Invisible Cities as a Postmodern Text: A Multidimensional Approach

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ABSTRACT

Famous Italian author Italo Calvino's popular novel Invisible Cities opens itself up for multidimensional theoretical and critical interventions due to its interesting and multifarious providence of scope for such interventions. Considering the diversity of interpretative scope the text offers, its reception in classroom both by students and teachers is equally critical and variegated. The text thus offers itself for multiple and divergent critical receptions and some of the critical receptions that can be made to the text include spatiality, temporality, magic realism, and a few other postmodernist approaches. My specific approach in this article shall be to explore and analyse the various possibilities of postmodernist critical receptions of the text through many interesting and revelatory postmodernist notions and concepts propounded by many famous postmodernist thinkers and philosophers like Michael Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Jean Baudrillard. In this article, I will explore how certain philosophical and theoretical postulates propounded by these philosophers/theorists become potent and effective critical tools to study the mentioned novel of Calvino and how these concepts open up new vistas of critical, comprehension, reception and interpretation of the text.

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Famous Italian author Italo Calvino's popular novel Invisible Cities opens itself up for multidimensional theoretical and critical interventions due to its interesting and multifarious providence of scope for such interventions. Considering the diversity of interpretative scope the text offers, its reception in classroom both by students and teachers is equally critical and variegated. The text thus offers itself for multiple and divergent critical receptions and some of the critical receptions that can be made to the text include spatiality, temporality, magic realism, and a few other postmodernist approaches. My specific approach in this article shall be to explore and analyse the various possibilities of postmodernist critical receptions of the text through many interesting and revelatory postmodernist notions and concepts propounded by many famous postmodernist thinkers and philosophers like Michael Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Jean Baudrillard. In this article, I will explore how certain philosophical and theoretical postulates propounded by these philosophers/theorists become potent and effective critical tools to study the mentioned novel of Calvino and how these concepts open up new vistas of critical, comprehension, reception and interpretation of the text.

I. INTRODUCTION

After completing reading Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities, a student asked inquisitively: "Sir, are the cities narrated by Marco to Kublai Khan real or imaginary?" I understood quite well that though the question sounded novice and simplistic on the surface, the student's critical engagement with the text and its effective comprehension won't be possible unless he/she is introduced to the fundamental notions and concepts of postmodernity and their categorical dismantlement of this antiquarian reality/ imaginary distinction. To enter into the practice of reading a postmodern text, one has to inculcate a thorough and probing comprehension of how in the realms of postmodernist thought and philosophy, the 'imaginary' is incorporated into the ambit of the 'real' so that their traditional distinctions get summarily dissolved and the 'imaginary' becomes an integral part of our cumulative perception of reality. And a thoroughgoing comprehension of such a dismantlement of binary oppositions at various levels (of which the reality/imaginary binary is only one) is not possible unless the student is again introduced to the Derridean poststructualist/postmodernist advocacy of the decentered formations, of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome, of Foucault's notion of heterotopia and of French sociologist Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation and simulacra etc. with their collective and principal advocacy for decenterd structures in various ways.

The text offers the students not only an amusing and phantasmagoric reading, but also absorbingly opens them up into a possible postmodern world along with its telling denunciation of all arbitrary binary oppositions, its escapade from all centered formations and its transgression of all spatio-temporal enclosures, barriers and demarcations. But the students' comprehension and critical reception of the text shall be most effective through their exposure to the mentioned theoretical postulates and propositions and their complex workings in Calvino's said text like invisible undercurrents imbued with the twisted patterns of his psychedelic and hallucinatory

narrative. Based on these precepts, this article shall primarily focus on the critical reception of Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities as a postmodern text in classrooms and academia by the use of the cited theoretical templates and frameworks that facilitate the fundamental assertion of the text's postmodernist character and quintessence.

II. CITIES WITHOUT CENTRE: DE-CENTERED STRUCTURES IN INVISIBLE CITIES

One major way of critically approaching the text Invisible Cities is to study Marco's narrated cities as centerless constructions, in the particular context of postmodernist/poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida's avant-garde and iconoclastic advocacy for universal, structural de-centrality. In this connection, a keen look at the cities' eclectic and heretical formations would easily divulge their archetypal elusiveness to the traditional system's arbitrary and predetermined centrality and their obstreperous non-adherence to all endeavours for obligatory centering and totalization; the cities en masse promulgate vague, esoteric and arcane configurations that are unabatedly in flux.

In this context, one can notice that the city of Eutropia is an appropriate enunciator—through its unabated relinquishment of its own mythic and pseudo-centrality—of a typical postmodern/post-structural configuration that is decentered, topsy-turvy and amorphous. The city exudes the shifting appearance of a "vast, rolling plateau" that possesses neither a center nor a fixed circumference for "Eutropia is not one, but all these cities together; only one is inhabited at a time, the others are empty; and this process is carried out in rotation" (56). Through its emphatic denunciation of an all-inclusive topographic fixity and stubbornness, the city undergoes multiple intra-territorial movements, deterritorializations and reterritorializations etc. through the rotational and periodic, territorial reshufflings made by its ever-transmogrifying citizenry—a praxis that evinces an "acentered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying [spatial] system" (Deleuze & Guattari23) of postmodernity. The city's exemplary territorial and topographic

de-centrality is also a suitable illustrator of Derrida's path-breaking and oft-cited post-structural cliché: "The Center is not the center" (90). Such architectural de-centrality is also adumbrated by cities like Sophronia, Clarice, Leonia, Theodora, and Olinda. In Sophronia, for instance, a yearly alteration between the complete demolition and subsequent reconstitution of the two halves of the cities are an exemplification of its peculiar non-adherence to an ostensible, permanent locus or center which remains amenable to endless processes of displacements and inter-substitutions.

Along with the cities mentioned above, the city of Olinda also possesses and exudes the character of a decentered formation. It is of course obvious that a postmodern edifice does not allow its inner space to be part of a resolute and cohesive organizational pattern, and this notion's conspicuous elucidation through the city's unremitting, non-arborescent architectural metamorphosis is worth noticeable. Olinda's original city-space is progressively disassembled by the outwardly escalating growth of its trunk in "concentric circles" (Calvino 117) through the annual addition of rings at the periphery such that the city's austere and prototypical arborescence (connotative of a stable archetype) remains thoroughly destabilized. In addition, the periphery gets crammed with the evolution of new centers along with their concomitant new peripheries dispersing in all directions thereby making the city's primary arborescence eventually indecipherable. The root remains no more a root; the stem remains no more a stem and the trunk remains no more a trunk and what remains instead is a 'rootless,' a 'stem-less' and a 'trunk-less' "totally new Olinda" and also "all the Olindas that have blossomed one from the other" (Calvino 117). In this systematic destabilization of Olinda's centered construction, the city's preexisting centrality gets relegated, substituted and superimposed by the proliferative evolution of new centers and peripheries all across, along with a concomitant blurring of the center/periphery distinction. So, the generation of an intricate and composite and ever-shifting terrain inside Olinda attributes the city a typical,

postmodern de-centrality thereby allowing the insemination of new, multiple and subversive spatial formations inside itself.

Marco's prophetic reconstructions of his visited cities generate a postmodernist labyrinth that unfolds and percolates through the novel's immense, textual landscape. The cities' collective subjection to continual transfigurations does indicate towards postmodernism's characteristic non-reliance on an orthodox and stubborn structural intransigency and simultaneously asseverates our inextricable submersion in a scrambled and chaotic condition of postmodernity. The cities are an incoherent assemblage of floating signifiers that apparently look phantasmal or imaginary, yet they baffle us with their incredible semblance to reality and verisimilitude to material facticity. They are bereft of customary beginning or end, and of stable epistemological foundations as critic Teresa De Lauretis points out that they have "no presence, no origin, no moment of plenitude, and no absolute form of knowledge" (25).

III. CITIES AS RHIZOMES: DECENTERED CITIES IN ITALO CALVINO'S INVISIBLE CITIES

Another potent theoretical approach for the critical reception of Invisible Cities that would establish the postmodernist, de-centrality of the cities can be Deleuze and Guattari's famous notion of rhizome, as explained by them in their combined work A Thousand Plateaus. The intricate and rootless network of a rhizome befittingly demonstrates a postmodern fabric's clear and "provocative assault on the systems of structuralist . . . signification" (Stivale20). In this context, the cities narrated by the 14th Century Italian traveler Marco Polo before Kublai Khan imitate and emulate rhizomes by abjuring concrete and stable structuralist significations and absolutions and becoming clichéd and paradigmatic emblems of destabilized postmodernist constructions.

Kerstin Pilz, while explaining the rhizomatic topography and architecture of the cities, pertinently remarks: "The topography of Calvino's cities indicates that the real, even in the form of man-made architecture, is resistant to rigid structuring. The lay-out of a city—the result of chance and the process of historical layering—is more akin to a naturally grown labyrinth like that of a rhizome" (115). It goes without saying that the fundamental tenet of a rhizome is its characteristic recalcitrance towards and nullification of structural singularity and binary-producing arborescence. The complex and immense multiplicity of the city of Dorothea is a case in point. In Dorothea, the narrator's edifying disclosure of the city's subversion of edificial symmetry through its incognito and enshrouded network of multiple openings instead of a single one is a precise testimony to its ingrained and symptomatic rhizomatic miscellany: ". . . but I know this path is only one of the many that opened before me on that morning in Dorothea" (Calvino 8). The narrator's statement is a compelling vindication of Deleuze and Guattari's emphatic explications that: "The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions . . . Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (14).

The rhizome's heteroclite spatial open-endedness, its incendiary disruption of territorial circumscriptions, its evasive escapade from paradigmatic, geometrical models and designs, can be witnessed in the city of Zoe which is "without figures and without form" (Calvino 29). This is precisely why a newcomer traversing across its city-space "has nothing but doubts," neither is he able "to distinguish the features of the city" as they "also mingle" (Calvino 29). The city's territorial irresoluteness is further ascertained through the narrator's confessional inability to "separate the inside from the outside" (Calvino 29); it is a categorical reassertion of this rhizomatic city's typical and slithery elusiveness to shapes, outlines and features, and its manifestation as "a force of pure transgression" (Sheehan 36).

Like Zoe, Ceccilia is a city that "stretches between one city and the other" (Calvino 137) in a way that its territorial demarcation or boundary remains both unrecognizable and inconclusive—a scenario

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that is ratified by both the narrator and the goatherd who conjointly fail to perceive the city's well-circumscribed, territorial enclosures: ""That cannot be! I shouted. "I, too, entered a city, I cannot remember when, and since then I have gone on, deeper and deeper into its streets. But how have I managed to arrive where you say, when I was in another city, far far away from Cecilia, and I have not yet left it?"" (Calvino 138). Cecilia possesses neither a beginning nor an end, neither a center nor a periphery, it is a rhizomatic space that spills, spreads and diffuses into other spaces like a patch of oil ; it reaffirms its "anarchic relationship to space" (Kaplan 87).

A rhizomatic structuration, according to Deleuze & Guattari, is not indentured by obligatory centers or loci; rather, it is constantly disassembled into intertwined lines and segments that constitute a tangled multiplicity—a multiplicity that "undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature" (D & G 23). The city of Ersilia possesses a similar configuration through its reduction into an assemblage of enmeshed and interwoven strings—an assemblage that becomes "more complex" (Calvino 68) through the city's proliferating metamorphosis in the form of its consistent fragmentation and miniaturization, following a rhizomatic pattern. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points and positions in a rhizome, such as that found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (9). They further enunciate: "The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available— always n-1 (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted)" (D & G 7). Such multidimensional and labyrinthine assemblages or networks are further witnessed in Esmeralda that manifests through an assembled and jumbled up "network of routes" through the tousled and interpenetrative convergences between its awry transport network, its curvilinear canals, its curled "underground passages" (Calvino 79), and its contorted areal trajectories netted by the swallows' continual and twisted flights. Thus, the rhizomatic city of Esmeralda extends in all directions as: "The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms . . . [through] ramified surface extension in all directions . . ." (Deleuze & Guattari 7).

These rhizomatic networks proliferate and extend into the terrestrial, the subterranean and the celestial spheres too, as witnessed in the cities of Beersheba and Andrea. The city of Beersheba forms intricate, ever-shifting rhizomatic interconnections between its subterranean, terrestrial and celestial extensions and projections like the routes of "human bowels" prolonging "from black hole to black hole" and splattering against "the lowest subterranean floor" (100) and also the celestial objects like the "long-tailed comets . . . released to rotate in space" (101).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is a 'map without tracing'—a notion that is the figurative illustrator of the typical, postmodernist discernment that the territory and its cartographic representations can never be correctly reciprocal; they can never be each other's metonymic doppelgangers; rather, they are incongruous and antithetical to the norms of mutual reflexivity and reciprocation. They are perennially subject to shifts, changes, modifications and transfor mations, like the rhizome as Deleuze and Guattari explain:

> The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. . . . What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation . . . It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectible in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting . . . (13)

The map displayed by Kublai to Marco towards the conclusive portions of the novel is indeed a rhizomatic 'map without tracing' that embodies

multiple shifts, exchanges, overlappings and inter-substitutions across time and topography such that an ever-shifting spatio-temporal loop percolates through its trans-territorial, cartographic body. From its perusal by Marco, one can notice interesting interchanges and inter-substitutions between the mythological/historic cities of Troy and Constantinople along divergent spatio-temporal coordinates scattered across the vast expanses of history and mythology such that one city becomes the other and vice versa. We learn that Marco, 'while speaking of Troy,' is able to 'give the city the form of Constantinople and foresee the siege which Mohammed would lay [there] for long months' (Calvino125) (an event that happened nearly 130 years after the former's death). The atlas, by effectuating the randomized collapse of different historic/mythological spaces and times on each other on its de-stratified cartographic body, truly presents itself as a rhizoamtic 'map without tracing' through its willful infringement of history's obdurate and adamantine spatio-temporal determinism.

Thus, Italo Calvino's novel Invisible Cities is replete with a plethora of individual cities that present themselves through ever-shifting, rhizomatic patterns that percolate through the text's enormous, postmodern textual terrain. The cities, through their display of rhizomatic structurations, do substantiate postmodernism's essential repudiation of centered frameworks and through the portrayal of such de-centered cities, Calvino undoubtedly remains an important writer of postmodernity.

IV. HETEROTOPIC CITIES IN CALVINO'S INVISIBLE CITIES

Another important postmodernist critical reception of Calvino's Invisible Cities can be to peruse the text through Foucault's notion of heterotopia (which appeared in his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" published posthumously) and to envisage the cities in the novel as de-centered representations of Foucauldian heterotopic spaces. Heterotopia, as per Foucault's own fascinating elucidations is, unlike the utopic space, an ambivalent and

conflictual one where the 'real' and the 'unreal' coincide, where an order and its transgressions are isochronous, where a space encounters both its real and mythic antitheses and antinomies. Foucault explains:

> . . . we are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered. A period in which . . . the world is . . . destined to grow in time . . . as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle. It may be, in fact, that our lives are still ruled by a certain number of unrelenting opposites, which institution and practice have not dared to erode. I refer here to . . . opposites that are . . . actuated by a veiled sacredness (330-331).

As per Foucault's own circumspections, nevertheless, a 'heterotopia' cannot be essentially pigeonholed into one intransigent type or category, rather can be inordinately miscellaneous and variegated in its nature and kind; it evinces a wide and divergent spectrum of categories: "It is evident, though, that heterotopias assume a wide variety of forms, to the extent that a single, absolutely universal form may not exist" (Foucault 332).

It is evident that the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan desires to encode his empire and his cities through a chessboard-model that can order, quantify and measure the formers' spaces through precisely calculable, geometrical codifications. It is revealingly discovered nevertheless that Marco's enchanting narrations run contrary to Kublai's self-presumed and erroneous conceptualizations of his empire and his cities through determinable, geometrical orderings and thoroughly abrogate the remotest possibilities of coherent architectural formations. Contrary to Kublai's idiosyncratic presumptions regarding fixity and resoluteness, the cities exhibit asymmetrical and inherently self-contradictory domains, just like Foucauldian heterotopias.

In this scenario, we can examine the heterotopic configurations of the cities of Zoe and Cecilia. Zoe is a heterotopic city that is "without figures and without form" because of which its novice visitor

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harbors in his mind "nothing but doubts;" neither is he able "to distinguish the features of the city" for they "also mingle" (Calvino 29). Moreover, the narrator's inability to "separate the [city's] inside from . . . [its] outside" (Calvino 29) and he getting lost in its incomprehensible labyrinth bespeaks the city's dubious closed-ness and open-ended-ness, simultaneously. Thus, Zoe's 'inside' opens into its 'outside' and on the contrary, its 'outside' encroaches into its 'inside' such that the city evinces a prototypical, heterotopic ambivalence and innate contradictoriness.

The composite city of Cecilia exudes similar heterotopic attributes because its cryptic terrain "stretches between one city and the other" (Calvino 137) in a way that its circumference remains virtually obfuscated and quintessentially deterritorialized. Cecilia's city-space trespasses into those of the other cities, while simultaneously allowing the neighbouring city-spaces to encroach into its own premise; it inheres and displays the peculiar heterotopic character and "creates its own muddle" (330), to use a typical Foucauldian expression. In other words, the heterotopic city of Celilia includes in its premises spaces of 'otherness' as according to Dana Badulescu: ". . . Foucault's heterotopia refers to spaces of otherness, which are neither here nor there . . ." (2). The uninhibited overspill of different city-spaces into each other's restricted territories leads not only to the rupture of their respective boundaries making them territorially unrecognizable, but also to each city's dubious inclusion of heterogeneous and contradictory spaces of 'otherness' in its premise. It is corroborated by the narrator and the goatherd's candid admissions regarding their failure in identifying comprehensible territorial demarcations between individual cities: ""That cannot be! I shouted. "I, too, entered a city, I cannot remember when, and since then I have gone on, deeper and deeper into its streets. But how have I managed to arrive where you say, when I was in another city, far far away from Cecilia, and I have not yet left it?" " (Calvino 138). Cecilia does not possess a clearly recognizable inside or an outside; it is elusive of restrictive

territorial confinements; it is a heterotopia. Foucault explains:

> . . . heterotopias, on the contrary, have the appearance of pure and simple openings, although they usually conceal curious exclusions. Anyone can enter one of these heterotopian locations, but, in reality, they are nothing more than an illusion: one thinks one has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, one is excluded. . . . Finally, the last characteristic of heterotopias is that they have, in relation to the rest of space, a function that takes place between two opposite poles. (335)

It must be comprehended at this juncture that the Foucauldian heterotopia possesses "the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other" (334). In this scenario, cities like Eudoxia, Beersheba and Andria behave like heterotopias by being the simultaneous occupiers of divergent and incongruous spaces—the subterranean, the terrestrial, and the celestial—that are inherently antithetical to each other, or are 'other' spaces to each other. Like a heterotopia, Eudoxia demonstrates a dubious spatial character by initially displaying "symmetrical . . . patterns" and then, by emulating the universe's vast, shifting and asymmetrical designs. The city that initially replicated "the carpet's harmonious pattern" now becomes "the true map of the universe" (87) and looks like "a stain that spreads out shapelessly" (87) thereby implicating its concomitant possession of two coexisting but mutually contravening attributes—one stable (represented through the image of the carpet), the other fleeting (represented through the map of the universe). The city is a heterotopia.

The city of Andria also displays the same, heterotopic terrestrial/celestial interminglings through a simultaneous and concomitant explosion/implosion of spaces between its inner and outer spheres. The narrator describes:

> The astronomers, after each change takes place in Andria, peer into their telescopes and report a nova's explosion, or a remote point in the firmament's change of colour from orange

to yellow, the expansion of a nebula, the bending of a spiral of the Milky Way. Each change implies a sequence of other changes, in Andria as among the stars: the city and the sky never remain the same. (Calvino 136).

Evidently, Andria's city-space and the sky are so absorbingly intertwined that any change in the former results in corresponding alterations in the latter's firmament in a way that Andria's inner terrestrial designs open up or explode into the sky. On the other hand, we learn that the city follows "an astral rhythm" in a scenario where ". . . its every street follows a planet's orbit, and the buildings and the places of community life repeat the order of constellations and the position of the most luminous stars" (136) which indicates the implosion of the celestial designs into Andria's inner city-space, thereby making themselves 'localizable' (to use a typical Foucauldian terminology). The city of Andria, therefore, displays a complex and ambivalent arrangement of space; its city-space explodes into the sky whereas, contrarily, the celestial space implodes into Andrea's city-space such that the city possesses not a stable, uniform and centered character, but an unstable and diversified one, like that of a heterotopia. Earlier in the text, we have encountered the city of Lalage where such heterotopic terrestrial/celestial interfusions are noticed through a peculiar, incredible and outlandish juxtaposition of celestial objects like the moon (deviated from its normal planetary orbit) and the terrestrial objects like the city spires (loosened and elevated from the Earth's binding, topographic grid) such that Lalage's city-space becomes a decentered, heterotopic terrestrial/celestial spatial conundrum.

According to Foucault, "Museums and libraries are heterotopias . . ." (335) for they create a conglomerate heterotopic domain of heterogeneous spaces and times juxtaposed in a single space, and the city of Fedora is perhaps its most explicative instance. We learn that Fedora exists only as a museum where multiple mini-models of the already-disappeared bigger Fedora are preserved and contained inside glass globes as the vestigial assemblages of its symbolic remnants. Intriguingly however, these mini-models are endowed with the innate capacity to potentially burgeon into bigger Fedoras in consonance with the shifting fantasies of the city's visitors. Fedora's maverick existence in the form of a museum replete with multiple, potentially regenerative mini-models makes it a heterotopia as these mini models are encoded with the heterotopic possibilities of generating divergent and mutually incompatible spaces, times and worlds juxtaposed in a single space.

As is evident in the case of Fedora, a heterotopia is not just a conglomeration of anomalous and antithetical spaces, but also of disparate times. Foucault explains:

> The idea of accumulating everything, on the contrary, of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place, . . . (334)

Such heterotopic multi-temporality is demonstrated by the strange and enchanting city of Laudomia—a city that is an aberrant combination of the city of the living, the city of the dead and the city of the unborn in a scenario where there are recurrent cross-territorial movements, migrations etc. by each city's citizenry into other cities leading to the creation of a spectacle of multigenerational polyvalence. This, in turn, results in each city's loss of its own spatio-temporal reclusiveness and its territory becomes divergent and multifaceted such that Laudomia becomes a heterotopia, a complex, decentered zone of interlocked spaces and mingled times.

Thus, the cities in the said novel exude, demonstrate and epitomize postmodernism's characteristic disavowal of the conventional space-time continuum. Their spatio-temporal patterns are "disorganized, heterogeneous and highly fragmented" (Bazzicchetto 98)—a tenet that itself is the defining feature of a heterotopia

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V. HYPERREAL CITIES: SIMULATION AND SIMULACRA IN INVISIBLE CITIES

Another curious and stimulating critical reception that Calvino's Invisible Cities can receive is its perusal through French sociologist Jean Baudrillard's path-breaking notion of simulation and simulacra, introduced by him in his famous book Simulacra and Simulation. A perusal of the mentioned novel along these lines would grippingly divulge that the narrated cities are neither real nor imaginary; they are in fact simulations of the cities; they are hyperreal cities which are indeed more real than the real. Such a presentation results in a thoroughgoing dismantlement of the real/imaginary binary or dialectic that has historically captivated our perception of the whole corpus of the vast and expansive world of materiality.

In the Baudrillardian parlance, the imitation, effacement and ultimate substitution of reality by images and signs through an act of simulation is the essential precondition of our postmodern mode of existence. Baudrillard's stern emphasis on the redundancy and virtual impossibility to trace, approach or unravel reality in its material absolution and on the only possible perception of the world through acts of simulation is explained by himself as: "By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—. . . It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real . . ." (2).

One can examine the hyperreal existence of the city of Tamara in its context. Marco's mesmerizing encounter with this city and his perception of the same only through clusters of signs, his inability to envisage the city through its exclusive material manifestations, the city's material adumbrations being completely camouflaged beneath a "thick coating of signs" (Calvino 12) etc. make the city manifest itself only in its hyperreal revelation, not though its concrete, material representations.

Marco's visual experience of the city through its hyperreal exposition is further affirmed by its airy, orphic and sign-mediated appearance before him where he recognizes its components like "a sailing ship, a hand, an elephant" (12) etc. in the air such that city demonstratively eludes any binding incarceration by its sheer and overweening materiality. A simulacrum rescinds "any underlying "real" reality" (D'haen 4) and the city of Tamara's tangible materiality getting thoroughly masqueraded by clusters of its emblematic, representational and substitutive, real signs makes it a hyperreal city. Apart from Tamara, Marco also encounters hyperreal cities like Zirma and Olivia which evince themselves only through their signs and images and particularly after visiting Olivia, Marco realizes that "Falsehood is never in words; it is in things" (54). The complete substitution of the real, material objects by an entire gamut of signs and images in the simulacral world of Invisible Cities is further acknowledged by the narrator in the following lines with absolute clarity and unequivocation: "As time went by, words began to replace objects and gestures in Marco's tales: first exclamations, isolated nouns, dry verbs, then phrases, ramified and leafy discourse, metaphors and tropes. (32)

One important point that must be emphasized at this juncture is that the postmodernist, hyperreal representation of the cities thwart Kubali's self-stultifying and egomaniac predilection to captivate his empire and cities through stable and finite models, through diagrammatic prefigurations, or through binding cartographic circumscriptions. Such free-flowing patterns of the cities sufficiently attest to the Baudrillardian dictum of hyperreality that postmodernist space "is utterly divorced from any underlying reference to an original model or archetype . . ." (Murphet118). These simulacral city-spaces also thwart, circumvent and dismantle the notions of subjective positioning, formation of corporeal, objective realities and central axes of power through panoptic surveillance etc. on which Kublai relied too heavily on, while contemplating for a fanciful delimitation of his empire through

well-formulated models and diagrams. Baudrillard explains:

> No more subject, no more focal point, no more center or periphery: pure flexion or circular inflexion. No more violence or surveillance: only "information," secret virulence, chain reaction, slow implosion, and simulacra of spaces in which the effect of the real again comes into play. . . . We are witnessing the end of perspectival and panoptic space (which remains a moral hypothesis bound up with all the classical analyses on the "objective" essence of power), and thus to the very abolition of the spectacular. (29-30)

It is important to mention at this juncture that in the postmodern world of simulation and simulacra, it is not just a space whose predetermined centrality gets contested and infringed, but time's chronology and linearity also confront similar fragmentations, disjunctions, inter-substitutions and resufflings. All coordinates—whether spatial or temporal or anything else—become subject to such disruptions as Baudrillard explains: "One does not see an alternative cosmos, . . .—one is from the start in a total simulation, without origin, immanent, without a past, without a future, a diffusion of all coordinates (mental, temporal, spatial, signaletic)— . . ." (125). Regarding a simulacrum's purposive repudiation of the traditional distinctions between past/present/future, Baudrillard writes: "These new objects are the poles of simulation around which is elaborated, . . .a hyperreality, a simultaneity of all the functions, without a past, without a future, an operationality on every level" (78).

The simulacral distortion of time's normal chronology is perhaps most fittingly demonstrated in the city of Adelma where its mingled populace is constituted by the living and the dead in a scenario where their shambolic amalgamation demystifies temporal chronology and distinctiveness. The strange, seemingly implausible and hallucinatory resemblances between the sailor on the dock and the dead soldier, between the old man holding a basket of sea urchins and a fisherman of Marco's childhood

time (now presumably dead), between the bearded fever victim and Marco's dead father, between the vegetable vendor and Marco's grandmother and finally, between the vegetable-buying girl and the already-dead, love-blinded girl in Marco's village are bright instances of such simulacral, non-chronological mix-ups. Even the city's denizens recognize Marco as someone who has returned from his death: "Perhaps, for each of them, I also resembled someone who was dead" (Calvino, Cities 85). The mix-up of the living and the dead populace in Adelma bespeaks the inception of a simulacral world order where the dead reenter into and represent themselves in the ambit of lived realities through their repetitive acts of simulation.

Thus, through their peculiar of simulacral characters, the cities establish that our postmodern condition of existence is representable only through floating chains of signs, images and signifiers that have replaced or substituted the entire corpus of traditional material reality which has lost its physical form, centrality and uniformity.

VI.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that Calvino's novel Invisible Cities can be read through multiple theoretical frameworks, as mentioned above, that would make the novel a representative postmodern text. These theoretical formulations collectively entail the total collapse of centered, monolithic and stable architectural textures; they establish the said novel as a palimpsest where there are randomized displacements and superimpositions of divergent topographic and temporal layerings; they demonstrate the steady destabilization of centered ontology at all levels and illustrate the thoroughgoing abrogation of coherent and logical episteme in a postmodern world. These theoretical templates, to which Calvino's said text astonishingly predates, curiously make the same available for multiple critical exegeses in the light of the fundamental conceptual fabrics of postmodernity. Calvino's ingenious anticipations and phenomenal fictional illustrations, in Invisible Cities, of the prevalence or the imminent advent of postmodernity into the

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realms of our existence make him one of the pioneering fictional exponents of postmodernity.

Notes:

i. In simple terms, arborescent model is a tree model. The arborescent model has remained very popular in the western epistemological practices (popularized by Descartes in particular) to denote a system of knowledge or structure that operates on the basis of a few fixed and rigid principles; it maintains a hierarchy within that structure. However, postmodern philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discard this kind of model calling it no more tenable in a scenario where a postmodern system does not conform to any particular form or model and remains thoroughly formless and open-ended. A heterotopic spatiality exudes a similar morphology that does not conform to any particular structural principle or model, may it be the arborescent model or anything else.

ii. It is D & G's master metaphor for a rhizome's unregulated and irregular growth along its exteriority. Rhizome's spilling over along its ruptured boundaries like a patch of oil shows its inherent defiance to any regular and concrete pattern of movement.

iii. Explosion and implosion are typical Baudrillard terms which refer to the erasure of the distinction between a particular space's inner and outer spaces. This is because the outer space implodes into the inner space of any territory whereas the restricted inner space of the territory explodes into the outer space such that each other's typical distinctiveness is lost. Similarly, the city of Andria is not able to separate its internal space from its external space in a scenario where the former explodes into the latter and the latter implodes into the former.

iv. Foucault frequently uses this expression in his mentioned essay to denote a defining feature of the heterotopia through which it includes extra-territorial qualities and attributes into itself—qualities which challenge and contest its own, inherent spatial character. In other words, heterotopia has this strange but unique ability to 'localize' outer and other spaces.

v. Panopticon is a prison-house model of eternal surveillance provided by French philosopher Jeremy Bentham where the prison guard sits at the central-top position and surveys the activities of the guards eternally. Kublai Kahn's desire for being the centrally positioned, eternal surveyor of his empire can be compared to this panoptical model of eternal surveillance.

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