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Memory and Place in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*

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Abstract

Research on the issue of memory in *An Artist of the Floating World* has focused on the diverse narrative techniques that this novel encompasses, to show that memory serves as a medium for the narrator to understand his past in order to assimilate into the present. However, little attention has been paid to the different settings that the narrator constantly reiterates and describes in his memoir. This paper aims to fill this gap by analysing the connection between places and memory in the novel. Based on an exhaustive reading of the narrative, this dissertation will consider both individual and collective memory, which are shaped by the ever-changing environment of the post-war Japan. It is proved that the narrator is unable to reminiscence the past without digressing to a specific location, and that places are carriers of memory and meaning, in which the individual and the group construct their identity. As such, the spatial context is found to be essential since it provides a better understanding of the past.

Keywords: individual memory, collective memory, place, nostalgia, Japan

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Introduction

Before Japan's defeat in the World War II, Japanese leaders were unwilling to surrender at first, and their ideals of imperialism, of "death before dishonour," and "blood debts to their war dead" doomed the nation to a terrible destiny. The American occupation lasted from 1945 until 1952, and Japan became a nation subjected under the rule of the Americans. This heavy rout led the Japanese to question their national identity. The population showed contempt for the militarists that led them to defeat, and they wished to forget the past. Besides, they were disgusted by those who venerated the leaders of yesterday. In this uncertain context, the Americans dismantled "the oppressive controls of the imperial state," and a new democracy begins. The date of August 1945 is normally understood "as a great divide between militarist Japan and a new democratic nation" (Dower 1999, 22-27). *An Artist of the Floating World* is the second novel of the Nobel Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro. The novel deals with the role of memory in a post-Second World War Japan, and the narrative voice is Masuji Ono, an old painter who was part of militarist organizations before the war. Ono's conflict arises as he remains attached to the pre-war values of imperialism and nationalism while the new generation looks forward to imitating Western democracies. The novel is constructed as a memoir that shows Ono's strive between the changing environment of the present and the old days to which he repeatedly digresses. In fact, the novel follows a chronological structure — from October 1948 until June 1950—, nevertheless the narrative is cyclical because the narrator constantly refers to the past.

Memory is understood as "the process or faculty whereby events or impressions from the past are recollected and preserved. [And] collective memory [involves] widely shared perceptions of the past. It shapes the story that groups of people tell about themselves, linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative" (Bell 2006, 2). Scholars have argued that memory in *An Artist of the Floating World* provides the narrator with a better understanding of his own past, and that individual memory is influenced by the collective one because the changing attitudes makes the major character rethink his own past (Ge Nan 2017, 33-46). Researches have also been concerned with the narrative technique; Inbaraj has properly defined the linguistic devices employed in the novel, such as digressions, gaps in the narrative, etc. arguing that they serve to construct an unreliable and doubtful narrative (2019, 70-71). In the same line, Zuzana Fonioková has focused on the first-person narrator in the novel and proved that the main character seeks to confess and justify his past mistakes (2007, 133). Additionally, Wojciech Drąg has argued that experiences associated with loss determine

the identity of the narrator, and that memory serves as a mechanism to understand those experiences (2014, 1). However, a much less discussed issue seems to be the significance of the different places in the novel in the context of individual and collective memory. Places are focus of memories, and as such, "the analysis of how memory and forgetting pervade real public space, the world of objects, and the urban world we live in becomes crucial" (Hornstein 2011, 9). Thus, what is the connection between places and memory in the novel? This undergraduate dissertation argues that the places in *An Artist of the Floating World* are intrinsically linked to Ono's individual memory, and to the collective memory of Japan after the war, and that they provide a connection between past and present. This research is based on an exhaustive reading of the novel, supporting the ideas with theoretical background. The aim of this paper is to offer new insight into the analysis of memory in Ishiguro's *An Artist of The Floating World* by highlighting that places and memories are strongly interconnected, while contributing to enhance the research concerning the understanding of memory in the novel. Although the literature of memory goes hand in hand with the analysis of trauma, especially after the World War II, the issue of trauma will not be covered in depth in this paper due to space limitations. This study will first start with an analysis of the connection between individual memory and place, then it will cover the topic of collective memory and discuss how it is perpetuated by the spatial framework. Finally, the paper will conclude with the discussion of nostalgia, together with the concept of losing place, as to examine how memory is affected by the destruction of places.

Memory and Place

The first association between a place and Ono's identity and memory, may be found in his most private setting, his house, which bears a symbolic meaning because it represents Ono's prestige. The house is the prize for his achievements as an artist. In the opening of the novel, Masuji Ono recalls how he acquired Akira Sugimura house by a so called "auction of prestige," which means that his status as an artist was the main factor that prompted the Sugimura family to accept him as the new occupier of the house, enhanced by the fact that Sugimura was "something of an art enthusiast" himself (Ishiguro 2016, 9). As a result, Ono seems to proudly recall how "honourable" is to consider "one's moral conduct and achievement . . . rather than the size of one's purse" (10)[1]. This is important because it reveals the connection between the individual and his surroundings. Since Ono feels that has earned the house by means of his status, this place acquires a special meaning. Furthermore, scholars argue that the house could be interpreted as Ono's "alter-ego" because before the Second World War, the house of Sugimura was "in its full grandeur and magnificence" (Inbaraj 2019, 71), in the same way as Ono was a renowned artist. Nevertheless, the war had an impact on the property as it "had received its share of . . . damage" (11), likewise Ono was forced to reconsider his ideologies (Inbaraj 2019, 71).

This passage of the novel suggests that both Ono and the house have evolved in tandem. Indeed, significant and traumatic events shake the structure of the house, so does Ono's personality, and most importantly, his experiences push him towards change. In this sense, the concept of trauma "is understood as an emotional or psychic injury, and in psychoanalysis it is argued that such injuries are often repressed, remaining unhealed and leading to various forms of 'acting out'" (Bell 2006, 7). There is no evidence in the narrative about how Ono copes with the traumatic experiences of the war, however it can be implied that he was forced to rebuild himself while rebuilding the property. Ono points out that he has made certain progress in restoring the house (12), and at a more personal level, Ono has experienced a certain transformation as well. Noriko claims that her father used to be a "tyrant," and now, after working hard in the property, "he's much more gentle and domesticated" (13). Ono does not admit having changed his behaviour, and even if Noriko's claims seem to be rather disrespectful, she offers a different, external view that the narrator is not providing about himself.

[1] From this point onwards, the numbers between parentheses will exclusively refer to pages from the novel, unless otherwise indicated.

In addition to the house, public places seem to be equally meaningful, the Migi-Hidari is one of the buildings that were demolished during the war, yet bears great relevance for Ono's memoir because he "played a small part in the Migi-Hidari's coming into existence" (63), and its reminiscences are representative of Ono's identity. The Migi-Hidari was an establishment owned by Yamagata, who sought to improve it and relied on Ono's influence as a painter. Ono convinced the authorities that this was to become "a celebration of the new patriotic spirit emerging in Japan" (63). As a result, the Migi-Hidari grows into one of the most popular locals in the pleasure district, and a site of celebration for Ono and his students. The building was demolished during the occupation, and Ono avoids expressing the reason why that place turned into ruins after the war. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that this has to do with the fact that it was a product of nationalistic propaganda, associated with ideas that now needed to be dismantled.

In addition, it may be worth considering why Ono chooses not to explicitly reveal that his influence contributed to the Migi-Hidari's demolition. Fonioková argues that the narrator can be labelled as a "selective narrator because he . . . chooses to convey some parts of the 'whole truth' and to withhold others," which serves "to avoid the topics and memories that threaten to give rise to his regrets and sense of guilt" (2007, 137). This is evident in his discourse: the overall tone is that of pride and satisfaction meanwhile there is a lack of any clear sense of guilt or even slight remorse. The scholar also notes that Ono "constructs a version of his past that presents him as a man doing the best under the given circumstances [and] this version would be jeopardized if Ono really acknowledged his mistakes to himself" (Fonioková 2007, 141). Indeed, the positive aspects that Ono, as a selective narrator, chooses to reveal would be put at risk if he admits his past mistakes. This is because the narrative is constructed as a confession, and he seeks the approval of the readers, who take the role of witnesses. The Migi-Hidari remains a fundamental part of Ono's identity, and it also represents his success, and because the narrator wishes to show the most positive aspects of his past, this place is frequently mentioned throughout the novel.

Nevertheless, as Shelley Hornstein claims "places . . . [are] in greater alliance with [the] social context" (2011, 82), and when external events happen to eliminate a space or an object, the role of memory is called into question. Consequently, Hornstein wonders: "does demolition end a memory?" (2011, 86) The memory of a particular place does not end because of demolition. Ono finds ways to keep the Migi-Hidari alive in his memory. The most evident example is the existence of an oil painting entitled "The Patriotic Spirit" which was painted by a student named Kuroda, whom Ono acknowledged as his most successful

pupil. This particular painting depicts “the boisterous, yet somehow proud and respectable atmosphere of the Migi-Hidari” (74-75). Consequently, even if the physical space no longer exists, its image remains valuable insofar as it creates a sense of permanence and continuity, at least in Ono’s memory. In the light of this, the painting could be understood as a link between the past and the present as it allows Ono to recall his accomplishments, since the painting depicts a successful episode of his past. Besides, the fact that his reputation and influence in the city helped to build such a place can only be positive even if the outcome was unfavourable, that is, the eventual demolition of the Migi-Hidari.

The Migi-Hidari is not, however, the only meaningful public space in the novel. Mrs. Kawakami’s bar is the only establishment that survived among the ruins of the old pleasure district, and this further emphasises Ono’s sense of continuity and permanence, for it is “as though nothing changed” (21). In this sense, it should be first considered that, as Andreas Huyssen claims, “space and time are fundamental categories of human experience and perception [and] they are very much subject to historical change” (2003, 24). In this sense, space is said to be fragile because it is exposed to alteration. Huyssen further states that “the memory of living in a securely circumscribed place, with a sense of stable boundaries and a place-bound culture” is frequently lamented, as such, “the issue is . . . to secure some continuity within time” (2003, 24). The fact that Mrs. Kawakami’s place has not suffered any significant change yet, as opposed to the rest of the buildings that formed the pleasure district, allows the protagonist to experience not only a reassuring sentiment of continuity, but also a temporal relief from the present, as he immerses himself in the memory of a glorious past in which he was highly respected by his pupils. Nevertheless, this sentiment seems to fade away once Ono leaves the bar and confronts the surrounding landscape that is similar to a “graveyard” (25).

Although the old district has disappeared, Mrs. Kawakami’s establishment could be understood as a physical, material link between the past and the present. Maurice Halbwachs claimed that “it is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present” (1980, 15). This sense of continuity also encourages Ono to naively think about the possibility to recover the past. Together with Shintaro and Mrs. Kawakami, they decide that they should gather those who used to visit the establishment, “that way [they] could start rebuilding the old days . . . [because] Mrs. Kawakami’s is still there, the same as ever, and things are slowly building back up again” (76). There is a clear desire to recover the old days by means of the only establishment that has survived, as the narrator puts it: “behind our bantering there is a thread

of serious optimism" (77), an optimism prompted by the existence of that little place. Indeed, this site has a powerful influence over the present situation of the narrator and his companions because it provides a sense of security. Thus, Mrs. Kawakami's bar is especially relevant insofar as it can work as a possible connection to the past, or as a medium to recover it.

Collective Memory and the Meaning of Place

Ono's memories are not only linked to settings, but also to different social groups: his family, the community of artists, and militarist organizations to which he belonged. Scholars point out that "every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These 'others,' however, are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995, 127). At the same time, groups are connected to the places in which they were formed. The concept of collective memory is thus identified by a shared past. Nevertheless, in *An Artist of The Floating World*, collective memory seems to be clashing with individual perceptions of the past, especially since the attitude of the population drastically changed after the war. While Ono used to be highly respected because he supported nationalistic ideas, now he receives frequent criticism from the ones who admired him. Although Ge Nan argues that this behaviour is the result of the "amnesia of collective memory" (2017, 36), the term "amnesia" cannot fully describe their forgetting, for this wish to erase the past, or detach from past influences, arises because the memories are still present, but individuals of the same group can adopt different attitudes towards the past.

Scholars claim that "the basic attitude toward . . . the past . . . [is that] one group remembers the past in fear of deviating from its model, the next for fear of repeating the past (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995, 133). This is because traumatic experiences can affect the structure of the group. Devastating events, such as war, challenge "communal self-understandings" and shape "subsequent political perceptions, affiliations and action" (Bell 2006, 5). When Ono attempts to meet his former pupil, Kuroda, he encountered his roommate —Einchi—, who blames Ono for Kuroda's suffering: he was imprisoned and tortured because Ono denounced him to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities (183). Consequently, Kuroda was considered a traitor long after the war. Einchi is upset and claims that the real traitors "are still walking free" (113-114). Indeed, after the war, the mindset of the population changed drastically, and the political milieu shifted from militarism to democracy. In this sense, Einchi seems to represent the new generation of Japanese who condemn not only the old values, but

also every individual associated to them. On the contrary, Matsuda claims that they should be proud of the things they have done, even if the new generation may have a different opinion (94).

The narrative adopts the form of a confession, as such, the narrator ultimately finds an opportunity to justify his actions, or at least to show that he is regretful, in order to avoid further criticism. The *miai* is a meeting between the two families involved in marriage negotiations (124), but Ono seizes the opportunity to publicly confess his mistakes:

> there are some who would say it is people like myself who are responsible for the terrible things that happened to this nation of ours. As far as I am concerned, I freely admit I made many mistakes. I accept that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people . . . . All I can say is that at the time I acted in good faith. I believed . . . I was achieving good for my fellow countrymen. But as you see, I am not now afraid to admit I was mistaken. (123-124)

In this passage the narrator is addressing not only the Saito family, but also the readers. He justifies himself in front of his witnesses and seeks their approval. There are references to "the nation," and to "countrymen," which denote rapport and belonging, as well as they appeal to a shared past. The language employed in this discourse establishes a sense of commonality, which makes the listeners finally empathise with the narrator. Besides, Ono praises himself for his success, because the meeting "hung in the balance until that point" (124).

In the novel, however, collective memory seems to be perpetuated by the spatial framework in which the group was formed, because the group is anchored to a specific place. The old district in which Ono and his students gathered "was nothing more than somewhere to drink, eat and talk," however, for them it was *their* "pleasure district" (24). In fact, the old district is a recurrent location in the novel, and it is especially relevant for the collective memory because the group adapted it to their own values, thus it acquired a shared meaning. And the meaning attributed to this location —and others— is what actually creates a shared memory, even if the group eventually splits. What is more, the meaning that a group has attributed to a place leaves a permanent impact on their minds. Halbwachs describes this idea as follows:

> the place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. No image of a blackboard can recall what was once written there . . . . But place and group have each received the imprint of each other . . . . Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society. (1980, 2)

Thus, while places eventually change or disappear, the meanings attributed to them seem to resist dismantling. For instance, Ono suggests that the ideals associated with the reception room of his house remain imprinted in his mind: "for throughout my years I have preserved the sense, instilled in me by my father, that the reception room of a house is a place to be revered, a place to be kept unsoiled by everyday trivialities . . . I was forbidden even to enter the reception room until the age of twelve [when] the 'business meetings' began, and then I found myself inside that room once every week" (41). This illustrates how the meaning of such room has been inculcated in Ono's mind at a very young age. It also evidences that even if the group is no longer there, in this case, Ono's family, the values they attributed to that place persist in time.

Moreover, the narrative that Ono provides about the reception room is marked by digressions, and the narrator is aware of that: "I see I am drifting" (48). Scholars suggest that digressions serve to withhold painful memories (Fonionková 2007, 134). Indeed, the reception room is associated to an upsetting event: Ono's father burnt some of his paintings there because "artists live in squalor and poverty" (46). However, since the narrative is, after all, autobiographical, the narrator decides to focus on himself, rather than on his father, in order to make himself look favourable. He accounts a conversation he held with his mother as an opportunity to show readers how his father's actions fostered even more his desire to become a painter: "it doesn't bother me in the least what Father's doing in the reception room. All he's kindled is my ambition" (48). Ono is proving his self-confidence to the readers, and as Fonioková argues, "self-projection is an important feature of Ono's narrative: his frequent asides about other people . . . gain their meaning as demonstrations of Ono's own actions, feelings, opinions and self-assessment" (2007, 134). Therefore, the melancholic memories linked to the reception room, together with the significance that Ono's family has attributed to it, have created a space which is unique because it is "more solemn . . . than to be found in most households" (41).

Additionally, the meaning and values attributed to a place can later be applied to another one. Hence, there can be established a parallelism between two places that are representative of the collective memory. This connection means that the members of a group unconsciously receive the imprint of each other, and that places are nucleus of such exchanges. Ono's career as an artist flourished when he studied at Mori-san's villa with other art students under the guidance of Seiji Moriyama (Mori-san). The narrator recalls that there was "a competitive yet family-like intimacy" that characterized this community of young artists (144). This group lived "in accordance with [their teacher's] values and lifestyle, which

meant that Mori-san conducted his students into "exploring the city's 'floating world'. . . the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink" (144-145). This "floating world" does not refer to any specific location, but it is an abstract concept that represents the ambience of delectation that was shared among the artists that gathered in the city, or at Mori-san's villa. And this world served as a source of inspiration for the group of young painters. The ideals that characterized this "world" were later applied to the Migi-Hidari, as it was also a place of congregation for artists. Thus, a parallelism can be drawn between the "floating world" and the Migi-Hidari, which seems to be Ono's own replication of the world he knew in his younger years, considering that he gathered his own students there. In fact, the narrator recalls how there was a "story-teller" called Maki, who would frequently visit the Migi-Hidari and "reminisce . . . about those nights" (145). The fact that this character has been moved from the "floating world" to the Migi-Hidari implies that there is an actual connection between the two spaces.

Additionally, the meaning of a place is also perpetuated through time by way of verbal discourse. As Jay Winter claims, "collective remembrance is a matter of activity. Someone carries a message, a memory, and needs to find a way to transmit it to others" (2006, 61). Mori-san would deliver discourses to his pupils about the beauty of that magical world and, interestingly, Ono would later take the master's words, instilled in his mind, and express them to his own students at the Migi-Hidari (151). It seems that the ideals of the "floating world" were perpetuated through time by the words that were transferred from master to pupil. Some scholars refer to it as "communicative memory," which "typically . . . takes place between partners who can change roles. Whoever relates a joke, a memory, a bit of gossip, or an experience becomes the listener in the next moment" (Assman and Czaplicka 1995, 126-127). Yet, while these discourses serve to strengthen the bonding of the group and establish common values, they seem to be unreliable. This is evident because when recalling those memories, the narrator introduces metanarrative comments such as: "it is possible that Mori-san did not use those exact words . . . but then again . . . it is quite possible that those were my teacher's words" (151). Fonioková argues that this behaviour shows that Ono is sceptical about the reliability of his memory (2007, 135). Therefore, the readers might doubt the veracity of the story.

Another place which shows the correlation between two groups is the pavilion of the Takami Gardens. The pavilion bears a valuable meaning for Ono, who used to take his pupils there to admire it (175) because he wished to share with them what that place meant for him. Although the pavilion was ultimately destroyed during the war, it is a place that was given a

shared meaning through paralleling conversations. Ono remembers the instances when he held insightful conversations with Mori-san, and later with his "most gifted student," Kuroda (175). The expressions that Mori-san used to communicate with Ono would later be replicated by the listener himself. Mori-san thought Ono "seem[ed] to be exploring curious avenues," and those same words are the ones that Ono later addresses to Kuroda in the same pavilion (177). Again, the roles are exchanged but the discourse remains the same. I argued earlier that such memories are not reliable, thus the narrator doubts the reliability of his own memory by making metanarrative comments, such as "[Mori-san] may not have used that precise phrase . . . but then again, I believe [he] did at times" (177). Nevertheless, what this account does prove is that the values of a group can be transmitted to another, hence perpetuated through time, and that the pavilion works as a nucleus for such exchanges.

Nostalgia and Memory: Losing Place

At the end of the novel, the narrative takes place during the month of June 1950. At this point, the last public place that remained from the old days, Mrs. Kawakami's, has been demolished. If places are nucleus of memory, what happens when such places are lost? Hornstein argues that places "carry the memories of stories," as such, places are often expected to be stable and permanent. However, when external events happen to destroy those places, "this substance, this stuff that carries meaning and memory, is lost over time. "Whenever we think of memories, those accumulated during our own formative years [our] own home settings come to mind immediately . . . . The visceral response we have to a house in the process of demolition, for example, speaks to the deep pain of loss of a place where memories were formed" (Hornstein 2011, 82-83). Indeed, the narrator is experiencing a sense of loss because the life he has cherished is slowly fading away. Some scholars argue that the response to a traumatic event is not purely transmitted because "it is inside the individual mind and cannot be communicated to others" (Fierke 2006, 121). As such, there is no straightforward representation on the narrator's part about how he copes with these events, or what his feelings are. For instance, the first line of the narrative that comprises the month of June informs us about Matsuda's death. The narrator's response to this tragic event is confusing, for he is not expressing an immediate reaction. Instead, he digresses to the past in order to convey his feelings in the present.

Thus, by recalling how he felt the last time he interacted with Matsuda, he can assimilate his death in a positive way. Ono feels that "there was no reason for [Matsuda] to

have died disillusioned [because] we have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith" (202). In this sense, memory serves as a mechanism to channel one's feelings. On the contrary, we know that Ono's wife and son died as a consequence of the war, however there is no account about their lives, only spare anecdotes that the narrator eventually regrets introducing (157). This implies that the way the narrator conveys his painful memories is significantly variable because, in this case, he automatically cancels any memory associated with them. Matsuda's death, however, triggers a new perception of life for Ono, as he seems to be more attentive to the passing of time, and to his present environment. His account demonstrates that he has accepted the fact that his surroundings have changed, but at the same time the nostalgic tone exposes the profound sense of loss he is experiencing: "yesterday morning . . . I walked on to where our pleasure district used to be. The area has now been rebuilt and has become quite unrecognizable. The narrow little street . . . has now been replaced by a wide concrete road [and] where Mrs Kawakami's once stood, there is now a glass-fronted office building . . . . Where the Migi-Hidari once stood is now a front yard for a group of offices" (205).

In this new context, Ono suffers a disruption from his glorious past. Such disruption is marked by the demolition of the places that carried his valuable memories. But in this new surrounding he finds elements that remain untouched, such as "a piece of fencing or else a tree, left over from the old days, looking oddly incongruous in its new setting" (205), and other details, such as "birds perched uncomfortably on the tops of the poles" (27). Ono seems to identify with those elements, as he is the one who feels out of place in the new setting. Besides, he cannot find his sense of belonging into the new surroundings because the places that provided a sense of stability and were part of his identity, such as Mrs. Kawakami's and the Migi-Hidari, have disappeared. Although he constantly relies on those elements that remain untouched to revive the past: "it is my fancy that the bench occupies a spot very close to where our old table in the Migi-Hidari would have been situated" (205). The narrator is constantly comparing and pointing out the changes which he notices, and this demonstrates that he is lamenting the fact that he is unable to rely on the spatial context any longer.

This behaviour shows that the narrator is mourning the past through the places that are no longer there, and that have been replaced by other elements that have no meaning altogether. According to Sigmund Freud, "profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world . . . the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love . . . and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of [it]" (1956, 244).

This same pattern can be applied, as Ono refuses to be included in this new context. Additionally, when the narrator recalls how the places have changed, the vocabulary he uses is negative and melancholic: "one evening . . . I was standing on [the] little wooden bridge and saw away two columns of smoke rising from the rubble . . . . The sight of those columns against the sky . . . were like pyres at some abandoned funeral. A graveyard . . . and when one remembers all those people who once frequented the area, one cannot help seeing it that way" (28). In this passage Ono is referring to the "old district" which has become "rubble." There are also references to death and a clear sense of loss. This is no coincidence, though, as Hornstein argues, "architecture under physical attack, and even in a state of progressive decay beyond the point of no return, is a reminder of our own eventual death, and a brutal announcement of the irretrievable" (2011, 2). The tone of the passage also reveals how the narrator feels about his environment, namely that these changes negatively affect his spirits, as he is unable to find any sense of meaning in the present setting.

Similarly, he loses his sense of belonging to any group because there are no places to satisfy gatherings of people attached to the old values. As scholars argue, Ono was part of "the organizations and associations that militarism entailed; he belonged also to the larger community of Japanese who had lost their loved ones in the war [however] Ono loses his sense of belonging to these groups, as time passes" (Ge Nan 2017, 38). Furthermore, his own family cannot offset this misplaced feeling as none of them are able to identify with his past experiences and old ideals in the same way as his colleagues did. He dislikes the places that are now significant to his daughter, such as Taro and Noriko's new apartment, which Ono finds "claustrophobic," while his daughter "seems very proud of her apartment . . . of Western design" (156). In addition, Setsuko does not acknowledge her father's work as remarkable enough to be constantly relived and subsequently justified. She claims that "father was, after all, a painter . . . . He must stop believing he has done some great wrong" (192-193). Setsuko seems to diminish his father's achievements by regarding his work as insignificant. This behaviour shows that his family is attempting to forget the past, because even if Ono cherishes his memories, his family does not show the same attitude. This proves that different members of the same group can have different understandings about the past, even if the experiences are the same. Some would rather remember while others would rather forget.

However, while in previous passages Ono felt uneasy about the future, by the end of the novel, the narrator adopts a more reflexive tone, he is talking to himself. It seems that by the end of his life —and the novel— Ono is able to finally comprehend that the times have changed. In this sense, the attitude of the narrator towards the future is, in fact, positive. And

his perspective of the past can be defined under the Japanese term *natsukashii*, which refers to "prototypically sweet, comforting feelings" that the individual finds pleasure, or comfort in remembering (Farese and Cavanagh 2018, 233). Although it is clear that Ono laments the loss of the different places that were meaningful to him, he finds confront in remembering the good old days. Finally, he is willing to accept that the young generation is now taking his place and building their *own* meaningful spaces: "I feel certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be . . . . Our nation, it seems . . . has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well" (206).

Conclusion

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, past experiences are constantly reiterated, and this allows the narrator to understand his own past, and to confess his mistakes. However, the narrative of such experiences is always set in a specific location. It has been proven that places in the novel are crucial since they provide a better understanding of memory, both individual and collective, and they can work as a link between the past and the present. In the novel, places adopt the role of bearers of memories, from Ono's own property to different public locations in which Ono constructed his identity before the war. The pleasure district is a recurrent setting throughout the novel, with its most relevant establishment, the Migi-Hidari, which represents the successful past of Ono, when he was an admired art instructor and an important member of militarist organizations. Another important public place is Mrs. Kawakami's bar, which has been proven to work as a link between the past and the present, because before its eventual demolition, it was still a place in which Ono could reunite with a few of his past acquaintances. This provided a sense of continuity in time, and a feeling that everything remains unchanged, together with the hope to eventually rebuild the old days.

Additionally, places are also nucleus of collective memory, since they allow the gathering of groups that share the same understandings about life. And what remains after people perish, and groups split, are the spaces in which they built their memories. Thus, every place has a specific and shared meaning, which can be transmitted to generations to come. As carriers of memories, the different settings that appear in the novel are treasured in the narrator's mind and constantly retrieved throughout the narrative. The collective memory in the novel is not, however, ideally homogeneous. Of course, the experience of war is common to Ono's family and friends, but every individual can have varying attitudes about the past. Especially if we consider that after the Second World War the nation suffered major changes,

both in terms of ideology and architecture, which evidences that physical places are not permanent, since after the war, all those locations that were meaningful to Ono were demolished. This raises the question of how the World War II trauma affects the general understanding of the spatial framework. In this sense, further research should be devoted to the issue of trauma in *An Artist of the Floating World*, especially after the physical environment in which the Japanese constructed their memories and identity is lost forever.

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