CITIES OF THE IMAGINATION AND SPACES OF UNCERTAINTY IN POSTMODERN LITERARY COMMUNICATION

Alina Țenescu
University of Craiova, alinatenescu@gmail.com

Abstract

As postmodern inhabitants and passengers through space, we are capable of capturing images of the city and of conceiving different modalities of incorporating spatiality into our peculiar ways of being in the world, and ways of dealing with the challenge that the complex reality of space represents to us. We start from the premise that the urban space is related to the architecture of postmodern dwelling places in the city and space and that space is produced, constructed through and embedded in peculiar spatial and walking practices which the postmodern writer works with and incorporates in his work so as to render one of the essential features of the postmodern world he lives in. Our main objective is to understand how the city is conceptualized as future science-fictional space or as space of uncertainty in Postmodern English-American and French literary communication. In this paper, we aim to explore how urban space can be related to subjective and implicit engagements and perceptions by the postmodern mind and body, through its sensations and perceptions, starting from a corpus of English-American and French novels by: Ray Bradbury, Curt Siodmak, Alison Lurie, Julien Gracq and Jacques Réda. We assert that *urban space* relies on conceptual metaphors related to peculiar spatial representations in order to describe what is conceived and perceived by the postmodern writers and characters from our corpus of novels. Our objective is to organize conceptualizations of urban space into several categories of cognitive metaphors related to the urban space, using a model inspired by the research of Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

Keywords: city of the imagination, cognitive metaphors, images, perception, postmodern literary communication, representation, spaces of uncertainty

1. Introduction

Paths, alleys, towns and cities are referred to as places or spaces or bringing about peculiar landscapes; consequently, their meanings are hard to assimilate. But places and spaces are ways of seeing, understating, knowing, grasping,

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

seizing the world around us. We guess the existence of worlds of meaning and spatial experience, we understand that there are attachments, connections and interrelations between places, spaces and people. To think of urban space or of a portion of space as an intricate and complicated interaction between individuals and their environment equates with grasping this area of the world as place which is not thought of in terms of mere facts, numbers and figures anymore, but as a web of meanings and as a way of gaining knowledge of the world.

Our experience of any urban space and place through the five senses cannot be separated from the social, cultural and psychological environment in which the individuals live. If to understand any place and place within the urban realm equates with feeling or experiencing space and place, we must be aware of the fact that each individual, each city inhabitant might experience the sensations in a different manner, and remember, conceive and perceive space and place differently. Consequently, places and spaces within the urban landscape are most of the time linked to peculiar perceptions, to subjective attitudes of appropriating space and place and to the relationship that inhabitants of passengers maintain with the particular spaces of living.

Starting from a comparative approach to space in Postmodern English-American and French literature, we contend that we can easily acknowledge urban space as a product of intersections and interrelations. Consequently, we assert that the urban space that emerges in postmodern fiction is also conceived through all kinds of interactions, starting from the immensity of the global to the most intimately flyspeck dwelling place. Under the influence of globalization, the urban space is perceived, conceived and thought of in three chief traits: 1) space is produced and constructed through interrelations; 2) the postmodern urban space opens the possibility of the existence of "multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality" (Massey 2005, 8-9); 3) the urban space is continuously being constructed and reconstructed by postmodern writers, citizens, inhabitants, passengers and by their experience of specific places.

For us readers to better understand the way images of the city are created and how the construction of urban space is conveyed through visual representations, a useful starting point is to see that the city is defined through a rich urban imagery and a wide range of conceptual metaphors in postmodern English-American and French literature. Having already identified and analyzed in previous studies other categories of cognitive metaphors associated with the city space (such as the metaphor of the city as chessboard, the city as self-conceived entity, the city as tumour, as reversed reflection, as wall of fire, as manifestation of chronic fear, as memory and so on), and having chosen as research corpus excerpts from Francophone authors, we thought it might be relevant to expand this time the corpus of study by selecting excerpts from both English-American and Francophone writers and by isolating other categories of metaphors, includingly focusing on images of the city as future science-fictional space/being. Our current research corpus is represented by excerpts from novels

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

by the following authors: Ray Bradbury (*L'homme illustré*, 1986), Curt Siodmak (*La Ville du Ciel*, 1976), Alison Lurie (*La Ville de Nulle Part*, éd. 1988), Jacques Réda (*Les ruines de Paris*, 1977), Julien Gracq (*La forme d'une ville*, 1985). Starting from an anthropologic-cognitive approach, using Lakoff and Johnson's model and the comparatist method, we assert that, within our corpus of study, the most recurrent urban space metaphors are those of the urban space as multi-sensory human being, as satellite, as setting and as space of uncertainty.

2. Imagining the city and representing the city. Spatial identity landmarks and visual representations of city space

Becoming familiar with the urban landscapes of postmodern writers is synonym for the reader to find and discover himself within a yielding space, endowed with indefinite outlines where the uncertain and the improbable become possible. It is a space whose identity is defined by boundaries which are transgressed and by differences which are blurred or lack consistency. Displacement and the lack of stable landmarks are generated by the omnipresence of intruder agents which eventually lead to the dismantling of common behaviours or routines of both passengers and inhabitants of dwelling places. These intruders might as well be represented by human noises and by stains, odours of fire, meteorite or metal. As common metaphor of urban imaginary, the intruder does not only symbolize the propensity to the non-observance of established order, but it could also symbolize the desire to change one's own way of judging space, the relations between individuals inside space as well as the structure and reaction of the human body in space and the perception of space projected from the body and bodily experience.

The writers' and the characters' representation of the urban space as well as the readers' perception are rendered unconventional and consequently, they trespass common, current and traditional geographical and spatial categories, so that they bring about a series of metamorphoses that occur as though they are shaped by unusual spatial landmarks. This new perspective on the urban landscape in postmodern English-American and French fiction is reflected by a wide array of metaphors in relationship to the urban space. One of the recurrent metaphors found in our corpus of study is that of the urban space as multi-sensory human being – instantly detecting these intruders – or as body organ (nose).

2.1. Cities of the imagination. The urban space as multi-sensory human being

One of the recurrent metaphors found in our corpus of study is that of the city as human being endowed with a multi-sensory body. The organicist-animist metaphor compares the city to a live organism with its own organs such as ears and nostrils.

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

In the science-fictional novel *L'homme illustré* by Ray Bradbury, the narrator perceives and describes the urban space in terms of corporeal metaphors, conceiving the city as an immense organism with a uniform body whose organs function interconnectedly. The imaginary city in Ray Bradbury's science-fiction is not only compared to a multi-sensory human being, waiting for the planet to follow its race within space, but it also gradually identifies with an organ whose tissues are woven in the heart of its shaped network of avenues and dwelling places, while the black-walled buildings of the waiting city are perceived as olfactory membranes where the sense of smell is mediated by specialized sensory cells of a nasal cavity whose layers lie deep within the pores of grim concrete walls:

> "La ville dégagea des narines secrètes dans ses murs noirs et l'air régulièrement aspiré souffla en trombe dans les profondeurs des conduits, à travers des filtres et des dépoussiéreurs, jusqu'à une série de membranes et de toiles délicates et argentées. L'aspiration continue apporta les odeurs du pré". (Bradbury 1986, 221)

The secret nostrils of the city are hidden inside the black walls and the air regularly inhaled by the urban body is afterwards breathed out within the depths of pipes, through filters and dust arrestors, till it reaches a series of membranes and delicate silver web threads. The suction is capable of bringing together a bouquet of wild meadow odours. Strangely though it might seem, this odour mixture does not smell anymore of wild herbs and flowers, of hay and countryside dust, but of gas, sulphur, copper, fire, meteorite and hot metal.

> "Odeur de feu, de météore, de métal chaud. Une fusée est arrivée d'un autre monde. Odeur de cuivre, odeur poussiéreuse de la poudre brûlée, du soufre, des gaz d'échappement". (*ibidem,* 222)

These intruder scents are not only intoxicating, but also provocative and powerful: they let the inhabitants of the city guess the presence of celestial travelers on their territory; as the celestial travelers are cruelly evicted into a vast space of silver stars and darkness, and cast out on a specific spot of the giant human-like city, the urban organism blocks the functioning of the other four senses: sight, hearing, touch and taste and operates only by activating and re-activating the olfactory system. The large urban nostrils are hence dilating again so as to seize and identify the odour of the *Others*. Hundreds or thousands of urban olfactory receptors bind to a specific molecular feature and odour molecules are endowed with a variety of features that excite particular receptors and disseminate the specific odour of the *Other* – which is strangely the odour of butter.

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

> "Les grandes narines de la ville se dilatèrent de nouveau.
> L'odeur du beurre. Venant des hommes qui s'avançaient avec précaution, les effluves se décomposèrent à l'intérieur du Nez en souvenirs de matières grasses, de fromage, de crème glacée, senteurs d'une économie laitière". (*idem)*

This mixture of excitatory signals from different receptors located in both the cilia and synapses of the olfactory sensory neurons of the city and in the epithelium of the urban airway makes up what the Earth's inhabitants perceive as the molecule's smell. In the urban brain, olfaction is primed, processed and treated by the olfactory system; once the olfactory receptor neurons in the nose of the living city have disseminated the fragrances of a dairy economy, the odours of the Other (coming from another planet) are decomposed inside the urban Nose into a recollection of terrestrial odour memory, into souvenirs of fat vegetable matter, of butter, cheese, ice cream. The olfactory receptor neurons differ from the other urban body neurons in that once they have died, they cannot regenerate fast enough. Consequently, the urban organism blocks the functioning of the olfactory system which proves at this stage useless and activates another sense – that is hearing. The Ears of the city are awoken and they listen to the sound of the *Others*, to the bitter cries of celestial travelers that are cast out not only onto the city but also into the infinite space of silver stars and blackness:

> "Au son de ces mots aboyés, les Oreilles s'éveillèrent. […] Les Oreilles écoutèrent: […]
> - Je n'aime pas ça ! Je ne sais pas pourquoi. Vous n'avez jamais eu l'impression d'avoir déjà vu un endroit ? Hé bien, cette ville paraît familière, trop, même". (*idem)*

The city is completely awoken as the other three senses are activated, beginning with sight and continuing with touch and taste. As ventilators are exhaling and retaining the air, the living city distinguishes the tobacco odour breathed out by the mouths of individuals, as well as it seizes the soapy scent of their hands and the peculiar odour of their eye globes. After a last analysis carried out by the living urban organism, after having touched, felt, heard, smelt, seen and tasted the *Other*, the city must accomplish a daunting task. A trap is thus opened inside the alley and inside the stomach of the city where the captain of the racket from outer space disappears. The readers might ask themselves what is to happen with him.

Before digesting him, the urban human being performs a sinister operation on his body: the captain is hung upside down, a razor cuts his throat, another razor cuts through his chest and stomach, his carcass is emptied of his guts and bowels, he lies on a table in a secret operating room underneath the

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

street. Giant crystal urban microscopes analyze his muscular fibers and mechanic hands resembling those of a quick-minded chess player on a chessboard examine his heart and his skin. While measurements are performed by the vengeful living city so as to take the celestial traveler's body temperature and cut his heart into several sections, as well as his liver and kidneys, his blood begins to flow over the vials and phials of the murderous urban entity which shakes it, centrifuges and displays it on strips and exposes it to further scrutiny under the sparkling glass of urban microscopes.

> "Une dernière analyse, et la ville, après avoir écouté observé, goûté, senti, pesé, doit accomplir une tâche ultime. […] Une trappe s'ouvrit dans la chaussée. Le capitaine disparut; les autres, qui couraient, ne s'en aperçurent pas.
> Pendu par les pieds, un rasoir lui ouvrant la gorge, un autre la poitrine et l'abdomen, sa carcasse instantanément vidée de ses entrailles, allongé sur une table dans une salle secrète sous la rue, le capitaine trépassa. De grands microscopes à cristal scrutèrent les fibres musculaires; des doigts mécaniques sondèrent le cœur qui battait encore. Les lambeaux de sa peau furent épinglés à la table, tandis que des mains articulées disséquèrent les différentes parties du corps comme un joueur d'échecs rapide et curieux qui déplace ses pions et ses pièces.
> Au-dessus, les hommes couraient, après Smith, en criant. Smith criait aussi, et au-dessous d'eux, dans cette étrange salle d'opération, le sang s'écoulait dans des ampoules, pour y être secoué, centrifugé, étalé sur des lamelles, exposé sous d'autres microscopes; les numérations étaient effectuées, les températures mesurées, le cœur découpé en sections, le foie et les reins partagés avec art. Le crâne fut trépané, l'encéphale dégagé, les nerfs retirés, les muscles allongés à la limite élastique; tandis que dans la centrale souterraine de la ville, le Cerveau établit enfin le grand total et tout le mécanisme fit halte, monstrueusement. […] Le total". (*ibidem*, 223)

The giant aggressive urban entity makes a bitter discovery: the celestial traveler proves to be another human being, from a far world, from another planet, but endowed with the same eyes, ears, legs and arms as other human beings; he carries guns, he thinks, he fights, he has a heart and he has organs, yet he is perceived as the city's enemy. In its turn, the living city proves to be the realm of Vengeance, on the Planet of Darkness, at the foot of the Mount of Dead. Once it stops performing experiments on the *Others*, the living city might become a balance, an antenna, a crucible meant to not only to analyze, but also to accommodate and accept the *Others* or the future voyagers from space.

"Et le nom de cette ville était et il est encore Vengeance, sur la

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

planète des Ténèbres, au bord de la Mer des Siècles, au pied du Mont des Morts; tout cela est très poétique. Cette ville était destinée à être une balance, un creuset, une antenne, pour analyser tous les futurs voyageurs de l'espace". (*ibidem*, 224)

2.2. Cities of the imagination. The city as satellite

With science-fictional author Curt Siodmak, in the *City in the Sky*, we become familiar with the metaphor of the city as satellite. The City in the Sky is conceived as a giant machine, as a satellite turning round the Earth every ninety-five minutes. It is the result of a project launched during a period of approach and reconciliation attempts between the major world powers. All the participating nations wish to contribute to the expensive project of the City in the Sky. The aerial urban space or the "International Space City" is designed as a neutral territory, as a symbol of unity amongst countries on the globe and as a propagator of peace. The City in the Sky is a satellite that has been launched on the orbit for two years by an idealist (Lee). This aerial urban project raises questions and tries to grasp issues of international political economics and geo-strategy, as well as it attempts to raise awareness and solve issues linked to the overabundance of computer technology and explain the technological philosophy behind the social-cultural realm of the urban community encapsulated and suspended up in the air.

As far as resources are concerned, the satellite's most precious commodity is water; the air of the City in the Sky is constantly dehydrated and the liquid is distilled for recycling. Strange though it might seem, everything is recycled in this encapsulated community: liquid human excrement is re-used: it is ejected into space through small reactors that help to regulate the satellite's rotation movements; hence, the inhabitants joke by realizing the City in the Sky maintains its balance by micturating into the void.

"La Ville Internationale de l'Espace est un terrain neutre, symbole visible de l'unité des pays sur le globe, propagatrice de paix. Lee a la sensation inquiète que tout le projet a trop bien marché, il ne voudrait pas que des difficultés à venir soient dissimulées sous l'euphorie politique. […] Sa cargaison se compose surtout d'eau, la denrée la plus précieuse sur le satellite. L'air de la VDC est constamment déshydraté et le liquide distillé pour recyclage. Même l'excrément liquide humain trouve un emploi: chauffé sous pression, il est éjecté dans l'espace par de petits réacteurs qui règlent la rotation du satellite. C'est une plaisanterie favorite parmi les passagers de dire que la Ville du Ciel se maintient en équilibre en pissant dans le vide". (Siodmak 1976, 23)

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

Even though the International Space City was meant as a propagator of peace, as a symbol of the unity amongst nations and as a symbol of highly-advanced technology, Lee is soon witness to the deception of a dream which cannot become reality. Consequently, the City in the Sky proves to be the playing field of the world's richest individuals and the headquarters of influential multinational corporations; a bunch of highly influential individuals have a monopoly on taxes collected, or better said, extorted by the space city authority. Ideologies are strongly defined and spread throughout the encapsulated city while tensions amongst nations and races living together in the aerial megalopolis cannot be controlled and tempered. Yet, insurgence comes from the Prison Space, a former laboratory of the International Space City, conceived as a smaller satellite of the satellite in order to host revolutionaries like Pierre Bardou, intellectual outcasts and renegades menacing the social, cultural and political balance as well as the propagation of dominant ideologies and hierarchies of power. The prisoners in space exiled to the smaller artificial satellite need to resort to desperate survival techniques: for each incoming cell mate, another is bound to be put to death. The prisoners are driven close to madness, while courage emerges alongside with Bardou's attempt to highjack a larger satellite, designed as a City in the Sky for the sole use of the rich. Even though the International Space City represents the height of sophisticated technology and an investment of the world's community of superpowers created so as to show that "the world's inhabitants do not need any boundaries in order to act and live together harmoniously" (*ibidem*, 23-24), it fails as a project since the overuse of technology, mainly computer technology, is not capable of bringing peace to the world and all the more so as tensions and conflicts amongst nations increase, instead of being tempered.

> "La VDC peut-elle prouver que les habitants du monde n'ont pas besoin de frontières pour agir et vivre ensemble en harmonie ? Que le nationalisme et le chauvinisme appartiennent à un passé barbare ? Cette idée était autrefois derrière l'obsession de Lee de créer la Ville du Ciel. Mais jusqu'ici son idéalisme reste insatisfait. Maintenant que le satellite géant tourne autour de la Terre toutes les quatre-vingt-quinze minutes, Lee éprouve la déception d'un rêve qui n'est pas devenu réalité. Les idéologies se sont âprement définies. Les tensions entre les nations ne se sont pas modérées. L'emploi massif des ordinateurs n'apporte pas la paix au monde". (Siodmak 1976, 24)

2.3. The city as setting

With American novelist Alison Lurie, in *The Nowhere City*, we encounter a peculiar metaphor of the city as setting/décor not for humans, but for cars. This setting resembles a vision of the future painted by an artist for the cover of

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

Galaxy Science Fiction. The setting becomes a major component for assisting the story of the *Nowhere City*. It is not a character itself, but it sets the time and place where cars become masters and human beings are out of place. It constitutes a dystopia – that is a framework for a non-human community which is somewhat frightening and disconcerting; this peculiar dystopia – a new technological urban environment – is characterized by the decay of human society, by dehumanization and by the invasion of cars as true masters of the city, as representatives of a secret race which merely tolerates the presence of human beings, by convenience or for amusement.

> "C'était un paysage très beau, à sa façon, mais inhumain […] Les gens n'y semblaient pas à leur place: ils avaient l'air beaucoup trop petits pour les routes et les bâtiments et, par comparaison, assez mal bâtis, tout en membres gênants et en morceaux de tissu. On ne voyait d'ailleurs qu'un très petit nombre de piétons. Les automobiles l'emportaient à dix contre un. Paul imagina une histoire dont le thème serait que ces automobiles étaient les véritables maîtresses de la ville, une race secrète qui tolérait l'existence des êtres humains par commodité, ou pour s'en amuser... Bien entendu, si un homme prenait conscience de la situation, il y gagnerait une liberté et des facilités sans limites". (Lurie 1988, 294)

The Nowhere City is the postpostmodern Los Angeles metropolis, a heterotopia made of layers of fault lines or fault zones - that is of geological shifts as well as of cultural, social, political shifts. The slices of heteropian space slid into each other, leaving traces of a most peculiar urban landscape: all we are left with is a conglomerate of non-places drawn together or melt together into a giant motorcar care center. Houses, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, spas are now meant to be dwelling places for a new race, that of motorcars. All restaurants, hospitals and cosmetic centers are hosting giant luxury mechanical beings and constitute shelters where the motocars are washed, fed and dressed:

> "L'air était figé; la rue vide, à l'exception des grosses voitures garées le long du trottoir, luisantes de vernis et allongeant, mi- grimace mi-sourire, la fente de leurs chromes. Elles semblaient plus grandes, ou tout au moins bâties sur une plus grande échelle que les maisons.
> Conçues, elles, pour des géants aux habitudes luxueuses; les maisons, pour des nains internationaux. Paul avait déjà remarqué qu'à Los Angeles les automobiles formaient une race à part, presque douée de vie. La ville était pleine d'hôtels et de salons de beauté, de restaurants et d'hôpitaux à leur usage: immenses et coûteux édifices où elles étaient garées ou lavées, nourries ou pansées. Elles parlaient, elles avaient leurs mascottes: des chiens ou

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

des singes en peluche qui regardaient par la vitre arrière […]". (Lurie 1988, 16)

The glistering city of the supermodern era with its glass skylines and trendy restaurants that turn into dwelling places and care centers for the giant mechanical inhabitants have already displaced the human dwellings that were so ubiquitous in postmodernity. That is why the air is now frozen and clad and the streets are deserted and devoid of human presence. The only witnesses to this new urban community of cars are the stuffed toys and plush pets which the cars talk to and which stare at them from behind the shop window panes.

2.4. The city as space of uncertainty

With Julien Gracq and Jacques Réda, the city is conceptualized as space of manifestation of uncertainty.

Urban morphogenesis corresponds to a paradoxical movement of concentration and dispersal. The paradoxical metropolisation resembles to a double motion: one that operates as centrifugal force and one that functions as a centripetal force. A wide array of spatial fractions, of vague grounds and sites emerge as collateral injuries inflicted by urban development. In *Les ruines de Paris*, Jacques Réda contends that the French metropolis turns into a vague land, which proves to be a nightmare for the suspicious and flicky urban planners or architects. The city thus resembles more to a land, a ground of infinite adventures enjoyed by both children and adults who remember that there is a child in all of us.

"[…] Appuyé dans cette attitude pensive à mon guidon, je me propose de créer l'Union pour la Préservation des Terrains Vagues. […]Je n'exigerai certes pas qu'on préserve tous les terrains vagues, parce qu'il faut prendre en charge des foules d'errants et d'expulsés, mais je constate que dans certains cas (peu nombreux à vrai dire) on y aménage des succédanés de squares ou de jardins. Car quelque agrément qu'on éprouve quand on y rôde, le terrain vague se déploie d'abord, entre ces interstices, comme un plan de méditation. La leçon tient dans sa seule présence de sauvagerie maussade, et mieux vaut s'abstenir d'en tirer une doctrine ou de l'art, tels ces francs-tireurs culturels de la rue Vilin (en dessous de la rue des Envierges), avec leurs fausses peintures naïves et le rose de leurs slogans. Comme eux j'essaierai d'émouvoir l'attention générale sur la nécessité de défendre le rêve garant de l'indépendance, mais en quoi consiste aussi le rêve, comment l'escamoter ? Terrain vague de l'âme et Dieu sait ce qui peut s'y produire, s'y glisser en fait d'ingénus poètes et de criminels. Ainsi travestir le terrain vague en cour de pouponnière, c'est risquer d'offusquer dans l'être la liberté

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

du dieu, négligeant qu'il enseigne, autant qu'une obscure espérance, la solitude et l'effroi de la mort". (Réda 1977, 63-64)

Not only does the creation of a Union for the Safeguarding of Vague Land proves relevant, but once the walker through the vague grounds of Rue d'Alleray becomes aware that his walking by and his movement raises the suspicious interest of other passengers, he wants nothing more but to get away, to dissolve his movement within the uncertain footpath, and not to alter the feeling of vagueness emanating from the pave walk as well as from the walls of dwelling places surrounding him.

The image of the city of Nantes is reconstructed dynamically by the narrator's memory as a spider's web: with thousands of fragile spun fibres which create structures that function as nets to catch and to crack the „massive urban mass". The interconnected strands cannot yet conceal the cracks, the slits within the urban mass and thus reveal a series of uncertain, opaque zones which resemble to the hazy, uncertain segments on a negative or print that would be uncovered only by discontinuous stains.

"[…] C'est ainsi que se reconstruit dynamiquement dans ma mémoire l'image de Nantes, un peu à la manière dont l'araignée construit sa toile: les radiales d'abord, que j'ai si souvent parcourues à partir du centre, et où cette double attraction s'exerce à nu, puis les barreaux parallèles des échelons latéraux, qui viennent souder et homogénéiser l'ensemble, liaisons pour moi plus lâches, moins souvent empruntées, raccourcis et cheminements de petite communication, qui fendillent capricieusement la masse urbaine, et familiers surtout au citadin que je n'ai jamais été complètement. Dans cette toile viennent s'engluer en désordre des noms de lieux, qui colorent autour d'eux et tirent de l'ombre, comme une source lumineuse, tout un lambeau de la ville, des itinéraires trop souvent empruntés que le pas n'a pu oublier, des instantanés qui ne se recoupent pas, et qui projettent sur la cité, plutôt qu'ils ne la recomposent, un canevas troué, dans les interstices duquel flottent des zones opaques, pareilles à celles d'un cliché mal développé qui ne se révélerait que par taches discontinues". (Gracq 1985, 106)

This metaphor conjures up images of urban space as system of short cuts and paths of communication which capriciously confound, unhinge and bewilder the urban mass while at the same time remaining familiar to the city dweller. Names of places, countless itineraries and footpaths are entrapped and get stuck on the thick urban spider web, so they turn into snapshots which are projected on the city without recomposing it entirely, leaving behind an architectural canvas full of holes. Within the interstices of the holey framework and canvas

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

float uncertain, opaque territories which reveal the fact that the city is also an environment under tension mirroring the tensioned strands of the spider's web.

3. Conclusions

From the analysis of conceptual metaphors associated with the urban space encountered in our corpus of study, we can assert that the conceptualization of city space is not centred on the common organicist metaphor (that we find in Ray Bradbury's fiction). In fact, stereotyped mental images associated with the city are undermined in postmodern literature so that they bring about peculiar images (such as that of the city as satellite or as realm of manifestation of uncertainty); cityscape metaphors in our selected corpus of study rather rely upon the conceptualization of the city as a system of unconventional experiences and sensations. The postmodern reader is thus faced not so much with a strange, unusual spatial and experiential realm as with a transformer landscape where conventional geographical categories and epistemological landmarks are subverted in order to conceive a world of uncertainties, strangeness and illusions.

Acknowledgment

This work was partially supported by the grant number 33C/2014, awarded in the internal grant competition of the University of Craiova.

Sources

Bradbury, Ray. (1986). *L'homme illustré*. Paris: Denoël.
Gracq, Julien. (1985). *La forme d'une ville*. Paris: Editions José Corti.
Lurie, Alison. (1988). *La ville de nulle part*, translated by Elisabeth Gille, coll. Bibliothèque étrangère Rivages, Paris: Rivages.
Réda, Jacques. (ed. 1977, ed. 1993) *Les ruines de Paris*. Paris: Gallimard.
Siodmak, Curt. (1976). *La Ville du Ciel*, translated by Georges H. Gallet, coll. Super-fiction, Paris: Albin-Michel.

References

Augé, Marc. (1992). *Non-lieux.* « Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité ». Paris: Seuil.
Bauman, Sigmund (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Caballero, Rosario. (2002). Talking about Space: Image Metaphor in architectural Discourse. In *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*. 12, 1 (1), 87-105.

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

Cresswell, Tim. (2010). *Place. A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
Dehaene, Michel, de Cauter, Lieven (eds.). (2008) *Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a postcivil society*. London: Routledge.
Dickinson, Greg, Blair, carole, Ott, Brian L. (2010). *Places of Public Memory. The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabame Press.
Fischer, G.N. (1989). *Psychologie de l'espace*. Paris: PUF.
Geddes, Patrick. (1915). *Cities in evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics*. London: Williams.
Gupta, Akhil, Ferguson, James.(ed. 1997). *Culture, power, place*, Duke University Press.
Hetherington, Kevin. (1997). *The badlands of modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering*. New York: Routledge.
Lefebvre, Henri. (1991.) *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. (ed. 1980, ed. 2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Massey, Doreen. (2005). *For Space*. London: SAGE Publications.
Menegaldo, Hélène, Menegaldo, Gilles. (2007). *Les imaginaires de la ville entre littérature et arts*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
Omhovère, Claire. (2011). *Perceptions et représentations de l'espace dans le monde anglophone*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy.
Sansot, Pierre, Mikel Dufrenne. (2004). *Poétique de la ville*. Paris: Editeur Payot Collection Petite Bibliothèque Payot.
Segaud, Marion. (2010). *Anthropologie de l'espace. Habiter, fonder, distribuer, transformer*. Paris: Armand Collin.
Soja, Edward W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real – and – imagined places*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell.
Stébé, Jean-Marc, Marchal, Hervé. (2009). *Traité sur la ville*. Paris: PUF.
Thacker, Andrew. (2009) *Moving through Modernity. Space and Geography in Modernism*. Manchester University Press.
Tuan, Yi Fu.(1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Țenescu, Alina (2014). The Organicist-Animist Metaphor in Italian Wine Media Discourse. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review, 2.*
Vinay, Dharwadker (ed.). (2001). *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture.* New York: Routledge.

Internet references

Larsen, Svend Erik, "The City as a Postmodern Metaphor", available at http://www.hum.au.dk/cek/kontur/pdf/kontur_10/svend.erik.larsen.pdf. Page consulted on the 21st of May, 2014.
Todolí, Júlia, "Disease Metaphors in Urban Planning" http://cadaad.net/files/journal/Todoli%20-

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)

%20Disease%20metaphors%20in%20urban%20planning.pdf.
Page consulted on the 21st of May, 2014.
Walther, Olivier, Matthey, Laurent, "The City as Body. Book Review of Peter Ackroyd. London. The Biography", 2010.
http://articulo.revues.org/1304
Page consulted on the 21st of May, 2014.

BDD-V1810 © 2014 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-25 10:06:33 UTC)