

Urban Cartographies in the Post-Cold War Era: Postmodern Challenges to Ethnocentric and Globalist Mappings

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We will have to learn [...] new maps of Earth and, as travel in the Interior becomes more common, as the maps grow another dimension, so must we.

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)

enfants terribles of our period/[...] on the sidewalks/ defying conventions/taking lofty experimental aims/at reality and dream/in their poems like nurses/on the outskirts of great cities . . ./willing to confront the roughest enemies/to sacrifice themselves for truth offstage/ longing for a homeland at the train-window/of their exile/ until they KO human history

Ion Monoran, *Locus Periucondus* (1994 — *my trans.*)

[...] It is space, more than time, that now hides consequences for us.

Edward Soja, 'Inside Exopolis' (1992)

The post-Cold War period has freed our topographic imagination of traditional ideological polarizations, but has often replaced these imperialistic mappings with cartographies of a nationalistic or ethnocentric kind that promote resentful cultural division. Much of this new ethnic and nationalist fundamentalism has emerged in direct reaction to the pressure of the First World's 'globalizing' ideologies which, far from being 'deimperialized', reinforce the 'international division of labor and appropriation [...] benefiting First World countries at the expense of "Third World" and Second World postcommunist societies' (Ebert 286). The new tensions between global interdependency and ethnocentric separatism, First-World centers and Third-World peripheries, indicate a state of continued crisis at the level of the ideological frameworks within which cultural exchanges unfold. These frameworks reflect a new 'heterological' sensibility, in Michel de Certeau's sense of the word, without allowing yet a truly liberating 'discourse on the other'. Neither a globalist 'notion of multiculturalism [that] affirms difference within a politics of consensus that erases culture as a terrain of struggle' (Giroux 14), nor a defensive localism which promotes a reified form of 'specificity', are proper approaches to the issue of otherness. As Rey Chow remarks in her 1998 book, the 'gestures of localism and pluralism' are virtually synonymous in-

sofar as they treat cultural difference in an essentialist and idealized way, as something fixed and final (10). Multiculturalism neutralizes difference by considering all cultural practices valid in their own terms; localism promotes an often chauvinistic notion of 'our own "cultures", "ethnicities, and "origins"' (12). The alternative, proposed by Homi Bhabha, Edward Soja (*Thirdspace*), Rey Chow, and others, to both the naive celebration of 'hybridity' (Chow 155) and 'nativist centrism', is the articulation of a 'third space' of negotiation (Chow 157) between self and other, native and foreign, global and local.

Spatial division, we have been reminded in the aftermath of the 1989 geopolitical restructuring, is '[o]ne of the major tools used by the state to maintain social order [...]: pitting one place against another, closing down this space, fortifying that space, abandoning the other place, and exploiting the place of the Other' (McLeod 85). Therefore, literary theory and practice needs to consider the political implications of the spatial divisions produced and occupied by modern technological society. Geography need not displace history at the heart of contemporary theory and literature; it suffices if it brings 'a new animating polemic on the theoretical and political agenda, one which rings with significant different ways of seeing time and space together, the interplay of history and geography, the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of being in the world freed from the imposition of inherent categorical privilege' (Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 11).

In a recent book that boldly remaps our professional landscape, Susan Stanford Friedman has proposed the term 'geographics' for a new field of interdisciplinary studies that 'crisscross[es] boundaries between the humanities and social sciences, between the so-called essentialists and constructivists, between identity politics and coalition politics' (*Mappings* 18). Central to this emerging field is a 'rhetoric of spatiality' that redefines identity as 'positionality, a location, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection, a network, a crossroads of multiply situated knowledges' (19). Though identity 'is in fact unthinkable without some sort of imagined or literal boundary' between self and other (*Mappings* 3, 19), we will benefit from approaching the increasingly fluid 'global ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 191-92) with non-binary notions of identification. We must learn to be 'crossroads', as Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands* 195) advises, but our celebration of hybridity should not overlook the fact that borders have an insidious way of regenerating themselves, even in multiple identities. However fine, ethnocultural distinctions tend to become reified and repolarized, creating interethnic crises of the sort we have witnessed in the aftermath of the 1991 Los Angeles riots, caused by Rodney King's battering by the police, or more recently in Bosnia and Kosovo. It is in the nature of boundaries to insist on separation even as they articulate a connection. Therefore, what we need, according to Susan Stanford Friedman, are 'narratives of relational positionality' (65) that will challenge traditional separations between self and other, western and non-western, male and female, global and local, 'specify[ing] a liminal space in between, the interstitial sight of interaction, interconnection, and exchange' (3).

I wish to argue, in reference to a few recent examples of American and East-Central European fiction, that postmodernism has provided and can continue to provide 'narratives of relational positionality' that bring an alternative cartographic imagination to bear on processes of post-Cold War restructuring. Recent multicultural, borderline, and feminist narrative projects contribute to the new 'politics of location' advocated

by bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), ‘identify[ing] the space where we [can] begin the process of re-vision’ (145). They retrain us in a transnational ‘geopolitical literacy that acknowledges the interlocking dimension of global cultures’ whilst also providing alternatives to ‘western modernity (colonialism) or western postmodernity (late-capitalist global markets)’ (Friedman 5, 6). But the most important contribution that these revisionary narrative cartographies make lies in their rearticulation of the post-Cold War world around polysystemic principles, principles that deemphasize monologic concepts of development such as the Heideggerian ‘dream of harmonious and unified culture [. . .] rooted in one particular place’ (Miller, *Topographies* 55), and replace them with an understanding of cultural evolution as open to ‘potentially limitless mappings’ (281).

My first example is Thomas Pynchon’s postmodern epic, *Mason & Dixon* (1997). This novel can be read as an expansion and reconceptualization of the quest, started in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and continued in *Vineland*, for an alternative cartographic vision that would scramble the ‘borderline[s . . .] between worlds’ (*Vineland* 105). Pynchon’s contribution to this project is twofold: on the one hand, *Mason & Dixon* explores the roots of the Western model of cultural development that has traditionally relied on an often violent assertion of difference from others, tracing it back to the Enlightenment segregation of cultures into ‘world-historical’, ‘emergent’, and eternally primitive. In Pynchon’s post-colonial vision, on the other hand, not only pre-Revolutionary America but also such antipodal places as Cape Town, St. Helena, or North Cape, where Mason and Dixon travel on their assignments, are examples of settler colonies where the European elite annihilated or marginalized over time the indigenous population through a process of discriminatory ‘othering’ (Spivak, ‘The Rani of Simur’) that reinforced racial, cultural, and class distinctions between the colonizers and the colonized. Pynchon’s exploration of the eighteenth-century geopolitical world confirms the fact that the success of the Western European imperialist project depended on a politics of binary separations. Partition created a ‘divisionary movement’ (Harlow 87) both within the metropolitan world (labor divisions, class and gender demarcations) and in the peripheral colonies, disrupting setting, turning majority populations into minorities, and encouraging ‘mutually contesting, starkly conflicting, [local] narratives’ (Harlow 107). As privileged instruments of colonial mastery, cartography and land surveying embodied in the most literal way the practice of partitioning, renaming, and reinscribing the place of the other. While critiquing the geometric D’Alembertian imagination of the Enlightenment that has generated divisive orders, from the time Mason and Dixon drew their 244 mile long line between Pennsylvania and Maryland to the time of narration (as new divisions emerge in the post-revolutionary America) and the time of our reading (the post-Cold War ‘new order’), Pynchon’s novel also ‘contrives [...] a map of the world that never was’ but could be (*Mason & Dixon* 242): a world of ‘borderlands (349), geocultural and ontological interfaces, and ‘fluid Identit[ies]’ (469).

Mason and Dixon themselves feature in this novel not only as mercenaries of an ideology of division but also as boundary-crossers. Their assignments on three continents occasion ‘intercultural narratives’, in Susan Stanford Friedman’s sense of the word (137), exposing Mason and Dixon to contact zones between cultures and places that

refuse single definitions. Mason and Dixon are compelled to reassess periodically their own positionality, dissociating themselves from the Dutch colonialists in Cape Town, from the British imperialists in America, from the metropolitan culture in the Wilderness, and from the control of the Royal Society and the East India Company nearly everywhere. They become provisional hybrids, visitors in intercultural or otherworldly zones. Their movement across ontological and geopolitical zones enriches the scope of the narrative, superimposing a polysystemic structure of borderlands on the monologic line that pursues Eurocentric interests in the world. Pynchon's multiple spatialities and identities upset simultaneously the narrative of European imperialism that dominates Mason and Dixon's time, the narrative of post-Revolutionary nationalism that remaps the freed American colonies during the time of narration, and the narrative of U.S. economic and cultural hegemony in the time of our reading. The reader is encouraged by the novel's many anachronisms to do a historical 'cross-reading,' moving back and forth between three temporal-diegetic levels. In the words of Peter Schmidt, 'Pynchon may have written his most prophetic work by taking his further leap *back* in time, writing an historical novel that problematizes more profoundly than any other works what it means to "write" history or measure how history writes us' (www.swarthmore.edu/Humanities/pschmid1/essays/pynchon/mason.html, Part 3).

Mason and Dixon's journeys, beginning with the time they first crossed the Equator on their way to Cape Town, can be summed up as a 'passage' into the 'haunted and *other* half of ev'rything known' (*Mason & Dixon* 58). The places they visit during their various assignments — Cape Town in order to observe the transit of Venus; James's town on St. Helena, to help the Astronomer Royal observe Sirius; America, to cut the famous Mason and Dixon line; and Scotland, to find an adequate mountain for magnetic measurements — are cross-cultural and 'otherworldly' places. Cape Town is 'a town with a precarious Hold upon the Continent, planted as upon another World by the sepia-shadow'd Herren XVII back in Holland' (58). James's Town on St. Helena is 'a very small town [that] clings to the edge of an interior that must be reckoned part of the Other World' (107). Cape Town is the first example in the novel of a liminal city but not in the conventional postmodern sense that, as Kevin Robins has pointed out, exults the pleasures of consumption and transgression from the perspective of a privileged middle-class 'flâneur who is careful to distinguish himself from the "have-nots" in the abandoned zones of the city' (323). Cape Town illustrates the category of what I would call a 'marginocentric' city, functioning both as an interchange in the imperialist 'global order' that segregates the 'haves' from the 'have-nots', and as a ground for the manifestation of unruly energies and 'multi-spiced', Oriental influences. Precisely because of its marginocentric position as an outpost at the 'End of the World' (*Mason & Dixon* 78), the town encourages the overstepping of boundaries both in the colonizers and the colonized. Zeemanns' kitchen slaves defect to the northern mountains, leaving Mason and Dixon without lunches. The two astronomers welcome their delivery from the unimaginative Dutch food and dabble in exotic Malay staples. As the narrator, Wicks Cherrycoke, observes, 'the cuisine of a people whose recreations include running *Amok* is necessarily magickal in its purpose and effect, and no one is altogether exempt' (86). Even without partaking of this energizing food, the Dutch girls in the Vroom household devote themselves 'most unreflectively to the Possibilities of Love,' showing that

desire can cross racial barriers. Later on, as Dixon accompanies Cornelius Vroom to his Company Lodge, he finds that the somber Dutch burghers have their own ‘Garden of Amusement’ (150), inside which history is being replayed as subversive farce: lodge-nymphs with scimitars command their naked ‘captives’ to squeeze together into a tight replica of the cell in Fort William, Calcutta, where 146 Europeans were condemned by the Nawab of Bengal to spend the night of June 20-21, 1756. As the narrator comments, in this scene of horror eroticized, the Europeans experience on their own skin the viciousness of their imperial power that ‘encourage[s] the teeming populations they rule to teem as much as they like, whilst taking their land for themselves, and then restricting the parts of it the People will be permitted to teem upon’ (153).

James’s Town on St. Helena, where Mason carries out his second assignment while Dixon stays back in Cape Town, is another example of a marginocentric place on an island that functions as a transit station for the Empire’s ‘Birds of passage’ — convicts to the South Seas, young wives on their way to India to join husbands in the Army and Navy, ‘Company Perpetuals, headed out, headed home, [...] shuttles upon the loom of Trade’ (109). At night, this town ‘which proves to be as Mazy as a European City’ (126) becomes an ‘unlit riot of spices, pastry, fish and shellfish’. ‘Smells of Eastern cooking pour out of the kitchen vents of the boarding-houses, and mix with that of the Ocean’ (114). Believing that James’s Town is still too infused with the power of the Company, Mason’s employer—the Assistant Astronomer Royal Maskelyne—forces the puzzled Mason to move to the unprotected side of the island where the Wind, ‘that first Voice, not yet inflected [...] of the very Planet’ (159), makes music that is not British, but ‘Viennese, perhaps, Hungarian, even Moorish’ (173). Maskelyne welcomes it because it causes him to ‘imagine things, that may not be so’ (161), and because ‘its properties of transformation’ make even unspoken words be spoken (163). Mason himself experiences the visitations of his dead wife, Rebekah, on the ‘Windward Side’ of the island (163). For both of them St. Helena is a place of haunting, underwritten by the ‘infernal’ (132) authorship of the unknown.

European imperialism makes periodic efforts to recuperate these liminal places into its global cartographies. Cities are more susceptible to recuperation, acting ‘like capacitors [...] plugged into the globe of history [...]’: they condense and conduct the currents of social time’ (Holston 65). After Venus’s transit on June 5-6, 1761, Cape Town returns to ‘colorless rectitude’, with ‘Impulse, chasten’d, increasingly defer[ring] to Stolidity’ (*Mason & Dixon* 99). People experience a ‘turning of the soul’ (100), masters resuming their language of abuse and slaves their silence. Mason and Dixon view this retrenchment ruefully, realizing that what drew them to Cape Town was not the celestial event itself, ‘but rather that unshining Assembly old Human Needs, of which Venus, at the instance of going dark, is the Prime Object’ (102). What they had witnessed was an encounter with ‘a Goddess descended from light to Matter’, passing ‘dark, embodied, solid, against the face of the Sun’ (92); in other words, an encounter with the mythic Other (Lacan’s ‘grande-autre’ — *Séminaire. Livre III* 68).

Mason and Dixon’s next encounter with otherness takes place in America. They arrive in Philadelphia in November 1763 to settle the boundary dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania by ‘mark[ing] the Earth with geometrick scars’ (257). Even though neither has illusions about America, they find it more open-ended topo-

graphically and politically than the other places visited. Philadelphia illustrates on a larger scale the role played by Cape Town and James's town in the first third of the novel, that of a resourceful and heterogeneous marginocentric node. The first time Philadelphia is introduced, in a quotation from Timothy Tox's *Pennsylvaniad* (both poet and poem are fictitious), it is described as one of the 'pelfiest' towns, helping '[a] young man seeking to advance himself [...] get [...] to the nearest Source of Pelf' (217). As the narrator confirms, at the time of Mason and Dixon's arrival, 'Philadelphia was second only to London, as the greatest of English-speaking cities' (258). In the middle of November, Philadelphia is bustling with sailors, traders, stevedores, vendors, charlatans, evangelists, and coquettes that 'put all the stoep-sitters of Cape Town quite in Eclipse' (259). Its coffeehouses are alive with debates on the most varied subjects, from the techniques of land surveying, to paranormal phenomena, religious divisions, and the British politics in the colonies.

However, as the surveyors cut their West line into the backcountry, they begin to realize that '[n]ot all Roads lead to Philadelphia', nor do the country roads respect the West Line, running 'rather athwart it' (484). The territory beyond the metropolis is inhabited by mystical sects that have a very different sense of reality and by 'preternatural' creatures (a 'Learned English Dog', an enamoured 'Mechanical Duck') that disrupt the flat ontology of the Age of Reason. A Kabbalistic community in the Chesapeake area believes in the existence of a giant Golem created by an Indian tribe supposed to be one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Escaping the tribe's control, the Golem roams the woods affirming its differential identity ('I am that which I am' — 486). The New World beyond Philadelphia appears as a secret text, at the intersection of Jewish, Indian, Chinese, and European myths. As they take in the mysterious otherness of the western world, the surveyors cannot decide whether America is a real alternative to the metropolitan-imperialist world they left behind or an outpost for the manifestation of its repressed impulses:

Is America [Britannia's] dream? — in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen, — serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *yet may be true*, — Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, . . . safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments, — winning away from the realm of the Sacred its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our Home, and our Despair. (345)

Going West, away from the troubling signs of a repressive white civilization, the surveyors 'believe themselves pass'd permanently into Dream' (477) — a dream of pristine otherness. What Mason and Dixon experience is a 'story of contact', in Friedman's sense of the term, animated by a 'desire for the other, the different, the alien; desire to connect across or bridge difference; . . . desire to fabulate, fantasize, dream or create' (Friedman 134). But, as Pynchon's novel suggests ironically, the white surveyor's 'story of contact' is also a *story of delineation*, approaching the other with

the tools for measuring, partitioning, and renaming. The fledgling America plays in Pynchon's novel the role of a 'New World' that challenges the histories of modern British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese imperialisms, while repeating some of their divisive strategies. Even before they start work on the West Line, Mason and Dixon become aware of the racial, political, and religious divisions that undermine the colonies, with Quakers, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics, and 'Reborns a-dazzle with the New Light' (*Mason & Dixon* 293), fighting each other or taking it out on the Indians as in the infamous 1764 massacres in Lancaster. Even though 'America was the one place [they] should *not* have found [slaves]' (693), the surveyors are reminded by a knowledgeable Quaker that the sugar they enjoy in coffee houses is 'bought [...] with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbados' (329). Dixon himself concedes at the end that in settling the dispute between the slaveholding colony of Maryland and the free colony of Pennsylvania he and Mason had reconfirmed the 'line between [...] Slave-Keepers' and 'Wage-Payers' (629). Unable to rectify 'this public Secret, this shameful Core' of division, Pynchon's surveyors are 'doom'd to re-encounter [it] thro' the World' (692). Before leaving America, Dixon confronts rather quixotically the issue of slavery, by grabbing the whip of a Baltimore slave trader and unchaining his twenty African slaves. Mason watches the scene with apprehension yet realizing that all lines, theirs included, are 'conduit[s] for evil' (701).

In typical exploratory fashion, Pynchon's novel suggests some ways in which America can reclaim a more complex mapping. Mason and Dixon's line is challenged not only by geomancers like Captain Zhang, who embrace the ancient Chinese lore of *Feng Shui* with its respect for the character and integrity of a place, but also by fellow surveyors like Captain Evan Shelby who want the line to accommodate variations and deviations:

There is a love of complexity, here in America, [...] pure Space waits the Surveyor, — no previous Lines, no fences, no streets to constrain polygony however extravagant, — especially in Maryland, where, encourag'd by the Re-survey Laws, warranted properties may possess hundreds of sides, — their angles pushing onward and inward, — all Sides zigging and zagging, going ahead and doubling back, making Loops inside Loops (586).

To the Cartesian sense of spatial order (the 'Ortholatry' and 'Goniolatry' of classical surveying), Captain Shelby opposes a metamorphic 'polygony' defined 'by as many of these exhilarating Instrumental Sweeps, as possible' (587). Pynchon's own prose aspires to an extravagant polygony, zigging and zagging through interminable m-dashes and semi colons, refusing to settle down into a simple, non-contradictory line. Mason and Dixon also learn something of this zigging and zagging style, applying it in their own explanations and narratives. The power of narration to create an alternative, utopian mapping of the world is well illustrated by Dixon in the mythic story he weaves around his visit to North Cape. Guided by an unidentified figure, Dixon enters the great 'circumpolar Emptiness' (739) to discover an upside-down world, hundreds of miles below the outer surface of the earth. The population of this 'Terra Concava' makes shrewd use of earthy forces and other powers unknown to man. They watch with trepidation the measurements undertaken by humans out-

side, knowing that once ‘the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last’ (741) and universal maps that divorce space from the specificity of place are established, they will have to look for another dimension. With their world of difference erased by standardization, these alternative tribal beings will not be able to join the outer surface because living on the convex surface points people away from one another. By contrast, in the ‘Earth Concave, everyone is pointed *at* everyone else, — everybody’s axes converge, — forc’d at least thus to acknowledge one another’ (741).

Mason and Dixon miss the possibility of imagining a similar world of convergence in America, but Chapter 73 offers a taste of this ignored narrative alternative: ‘Suppose that Mason and Dixon and their Line cross Ohio after all, and continue West by the customary ten-minute increments’ (706). What they would have discovered is a ‘perfect Latitude’, crossing the lightning-struck prairie towards ‘towns from elsewhere, coming their way, with entirely different Histories, — Cathedrals, Spanish Musick in the Streets, Chinese Acrobats and Russian Mysticks’ (708). In one word, they would have discovered a new frontier of ‘borderlands’ accommodating those traditionally excluded by the American frontier: ‘hyphenated Americans’ and other marginals ‘betwix and between’ (Thomas 134, 135). Like the geopolitical borderland between Mexico and the United States explored by Anzaldúa, this imaginary borderland has both utopian and dystopian suggestions. As yet unabsorbed by America’s exceptionalist project, it plays the role of a genuine ‘contact zone’ between civilizations, challenging ‘dualistic thinking in individual and collective consciousness’ (Anzaldúa). Yet, surely, had Mason and Dixon reached that far, their Line would have created new divisions, splitting the land and its people.

The project of a multicultural, ‘polygonal’ mapping of America that failed in Mason and Dixon’s time is brought back again both by Cherrycoke’s post-revolutionary narration and by our own interpretive rereading. What the narrator and some of his narratees seem to be looking for is an ‘America of the Soul’ pieced together by ‘one heresy after another, [...] ever away from the Sea, from the Harbor, from all that was serene and certain, into an Interior unmapp’d, a Realm of Doubt’ (511). Alternatively, Reverend Cherrycoke imagines a ‘planet-wide Syncretism, among the Deistick, the Oriental, the Kabalistic, and the Savage, that is to be’ (356). This utopia is partly realized at the level of narratology, as the space of storytelling is invaded, after the narrator and his narratees go to bed, by a veritable ‘Bedlam of America’: ‘[S]lowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese sailors, the overflow’d from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia’ (759). Pynchon’s fictitious epic poet, Timothy Tox, is also there to ask what ‘if all were naught but Madmen’s Sleep?/ The Years we all believ’d were real and deep/As Lives, as Sorrows, bearing us each one/Blindly along our Line’s relentless Run [...]’ (759). Once again, the Line is denounced as restraining and replaced with a bedlamic web. Cherrycoke’s own narrative illustrates that model, suggesting — to use J. Hillis Miller’s words — that ‘[n]o one thread [...] can be followed to a central point where it provides a means of overseeing, controlling and understanding the whole. Instead it reaches sooner or later, a crossroad, a blunt fork’ (*Ariadne’s Thread* 21). Historical narrative becomes by necessity a ‘complex knot of many crossings’

(22), a ‘web of storytelling’ (23) within which the reader is invited to explore alternative paths.

My second example of how postmodernism has and can further contribute to a remapping of post-Cold War cultures is taken from the other side of the former ideological divide. In response to both globalist and nationalistic-ethnocentric cartographies, East-Central European postmodernism has often emphasized those geocultural interfaces (crossroads, borderlands, in-between regions, multiethnic cities) that foreground the interaction of various local entities, as well as the dialogue of larger cultural paradigms (Eastern and Western, traditional and innovative, native and foreign). Paralleling the postcolonial/postmodern redefinition of the Western city as multifaceted and decentered as a result of immigration, recent Central and Eastern European topographic representations have emphasized the heteroglossic potential of multiethnic nodal cities like Cernăuți/Czernowitz, Dubrovnik, Gdansk, Lwów, Riga, Timișoara, Trieste, or Vilnius that, at favorable historical junctions, have rewritten the national cultural paradigm from the margin, ascribing to it a dialogic dimension, both internally (a dialogue with other ethnic traditions) and externally (a dialogue with larger geocultural paradigms). Such nodal cities encourage a de/reconstruction of definitions and cultural myths, a hybridization of styles and genres, and alternative interethnic rapports. Like the postcolonial metropolis described by Salman Rushdie, the East-Central European marginocentric city brings together ‘things that seem not to belong together,’ setting ‘alongside each other in odd, often raw juxtapositions all sorts of different bodies of experience to show what frictions and sparks they make’ (Rushdie, quoted in Appignanesi and Maitland 8).

The multifaceted sociocultural identity of a city like Timișoara — Romania’s westernmost urban center where the anti-Ceaușescu revolution started in December 1989 — functioned as a broad metaphor of resistance against ideological oppression before 1989, and as an equally important anti-nationalistic symbol after 1989. Located in the multicultural Banat, a region caught between Central Europe and the Balkans, this city with its blend of six cultures (Romanian, German, Hungarian, Serbian, Jewish, and Romany) has often acted as a hybrid, intercultural node. As Timișoara’s first mayor in modern times, Johann Nepomuk Preyer, explained in *Monographie der Königlichen Freistadt Temesvár* (The Monograph of the Free Royal Town of Timișoara, 1853), the city looked simultaneously ‘towards the Orient, [...] where the big waves of the ancient Danube carry the diligent commerce of Germany’s and Austria’s flourishing cities, but where the brilliant spirit of modern civilization is still struggling to take root,’ and towards the West and ‘happier cities, where [...] the interests of greater countries and empires come together’ (256 — *my trans.*). Romania’s first important novelist, Ioan Slavici (1848–1925), grew up in the neighboring city of Arad with the conviction that one needed to acknowledge each individual’s ethnic language and customs. The multilingual press of Timișoara shared a similar conviction at the beginning of World War I, maintaining a surprising neutrality in its reports (for example, deploring the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in Central Europe without vilifying its enemies such as the Serbs). As Victor Neumann puts it, ‘If not entirely a Mitteleuropa, [this area was] in any case a Kleineuropa, synthesizing the civilizations of the East and West’ (*Tentația lui homo-europaeus* 225). By virtue

of their hybridity, cities like Timișoara, Zagreb, Novi Sad, or Cernăuți, managed to resist nationalist homogenization after World War I and ideological leveling after World War II, contributing their models of interethnic collaboration and regional self-identification to the process of nation-building.

To be sure, the interplay between an archaic-oriental and a middle-class East-Central European civilization has often created tensions, as Preyer's own comment on the double gaze of the city of Timișoara suggests. Like so many other commentators, Preyer deemphasizes the Eastern inheritance of the city, attributing all efforts to civilize Timișoara to Western influences and deploring the decay of the city under Turkish occupation. The 'Homo Otomanicus' remained Central Europe's Other, considered as 'inassimilable' as the Gypsy. Fear of the Eastern Other reemerged periodically whenever the multiethnic balance of Timișoara or the Banat area was weakened by nationalist ambitions, but it seldom took violent forms.

The dialogic, multiethnic culture of Timișoara and the Banat managed to survive even through the years of nationalist communism. In the 1970s, Timișoara became a metaphor of resistance against Ceaușescu's authoritarian city-planning, through the work of two groups of writers loosely connected with postmodernism: the innovative novelists, Sorin Titel and Livius Ciocârlie, and the 'action' poets, Ion Monoran, Petru Ilieșu, Richard Wagner, and William Totok. At once provincial and cosmopolitan, Timișoara and the Banat region function as a nostalgic model of political tolerance and multicultural coexistence in Sorin Titel's tetralogy, *Țară îndepărtată* (Remote Country), a work that reveals Titel's kinship with two other 'marginocentric' writers of Central Europe, Danilo Kiš and Andrzej Kuźniewitz. In Titel's novels, 'Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs, Poles, Germans, [Jews], navigate towards the Vienna of the 1900s, reexperiencing a deep human solidarity under the sign of mythic-imperial values' (Ungureanu 61); they also try to take the respect for cultural differences learned in the interstices of the Habsburg Empire, in a maternal and provincial Banat, into the polarized Cold War world.

Livius Ciocârlie's fiction also attempts the difficult recovery of a communitarian and culturally hybrid notion of a provincial city (embodied in pre-war Timișoara) against the culturally homogenized and ideologically sterile concept of a totalitarian city. The strikingly unusual form of *Un Burgtheater provincial* (A Provincial Burgtheater, 1985), described by its author as 'a sort of chronicle, a sort of novel', or of the semi-autobiographical novel-diary, *Clopotul scufundat* (The Sunken Bell, 1988), and other novelistic memoirs published by Ciocârlie since 1989, suggests that the reconstruction of an East European city-text involves a rethinking of literary genre and of the rules of representation. The first work presents a collagist view of Timișoara and the Banat region, pieced together from fragments of historical chronicles (Turkish, Romanian, and German), newspaper clips, letters and documents, private or printed. Both the status of the author (who is reduced partly to the role of an assembler of texts) and that of his narrative subject (the cultural spectacle of a multiform provincial city, summed up in the metaphor of a 'Burgtheater') are redefined in this open-ended intertextual construction. In *Clopotul scufundat* the recuperation of an ideal Timișoara is more difficult, involving a whole range of conflicting genres (personal diary, memoir, essay, document, fiction). Much of this work records relentlessly the

degradation of the contemporary city-text in Ceaușescu's Romania. The attempts of Ciocârlie's semi-autobiographical narrator to find his mooring in the urban present end in litanies of insignificance and loss. But in time the 'slow and vulnerable gelatin' of writing (*Clopotul scufundat* 69) begins to fill the existential void with vivid notations of former times and places. Drawing on a memory he did not know he had, the character-narrator recovers images of a historical Timișoara:

'Out-field', was the name of a not too large plot of grassland, at the margin of the 'Bucharest Street'. The street branched out from the boulevard. It began, much like it does today, with a villa hidden behind a high iron fence. Then came the more modest house inhabited by the Strumpfs. Two Bauhaus-style houses, with a second level. In one, bluish-gray, lived a family of Italians. Their name ended in 'atti'. Vignatti, perhaps. Across from them, on the other side of the street, a single house which belonged to some Germans. The old man used to sell soccer tickets. I had a high regard for him. His wife, big, bony and always frowning. [...] Further up, the street ended in the field that stretched on the other side of the fence. (162)

These images have a surprising germinative force, reconstructing the 'ghost' of a pre-war city (Brînzeu 153). They also have important political implications, opposing a description of the city as a multiethnic periphery only marginally removed from nature, to Ceaușescu's ideological dream of a monolithic communist city (a dream realized in part in the demolishing of certain historical sections of Bucharest). Belying the narrator's initial distrust in memory, his text performs the task of 'unburying' a web of authentic city-images from the debris of an impending ideological cataclysm. The city becomes a palimpsest of different ethnic legacies and cultural inscriptions, a historically layered experience of a place that no monologic ideology can eradicate.

It should not come as a surprise that recent theoretical attempts to recover the idea of a multicultural 'Third Europe' as a buffer zone between imperialistic ambitions and a response to invidious ethnic separations have also returned to the cultural-affective model of marginocentric cities like Timișoara or regions like the Banat. As Monica Spiridon argued in the first issue of *A Treia Europă* (The Third Europe), published by a homonymous Research group based in Timișoara, the Banat represents a veritable *forma mentis*, structured around 'faith in equilibrium, allergy to excesses, a cult of harmony and order, and a phenomenology of the middle way. Other dimensions of this model include a tempered version of middle-class liberalism, [...] tolerance for otherness and prudent ecumenicalism, [...] and a transregionalism purged of mistrust in specificity' (Spiridon 31–32). This observation has been confirmed by cultural historian, Victor Neumann, whose recent work (especially *The Temptation of Homo Europaeus* and *Identități multiple în Europa regiunilor: Interculturalitatea Banatului* [Multiple Identities in Regional Europe: Interculturalism in the Banat Region]) has emphasizes the idea of a 'transethnic' East European civilization developing beginning in the eighteenth century in response to parochial ethnic interests and the continued threat of Ottoman imperialism. Neumann finds this 'multivectorial' cultural ambiance well illustrated in the main urban centers of Transylvania, Banat, and parts of Serbia. These two studies, conceived during the last decade of the Cold War era but published after 1989, can be read also as a contemporary meditation on the dangers of postcommunist ethnic/nationalistic fragmentation and the need for a new pluricultural renaissance.

As Captain Zhang muses in *Mason & Dixon*, nothing produces ‘Bad History [...] more directly or brutally, than drawing a Line, in a particular a Right Line, the very Shape of Contempt, through the midst of people, — to create thus a Distinction betwixt ’em [...] — All else will follow as if predestin’d, unto War and devastation’ (615). The alternative cartographies proposed by Pynchon, Titel and Ciocârlie from the two sides of the former Cold War divide seek to reverse centuries of ‘Bad History’, replacing ‘Ortholatry [...] — that deprav’d worship of right Lines, intersecting at right Angles’ (522) with the imaginative topography of multicultural cities and zones, their ‘Sides zigging and zagging, going ahead and doubling back, making Loops inside Loops [...] and saying] Poh! to simple Quadrilaterals’ (586).

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URBÁNNE KARTOGRAFIE V ÉRE PO STUDENEJ VOJNE:

POSTMODERNÉ VÝZVY ETNOCENTRICKÝM A GLOBALISTICKÝM MAPOVANIAM

**Mapovanie. Kartografia. Nacionalizmus. Globalizácia. Studená vojna.
Multikultúrnosť. Identita. Postmodernizmus. Thomas Pynchon.**

Obdobie po studenej vojne oslobodilo našu topografickú imagináciu od tradičných ideologických polarizácií. Tieto imperialistické mapovania sa však často nahrádzali nacionalistickými a etnocentrickými kartografiami. Mnohé z nich vznikali ako priama reakcia na globa-

lizačné ideológie prvého sveta. Nové napätie medzi globálnou závislosťou a etnocentrickým separatizmom, centrami prvého sveta a perifériami tretieho sveta naznačuje stav permanentnej krízy v rovine ideologických rámcov, v ktorých prebiehajú kultúrne výmeny. Tieto rámce reflektujú novú heterologickú senzibilitu bez toho, aby umožnili skutočne oslobodzujúci diskurz o inom. Správnym prístupom nie je ani globalistický pojem multikultúrnosti, ani defenzívny lokalizmus. Oba vnímajú kultúrne rozdiely esencalisticky a idealizovane ako niečo fixné a konečné. Alternatívou je naivné oslavovanie „hybridnosti“ a „národného centrizmu“ (Homi Bhabha, Edward Soja, Rey Chow a ďalší). Autor štúdie tvrdí, že potrebujeme „naratívny relačnej pozicionality“ (Susan Stanford Friedman), ktoré sú výzvou pre tradičné rozdelenie medzi sebou a inými, západným a nezápadným, ženským a mužským, globálnym a lokálnym, pričom by špecifikovali priestor uprostred, v ktorom dochádza k interakciám a vzájomným spojeniam. Štúdia ukazuje na príkladoch zo súčasnej americkej a stredoeurópskej literatúry, že postmodernizmus dokáže naďalej poskytovať takéto „naratívny relačnej pozicionality“.

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