Heterotopia, Liminality, Cyberspace as Marks of Contemporary Spatiality

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Abstract

This paper aims to synthesize perceptions and theories of spatiality and zoning in the contemporary world. The terms, concepts, notions and theories related to spatiality and zoning will be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. New perceptions of space are reflected in such conceptual perspectives as Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia,' and more recently Brian McHale's concept of zone and Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact-zone. In post-colonial studies, for Edward Said, and especially for Homi Bhaba, the spatial concept of 'liminality' is related to cultural hybridity. In urban studies, the liminal space is a major characteristic of the city. The term of 'cyberspace' was coined by cyberpunk writer William Gibson and used for the first time in his story "Burning Chrome" (1982). The principle of cyberspace is similar to Foucault's heterotopias. The terms, concepts, notions and theories that reflect on this composite and indistinct spatiality of the contemporary world proliferate. Jean Baudrillard sees it as hyperreal. The fictional worlds of Jorge Louis Borges, of Don DeLillo, or Salman Rushdie are imaginary projections of this liminal heterotopic spatiality. This paper purports to look into the way in which contemporary theories of spatiality and contemporary postmodernist and postcolonial fiction mirror each other.

Keywords: heterotopia, contact-zone, liminality, cyberspace, alternative worlds/realities, infosphere, hyperreality

In October 1984, the French journal *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité* published the text entitled "Des Espace Autres," which was originally a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Foucault's death.

When he holds that "we are in an epoch of simultaneity," Foucault (web) reiterates Henry Adams's argument some 67 years before that the 20th century is governed by multiplicity. Adams's "multiplicity" was a new system of reference, resulting in a new perception of time and space as simultaneous.

In the arts, Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" is a visual expression of this sense of multiplicity, deploying both Cubist and Futurist styles. Duchamp's angular multiplied silhouette, looking more like a cloned robot descending a vague flight of stairs rather than a human body, gives us a futuristic sense that technology has become more and more integrated not only in our daily life, but it is also the perfect expression of the human body and its movements.

In literature, James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's one-day stream of consciousness novels convey this sense of temporal and spatial simultaneity. All the characters in each novel live simultaneously each moment of their lives, and through a cinematic technique of time and space montage the sequences of their actions and fluid thoughts during one day occur simultaneously not only in space but also in time. Thus, while opening the windows of her Westminster flat, Clarissa Dalloway opens the French

windows of her parents' house at Bourton over twenty years before. While Septimus Warren Smith throws himself out of the window, Clarissa makes preparations for her party, thinking her thoughts, which echo his. While Leopold Bloom, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, walks the streets of Dublin, he unreels his memories of Gibraltar when he and Molly were very young.

Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* and the whole theory underpinning it are scientific statements of this new sense of simultaneity which had already become the system of reference in the early 20th century. The development of technology and science throughout the 20th and over a decade of the 21st century has validated Foucault's theory. Ever since 1967, new concepts have emerged.

Foucault's *heterotopia* refers to spaces of *otherness*, which are neither here nor there, simultaneously physical and mental, e.g. the space of a phone call, chat via the internet, facebook, or the moment when you see yourself in the mirror. Foucault's argument that "we are at a moment when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" anticipates such social networking as facebook.

The French philosopher distinguishes between utopias, which are sites with no real place, and heterotopias, which are places absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about. However, between utopias and heterotopias there is what Foucault calls "a sort of mixed, joint experience," which is *the mirror*. Foucault further explains that "the mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I'm not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface." At the same time, the French philosopher contends that it is a heterotopia because the mirror exists in reality, reflecting the image of somebody absent there, but present where one is, and by gazing at oneself in the mirror, one reconstitutes one's self where one is. The heterotopia function of the mirror is that it makes the place occupied at the moment of the gaze "at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there." (Foucault web)

Foucault may have had in mind passages like Clarissa Dalloway's gazing at her own figure in the mirror when he considered the heterotopia function of the mirror:

> How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self – pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together; she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps. (Woolf 42)

Clarissa knows by intuition that her own self is prismatic, many-sided, that there are as many Clarissas as Clarissa's reflections in the eyes of others: Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, Sally Seton, her daughter Elizabeth, Miss Killman, Mrs. Bruton, etc. What she

does when she gives her face (i.e. herself) point in the mirror is to focus these images scattered all over the place (wherever her beholders may be or may have been) into one image whose reality the whole world should recognize. Thus, Woolf created what might be called *the heterotopic prismatic character*. In this passage, the mirror performs that double function of heterotopia and utopia: it pulls the various sides and sites of the self together, and projects that image into its unreal, virtual space behind its glass surface.

Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine writer of Spanish and English roots and a (rather remote) line of Portuguese Jews, confessed that he always lived in dread of mirrors:

"When I was little, we used to have a terrible house. There were three huge mirrors in my room. The furniture was mahogany and looked like a dark mirror, like the one in St. Paul's epistle. I've always lived in dread of them, but as a child I didn't dare say anything. As a consequence, each and every night I faced three or four images of myself." (Borges 67, my own translation)

Borges multiplies mirrors. Their double function multiplied, mirrors have terrifying effects, creating a dense space where their reflections intersect. As Borges accounts for it, this space of intersection is the self. Borges's mirror is at the same time a metaphorical projection of the reader. His fictions are mirrors through which he looked at the world, reflecting it. In their turn, the readers look at the world through Borges's mirror. The metaphor of the mirror suggests the metaphysical nature of Borges's fiction: the physical world is a reflection and a projection of the mind.

E. A. Poe, whose preference for short fiction surely influenced Borges's own keenness on what the genre offers in terms of "unity of effect", gave the terrifying distorting role of mirrors a terrible turn of the screw. Poe's Gothic is replete with mirror and echo effects. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" we see the traveller to the House of Usher engaged in reflecting "that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression." Reining his horse, he continues this mental reflection by gazing "down – but with a shudder even more thrilling than before – upon the re-modelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows." (Poe 1350) When critic Liviu Cotrău analyses the function of mirrors in Poe's writing, he argues that "at a literal level, the mirror – the reflective object par excellence – does not reproduce iconically the image it reflects. On the contrary, it transposes the three-dimensional into the bi-dimensional, it doubles the distance and implicitly it reduces the image of the real object to half its size and, which is perhaps most important, it reverses the left-right coordinates." (Cotrău 18, my own translation) The Romanian critic believes that we may interpret this mirror effect of reflective objects in Poe's writing, which the tarn in "The Fall of the House of Usher" obviously is, in the key of a designed distortion and subversion of the structures of the "real." In this passage, there are three reflecting objects: the mind, the tarn, and "the eye-like windows." Reflected through these mirrors, the "mansion of gloom" becomes a hypnotic arresting space, and in the next passage, the traveller proposes to himself "a sojourn of some weeks." During this sojourn, mirror and echo effects and doubles will invert the whole universe of the House of Usher, eventually sinking it into the dangerous mirror of the tarn. Roderick Usher strangely looks like the visitor's

double, he has a twin sister, the house is zig-zagged by "a barely perceptible fissure" (Poe 1352), which foreshadows the collapse of the whole universe of the House of Usher.

According to Foucault, there are two main classes of heterotopias. The French philosopher calls one class "crisis heterotopia." Crisis heterotopias are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places" reserved for persons who are in a state of crisis in relation to the society in which they live. The examples provided by Foucault are the boarding schools or military service for young men, "as the first manifestations of sexual virility were in fact supposed to take place 'elsewhere' than at home." Another instance is the "honeymoon trip," which allows the young woman's deflowering to take place in such no-places as trains, ships, hotel or motel rooms, in other words a type of space which Foucault calls "this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers." (Foucault web)

The experience of the journey is central to literature. Any text is essentially a journey and a quest. Roads are ridden or driven along by characters which embark on journeys from here to there. Travelling is the opposite of staying put. For the traveller, topography is protean, a "heterotopology." The opposite impulse is that of staying put within the space of clearly defined geographical markers. Homer's *Odyssey* and Ulysses / Odysseus are emblematic for the travelling impulse, which is an essential archetype. In *Ordeal by Labyrinth,* Mircea Eliade contends that "Ulysses is the prototype of the individual, not only the modern individual, but also the man of the future, because he is the epitome of the traveller. His journey is always a journey towards the centre, towards Ithaca, in other words towards himself." (Eliade 85, my own translation) In contrast, Penelope stays put, waiting for Ulysses to return home.

This tension between travelling and staying put, between a heterotopology and a topology feeds the conflicting attitudes to space of the characters in *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie's most recent novel. Akbar, the Mughal emperor travels to wage battles most of the time. His Ithaca is called Sikri. However, even Sikri defies geographical markers, it "would always look like a mirage." (Rushdie 2009:33) For Rushdie, it is *liminality and insubstantiality* that give problematic "substance" to an equally protean sense of identity.

In one of the episodes of Rushdie's enchanting tale, it is through painting that space is rendered liminal. The story goes that Dashwanth the painter falls in love with the hidden "dream-woman" Qara Köz / Lady Black Eyes / Angelica / Angelique the enchantress, paints her, and eventually vanishes into his own painting. When that is discovered after the painting's frame has been removed, Akbar orders that the border be put back and Dashwanth allowed to have some peace.

Like all the other characters in the novel, Qara Köz / Lady Black Eyes / Angelica / Angelique is an embodiment of the individual's permanent mobility. Akbar is a warrior fighting his wars away from home, periodically returning home to eventually lose home – a whole empire. Argalia the Turk leaves home – Italy – while very young, to return home and die there. Even Ago Vespucci, the cousin of Amerigo, who travels, but reluctantly, has to leave Europe-Italy-Florence for an America which was, in the 16th century when the novel is set, "a world of fantasy which men were still dreaming into

being." Qara Köz finds that "dreaming of finding her way back to her point of origin, of being rejoined to that earlier self, she was lost for ever." (Rushdie 2009:418) Having "burned her boats" both in the East and in Europe, Qara Köz decides that it's high time she journeyed across the ocean to America, the place dreamed "into being." Her network of journeys suggests that diasporic identity, of which she is the effigy in the novel, can often draw much more on the experience of "dreaming" one's home, a heterotopia and utopia at the same time, looking forward to it, than on looking backward in a fixation to a 'homeland,' i.e. topography.

Any Rushdie text is a celebration of hybridity, pluralism, and what Rushdie himself calls "unrootedness," a postcolonial version of Foucault's *heterotopology*, which in postcolonial terms is called *liminality*. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the "Bombay mix" that the Moor is gets his/its aesthetic representation in his mother Aurora's palimpsestic series of the Moor paintings. Aurora's series of paintings ironically falling into an 'early' period, followed by a 'great' or 'high' and then a late period of the so-called 'dark Moors' is a visual and visionary mirror of Rushdie's own writing. This fantasy world of 'Palempstine' is, as the novel itself, a metaphor of cultural fusion and hybridity. As Minoli Salgado shows (164), "in taking the logic of palimpsestic discourse to its logical conclusion, Rushdie reveals the urgent need to connect the cultural pluralism of secularist discourse to the social and historical context that generated it." In the palimpsest, the spectre of the past haunts the present, the eerily corporeal-ghostly presence of earlier traces of writing "inhabit" the body of the most recent layer of writing on the parchment; the ghost of earlier layers of writing inhabit the bodily presence of recent layers of writing.

Alternatively, Aurora's fantastic visionary world of past and present populated by monsters, elephant-deities and ghosts is called 'Mooristan.' Whatever it is called, this world is a "place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away." This "body" of work is the Moor's own body, which is also – in its megalopolis size – a whole city: Bombay. Thus the Moor's body becomes a hyperbolic ekphrasis: "And above it all, in the palace, you." (TMLS, 226). Weaving her vision around the Moor "in his hybrid fortress," Aurora unfolds his autobiography, which is at the same time "an attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation; she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India, and this land-sea-scape in which the land could be fluid and the sea stone-dry was her metaphor – idealised? sentimantal? probably – of the present, and the future, that she hoped would evolve." (TMLS, 227). In Homi Bhabha's sense, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a metaphor of dissemination, not just one moment, but recurring moments of "the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering," and also of "other worlds lived retroactively." (Bhaba 139)

When it evokes and describes Aurora's paintings, the novel becomes an intersection of mirrors, a *mise-en-abyme*, an infinite regress in time and space, an endless succession of internal duplications. Aurora's art mirrors the Moor's story, and the Moor's story reflects her art, which is a reflection of history. The Moor himself is a reflection, the sum of Aurora's images on the canvas, taking bodily shape in the story as a character, while he is also the story's narrator. The sharpness of these intersecting

edges cut deep into the Moor's body, wounding it, while in their turn those wounds are reflections of communal injuries:

> As I set down my memories of my part in those paintings, I am naturally conscious that those who submit themselves as the models upon whom a work of art is made can offer, at best, a subjective, often wounded, sometimes spiteful, wrong-side-of-the-canvas version of the finished work. What then can the humble clay usefully say about the hands that moulded it? Perhaps simply this: that *I was there*. And that during the years of sitting I made a kind of portrait of her, too. She was looking at me, and I was looking right back. (Rushdie 1995:219)

Sitting for her in her studio as artist and model, the Moor is no longer "the victim of an incurable premature-ageing disorder, but a magic child, a time traveller" (Rushdie 1995:219), an archetypal quest hero with whom readers can identify in their quest for their own deepest essential selves. As a mother, also standing for Mother India, Aurora may give birth to crippled babies, but as an artist she transfigures her baby's crippled body into a magic Moor, chanting her dream of secular transcendence through art: "Baby mine, you just startofied out going too fast. Maybe you'll just take off, and zoom-o right out of this life into another space and time. Maybe – who knows? – a better." (Rushdie 1995:219-220) Aurora's vision is echoed by the Moor as he lies dying, a form of sleeping, hoping "to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time." (Rushdie 1995:434)

While the Moor dies at Benengeli after flying there, the key characters of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha land "out of thin air" in London, "a universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time." (4) Like all the other Rushdie characters, they re-enact the same old archetype of the traveller "without any certain abode." *The Satanic Verses* is prefaced by a motto from Daniel Defoe's *The History of the Devil*: "for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste or air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is...without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon."

There are certain principles which underpin Foucault's heterotopias. Apart from heterotopias of crisis, there are *heterotopias of deviation*, "those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm in which they are placed." Examples of such places are asylums, psychiatric hospitals, rest homes, prisons, retirement homes. The example of this principle Foucault tackles in detail is the cemetery, which, as he argues, has gradually lost its centrality and sacrality, and has become "the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place." (Foucault web)

On his plane to Madrid, a heterotopia of crisis in Foucault's terms, Rushdie's Moor wonders whether he is travelling to the country of the dead. Reassured by the flight attendant that many passengers feel this way, he meets a woman with whom he has a brief sexual intercourse right there on the plane, a suspended nowhere. Then he changes planes at Madrid, and the memory of his strange experiences on the

transcontinental flight fade away. Landing at Benengeli, the Moor rediscovers his feeling of strangeness and feels dizzy. He has the eerie feeling that he hasn't quite arrived, or not all of him. Alternatively, he suspects that the place he has arrived in is not quite the right place. As a matter of fact, there is no one or right or secure place for the Moor. It is strange that he seems to have never been born, we only see him dying. The very first lines of the novel show him sitting in a dark wood, a mount of olives, within a clump of trees, observed by the stone crosses of a graveyard. From these very first lines we find out that contrary to our expectations, his journey is not beginning but ending. The graveyard as a heterotopia of deviation is the heterotopology that best suits the Moor, whose fast growing body is a deviation from normality. For the very last days of his life he is imprisoned and forced to write his story, which we have been reading, and the curtain falls upon the graveyard scene.

Heterotopia's third principle, as Foucault argues, is that of *juxtaposing contradictory sites*. Foucault holds that perhaps the oldest example of this type is the garden. By far the most compelling garden heterotopology in contemporary literature is Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," which is a hypertext avant la lettre. In order to reach the garden, the story's narrator Dr. Tsun boards a train to the village of Ashgrove. Although the forking takes place in time, space and time can hardly be set apart. What Borges's forking suggests is that a text can branch out instead of narrowing down, following the structure of a maze where readers might get lost, or alternatively they may read the text in multiple ways. Contrary to most fictions which follow a plot, i.e. a cause and effect sequence, Ts'ui Pên's novel aims to describe a world where all possible outcomes of an event occur simultaneously. From each such outcome a virtually infinite number of possibilities proliferates. These forking paths may converge again. For instance, as Dr. Albert explains, in one possible time-line Dr. Tsun has come to his house as an enemy, in another as a friend. At the same time, Borges's "Garden" performs the function of what Foucault calls *heterochronies*, like museums and libraries "in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit." Entering the garden, Dr. Tsun is then led to a library of Eastern and Western books.

Libraries are heterotopic. Borges's universe is a large library, a bibliocosmos. His *Ficciones* insist on their status of *artifacts, fictions, fabulations*. For Borges, the world is speculative illusion. In "Circular Ruins" human condition is that of a mere appearance. As places can be dreamed into being in Rushdie's *Enchantress*, a man is not a man but a projection of another man's dream in Borges's "Circular Ruins." In "The Library of Babel" the universe is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries.

Every Borges piece compels the reader to enter the Borges universe, which is labyrinthine. In the labyrinth, the real loses its concrete reality, the palpable – palpability, history – its historicity, all of them being supplanted by a virtually infinite circularity of mirror projections.

Borges suggests that history repeats itself. Thus, facts and events lose their grip in reality and look like repeated projections of a scenario, of a story that the vision of the immense Borges library contains in each and every letter, from A ("El Aleph") to Z („El Zahir"). It is strange and at the same time fascinating that the origin A is reflected in

the end Z. The fascination of contemplating this circular projection may induce states of madness, like in Poe's fiction. The human mind, or at least the modern western mind, which thinks in terms of dichotomies and linear progression, cannot find any foothold in circularity and reflections, and therefore collapses when it faces the heterotopia of infinite projections.

Since the whole universe is a bibliocosmos, contemporary philosopher Jean Baudrillard borrows from Borges's "On Exactitude in Science," which in its turn draws on Lewis Carrroll, the model of a society whose cartographers design a map so detailed that it covers the very place it was supposed to represent. When the empire declines, the map fades into the landscape and there is neither the representation nor the real place – just the hyperreal.

The hyperreal virtual nature of today's world is one of its most characteristic aspects. In "Simulacra and Simulation" Baudrillard argues that this "is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself." (170) Umberto Eco deems America to be the epitome of hyperreality as its culture is underpinned by "a philosophy of immortality as duplication." Eco (4) states that this philosophy "dominates the relation with the self, with the past, not infrequently with the present, always with History and, even, with the European tradition." To Eco's mind, American imagination demands "the real thing", but "to attain it, [America] must fabricate the absolute fake." (Eco 8) This impulse of imagination has therefore turned America into a blueprint, a hyperreal world "where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred, the art museum is contaminated by the freak show, and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of "fullness", of *horror vacui.*" (Eco 8) Of all these fabrications, Disneyland is "the quintessence of consumer ideology" and it "makes it clear that within its magic enclosure it is fantasy that is absolutely reproduced." (Eco 43) The Internet and the speed with which it has progressed have added to this new configuration of our contemporary world. Marshall McLuhan argues that "as electronically contracted, the globe is no more than a village." (McLuhan 5)

Rushdie's New York in his novel *Fury* is, like DeLillo's America in *White Noise*, a glossy hyperreality, a simulacrum. The real world is only a reflection, or even the reflection of a reflection, i.e. fiction. The protagonist Malik Solanka, the resourceful inventor of Little Brain – a successful doll – is also the creator of the back-story of a hypertext suggestively titled "The Fittest Survive: The Coming of the Puppet Kings", and the eerie sense that both Solanka and the reader have is that the story takes on a proliferating life of its own, that fiction has them in its grip, that the events in the "real" world simply follow the story's script.

Malik's hypertext implies new narrative strategies, branching out from the back-story, abolishing linear chronology, developing virtually *ad infinitum* just like Ts'ui Pên's novel in Borges's story. For Malik this hypertext's "freedom from the clock, from the tyranny of what happened next, was exhilarating, allowing him to develop his ideas in parallel, without worrying about sequence or step-by-step causation. Links were electronic, not narrative. Everything existed at once." (Rushdie 2002:186-187) Malik likens this freedom from time's tyranny with God's omniscience and freedom. To

humans, Malik broods, it is available "at the merest click of a mouse". In the virtual world of the website, our global village, distances in both time and space are compressed into simultaneity, and thus Malik contemplates the wonderful possibility that "visitors would be able to wander at will between the project's different storylines and themes", while "each of these in turn would lead to further pages, plunging deeper and deeper into the multidimensional world of the Puppet Kings, offering games to play, video segments to watch, chat rooms to enter and, naturally, things to buy." (Rushdie 2002:187)

These puppets are in fact cyborgs, protean figures populating the virtual world of the Internet, shifty projections of a world that is already "the desert of the real itself" (Baudrillard 169), a world of endlessly reproducible copies of copies for consumers to buy. Rushdie's story of Solanka's back-story seems to draw on "the Borges tale where the cartographers of the Empire draw a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory." (Baudrillard 169) Various mythologies coexist in the hi-tech medium of the on-line going hypertext, which will always be a work in progress, generating thousands of streams of comments. In its combination of old myths and new digital technology, Solanka's back-story in progress is Rushdie's translation of *The Matrix* style in fiction.

Baudrillard's thesis that the hyperreal is "produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times" (Baudrillard 170) can be tested against Rushdie's approach to the relation between Solanka's back-story and reality. Thus in Chapter 16 of *Fury* Neela Mahendra, Malik's much younger and dangerously beautiful lover informs him about the intervention of the living dolls from the fictitious planet Galileo-1 in the public affairs of the actually existing Earth. However, it is virtually impossible to tell the map/fiction from territory/reality in *Fury* because Lilliput, the allegedly "real" place is an intertextual echo of Swift's imaginary place in *Gulliver's Travels*. Thus, layers of fiction proliferate and multiply to eventually cover the territory of the real.

America is real only by name, its "reality" being constantly blurred by the performance staged on streets, round street corners, and acted by a gang of killers dressed up like characters from Disneyland. Thus Disneyland, "the absolute fake" is trespassing in the reality of New York, giving it an eerie cartoonish aspect which makes the creepy crimes lose their reality. In this cartoon city, we are reminded at every turn of the page, characters from books, videos, movies or songs feel more solidly real than most living people do. Although Malik thinks that movies infantilize their audience, he also admits that, numbed by "daily life, its rush, its overloadedness", people go to movies "to remember how to feel", and as a result, in the minds of many adults, the experience in the movie theatres now feels more real than what is available in the world outside. (Rushdie 2002:230-231)

Fury is Rushdie's reflection of Solanka's "brave new world", a stage of "encounters between "real" and "real", "real" and "double", "double" and "double", which is a demonstration of "the dissolution of the frontiers between the categories." (Rushdie 2002:187)

Watching *Solaris* in Chapter 16, Solanka looks at himself as if in a mirror and recognizes the scene and the characters, but at the same time he realizes the "unreality" of it all: the scene (of happy reunion) is fake, the man in the role of the father (himself) is only an actor playing a role, and the role is a lie, the home (his home in London) is not a happy home, the child (his son Asmaan) is not himself, nothing is what it seems, and this is a reply frequently occurring in movies.

The recurrence of scenes and replies from movies, video clips and songs, Solanka's frequent revelations of dejà-vus while watching movies or real life events, his blackouts, which project his real life in an imaginary scenario of a mysterious series of murders that consume his murderous intention of killing his wife and son, are constant reminders of simulation.

Indeed, the American society is the model of this heterotopic electronic matrix**,** and New York its radiating kernel; the Americans' "hallucinatory" lives unreel against the background of electronically generated messages, whose meanings are often undecipherable. It is precisely this hyperreality **-** which has caused new perceptions, new insights, new fears and anxieties - that foregrounds the core of today's America. Electronic messages come in the form of electromagnetic impulses that pass through the body, radiated through hundreds or even thousands of channels. Words, signs and symbols, texts, TV messages assail Oedipa Maas, impinging upon her baffled mind, henceforth upon the reader's, in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*; icons, "waves and radiation" sink into the characters' bodies in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. "White noise" is a susurration, a fusion of signals and messages, a leveling of sounds into a one-all-sound – its individual components becoming indistinguishable.

Cyberpunk is the genre that crystallizes this (post)-postmodern electronic matrix. Cyberpunk writer William Gibson is considered to be the sound of a decade (the 1980s) that finally found its own voice. In the short story "Burning Chrome", the definition of the matrix, which is the electronic medium DeLillo calls "white noise", perfectly matches the point made by the theorists of hyperreality. It is essentially a world of "simulacra and simulations":

> The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems. Legitimate programmers jack into their employers' sector of the matrix and find themselves surrounded by bright geometries representing the corporate data.Towers and fields of it ranged in the colorless non-space of the simulation matrix, the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitates the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data. (Gibson 169-170)

The genre of cyberpunk has consistently and unflinchingly focused on the dilemmas caused by the web of individual and communal memories that shape our more and more precarious understanding of history and complicate our chances to grasp the relationship between reality and illusion.

In *The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media* (1985), Jean Baudrillard states that for Marshall McLuhan the electronic media inaugurate a generalized planetary communication. In Gibson's fiction, this is called "cyberspace."

Of all media and means of communication developed by the human societies so far, it seems that the internet is responsible for a new wave of transformations undergone by contemporary societies. Compared to the rise of other electronic media, the internet has expanded at a phenomenal unprecedented rate, integrating various modes of conventional communication, including radio and television, into a vast interactive network.

The globalization effected by the internet is a new major source of dynamism. In the first place, it reorders and compresses time and space. Secondly, communications and information technology facilitate action at a distance and are deeply bound up with the intensification of globalization. Instantaneous global electronic communication has profoundly altered the relationships of reciprocity and interdependency: we now live in a 'global society' in which we can no longer avoid other individuals and alternative ways of life. New communication networks, in J. B. Thompson's words (119), increase the possibility of *global scrutiny* and *global visibility*, and also the possibility of *mutual interrogation*. We no longer merely exist 'side by side' with other cultures and other people but interact with them in many different and ever-changing ways.

However, contemporary globalization raises feelings of anxiety and frustration. As global communication networks reorder time and space, they also facilitate shifts in the global flows of symbolic goods and in the concentrations of symbolic power. Given the complexity of the structured character and patterns of transmission, it is unlikely that our understanding of these features will ever be more than partial. As a matter of fact, misreadings of these are more likely to occur, thus baffling and frustrating the minds of many. Likewise, new concentrations of power and new power elites may emerge. All these possibilities are thematized by Gibson's cyberpunk fiction.

In this context of the 'global village', localities are in danger of becoming no more and no less than transit stations in the worldwide flow of (ungraspable) information. These are Gibson's *neuronal territories*, and the more serious danger seems to be that "we may be heading towards life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet." (Bauman 251) Therefore, contemporary societies are poised in a limbo, a rather uncertain state of mind permanently tugged between exhilaration and fear, dream and nightmare.

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