Transgressive Spatiality and Multiple Temporality in Jim Crace's *Arcadia*

Petr Chalupský

Abstract

Arcadia (1992), Jim Crace's most distinctively urban novel, bears the idiosyncratic features of its author's writing: it is a deceptively simple story of vague geographical and historical setting conceived as a parable of the current world concerns, it portrays a community in a transitional moment of its existence, and it places special emphasis on spatial representations of its fictitious environment which assume metaphorical properties that convey the story's rich ideas. Moreover, as a writer focusing on moral issues with a leftist political outlook, Crace has been consistent in his criticism of the neoliberal market economy and its negative impacts on communal values, a view which is also voiced in the novel. This paper makes use of the theoretical premises of Transmodernism as well as analytical tools of phenomenologically focused geocriticism to demonstrate that Arcadia *can be subsumed within so-called transmodern fiction. This critique of globalized capitalism is carried out through sites Eric Prieto terms as the entre-deux, the in-between. Accordingly, the paper attempts to demonstrate how the novel's liminal and heterogeneous places display non-linear and complexly interrelated temporalities which are indicative of their role within the city's progress.*

In terms of subject matter, Jim Crace's novels can be characterised by two interlinked features: a distinctive imaginative rendering of various landscapes and cityscapes, and the theme of "communities in transition."[1] The former has earned his fictitious milieus the label "Craceland"[2] among critics, the latter has allowed him to explore the impacts of such transitional moments on selected individuals in these communities, while the textual representation of the landscape reflects simultaneously the protagonist's resistance to and compliance with the emergent state of affairs. Crace is a person of strong leftist views, and his novels do not lack social and political engagement, though this sometimes comes out rather implicitly. This can be seen, for instance, in *The Gift of Stones* (1988) and *Harvest* (2013): the first, though set in the late Stone Age, was meant as an allegorical critique of Thatcherite Britain, while the latter, set during the Enclosures, was inspired by an article in *The Guardian* about present-day South-American soya barons and asylum seekers in Birmingham.[3] Crace's more politically outspoken novels, such as *Continent* (1986), *Arcadia* (1992) and *The Melody* (2018), show his "deep antipathy to trade and capitalism,"[4] but even this criticism is subdued by their author's optimistic belief in "the fundamental goodness of humankind."[5]

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1   Adam Begley, "A pilgrim in Craceland," *Southwest Review* 87, no. 2 & 3 (2002).

2   Adam Begley, "Jim Crace, the art of fiction no. 179," *The Paris Review* 167 (2003).

3   Nicholas Wroe, "At the Watford Gap it hit me that the English landscape was absolutely drenched in narrative," *The Guardian*, August 13, 2013, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/aug/16/jim-crace-interview>

4   Minna Proctor, "Jim Crace." *BOMB Magazine*, 2000, available at <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jim-crace>.

5   BiblioBlog, "An Interview with Jim Crace." October 22, 2007, available at <https://www.biblio.com/blog/2007/10/interview-jim-crace>

Set in an unnamed present-day city, *Arcadia* is an urban narration with a strong pastoral undertone. Composed as a crossbreed of allegorical morality story and social satire, it captures a transitional period which permanently changes the layout and climate of the city's centre and its inhabitants' life. By its critical attitude to the impacts of capitalism on both the human and the spatial dimensions of the city – the communal life and the cityscape – the novel resonates with the premises of the post-postmodern paradigm shift labelled as transmodernity. Accordingly, it also evinces multidirectional temporality through its determining spatial concepts, within which the past and the future are metaphorically drawn. By using Eric Prieto's phenomenological geocritical approach and the theoretical framework of Transmodern postulates, this paper attempts to analyse how *Arcadia* renders the inherent spatio-temporal fluidity and volatility of our current globalised world within the individual as well as collective experience.

Phenomenological geocriticism

A theoretical approach which proves most applicable to analyse Crace's spatial representations is geocriticism, which concerns itself with the ways in which recipients engage with the spaces and places that are formative for them and how their lived spatial experience is transformed into textual discourse and its interpretation. The founder of geocriticism Bertrand Westphal claims that this approach helps us "understand 'real' places by understanding their fundamental fictionality. And vice-versa, of course."[6] He focuses on spaces that are endowed with non-linear temporality and are therefore essentially unstable and transgressive. Such spaces, in Westphal's view,[7] have appropriated the relative laws of space-time, which makes them entropic systems of disorder whose stored energies allow them to evolve into a new state. They possess an inherent tendency towards overstepping and violating the rules and limits, are incessantly volatile and mobile, and are always ready to metamorphose and rearrange themselves in defiance of the homogenising measures imposed by the establishment's apparatus. As such, they also evince the capacity to generate a multiplicity of stories, which makes them interesting for literary renderings and critical analysis.

Westphal's aim is to come to a richer knowledge of real, existing spaces by investigating their fictional representations, thus his approach has been gradually expanded by more ego-centred geocritical practitioners in order to involve our psychological perception of space as well as the use of fictitious spaces as a means of understanding our spatial experience. Influenced by Yi-Fu Tuan's humanistic geography, phenomenological geocriticism examines the relationship between the individual's psyche and an occupied physical environment by "emphasizing the embodied, environmentally constrained nature of human consciousness."[8] Therefore, this is primarily concerned with place, which is understood as a segment of space to which its inhabitants are emotionally, socially and culturally attached, a meaningful environment infused with human feelings and

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6   Robert T. Tally, "Translator's Preface: The Timely Emergence of Geocriticism," in Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), x.

7   Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Trans. Robert T. Tally (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 20–56.

8   Eric Prieto, "Geocriticism, Geopoetics, Geophilosophy, and Beyond," in *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert T. Tally (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16.

experience. Landscape, then, is viewed as a larger unit consisting of several places, yet "linked to an area, a region, in a way space is not."[9]

In his phenomenological geocritical approach, Eric Prieto proposes the concept of places *entre-deux* or in-between, that is, borderlands situated between officially acknowledged landscapes/ cityscapes and what lies beyond their limits. These interstitial territories thus do not fit into "the established categories that shape our expectations of what a place should be" and are thus taken as "defective variants of more-established, better understood places."[10] Such liminal variants of place often tend to be dismissed or misunderstood, yet Prieto sees in them a latent productive and dynamic potential which can be most distinctly revealed in works of imaginative literature, which are naturally drawn to such places by their intangibility and inscrutability. He notes that although these sites have always existed, within the unprecedented rapidity of recent socio-cultural transformations they have assumed a particular significance since such transformations have allowed new forms of spatial organizations and living together which have generated areas "destined to become an enduring part of the physical and cultural landscape even if they are not yet fully understood or accepted."[11] Such places can be defined particularly on the margins of the established habitats. Drawing also on the premise that the loss of one kind of place leads to an emergence of new spatial alternatives, Prieto calls for a systematic inquiry into literary representations of *entre-deux* places not only in order to better comprehend the overlooked properties of borderline and emergent forms of place, but also to provide further insights into our experience of place/space in the current, globalised era.

The transmodern paradigm shift

According to a number of thinkers, since the 1980s a socio-cultural paradigm shift from Post-modernity to what has been called "Transmodernity"[12] has been taking place. This shift in perception stems from the specific character of the social, political, economic, technological, cultural and environmental circumstances in which we have been living. Susana Onega speaks of a "fragmentary, polycentric, multicultural and chaotically arranged"[13] decentralised yet interconnected information society. Transmodernity not only challenges the centre/margin binary but replaces it with a concept in which the centre no longer exists. Such theoreticians agree that we live in an era of volatility and interconnectedness, but they differ in their evaluation of this transformation.

The pessimistic attitude, forcefully voiced by Rodríguez Magda, claims that postmodernism, despite its proclaimed contestation of grand narratives and acknowledgement of pluralisation, facilitated the opposite tendency by creating yet another totalising Grand Narrative of Globalization.

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9 Attie de Lange at al. "Introduction," in: *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*, ed. Attie de Lange at al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), xvi.

10 Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

11 Prieto, *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place*, 9.

12 Rosa María Rodríguez Magda coined the term in 1987.

13 Susana Onega, "The Notion of Paradigm Shift and the Roles of Science and Literature in the Interpretation of Reality," *The European Review* 22, no. 3 (2014): 496.

For her, ours is a "period of transformation, transience, and accelerated time"[14] which favours the virtual over the genuine, instantaneity over permanency, exteriority over interiority, exclusion over inclusion, nationalism over cosmopolitanism, populism over democratic dialogue, fundamentalism over multiculturalism, and economic pragmatism over environmental awareness. She thus calls for recovering the above suppressed concepts and argues for the necessity of what she calls "narratives of fracture" or "narratives of the limit" which, by undermining the current totalising mechanisms and transgressing established rules, will enable us to imagine new realities and create new values.

The optimistic perspective interprets the transmodern paradigm shift as evidence of a major mind change in the context of the post 9/11 world. For Irena Ateljevic, this is a geopolitical move towards "biosphere politics"[15] promoting values such as solidarity, interrelatedness and respect for the other. She also argues that the development of human society oscillates between two antagonistic systems: partnership and domination. While since early modernity, systems of domination held power in the name of reason and progress, with the advent of Transmodernity, a reverse shift has taken place.[16] Similarly, Jeremy Rifkin believes that human beings are essentially empathetic, and Transmodernity is the "Age of Empathy,"[17] a hopeful cultural shift generated by the global reawakening of communal, spiritual and environmental values of the partnership system.

The task of transmodernity is thus to harmonise the purportedly antagonistic global and local tendencies into the "glocal."[18] This requires an approach that would equip us with anti-linear models of such key concepts as memory and history. Such models would privilege the horizontal over the vertical and operate on the principles of dialogue, cooperation, and interdependence. The indisputable stimulus toward transmodernism was the so-called "ethical turn" that originated in the 1980s as a response to the extremes of the postmodernist sensibility and found its point of departure in Emmanuel Levinas's ethic of alterity. Hence, rather than in searching for universals, this approach rests in recognising what interacting participants share, seeing moral values as relational and connective, and postulating a continuum between all living and non-living beings, interconnected and in what Luyckx Ghisi terms "shared vulnerability."[19]

One of the cardinal side-effects of globalised (post)modernity has been the widespread resignation of the communal, and a consequent redefinition of human happiness as personalised and privatised. In the long run, however, such a tendency results in frustration, not only from the underlying fear of insufficiency in the face of the omnipresent glitter of visual culture, but also from the absence of a hopeful vision of one's existence. With an unsatisfactory present and an untrustworthy future, it is only one step from a dangerous reinvestment of one's prospects in

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14 Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, "The Crossroads of Transmodernity." International Conference *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, Universidad de Zaragoza, April 26–28, 2017.

15 Irena Ateljevic, Irena, "Visions of Transmodernity: A New Renaissance of our Human History?" *Integral Review* 9, no. 2 (2013), 203.

16 Jean-Michel Ganteau, and Susana Onega, "Introduction: Transcending the Postmodern," in *Transcending the Postmodern*, ed. Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 4–5.

17 Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction," 7.

18 Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen, and José María Yebra-Pertusa, "Introduction: Transmodern Perspectives on Literature," in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, ed. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 7.

19 Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction," 16.

a reinvented past. Zygmunt Bauman speaks of the age of nostalgia and the emerging "retrotopias,"[20] false and imaginary conceptions of past entities – eras, events, circumstances or sentiments – which desperate cravings for a wished-for history cling to or valorise. Likewise, Rodríguez Magda warns that such a fixation on an illusory past that suits our present-day desires may easily cause a dangerous "melancholy loop"[21] destined to produce only new (semi-) fictitious narratives.

The transmodern and transgressive Craceland

Literature has been responding to anxieties of the present-day world "by generating new stylistic, generic and modal forms that would correspond to a transmodern culture,"[22] by which these works exemplify Rodríguez Magda's persuasion that transgression represents a way out of the ethical crisis brought about by the Age of Globalisation.[23] Such literature attempts to eliminate the gulf between the self and the other by means of approaching rather than assimilating differences by being "imaginative enough to reach the other […] and break with otherness."[24] By doing so, these texts address the values promoted by the new paradigm, such as relationality, empathy, and environmental sustainability.

Crace's novels can be subsumed within the umbrella term of transmodern fiction for a number of reasons: he avoids postmodernist themes and narrative strategies in favour of what he calls traditional or imaginative writing which relies on a clear storyline and pure invention[25]; his novels, no matter the time in which they are set, are always meant by means of "provocative and complicated parallels with our own world"[26] to address acute contemporary issues; his stories always revolve around serious ethical concerns directly relevant for his readers, especially the relationship to the other, be that human beings, animals or the environment; and last but not least, hand in hand with his moral focus goes his political engagement and criticism of the inauspicious impacts of capitalism and globalisation.

As Crace is interested in timeless moral questions rather than in individuals,[27] he must employ devices by which he can effectively convey the allegorical meanings of his stories. Central among these are his spatial representations – his Cracelands – which serve as figurative mediators for the depiction of the characters' feelings and states of mind as well as of the larger mechanisms and implications of the transformational processes. These environments simultaneously reflect and actively interfere in the protagonists' struggles with the ongoing whims of fate, namely the

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20   Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*. (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2017).

21   Rodríguez Magda, "The Crossroads."

22   Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction," 13.

23   Rodríguez Magda, "The Crossroads."

24   Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen, and José María Yebra-Pertusa, "Some Concluding Remarks," in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, ed. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 239.

25   Begley, "A pilgrim."

26   Katy Shaw, and Kate Aughterson, "'Craceland': An Introduction," in *Jim Crace: Into the Wilderness*, ed. Katy Shaw and Kate Aughterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.

27   Sameerah Mahmood, "Interview with Jim Crace," *Writers in Conversation* 2, no. 1 (2015), available at <https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/35172/Crace_Mahmood.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

characters' often futile attempts to defy the impending changes by disparate acts of transgression and defiance. Crace's narratives thus feature various places which are in some way caught in-between the old and the new worlds. Yet, just as his protagonists are rather unexceptional people who find themselves helpless in terms of warding off an upcoming state of affairs, eventually yielding to it, these *entre-deux* places follow a parallel transitional trajectory: from transgression and resistance to submission and transformation. At the same time, Crace also shows that a loss of one such place does not mean that the dissenting forces are suppressed for good since new, different liminal places emerge ready to take over the transgressive agenda.

Arcadia's spatial representations

Arcadia tells a story of Victor, a self-made, rags-to-riches multimillionaire, who becomes a city-dweller as a baby when his tragically widowed mother leaves her village for the city in hope of having better opportunities for making a living. Her fate, however, is unfortunate, as she ends up a beggar at the fruit and vegetable market, nicknamed the Soap Market, and seven years later she dies in a fire, leaving her orphaned son in the care of her sister. Having experienced a childhood of poverty and emotional scarcity, young Victor makes his resolution to always rely only on himself and to become wealthy. His enterprise is so thriving that he is eventually able to buy the marketplace and make himself into a fruit and vegetable tycoon. The novel's plotline begins as he is celebrating his eightieth birthday, upon which he decides to "make his lasting, monumental mark upon the city"[28] by demolishing the Soap Market and replacing it with a modern, steel and glass shopping mall, and the story ends some ten years later when the mall, named "Arcadia," is already in service and Victor is planning to have his memoirs written.

Yet, in spite of this uncomplicated storyline, the novel may be interpreted in numerous ways, in concord with Crace's belief that ambiguity is "the lifeblood of fiction."[29] It can be read, for instance, as a psychological novel, a sociological study of modern urban life, a mock-pastoral, or an ethical contemplation on the shortcomings of late modern capitalism.[30] The work also evidences its author's claim that ideas matter more than individuals in his stories, as neither Victor nor any other character can be labelled as the novel's indisputable leading protagonist. Although Victor's life story determines the novel's plotline, his role in the "present-day" happenings is more restrained and shadowy. Rook, Victor's go-between with the market, occupies a larger space in the story, yet even he leaves the story before the plotline reaches its climax. Similarly, Anna, once Rook's colleague and lover to later replace him in his position after his dismissal, and Joseph, initially an antagonist to Rook, but eventually his accomplice out of necessity, are as characters rather instrumental. And the narrator of the story – a journalist pen-named the Burgher – though occasionally involved in the story, fulfils the role of a detached, at times ironic, observer and commentator upon the action.

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28 Jim Crace, *Arcadia* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 47.

29 Proctor, "Jim Crace."

30 For a more in-depth analysis of how in *Arcadia* Craces hybridises and transforms the genre of the British urban novel see Petr Chalupský, "The Urban Pastoral: Hybridizations in Jim Crace's *Arcadia*," *Litteraria Pragensia* 20, no. 40 (2010): 38–53.

Crace expresses his ideas through spatial representations, which is why the novel's central places – the Big Vic, the Soap Market, Soap Two and Arcadia – only assume their meanings in relation to one another. Big Vic is the nickname of Victor's tower block overlooking the Soap Market, yet high enough to provide a view of the city's outskirts. It is a place of his much longed-for safety and privacy, but also of self-imposed isolation, as he only very rarely leaves it in order to come into direct contact with the outside. This is a perfect materialisation of his childhood dream of building for himself "a fortress shield of wealth, beyond which the dramas of the world can run their courses unobserved," one in which he would be "protected from the city by what his wallet held."[31] Although the city and its market have made him, Victor has never really identified with the landscape, atmosphere and values; he has never really got used to "the clutter and the hardness of the streets."[32] Crace describes him as a "townie *almost* through and through,"[33] one caught between the city and the country. Deep inside, he still feels himself a countryperson, though he has in fact never lived in the country and he would have not become so rich and powerful there. Therefore, his attitude to the city is pragmatic; he does not see it as his natural habitat, but rather as a means for accomplishing his goals which, once exploited, needs to be kept at bay.

Victor believes that there is nothing valuable money that cannot buy, and that there is no one else to be entirely trusted but himself. Lacking in social skills and affability, he ends up a person belonging nowhere: he does not feel at home in the city and its market and thus employs the "market-wise"[34] Rook to walk the streets for him, yet he is not a villager either, and his attempt to celebrate his birthday in hearty country style with the senior Soapies proves to be an embarrassment due to his distance and discomfort in their company. Victor thus prefers spending his time fortified on the top floor of his air-conditioned, sanitised and heavily guarded ivory tower, safely detached from the city's turmoil, watching it "like a hawk"[35] from above, as only from this height does the city look orderly, lucid and controllable. The city of his mind is an abstracted, topographic one, devoid of most of its heterogeneous manifestations, one which only partially corresponds with the actual reality.

Victor may not like the city much, but he truly detests the Soap Market, as with its bustling and clamorous hustle it embodies precisely those urban properties he has never come to terms with. Moreover, the place is an invasive reminder of his deprived childhood and destitution, which is why Claudio Busi's project of Arcadia appeals to him particularly strongly. The experienced architect perfectly estimates the elderly millionaire's sentiment and in his presentation denounces the market as "a tumour at the city's heart"[36] which needs to be removed, modernised and regulated by the imposition of "geometric harmony into the ancient centre of the town where legibility and graciousness are out of fashion."[37] Although he flatters Victor by calling him "a man of now,"[38]

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31 Crace, *Arcadia*, 151.
32 Crace, *Arcadia*, 121.
33 Crace, *Arcadia*, 67, emphasis added.
34 Crace, *Arcadia*, 183.
35 Crace, *Arcadia*, 44.
36 Crace, *Arcadia*, 185.
37 Crace, *Arcadia*, 190.
38 Crace, *Arcadia*, 190.

he is aware that the opposite is the case, which is why the central premise behind his project is bringing the intact, idealised countryside right into the heart of the town. The places Victor dwells in and feels good in thus reflect his character and values – they are pragmatic, controllable, costly, comfortable, yet dehumanised and emotionless, essentially urban yet out of touch with the city's daily happenings.

The Soap Market is a place of a completely different kind – lively, colourful and dishar-monious. With its ambiguous character, it represents an apt example of an *entre-deux* place: on the one hand, it evinces certain features of the countryside, as it engulfs the area of the city's park and garden and offers a compound for country people to trade in products from country farms. On the other hand, the market is not as spontaneous and unrestricted as it may appear since the sellers must submit to Victor's requirements and principally sell goods coming from farms that he controls. However, the marketplace is very popular with the town's residents, drawing people in with its refreshment stalls, snack bars and cafés. Moreover, due to its relatively unrestrained atmosphere it becomes a popular refuge for vagrants and the homeless, "the closest citizens in town to the earth's enduring elements."[39] This heterogeneous area is thus comprised of all kinds of people – sellers and waitpersons, their customers, needy beggars, layabouts, but also archetypal urban strollers who, like Rook, enjoy "the city at full pelt,"[40] relishing the anonymity of the crowds and watching the spectacle of the streets. It is a productive place in terms of generating narratives through the incessant encounters between these diverse individuals, while at the same time it is a latent site of transgression and resistance to the forcible measures exercised by the rich and powerful to appropriate and commercialise this territory. Both these faces of the market are shown through the events of the last day before it is closed and pulled down to make space for the construction of Arcadia: while in the daytime, the place turns frolicsome in its exuberant celebration of life despite its approaching ending with buskers, musicians and dancers, at night it transforms into a site of riot and revenge in violent, spectacular yet short-lived defiance of the official authorities.

Arcadia also dramatises how the disappearance of one in-between place gives way to the emergence of a new one which may or may not serve the same function as the original. Not long after Arcadia opens up on the site of the former Soap Market, a new outdoor fruit market spontaneously establishes itself in the shopping mall's vicinity. This much smaller "Soap Two," as it known among the townspeople, is already gaining strength and makes the once uneventful district in which it is located "as noisy and congested, lively and unsafe, as the Soap Market used to be."[41] The novel makes the point that the transgressive and resistant forces/spaces can never be silenced and suppressed completely, as they are an inherent quality of each human society and the urban context only amplifies them. Therefore, they will always leave their vigorous mark upon the city(scape), though the intangible and immaterial, as the narrator notes:

> So now we see that it's not true that 'cities swallow up the small', that soufflés only rise the once'. The pygmies flourish on the street. I used to think that buildings were all that could endure in cities. But

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39 Crace, *Arcadia*, 179.

40 Crace, *Arcadia*, 12.

41 Crace, *Arcadia*, 309.

people, it would seem, endure as well. They hang on by their nails. They improvise. They kick. They leave a legacy which is not brick or stone.[42]

This emergent interstitial place demonstrates that the need for various forms of communal socio-cultural and spatial organisations is in fact a persisting and invigorating aspect of the life of any city, no matter how inferior or even dangerous these spaces may seem in the eyes of Victor and his like.

The last pivotal space in the novel is the eponymous shopping mall Busi designed for Victor which is set to supersede the ancient marketplace. Although Arcadia does not really play an active part in the storyline, the building teems with meanings which are fundamental for the novel's interpretation. The construction accomplishes the goal of project to bring the country and its landscape to the city centre, just like its open-air predecessor, but by different means – by its architectonic design based on horizontal curving lines of glass and steel reminiscent of "country greenhouse,"[43] yet a layout which is not only efficiently consumer-friendly but also deliberately exclusive. The market's multifariousness has been replaced by glossy uniformity: the traded goods are polished and arranged in standardised wicker baskets and when sold, packaged in bags with the mall's coloured logo, the sellers dressed in the same folk-like costume, the customers all of similar social background, the whims of the seasons evened out into a permanent absence of any traces of the weather outside. This is a climate-controlled and well policed environment designed to keep out the inconvenient intruders the Soap Market was always swarming with.

With its exclusiveness, rather than spontaneous extension of the city, Arcadia, nicknamed "Fat Vic," is seen as a complement to Victor's business centre, "Big Vic's plumper sibling."[44] Profit-wise, it is a triumph, "the perfect cash machine,"[45] a union of "art and industry and arrogance,"[46] yet although the narrator admits that the latter properties are idiosyncratic of the urban life, his tone suggests that in his view the mall's calculating homogeneity represents a dead-end in the city's evolutionary trajectory. Although the shopping mall is meant to be advanced and progressive, for Victor it is first and foremost a monument to the past symbolised by the bronze statue "The Beggar Woman and her Child." He enforces the placement of this old-fashioned sculpture, a thorn in the younger architects' side, right behind the mall's doorway to memorialise his mother and, more importantly, his dismal childhood, and thus highlight his own life achievements. Yet this intention of making the artwork an item of reverend commemoration cannot be carried out even in such a patrolled and fancy place; due to vandalism the statue is eventually railed in, and subsequently becomes mockingly known as "The Cage."

In all these three major places spatiality is inseparably intertwined with their temporal dimension. Interestingly, each of them evinces a tendency towards multiple temporalities. The most straightforward in this regard is the Big Vic, an embodiment of the present and of the future, a site of heartless business, rational pragmatism and unrestrained money-making in which the

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42 Crace, *Arcadia*, 308–309.

43 Crace, *Arcadia*, 192.

44 Crace, *Arcadia*, 306.

45 Crace, *Arcadia*, 304.

46 Crace, *Arcadia*, 302.

past is taken as something to be outdone and surpassed. It is then no surprise that all of Victor's attempts to bring the past into his workplace, such as commemorating his own childhood past in a stall, is inevitably destined to fail. A more complicated case is Arcadia, as it is necessary to distinguish between the project's promotional ideas and the actual reality: the first presents the mall as essentially a contemporary place, yet one in which the heritage is maintained in an updated form so that it can be continued into the future. In reality, however, the standardised indoor stalls have nothing to do with the Soap Market tradition: the memories and history connoted by "The Beggar Woman and her Child" statue is meaningful to no one but Victor. On top of this, Arcadia is not even really related to the present: it is neither countryside nor city but an artificial crossbreed between these images. Its marketing strategies work most efficiently in a perpetual timeless space which makes no promise of change for the future. Geocritically speaking, it is a no-place[47] without any spatiotemporal identity and thus without any productive evolutionary capacities.

The Soap Market, on the other hand, actively incorporates diverse temporalities. With its long tradition, it represents a unique site of continuity, which for centuries has affected the city's atmosphere and development. It has always been the city's *agora*, an openly accessible public meeting place, one whose larger role – social, political and cultural – by far exceeded its manifest economic activities. Its position has been conditioned by its liminality: an official marketplace and leisure district on the one hand, and a locus of the outcast and the discontented on the other. While keeping to the customs and wisdoms of the ancestors, it is also a place of the here-and-now and, in consequence, of the future, one in which acute issues resonate powerfully. It is a transgressive area which is always only a step from turning into a turbulent battlefield on which the city's underdogs struggle to assert their claims against the authority of the powerful, who consider it inconvenient and strive to reduce it to a relic of the past by means of restriction or destruction. Nevertheless, due to its heterogeneous spatio-temporality, the market is imbued with strong communal identity and attachment which is why, once demolished, its social and emotional drive conjures up another place of this kind, Soap Two, a site with the potential of becoming a new platform for the dissenting voices.

Arcadia's transmodernist critique

Arcadia touches upon a number of concerns theoreticians of Transmodernity have pointed out as determining. In the first place, it satirically depicts a highly centrist world of rigid binary hierarchies in which power is concentrated in the hands of a scanty affluent elite. The story is set after the onset of globalised capitalism and on the egotistical, complacent Victor and his utilitarian thinking, a process which generates a totalising discursive formation. Victor's is indeed an era of transition, transformation and a growing demand for immediate gratification of one's needs and desires, which, to echo Rodríguez Magda's words, favours inauthenticity, transience, exclusion, autocratic decision-making, mercantile pragmatism and extreme individualism over their binary opposites. Victor's method represents a specimen of the domination system rooted in "the legitimation of

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47 Westphal describes such orderly spatial entity as an equilibrium deprived of history and therefore equivalent to a nonstory, as opposed to heterogeneous spaces of entropy and points instability capable of providing a very complex story (2011, 19).

violence and greed, the justification of capitalism, colonial domination, the subjugation of the other and the exploitative annihilation of the earth, unrestrained by belief in transcendence and in the spiritual dimension of life-giving and sustaining powers."[48]

Victor's successful trading company has been built on his idea of happiness and achievement as a highly privatised and self-centred goal, thus he wishes Arcadia to be a monument to himself, "a market like a cathedral, grand and memorable, worthy of a millionaire."[49] At the same time, however, he comes to realise that no such thing can ever be accomplished completely, since it is impossible to force other people to fully recognise those particular connotations that he himself sees as significant. Moreover, with its implicit referencing to an idealised history, the Arcadia project also exemplifies Bauman's concept of retrotopia, which under the guise of present-day needs, a bygone past is mentally conserved in nostalgia. In spite of his business-oriented disposition, Victor's mind is stuck in a self-deceptive "melancholy loop" due to which the discourse he uses to explain and justify his intentions with the Soap Market and Arcadia actually consists of (semi-) fictitious narratives nourished by his latent self-pity and his need to come to terms with his traumatic childhood experience.

The Soap Market, on the other hand, represents a set of contrary values, namely communality, solidarity and interdependence. The Soapies in fact compose an independent community of stallholders, sellers, pub and bar owners, wait staff, street artists and buskers, for which the success of one may bring about benefits rather than ruin to the others. They are united not only by a common workplace and clientele, but also by the goal of drawing as many people to the marketplace as possible. Theirs is a partnership system requiring cooperation and mutual support based on the participants' ability to recognise the values and interests they share, which in most cases outweighs those of their business competition. The market is also a forerunner of a glocal environment which primarily serves locals but offers products, services and entertainment imported from other parts of the country/world. In Victor's business empire and the Soap Market, *Arcadia* presents two antagonistic environments with dissimilar principles and ethics which can only coexist when the first space respects the autonomy of the latter, a condition violated in the novel. The incompatibility of the two systems is illustrated in the character of Rook, who believes he can be a double agent. Though essentially a "Soapie through and through"[50] who loves and feels at home at the market, his opportunist nature has alienated him from the stallholders as he charges them additional fees for representing and defending their interests with Victor. Rook's prospects break down when his employer hears about his private income and dismisses him on the spot, and the Soapies, taking him for a betrayer, also do not receive him, which is why he ends up a zealous but unfortunate campaigner for the market as well as its only victim.

While the world of the Big Vic and Arcadia embodies a strictly vertical structure and a linear time concept, the Soap Market's spatio-temporal model is more intricate. In terms of distribution of power, it is organised horizontally through a number of lesser centres which need

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48 Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction," 5.

49 Crace, *Arcadia*, 63.

50 Crace, *Arcadia*, 14.

to communicate with one another in order to keep the whole operational. Timewise, it follows a combined pattern in which past-present-future linearity is disrupted by the market's circular character derived from the cycle of the year both in the seasonal nature of the products as well as in the city's life. At the same time, these cycles are not wholly identical and each year innovations must be made if the market wants to remain viable, a situation which makes its developmental arrangement not only spiral, but also multidirectional, as these innovations draw inspiration from diversely dated and located sources, as well as palimpsestic, as each new year's temporal arrangement is layered onto the preceding ones which still retain, at least partially, their visibility.[51] Therefore, the market represents a composite temporal structure of miscellaneously interconnected historical moments that resists the imposition of linearity, a place where the present, the past and the future unceasingly interact without one mode being dominant over the others.

In its first plan, *Arcadia* depicts the supremacy of mercantile forces over what appears as an outdated residue of an early capitalist social organisation. Nevertheless, its tone is for most of its part ironic in relation to Victor and his "monumental" project, and the actual target of Crace's satire is the winning side of this conflict and its psychological, social and moral deficiencies, thus the victory here may be taken as rather Pyrrhic. The implicit critique of Victor's visions principally rests in their being at odds with the very essence and ethics of the urban condition, which is seen as communal and cooperative. While Victor is an unsociable solitaire who believes the streets are paved with gold, the narrator suggests that other values are at the core of the city's dynamic viability: the "sorcery of cities" lies in their inhabitants instinctive seeking out crowds[52], and "hope – not gold – [is] what they pave the cities with."[53] The Burgher makes his crucial critical comment, paradoxically enough, upon having admitted Arcadia's business triumph when he notes that retaining Victor's grand bird's eye position would mean losing the vital touch of the streets as

> [t]o be removed from them is to lose the blessing of the multitude. The tallest buildings throw the longest shadows, it is said, by those who spend their lives in contemplation of their monuments, and for whom the shadow life is better than the real. But most of us who live in the cities die and take our shadows to the grave. We don't outlive the masonry or glass. […] I make my mark upon the city, too. My living mark. […] My rainy footprints on the pavement will soon dry, but footprints and the thousand sodden paper bags which held a thousand pears, the eyes, the cores, the stalks, the rinds of daily life, are more substantial […] than shadows. They swell the middens of the town.[54]

The narrator implies that Victor may be rich and successful in fulfilling his professional ambitions, but can never happy as a person and a dweller since in actual fact he does not understand the city and its mechanisms. Having exploited its opportunities and landscape for his personal ends, he has willingly alienated himself from the environment and constructed for himself a virtual

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51   The multidirectional and palimpsestic concepts of memory and history are discussed at length in Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* and Max Silverman's *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film*.

52   Crace, *Arcadia*, 237.

53   Crace, *Arcadia*, 238.

54   Crace, *Arcadia*, 311–312.

reality in which he is the place's absolutist ruler. Yet, the true spirit of the city is to be found in its day-to-day, commonplace community goings-on, which favour those qualities Victor is so desperately short of.

Conclusion

With its unconcealed criticism of the totalising discourse, rigid hierarchical power structure, as well as lack of empathy and respect for the other of globalised capitalism, and by promoting contrary values and social arrangements, *Arcadia* represents an example of Rodríguez Magda's narrative of the limit/fracture. The story points to a number of the detrimental impacts of what it sees as an antisocial, alienating and unethical establishment which produces flocks of unhappy, anxious and lonely individuals whose coping strategy rests in fabricating a soothing alternative reality built on illusory consolatory narratives. Against the atomisation of an individualist society, it implicitly argues in favour of those principles which allow the formation of firm communal bonds. Moreover, it portrays a clash between domination and partnership systems in which this orthodoxy temporarily prevails, yet where the community, despite its innate vulnerability, is shown as more viable since it is much more in accord with city life's variability. In doing this, it also echoes the above-mentioned ethical turn by promoting a responsive and relational attitude to the other over competitiveness and profit-seeking pragmatism. The novel falls under the category of transmodern literature not only by its subject matter, but also by the generic and narrative form of its apparently simple plotline, which when read carefully, however, offers a variety of voices, perspectives and interpretations.

Characteristically, Crace makes use of spatial representations to render and communicate his principal ideas. The novel's cityscape consists of two different kinds of places – Big Vic and Arcadia on the one hand, and Soap Market and Soap Two on the other. While the first group – homogeneous and carefully designed – are depicted as unproductive in terms of their contribution to the city's wholesome development, the second – varied, volatile and liminal – prove to be the vital bearers of its *genius loci*. The heterogeneous and transgressive marketplaces, with their social metamorphoses, countless narratives and potent evolutionary energies, are shown to be an enduring constituent of the city's essence. Importantly, the novel's spatiality is imbued with a convoluted temporal dimension, particularly with the latter group, which evinces a compound time arrangement that undermines the straightforward consequentiality of the chronological model in favour of the spiral, multidirectional and palimpsestic variants in which the relationship between the past, the present and the future is one of interaction, circulation and transposition. By combining transmodern critique and symbolic spatio-temporal representations, *Arcadia* provides a multi-layered and thought-provoking commentary on a number of the determining aspects of the present-day urban and civic condition.

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Petr Chalupský is an Associate Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Charles University, Czech Republic, where he teaches courses in English Literature, Literary Studies and Literary Theory. His research and publication activities focus on contemporary British fiction, particularly on the representation of place and space. He is the author of the monographs *The Postmodern City of Dreadful Night: The Image of the City in the Works of Martin Amis and Ian McEwan* (2009) and *A Horror and a Beauty: The World of Peter Ackroyd's London Novels* (2016).