Rushdie's New York[1]

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Abstract:

As the 20th century came to a close, Rushdie's epicentre shifted from East to West in The Ground beneath Her Feet, a novel of 'disorientation.' The epicentre of Rushdie's next novel Fury is New York, the city 'boiling' with money, where the main character Malik Solanka goes to be 'eaten' and to find peace only to learn that this is an illusion, too. This article purports to look into Rushdie's 'disorientation' in The Ground beneath Her Feet, with a focus on its New York setting, and his orientation towards the 'cosmopolis' of New York in Fury as our global world entered the new millennium.

Keywords:

disorientation, New York, musicscape, selfscape, Americanization, flâneur

"Now Ormus's music has arrived like an affirmation from another East to enter the musical heart of Americanness, to flow into the river of dreams; but it's driven by the democratic conviction, retained by Ormus from the days when Gayomart sang the future into his ears, that the music is his as well, born not just in the U.S.A. but in his own heart, long ago and far away. Just as England can no longer lay exclusive claim to the English language, so America is no longer the sole owner of rock'n'roll /.../."

Salman Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*

"India, it's gone for all of us. I'll take Manhattan."

Salman Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*

"Scan me, digitize me, beam me up. If the past is the sick old Earth, then America, be my flying saucer. Fly me to the rim of space. The moon's not far enough."

Salman Rushdie, *Fury*

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"*Disorientation,*" VTO and the Rock'n'roll Musicscape of New York

The Ground beneath Her Feet, a post-*fatwa* novel published in 1999, is a book of "disorientation," which puns on a few virtual meanings of the word, maybe the most significant of them being "loss of the East." (Rushdie 5) Two Indian-born characters Ormus Cama, the rock'n'roll Orpheus, and Rai Merchant, a photographer and also the novel's narrator, and Vina Apsara, an American-born singer whose father is Indian, literally lose their East by flying from East to West through the "membrane" of the sky. Ormus goes to England, and that is where he is "disenchanted" with his idea of the West for the first time, and then, persuaded by Vina, they go together to America. She describes America, "and New York City in particular" as a "state of mind," by which she means a spiritual atmosphere which accommodates the most hybrid elements in a challenging and dynamic cultural multifariousness:

> However you get through your day in New York City, well then that's a New York kind of day, and if you're a Bombay singer singing the Bombay bop or a voodoo cab driver with zombies on the brain or a bomber from Montana or an Islamist beardo from Queens, then whatever's going through your head?, well that's a New York state of mind. (Rushdie 331)

The Ground beneath Her Feet is the novel in which Rushdie encapsulated the *Zeitgeist* of the last five decades of the 20th century, whose most essential aspects are expressed through rock'n'roll music, its soundtrack, as the spirit of the roaring '20s had found its expression in jazz. In other words, this is the novel in which rock'n'roll is an art form underpinned by a set of aesthetic principles which defined all the other arts of those decades: the genre is transgressive, more often than not crossing the line in every possible sense, profoundly liberating and also hedonistic, though Ormus-the-Indian-born-to-be-American goes far beyond hedonism in his personal life and in music, pushing it beyond the limits of its flimsiness and triviality.

Rushdie expects his readers to "suspend their disbelief" and to accept what the fiction in this novel proposes as an alternative to the deep-seated idea that rock'n'roll was born in America. In Rushdie's alternative "reality," the genre germinates in Ormus's mind and soul, sung in his ears by his dead twin brother Gayomart. Ormus brings his Eastern music to America and turns it into an underground, innovative and profoundly liberating style. He and Vina set up a band called VTO, which literally and metaphorically takes America by storm. New York proves to be the perfect place for it: "At the epicenter of the American earthquake that is VTO lies this very Oriental disorientation. Abstinence: it becomes their rocket fuel, and flies them to the stars." (Rushdie 372)

If New York's skyscraping architecture is a spatial expression of the colonization of space, upon which the cosmopolis of New York had embarked since the first decades of the 20th century, Ormus's and Vina's "Oriental disorienting" VTO is a temporal colonization, which projects the epicenter of New York onto the same vertical axis of its cosmic spatiality. Piecing together as it does a wide range of sounds across the world in its cosmopolitan, rocket-fueling soundtrack, VTO is the rock'n'roll expression of cultural

"glocalization" as the "musicscape"[2] of the New York cosmopolis in the '70s and '80s. Boarding "VTO's Orient Express," the young Americans "in search of new frontiers" launch their dreams into space while listening to Ormus and Vina:

> And that America which by losing certitude has newly opened itself to the external world responds to the un-American sounds Ormus adds to his tracks: the sexiness of the Cuban horns, the mind-bending patterns of the Brazilian drums, the Chilean woodwinds moaning like the winds of oppression, the African male voice choruses like trees swaying in freedom's breeze, the grand old ladies of Algerian music with their yearning squawks and ululations, the holy passion of the Pakistani qawwals. (Rushdie 379)

What this "disoriented" musician endowed with double vision has in mind is a work with "the full orchestra" which must express "the full range of musical emotional intellectual yes and moral possibility" (Rushdie 379) through a musical creation of universal appeal and meaning, beyond both spatial and temporal borders.

After Vina's death, she is turned into a cult. The New York dance halls, record stores and clubs provide too little room for the huge congregations of people who gather to commemorate her. The cult of rock'n'roll music has to infuse the whole city. Indeed, it seems to acquire cosmic proportions, as the diction suggests. The epicentre of New York radiates its waves of rock'n'roll music across the world:

> The crowds begin, instead, to gravitate to stadiums, arenas, parks, maidans – the major venues, Shea Stadium, Candlestick Park, Soldier's Field, San Siro, Bernabeu, Wembley, Munich's Olympic Stadium, Rio's fabulous Marcanà. (Rushdie 481)

Technology makes the transformation of this rock starlet into a "goddess of the stadiums" as "in the packed stadiums, the sound systems offer her music to the crowds. /…/ Where possible, videotapes of her performances are played on stadium screens." (Rushdie 481) In this era of technology and liberating music whose New York heart pumps into the arteries of the whole world, all other public activities are suspended and all public spaces deserted. These "world" stadiums concentrate and resound with the music of the age. The whole bereft world is united on a global scale in the name of music.

New York, Selfscape

Ormus and Vina arrive in New York in 1971, eight years after John Kennedy was assassinated, and Ormus, in his double vision, speaks about having found "the outsideness of what we're inside." (Rushdie 350) In a technical jargon which is very new at that date, Ormus explains to Vina how his double vision connects the inside with the outside not in a "supernatural" way but in a most physical way. What Ormus projects is a

[2] In his book *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Edward Soja references Arjun Appadurai's use of "the suffix scape" and quotes his explanation that it "allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles" (Appadurai 33 as quoted by Soja 210). In Rushdie's *The Ground beneath Her Feet* the fluid and irregular shapes characterize an essentially hybrid cosmopolitan music which infuses New York, turning its *locus* of hybridity into a "musicscape."

"selfscape," which is in Rushdie's terms an "imaginary homeland," although New York is, at least at this stage in the novel, a rather "unhomely," i.e. "unfamiliar," home. The metaphors used by Ormus to describe it are technological, the fast progress of technology being an important aspect of the century's *Zeitgeist,* experienced with maximum intensity in its epicenter, which is New York:

> The technique for jumping the points, from one track to the other. Universes like parallel bars, or tv channels. Maybe there are people who can swing from bar to bar, people who can if you understand me channel-hop. Zappers. Maybe I'm a zapper myself, he says. Exercising a kind of remote control. (Rushdie 350)

What Ormus expresses here is what Edward Soja calls an awareness "of ourselves as intrinsically spatial beings, continuously engaged in a collective activity of producing spaces and places, territories and regions, environments and habitats," (Soja 6) which in the late 20th and early 21st century is more and more a space of circuits and lately a cyberspace. Soja argues that the interaction between the self's body and mind, on the one hand, and man-made space, on the other, is two-sided, in the sense that the self shapes the cityscape and lets itself shaped by it at the same time.

Indeed, Ormus's music typifies the conjunction between the universe within and the universe without. The "Ormic guitar" may be

> the structural basis not only of the whole universe but of the human soul as well. When we explore our inner space, as both Buddhists and sub-atomic physicists agree, we find a microcosm there which is identical with the macrocosmos. Ormus's music reveals to our hearts the identity of the little and the large. (Rushdie 392)

The music of this 20th century Orpheus breaks down all barriers, not only those between inner and outer space, but also between the Apollonian and the Dyonisian. Ormus's music fuses "two great spirits," "Spiritus Humanus, that links body and soul," and "Spiritus Mundi, linking the sublunary and translunary worlds," which in Ormus's doctrine correspond to "the two realities, world and otherworld." (Rushdie 393) It is to this high mythologically and philosophically charged spiritual level that Ormus's music brings the cosmopolis of New York in the '70s and '80s in Rushdie's fictional and transcultural translation of the cultural *Zeitgeist* radiated by the epicentre.

New York is mesmerized and enthralled by Ormus's essentially Eastern music, and Rushdie's imagination runs wild when it puts together the vocabulary and imagery of fantastically hybrid combinations of hi-tech and Eastern paraphernalia which depict his shows. The elating performances staged by this "Bombay lad at heart, turning to the mythic vulgarity of the Bollywood musical" electrify masses of people, creating "New York states of mind" out of

> science fiction dystopias, fabulated dragon-worlds, seraglio visions featuring platoons of harem-panted, rhine-stoned-naveled belly dancers, black-magic rings of fire o'ertowered by Baron Samedi inflatables, and the whole multiple-image videorama which is now the staple fare of stadium rock but in those days gave people the kind of shock Bob Dylan did when he went electric. (Rushdie 425)

However, fury and fear are also aspects of the *Zeitgeist*, and anticipating their cosmic proportions in Rushdie's next novel, *The Ground beneath Her Feet* contains them in Ormus's music and the public's reactions to it. Ormus' aloofness and asceticism stir the rage of many women, and thus "threats are received, and the policing of VTO concerts, as well as security at the Rhodopé Building, is stepped up as a result. Such bacchic fury is one part of the temper of the times." (Rushdie 393) Reactions of anger are triggered by VTO's political engagement at a later stage, and when Ormus makes a public statement of "his fear that some sort of apocalypse might be imminent, some sort of science fiction encounter between variant and incompatible versions of the world, was the last straw." (Rushdie 426)

Fury, which came out in 2001, a few months before the 9/11 attacks, is Rushdie's first novel set almost exclusively in New York, except for the last two chapters, of which one covers a journey to and brief stay at an imaginary Liliput-Blefuscu, and a coda set in London.

Professor Malik Solanka, to a large extent an alter ego of Rushdie himself, left London and has come to New York to find peace. However, in this "golden age" and city "boiling with money," (Rushdie 3) Solanka finds out that he is pursued by the Erinys, which the novel translates from ancient Greek culture into the contemporary 'glocal' and hybrid culture of New York. The fury-related vocabulary abounds, and it reinforces Solanka's and the city's state of mind, which mirror each other.

America and Americanization

Rushdie's characters have ambivalent feelings for and attitudes towards America. Both Rai Merchant and Malik Solanka are repelled by its imperial might and its "fist," being at the same time seduced by an imaginary America, an America of the mind. Rai speaks about "the dream America everyone carries round in his head, America the Beautiful, Langston Hughes's country that never existed but needed to exist," and he confesses that "with that, like everyone else, I was thoroughly in love." (Rushdie 419)

Sometimes America seduces in a fatally dangerous way. Jack Rhinehart, for instance, Solanka's African American friend, chooses to stay away from America, marry a white woman and stick to circles where race is "not an issue." He stops "hyphenating himself" and becomes, "simply, an American." In 1996, Arjun Appadurai had already noticed and written about "the point of saturation" reached by "the formula of hyphenation" when "the right-hand side of the hyphen can barely contain the unruliness of the left hand-side." In contemporary America, as "diasporic identities stay mobile and grow more protean," (Appadurai 172) the problem of hyphenation is more and more complicated since these hyphenated citizens are actually doubly hyphenated. Consequently, Appadurai speaks about a scenario in which hyphenation is supplanted by a new "nonterritorial transnation," a "diasporic diversity" which recognizes at the same time "that there is a special American way to connect to these global diasporas." (Appadurai 173) However, in Rhinehart's case, this fascination with an America of his fabrication implies a dangerous crossing of the line, until he eventually finds himself to be "the only black man Jack knew," apart from Solanka, who is "probably the only brown one." Jack's line crossing does not stop there: in his line of work as a journalist, he has "an all-access pass to the Palaces," by which, despite his loath of them, he is continuously seduced. As an outsider inside, he unleashes his "waspish venom" in

virulent attacks of the "crassness," "blindness," "mindlessness" and "depthless surfaceness" of this "gilded milieu." In spite of that, or maybe because that feels inciting on both sides, he continues to be invited, as Solanka accounts for it "because the guy was hooked and they knew it. He was their nigger and it suited them to keep him around, as, Solanka suspected, a sort of pet." (Rushdie 57) For Rhinehart, women, "the Valley of Dollybirds" is another American lure. It all amounts to his fabricated race-free America, which seduces Jack, and "his desire to be accepted into this white man's club" is "the dark secret" he cannot "confess to anyone, perhaps not even to himself." It is this secret that is the "dark bed" where "the seeds of fury grow." Although Solanka does not realize it for a long time, he eventually concedes "that Jack's suppressed fury" is "the mirror of his own." (Rushdie 58) In frequent moments of introspection, Solanka is aware that "yes, it had seduced him, America; yes, its brilliance aroused him, and its vast potency too," but at the very same time he knows that "he was compromised by this seduction." (Rushdie 87) Looking in the mirror and musing on the fate of his murdered friend Jack, Solanka realizes once more, on a note of finality, that his friend "had been sucked down by glamour and wealth." He concludes that "to be seduced by what one loathed was a hard destiny." (Rushdie 200)

New York being the epicentre of the *Zeitgeist*, Professor Solanka invokes the country, begging to be eaten by it in order to find peace. Mila Milo, a young woman who plays a pervert game with him, explains to Solanka that "America, because of its omnipotence, is full of fear; it fears the fury of the world, and renames it envy /…/." (Rushdie 114)

Solanka's alert to what is lurking under America's glamorous façade of the "golden age" is constantly maintained by Mila. Malik knows that under the glossy surface of economic wealth, "people were stressed out, cracking up, and talking about it all day long in superstrings of moronic cliché," and Mila endorses that "everybody was scared, everybody she knew, however good their façade, was quaking inside, and it didn't make any difference that everybody was rich." (Rushdie 115)

As an outsider inside, Solanka observes the whole show, and is critical about its actors' gestures. One such alarming antidote to emotional stress or physical problems is medication, which reminds one of the method of keeping the citizens of the Brave New World happy and carefree by doses of *soma*. Solanka notices how "here at the outset of the third millennium, medication was readily available to deal with the eruption into the adult self of the outrageous and the inchoate" and how "every American knew the names of half a dozen effective mood-management medicaments." (Rushdie 182) Doctors are ignorant of the problems they handle, their only skill being a management of an artificially transformed self by medication. Solanka sees them metaphorically as "the cartographers of the altered states of America." (Rushdie 183)

An alternative to medication, or rather a complementary antidote, is advertising. Thinking of his first wife who embraced a job in advertising, Professor Solanka remembers the old days in the seventies when advertising was regarded as a rather shameful, frivolous and low business. Now, and in America of all places, "the commercials soothed America's pain, its head pain, its gas pain, its heartache, its loneliness, the pain of babyhood and old age, of being a parent and of being a child," (Rushdie 34) and the list covers all imaginable pains that advertising alleviates.

Since America has taken the lead, she is the only measure of anybody's success in the flatteringly magnifying mirrors of the world. If one succeeds in America, that means one "made it big" and "American success had become the only real validation of one's worth." (Rushdie 224)

As top number one leader of the world, America proudly puts her logo on everything: "American Dream, American Buffalo, American Graffiti, American Psycho, American Tune." (Rushdie 55)

What Solanka finds most annoying is that "everyone was an American now, or at least Americanized" and "even anti-Americanism was Americanism in disguise." (Rushdie 87)

New York as "a State of Mind"; New York Perspectives

In 2002 in an interview with Peter Catapano, Rushdie declares what he has kept saying ever since - that he had always been fascinated with and attracted to New York. The leap from London to New York did not feel like a huge plunge for a migrant transnational person like Rushdie, who had been living in big cities all his life. To a certain extent, New York is not unlike Bombay in terms of hybridity, and Rushdie explains it in these terms:

> It has to do with it being an immigrant city, a city whose culture is created by successive waves of migration. It's the only city in the world — since I left Bombay — where I've actually felt normal, or at least everybody else is abnormal in the same way. (Catapano)

In the same interview, Rushdie dwells upon his attachment to the city, and in doing so he makes it very clear that for him "it's always been New York, not America." The author seems to echo his narrator in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*. There Rai says with even more emphatic conviction that "America below Fourteenth Street, loosey-goosey and free as air, gave me more of a sense of belonging than I'd ever felt back home." (Rushdie 419)

Of all places in the world, New York seduces as the epicentre of this "golden age" which cannot last. In another interview, Rushdie declared that he was even in a hurry to capture it before it was gone as Scott Fitzgerald had captured its glamour in the twenties, which lasted for a decade and then crashed into depression. Rushdie explains his sense of urgency when he wrote *Fury:*

> That's one of the reasons I felt such a sense of urgency about getting it down: I had a sense that this wasn't going to last long. *This bubble is going to burst*. Obviously I didn't foresee calamity, but I did see that these moments in a city, or in a society, are usually pretty brief; this sense of infinite possibility doesn't go on. People fall back to earth. That's I think what drove me to write this book with such urgency that it actually interrupted another book and took precedence. (PowellsBooks.Blog)

Indeed, *Fury* references *Great Gatsby* several times where the two novels echo each other to evoke the gorgeous and seductive glitter of the city, which is often clouded by potential disaster within and without.

As Arjun Appadurai argues, writers "often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers." (Appadurai 58) Appadurai explains that imagination does shape the space we inhabit, and writers' imagination, especially the kind of imagination prone to fantasy and to projecting alternative "realities" which underpins magic realism, shapes it in a way which virtually never exhausts possibilities and meanings. In other words, we inhabit the spaces charted by these writers in their "gardens of forking paths," a text Rushdie references in *The Ground beneath her Feet,* which provides him with a typifying visual metaphor of the virtually infinite possibilities in which we may project the plots of our lives in the settings we inhabit.

Books like *Fury*, which capture the not-yet burst bubble on the verge of its outburst, make that brief moment accessible to readers in a way that would not otherwise be accessible to them. Thus, Rushdie explains:

> I always thought the book, if I did it right, could at some later point— which we're already at, as it turns out—be a kind of evocation of an age. In the way, to be vain, that you look at the Jazz Age through Fitzgerald. A book that is correct about its moment can have an enduring value because it evokes the moment and makes people able to enter the moment in a way that is otherwise hard to do. (PowellsBooks.Blog)

The writer himself feels he is a New Yorker now. He confesses: "I'm not an American citizen and I have no plans to take citizenship, but I do feel that being rooted in New York is increasingly becoming a perspective that I have." (PowellsBooks.Blog)

Rushdie is convinced that "sometimes literature is the way in which the past can really be captured and held, in such a way that we're able to enter it." (PowellsBooks.Blog)

In the same interview, Rushdie reinforces the distinction he has always made between America and New York, being an American and being a New Yorker, respectively: "I don't feel American. I **do** feel like a New Yorker. I think there's a real distinction there. A city allows you to become a citizen even when you're not a national." (PowellsBooks.Blog)

Rushdie declares that he goes to London very often because of his children, but when he reads the British newspapers he feels that "the position from which people think is so different /…/." Echoing Solanka's remarks about what he calls "automorphosis," by which he means the transformation(s) of the self, Rushdie finishes this statement on a note of change within him, a change determined by the "ideoscape" of New York:

> That's to say I've now moved into understanding the world from the kind of positions Americans think about things. I go and I'm constantly shocked by the relatively alien mindset with which I'm confronted and with which I used to be completely at home. (PowellsBooks.Blog)

New York, the New Rome

Very frequently in *Fury*, New York is compared to Rome. The first association between the metropolis of Rome as an ancient version of a "spectacle" society of the plenty, which generously treats its citizens to circuses and bread, on the one hand, and New York, a postmodernist metropolis with its concupiscent display of a wide range of artistic and political performances, sometimes an imbrication of those, on the other, appears early in the novel to foreground the anthropological and cultural analogy. One finds it in "the season's hit movie" which portrays "the decadence of Caesar Joaquin Phoenix's imperial Rome." New York the New Rome is equipped with the hi-tech needed to digitize ancient Rome through "the computer-regenerated illusion of the great gladiatorial arena, the Flavian Amphitheatre or Colosseum." In New York, "actions and distractions" abound: there is "a musical about lovable lions, a bike race on Fifth, Springsteen at the Garden with a song about the forty-one police gun shots that killed innocent Amadou Diallo," movies "about lovable dinosaurs." (Rushdie 6) There is also the show of the elections,

> a cardinal's inauguration, a cartoon about lovable British chickens, and even a literary festival; plus a series of 'exuberant' parades celebrating the city's many ethnic, national and sexual subcultures and ending (sometimes) in knifings and assaults on (usually) women. (Rushdie 6)

The description of this New Rome matches the idea of a "cosmopolis" containing a variety of cultures and subcultures, flattened history and geography from dinosaurs and lions to British chickens, all "lovable" animals, from art through politics to religion, all turned into spectacle and (sometimes) ending in real-life assaults and murder.

Assaults and murder are extreme manifestations of fury. In her essay "Global Minds and Local Mentalities: 'Topographies of Terror' in Salman Rushdie's *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown,"* Ines Detmers argues that "Rushdie creates symbolic terrains of terror by means of which all cultural and social order appears to be rooted in and/or founded on literal and metaphorical acts of slaughter." (Volkmann, Grimm, Detmers, Thomson (eds.) 356) Indeed, slaughter is either an intention, which in the case of Solanka turns him into an alien to himself and drives him across the ocean to New York, or imagined by Solanka as a possibility, since he has several blackout episodes and knows himself virtually capable of it. To these, several acts of extreme violence add: the three crimes in the media committed by a mysterious criminal and eventually sorted out on Jack Rhinehart's death, which is incredibly made to look like a suicide, but which in fact proves to be an act of murder whose victim Solanka's friend is. Apart from these, there is the violent dictatorial regime in Liliput-Blefuscu, which is imagined by Solanka in his Galileo-1 story before it actually happens in the imaginary space of the novel. Thus, the whole novel is a *mise en abyme* of spaces of terror, which starts with this analogy between the Rome of gladiatorial fights and the contemporary knifings in New York.

The analogy between ancient Rome's power and opulence, its decadent culture and civilization, and New York, today's "object and goal of the world's concupiscence and lust" (Rushdie 6) finds its best advocate in Jack Rhinehart, who now and then slips into Eddie Murphy's manner of speaking when he describes New York's Palaces as an affluent centre of gravitation, rotten at heart, but radiating their glamour around, which keeps the planet moving:

> He often compared his subject to that of the Roman Suetonius. 'These are the lives of today's Caesars in their Palaces,"/…/ They sleep with their sisters, murder their mothers, make their horses into senators. It's mayhem in the Palaces. But guess what? If you're outside, if you're the mob in the street, if, that is, you're us, all you see is that the Palaces are the Palaces, all the money and power is in there, an' when dey snaps dey fingers, boy, de planet it start jumpin' (Rushdie 56)

Solanka himself is no less critical and worried about the self's "disintegration" in the West, and of all places in America, and of all places in America - New York, "this city of fiery, jeweled garments and secret ash, in this time of public hedonism and private fear." (Rushdie 86) Brooding on the analogy with Rome, and thus connecting moments and cityscapes, and their "ethnoscapes" and "ideoscapes" across time and space, Solanka sees the decadence of both and compares the situations leading to the imminence of their crash from their cosmic height, which might reveal their face of clay, their provincialism:

> Rome did not fall because her armies weakened but because Romans forgot what being a Roman meant. Might this new Rome actually be more provincial than its provinces; might these new Romans have forgotten what and how to value, or had they never known? Were all empires so undeserving, or was this one particularly crass? (Rushdie 86-87)

Flâneur

Apart from taking as many showers as he needs to keep himself clean and nice-smelling, Solanka takes a lot of walks. His loitering habits are those of a *flâneur,* whose aim, as Baudelaire accounted in the 19th century, is to "capture the passing moment" and "all the suggestions of eternity that it contains." (Baudelaire 5) The pleasure Solanka takes in "being crowded out by other people's stories," in "walking like a phantom through a city that was in the middle of a story which didn't need him as a character" (Rushdie 89) may be an echo of Poe's text "The Man of the Crowd" and of an essentially modern ethos of pacing the streets as an observer, a reader of the labyrinthine geography of the city and its dwellers for an answer to one's own questions. There is, of course, a whole league of *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* in the modernist city novel novel, of which Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway are just two well-known examples. It seems that with figures like Solanka's in *Fury*, or the male characters in the American novel of the first decade of the new millennium like Adam Walker in Paul Auster's *Invisible* (2009), the key characters in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), the *flâneur* is there to stay, and he becomes a counter-hegemonic figure, an introspective agent of masculine subjectivity taking the city in and projecting himself onto it.

In the third paragraph of the novel, Solanka is accosted by a daring blonde who reverses the deep-seated idea that the gaze is masculine, and who tells him: "You walk a lot. I mean, five or six times a day, I see you walking someplace. I'm sitting here, I see you come, I see you go, but there's no dog, and it's not like you come back with lady friends or produce. Also, the hours are strange, it can't be that you're going to a job. So

I'm asking myself, Why is he always out walking alone?" (Rushdie 4) Solanka is irritated by the woman's intrusive verbal inspection because he has come to America and to New York in particular to be eaten away, to be unnoticed, invisible, and find peace. "Botanizing on the asphalt" in Walter Benjamin's words, Solanka looks not just for peace, but also for answers to his troubling questions, and for a meaning.

Galileo-1

Solanka's attachment to dolls dates from his abused childhood, and later he becomes a dollmaker himself. As a matter of fact, the story of Solanka's life gravitates around dolls. What drives him to New York is a rage which starts from his disappointment in seeing Little Brain, his favourite doll, out of his control, in the hands of press conference organizers, magazine editors and television people. Seeing that "this creature of his own imagining, born of his best self and purest endeavour, was turning before his eyes into the kind of monster of tawdry celebrity" "most profoundly abhorred" (Rushdie 98) by him, he decides he will annihilate the doll. Since he cannot do it himself, Solanka makes the drastic decision of letting his wife Eleanor destroy all the dolls he has ever created. Eleanour rises heroically to the task, and then carefully stages a celebration only to see that Solanka and their little son Asmaan want Little Brain back. It is her turn to be disappointed, and besides, there is one doll Solanka failed to mention, which is still in the house. The result of the terrible tension is Solanka's gesture of standing above his sleeping wife and son with a knife, in a state of booze torpor. This sets him off to New York, where he meets Mila Milo, an incest victim and young Internet entrepreneur, who talks Solanka into re-launching Little Brain digitally.

This is how the hypertext of Galileo-1 starts to be created, which gets Solanka, and behind him Rushdie, of course, in the grips of a digital writing trance. The textuality explored by Solanka/Rushdie now is similar to Borges's "Garden of Forking Paths," which is considered to be the prototypical hypertext even before the term was invented. The "ideoscape" is now digitized, and the possibilities opened by this virtually infinitely branching out textuality fill the Professor with enthusiasm. What the hypertext offers is something Rushdie had always pursued, namely "freedom from the clock, from the tyranny of what happened next" and the possibility of developing "his ideas in parallel, without worrying about sequence or step-by-step causation. Links were electronic now, not narrative." (Rushdie 186-187) Like in "The Garden of Forking Paths," "everything existed at once," which brings Solanka, and Rushdie, to the realization that "this was an exact mirror of the divine experience of time." The hypertext is not only polyphonic, but also multispatial, "multidimensioned." It is also hybrid and fantastic and it taps into the market, the consumerist paradise, "offering games to play, video segments to watch, chat rooms to enter and, naturally, things to buy." (Rushdie 186-187)

Galileo-1 raises issues which have "gnawed at Solanka," "questions of knowledge and power, surrender and defiance, ends and means," (Rushdie 188) but also cyborgization, definitely an issue for the new millennium.[3]

Moreover, the hypertext lends itself to endless "metamorphosis" and "transmutation," old myths are given a "contemporary twist" by web users who are not familiar with them; it "swells" and "grows," and it is no longer an individual project, but

[3] All aspects related to "cyborgization" are analyzed by Chris Hables Gray in his book *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age,* New York: Routledge, 2002.

a work of collective imagination, as comments "flood in." (Rushdie 190-191) Neither is the hypertext contained within its borders: it is Solanka's way of crossing the line from its fiction into the imagined "reality" of New York and of the other imagined world of Liliput-Blefuscu, which translates Rushdie's postmodernist idea that the frontiers are softening and the worlds fuse.

Bombay and India of the Mind

Bombay, "the great metropolitan creation of the British," (Rushdie 31) is recreated by Rushdie, his narrators and his characters in more than one novel. Like New York, which is not America, but it may essentialize her, Bombay is not India, but it is her *omphalos*. Like New York, Bombay is "a metropolis of many narratives." (Rushdie 52) In *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, Rai's father is a digger of the city's prehistory, which fills "his imagination and his photo albums." (Rushdie 79) The "disorientation" in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* is the result of Ormus's and Vina's "auto-couture" of culture:

> This is what Ormus and Vina always claimed, never wavering for a moment: that the genius of Ormus Cama did not emerge in response to, or in imitation of, America; that his early music, the music he heard in his head during the unsinging childhood years, was not of the West, except in the sense that the West was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay where West, East, North and South had always scrambled, like codes, like eggs, and so Westernness was a legitimate part of Ormus, a Bombay part, inseparable from the rest of him. (Rushdie 95-96)

It is this "inseparability" that Rushdie himself has carried with him everywhere he may have been faring. He has declared many times in *Imaginary Homelands* and other essays and in interviews that India, and especially Bombay is a place of the mind, recreated in a way which has an analogy in archaeology, out of shards of memory, out of pieces of broken glass. For him, Bombay is, like New York, a cosmopolitan city and a "state of mind."

Although she is born in America, Vina Apsara goes to India, spends a few years and falls in love there, and later, while in America, she dreams of returning, she feels that India calls her. He father, an Indian, "takes Manhattan," declaring that India "is gone" for all of them. Indeed, Rai compares the period when Bombay was as cosmopolitan as New York to a later period when it ceased to be so. However, while spilling Ormus's ashes over Manhattan, Rai describes the city as standing up "iced and jagged and majestic like any Himalayas." It seems that "for no reason at all," he starts thinking at an Indian girl who "saved herself for Ormus." In his imagination and in that significant moment, he sees her "on Malabar Hill, Bombay." (Rushdie 572)

In *Fury* Bombay is not a setting, but it is a haunting memory which Solanka does his best to keep at bay. No matter how hard he may try to declare it dead and buried, Bombay is there in New York, as the West was in the Indian city, and that reminds Solanka of his fury: "Even the stores hereabouts had Indian names. Bombay, Pondicherry. Everything conspired to remind him of what he was trying to forget – of, that is, home, the idea of home in general and his own home life in particular." (Rushdie 70)

His own decision of leaving home and family behind reminds him of Mr Venkat who, in 1955, "became a *snayasi* on his sixtieth birthday and abandoned his family forever, wearing no more than a Ghandian loincloth, with a long wooden staff in one hand and a begging bowl in the other." (Rushdie 80) Nevertheless, what Solanka realizes is that the comparison triggered by this involuntary memory highlights a gap and an incongruity between the cultural significances of the act. While in the case of Mr Venkat it was done in the name of faith, Solanka knows that "when a man without faith mimicked the choices of the faithful, the result was likely to be both vulgar and inept." (Rushdie 81) Solanka cannot give a meaning to his act: he has "landed himself" in a city which is, despite some moments when he feels an alien, not unknown to him, whose language he speaks and whose customs he can understand up to a point. Both Bombay and New York, both Indian culture, which is a memory, and American culture, which is not exactly one he feels he belongs to, are alien to Solanka. Where does he belong, culturally speaking? Where is his place/home in this space of metamorphosis and translation, which is neither Bombay, nor New York? There is no answer to this question, but there is a remark, which reminds the reader of the kind of reality, atmosphere, and experience the novel captures as related to Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*: "After all, Jay Gatsby, the highest bouncer of them all, failed too in the end, but lived out, before he crashed, that brilliant, brittle, gold-hatted, exemplary American life." (Rushdie 82)

Here in New York, his Indian forbidden past continues to haunt Solanka. When they return from the funeral of Jack Rhinehart, Neela, Malik's new lover, opens a bottle of red wine, draws the curtains, lights many scented candles and plays a CD of Bollywood song classics from the fifties and early sixties. Neela's apartment is suffused with India: music, candles and incense, images, the dhuries on the floor, and Neela herself seems to have a "Bombay alter ego." (Rushdie 208) Now and again in the midst of New York, triggered by music, by names, by images, by any other Proustian associations, Bombay floods back, it is "his damned Yoknapatawpha, his accursed Malgudi, which had shaped his destiny and whose memory he had suppressed for over half a lifetime." (Rushdie 220)

On his way to Liliput-Blefuscu, the plane stops in Bombay, and Malik refuses the transit card and stays on board. However, even so, he is "not safe from feeling." He can feel the smell of India worn by the cleaners who come on board; they remind him of the "perfume of half forgotten unguents and spices – coconut oil, fenugreek, *kalonji* – that lingered on their skin"; "India arrived with them like a disease: the erectness of their bearing, the loud nasal intonation of their speech." (Rushdie 236)

Bombay lingers, and it stirs in the minds and souls of the writer and his characters ambivalent feelings and attitudes, like New York. After all, a transnational person like Rushdie transcends all spaces and reshapes them in his imagination, providing new maps of them for his readers.

Cosmopolis

Quoting Leonie Sandercock's definition of "cosmopolis," Edward Soja argues that it is "a construction site of the mind, a city/region in which there is genuine connection with, and respect and space for, the cultural Other and the possibility of working together on matters of common destiny, a recognition of intertwined fates." (Soja 230)

Soja's gloss upon this definition, in which he explains that the cosmopolis "can never be realized, but is always in the making" meets Rushdie's notion of "metamorphosis" and "transmutation," which are characteristics of his own cosmopolis. The cosmopolis is a "metropolis unbound," which no longer develops around a core city: it is "polycentric" and it may take the form of "the new techno-city," which New York is both in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* and in *Fury*, or "the galactic metropolis," which is one of many images of New York projected by *Fury*. No matter what it is called and what form it may take, its essential aspects are "fragmentation" and "immense distances between its citizens," (Soja 231) which *Fury* highlights. Sprawling, fragmented and global, this "New Rome" is a protean metropolis which undergoes transformations caused not only by economic, social, and political factors, but also a chain of metamorphoses projected by imagination.

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