

RE-IMPLACEMENT: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF LITERARY SPACE IN THE CYBER-CITIES¹

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Robotic designs or works such as Yochiro Kawaguchi's *Ocean* (1986) serve as examples of the assimilation of old and new models, of the mixture of the natural and the artificial, based on the interaction between science and art, in the development of new artistic forms. In this sense, and like Kawaguchi's «Growth models», the study of literature, theatre, cinema, television, music, and art have undergone an important evolution, much in the sense that in natural evolution species adapt over time to their environment. The results of this change for the spectator have been described in new terminology which includes concepts such as *multimedia*, *transmediality*, *intermediality*, *hypermediality* or *postmediality*.

The rupture with traditional ideas of unity, authority, and literary space/time has provoked the incorporation of a new theoretical vocabulary and new ways of studying the works which make up the new literariness, or, more widely, the new «literacy». This

¹ This article is part of the project *Le.es* directed by Professor Anxo Abuín González of the University of Santiago de Compostela, to which I belong. This project aims to evaluate, catalogue, and analyze the literary, artistic and interdisciplinary work in digital languages in the Spanish-speaking world. Its reference is INCITE09 204039 PR, Xunta de Galicia.

transformation extends to all the elements of the literary process. Creation itself has been multiplied in hypertextual artefacts, which require manipulation, and which have proliferated widely, infecting our screens and creating new ways of reading adapted to the complexity of contemporary life. There is nothing more apt to the world we live in today than artefacts which require less time to read, which submerge the reader in phrases which do not call for conventional strategies of comprehension, but an almost artisanal putting together of pieces, a polishing of surfaces and superficialities that dominate over diegetic density. And when we manage to solve the difficulties which hypertextual works present us with, to mention just one of the genres that calls for this additional effort, our pleasure derives from a feeling of recovered serenity, lost in the process of reading.

The sixth law of John Maeda's *The Laws of Simplicity*, what he terms «context», is very useful in giving us the keys to understanding the role of the reader in the digital era. When we find a laguna, a blank space, it is often difficult not to fill it with interpretations, to conclude it. The digital page becomes a '*tabula rasa in progress*', a blank space, modifiable in real time, in which what we encounter in the margins is also relevant, in which «nothing is something». The computer screen conditions establish new contracts of reading based on fluidity, generalized connectivity, interactivity, and fragmentation. The text does not entirely disappear, but it has been changed and, of course, has absorbed the reader, who flows within its spaces.

RELATIVITY OF SPACE AND TIME

Edward S. Casey uses the term *Re-implacement* to refer to the ways in which places and events are altered and transformed when they are assimilated, processed, and represented by different artistic

media that combine diverse techniques and disciplines. In «Cambios de tiempo» («Changes in Time»²), José Luis Molinuevo mentions, following Zielinsky, that if in the twentieth century time becomes space, in new technologies, space becomes time.

Edgard Morin (2001) argues that we form a complex system, and that anything that occurs in one place is related to whatever happens in another, implying that we need to think globally but act locally, but also, that we need to think locally and act globally. These spaces are also spaces which digital visual culture tends to dissolve, moving the local to the global (deglocalizing), and in this way leading to omnipresent identities, in search of multidiversity. These new spaces can be defined as «confused space-time, where before, after, and now mix and interpenetrate, a space where the exterior configures the interior... a space which subverts intuition, a space with a blind spot, the blind spot of an empty space, of an absent center» (Hernández-Navarro, 2008: 14).³

Literature, once again, has imagined these processes of change, has accepted, from the very moment of its own destabilization, the importance of the developments in creativity (narrative, poetic, or dramatic) and adapted to the culture of simulation and the virtual. It has enabled new concepts of *spatiality* and *temporality*, transforming them into alternative models, characterized, as is to be expected, by the relativity and multiplicity of confluent and antagonistic lines.

The cultural mix of the moment extends to the notion of *hybrid temporality*, frustrated (*vid.* in this respect the screenwriter Charlie

2 All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author.

3 The idea of *glocalization* means, as we read it, a significant advance in the understanding of the influence of new technologies on social interaction (Internet, instant messaging, SMS, etc.) and in the formation of new types of communities not based on physical place but based, more so, on the interests which unite people (Yus, 2007: 150).

Kaufmann), a «third time» similar to the «third space» proposed by Homi Bhabha, a spiral temporality in which difference is valued, an asimultaneity of times (Molinuevo, 2008), and a temporality that is, ultimately, «mobile and changeable, multiple and absurd» (Hernández-Navarro, 2008: 14). We could describe the range of this space time variation with Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of *topocriticism* (2008: 17), a temporal topology, based on the time of absence and situated beyond localization.

These 'new' forms of writing imply the search for reconstructed worldviews (between utopia and dystopia) and the recognition of unheralded identities which stem from cognitive and cultural practices:

An optimized topology here: one which in reality does not exist as a «design of spatialities», or a distribution of these, but is, more so, the architecture of its opposite: an *antispace*, «the place of the points which are not a place», or, perhaps more accurately, «that of those which are a *non-place*» [...]. An *atopia* which, as such, only (de) constructs itself through the (in)organic aggregation of dystopias, of abstract *heterotopias* (Brea, 2010: 111).

The reformulation of spaces provokes change in interpersonal relationships. We are, from the phenomenological viewpoint, like *epiphytic* plants, beings which coexist with the *other*, with those with whom it has not perhaps anything in common and, even so, with whom we need to create links in order to guarantee progress. As anthropology has claimed for years, the *identity* of virtual environments becomes a narration (projection, autoproclamation) of itself and loses all reference which frames it within the classical or modern parameters of the concept (Mayans, 2002). It is the moment of placement, the coming of the 'false' virtual closeness which

makes human relations, as José Luis Brea would claim, a *coalition 2.0*, with looser and more habitual links that are at the same time, shorter and more intense. The omnipresence and continual apparition of a third, universally and permanently available thanks to the web, weighs the balance decidedly in favor of distance and imagination (Urry, 2002).

The other face of *virtual proximity*, according to Zygmunt Bauman (2003) is *virtual distance*, the suspension or cancellation of physical closeness, taking into consideration that this does not determine proximity. Unlike the ostensibly diffuse and intense human relationships, for Bauman (2003: 88), nothing is stable, there is nothing but *taking turns* or *short cuts*; relationships are, in the words of Brea, «at every moment and simultaneously, lines of contact and lines of escape» (2010: 109). The new perception of space-time places the subject in a relationship of immediacy with messages, whose geographical precedence (historical and social) «becomes 'leveled out' in a *collage of signs*» (Cuadra, 2003: 68).

UNTIL WHAT POINT CAN I STAND BEING DIRECTED? / UNTIL WHAT POINT CAN I ALLOW MYSELF TO PROCEED WITHOUT INDICATIONS?

In 2005 Google launched a service (*Google Maps*) which allows us to explore our own neighborhood by satellite photography with the simple typing of the address of the user. This development provoked the sensation that «being lost» would become, with its contemporary assimilation, finding oneself «comfortably lost». In this cyber world, in which we have built societies, spaces, temporalities, identities, amusements, pleasures, pedagogies, architectures... which do not have a physical presence, we wander looking for more stable anchors to help us on our Homeric journey. We feel obliged then to map the web, to catalogue it, as happens with all that the human species cog-

natively encounters.⁴ In this world, deterritorialized and completely remodeled by technology, geography is no longer a matter for hard science alone, but also for artists, who approach it from a perspective that is both poetic and critical (Bourriaud, 2008: 25).

The first literary experiments that had to do with the definition of 'cyberspace' problematized, precisely, the notion of *spatiality*. I refer here to the subgenre of *cyberpunk* of the science fiction of the eighties, later elaborated upon in the critical and philosophic theory of the delezian rhizome, Jean Baudrillard's *simulacra*, Michael Heim's cyberspatial ontology, or Fredric Jameson's spatial turn, which rejects a conception of time as the structuring axis of the literary and with an increasing dedication to the «literary geographies» which are themselves the legacy of the work of Franco Moretti or Dennis Hollier.⁵ Conceptions of the *web* or *connectivity*, associated with cyberspace, lead to the *map*: «Maps, planes, satellite images, shots, exhibitions, social studies, diagrams, and paintings: the notion of geography has never had such importance in art as it does today» (Bourriaud, 2008: 17).

The coming of this electronically guaranteed *no-place* makes voyages more secure, attractive, and with less risk than ever, with older limitations abandoned in favor of the magnetic power of the «route». New technologies, along with changing and widening our notions of almost everything, and of the text, as we have already mentioned, provoke the disappearance of cities, and of physica-

4 «The difficulties that we run into are like those we would have with the geography of a country for which we have no map, or only a map of isolated places... We may freely wander about within the country, but when we are compelled to make up a map, we get lost. The map will show different roads which lead through the same country and of which we could take any one at all, but not two.» (Wittgenstein, from a Cambridge Lecture of 1933-34).

5 Jameson, for example, derives his notion of *hyperspace* from an analysis of *Hotel Bonaventure* which illustrates his theory of postmodernity and its importance in the development of late capitalism.

lity, as we understand it, in order to change them into an enormous map which fits its pieces in the crossing of streets and traffic lights: «Terms such as ‘city’, ‘land’ and ‘landscape’ can today only be used if crossed out» (Ruby, 2002: 17). The city, Brea argues, can be understood as a fractal constellation of affects, and the potentialities of work (2010: 109). These are now *relational* spaces (I will elaborate on this term later) in which there are no frontiers, but transitions, in which the population is a «liquid flow» which casts bodies outside of itself, creating «non-bodies», nodes that interstice with other bodies.

Computer screens facilitate this interaction through links that turn a context into a *transcontext* in which we cannot design a classical city, but can create the conditions whereby it reorganizes itself as a living structure:

The philosophy of postmodernism recognized the downfall of the grand narratives in which everything was explained as converging towards a higher consciousness of the present and the promise of a radiant future. [...] There is no ultimate truth; everything is permitted. [...] The good thing is that the global restructuring process of postmodernism has now reached the point where it has itself become another narrative in which everything converges, in which everything is explainable as leading to an awareness –sometimes inspiring but otherwise provoking resistance– of where we are going with our lives. The narrative is titled ‘globalization’, and the translocal culture is part of it. Transurbanism is urbanism in the era of globalization. [...] Transcontextualize. You cannot design a city, but you can help a city organize itself as a living structure –not by breaking down all barriers to the streams of information and commodities, but by allowing specific obstacles, channels, retardations and accelerations to be designed for individual streams, and thus to be informed by the city itself. (Mulder, 2002: 9-10).

The city plan is both a rationalization of space and time; its streets, buildings, bridges and roads are also temporal indices. It «permits us to grasp an outline, a shape, some sort of location, but not the contexts, cultures, histories languages, experiences, desires and hopes that course through the urban body. The latter pierce the logic of topography and spill over the edges of the map» (Chambers, 1993: 188).

In the ‘mental geography’ of theorists of architecture the similarity between the narratives of science fiction and contemporary cities is often posited, provoking speculation as to how the possible worlds of artificial intelligence could affect design, conceptual models of space and the architectonic thought (Boyer, 1995: 14).

The importance of the *body* in terms of making sense of the city, space, and the architecture of cyberspace is argued for by Coop Himmelb(l)au, who in 1968 already established that architecture has no physical plan, but exists on a psychic level. Walls no longer exist, our hearts become space and our faces the walls (Gerberl and Weibel, 1994: 58).

CITY, BODY, SPACE

The transformation sparked in the identity of the reader-navigator of the web, of the inhabitant of the virtual cities has already been mentioned. Communication through new technologies, above all through the internet, has modified the way in which we construct our identities and the environments in which they are developed.

Cyberspace also provides the necessary fluidity in order to allow one to change gender, name, age, culture, race, role, and personality in the process of changing from one world to another. We can speak of a new social agent, with a plural ideology, which dissolves itself in its performance, an ethereal and evasive subject.

In her *Megalopolis*, Celeste Olalquiaga (1992) uses the term *psychasthenia* to describe the contemporary condition of not being able to mark a divisory line between oneself and one's surroundings, a state in which space defined by the coordinates of the body are confused with those of represented space. The *psychasthenic* organism, unable to mark the limits of its own body and lost within the immensity which devours it, abandons its own identity in order to embrace the space which exists outside of itself, camouflaging itself in the process (1-2). With the lack of «flesh» of cyberspace, all identity inevitably becomes social. This disappearance of the physical subject is typified in the figure of the «flexible self», diversified, fragmented, and uprooted (Turkle, 1997), or is substituted completely by artificial intelligences, cyborgs which imitate us (see the webpage of Hanson Robotics, <<http://hansonrobotics.wordpress.com>>).

In a similar sense, the work of Swedish visual artist, Lisa Jevbratt, allows us another way of conceptualizing space, and the interfaces and links between spaces.⁶ Many of her projects are attempts to make a map of the web. Her main page shows various maps of the world and time. This is the case of one of her works, *1:1* (1999-2002), which maps all the IP addresses of the world's computers, producing digital images of great beauty.⁷

Virtual Void: The System arose as a virtual reality system, an interactive and immersive environment and a mapping process which constantly monitors navigation thanks to the environment.⁸ The system was conceived as two parts which functioned as separate elements in the installation, so that, when the system is initiated, a single room is created as a starting point; however, when a door is opened

6 <<http://jevbratt.com>>

7 It consists of five sections: *migration, hierarchical, every, random, and excursion*.

8 Exhibited in the University of San José in 1996.

a new room is created and the program randomly decides the number of doors this room will have. The rooms created remain stable throughout the exhibition and in the system's memory, and the map reflects how their construction develops. The system also remembers how many times a room has been visited. Each time that the user returns to an old room the room's representation is darkened on the map, leaving a trace of the visitors' movements.

Jevratt's work serves as an example of the new discipline, termed *topocriticism*, in which artists gather all the information necessary in order to create artistic works. Production in itself is thus transformed into a topographic instrument.

Finally, the artist Jennie Savage, has demonstrated a particular interest in exploring the space hidden between public spaces, the maps of the city, constructed territories, and human histories: lives lived and personal narratives which are connected to these web pages.⁹ In a process which uses archives and user intervention in order to reveal a complex situation, a microstructure, or simply an unheard voice.

Visualization programs which allow for strolls through the cities of the future are the latest discoveries in the so-called *liquid architecture*. The term *liquid* in this context is Zygmunt Bauman's, but recovered by Marcos Novak and applied to architecture, and which I have explored in the article «Trans-arquiteturas, e-cartografías, ciber-textos» («Trans-Architectures, E-Cartographies, Cyber-Texts»). The term refers to a process of modelization, transformation, and self-organization, as well as to experimentation at different levels of simulation, points of view, and interactions. Liquid means, ultimately, a fusion of form and action, of time and space in a labyrinthine shapeless mass which the individual or group manipulate. These «symphonies of space», which vary constantly in form, cause 'real

9 <<http://www.jenniesavage.co.uk>>

reality' to coincide with the virtual, public space with the infinity of virtual space, creating «intelligent spaces» free from the limits of physicality (Molinuevo, 2004).

We can recall here that one of the first projects in the field of virtual reality was Jeffrey Shaw's *The Legible City*, presented in the years of 1988 to 1991. *The Legible City* was an interactive environment in which the user could travel within the virtual cities of New York, Amsterdam, and Karlsruhe on bicycle. The urban architectures of these cities were recreated as if they were texts, so that the user could gradually submerge herself in the «textual city» (Gian-nachi, 2004: 149). The Manhattan version of this project (1989), for example, included eight narrations with monologues from the city's mayor, Ed Koch, Frank Lloyd Wright, Donald Trump, a tourist guide, a con-artist, an ambassador, and a taxi-driver. In the case of the remaining cities, Amsterdam (1990) and Karlsruhe (1991) the narrations conformed to the most up to date characteristics of the buildings, every textual line adopted a different color, so that the reader could choose a specific route for their reading. This travelling across a city of words implies an act of reading of an artifact which is a type of «three-dimensional book» (*Ars Electronica*, in Wilson, 2002: 760).¹⁰

In the same year as the second version of *The Legible City*, the British company Forced Entertainment created, with the help of the photographer Hugo Glendining, the work *Nightwalks* (1998). This is an interactive urban journey on *CD-rom*, using specific software and photographs which construct 360-degree panoramic landscapes. *Nightwalks* allows the spectator to move through the streets of a divi-

10 Some years later Jeffrey Shaw followed this initial Project with the *Distributed Legible City* (1998), introducing a second bicycle.

ded city at dusk, in an environment in which the objects, figures and images clicked upon open up specific narratives.

The Galician web design company, *A navalla suiça*, has done something similar in their *Augmented Films* project, which uses augmented reality to create links between cinema and everyday spaces, relating urban spaces to documentaries and short films. The project, a prize winner in Cannes in 2010, takes advantage of the widespread global socialization made available through virtual urban networks, and uses mobile phones, GPS, and the web as tools for the users to immerse themselves in alternative experiences. The project deals with locating spaces that have been used in films, the so-called *filmspots*, encouraging participants to establish connections between spaces and films: «you can go looking for the films in your city, on your roads, checking-in the places where the film was shot, or even taking a picture of yourself in the filmspot and sharing it. You can also play a competition against other spectators, other filmspots hunters» (from the project's website, <<http://www.anaallasuiza.com>>).

Virtual reality, virtual worlds and their immersive character represent a logical extension of the integration of arts. We can recover examples of the «cinema of the future» by Morton Heilig (1950), the first software for interactive graphics, Ivan Sutherland's *Sketchpad* (1965), the *Immersive Environments* of Scout Fisher, or various projects by Myron Krueger (1970), such as *Metaplay* or *Videoplace*. In *Videoplace*, Myron Kreuger plays with full-scale shadows of human beings, projected in video, and interacting in complex and surprising ways. All of these lead to ideas of *telepresence*, of *shared virtual spaces*, to a *world* which is an artificial reality.

Similar to Krueger, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's relational architecture proposes large scale interactive occurrences which are capable of transforming emblematic buildings through new technological

interfaces.¹¹ His *Vectorial Elevation* (alzado.net), presented in Mexico on the 26th of December, 1999, used 18 robotic anti-air cannons placed around the main square of Mexico City, which any internet user could manipulate from the program's web page, thanks to a virtual reality program. The program allowed users to create enormous light sculptures, which could be seen from a distance of 25 kilometres and which lit up buildings in the historical centre of the city.¹² His concept of the *relational*, which derives from the neurological studies of Maturana and Varela, 2004¹³, implies the active collaboration of the public which Lozano-Hemmer calls «taking turns» and «taking averages».

In the first of these actions the spectator is in the position of choosing paths, taking turns as a consequence of the activation of one or more sensors. Hemmer explains this exercise in terms of Jeffrey Shaw's *Eve*, in which one person dominates a virtual world directed by a giant turret. Similarly, he highlights Toni Dove and Michael Mackenzie's *Archaeology of a Mother Tongue*, in which the user manipulates a cursor to build the narrative of the text. Finally, in *Displaced Emperors* each participant controls a system which transforms the castle of Linzer.

The second action defined by Lozano-Hemmer, «Taking averages», introduces the idea of an interface «where input is statistically computed and the majority directs the outcome». The challenge consists of opening a piece to collective participation, giving us the sensation that our journey will lead to nowhere if we do not use the right tools: «taking averages» and «taking turns».

What makes the narratives of these works advance, then, is a mixture of action and reflection. Another example can be found in the

11 Rafael Lozano-Hemmer prefers the term *relational* to *interactive* as he sees this last as falling into the same vagueness through overuse that characterizes terms such as postmodern, virtual, deconstruction, etc.

12 <<http://www.vectorialvancouver.net/home.html>>

13 The term has also been used since the 1960s to refer to a cross-referenced database.

work *Body Movies*, in which the spectator undertakes an individual performance based on the recognition of her own shadow, and, at the same time, takes part in cooperative activity in which it is necessary to form connections with other people and buildings. This text, which is inspired in *The Shadow Dance* by Samuel van Hoogstraten, makes reference to the power of the shadow in the philosophical, artistic, and literary traditions:

The shadow as a metaphor for being (Plato), the birth of representation and painting [...] the mysterious expression of the self (shadowgrams), and, most importantly, the expression of a hidden monstrosity or otherness (which is depicted in Van Hoogstraten engraving) (Lozano-Hemmer, 2002: 155).

The role of the shadow in Lozano-Hemmer provokes reflection on embodiment and its inverse correlate, disembodiment, and on visual representation. The work moves between *performance* and architecture, and explores the distance between bodies in public space, these conceived as anti-monuments opposed to the hegemonic power which they translate.

Lozano-Hemmer searches for the intersection between the new technologies, urban space, active participation, and memory, which he terms «alien» (*vid.* Lozano-Hemmer, 2002: 139). For this author, every city is many cities in one, coexisting and superimposing in chaotic layers which intermingle with the experience of its inhabitants, strollers, transients, nomads, and the world outside of themselves (*ibidem*). Lozano-Hemmer's search tends towards displacement in order to reaffirm the fact that we belong to many places at the same time and to no place at no time.

The post-digital aesthetic links distinct elements, apparently exclusive, in order to create personal associations which move

in fluid environments, given that they form a permeable structure. Computer science, that imaginary framework, allows us to comprehend the importance of certain forms which transform themselves, in contemporary art, into *tape*, *circuit*, an itinerary which takes place in a network, or involves various networks. Our urban experience is made up of passages without transition between one zone and another. Art participates in this *traceability* of contemporary phenomena, it is exteriorized like a *planet-screen*, filled with a succession of scenes and decorations, and the world is formed then as a vast catalogue of plotlines, among which none have more value than another, forming a global script (Bourriaud, 2008: 29). With this vital background, literary studies of the XXI century have taken into account phenomena which are not strictly humanistic in essence. Cultural texts have taught us to redefine our attitude to the literary. Although there is no fixed conception of *space*, *time*, *identity*, *city*, *architecture*, *play*, *sociability*, or *text*, literature remains as the *space* of creation which has been able to break the radical disjuncture between the experimental sciences and the sciences of the spirit.

Literature

No es lo que fue

No es lo que será

[...]

Es lo que ahora es.

(Is not what it was

Is not what it will be

[...]

It is what it now is)

(Jodorowsky, 2006: 205)

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ABSTRACT

The study of literature, theatre, cinema, the visual arts, television, and music has undergone an evolution that has produced a rupture with traditional notions of unity, authority, and space/time. This rupture has meant the emergence of a new theoretical discourse and new ways of studying the works that make up the new notion of the literary. In this article, I use Edward S. Casey's notion of *re-implacement* to refer to the way in which places, as well as the events that occur within them, are assimilated, processed, and represented by artistic media that combine different techniques and disciplines. From this starting point, I analyze a number of texts that can be defined as forming part of a cyberculture in which the spectator-reader encounters a rich terminological vocabulary that corresponds to concepts such as *multimedia*, *transmedia*, *intermedia*, *hypermedia*, and *postmedia*.

Keywords: Reimplacement, cyberculture, literary cibercartographies, relational architecture, postdigital aesthetics.

RESUMO

O estudo da literatura, teatro, cinema, artes visuais, televisão e música sofreu uma evolução que produziu uma ruptura com as noções tradicionais de unidade, autoridade e espaço /tempo. Essa ruptura implicou a emergência de um novo discurso teórico e de novos modos de estudar as obras que sustentam a nova noção do literário. Neste artigo, recorro à noção de *re-implacement* [*re-localização*] de Edward S. Casey para referir o modo como os lugares, bem como os eventos que neles ocorrem, são assimilados,

processados e representados por meios artísticos que combinam diferentes técnicas e disciplinas. A partir deste pressuposto, analiso uma série de textos que podem ser definidos como fazendo parte de uma cibercultura em que o espectador-leitor encontra um vocabulário terminológico rico que corresponde a conceitos tais como *multimédia*, *transmédia*, *intermédia*, *hipermédia* e *pós-média*.

Palavras-chave: *re-implacement* [*re-localização*], cibercultura, cibercartografias literárias, arquitetura relacional, estética pós-digital.