Memory and Diasporic Spaces: The *Imaginaire* in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes988

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Received: 30.12.2024 Accepted: 1.12.2025 Published Online: 4.12.2025

Abstract: This qualitative study examines spaces of the imaginaire in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*. It argues that protagonist Masuji Ono's diasporic identity is constructed through narrative spaces. His house serves as the central locus and primary narrative space. Employing a spatial framework, the analysis demonstrates how physical places within the house and related spaces like bars and bridges function as active agents. These spaces structure memory, history, and identity formation. They thereby generate and shape the novel's exploration of diasporic consciousness. Moving beyond temporal or psychological approaches, this study offers a significant new spatial framework for analyzing diaspora in Ishiguro's work. Its implications contribute substantially to diaspora studies, memory studies, and Ishiguro scholarship. It does this by demonstrating literary space's foundational role in articulating displacement and belonging.

Keywords: diaspora, *Floating World*, memory, narrative tapestry, space, the imaginaire

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) traces the reflections of Masuji Ono. Ono is an aging Japanese artist negotiating post-war societal condemnation of his nationalist past. Set between 1948 and 1950, the novel unfolds through Ono's unreliable recollections. He navigates his daughters' marriages amid Japan's cultural reckoning. The title alludes to *ukiyo-e*, the "floating world" artistic tradition. This allusion serves as a metaphor for transience and moral ambiguity in a society dismantling imperialist ideologies.

This paper probes the intricacies of spatial representation within the novel. It deftly unravels the borders between the real and the imagined in Ono's psyche. The analysis focuses on the space of the imaginaire. It examines how this conceptual domain is woven through physical and psychological landscapes. The study draws

on Gilles Fauconnier's "mental spaces" (Fauconnier 1994). It illustrates how ideas are arranged through comparison, projection, and blending. These mental spaces facilitate dialogues between contrasting worlds. These include the present and the past, the homeland and the diaspora, the real and the imaginary. As interconnected domains, they enable the specification of counterparts and structural projection across boundaries. The imaginaire thus emerges as a collective repository of mythology and ideology. It is shaped by cultural narratives.

This study argues that Ishiguro makes a significant contribution by examining diasporic identities and the power structures that shape cultural identity. It shows how displacement informs his imaginaire of Japan. Ishiguro's own "hybrid" status as "a kind of homeless writer" (Wong 2000: 10) also informs this perspective. Ono's imaginaire is shaped by interpersonal exchanges. In this respect, Bezari et al. note that "the notion of the imaginary is often connected with […] implicit or explicit cultural references" (2019: 2). Drawing on Foucault, Hutcheon notes that no subject has "absolute certainty about the past." This reflects an "inscription of subjectivity within history" (1988: 118). Thus, Ono's fragmented identity challenges the idea of a unified self. It also disrupts historical continuity. This paper aims to analyse the imaginaire as a key narrative element shaping the novel's storytelling.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The imaginaire

The imaginaire serves as a chronotopic tool in Ishiguro's narrative. It is grounded in Brigit Neuman's notion of "fictions of memory." This concept highlights how recollections often reflect present desires more than past events (2008: 333). Kant's "transcendental imagination" connects sensory impressions to abstract ideas. Ernst Cassirer distinguishes between "productive" and "reproductive imagination." He argues that imagination adds new meanings to sensory images (2021: 10). French philosophers have also explored these functions. Hélène Védrine describes the imaginaire as encompassing beliefs and myths. These beliefs and myths shape individual and collective consciousness (Paton 2008: 75). It involves a complex system of images and symbols. Claude-Gilbert Dubois describes it as a psychic energy that structures both individual and communal levels. Joël Thomas sees it as an organising dynamism of images, as cited in (Tyldesley 2020: 114).

The social imaginaire is a collective construct. It includes symbols and mythological events that provide meaning to historical narratives and cultural memory. Charles Taylor defines it as the ways people imagine their social existence (2004: 23). Gérard Bouchard emphasises its basis in myths (2017: 18). The imaginaire embodies collective desires and fears, which often diverge from historical realities (McTighe 1993: 75). In diaspora, the imaginaire generates archetypal images and fantasies. These shape diasporic identities and form coherent imaginary worlds, as Peter Turchi (2007) notes. Doležel contends it produces a "hetero-cosmos" with constitutive effects on reality comprehension (1998: 5).

Bakhtin formulates the chronotope concept to show "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships […] in literature" (1981: 84). This concept helps identify the unique geography and history of the imaginaire. Analyzing Ishiguro's work through this lens reveals how he maps the figurative chronotopes of diasporic identities. Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki and educated in England. He has achieved international acclaim, yet critical approaches to his work are often constrained by stereotypes and Said's concept of orientalism. Bradbury notes that Ishiguro blends fictional forms to create a voice transcending individual cultures (Wong 2000: 12). Rushdie identifies an "underlying turbulence" in Ishiguro's understated style (1991: 244). Tomkinson explores how this turbulence stems from the fraught interplay of memory and imagination in his narratives (2016: 62).

2.2 Diaspora

Diaspora is a multifaceted concept that historicises varied trajectories. It weaves networks across domains to explain contemporary experiences. This concept involves both departure and resettlement. These processes are shaped by power dynamics and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Abu-Shamar and Salam describe the "dialogic paradigm" as a fluid space for intercultural dialogue (2024: 4). Avtar Brah critiques binary frameworks as "socially constructed categories." She highlights "multiple others" who cross these boundaries. Brah draws attention to intersecting identities. These include gender, race, class, religion, language, and generation. For her, "the specificity of each is framed in and through fields of representation of the other" (1996: 181, 182).

The diasporic space is a realm of multiplicity. It embraces migrants, their descendants, and those represented as natives. This space reveals complex layers of identity and belonging. Ishiguro's diasporic authorship mediates the "imagined distance between home and abroad, self and the other" (Connor 1996: 107-108). His fiction articulates the constitutive tensions of diaspora. It illuminates the dialectic between dislocation and attachment. These narratives thereby provoke critical engagement with the fragmented nature of identity within globalisation. This fragmentation of identity is powerfully enacted through Ishiguro's narrative form.

3. Discussion

3.1 The narrative of Ishiguro's text

Ishiguro's narrative centres on the protagonist's fragmented recollections and experiential uncertainties. This memory-driven framework critically engages dominant historical narratives. Historical events surface within the text. However, they undergo intentional distortion and reconfiguration. Through these textual strategies, the narrative destabilises monolithic historical accounts. It simultaneously foregrounds the subjective mediation of collective pasts. This approach reveals memory as an active site of historical interrogation. Memory is not a passive recollection. Such manipulations illuminate the "possible mnemonic

failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error" (Hutcheon 1988: 114). In this light, historical insertions are not mere embellishments. They are crafted to challenge the certainties history purports to offer. This reveals the inherently discursive nature of both history and fiction.

Ishiguro destabilises historical certainties through Masuji Ono's contradictory accounts of his painting, *Complacency*. Initially, Ono frames it as a moral indictment of pre-war corruption. He describes it: "[It] was framed by two factory plants looming one to our right, the other to our left. Wedged in between was a dense muddle of roofs" (1986: 165). Later, he reduces it to depicting "three fat, well-dressed men, sitting in a comfortable bar laughing together" (1986: 168). This palimpsestic revisionism erodes personal credibility. It also undermines collective historical narratives. The painting's physical absence prevents material verification of Japan's militarist past.

The resultant ambiguity transforms memory into a fluid hetero-cosmos (Doležel 1998). This ambiguity is embodied in Matsuda's admission: "'We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost'" (1986: 204). Readers must navigate the imaginaire as a contested space. Here, time collapses: 1930s ideology permeates 1948 reconstruction. Unspoken trauma haunts performative recollections. Ishiguro denies narrative resolution. Thus, he materialises Abu-Shomar's and Salam's "dialogic paradigm" (2024: 4). Readers reconstruct meaning through gaps between narrative versions and historical absences.

Memory is exposed as an active site of ontological negotiation, not a passive record. The imaginaire is achieved through "Ishiguro's realistic rendering of an imaginary Japan" (Sloane 2021: 19). In this space, memory intertwines with history and experiential knowledge. This creates a space that is ephemeral and fraught with uncertainty. The narrative landscape emerges as a vital element. It enriches the novel's artistic depth in ways previous scholarship has overlooked.

Ishiguro's oeuvre "despite exploring a consistent set of concerns about memory, identity, and ethical responsibility, confound any one way of reading that they have proven so alluring for readers and critics" (Battersby 2021: 83). Throughout the text, "the narrative maintains a parallel between a present tense and a past tense that is gradually but unreliably retrieved in reminiscence as the narrative proceeds" (Connor 1996: 104). This interplay of temporalities complicates our understanding of the protagonist's journey. It also challenges the very foundations of how we perceive memory and history. The narrative urges us to reconsider the fluid boundaries between the remembered and the real. In doing so, it reveals the profound intricacies of an artistic vision that transcends mere storytelling. It invites a deeper engagement with the nature of identity and existence itself. This complex interplay of temporalities finds its parallel in the novel's intricate spatial dimensions. This is achieved particularly through the construction of its narrative imaginaire.

3.2 Spatiality in Ishiguro's text

Ishiguro's novel foregrounds spatiality through a first-person narrator. His act of remembrance creates a rich space of the imaginaire. This raises the question of why this space is so central to the narrative structure. Exploring the imaginaire does not lessen the importance of other temporal layers. The novel intricately constructs the imaginaire as the protagonist, Ono, navigates his daughter's marriage negotiations. This prompts him to recall memories that blend non-chronological sequences of past and present.

The narrative is divided into four temporally marked parts: October 1948, April 1949, November 1949, and June 1950. This covers about eighteen months. Yet, the story also reaches back to Ono's youth and family history. In the opening section, October 1948, Ono describes the physical attributes of his home. He also shares a poignant visit from his daughter, Setsuko. She is concerned about her sister Noriko's marriage prospects. Setsuko urges her father to guard against the revelation of his own past to protect the engagement.

During their conversation, the family reveals they "were extremely puzzled by Father's behaviour [at Noriko's *miai*]" when he apologised for his nationalist past (Ishiguro 1986: 191). Ono recalls it was Setsuko who advised him to take "precautionary steps" (1986: 191). This discrepancy highlights Ono's selective forgetting and misremembering. The novel suggests this is a deliberate, self-protective strategy. It helps him avoid confronting the guilt and shame over his past.

Throughout the novel, Ono's act of remembrance highlights the interplay of temporality and spatiality. These are critical interpretative lenses for understanding the imaginaire. As Bill Richardson asserts, the "self-conscious reflexivity in relation to spatiality and temporality is an awareness of the intimate connection between the two notions of space and time, neither of which can be conceived of without the other" (2015: 6). The spatiality of a plot does not negate its temporal movement. Conversely, recognising a plot's temporal nature does not preclude acknowledging its spatial dimensions.

The spatial elements of the imaginaire facilitate the realisation of temporal configurations in the novel. These elements act together with other narrative components. Together, they profoundly shape the literary fabric of the text. This exploration will be further illuminated through the analysis of key narrative excerpts from Ishiguro's work. The spatial elements of the imaginaire are made tangible through the physical spaces the protagonist navigates.

3.3 Memory and space in Ishiguro's text

In Ishiguro's novel, Masuji Ono moves through spaces that trigger memories and confrontations. These encounters challenge his sense of reality. Chris Holmes notes that Ishiguro "engages the imaginary, the networks of connection and constraint that are invisible to us, but which shape the forms of our lived experiences" (2025: 30). Ono's journey is a struggle marked by a gap. This gap exists between his own perceptions and those of others. Each space he enters deepens this dissonance. These spaces serve as portals to reflection and action. The house and its

surroundings both bear the scars of war. However, while the outside world is being rebuilt, Ono's house remains stuck. It is in a state of unresolved reconstruction.

The house's unfinished renovation mirrors the spaces Ono moves through, which uncover spaces from the past. Places in a destroyed present cause places from a destructive past to emerge. This happens through overlaps. These layered spaces complement each other, with each place unfolding into another. For example, the living room in Ono's house refers to other living rooms. Likewise, situations that occur there give rise to similar episodes. The reconstruction of the house cannot progress until Ono himself progresses in reflecting on his errors. This is not just a material reform, but a reformulation of his own existence. In temporal terms, the destruction of the house and his difficulty reforming it link him to a war-committed past. The damaged parts of the house represent past events that persistently haunt Ono's existence. They attest to his need to reinterpret these events, while also revealing his difficulties. These difficulties are shown by the postponed renovation. They are also reflected in the memories the narrator tries to reconstruct. This process of memory reconstruction aims to build his space of the imaginaire.

The novel's spatial configuration presents different places, distinguished in three ways: (a) The first is closed spaces, represented by the rooms in Ono's house, Mrs. Kawakami's bar, and the Migi-Hidari bar. These are bars Ono frequents in the present and past, respectively. (b) The second is open spaces, such as the parks where Ono walks and the scenes of ruins from the bombings. (c) The third is means of spatial connection, like the corridor inside the house, the "Bridge of Hesitation," and urban roads.

This distinction between spatial elements allows for a mapping of the narrative's imaginaire. It verifies that Ono's house plays a constituent, or central, role in constructing this space. In other words, the configuration of the house and its rooms is a structuring pillar of the narrative. It also acts as a source for configuring the space of the imaginaire. The overlapping of these spaces creates "a structure of 'spatial dislocation' that foregrounds a number of physical and psychological spaces" (Ben Amara 2024: 268). This physical architecture of dislocation directly enables the psychological architecture of Ono's memory and imaginaire.

3.4 Memory and the imaginaire in Ishiguro's text

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, memory, the imaginaire, and meaning are closely linked. They shape both Ono's identity and the novel's view of postwar Japan. Ono's memories are subjective, filtered through his need for self-justification and an idealised self-image. As Huang (2024: 47) observes, the novel presents "a subjective version of the past" shaped by the narrator's intentions. Ono's imaginaire—his internalised ideals and cultural narratives—further influences how he reconstructs his past. It often blends nostalgia and selective forgetting.

Ono himself acknowledges this, stating: "I feel certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be […] Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may

have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things" (Ishiguro 1986: 206). This nostalgia, blended with forgetting, allows him to downplay past mistakes and focus on national renewal. This illustrates how memory enables self-justification and historical amnesia.

Places and objects, such as the reception room or lanterns, serve as carriers of memory. They link individual and collective histories while imbuing them with symbolic meaning. Yet, these memories are unstable and unreliable. They are shaped by shifting social values and Ono's own self-deception. This makes meaning itself provisional and contested in the aftermath of trauma.

For Maya Sibul, the novel is "concerned, both broadly and particularly, with the concurrent construction of individual and collective realities, positing an interchangeable relation between the two" (2021: 8). This unstable process of memory finds its most potent symbol and stage in the detailed spatial configuration of Ono's own house.

3.5 The space of the house and the imaginaire

The house is large and consists of a veranda, a reception room, a dining room, a piano room, and a long corridor. This corridor leads to the bedrooms in the east wing. The narrative is set against a backdrop of destruction caused by war. Scenes of debris and smoke are "like pyres at some abandoned funeral" (Ishiguro 1986: 28). This simile connects physical destruction to psychological fragmentation. The "abandoned" funeral signifies a suppressed collective mourning. Japan's wartime trauma remains ritually unaddressed. The pyres also symbolise moral failures. They implicate Ono's generation in cultural desecration. The description reveals Ono's avoidance. His memories become sites of abandoned accountability, where guilt remains unconsummated. The reference to a house almost inevitably leads to Bachelardian images of intimate space. For Bachelard, the image of the house is a topography of the intimate self. It is an integrating pole for thoughts, memories, and dreams. A whole past comes to life through the dream of a new house. In Bachelard's view, the house represents a space of welcome, refuge, and stability. It "is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (1994: 6). This concept contrasts sharply with the fractured role of Ono's own home.

This image of the house is intensified in the narrative. Ono speaks with pride about how it stands out in the landscape. This indicates a topophilia. He states, "it is inside a place of soft, natural woods selected for the beauty of their grains, and all of us who lived in it came to find it most conducive to relaxation and calm" (Ishiguro 1986: 10). His description emphasises the house's aesthetic distinction. The environment is framed as intrinsically therapeutic, producing "relaxation and calm." This pastoral idealism functions as strategic nostalgia.

Crucially, the description divorces the architecture from its historical context. The house's luxury originated from Ono's position as a nationalist propagandist. His focus on natural beauty obscures this institutional patronage. Material comfort becomes an alibi for moral evasion. The rhetoric of tranquility also reveals a

temporal disjunction. Such selective recollection sanitises the house's association with imperial ideology.

The woods' "beauty" symbolically masks the violence financed by Ono's artistic service. By fetishising the villa's serenity, Ono sublimates his complicity into aesthetic appreciation. The landscape becomes a psychological refuge from accountability. It is a heterotopic space (Foucault 1984) where uncomfortable histories remain deliberately unexcavated.

The implied author creates dissonance, making it hard for the reader to fully accept Ono's perspective. This increases the distance between the reader and the narrator. Ono bought his house cheaply through an "auction of prestige," (Ishiguro 1986: 9) which reflected his status as an artist linked to imperialist politics. His surprise at this is false modesty, masking pride and self-delusion about his importance.

The individual rooms, including those of Ono and his children, are not described. This omission highlights their emotional separation. The long corridor to the east wing further emphasises this distance and symbolically links to Ono's past. The piano room, once his studio, is the closest he has to a private space. Yet, even here, Ono's paintings have been removed and hidden. This architectural design, which isolates and conceals, ensures that even the most public rooms become arenas of confrontation rather than comfort.

3.6 The overlapping of spaces and the imaginaire

Other spaces, like the veranda, dining room, and reception room, function as public spaces. Their public nature tends to expand, in an increasing order, with the presence of characters who confront the narrator. On the veranda, Ono interacts with his daughters and grandson. In the dining room, we see the presence of his son-in-law. In the reception room, students and other characters are present.

There is no space for comforting solitude in Ono's house. Every room becomes a place of confrontation. His views are consistently challenged by the views of others. Family members and visitors question his memories and beliefs. These conflicts create dissonance and discomfort for Ono. His memory fails to bring him the justification or approval he seeks. Instead of peace, his house is filled with tension and unresolved questions. Each space becomes a stage for his struggles. In the reception room, dining room, and veranda, he grapples with guilt, pride, and misunderstanding.

The house's spaces function as public arenas. Here, Ono must continually face his past actions and the judgments of others. This contrasts with Bachelard's concept of the intimate house. Instead, it is a public stage for personal and collective struggles. Together, the reception room, dining room, veranda, and piano room form a tapestry of the imaginaire. These shared spaces profoundly shape the narrative.

The reception room is first mentioned when Ono meets with Setsuko. She enters with flowers for the ancestors' shrine. This meeting occurs after a disagreement between Ono and his other daughter, Noriko. Noriko wants to take

Ichiro to a friend's house, which ruins Ono's plan for a trip to the cinema. Concerned about this family tension, Setsuko stays home with Ono. In the sanctuary of the reception room, she expresses her worries about Noriko's marriage negotiations. She advises her father to be cautious. Her goal is to prevent the Saito family from learning any damaging information about his past. She says, "[...]To ensure misunderstandings do not arise […]. Misunderstandings about what, Setsuko? About the past" (Ishiguro 1986: 49). This conversation shifts focus to the past and provides key elements for the narrative's spatial configuration. Setsuko's careful, euphemistic advice reflects postwar Japan's values. It shows a preference for silence and stability over a moral reckoning with the past. This highlights how survival in that era often required complicity in collective forgetting and personal historical amnesia.

Ono initially describes the "reception room" as a solemn and revered space. He believes it should be kept separate from everyday life, reserved for important guests (Ishiguro 1986: 41). This portrayal of the room as pure and solemn masks its actual history of nationalist collaboration. Ono uses the idea of tradition to obscure the room's complicity in imperialist activities. This is revealed through a memory. Ono recalls being summoned by his father to the same room to present his drawings. His father asks, "Masuji, are you sure all your work is here? Aren't there one or two paintings you haven't brought me?' […] the missing paintings are the very ones you're most proud of. Isn't that so?'" (Ishiguro 1986: 43). This scene exposes the tension between Ono's pride and his father's authority. His father's suspicion and probing questions highlight Ono's vulnerability. This moment foreshadows his lifelong struggle for validation and self-assurance.

Ishiguro's work often intricately weaves together spaces, characters, and themes. This is clear in Ono's account of his seven-year training under Master Moriyama. Within this period, the top pupil, Sasaki, is called a traitor. The master confiscates his paintings and expels him from the studio. Later, this pattern repeats tragically. Ono, who became Moriyama's finest disciple, develops his own artistic vision. It conflicts with his master's. As a result, Moriyama also confiscates Ono's paintings, leading to his expulsion. This cycle of betrayal appears a third time. Now, Ono is the master to his own gifted pupil, Kuroda. Ono betrays Kuroda by reporting him to the political police. Using his government position, Ono causes Kuroda's arrest and torment. The invasion of Kuroda's home is a harrowing scene. The sound of fire and the smell of burning paintings fill the air. A woman sobs inside the house (Ishiguro 1986: 181). This moment underscores the profound tragedy of artistic betrayal. The destruction of Kuroda's work symbolises a personal loss and the erasure of trust. It shows how violence devastates both art and human lives.

In Part II, complementary elements unfold within the space of the imaginaire. Ono's pupil, Shintaro, visits his home. He wants a reference letter for his application to Higashimashi High School. They sit in the reception room around a brazier for warmth. Shintaro is optimistic but fears the selection committee has one concern. He states, "Perhaps I should be frank. The small points I refer to concern the past"

(Ishiguro 1986: 101). He asks Ono for a statement that creates distance between them. He specifically wants to disavow their collaborative work on wartime posters for the Manchuria invasion. Ono reacts negatively. He demands Shintaro show a firmer attitude, telling him, "'why don't you simply face up to the past? ... there's no need to lie about yourself'" (103-4). This encounter highlights a key tension. Ono's idealised reception room becomes a space where his wartime legacy must be confronted. Shintaro's request exposes the lasting stigma of nationalist collaboration. Ono's command to "face up to the past" is deeply ironic, as he avoids doing so himself. Through this, Ishiguro reveals the conflict between personal responsibility and society's pressure to forget. He shows how different generations struggle with the burdens of history.

Two important scenes occur in the "reception room" of Chishu Matsuda's house. Matsuda is Ono's political mentor. These visits happen just before Ono breaks away from his artistic master, Moriyama. These are not simple social calls. They are defining moments that shape Ono's political and artistic beliefs, especially regarding the invasion of Manchuria. During the first visit, Matsuda advises Ono with great seriousness. He tells him to let go of a past that should be forgotten. Matsuda also guesses that Ono has met with other old associates. He encourages Ono to seek out Kuroda. Kuroda is an enigmatic figure who holds great significance in Ono's mind.

Ono's second and final visit to Matsuda also takes place in the reception room. Their conversation is light. However, a gentle breeze carries the troubling smell of smoke. Ono murmurs that this odor once signaled fire and devastation. Matsuda subtly corrects him, denying this by saying it is just someone burning leaves in a garden. This moment reveals the lingering fear of destruction in Ono's mind. The reception room thus becomes a lens for understanding his imaginaire. In this mental space, he shifts between many roles: superior and inferior, esteemed and authoritative, guilty and condemned. Each role is reflected in the characters from his memories. The interplay of these roles builds a complex narrative. This echoes his earlier confrontation with his father. Key elements recur here, such as the smell of burning, the residue of ashes, and the dynamics of authority. These components intertwine to create a vivid picture of Ono's complex existence and his multifaceted introspection. The room acts as a chronotope, fusing the psychological space of memory with the physical space of the encounter.

The dining room is a key setting. It connects pivotal moments to other important spaces like the Hotel Kasuga Park and the Migi-Hidari bar. The interplay of light and shadow in this room reflects the complexities of memory. This shapes the narrator's self-presentation. Ishiguro writes, "Although during the day the dining room is rather a gloomy place on account of the sun rarely reaching it, after dark, with the lightshade low over the table, it has a cozy atmosphere" (1986: 37). This description shows how the imaginaire shapes spatial perception. The dining room demonstrates how human experience and memory transform a space. The "lightshade low over the table" is a key symbol. It shows how imagination can alter atmosphere. It blends physical reality with emotional meaning. Therefore, the

imaginaire acts as a mediator. It connects the external environment to internal psychological states.

In the dining room, Noriko discusses her former suitor, Jiro. She asks Ono, “I wonder what it could have been to make them pull out like that” (Ishiguro 1986: 52). This question makes Ono uneasy. He senses something deliberately pointed in her tone, noting that "a father came to notice any small inflections in his daughter’s speech" (53). This exchange reveals how the imaginaire shapes the perception of intimate interactions. Ono's heightened awareness shows how memory and emotion influence how we hear others. Small details gain symbolic weight through imagination. The imaginaire colors everyday moments, turning them into sites of emotional complexity. Ono then recalls Jiro’s own words, which linked the broken engagement to Ono's past. Jiro said, “They should be the ones apologizing” (54). This shows how the imaginaire connects personal and collective memory. Jiro's statement evokes unresolved historical injustices. This highlights how memory and imagination intertwine to frame personal crises within larger social contexts. This constant confrontation within the domestic sphere is orchestrated by key characters. Their dialogues weave disparate spaces into a cohesive, yet contentious, imaginaire.

3.7 The characters and the imaginaire

Spaces and characters intertwine to create layered meaning. The characters' dialogues converge to weave complementary significances, even when they refer to different moments in the narrative. Setsuko and Noriko are steadfast in their opposition to Ono. They are strongly associated with the reception room and the dining room. While not confined to these spaces, their most intense interactions often occur there. In the reception room, Setsuko acts as a catalyst who drives Ono's actions forward. In contrast, within the intimate dining room, Noriko assumes this pivotal role. She subtly reveals Ono's motivations for seeking out Matsuda and Kuroda. Her goal is to protect her engagement with Taro from the shadow of past uncertainties.

At the end of the second chapter, Ono is in Mrs. Kawakami's dimly lit bar. In this space, he profoundly merges with his surroundings. The bar highlights his smallness and solitude, revealing his existential isolation. The atmosphere is thick with yearning, showing how his loneliness intertwines with the place itself. Ono reflects, “I was struck by the thought of how small, shabby and out of place her little bar would seem amidst the large concrete buildings the city corporation was even at that moment erecting around us” (Ishiguro 1986: 126). The bar's impending closure signifies the end of a chapter in Ono's life. His prestigious past is now out of reach. He feels the truth that “That little world has passed away and will not be returning” (127) more deeply than Mrs. Kawakami does. The Migi-Hidari bar, linked to the peak of Ono's career, closed even earlier. This creates a spatial and meaningful relationship. Both bars are public spaces connected to his golden era. They evoke a powerful nostalgia, transporting the narrative back to a time of prestige. This crafts a rich space of the Imaginaire in Ono's mind, where past glories persist as the present fades. He recalls, “when I try to recall that evening, I find my

memory of it merging with the sounds and images from all those other evenings..." (25).

The past continues to haunt Ono in the present. This is clear when he sits in the comforting yet melancholic space of Mrs. Kawakami's bar. In this intimate setting, echoes of the past surround him. A nostalgic haze blurs the line between memory and reality. For Holmes (2025), "Ono's nostalgic reflections on his past […] reveal themselves as artifice, as a form of ideological, uniform thinking" (2025: 115). This thinking "is in constant tension with the novel's clear-eyed descriptions of the urban landscape destroyed by the war, but in the process of rebuilding" (115). The weight of the past presses on him. He notes, "Quite often these days, in the evenings down at Mrs. Kawakami's, I find myself reminiscing about the Migi-Hidari and the old days" (Ishiguro 1986: 75). Despite the bar's constancy, the surrounding landscape is transformed into a desolate tableau. Mrs. Kawakami tells Ono she wishes neighboring buildings were filled again, even with rival bars. She wants to escape what she calls a "graveyard." Ono agrees, reflecting that the ruins were "like pyres at some abandoned funeral" (28). With this shared memory, it becomes impossible to see the area any other way. This interplay of spaces continues as Ono remembers other bars. Each one is a portal to his memory. The bar of his present is linked to the bar that once nourished his spirit. Both are public spaces where Ono experienced both prestige and decadence. Together, they craft his imaginaire. This is a rich mental space where triumph and loss converge, ultimately shaping his identity as a man and an artist.

Ono's house is a pivotal locus in the narrative. It acts as the primordial source from which all other spaces derive their essence. The rooms inside are not simply placed side-by-side. They are interwoven through spatio-temporal signs, where present places echo with the past through nostalgic digressions. The corridor in Ono's house and the "Bridge of Hesitation" act as vital conduits between these different realms. The corridor is notably long. Ono mentions it is "so extravagant in its length that some people have suggested Sugimura... built it... for his parents whom he wished to keep at a distance" (Ishiguro 1986: 11). This length parallels the bridge's role as a connector, but also of separation. Tragically, this hallway bears the damage from the bombings, foreshadowing Ono's own fractured past: "The bulk of the bomb damage had been to this section of the house" (11). Through Ono's reflections, the corridor is revealed as more than a physical passage. It is a testament to enduring destruction that overlays his existence. Each time Ono leaves the house or crosses the bridge, it signifies a journey toward remembrance. This emphasises the profound spatial significance of the corridor and the bridge. They function as bridges between the past and the present, what was and what is.

The narrative is written in the past tense. This subtle choice makes the omission of the "Bridge of Hesitation" significant. It suggests the connection between past and present is so inherent it need not be stated. Ono crosses this bridge every time he leaves for the city. Its name evokes an unseen river, a classic symbol of separation. The bridge is a passage between spaces of memory, facilitating movement from the past to the present. Ono claims, "if sometimes I am to be seen

up on that bridge, leaning thoughtfully against the rail, it is not that I am hesitating" (Ishiguro 1986: 99). Yet, he does grapple with hesitation. He struggles to navigate remembrance and reconstruct meaning in his life. Within his Imaginaire, Ono uses spatial elements to navigate his experiences. These elements often conjure images that distort his inner struggles, allowing for a less painful self-awareness. His journeys to find Kuroda and Matsuda create new spatial connections. These travels bridge the present with the past through remembrance. They are interwoven with digressions that illuminate his relationships, especially regarding art and politics. Ono's house, scarred by bombs, reflects this tumultuous history. He made repairs, but the veranda still bears marks: "it was still billowed and cracked where the impact of the blast had pushed up the boards from underneath" (12). These repairs resonate differently for his daughters. Setsuko and Noriko create new spaces for themselves through marriage and children, gradually leaving Ono's imaginaire behind. Ono notes the modern apartments his daughters prefer are "infinitely more practical" than his own house (156). Thus, the narrative reveals the shifting spaces of identity and belonging across generations.

The narrative is filled with images of wreckage and ruin. Ono's house "had received its share of the war damage" (Ishiguro 1986: 11). Mrs. Kawakami's bar exists "in the midst of a graveyard" (27). Moriyama's storeroom feels like "some grotesque miniature cemetery" (146). Even Kawabe Park is described as a "derelict site half-way to demolition" (165). These images create a pervasive context of destruction. This destruction permeates both the past and present of the story. Ono's space of the Imaginaire is woven from memories of smoke, ashes, debris, and shadows. This reflects his condition as a diasporic subject grappling with moral conflict. The bridge serves as a key vantage point. From it, Ono observes, "One evening not so long ago, I was standing on that little wooden bridge and saw away in the distance two columns of smoke rising from the rubble" (28). As the narrative progresses, the bridge becomes part of Ono's contemplative journey. It signals shifts in the post-war landscape and in his own behavior. He notes that he enjoys standing there at sunset, "surveying my surroundings and the changes taking place around me" (99). However, the new constructions are still unfinished. In the low sun, one might mistake them for the bombed ruins found elsewhere in the city (99). This shows how the past and present visually overlap, just as they do in Ono's memory.

In Ono's memories, past events illuminate the essence of his existence. These memories are woven into his space of the imaginaire. This space is fluid, constantly transforming meaning and propelling the narrative forward. Kawabe Park and Wakaba Hill are pivotal backdrops. In these open spaces, the protagonist's inner turmoil unfolds. While closed spaces reveal the nuances of Ono's identity, the open spaces host a dance between dualities. Haunting remnants of devastation follow the narrator. These echoes hint at a future that is uncertain for Ono, but holds promise for the next generation. Ultimately, as he sits on a bench, a wave of optimism washes over him. He is sparked by the city's vibrant resurgence: "how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness" (Ishiguro 1986: 206).

The piano room stands as a stark testament to Ono's artistic denial. It was once a sanctuary for his cherished paintings. His house is a place of material comfort, visible through "the tops of two ginkgo trees" (Ishiguro 1986: 1). But this private retreat has been stripped of its former purpose. Now, the room is practically empty: “apart from the upright German piano, the room is practically bare” (28). This emptiness creates powerful dichotomies. The room embodies emptiness versus fullness, idleness versus productivity, and opulence versus deprivation. It is a paradox of beauty and barrenness. Its identity has been inverted; it is a piano room that has forsaken its original use as a studio. Noriko’s comment, “I don’t practice nearly enough” (119), underscores the space's desolation. Therefore, the piano room is a somber monument to the decline of Ono's creative spirit, a space where aspiration has been replaced by absence.

The novel's title holds deep symbolic meaning. It reflects Ono's complex diasporic identity as he moves between Japanese and European cultures. His art, filled with European influences, appears iconoclastic to traditional admirers of Utamaro. This challenges their foundational aesthetic beliefs (Ishiguro 1986: 141). The "floating world" evokes a hybrid, sensuous paradise. It was immortalised by artists who captured its fleeting pleasures in paintings and woodcuts. The term comes from the Japanese "*ukiyo-e*," where "*e*" means the art that flourished in Japan's entertainment districts. Ishiguro skillfully expands these meanings through his narrative. He invites readers to reconsider this concept within a new, diasporic framework. His work tries to “find new security against the geographic fracturing of Japan’s borders under conditions of occupation, abandoned imperialism, and incipient globalisation” (Dean 2022: 1124). In doing so, he guides us through liminal and hybrid cultural spaces. Here, the beauty of transience and the weight of identity collide. This creates a rich tapestry that reflects both loss and renewal.

4. Conclusion

In Ishiguro's narrative, the house is a crucial symbol of spatiality that reflects his artistic vision. The story progresses through interconnected spatial planes. Corridors and bridges within this framework facilitate the character's movement. Each space is defined by its relationship to others, highlighting the deep connection between memory and physical place. While remembering requires moving through time, this process is anchored in the narrator's spatial reality. This exploration establishes the house as the central space of the imaginaire. It is the foundation upon which the entire narrative is constructed. Ultimately, these spatial elements are intertwined with the protagonist's diasporic identity. This connection drives the unfolding of time, action, and reflection in the novel.

When viewed through a spatial lens, memory reveals a past that actively shapes the present. The house embodies both memory and loss. Its spaces are not isolated; they evolve in relation to one another, creating a rich tapestry of interconnected experiences. Ultimately, the narrative shows that spatiality acts as a catalyst for progression. Haunting images of destruction underscore the complex

interplay of memory, identity, and loss in Ono's journey. The physical world continuously informs and transforms his inner world.

Funding

The authors extend their appreciation to the Arab Open University for funding this work through research fund No. (AOUKSA-524008)

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