

## FROM “NOW-HERE” TO “NOWHERE”: THE SPATIAL AESTHETICS OF POSTMODERNISM

Syed Manzoorul Islam

*Department of English, University of Dhaka and  
Visiting Faculty, Department of English, BRAC University*

### ABSTRACT

*With the waning of the age of modernism, time has ceased to have a primary role in shaping people's psychological and cultural expressions. Time has given way to space and a new understanding of spatiality, which has been described as the “spatial turn.” Space is now seen as fluid and shifting without any locational coordinates just as time is viewed as fragmented, misaligned and imaginary. This new realization of space rejects the modernist concern for rationality and order, which has allowed various power groups to have domination and control over space. The opposing modernist and postmodernist views of space can be summarized under the categories of “now-here” and “nowhere.” These two categories clash over questions of order, control, identity, subjectivity and representation but there is an eventual rejection of hierarchical and gendered spaces, and other historically determined attributes of space. While “now-here” is considered predominantly male, white and rooted in history and time, “nowhere” is seen to be supportive of women and ethnic groups. “Nowhere” is characterized by a postmodern ambivalence, playfulness and virtuality; it is also the hyperreal cyberspace. However, in spite of the predominance of postmodern “nowhere” in our time, the paper posits that “now-here” is not a spent or inactive site either, but that it makes and remakes itself according to historical or political exigencies.*

Marxist literary and cultural critic Fredric Jameson, writing in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* suggests that our understanding of psychic experiences and cultural expressions is “dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time as in the preceding period of high modernism” (Jameson 1992: 43). He also characterizes the passage from modernism to postmodernism as a gradual loss of the importance of time and temporality. His position has been vigorously supported by a number of postmodernist theorists and cultural geographers such as Edward Soja and David Harvey who also maintain that space is not only a cultural but also an existential dominant of our time. The “spatial turn,” to use a phrase popularized by Henri Lefebvre, has led to a reversal of what Karl Marx posited back in 1857 as the annihilation of space by time in the era of industrial modernity. As space supplants time in our consciousness and in our daily life, time becomes misaligned, anarchical, and imaginary; consequently we struggle to locate ourselves in a post-Cartesian geography of shifting dimensions and ambiguous coordinates. The “here and now” certainty of modernism has given way to an eclectic and fluid understanding of a postmodern

“nowhere” which then comes to represent any number of configurations that distinguish postmodern discourse of space: hyperspace, heterotopia, thirdspace, fluid space, lived/living space, nomadic space, gendered space, radical space, cyberspace, non-place, parallel space, space as text or space as body. The effort to make sense of the constant mutations of space in our time has led to a new spatial aesthetics that tries to weave the different implications of these mutations into a cognitive pattern. It also questions earlier manipulation of space by various agencies of power to confine and control individuals and groups. Space, to bring the point closer home, is questioned for its association with power, and the way it is used as a disciplinary tool. Michel Foucault's example of monastery, school and asylum as carceral spaces reinforces postmodern suspicion of institutional manipulation of space. This suspicion has led to a realization and a celebration of “other” spaces and non-spaces as sites of defiance where the exclusionary politics of space, especially in the age of globalization, is contested.

The modernist “now-here” is largely seen to be a rational, pure, symmetric space represented by a

horizontal axis that cuts across a vertical axis of rational and hierarchical time. Accompanying such a purposive view of time however, is an obsession with flux, and a desire to salvage and store every significant moment. “Now-here” thus purports to anchor infinity within the coordinates of mappable space and measurable time. The postmodern “nowhere,” in contrast, has dumped those coordinates that firmly locate one in space and has assumed the appearance of a free floating, asymmetrical and anti-infinity “time-space compression” (Harvey 260-307). Postmodern spatial aesthetics is thus an attempt to understand the transition from an assertively modernist “now-here” to a constantly dissolving and expanding “nowhere.” It is also a re-evaluation of modernist categorization of surface, border and horizon; a reformulation of space in terms of human agency and the body; and an appreciation of hyperspace and new textual spaces – such as the online and networked domains.

The transition from now-here to nowhere has seen a reinvestigation and re-articulation of the politics of space. The political aspect of postmodern spatiality examines, for example, how one’s right to private space is being increasingly subverted by a proliferation of communal or shared spaces, as is happening in both urban (e.g., high rise housing, gated communities) and rural settings (e.g., rehabilitation and resettlement camps, cluster villages). The methodology, which is still evolving, hasn’t yet fully addressed the predominantly eurocentric bias of postmodernism which makes it vulnerable to charges of “first-worlding,” and retracing the WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant)-ish footprints of modernist traditions. Victor Burgin thus maintains that the postmodern is a “first-world problematic,” but admits, in the same breath, that “(t)he end of ‘grand narratives’ does not mean the end of either morality or memory” (Burgin 198). Burgin however, ignores the variable and provisional nature of morality in our time and the dangers of institutional or state enforced morality that promulgate certain unalterable codes of conduct and systems of compliance. Such an enforcement denies individuals the freedom of dissent – as is happening in theocratic states and extremist political set-ups throughout the world. Postmodern resistance against such totalizing versions of morality notwithstanding, one must take into account the violence with which institutions and states apply their “moral” agendas, and their

replication even in “first-world” countries. Besides, as global capital relentlessly flows into every local market, transforming their character and eliminating their ability to resist, there appears to be no safe corner where one can hold onto age-old economic, cultural or spatial practices. Space, for someone living in South Asia, has become as commodified, constrained and mediated and, by the same token, dispersed, unmanageable and hyper, as it is for someone living in the “first-world.” Their positions only vary in terms of the questions of scale and scope, and the different manifestations of the politics of space. However, as David Harvey maintains, postmodernism has begun to pay “close attention to ‘other worlds’ and to ‘other voices’ that have far too long been silenced (women, gays, lacks, colonized peoples with their histories)” (Harvey 42).

The transition from now-here to nowhere is by no means complete. In effect, as Umberto Eco has suggested in *Travels in Hyperreality*, we are living in an age of “permanent transition” (Eco 81). The fluid state of postmodern nowhere, despite its association with tentativeness and dispersal, encourages a “methodology” to investigate different manifestations of space in our time. The methodology, a highly idiosyncratic and eclectic one, raises a series of questions about the very nature of space: Is there a universal narrative or semiotics of space? Is space a singular, conceptual entity or a plural of contesting elements and shifting coordinates? Is space male? Gendered? If postmodern space is nomadic, does it yield any power to the outsider, the “other,” indeed, to the nomad, the subaltern, the people on the fringes of society? The questions also confront the categories of bodily space, social space and textual space, and the idea that space in our time is transferable, that is, one can, and sometimes does, carry space across geographical boundaries and replant it in new surroundings (e.g., diaspora communities, various “towns” such as China Towns and Bangla Towns in Europe and North America).

The methodology, then, basically focuses on the following set of questions

- How are space and subjectivity related, configured and contextualized? What are the spatial connotations of the body?
- How does the globally shifting space impact upon identity (migration, diaspora)?
- What is the relationship between space and violence?

- How far does postmodernism elevate “chronology over geography, place over space”? (Der Derian 307) This question has become quite pertinent now as different forms of violence (domestic, communal, institutional, as well as violence perpetrated by terrorist groups) tend to assume a spatial signature.
- Is speed another dimension of time and is it releasing now-here anxieties onto a postmodern nowhere landscape, again?

Answers to these questions are not easy to arrive at because of the fragmentary, incomplete and often ambiguous nature of postmodern experience. As a result any sustained enquiry becomes susceptible to sudden shifts and misreadings or even erasures. The task is made more difficult by the mutating and multivalent nature of postmodern spaces, and

their interconnected and changeable texturalities. Space social thus becomes space political with the inscription of individual or social struggle; just as space cultural becomes space material as social productions change from intangible to tangible. Such changes in territorial configurations become more numerous and unpredictable as the global economy expands. In such an expanding economy power groups of different descriptions dominate and produce space according to changing material, economic, military and other needs. Postmodern spatiality seems to have taken into account these altered configurations of space in its attempt to put up an overall “frame” of “nowhere”. The frame, despite its rather tenuous and incomplete appearance, does enter into a fruitful binary relation with “now-here” within the following schema:

<b>Now-here</b>	<b>Nowhere</b>
Structured/installed	Growing from within/fragmentary
Explores depth	Explores surface
Self-conscious/ rational	Unself-conscious/irrational
Focuses more on male/white/self	Concerns more with women and people of different colours and races
Rooted in history/time	Indifferent to history/a temporal/futuristic
Actual/real	Traces of the real/imagined/virtual/hyper
Fixed/hard	Fluid/soft
Displays a liking for anchoring/ centering/presence	Essentially Nomadic/peripheral/absent
Concerned with inside/interiority	Shows a likeness for outside/exteriority
Exclusive	Inclusive
Marked by anxiety about locus/situatedness	Marked by playfulness
Prefers particularly	Prefers randomness
Celebrates order	Celebrates spectacle
Hierarchical	Subaltern
Closed and boxed in	Promotes radical openness
Appears as significant place	Gives the appearance of heterotopia/non-place
Integrated	Eclectic

However, certain attributes and markers, such as parallel space and thirdspace that denote the postmodern “nowhere” do not have easily recognizable counterparts in the schema, unless we evoke the trialectics of space elaborated by Lefebvre in his *The Production of Space*. The material realm of Lefebvre’s “perceived space” and the controlled domain of his “conceived space” loosely correspond to the modernist now-here; and the real-and-imagined “lived space” to the postmodernist nowhere. Lived space, in Edward Soja’s interpretation, is “another space . . . actually lived and socially created spatiality” (Soja: 10-11).

However, when society creates “an other” space it does not do so by following the existing spatial norms but by infusing an element of otherness into it, which removes it from the constraints of planned spatial production. It is in this sense that lived space can also perform the functions of otherness, including resistance.

The postmodern nowhere does not mean “not anywhere,” in the sense it has no physical existence. It is indeed somewhere, as non-place is some place (supermarket, motorway, airport etc.); only that its spatial logic is markedly different from

the ideals of standardization, rationalization and uniformity that inform the modernist now-here. Nowhere is not a knowable, mappable or maneuverable space; it is rather an open-ended and undecidable space, prone even to invisibility. It transcends the various topographies of social space – such as work space, leisure space, public space – to assume an entity much like Homi Bhabha’s “the realm of the beyond.” Bhabha maintains that the “beyond” is “neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past . . . . For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth” (Bhabha 1994: 1). Postmodern nowhere is both here and there; it exists as memory and imagination, but is real enough to host excluded groups fighting for their rights. This “reality” indeed, is not one of modern city planners’ with their battle cries of functionality and solidity; nor of gated communities with their watchtowers and barbed wire fences; but of endangered ethnic groups who look at their land as belonging to nature, and have no legal deeds to support their ownership. This “reality,” as we have seen in the last several hundred years, is extremely tenuous and vulnerable, as armed and empowered settlers have made mockery of it (in Bangladesh the hill people in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the Garos and Santals in plain lands have been forced out of, or marginalized within, their own lands by the mainland settlers and land grabbers). The postmodern nowhere is “here” in the sense it partakes of the anxieties and imperatives of our time, such as institutional and state control of space, ecological deterioration, an end to family and community spaces and various other threats to private and public space. River erosion in Bangladesh, for example, has taken a vicious turn in recent times, erasing whole villages from the map every year, often forcing the displaced to settle in encampments or migrate. Examples of how a known landscape can turn into a forbidden territory may easily be drawn from our time: in Cambodia, the Balkan region, Afghanistan, Iraq and other past and present flashpoints of the world, where the scourge of landmines has turned once hospitable farmlands and fields into deathtraps. “Nowhere” recognizes these anxieties and assaults on space, as also the growth of planned cities that zone and grid out space according to administrative, economic and other imperatives. Nowhere is also a place where “the existential link

between spatiality and human agency” (Soja 129) is reviewed and reconnected. Nowhere is not a place where planned and programmed activities take place; rather, things happen, vistas unfold and the spatial turn enacts itself in an unselfconscious fashion. Nowhere is characterized by abandonment, not accumulation; and a playfulness that organizes social relations and productions in a random manner.

The schema detailing the opposites within which now-here and nowhere trace their different spatialities also helps us search for answers to questions that were posed above: Is there a universal narrative or semiotics of space? Is space singular, or a plural of different manifestations of spatiality? Is space predominantly male? Hierarchical? One look at the opposite pairings would suggest the probable answers (as also the different histories of spatiality in the last couple of hundred years). The answers to these questions, of course, is a qualified “yes” in case of modernistic now-here, and a less tentative “no” in case of postmodern nowhere. The logic of universalism which underpins modernist thinking infuses a sense of abstraction, and provides a broadbased applicability and timelessness to spatial constructs. In architecture, the ideals of functionality, purity and univalence have stifled localized, romantic and decorative urges. Modernist planners aspired to make their cities speak in a universal language and zoned out its public, corporate/work, entertainment/cultural and functional areas according to a universally applicable logic. But the same forces that contributed to “an architectural iconography based on . . . interpretation of the progressive technology of the Industrial Revolution” (Venturi 135-6), also, ironically, abandoned the core city in search of edge cities and suburban spaces, as an upwardly and outwardly mobile class, eager to make the best use of the possibilities offered by improved transportation and telecommunication facilities and networked communities began to move out of the city. The iconography of power, which Venturi suggests modern architecture overlooks, is again, ironically responsible for upsetting the universalistic logic of modernism, as in the case of the Las Vegas Strip. According to Venturi, the Strip “is not an order dominated by the expert and made easy for the eye. The moving eye in the moving body must work to pick out and interpret a variety of changing, juxtaposed orders” (Venturi, 52-3). The effort to “pick out and interpret a variety of . . . orders”

suggests a waning of an uneffortive, universal order. The order of the Strip is local, culture-specific, open-ended and subject to personal interpretations.

The male nature of modernist space is writ large over any structured, hierarchical or functional space that caters to a group of people, large or small. Family and community space, institutional or corporate space, space of discipline or worship – all privilege the male and perpetuate male domination. Feminists and feminist geographers such as Judith Butler and Gillian Rose have commented on the socially constructed nature of gendered spaces, and women's exclusion from these spaces or their marginalization within them. They have also shown how urban imagery and meanings are manipulated and reconstructed in keeping with the necessities of social power by different groups – which are primarily male – mainly for control over the production process. Ruth Fincher in an article has analyzed the structure of four sites of gendered social practice – the domestic sphere, the paid workplace, the city's built environment and localities to show how adversely women fare in all these sites (Fincher 29-37).

If these sites appear more as enclaves than open spaces for women to negotiate as they like, the situation is not any better for minority groups (ethnic, indigenous and other peripheral social groups) as well as for people with disabilities. These sites operate within a system that values the inside as purity, power and familiarity and the outside as a threat to all of these. In countries such as those in South Asia, these closed spaces get a boost from social systems and gendered practices, which restrict women's entry. A close look at families and communities in any country of the region will prove how these spaces marginalize women and place them under male gaze, as if they are objects which need constant monitoring. Interestingly, television soap operas produced in these countries (most notably in India) play on the theme of women's entrapment even in "modern" upper middle class and wealthy families. In cities across the region, women are unfairly disprivileged, as they find their spaces difficult to negotiate. If Michel de Certeau were to take a walk in any South Asian city, his ideal of the city would be a far cry from what he posited in "Walking in the City." In that nearly utopian essay, what is missing is an appreciation of feminine geography,

and the limitations within which it is placed. In a "modern" South Asian city, de Certeau will have to come up with two distinct versions of the walk – one for a male walker and the other for a female one. The female walker's version would be a practical manual for city planners and managers to revise, change and re-enact different spaces to accommodate women's priorities (the task would be quite impossible in the end, and would certainly be abandoned). It would also be a tract written for no one in particular that details the historically situated nature of women's subaltern positionality, their placement at the margin, and the stiff resistance from the inside once they aspire to change their position. A walk in the community or the city reinforces the idea of this historically created subject position of women. Julia Kristeva has suggested that women appeared as a historical group after World War II, just about the time cities in the west, particularly in the US, also began to see an outward expansion – the opening up of the suburb, for example, and the deterioration of inner cities. The emergence of women as a historical group is akin to what Teresa de Lauretis describes as "a shift from the earlier view of woman defined purely by sexual difference . . . to the more difficult and complex notion that the female subject is a site of difference" where sexual, economic, social or (sub)cultural differences come together, often at odds with one other (de Lauretis: 14). This shift also signaled an awareness of the dynamics of other sites that women inhabit. Home and workplace, for example, came to be seen differently than before, foregrounding identity and rights issues. But there has been hardly any reflection of this awareness in urban space planning and management. The situation is even worse in a South Asian city like Dhaka, where for a huge female workforce that daily commutes between home and factory or office there is no public transport and no safety. Many women walk to and from workplace. The streets, footpaths, parks and market places are overwhelmingly male, which women are expected to quickly pass through.

Structuring and organizing space reinforces traditional gender roles, as is seen in modern homes and apartments in South Asian cities. The kitchen in these homes, for example, is a female space – the layout of counters and shelves and sink proclaims its femaleness. Television commercials promoting sale of homes/apartments relentlessly visualize such separateness of space, reminding us

of Foucault's contention that the body is situated in space and should submit to authority – in this case, male authority. Foucault also maintains that the alternative to submission to authority is resistance, and his heterotopia – which is basically a juxtaposition of several places in one, a flaunting of modernist spatial logic and accommodation of the postmodernist nowhere – offers itself as a site of such resistance.

Spacing the body also entails seeing space in sexual terms, which further reinforces gender stereotypes. From medieval cartography to modern landscape planning, aspects of landscape have been projected in sensuous terms suggestive of feminine charms. Gillian Rose describes such feminization of landscape as the “pleasures of power” and suggests that the “intersection of voyeurism and narcissism . . . structures geography's gaze at the landscape” (Rose: 108). Bernard Tschumi considers the way architecture organizes space with an erotic overtone as “the pleasure of space,” and writes in his celebrated book *Architecture and Disjunction*:

. . . it is a form of experience – the ‘presence of absence’; exhilarating differences between the plane and the cavern, between the street and your living room; symmetries and dissymmetries emphasizing the spatial properties of my body: right and left, up and down (84).

What male domination of space means is simple: a perpetuation of an uncritical stance towards the categories of male/female, self/other, insider/outsider, and assigning to space certain historical and cultural specificities that remain oblivious to changing times. Body is a social category as well as a trope, and, according to Foucault, is “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks” (Foucault 94). Power wants to create a “docile body,” but where there is domination, there is resistance. If the body is a site, then resistance also assumes a spatial dimension, and a locus. An additional site of resistance is the globally shifting space occupied by transnational laborers and migrants. These shifting population groups do not get completely lost in their new milieus because of their power of resistance against attempts at homogenization and monocultural unification. A good example is the group of Afghan refugees who were evicted from “the

Jungle” near Calais in France in September 2009. Despite the offer of rehabilitation on terms that would require these refugees to homogenize with French lifestyle and culture, they maintained their resistance, which to them was the only mode of ensuring their identity. One refugee spoke about the “Jungle” being their “home” since it allowed them to be themselves no matter how temporary and fragile that home was. These refugees were staring at the prospect of deportation, and one cannot predict how far their resistance would continue.

The above example may also explain the relationship between space and violence. There are, of course, many dimensions to the term violence, not the least of which is political. When a space spells identity for opposing groups that are hell-bent on establishing their identity rights, the result is violence, which often continues for generations. Political space is thus often deceptive. Palestine today stands out as a space marked by violence across Jewish and Muslim lines. The forceful occupation of Palestinian land by Israel has unleashed a string of unending violence, which has traumatized the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Country promotionals of Sri Lanka on TV channels and print media of the world depict the island as paradise, but behind the pictures of serene coastlines and teeming jungles lie killing fields where thousands have died in decades of ethnic violence. The violence has come to an apparent end, but the space the Tamils claim as their Elam (nation) has not disappeared. It will remain in their imagination as a place they have lost, and will reform itself in ways the official version may never apprehend. In Bangladesh too, ethnic minorities often stare at eviction, and loss of space, which is always accompanied by violence.

In most discussions of the politics of space, the emphasis falls on questions of identity and representation. Starting with domestic and domesticated space to neo-pastoral representations of space (the latter especially in advertisements for suburban housing projects as well as in literature and film), it is representation that forms and reforms identities. In housing project commercials across South Asia, individuals featured and targeted represent a homogenized group: young, upwardly mobile professionals and strong believers in small family norms. This homogenized identity is important for the promotion of a sales-vision – the apartments or houses are expected to bring with

them a culture of good neighbourliness, work ethics and meaningful enjoyment of leisure. Such make-believe identities are also the staple of political rhetoric of space which centralizes the concepts of compliance, good citizenship and tolerance. During the decade long violence in Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh from the early 1980s, ethnic rights activists were depicted as “miscreants” and “terrorists,” and those in government’s good book as “conscientious,” “model citizens,” etc. While the “miscreants” were threatened with incarceration, the “model citizens” were rewarded with cash and land – the very land over which ethnic groups fought the government forces.

Modernist now-here is situated in a landscape of known and reassuring markers; it celebrates order, situatedness and specificities. In modernist literature however, there is an ambivalence regarding such structured space. It recognizes, on the one hand, that the world is anything but whole and orderly – indeed, as TS Eliot so poignantly depicted in *The Waste Land*, it is fragmented, barren and soulless – and on the other, that it is alright to hope for a semblance of order to bring meaning to human enterprise within a spatial matrix. Modernist literature nurses a nostalgia for wholeness and order, the improbability of ever attaining which leads to tragedy and despair. Postmodern nowhere begins with the recognition of the improbability and undesirability of order – it is wary of order bringing with it its own logic and means of domination and control, and the consequent loss of freedom. Postmodernism differs from modernism in its method of articulating its doubts, which often takes an ironic, satirical or deliberately comical undertone. In Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), for example, the city of Berlin is depicted in a series of narratives that disrupt not only the spatial logic that one ordinarily associates with the city, but also the narrative mode of novel. The result is both ironic and comic. One notable achievement of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is its bringing home the message that in our time paranoia is an operative force, and that our perception of space and time is marked out by ambiguity and intrigue rather than nostalgia. In a different vein, Truman Capote in *In Cold Blood* ironizes the American pastoral of agricultural communities. Based on a true story of the murder of a family of four in a small Kansas community, the non-fiction novel turns upside down the traditional pastoral attributes of innocence,

happiness, togetherness and freedom from fear or violence. The novel’s irony lies in the realization that the line dividing the pastoral from the tragic is very thin, and may indeed have already disappeared. The mutations of space in our time lead to profound changes in people’s attitude to space. The River Valley farm in *In Cold Blood* was once a pastoral landscape, no doubt, but in the space of four gruesome murders, the farm has lost its innocence forever. It now resembles a violent back street of a big city, a hospital morgue, a psychiatric ward and a prison cell. Capote makes us realize how quickly a myth shatters itself, and how total and unexpected spatial changes can be.

A postmodern response to such quick and irreversible mutations is indifference. As one rises over the flow, the mutations fail to register their impact and are reduced to elements of everydayness. Italo Calvino’s science fiction, *Cosmicomics*, for example, shows how rising over the flow of events means ignoring geography and time altogether. Space is reduced to a hodge-podge of dimensions and elements that do not add up to anything; no one stands on any firm ground, and all is a crazy flux and fleeting impressions of space. Through the use of the technique of defamiliarization, science fiction attempts to dislocate the reader’s known registers and references in order to create its own tropes of hyperreality. This hyperreality then transcends and replaces lived reality. The reason why science fiction (along with cyberpunk novels) is often classified as postmodern lies in its distancing, in the words of Scott Bukatman, “the world of the reader” from the “diegetic construct.” He elaborates: “At its best the language of science fiction, and the distance between its signifiers and the reader’s referents, becomes its ultimate subject” (Bukatman 12). In a postmodern science fiction like Philip Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968; a film version, *Blade Runner* became a success) the grim and dystopic presentation of a twenty first century megalopolis in ruins underlies both the vulnerability of our spatial constructs to mutations of time and technology, as well as the futility of a belief in rational order, including belief in scientific progress. Although there is a general agreement among a section of critics and commentators that science fiction owes its origin to utopia, Dick and a few other science fiction writers (Samuel R. Delaney, J. G. Ballard) show a world, which is desolate and sinister, a wasteland dominated by a

perverse, wayward technology. The future-based locus of science fiction defamiliarizes known categories of space and time and creates a nowhere of unknown dimensions. There is also an anxiety about dissolution and disappearance and an end-of-progress skepticism about the very continuation of time. End of progress implies an end of space-time continuum, and, with it, mankind's ability to conquer new frontiers with the help of science and technology. Nowhere doesn't have any space for heroism. Indeed, there is no heroism in Dick or Ballard, only a doomed fight against unpredictable forces of destruction. There are moments of individual greatness, no doubt, but in a world where technology has gone haywire, where simulation rules and where cyborg culture has replaced human enterprise, these moments do not add up to a chronicle of heroism.

If dystopia is one direction that science fiction takes, another direction appears to be hope -- hope of achieving a balance between technology and human imagination. Writers like Olaf Stapledon even use a metaphysical frame to foreground fantasy, anxiety or even disorientation for arriving at an understanding of our world. Whatever the direction science fiction takes, the space it creates defies the logic of reality, spatial ordering and the connectivity of time and place. Space in science fiction is never now and here, as both now and here appear as floating signifiers without any corresponding signifieds. If anything, science fiction space, like cyberspace, is nowhere, which is both here and not here; here and there. It is a constantly evolving space, which allows it to be created, recreated and dissolved. Increasingly, as the twenty first century progresses, people will have to deal with nowhere and learn to come to terms with it. The futuristic space in science fiction is both a debased and reworked version of the space we know, and an impossible space whose coordinates we cannot locate and whose mutations we cannot predict. Cyberspace too, problematizes our perception of the real and the superreal, the knowable and the unknowable. Cyberspace is no place in the sense it doesn't exist in any known dimension, but it is also a place that anchors many of our real-life activities and experiences. It is a space where cash transactions take place, bonds and shares are traded, properties are bought and sold, commerce is conducted on both big and small scales, academic lessons are transmitted and medical advice is given. It is a complex, borderless interface between the global and the local, where

even complete strangers can establish intimate communications. Commentators on virtual reality, most notably Benjamin Woolley (*Virtual Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), have discussed the "interior" nature of cyberspace in opposition to the three dimensionality and outwardness of our everyday life, but assert that cyberspace, despite this interiority, is convincingly real. The virtual environment of cyberspace is interactive, often consensual and constantly presents us with newer ways of seeing and experiencing reality. Virtual reality, in other words, is as real as one wishes it to be, but without the constraints of three dimensionality or the order of reality. It is a realization of the possibilities of spectacle, where desire and fantasy interface with simulated imagery and the moving texts of our experience. In the domain of the spectacle, our everydayness assumes almost a metaphysical property, even when mediated by capital (as Guy Debord maintains in *The Society of the Spectacle*) or corporate power. Viewers see their own images and fantasies in spectacle, which continuously works up their appetite for more. It is an unending journey towards a hyperreality that takes place in no space, but spreads over all space and every space. The postmodern nowhere is characterized by such mediated and unmediated spectacles that bring to the fore the visual, cultural, technological and sensory nature of space, and its vulnerability to global capital, technological control and various forms of manipulation.

Another aspect of postmodern nowhere is its decoupling of power and language in the construction of space. Cultural geographers have long since rejected universalist definitions of space or place, and suggested that these are both real and imagined constructs of language. Spatial language is key in creating social and political orders, as we have seen in political rhetoric of our time again and again. Space cannot be mapped without a recourse to language, and hence it assumes the status of a text. Space as text is however, infinitely variable, which makes it a nowhere without clear boundaries. Space as text is also closely linked to body as text -- which locates the body in spatial and temporal contexts for an understanding of its aura, its performance and its materiality.

The modernist now-here and the postmodern nowhere are however not mutually exclusive categories: neither is the age of now-here over, nor that nowhere now reigns. The very terms "regions"

and “reigns” would foreclose such a possibility. For, nowhere is not a region in the sense of being a specified, marked out territory; and the idea of its reigning would clash sharply with its subalternity. Now-here also is very much here – in the political and corporate world; in academia and the marketplace and in the carceral societies whose pictures Foucault so neatly drew. But the resistance against the hegemonic dominance of now-here is also well-marked. This resistance is against the control and manipulation of power, against the fixity and rationality of an imposed spatial order, against the subordination and control of the body, against hierarchy. Nowhere promises a freedom from these forces, but it does not guarantee anything. Now-here also appears and disappears in keeping with political or historical exigencies, and its spread reaches far. However, a way out is offered by virtuality and hyperreality, and it remains to be seen how nowhere evolves into a new nowhere through mutations in the world of virtuality and hyperreality.

#### WORKS CITED

- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bukatman, Scott. *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Burgin, Victor. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. “Feminist Studies/Cultural Studies: Issue, Terms and Contents.” *Feminist Studies/Cultural Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Der Derian, James. “The (S)pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance, and Speed.” *International Studies Quarterly* 34.3 (1990): 295-310.
- Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyperreality*. London: Picador, 1987.
- Fincher, Ruth. “Women in the City: Feminist Analysis of Urban Groups.” *Australian Geographical Studies* 28.1(2004): 29-37.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: An Introduction. Tr. Robert Hurly. New York: 1990.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge?* Minneapolis, MN: Polity Press, 1993.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Sociology Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Tschumi, Bernard. *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994.
- Venturi, Robert. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977.