access to the published version:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2010.0006>

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## The 'Blind Space' that Lies Beyond the Frame: Anne Provoost's *Falling* (1997) and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006)

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*'Blind space' is a filmic term more widely referred to as 'off-screen space' in cinematography. It refers to the unseen area outside the frame of the screen and beyond the margins of the visible. The effects of blind space on the film viewer are similar to those of mise en abîme on the reader of narrative fiction. The term mise en abîme is here used in its most literal sense to refer to the determination of meaning outside of a normative frame of reference. This article explores the visual implications of the 'out-of-frame' in two young adult novels, Anne Provoost's *Falling* (1997) and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006). Blind space in these texts, in which the Holocaust is theme or sub-theme, is the space in which the cultural minorities reside. A foregrounding of the blind space thus calls for increased social awareness. In both novels a repeated motif of impenetrable walls, barriers and borders highlights the need for the apolitical protagonists to turn their gazes towards the blind spaces and to restore the marginalised occupants with visibility and voice. Blind space here becomes the interpretative key with which to unlock the texts' call for multiracial acceptance.*

**Key words:** *Blind Space; Mise en abîme; Framing; Marginality; Holocaust; YA fiction.*

*[O]n-screen space... is everything we can see on the screen. Off-screen space, blind space, is everything that moves (or wriggles) outside or under the surface of things, like the shark in *Jaws*. If such films "work," it is because we are more or less held in the sway of these two spaces. If the shark were always on screen it would quickly become a domesticated animal. What's frightening is that it is not there! The point of horror resides in the blind space. (Bonitzer 58)*

This article uses the filmic concept of 'blind space' to illuminate the often complex interactions between majority and minority cultures in children's and young adult literature by focusing on those characters who function outside of a specified physical and ideological framework set up, and presided over, by the majority. These peripheral figures exist on the margins of mainstream social systems, often physically relegated to spaces beyond walls, barriers and borders. Frequently feared for their threatening manifestation of difference and the potential they embody to disturb the equilibrium of those at the centre, these marginalised figures remain, in essence, unseen. The young protagonists of such

novels, if members of majority cultures, are often tasked with turning their gazes towards the margins in order to restore visibility and voice to such figures (a task that they themselves may be unaware of carrying out). In texts of this nature, the dynamic will hinge on how fully the protagonists are able to determine meaning outside of their originally established and culturally instituted frames of reference. The space in which such meaning can be determined – an initially unvisualised space – is a ‘blind space,’ in the sense used by the film director and theorist Pascal Bonitzer, quoted above. It is blind since it remains physically unseen, and blind since it remains ideologically unseen, following the protagonists’ enculturated impulse to ‘turn a blind eye’ to those who exist outside of their pre-established reference frames.

The concept of blind space is helpful in exploring the partial visibility and liminal spatial positioning of such marginalised figures, as viewed from the perspective of the majority culture. In cinematography, where the concept originates, blind space is more commonly referred to as ‘off-screen space’ and concerns ‘the four segments of space bordering the frame lines’ of the screen, as well as the space behind the camera and the space beyond the filmic horizon (Burch 17). It is the space characters enter when they exit the screen and that they inhabit up until the point of their return. The interaction between the visible space and blind space in film relies on specific cinematographic choices (camera angle, depth of field, montage and so on) and can be tightly controlled and manipulated in the service of visual inclusion and exclusion. The ‘frame lines’ of the screen, much like the frame of a painting, separate the sphere of artistic representation from the sphere of a viewer’s reality. Blind space thus pertains to the physical spaces outside of such a frame, as well as to the conceptual spaces outside of its cognitive or ideological demarcations.

In applying the filmic concept of blind space to literature, as a tool with which to explore the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion in texts, the obvious point to make is that this transference necessarily entails a different, and less literal, conception of visibility. Whilst certain characters, places and perspectives might be visible or invisible to the characters in a novel, the reader is unable to partake literally in such a visualisation process, as the viewer would in film. Thus, in a non-visual medium, the duality of visible space and blind space must rely on the foregrounding of limited narration. Novels can control the reader’s knowledge of, and access to, key events by adopting inherently naïve, ignorant or prejudiced focalising or narrating voices. In doing so, they can manipulate the margins of the visible and the non-visible, creating a looming textual blind space through which the reader can explore the consequences of literal and ideological blindness.

Whilst the interaction of centres and peripheries is a staple concern of postcolonial theorists, the concept of blind space is helpful for a fuller visualisation of these peripheries. The reader, conditioned to direct his or her attention to the space *within* a given frame rather than to the space beyond its borders, must be given a strong authorial push to empathise with those figures a text ostensibly excludes. Thus a purposeful use of blind space, and a focus on its

interaction with the visible space, can be a call for increased social awareness, directing the reader to acknowledge alienated people, places or perspectives. Blind space, therefore, encourages frame-breaking: the desire to venture beyond physical comfort zones, and to see beyond enculturated frames of reference. Blind space, in fact, constitutes a semantic *mise en abîme* (and I use this term in its most literal, and less frequently referenced, sense: 'to throw into the abyss'), since meaning is determined outside of traditional or given frames of reference and in a semantic void: that initially incomprehensible, misperceived or unseen space that lies beyond the margins of the already established.<sup>1</sup> When a novel aims to challenge the reader to re-examine existing frames, blind space becomes the interpretative key with which to accomplish such a re-framing.

#### THEORISING FILMIC BLIND SPACE: WHAT LIES BEYOND THE FRAME

The subject of some critical theorising in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, but almost wholly overlooked since then, off-screen space in cinematography is a concept that is marginal in its relation to both the visible on-screen space and the broader theoretical canon. As Libby Saxton, one of the very few contemporary academics to broach the subject, remarks: 'critical and theoretical accounts of cinematic space to date have habitually privileged the visible spaces on the screen over the invisible spaces which lie beyond them' (Saxton 5). Saxton herself has undertaken a thought-provoking analysis of Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005) in which she explores the mechanisms of repression, denial and amnesia that allow for distorted or blinkered vision in the formulation of the past, suggesting that Haneke's use of off-screen space exposes 'some of the blind spots that structure history, memory and spectatorship' (5). The equation of off-screen space with cultural or historical 'blind spots' is a useful one, and prefigures the ideological emphasis I accord to the workings of blind space in literature.

When off-screen space was first theorised, the conceptual focus was generally more organisational and taxonomical in approach, although it was oftentimes suggestive. French theorists Pascal Bonitzer, Noël Burch, André Bazin, Jacques Aumont and Gilles Deleuze, amongst others, attempted to map the properties and potentialities of off-screen space in cinematography, using a variety of classic films to do so. A common concern was to explore the interaction between the on-screen and off-screen spaces, and to question whether these two planes function as homogenous or heterogeneous spaces (and there was some disagreement over this). The usefulness of these theorists to an analysis of the workings of blind space in literature is undoubted, and much use will be made of them throughout this article.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'blind' space, as opposed to 'off-screen' space, was coined, and to my knowledge used solely by, Bonitzer. It is a term with a more conceptual and ideological emphasis than the former, since it is associated not simply with what remains unseen but with what takes place 'under the surface of things' (although Bonitzer himself appears to use the two terms interchangeably). Gilles Deleuze

similarly attributes dual significance to blind space (and I am indebted to Libby Saxton for the translation):

In one case, the out-of-field [blind space] designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time. (Deleuze 30)

A physical elsewhere and a 'more radical' metaphorical and discontinuous Elsewhere, off-screen space is not simply unseen but 'does not belong to the order of the visible' (30–1). Its heterogeneity accords it a flexible status. It is the territory of physical objects and absent beings on the one hand, and ideologies, concepts and ideas on the other. The former remain beyond vision, the latter beyond comprehension.

André Bazin gives a useful analogy for the workings of blind space in his distinction between the space of the painting and the space of the screen. 'The edges of the screen are not,' he suggests, '... the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality' (Bazin 166). Whether 'a portion of reality' is understood in a physical sense, as simply the events that occur in the limited on-screen space, or in an ideological sense, as one perspective or point of view amongst many competing world-views, the edges of the screen provide a frame that allows for an essentially one-sided story. This one-sided story is that of the privileged storyteller: the self, rather than the other. Bazin's metaphor of the mask is helpful to concretise this association of visible space with the self and blind space with the other. In theatre, the mask is used ritualistically and symbolically to engender empathy for the other:

Frequently used as a symbol for theatre, the mask calls attention to the often ambiguous play between self and other involved in its alchemical procedures. The unworn mask begins as something clearly set apart: an inert and disembodied other... For the actor, the otherness of the mask becomes both the obstacle and the goal. He or she must redefine the sense of self in order to wear the other's face and be true to it in spirit, thought, and action. (Emigh xviii)

Wearing a mask is not simply a question of obscuring the self in deference to the other, but of a conscious melding or overlapping of both self and other to create an entirely new persona. As an attempt to *see* the other, both literally and metaphorically, the melding of perspectives occasioned by turning the gaze from the visible space to the blind space – the conceptual equivalent of putting on the mask - amounts to an inclusive gesture towards cultural assimilation: a movement out-of-frame in order to see more than Bazin's 'one portion of reality'.

Whilst blind space itself is peripheral and marginal, its role in the construction of the cinematic image is far from it. In an analysis of the differing mediums of film and painting, Bazin further suggests that:

The picture frame polarises space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal. (Bazin 166)

In contrast to painting, cinematography relies on the viewer's acknowledgement that the film image extends *beyond* the frame and 'indefinitely into the universe'. By its very nature, in fact, film gestures towards the blind space and encourages such an outward-facing gaze. If, through subsequent spectator re-positioning and variation of perspective, the un-visualised spaces that the marginalised occupy become visible, the occupants of the blind space can gain some form of centrality; these previously marginalised figures can be dragged, temporarily at least, into our sight and framed, partially at least, within our gaze.

#### EXAMPLES OF FILMIC BLIND SPACE: STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *JAWS* (1975) AND ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S *REBECCA* (1940) AND *REAR WINDOW* (1954)

By definition, blind space is only blind whilst it remains liminal and peripheral: in the margins and never fully visualised (literally or metaphorically). In Bonitzer's illuminating analysis of the interaction between the visible space and the blind space in *Jaws*, quoted above, it is the very absence of the shark that inspires horror in the viewer. The shark haunts the on-screen space precisely by denying the viewer's gaze and refuting the possibility for the monster's safe containment and domestication. Blind space, in this film, is an unstable and unknowable space where the shark malevolently bides its time before shockingly erupting into vision. The shark is the mechanism through which human fear, horror and heroism can be explored in greater semantic depth, making the uncharted ocean and the half-glimpsed monster the bearers of thematic significance.

According to Noël Burch, blind space is 'purely imaginary' until 'something that is the particular and *principal* focus of attention can bring it into play' (Burch 21). An example of such a focus is the 'off-screen glance,' a character's meaningful gaze towards the margins of the screen:

Sometimes the gaze of the character speaking is so intense, so fraught with meaning, that the character off screen (and therefore the imaginary space that he occupies) becomes as important as, if not more important than, the person who is visible in frame and the actual screen-space. (Burch 20)

Hitchcock's *Rebecca* is a prime example of the way in which cinematic techniques such as the 'off-screen glance' are used to bring the blind space into play. Throughout the film the dead Rebecca is an absent presence, haunting the on-screen space from beyond the visual frame. Denying Laura Mulvey's '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey 11) by remaining tantalisingly unseen, Rebecca haunts the nameless heroine, whose attempt to fulfil the role of Mr de Winter's wife in the expansive spaces of Manderley is consistently frustrated. Glimpses of Rebecca's monographed stationery, brief snatches of remembered conversation, the protagonist's unwitting appropriation of her clothes and habits, and a cinematographic lingering on the spaces Rebecca inhabited, all bring the blind space in which she now resides forcefully to the viewer's attention. Like the shark in *Jaws*, Rebecca cannot be safely contained or domesticated by the camera lens,

and thereby retains an inexorable influence on the visible screen space. *Rebecca* thus perfectly exemplifies the way in which ‘the cinematic image is haunted by what is not in it’ (Bonitzer 16, translated by Saxton), a directorial choice that is highly effective in producing the aforementioned sense of horror.

There is a moment in a later Hitchcock film, *Rear Window*, that directly exemplifies the type of re-framing that comes from turning one’s attention to the blind space. The incapacitated cameraman L. B. Jeffries (played by James Stewart) slowly becomes convinced that his neighbour, Thorwald, has murdered his wife, and begins viewing this figure closely through the rear window of his apartment. At one point we are given an image of L. B. Jeffries’ face in medium close-up with his unwieldy camera, with its protruding telephoto lens, obscuring all but his eyes. In an example of the off-screen glance, he is staring intensely out of the screen, a little to the left of centre. The viewer knows what L. B. Jeffries is gazing at because framed within the circular camera lens is a clear image of the suspect, a middle-aged man sitting in his home on the far side of the courtyard. Thus, the stigmatised individual is contained within our sights, embedded within the principal image, in a highly effective example of visual framing. With the margins so obviously framed, so significantly dragged into vision, the dialectical opposition of centre and margins begins to blur.

#### LITERARY BLIND SPACE: ANNE PROVOOST’S *FALLING* (1997) AND JOHN BOYNE’S *THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS* (2006)

John Frow suggests that a literary frame designates:

[a] limit, at once material and immaterial, literal and figurative, between adjacent and dissimilar ontological realms. The frame can be anything that acts as a sign of a qualitative difference, a sign of the boundary between a marked and an unmarked space.’ (Frow 25)

Like the frame of a painting or the frame lines of a cinematic screen, literary frames can be used to designate a boundary between the visible, or marked, spaces of the majority culture and the blind, or unmarked, spaces existing at their margins. Both Boyne’s and Provoost’s novels make purposeful and effective use of blind space in order to accomplish the blurring of oppositions – visible and blind, centre and margins – that comes with breaking such physical and conceptual frames. In doing so, they explore the complex dynamics of cultural inclusion and exclusion. If judged successful – and I believe them to be so – their use of blind space illuminates the dangers of cultural ignorance by examining the disabling effects of blindness and prejudice.

The racial atrocities of the Holocaust provide the backdrop to both novels, directly (*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*) and indirectly (*Falling*), and both texts are unusual in rejecting narration or focalisation by the victim of racial prejudice and adopting instead the more ambiguous and potentially contentious point of view of an aggressor’s child: in Boyne’s text, the naïve nine-year-old son of a Nazi Commandant; in Provoost’s text, the apathetic fourteen-year-old

grandson of a Belgian Nazi sympathiser. Lydia Kokkola (2003) amongst others has remarked on the unusualness of such a viewpoint. In this configuration, Jews and Arab immigrants become the occupants of the blind space: in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* the Jews are glanced at, avoided and consistently misunderstood by Bruno; in *Falling* the Arab immigrants are glimpsed, feared and vilified by Lucas.

Having been brought up to believe the one-sided story that is a product of life in the visible space – a story that privileges the interests of the majority culture and ignores, or actively silences, counter-hegemonic voices – Bruno and Lucas participate actively, or by association, in the racially motivated persecution of these marginalised groups. Bruno watches, unseeing, whilst the concentration camp Jews struggle to survive on the other side of the fence, and Lucas violently protests against the decision to shelter refugees in his grandfather's hometown and stands by as his friends beat an Arab boy unconscious. Both novels end on a similarly tragic note, with the two boys punished for their affiliation with the persecuting cultural majority: Bruno enters Auschwitz with his Jewish friend Shmuel and is killed at the hands of his own father's soldiers, and Lucas has to live with a lifetime of guilt for his part in the Jewish dancer Caitlin's disfigurement (Lucas' panicked decision to amputate Caitlin's foot in order to save her life at the scene of a car accident caused by his neo-Nazi 'friend' Benoît was overhasty since the foot could easily have been saved – a vital piece of information that the text only brings to light retrospectively).

Crucially, however, although the protagonists of these novels may be members of cultural majorities, their affiliation with the ideologies that sustain the political centres is undesired and misunderstood. Both young boys are surrounded by a web of secrecy, ostensibly for their own protection; the marring of childhood innocence brought about through knowledge of the events happening on the other side of the fence, in Bruno's case, and of his grandfather's racially motivated actions of the past, in the case of Lucas, is deemed, by the adults in charge of their enculturation, a greater humanitarian crime than the actual events themselves. Confronted by a network of silences and elisions, the protagonists begin each novel having succumbed to Bazin's blind masking without questioning its moral bias, having been conditioned, as it were, to a reality of non-seeing.<sup>3</sup> The boys' disinclination to take sides, however, means that by default they reject the homogeneity of majority culture and unwittingly, or belatedly, take up the minority cause: Bruno through his growing friendship with Shmuel, and Lucas through his awkward yet heartfelt affection for Caitlin. In so doing they begin to open their eyes to the margins, to peer into those previously unimagined out-of-frame spaces from their privileged position of centrality, and, little by little, to invest these spaces with significance.

Window frames – bracketing off a partial view – and gazes 'fraught with meaning' (quoting Burch) work to invest the blind space in both of these novels with semantic importance. When, in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Bruno and his sister Gretel peer through the window of Bruno's new room towards the

concentration camp beyond, they see a confusing and inexplicable array of figures:

Everywhere they looked they could see people . . . Some were formed into a sort of chain gang and pushing wheelbarrows from one side of the camp to the other, *appearing from a place out of sight* and taking their wheelbarrows further along behind a hut, *where they disappeared again* . . . Some carried spades and were being led by groups of soldiers to a place *where they could no longer be seen*. (Boyne 36: my italics)

The Jews are only accessible to Bruno and Gretel in their brief moments of visibility, and since the children find it impossible to recognise the Jews for what they are, these stigmatised figures are doomed to remain the object of another's viewpoint rather than the subject of their own; they can move into and out of frame, yet are incapable of remaining in full vision. When these amorphous figures disappear to that place 'where they could no longer be seen', they effectively re-enter a blind space in which they are forced to remain until Bruno turns his attention towards them once again. If it were not for Bruno's chance meeting with Shmuel a few days later, we might presume that the blind space would have remained unvisualised, following Gretel's purposeful decision to turn her gaze in the opposite direction and to the 'decidedly nicer' view from her own bedroom window (Boyne 38).

In *Falling*, the Arab immigrants are the objects of Lucas' similarly fleeting gaze. An incident with the same conceptual emphasis as Bruno's brief glance out of the window occurs when Lucas thinks he recognises the Arab seasonal worker who instigated an attack on him a few days previously. Lucas peers into 'the distance' where the Arab men are standing and attempts to view their faces more clearly, yet perversely only succeeds in investing them with a strange homogeneity:

In the distance . . . stood a group of young men, one of whom I thought I recognised . . . I kept looking hard at the man, trying to see his face . . . I wasn't sure. It could be the man, but might just as well be his brother, or someone who looked like him. They all looked like each other, those Arabs, and they all wore moccasins and short-sleeved white polyester shirts. (Provoost 176–7)

Just as the Jews in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* are indistinguishable from one another in their identical pairs of dirty striped pyjamas, these Arab seasonal workers are equally so; their foreign 'moccasins' and low-quality cloth shirts denote cultural and social difference whilst denying their wearers individuated identity.

Where these marginalised figures go when they move out-of-frame to that 'place where they [can] no longer be seen', is a subject of speculation for both Bruno and Lucas. To satisfy such speculation the boys undertake to undermine, to a greater or lesser extent and at times often unwittingly, the real and conceptual borders that separate their two spaces. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs usefully coins the term 'hyper-border', in an adaptation of Baudrillard's 'hyper-real', with which to signify the non-referential nature of political borders. In the

following quotation, the fictions to which she refers are three politically-aware young adult novels, of which Provoost's *Falling* is one:

The fictions show how these young people negotiate their identities across the newly mapped hyper-borders of the contemporary political maelstrom that is the generationally exclusive frame through which macro- and micro-politics translate into their everyday lives. (Wilkie-Stibbs 238)

Whether these hyper-borders are geographical, temporal or ideological, they are 'reinscribed to demarcate any manifestation of...alterity that is deemed to be outside the particular frames of reference the [socio-political] messages themselves set up' (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2006, p. 266 [notes]). Functioning within such a socio-political framework, Bruno and Lucas similarly find themselves pitted against such non-referential borders. Tellingly, impenetrable (or seemingly impenetrable) walls, fences and barriers – in themselves framing devices – form repeated motifs in both novels, reflecting the need to see beyond one's own blocked or obstructed vision and to adopt a perspective that is inclusively frame-breaking.

The excited curiosity with which Bruno adopts Burch's 'off-screen glance' and looks towards the margins attests to the naivety with which he interprets his surroundings:

He looked as far to his right as he could see, and the tall fence seemed to carry on in the sunlight and he was glad that it did because it meant that he didn't know what was up ahead and he could walk and find out and that was what exploration was all about after all. (Boyne 102)

Here the margins equate to the physical boundary separating Nazis from Jews, self from other, and if Bruno is at this point unable to look *into* the blind space itself, he is at least willing to explore its borders. But just as the image of the fence disappearing into the sun suggests a limit to his vision, the restrictions imposed upon his imagination by his Nazi upbringing provide a limit to his understanding. Unable to visualise life in the camp as Shmuel struggles to articulate it, Bruno refuses to give shape or substance to the blind space in deference to his former enculturation. His inability to visualise the space of the camp in its actuality, preferring to imagine 'huts... full of happy families... [and] boys and girls... playing tennis or football, skipping and drawing out squares for hopscotch on the ground' (Boyne 207), constitutes the more disturbing (and less fictively credible) effects of his ignorance. It demonstrates, in fact, his unwillingness, or inability, to see beyond his formerly demarcated frame of reference and to determine meaning in that misunderstood space beyond. Thus the endlessly long barbed-wire fence not only signals the physical boundary between two heterogeneous spaces, but also becomes a metaphor for Bruno's lack of comprehension.

In *Falling* Lucas' similar failure to comprehend the unseen spaces in which the Arab immigrants reside is highlighted in his search for the warehouse in which his stolen television is being kept. His journey into the heart of the aptly

named 'Cercle Meunier' takes Lucas from a well-lit, populated and spacious area of the city into a series of labyrinthine alleyways that become increasingly dilapidated and deserted:

I came to places I'd never been before ... I tried to visualise the map of the area, but I had absolutely no memory of any square, and realised I was lost ... Then I noticed a lane running behind the row of houses, a bit hard to find, but clearly a public right of way which led somewhere ... [.] The small building at the end of the lane had been cordoned off with an improvised barrier with coloured ribbon wound round it ... [.] I stood in [the] dead-end lane, right at the end of it. (Provoost 107–10)

Forced to a halt by a dead-end, and unable to see beyond the barrier, Lucas metaphorically reaches the heart of the labyrinth, a space which traditionally denotes the end of a quest or a moment of reckoning.<sup>4</sup> In an intriguing rumination on the relationship between film and the labyrinth, Bonitzer notes that '[a]t the heart of every labyrinth ... there is a blind spot' (Bonitzer 57). Lucas' 'blind spot' is his inability to see beyond the imposed barriers and into the space beyond, failing, like Bruno, to invest with significance the marginalised space in which the cultural minority resides. In fact Lucas' journey ends not with increased cultural understanding but in a physical fight: the ultimate polarising gesture between cultural groups. The heart of the labyrinth appears to warrant such a pivotal test of strength and staking out of territory; its famous precursor is Theseus' classical battle with the Minotaur and a subsequent example can be found in Harry Potter's clash with Voldemort in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000). In Lucas' fight with the Arab immigrants, these marginalised figures are configured as the monstrous other: 'big fellows' verging on the demonic with their 'dark eyes which don't look at you, but see you all the same' glittering 'feverishly' in the setting sun (Provoost 110 & 112).

In her comprehensive account of the multiple and contradictory symbolic associations of the labyrinth in classical and medieval iconography, Penelope Reed Doob suggests that the labyrinth is 'intrinsically unstable: change your perspective and the labyrinth seems to change'; '[l]abyrinths,' she goes on to suggest, 'may be perceived as path (a linear but circuitous passage to a goal) or as pattern (a complete symmetrical design)' (Doob 1). In an analysis of Hitchcock's cinematography, Jessica Brent echoes this sense of labyrinthine duality when she notes the director's use of spirals in his work:

The spiral, in fact, appears frequently in Hitchcock's oeuvre ... illusionistically offering the promise of penetration and depth at its centre, but negating that possibility by stubbornly insisting on itself as a flat but infinite design that mesmerises and suspends narrative purpose. (Brent 82)

Static and artistically complete, thereby encouraging sustained examination and suspending the forward flow of narrative, the circular labyrinth or spiral appears to impede, as much as it encourages, penetration. Penetration here equates to the uncovering and demystifying of Bonitzer's 'blind spots' – the various framing devices barring sight and comprehension that separate the visible space from the blind – with a resultant growth in cultural understanding.

According to Bonitzer, the peculiarly labyrinthine capability of film is used to best effect in the creation of suspense. In analysing the effect of tracking shots down lengthy passageways, he suggests that:

The dark passage or rhizome effect that is the properly labyrinthine effect of film implies, in fact, suspense. In other words, it means the use of a restricted visual field (close-ups as well as depth-of-field shots) towards essentially terroristic ends. (Bonitzer 59)

The suspense created by the image of Lucas walking along a dead-end lane in the gathering dusk is enhanced by the foregrounding of his 'restricted visual field': the sense that '[t]here wasn't a living soul in the lane... [yet] I could feel eyes following me from behind the windows' (Provoost 108). Although Bonitzer uses the word 'terroristic' in the sense of inspiring terror, it is of note that this episode, ending with Lucas slumped unconscious on the ground, is a direct precursor to his adoption of a terrorist's attitude towards the minority group and his decision to throw Molotov cocktails into the old presbytery in which refugees are to be housed. Lucas' subsequent guilt, centring on the tragic episode in which he amputates Caitlin's foot, leaves him with 'the terrifying feeling that the world was deserted... as if I was standing in the middle of the hills, without a living soul for miles around, and with nothing but scorched grass and sand around me' (Provoost 25 & 187), a comment that uncannily echoes Bonitzer's claim that 'the best labyrinth is the unlimited desert' (Bonitzer 63). Unable to see beyond his own solipsism, Lucas finds himself incapable of adopting the labyrinthine dual perspective that would allow him to fully visualise the stigmatised minority – the other rather than the self – and thus becomes trapped in an ideological blind space of his own fashioning.

#### BREAKING THE FRAME AND VISUALISING THE BLIND SPACE: INCLUSIVE CULTURAL ASSIMILATION?

At this point we would have to question whether the protagonists' attempts to turn their attention to the blind spaces (with varying levels of success) are enough to propel the minority figures who reside there from object to subject, or from voiceless to voiced. Does this re-examination of existing reference frames drag the blind space from the semantic abyss to the brink of newly determined meaning? Put another way, do the texts allow for increased understanding of the minority figures through enhanced visibility, or do they simply contain and domesticate the marginalised individuals as they might the vilified shark in *Jaws*? I suggest that if the blind spaces of these novels are initially dehumanising in robbing the minority figures of visibility and voice, in the end they allow for a redeeming counter-narrative to thread its way through the majority discourse by means of its condemnation of cultural ignorance and political apathy and its advocacy of multicultural awareness and assimilative empathy. The point these novels make is that relegating minority figures to a blind space under the auspices of childish ignorance, political apathy, generational amnesia or

historical revisionism is not simply irresponsible, it is also potentially fatal, and not just for the persecuted minority but also for the persecuting majority (Bruno, after all, is murdered alongside Shmuel, and Lucas dies a metaphoric death, the death of his childhood, for his part in Caitlin's disfigurement).

The redemptive counter-narrative that the novels set up is one of 'absence and silence contoured by language', a narrative formulation Ernestine Schlant sees within much West German literature in the decades following the Holocaust (Schlant 1). Silence amidst noise, like the blind spot at the heart of the labyrinth, is an intrinsic characteristic of the textual blind spaces these texts purposefully create. Schlant's analysis of the use of silence within Holocaust fiction is particularly appropriate in the context:

Silence is not a semantic void; like any language, it is infused with narrative strategies that carry ideologies and reveal unstated assumptions. Silence is constituted by the absence of words but is therefore and simultaneously the presence of their absence . . . Language becomes the cover-up for a silence that nevertheless operates and becomes audible only through words. (Schlant 7)

The silences and elisions that weave their way through *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Falling* (seen, for instance, in Bruno's maid Maria impotently opening and closing her mouth when she appears to be 'considering her response carefully, selecting the right words, preparing to say them, and then thinking better of it and discarding them altogether' (Boyne 56–7)) reconfirm the blind space as an effective *mise en abîme* and the key to a determination of the novels' anti-xenophobic message.

One of Burch's more illuminating quotations in reference to the filmic origins of the concept offers an apt conclusion to my discussion:

It is important to realise that off-screen space has only an intermittent or, rather, *fluctuating* existence during any film, and structuring this fluctuation can become a powerful tool in a film-maker's hands. (Burch 21)

Structuring the fluctuation between the visible and the blind – the included and the excluded, the centre and the margins – can also be a powerful tool in a novelist's hands in his or her portrayal of unbalanced or fragile cultural relations, specifically in the manipulative spatial positioning and partial visibility of marginalised figures. Despite Bruno's unrealistic naivety and Lucas' grating apathy, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Falling* are effective in their retrospective condemnation of cultural ignorance and their exploration of blind prejudice. In devaluing the inward-facing gaze and looking 'under the surface of things,' to use Bonitzer's phrase one last time, these novels undermine the processes used to shield, protect and cocoon someone, child or otherwise, from dissonant truths and instead advocate the outward-facing gaze, the gaze that directs attention towards the margins, to those contentious points of overlap between cultures where a physical or ideological frame becomes not so much an implacable border as a potential and liminal point of transgression.

## NOTES

1. Here I distinguish between the more common interpretation of *mise en abîme* (or *abyeme*) – as that describing a self-contained episode which reflects upon, sums up or thematises a larger framing narrative – and the less frequently cited sense that refers to the determination of meaning outside of a given frame. See Hawthorn (1998, p. 28) for a more detailed account of the differing interpretations of the term.
2. For a more comprehensive account of theoretical writings on the subject, see Livio Belloi (1992) or Libby Saxton (2007).
3. This is not unproblematically so. One of the most frequent criticisms directed towards *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is Bruno's unrealistic naivety and obtuse ignorance of the situation occurring on the other side of the fence. My argument that Bruno's cultural ignorance, nurtured by the adults around him, is the very object of Boyne's condemnation hinges on the reader's belief that Bruno's level of naivety is fictively credible (a point that Boyne himself has made: see <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Books-Review/the-boy-in-the-striped-pyjamas-john-boyne-interview>).
4. For a more detailed exploration into the symbolic associations of the labyrinth see Penelope Reed Doob (1990).

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