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**ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS**

LONDON AS PALIMPSEST:  
GEOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY AND POSTWAR URBAN  
REGENERATION IN RECENT BRITISH LITERATURE  
(1975-2005)

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## ABSTRACT

Keywords: geocriticism, geographies of memory, palimpsest, mythopos, mnemotopos, language, entropic habitus, the urban spec(tac)ular.

This doctoral dissertation proposes a new interdisciplinary approach to the representations of London in recent British literature by exploring the interplay between reality and fiction in mapping the urban imaginary. Studying narrative space and its geography (from Ancient Greek γεωγραφία - “earth-writing”), an analogy may be drawn between textual strategies and mapping techniques. Literature functions as a map since it introduces the readers to manifold imaginary places, offering descriptions and landmarks designed to guide them through the created universes. Consequently, the examination of narratives as cognitive maps produced by writers/ cartographers will emphasize them as products of a geography that derives from both reality and fiction but exists independently.

By means of correlating geocriticism, spatial literary studies and memory studies, I investigate London as both a narrative spatial construct and a real city which stands under the sign of urban regeneration. Considering the plethora of literary works revolving around the cartography of the city and the complexity of the theoretical and conceptual framework, I inquire into a specific segment of the dimensions which the metropolis exhibits in fiction. This doctoral dissertation conducts a geocritical analysis of London in recent British literature published between 1975-2005, exploring the literary representations of the real urban restructurings prompted by the rebuilding projects aimed to revitalize the war and poverty-stricken districts of London, the reterritorialization and remapping of the metropolis by immigrants, the gentrification and displacement of communities, as well as the urban dissolution caused by terrorism. I argue that the London fiction written at the turn of the twenty-first century provides a record of the city in times of de/reconstruction, emphasizing the structure of London as a palimpsest, which becomes a central image in the selected literary works. As the title of the dissertation suggests, London is interpreted as a palimpsest, prone to being obliterated and rebuilt yet preserving traces of the past embedded in the urban fabric of the city. I also challenge the pre-eminence of the temporal organization of knowledge and contend that spatiality creates alternative ways of interpretation.

The research questions regarding the discursive and aesthetic complexity of London addressed in this dissertation are the following: What features of metropolitan London highlight the recent spatial, mental and social reconfigurations undergone by the city? How is cartography used to negotiate the connection between the metamorphosing effects of reconstructions on urban planning and the changes in experiencing the city locus? To what extent does the disturbing nature of the personal and collective past affect the connotations assigned to the multicultural London metropolis? How do the mind maps conjured in the selected novels mediate the imaginary geographies of contemporary London? In order to answer the research questions, the research objectives pursued are: to provide a theoretical overview of textual approaches to geographies of memory, to analyse the psychogeographic incursions into London as a city which undergoes a process of redevelopment yet preserves its sacred heterotopias and *lieux de mémoire*, to analyse the ironical reterritorialization of London by immigrants, to investigate the entropic habitus resulting from the pursuit of spatial justice in gentrified London and finally to examine the urban specularity and the spectacularity of urban simulations in order to address the current issue of portraying London as an alleged space of terror.

What this dissertation brings as a novelty is the reconsideration of literary spaces through the lens of the new field of geocriticism and spatial literary studies associated with memory studies, which allows for an interdisciplinary insight into the physical and psychological terrains proper to any city. Moreover, I contribute to the development of the field of research by proposing and developing a number of original concepts: *mythopos*, *mnemotopos*, *landguage*, *entropic habitus*, *urban specularity*. By using these original concepts, I examine how the textual city functions as a repository of memories and a gateway to the past, as the structural element in the narrative and as a space capable of producing countless geographies but also prone to destruction. Throughout this study, a special attention is paid to architectural practices and urban planning occurring after periods of destruction and reconstruction in connection to the individual urban experiences.

The primary sources I use in my research include the novels *Hawksmoor* (1985) by Peter Ackroyd, *City of the Mind* (1991) by Penelope Lively, *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith, *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, *High-Rise* (1975) by J.G. Ballard, *Mother London* (1988) by Michael Moorcock, *The Good Terrorist* (1985) by Doris Lessing and *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan. The reasoning behind the choice of this literary corpus was to narrow the selection of novels to a set of criteria. First, all novels are set in London and explore the literal or metaphorical

journeys of the characters across the city. Second, the novels were published between 1975 and 2005 while the narrated events convey a portrayal of the urban landscape, mindscape, atmosphere, lifestyle and characters in the context of the postwar urban regeneration of London. Since space is the focus, I propose the idea that London fiction may be read as a transhistorical epistemic source about spatiality which reveals a timeless pattern of destruction and rebirth. Third, I propose an analysis which explores the works of writers relevant to the British cultural scene, who are recipients of literary prizes, offering a balance of male and female writers, in order to provide a heterogeneity of perspectives while preserving a common narrative thread.

The secondary sources which have been essential for this doctoral dissertation include Bertrand Westphal's pioneering work *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011) and Robert T. Tally's *Spatiality* (2013) which reference the main theoretical strands and conceptual developments introduced by scholars in order to investigate the meeting point between literature and geography on the search for recurrent patterns which uncover the "making" of a place. The "spatial turn" was spurred by the changes occurring after the Second World War. Taking into account the metamorphosis of cities in an "epoch of simultaneity" (Foucault 22) defined by uncertainty and incredulity towards historical progress, Tally explains that the focus shifted towards a re-evaluation and re-interpretation of space. This doctoral thesis reveals the protean nature of London, whose recent transformation into a city assaulted by high-rises and tower buildings was brought by changes which harken back to the Blitz.

The incursion into memory studies employed the vital secondary source of Andreas Huyssen's *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003) from which I borrow the guiding principle of the city as palimpsest. The concept of palimpsest implies that spatiality, literature and memory involve similar devices, such as planning, structure, pastiche, encoding and decoding. The representations of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, places which act as depositories of collective memories, are examined throughout the research. Further conceptual tools are those of "collective memory", coined by Maurice Halbwachs in the study *The Collective Memory* (1980), referring to the stories embedded in the fabric of the city and Cathy Caruth's "double wound" in which the boundary between past and present collapses. The aforementioned concepts resonate with Homi Bhabha's notion of "third space" of cultural hybridity, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "deterritorialization" and the "non-places" of Marc Augé. The postwar strain on spatiality, which is investigated by focusing on hyperreality, coined by Jean Baudrillard in

*Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), reverberates in Pierre Bourdieu's habitus from *The Logic of Practice* (1992) which I associate with inner spaces and entropy (J.G. Ballard). The point of convergence of these concepts is the impact of global conflagrations on the physical and psychological terrains which overlap in the city.

Chapter one, entitled “‘Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice’: Textual Approaches to Geographies of Memory”, proposes an interdisciplinary approach which associates memory studies with geocriticism and spatial literary theory. In the theoretical part of the thesis, the idea advanced is that the concept of space represents a fundamental organizing principle in any literary work which may be simultaneously read as a narrative and a map by means of which the individual and collective memory of the protagonists can be brought to the surface despite the architectural dissolutions of the city. In the first subchapter, “A Brief History of the Spatial Turn: From Psychogeography and the Production of Space to Postmodern Geographies” (1.1.), I propose a brief overview of the spatial turn, ranging from the psychogeography of *derive* and *détournement* of the *flâneur*, first proposed by Guy Debord, the distinction between place and space made by Michel de Certeau, the Foucauldian heterotopia and the spatial triad of lived/perceived/conceived space, introduced by Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*), to the postmodern geographies which include concepts such as Fredric Jameson's “cognitive mapping” (*Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*) or David Harvey (*Social Justice and the City*) and Edward Soja's concept of “spatial justice” (*Seeking Spatial Justice*). I demonstrate that space is inextricably interwoven in the narrative structure, social formations and cultural practices which are textually portrayed. When examining the spatiality of the city, an emphasis on movement alone does not suffice to describe the broad spectrum of social exchanges and cognitive processes involved in everyday experiences. Thus mapping London involves following a geography of power and a thread of thought which connects all its structural aspects.

Furthermore, in the second subchapter, “Imaginary Geographies of the City: A Geocritical Approach to Literature” (1.2), I delineate the underlying principles of a geocritical analysis. In addition to Westphal and Tally as the main critical sources, I equally refer to space as a sensuous experience for Paul Rodaway and Sten Pultz Moslund, the relation between consciousness and places from the perspective of Eric Prieto as well as Marc Brosseau's parallel between literary works and geography. I infer that the author may be regarded as a creator of worlds who forges with words metaphorical maps and spatial trajectories. In the third subchapter, “Mapping the

Physical and the Psychological Terrains: Urban Dissolutions and the Semantics of Memory and Space” (1.3), I develop on the theory of geocriticism by correlating it with memory studies and by observing the connections between memory, space and urban dissolutions. Navigating London, the protagonists document and map the changes on the physical and the psychological terrains, both prone to collapse.

The second chapter, “The Presence of the Past: Geographies of Memory and Myth in London (*Hawksmoor* and *City of the Mind*)”, examines London as a contested space, oscillating between the historical and the mythological, the personal and the collective, the public and the hidden layers of meaning which construct the cityscape as a palimpsest. The two focal points of my investigation are, on the one hand, geographies of memory and the spatial manifestations of myth in Thatcherite London inasmuch as London is presented in both novels as a simultaneous city, a place where all events are instantaneous, which is reminiscent of the Borgesian spatial model and, on the other hand, the mapping of the city following the destruction and reconstruction of East End. In the subchapter “Mapping Memory and Myth in Thatcherite London” (2.1) I propose two original concepts: *mythopos* and *mnemotopos*. I form the term *mythopos* by combining the Greek word for story (“mythos”) with the Greek equivalent of place (“topos”). I observe the portrayal of London as a topos endowed with a mythical, supernatural, eternal quality epitomized by the seven churches of Nicholas Dyer. Conversely, I describe Cobham house or Frobisher house, designed by Matthew Halland, in one term as a *mnemotopos*. The term *mnemotopos* originates from the juxtaposition of the prefix “mnemo,” derived from the Greek word for memory (“mnēmē”) with “topos”, or place. Consequently, I demonstrate that London may be perceived at the border of memory and myth.

The second subchapter of chapter two, “Mapping the City: The De/Reconstruction of East End” (2.2) employs the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, coined by Mircea Eliade, in order to analyse the representative architectural typologies erected in East End. I use the term sacred heterotopia to refer to the seven churches from *Hawksmoor* which act as gateways to another plane of existence. By means of space, hierophanies occur once the sacred irrupts into the city to create an eternal return. The *lieux de mémoire* identified in the redeveloped historical houses convey the profane, personal connections to the urban space. I argue that both constructs act as *axis mundi* and demonstrate correspondence between the architect of churches and that of tower blocks considering that the former erects churches to channel a supernatural force, whereas the latter obeys the will of



the new capitalist power that worships money. I demonstrate that London is no longer composed of a chronological sequence of events, but is perceived as a focal point of energy which has a hold on the imagination of its inhabitants to the point that the urban continuum equally manifests itself in the obliteration of time and in an eternal quality assigned to the metropolis.

Chapter three, “Breaking *Landguage* Borders Through the Ironic Reterritorialization of London (*White Teeth* and *Small Island*)”, discusses London as a metropolis which is reterritorialized by immigrants. The Deleuzian term reterritorialization is used in this analysis to refer to the acts of effacement and remapping committed by the protagonists on a small scale throughout the novels. This quest is ironical since it does little to change the face of London, yet it intrinsically evokes the tensions underlying the spatial interactions of the Anglo-Jamaican Joneses, the Bengali Iqbals and the white Jewish Chalfens within multicultural London. First, I use the concept of reterritorialization to examine the superimposition of the cultural and spatial dimensions, arguing that immigrants reterritorialize London by transferring pieces of memory to their surroundings. Second, I demonstrate that immigrants undergo a process of mental deterritorialization which manifests itself through language. Third, I analyse the portrayal of third space and non-place, demonstrating that both spatial instances are connected to the issue of assimilation. Moreover, I acknowledge that the term *landguage* (“The Presencing of Place in Literature” 31) is only mentioned in the topopoetics of Moslund but it has not been explained or applied to any literary works. I develop the connotations of the term, analysing how immigrants reinvent the aesthetics and the language of the new environment.

The first subchapter of chapter three, “A Stranger in a Strange Land”: The Reterritorialization of Home(land) and Remapping of London by Immigrants” (3.1), starts from the idea advanced by Jacques Derrida in *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1998) that the mind can equally be envisaged as a territory susceptible to be erased and reinscribed. Both novels provide relevant examples of amnesia regarding the homeland and hypermnnesia of the colonizing country which hinders their integration. I argue that in order to cross the borders of *landguage* and begin the process of reterritorialization, protagonists must gain control over the language. Relying on Heidegger’s concept of “dwelling” and Gaston Bachelard’s poetics of space, I also argue that throughout the peregrinations of the characters, the rationale behind their action is, the idea of “home”, of a maternal shelter, which ontologically equates to homeland. Homes are used in both novels as microcosms. For instance, in *Small Island*, Hortense is incapable navigating

the public and private space without assistance due to her thick accent and outdated language. Conversely, the generation of immigrants born within the borders of the country integrates easily. In *White Teeth*, Millat adapts to a plethora of dialects and situations, invents a new language called Raggastani and has clout on the peripheral streets of North West London.

The second subchapter of chapter three, “Third Spaces and Non-Places in Multicultural London” (3.2) explores the changing shape of London which produces hybrid spaces. I argue that the third spaces and non-places are connected to the issue of assimilation. In this respect, the British Empire Exhibition is a symbolical third space capable of accommodating simulations of the Other, who is perceived only in terms of goods whereas project FutureMouse© anticipates the threat of the transformation of London into globalized space of transit designed to accommodate neutral areas of communication and consumption. Moreover, I examine the topographical contrast of North/ South, East/West and Inner/Outer London as cardinal points of cardinal importance. The protagonists gravitate towards Inner London but remain on the outskirts. In addition, I argue that there is a contrast between the liberal North-West London, represented by Willesden, and South West London, portrayed by the London borough of Lambeth, which has a strong religious stamp. By observing the effect of the deterritorialization of the immigrant mind on navigating the streets of London and the ensuing reterritorialization of the cityscape, London evolves towards heterogeneity, hybridity and spatial malleability.

Chapter four, entitled “Entropic Habitus and Spatial Justice in Gentrified London (*Mother London* and *High-Rise*)”, shifts the perspective from the alleged spatial threat of the invasion of immigrants to the wounds in the urban fabric caused by gentrification. I employ the concept of inner space, described as a space which reflects the inner life of the inhabitants, to argue that both novels delineate the effects of spatial dissolutions. The physical and the psychological strata of the city are interconnected. In this respect, Lefebvre observes the productive nature of space and Bourdieu develops the idea that this ability to shape space, to have spatial capital, results in habitus. I propose the original concept of “entropic habitus” to refer to the social space in which urban regeneration has produced a state of anomy and a divide between classes in line with the principle of entropy which regulates the world in the vision of Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard. The concept of spatial justice, which has recently started being used in literary criticism, completes the pursuit of analysing the connection between memory and cityscape in the larger context of unjust geographies at a global and local level.

The first subchapter of the fourth chapter, “New Wave Journeys into the Wounded Inner Spaces of East and West London” (4.1), analyses the new architectural layer added to the palimpsest of London with the election of Margaret Thatcher who saw the opportunity of transforming the buildings from East End affected by the Blitz into residential estates or office buildings. I demonstrate that the commodification of London in the form of urban simulations together with the imagery of the tower buildings appear to be consistent with the future envisaged by J.G. Ballard inasmuch as the deracinated cityscape is envisaged as being alienated from its past and driven by personal interests rather than respect for communal experience. Spatial injustice permeates as a result of class struggle, with the lower middle-classes violently pushing the boundaries of their assigned levels in the vertical city of *High-Rise*. Conversely, the upper class undertakes the politics of evicting the lower class from their homes and demolishing hundred-year old buildings in order to construct skyscrapers. I argue that the novels depict inner spaces in which the mind and the city coalesce, hence the proclivity for displaying an eclectic urban configuration which translates into psychopathology in the case of the inhabitants. The resulting habitus is entropic considering that the palimpsest nature of the city implies a cycle of destruction and reconstruction.

The second subchapter of the fourth chapter, “Urban Reconstructions and Gentrification as Invasion: Aural, Visual and Cognitive Spaces” (4.2) examines the triad of cityscape, mindscape and soundscape in relation to the principle of entropy in an attempt to investigate the effects of the aforementioned urban projects of revitalizing London once gentrification is exacerbated in the case of *High-Rise*, or once it is resisted in the case of *Mother London*. I demonstrate that both novels emphasize the centrality of owning property. In conformity with the concept of entropy, both novels foresee the failing performance of the high-rises themselves, which could purportedly degenerate in the next slums. Characters interact indirectly through the use of sound. They are in tune with the sounds and the motions of the city, letting themselves be carried away by the urban frenzy. Thus sounds echo architecture and architecture becomes sound. The concept of spatial justice developed by David Harvey and Edward Soja is employed to refer, in *Mother London*, to the dissension caused by policies which favoured the upper class at the expense of geographically excluding social or racial groups. In *High-Rise*, the concept applies to the distress of apocalyptic dimensions caused by the vertical class stratification in the allegorical high-rise building. In both instances, the ensuing conflicts reveal how the urban regeneration of London may lead to struggles

for space which have deeper implications than a mere spatial reconfiguration and superficial change in the aesthetics of the city. I demonstrate that while in *High-Rise* the total disregard for the past in the attempt to erase the palimpsest of memories embedded in the urban fabric results in the obliteration of the whole structure, in *Mother London* gentrification is acknowledged as a damaging force yet it is counterbalanced by holding on to memory and myth. Thus instead of the dissonance experienced by the inhabitants of the heterotopic high-rise in their individual pursuit of spatial justice, the collective polyphony of memory and myth in the London of Michael Moorcock ensures the endurance of the city.

Chapter five, entitled “London, a Space of Terror? (*Saturday* and *The Good Terrorist*)”, engages in an exploration of the private and public spaces within a London threatened by terrorism. I analyse the palimpsest of physical traumas inflicted upon the cityscape and psychological traumas of the perpetrators who threaten that which the protagonists value most – the security of their homes. I argue that both novels trace the connections between the private and the public spaces which become analogous under the strain of urban transformations. I refer to the connection between spatiality and terrorism by relying on the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek regarding the rise of simulations and the urban spectacle once the portrayal of the violent dissolutions of the city was mediated by mass media. Moreover, I use the theory of Bachelard that public spaces are imbued with the characteristics of private spaces and the concept of “double wound” proposed by Cathy Caruth which emphasizes the compulsion to repeat traumatic events. I continue with the idea of the fetishization of property, arguing that owning, claiming or destroying buildings offers agency to the characters.

The first subchapter of the fifth chapter, “Urban Specularity in Private Spaces” (5.1), investigates the house located in South-East London, at 43 Old Mill Road which becomes the headquarters of a communist organization, in contrast with the takeover of a domestic space situated in Fitzrovia, Central London, which mirrors the anxieties regarding terrorist attacks in the public space. I propose the concept of urban specularity in order to explore the relation between the mind and the city in the larger context of the spectacular character of the city, situated between reality and simulation, recomposed and decomposed by conflicts of memory. The origins of the term “specularity” resides in the concept of specular image introduced in psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan and is used in the doctoral thesis to refer to the projection of the psyche onto the infrastructure of the city, as well as the importance of architecture and territorial control in the

development of the psyche which inflicts terror or is affected by the phenomenon. In order to support this interpretation of the two novels, I analyse the imagery of the house either transposed in connection with filth and scatological vocabulary to reveal the unspoken problems which divide society, or in terms of an opulence which ignores the problems of the city regarding the gentrification and dissolution of London. Moreover, the memories of terrorist attacks, as a recent form of war, are interpreted in agreement with the vision of Halbwachs regarding memory as a social phenomenon which creates social cohesion. The image of the panoptical tower building in Fitzroy Square and of the “great carceral continuum” (Foucault 289) propagated by the extremist group convey a Foucauldian imagery of surveillance and control.

The second subchapter of the fifth chapter, “The Urban Spectacular in Public Spaces” (5.2) explores the transformations undergone by London in relation to the experiences of the protagonists. In agreement with the concept of urban specularity, there is a mirroring of the city and the mind which implies that both memories and spatial metamorphoses can account for the terrorist attacks. I use the concept of cultural memory introduced by Jan Assmann to refer to the redeeming quality of art since the engagement with or disengagement from literature determines either a search for urban solutions or the urban dissolution of the city. I argue that London is constructed as a city governed by simulations and dissimulations, a theatrical space according to Baudrillard and Žižek. Moreover, I employ the idea of Georg Simmel about the impact of the city on the mental life. The persistence of memory ensures the transhistorical character of London whose design is comparable to that of a palimpsest.

This research contributes to the enrichment of the new field of geocriticism and spatial literary studies by devising and developing a number of original concepts (*mythopos*, *mnemotopos*, *landscape*, *entropic habitus*, *urban specularity*) which connect real and fictional literary spaces and memory in the context of urban regeneration. The exploration of the urban regeneration, manifested in the rebuilding projects in the war and poverty-stricken districts of London, with an emphasis on both the spatial and social implications, in the immigrant reterritorialization of London, in the gentrification which creates an entropic habitus and in the metamorphoses caused by terrorist attacks, enables a transhistorical perspective on London as a palimpsest subjected to a cyclical obliteration and rewriting. The mapping of the textual city operates as a structuring element due to the fact that it is able to reveal an abundance of versions of the city framed by a single space. The innovative character of this doctoral thesis lies in the fact that it conducts narrative walks into

the textual city in order to answer one of the pressing current issues that its referent is confronted with, namely the radical transformation of the infrastructure and the changes in the social dynamics. London is envisaged as a site of transgressive spatiality which resembles a palimpsest whose endurance depends on the multifarious layers of meaning hidden in its structure. In this manner, literary London functions as an archive of memories as well as a catalyst of psychological responses engendering geographical consciousness, as the pillar of the narrative structure and a source of manifold imaginary geographies.

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