LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Superpositions: A Typology of Spatiotemporal Layerings in Buried Cities

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Abstract:
The essay sketches a typology of layered representations of urban history based on the question of how texts activate different strata beneath the cityscape. In describing these layers, we are guided by Walter Benjamin's concept of superposition or 'Überdeckungstransparenz' (as formulated in the *Arcades Project*), a specific mode of perception which allows for the simultaneous awareness of different temporal layers. What is central to our endeavour is the structural analogy of 'city' and 'text' – both in the sense of reading 'the urban landscape as a form analogous to that of a literary composition' (Sharpe and Wallock 1987: 11) and, conversely, of studying 'how a text can function like the city in its layering of meanings' (Gurr 2015: 24). We further take our cue from Martindale's distinction between 'diachronic and historical' approaches, allowing for a clear distinction between 'past' and 'present' on the one hand, and 'archaeological and synchronic' approaches layering different periods of time so as to suggest a timeless, simultaneous 'presence of the past' (*sensu* Eliot) on the other hand (Martindale 1996). We propose a matrix, as it were, of temporal and spatial 'directions' of layering, distinguishing between retrospective, simultaneous and prospective *temporal* superpositions and 'co-spatial' (layerings of different temporal strata of the *same* city) as opposed to translocal (overlay of *different* cities and spaces) *spatial* superpositions of different cities. We thus seek to provide a more nuanced outline of the textual strategies used to access, make visible (or at times construct) buried layers of spatialised, palimpsestuous urban memory.

Keywords: typology; historical layers; superposition; city; urban; palimpsest.

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Introduction

All cities contain buried cities, but each buried city is buried in its own way. Urban space is frequently theorised as archive (Sheringham 2010), as palimpsest (Kronshage, Sandten and Thielmann 2015) or as a multilayered excavation site of its own history (Huyssen 2003). Especially in science fiction or crime novels, a hidden city beneath the city is often where the real action takes place. In order to see where this fascination with buried cities stems from, one need only look at any given cityscape 'replete with monuments and museums, palaces, public spaces, and government buildings' (Huyssen 2003: 1) that allow us to trace each space's past and sometimes even to project its future. But no matter whether we deal with theorised, narrated or physical cities, two observations seem to apply to all of them: First, there are always a number of layers buried beneath their surface. Second, the way in which each layer is buried, and therefore also the way in which it can be excavated, is unique.

Since this omnipresence of layers in urban space, theory and literature often entails a rather vague, seemingly all-encompassing, conceptualisation of the distinct layerings, our aim here is to provide a matrix that can be used to categorise different forms of representing buried cities in literature and thereby better understand the ways in which these layerings function. Our guiding principle for this exploration is based on an individual perception of urban space that transcends time and space to uncover the strata beneath the cityscape: Walter Benjamin's notion of superposition or 'Überdeckungstransparenz'.

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin develops a notion of the interpenetration of different layers of time and of their simultaneous co-presence in urban space, a phenomenon he refers to as 'superposition' (1999: 172, 418, 854 *et passim*). This concept is never set out discursively in any coherent way by Benjamin. Thus, what Bolle (2000: 413) states about Benjamin's notion of historical cognition, namely that it has to be re-constructed from a large number of fragments scattered throughout the *Arcades* book, is also true of his notion of superposition and the reading of the layers of meaning in urban history. Our reading of Benjamin's notion of 'superposition' is indebted to Dieter Hassenpflug, who has explored its implications for urban semiotics. Hassenpflug summarizes the idea as follows:

> [Superposition is] the ability to remember the new – for instance by regarding present urban elements as elements of a spatialised memory and, in so doing, as anticipations of prospective urban realities. […] The technique of superposition points to history which is preserved in the elements of cities. (Hassenpflug 2011: 54)

Given a certain frame of mind – and Benjamin clearly characterises this frame of mind as that of a *flâneur* – this simultaneous co-presence can be perceived and understood by an urban observer. He even speaks of this 'interpenetration and superposed transparency' of different times in a given space as a 'perception of space [unique to] the flâneur' (Benjamin 1999: 546): 'thanks to this phenomenon, everything potentially taking place in this one single [space] is perceived simultaneously. The space winks at the flâneur: What do you think may have gone on here?' (418-19; cf. also 4, 390, 392, 418, 462, 841, 854, 879f.).

Thus, superposition refers to both temporal layering and to the ability to perceive it; Hassenpflug even refers to it as a 'technique' (2011: 54).

In an excellent discussion of Benjamin's view on modernity in the *Arcades Project*, Brüggemann speaks of two types of modernity, represented by Breton and Le Corbusier, of which the latter conceives the metropolis as a space of 'geometrical order and functional separations […] absolutistically related to the present', while the former regards it as 'a memory and image space of mutually overlaying and interpenetrating periods and time-spaces' (Brüggemann 2000: 595).[1] Though he does not comment on Benjamin's concept of 'superposition' here, it lies close at hand in the notion of the city as a time-spanning space of layered memory, an understanding which clearly anticipates the still-current notion of the city as palimpsest (for various aspects of this, cf. Assmann 2009; Butor 2000; Freud 1986: 16-18; Harvey 1989: 66; Hassenpflug 2006, 2011; Huyssen 2003; Martindale 1996; Sharpe and Wallock 1987: 9; Suttles 1984).[2]

According to this understanding, events occurring at different times superimpose themselves onto the same space if only the observer is in the right state of mind to perceive them *and* if the space offers points, traces or clues to which layerings can be anchored. Whether space or walker play the more active role in bringing these layers to the fore is debatable. In an attempt to group the distinct layerings into a typology that facilitates their analysis, we propose a matrix, as it were, of temporal and spatial 'directions' of layering. In this, we distinguish between *buried past*, *present* and *future* (or retrospective, simultaneous and prospective temporal superpositions) but also, within these categories, discern *co-spatial* (different temporal strata of the *same* city) as opposed to *translocal* (overlay of *different*, often remote, cities and local spaces, cf. Brickell and Datta 2011) spatial superpositions. This, we hope, may allow for a more nuanced outline of the textual strategies used to access, make visible, or at times construct buried layers of spatialised, palimpsestuous urban memory.

While this approach is not strictly speaking geocritical, it is indebted to observations such as Bertrand Westphal's when he explains that 'a geocritical analysis locates places in a temporal depth in order to uncover or discover multilayered identities, and it highlights the temporal variability of heterogeneous spaces. Spatial analysis reveals that present as asynchronous: our vision of time is not necessarily the same as our neighbor's.' (Westphal 2011: xiv). As both perception and representation of layers depend on a unique space as well as on the individual observer, the same space can reveal different layers and types of layering, even within the same text. Basing his remarks on Westphal, Eric Prieto comments on how, in a geocritical analysis, 'texts from different historical periods and cultures should be referenced in order to create an archaeological, or as he [Westphal] puts it, "stratigraphic", reading of the places in question.' (Prieto 2011: 21). While, in geocriticism, the creation of a 'stratigraphic reading' is the task of the researcher, we have found that texts which narrativise buried cities not only *appeal to* stratigraphic readings, but also *produce* them. Prieto goes on to suggest that a geocritical approach must not be limited to the study of one place but can also be applied to a type of place, which can be regarded as another geocritical component to our approach: the type of place we study is a narrativised buried city that produces layering in the minds of characters and readers alike. In a way, we therefore align our perspective with Sheila Hones, when she proposes that 'the novel can

be understood as a geographical phenomenon in itself, an event that emerges in individual readings which are nonetheless highly relational' (Hones 2011: 254).

Describing a literary text as a geographical event also speaks to the structural analogies between urban text and urban space – both in the sense of reading 'the urban landscape as a form analogous to that of a literary composition' (Sharpe and Wallock 1987: 11) and, conversely, of studying 'how a text can function like the city in its layering of meanings' (Gurr 2015: 24). A text can therefore very effectively produce the same superposition an urban space can generate and enable us to comment on the experience of walker and reader.

Buried Past: Co-spatial

Quite possibly the most intuitive way to think about reading buried cities is the unearthing of the past. Jerome Bruner posits the diachronic nature of narrative as a central feature of the way in which narratives construct reality and argues that 'what underlies these forms for representing narrative is a "mental model" whose defining property is its unique pattern of events over time' (Bruner 1991: 6). While this is only one possible 'mental model' – our conception of *buried present* is based on narrative synchronicity – Bruner's privileging of the diachronic nature of narrative emphasises how apparently 'natural' a reading of a text as a more or less linear progression through time really is. Narrative events are stacked up like strata beneath the narrative present, supporting or explaining the present moment, although not every narrative point of view allows access to every stratum. Reading narrated urban space in this way, as layers of *buried pasts*, we can further distinguish between two broad categories: mediated past and mimetic past. Dionne Brand's Toronto novel *What We All Long For* (2005), for example, intersperses the present of a neighbourhood with scenes taking place in its past, therefore employing a mimetic mode of representation. By revealing episodes from different migrant families' arrival in and experience of Toronto, Brand allows the reader to better understand the space they currently live in, although the places the characters used to relate to no longer exist. Since this way of representing a buried city space is fairly common and therefore straightforward, we would now like to focus on mediated pasts instead.

Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) is a novel that 'reads history back into the city through Julius' [the protagonist's] wanderings, in which he observes and uncovers the lost histories that contributed to make New York what it is today' (Hartwiger 2016: 3). Unlike Brand, Cole does not *show* the *buried past*, but *tells* it, often from a seemingly detached perspective that evokes the 'objectivity' of a historical essay. A prominent example that deals quite literally with the *buried past* of New York is his description of a small memorial demarcating a burial ground:

> The tiny plot was what had been set aside now to indicate the spot, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the site had been large, some six acres, as far north as present-day Duane Street, and as far south as City Hall Park. Along Chambers Street and in the park itself, human remains were still routinely uncovered.

> But most of the burial ground was now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government.
>
> Into this earth had been interred the bodies of some fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves, but then the land had been built over and the people of the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground. [...] Then the dead returned when, in 1991, construction of a building on Broadway and Duane brought human remains to the surface. (Cole 2011: 220)

Cole here reminds us of several *buried pasts* at once: the time of slavery, the time during which that past was, again quite literally, paved over, the time at which the past resurfaced and the time at which the memorial was constructed to acknowledge the past. Placing the coordinates of the original burial plot by using specific and easily verifiable locations in New York is a strategy which grounds the past in a space that suppresses and supplants it. As Huyssen points out, 'representations of the visible will always show residues and traces of the invisible' (Huyssen 2003: 10), although the degree to which the invisible, buried space is visible changes over time. When Cole writes that 'the dead returned', he evokes gothic images of a haunted past that returns to life and demands to be seen.

Describing the site of a more recent trauma, Cole makes even more explicit how the past seems to be physically accessible: 'The place had become a metonym of its disaster. I remembered a tourist who once asked me how he could get to 9/11: not the site of the events of 9/11 but to 9/11 itself, the date petrified into broken stones.' (Cole 2011: 52). This layer of the past is, in fact, not buried but much more often described as a highly visible open wound. This juxtaposition with the many hardly visible pasts, especially those connected to slavery, colonialism and racism, turns Julius' gaze onto the city into a series of historical revelations – despite the fact that the protagonist's credibility is undermined by the last part of the novel. The turmoil of Julius' own past is first projected onto city space during his travels in Brussels, when a rainy day reminds him of his first, traumatizing, sexual experience in childhood, which took place during a downpour. Although this day is not explicitly connected to the rape the reader learns about much later in the novel, the hidden city carries a sense of unease:

> The little street we were walking on had a hundred years ago been a stream, not a street. It had been covered over by city planners, and waterside houses suddenly found themselves looking out on traffic. But the water still coursed underground, along the entire length of the street, and that water was returning now, in the form of rain, heavy waters above and flowing waters below. (Cole 2011: 145–46)

The water, symbolising a past that cannot be suppressed, resurfaces with unrelenting force and presses against manmade barriers and structures both in Brussels and in Julius' mind.

A variety of this co-spatial *buried past* occurs in laments of a past glory that is no longer to be found, as in Du Bellay's lament in Sonnet III of *Les Antiquités de Rome* (1558), here quoted in Edmund Spenser's famed 1591 translation:

> Thou stranger, which for Rome in Rome here seekest,
> And nought of Rome in Rome perceiv'st at all,
> These same olde walls, olde arches, which thou seest,
> Olde palaces, is that which Rome men call.
> Behold what wreake, what ruine, and what wast,
> And how that she, which with her mightie powre
> Tam'd all the world, hath tam'd herselfe at last,
> The pray of Time, which all things doth devowre.
> Rome now of Rome is th' onely funerall,
> And onely Rome of Rome hath victorie;
> Ne ought save Tyber hastning to his fall
> Remaines of all: O worlds inconstancie!
> That which is firme doth flit and fall away,
> And that is flitting doth abide and stay. (Spenser 1908: 108)

The speaker seeks to find and experience a Rome that is no longer there, but finds instead imprints of past grandeur, buildings and history amidst the ruins.

While it is thus entirely possible to use the *buried past* to write about individual, even private pasts, it seems to us that, at least in urban texts, there is a clear tendency to use the *buried past* to reveal something about a larger space or group, whether that be a neighbourhood, a monument, a particular group of inhabitants or the city in its entirety. This tendency manifests itself most clearly in mediated pasts.

As an underlying figure of thought, this way of representing the city as layered, spatialised memory is reminiscent of Gadamer's notion of the temporal distance between the writing of any given text and a later interpretation not as a barrier to be overcome. Rather, according to Gadamer, this temporal distance is to be seen as a benefit and the different interpretations a text has received in the course of its history of being read can be seen as accreting to the text as levels of its meaning and, in a sense, become part of the meaning of that text itself (Gadamer 1960: 296-312, ,'Die hermeneutische Bedeutung des Zeitenabstandes' and 'Das Prinzip der Wirkungsgeschichte').

Buried Past: Translocal

A less intuitive but also fairly common form of layering is to be found in representations of cities using older, frequently prestigiously 'classical', phases of a different city as a foil. It is hardly accidental that a large number of such texts are to be found in the Augustan Age: at a time when London was the largest city in Western Europe and the centre of a growing Empire, the British capital was frequently represented as the *new Rome* (a self-conception also expressed in contemporary architecture, landscape gardening and in the visual arts). In this vein, John Gay's *Trivia* (1716) uses the past of an entirely different city, namely ancient Rome – in a mixture of references to Juvenal, Horace and a host of other classical intertexts – as a blueprint for a walk through London (for the classical echoes, cf. the edition by Brant and Whyman (2007), as well as Kirk (1981) and Braund (2007); for

later representations of London as Rome in the Victorian period and in Modernism, cf. Finch (2016) and Cook (1979)).

Gay's poem, in many ways an 'urban georgic' (Rogers 2005: 29; for questions of genre, cf. also Kirk 1981), deploys a mock-heroic, pseudo-serious tone throughout its three books and some 1,300 lines plus a mock-scholarly index. It makes recommendations about how to negotiate a walk through the city by day and by night, including appropriate footgear and clothing, signs of the weather, how to urinate without offending passers-by, how to avoid falling masonry and emptied chamber pots, how not to lose a walking companion in the crowd, or how to avoid (or find) prostitutes. In numerous instances, the city is referred to as a complex sign system to be decoded:

> Thus far the Muse has trac'd in useful Lays
> The proper implements for wintry ways;
> Has taught the walker with judicious eyes
> To read the various warnings of the skies. (Gay 2007: II, 1-4)
>
> Nor less do certain signs the town advise … (I, 143)
>
> Be sure observe the signs, for signs remain
> Like faithful land-marks to the walking train. (II, 67-68)
>
> Careful observers, studious of the town,
> Shun the misfortunes that disgrace the Clown. (II, 285f. cf. also II, 275ff. or II, 307)

Throughout the text, Juvenalian, Horatian and other classical echoes remind readers to regard ancient Rome as a foil for London. The lineage, however, is extended beyond Rome, with other references pointing further back to Thebes, Troy, and Athens. In this vein, the speaker, describing an attempt to force his way back to a walking companion lost in the crowd, establishes an analogy with Aeneas desperately seeking his first wife Creusa after the sacking of Troy:

> Yet I (perhaps too fond) if chance the tide
> Tumultuous, bear my partner from my side,
> Impatient venture back; despising harm,
> I force my passage where the thickest swarm.
> Thus his lost bride the *Trojan* sought in vain
> Thro' night, and arms, and flames, and hills of slain. (Gay 2007: III, 91ff.)

What lies behind this, beyond the notion of the *translatio imperii* from Athens to Rome to London as the 'new Rome' (cf. section below, 'Buried Future: Co-Spatial'), is also the myth of Brutus of Troy, legendary descendant of Aeneas and allegedly the eponymous founder and first King of Britain and, according to some versions, founder of a New Troy that was to become London. This story, known since the 9th-century *Historia Britonum*, was recounted in more detail in Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th-century *Historia Regum*

Britanniae. To trace the lineage of London from ancient Troy is, of course, as spurious as it is suggestive in the context of an imperial London that is frequently cast as the 'new Rome'.

While a comparable passage establishes a link to Oedipus and Thebes (Gay 2007: III, 213ff.), the main foil for Gay's contemporary London is ancient Rome, suggesting that the walk through London *Trivia* represents, on another temporal level, a walk through ancient Rome. The title of Braund's essay (2007), one of the best discussions of classical references in *Trivia*, is telling: 'Gay's *Trivia*: Walking the Streets of Rome'.

A comparable translocal *buried past* is to be found in Samuel Johnson's 1738 poem 'London: A Poem in Imitation of Juvenal's Third Satire' (Johnson 1984: 2-8; for a typology of eighteenth-century imitations and adaptations of Roman classics, cf. Gurr 2005). Closely modelled on Juvenal's Rome – in parts so closely as to be virtually a translation of Juvenal – Johnson's poem portrays London as a hotbed of crime, depravity and dirt. Where Juvenal, after a brief introduction by a speaker, has Umbricius explain why he leaves Rome for Cumae, Johnson's imitation very closely follows the pattern by having Thales explain to the speaker of the poem why he feels compelled to leave London for Wales. Both the speaker and Thales here complain about the dangers and discomforts of living in London:

> Tho' grief and fondness in my breast rebel,
> When injur'd Thales bids the town farewell,
> Yet still my calmer thoughts his choice commend,
> I praise the hermit, but regret the friend,
> Who now resolves, from vice and London far,
> To breathe in distant fields a purer air,
> And, fix'd on Cambria's solitary shore,
> Give to St. David one true Briton more.
> For who would leave, unbrib'd, Hibernia's land,
> Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
> There none are swept by sudden fate away,
> But all whom hunger spares, with age decay:
> Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire,
> And now a rabble rages, now a fire;
> Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
> And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
> Here falling houses thunder on your head,
> And here a female atheist talks you dead. (Johnson 1984: 1-18)

> Prepare for death, if here at night you roam,
> And sign your will before you sup from home. (224-25)

> In vain, these dangers past, your doors you close,
> And hope the balmy blessings of repose:
> Cruel with guilt, and daring with despair,
> The midnight murd'rer bursts the faithless bar;

> Invades the sacred hour of silent rest,
> And plants, unseen, a dagger in your breast. (236-41)

Without a single explicit reference to Juvenal (apart from the title and an epigraph), the poem throughout its 263 lines relies on familiarity with the original for its palimpsestic effect. Commenting on just *how* closely Johnson's London is reminiscent of Juvenal's Rome (and shares its dangers and depravities), Kirk in his discussion of Augustan adaptations of Juvenal leading up to Gay's *Trivia* appropriately remarks that '[i]n 1738, Johnson's "London" would show how fully interchangeable the English metropolis was for Juvenal's Rome' (Kirk 1981: 263).

In both texts, the position of Rome as foil to London established by means of references to or parallels with the classics serves numerous purposes: while it dignifies London by affirming its status as the 'new Rome', the comparison also supports the display of learned wit, the demarcation (and subversion) of genre boundaries, the borrowing of cultural authority, as well as a – serious or mock-serious – didactic impetus.

Buried Present: Co-Spatial

In *The Waste Land* (Eliot 1974a), arguably the quintessential poetic representation of layered urban memory, this layered texture is partly established through the suggestive combination of extreme condensation by means of multiple allusions with the repetition of key phrases connecting different sections of the text ('Unreal City', l. 60, 'Unreal City', l. 207, 'Unreal', l. 376). However, the closest textual equivalent of the palimpsestic layering of memory as spatialized in the city is the layering of texts from different periods, as in the layering of Spenser's pastoral view of the river Thames into contemporary London in 'The Fire Sermon' ('Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song', ll. 176, 183f.), of Ophelia's parting words into the pub conversation (l. 172), or in the sudden appearance of a combatant from the Punic Wars in the crowd on London bridge (l. 70). Though there are references to a large number of places in European as well as global cultural history, the cumulative effect of the majority of references is to suggest a layered texture to London (cf. Martindale's assertion that '*The Waste Land* is a London poem'; Martindale 1996: 114; for *The Waste Land* as a key text in the 'visionary historical' tradition, cf. Finch 2016).

If we follow Martindale's distinction between two 'models for our understanding of the past, the first historical and diachronic, the second archaeological and synchronic' (1996: 117), the notion of the past in *The Waste Land* clearly adheres to the 'synchronic' camp. Martindale appropriately refers to 'Eliot's theory of poetry [as] in part an "archaeological" one, in terms of recessive layers of meaning [which are] brought to simultaneous life' (1996: 116, also 115). This 'archaeological and synchronic' notion of the co-presence of the past in the present suggests a philosophy of history according to which, as we later read in the opening of 'Burnt Norton,' 'all time is eternally present' (Eliot 1974b: l. 4). However, nearer the time of writing *The Waste Land*, Eliot famously outlined this view in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in which he defines what he calls 'the historical sense':

> [The historical sense] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (Eliot 1975: 38; for Eliot's notion of literary tradition in the light of the palimpsest, cf. Dillon 2007: 37 and 61)

Though we should be wary of uncritically reading into *The Waste Land* Eliot's aesthetics as outlined in the essay, which appears to be far more aesthetically conservative than his practice, in *The Waste Land*, we find a remarkably close textual equivalent to the notion of 'superposition' and the presence of the past in the physical urban environment as Benjamin outlines it.

This collapsing of past and present into a timeless continuum effectively suggests the palimpsestic layering both of physically built urban fabric – where, for instance, an underlying medieval layout may still be visible in even the most heavily bombed and rebuilt European city – and of memory in the contemporary city.[3]

Buried Present: Translocal

In her analysis of the spatiotemporal trajectories between New York, Mumbai and London, Maria Ridda 'regard[s] the city as the site where different layers of time and space, the contrasting spatial and temporal segments of colonialism, postcolonialism and globalisation "interact and oppose one another"' (Ridda 2015: 50). Ridda bases this observation on Neelam Srivastava's reading of Bakhtin's heteroglossia as dialogicity and thereby posits that every city can contain translocal layers and chronotopes. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a novel which also serves as an example for Ridda, events unfurling in New York City and Kalimpong, a hill station in West Bengal, run parallel and create a sense of simultaneity that ends in a crescendo of ever shorter, place-alternating chapters and a return from New York. In the process of the narration, the two settings are aligned through spatial analogies in both the structural composition of the narration (increasingly shorter chapters when characters approach each other across different locations) and the structures of narrated places (increasing altitude mirroring social status in all locations). Most prominently, both the metropolis and the hill station physically reinforce the 'higher' and 'lower' positions their inhabitants occupy in society: in New York, the rich and famous live in penthouses high above the basement rooms the protagonist Biju sleeps in, whereas in Kalimpong, the richest and most educated live higher up on the slope of the mountain. Commenting on such spatially implemented hierarchical structures in the novel, especially in airports, Masterson suggests that *The Inheritance of Loss* challenges 'the foundations upon which these stratifications are built' (2010: 424), resulting in 'disruptions within specific sites spill[ing] over' (423). The actions suggesting simultaneity and the settings that build up more and more structural analogies cause the cities to invade each other's present. This translocal mutual invasion of the present,

however, remains visible only to certain groups of inhabitants and is therefore 'buried', as it were.

In *The Maestro, the Magistrate & the Mathematician* (2014), Tendai Huchu uses a similar strategy to open up translocal spaces in Edinburgh, the main setting of the novel (for a more detailed reading of the novel and background on Huchu, see Mattheis 2016). During his daily walk around Arthur's Seat, a hill in the middle of the Scottish capital, the Magistrate walks himself into a state of mind in which a simple topographical similarity to Bindura – his hometown in Zimbabwe, which also has a hill at its centre – triggers a superposition of Bindura over Edinburgh. The way in which the Magistrate describes his mode of perception suggests that it is not just a memory, but a timeless imprint of Bindura that suddenly permeates Edinburgh:

> He found he could clear his mind when walking. It was as though the act of perambulation was complemented by a mental wandering, so he could be in two, or more, places at the same time. His physical side being tied to geography and the rules of physics, his mental side free to wander far and wide, to traverse through the past, present and future, free from limits, except the scope of his own imagination. (Huchu 2015: 13)

Despite the fact that the Magistrate has lived in Edinburgh for many years and has not visited Bindura for a long time, his description that 'he could see Bindura, the low prospect, the giant mine chimneys in the distance' (Huchu 2015: 18) suggests that it is Bindura as he imagines it to be in the present moment that layers itself over Edinburgh, underlining how 'the act of remembering is always in and of the present' (Huyssen 2003: 3). The translocal *buried present* is uncovered by a ritualistic combination of walking, memory and place attachment in an almost *nekyia*[4]-like link to the place beneath the place. An invisible spatial layer that is only visible to a specific character in a specific mode of perception can therefore be read as a subtle comment on place attachment (for studies on the concept of place attachment, see Altman 1992 or Manzo 2014), as the hidden layer can be used both to contrast with and to build a connection to the visible space. Contrary to the *buried past* and the broader perspectives it fosters, we could therefore deduce that the *buried present* lends itself to further examinations of the relationship between the individual and the city.

Buried Future: Co-Spatial

A far less common and arguably somewhat counter-intuitive form of 'palimpsestic superimposition' (Martindale 1996: 137) is the *proleptic* superposition of *later* strata of a city onto the main temporal layer of a text; the future of a city is projected onto or rather extrapolated from its present (or, to complicate matters further, its past). The classic instance is to be found in the passage in which Aeneas walks over sites of later Roman grandeur in book VIII of Virgil's *Aeneid* (cf. Martindale 1993: 50-52; Reeves 1999: 13 *et passim*). Aeneas here accompanies old king Evander, Arcadian founder of Pallantium, a settlement on the site that was later to become Rome. In Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*, Evander is even referred to as the 'founder of the Roman tow'rs' (Virgil 1989: VIII, l. 312).

Initially, Evander 'conventionally' refers to the prehistory of the sites he shows Aeneas (cf. VIII, 314-319). In the ensuing passage, however, as Evander continues his walk with Aeneas, the narrator refers to sites that were *later* to be major Roman landmarks:

> Then shews the forest, which, in after times,
> Fierce Romulus for perpetrated crimes
> A sacred refuge made; with this, the shrine
> Where Pan below the rock had rites divine:
> Then tells of Argus' death, his murder'd guest,
> Whose grave and tomb his innocence attest.
> Thence, to the steep Tarpeian rock he leads;
> Now roof'd with gold, then thatch'd with homely reeds.
> A reverent fear (such superstition reigns
> Among the rude) ev'n then possess'd the swains.
> […]
> Discoursing thus together, they resort
> Where poor Evander kept his country court.
> They view'd the ground of Rome's litigious hall [the later Forum Romanum]
> (Once oxen low'd, where now the lawyers bawl). (Virgil 1989: VIII, 337-350, 359-362)

The text thus proleptically suggests an unfolding of the future city from its present-day form, but intriguingly leaves open whether this development proceeds by means of path-dependencies or is contingent on future interventions. Functionally, by staging an encounter – even a military alliance against the *Latini*– between Aeneas and Evander in his role as the founder of one of the settlements that were later to be merged into Rome, Virgil's account clearly serves to establish a continuity between Greek and Roman history. This is made all the more significant by means of the proleptic reference to sites of later Roman grandeur precisely in the account of this encounter. Such suggestions of historical continuities by means of palimpsestic layering, like the suggestion of a translocal continuity – for better or worse – between Rome and London in the Augustan Age (discussed above), thus lend themselves to ideologically charged suggestions of a *translatio imperii*.

What comes to mind in conceptualizing such seemingly anachronistic proleptic layering is Harold Bloom's similarly counter-intuitive notion – present in one form or another from *Anxiety of Influence* to *The Western Canon* and beyond – that a later text can retroactively change the meaning of an earlier text, or that canonical influence proceeds backwards, as it were (Milton reading the Romantics as opposed to the Romantics reading Milton). Bloom's counter-intuitive notion of a retroactive modification of literary history and of historical understanding as well as the proleptic layering of urban history explored here – although apparently proceeding in opposite chronological sequence (retroactively as opposed to proleptically), both, we suggest, raise similar questions concerning "natural" chronology, chronology as mere sequence vs. chronology as causality, determined vs. open futures, contingency and the temporal directionality of historical understanding.

Buried Future: Translocal

The translocal *buried future* is quite probably the most abstract category in our typology. While examples of translocal movement from science fiction, climate change fiction or apocalyptic dystopian narratives set in the future – a frequently discussed example being Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) – may readily come to mind, these types of narratives project a future only when observed from outside their diegesis. Since we are here considering the coordinates of time and place established within the narrative, these texts – despite being set in our future – generally deal with their *buried pasts*. Nonetheless, we have tentatively identified narrative instances that may be read as translocal *buried futures* in a different type of narrative.

In *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, magical doorways suddenly appear in an unnamed war-torn city. Whoever steps through these doors is transported to an entirely different part of the world, and we soon find out that such doors exist all over the planet. While the narrative focusses on Saeed and Nadia – and their route from Mykonos to London to Marin and, finally, back to the unnamed city – there are several passages that reveal accelerated travel everywhere and project futures for a world marked by flight. When Saeed, for example, reflects on 'layers of nativeness' (Hamid 2017: 198), he points out that one layer of nativeness in the US context was created long ago by violent removal and by large groups of people being transported to America as slaves, and wonders whether that is 'a stratum of soil that perhaps made possible all future transplanted soils' (Hamid 2017: 198). Saeed here suggests that the future may essentially be translocal and the new structure of Marin and San Francisco, created by travellers through doors of the sort described in the novel, may not remain a state of exception but become the norm. Nadia similarly describes the new city, in which change comes and goes but lacks any dramatic outcomes. After the new inhabitants start to realise they can simply stay, work and live, 'plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now' (Hamid 2017: 217). For some, these desirable futures can be built where they are, but for Nadia and Saeed a desirable future will take place in the city they left behind. A potentially peaceful future is therefore projected translocally.

Katherine Hallemeier's reading of Adichie's *Americanah* (2014) presents a similar idea of a desirable future of one place being projected not onto but by means of a different one:

> Adichie's rendering of Nigerian middle-class mobility, I suggest, hinges upon a comparative approach that examines the centrality of the United States to a Nigerian middle-class imaginary. The aspirational Nigerian middle class that *Americanah* celebrates, however, is by no means an iteration of its American counterpart. Adichie's novel challenges a narrative in which the US models class mobility for the world in favor of one in which contemporaneous national histories have produced different potentials and limitations for the individual, and especially for the black woman, who aspires to a normative middle-class life. *Americanah* does not so much speak to the US of the present reality of African lives as it speaks of the US in order to better articulate a desirable Nigerian future. (Hallemeier 2015: 235)

This future imaginary, constructed between Princeton and Lagos, is buried beneath a narrative surface that entices the reader to focus on the love story between Ifemelu and Obinze. While global and glocal concerns are obviously an issue, they appear to focus mainly on the present moment and the immediate future. Reading for extrapolations about a less individual and more distant future requires a bit of 'digging', which is why we can say that Hallemeier does not simply analyse but unearths a translocal *buried future*.

One main function of translocal *buried futures*, at least in contemporary novels, therefore seems to be a projection of peaceful and desirable futures, either from a distant place onto the future of the place of origin or through the foil of a place that meets some of the desired conditions already. Especially in a literary age that tends to favour dystopian models to imagine a future, this tendency is noteworthy and should be explored much further than is possible in our brief observations here.

Conclusion

We would like to end with one of the most iconic endings in the history of film, that of the 1968 classic *Planet of the Apes*, which adds a further twist to our notion of the translocal *buried future*: Astronaut Taylor (Charlton Heston) leaves Earth with his crew in 1972 and, having travelled at nearly the speed of light for 18 months of ship time, in what must be the year 3978 in terms of Earth time, crash-lands on a desolate planet on which primitive humans are dominated by apes. In a shocking moment of revelation at the end of the film, riding around a corner on the beach, he sees the upper half of the Statue of Liberty rising out of the sand and realizes he has returned 'home' to a post-apocalyptic earth.

This much-cited ending quite literally portrays a *buried past*. More precisely, however, in the logic of the film, this is a future *buried past* (also in the sense of the future perfect tense of 'what will have happened'). In keeping with the film's obvious didactic orientation (and again in the logic of the future perfect tense), one obvious function or purpose of this ending is to warn what may happen, or rather, from a future vantage point, 'what will have happened' unless humanity mends its ways. On a more positive note, this is precisely what the German Foundation FUTURZWEI (literally: 'future perfect') seeks to achieve: a more sustainable, resilient and liveable future, with the telling of success stories of how, again from a future vantage point, this 'will have been achieved' (cf. futurzwei.org). It may be interesting to note that their most recent *FUTURZWEI Zukunftsalmanach* – literally *The FUTURE PERFECT Future Almanach 2017/18: Stories of Good Stewardship of the World* – should come with a focus on 'the city' (cf. Giesecke, Hebert & Welzer 2016).

Where the *buried past*, then, frequently reads the city in a larger, historic sense and the *buried present* often confronts us with more individual, selective perspectives on city life, the *buried future* reveals wishes and desires from both a collective and an individual viewpoint and oftentimes constructs a narrative that warns us to heed the advice it scripts. While the different types of layering we have described each have specific functions (some specific to individual texts, some, we have suggested, more or less generic), we would finally like to argue that the different types of temporal layering – *buried past*, *buried present* and *buried future*, each in co-spatial as well as translocal varieties – all serve to suggest three types of 'urban palimpsest'. Firstly, through the temporal layering of different historical strata, any

individual text can thus become a palimpsest, a layered form of memory. Secondly, the different historical strata of writing about the city and cities make (urban) literary history as a whole a palimpsest of layers, strategies, individual representations and their intertextual repercussions. Thirdly, and taken together, these two types of palimpsest – the individual text with its specific historical layers and the history of urban representations in the archive of urban representations collectively – both suggest the palimpsestic nature of 'the city' (both the individual city and 'cityness' as a generic concept) as a form of co-spatial as well as translocal layers of spatialized urban memory.[5]

Notes

[1] Original: 'absolutistisch auf die Gegenwart bezogen […], ein Wahrnehmungsraum geometrischer Ordnung und funktionaler Trennungen' [Corbusier] vs. '[ein] Gedächtnis- und Bild-Raum einander überlagernder und durchdringender Zeiten und Zeit-Räume' [Breton].
[2] This outline of Benjamin's notion of superposition reuses material from Gurr 2015.
[3] This discussion of *The Waste Land* reuses material from Gurr 2015.
[4] Unlike the *katabasis*, which is a physical descent into the underworld as for example in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the *nekyia* denotes a heroine or hero seeking council from inhabitants of the underworld by performing a ritual that allows them to conjure up spirits of the past.
[5] This might be illustrated by means of the *Planet of the Apes* ending: On the one hand, this ending itself suggests several temporal layers: that of the crew's departure from a war-torn earth in 1972 (invoked already in the opening scene in Taylor's rather gloomy final log before joining his crew in their deep sleep), then (implicitly) the apocalypse that led to the destruction of human civilization at some point during the crew's absence from earth, and finally the time of the diegetic 'present', the year 3978, with the half-submerged Statue of Liberty as an iconic reminder of the first two layers. Secondly, on the level of the history of urban representations, this ending is part of a succession of apocalyptic scenes of urban destruction in literature and film (with later films frequently referencing this iconic ending), which superimpose themselves one upon the other. Finally, the city – both New York City specifically and the human institution and cultural achievement of cityness generally (or what remains of both) – thus becomes a palimpsest of (submerged) layers of memory.

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