Imagining Territories: Space, Place, and the Anticity

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We speak a different language, and here our tongue is incomprehensible. The greatest travelers have not gone beyond the limits of their own world; they have trodden the paths of their own souls, of good and evil, of morality and redemption… but to this shadowy land, that knows neither sin nor redemption from sin, where evil is not moral but is only the pain residing forever in earthly things, Christ did not come.

--- Carlo Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*  
[*Christ Stopped at Eboli*] (1947)

I.

This essay explores the concept of territory in some of its cultural forms (or “territories”—grammatically plural, the term actually functions in the singular: unlike places, territory does not signify the possibility of differentiation; there is no grouping of independent individuals). It likewise looks into some cultural and linguistic conditions for territories-talk. Initially, it engages territory as a pre-political representation and explores its formal relation to *space* and to *place*. For culture offers certain conceptualization before it experiences, and that in turn shapes linguistic, visual, and other representational schemes. It is therefore also an inquiry into imagination, the imagining of emptiness, of movement, of human habitat, of violence; but it is also a social approach to the commodification of imagination in a consumer economy of mass media representations.

The parameters of the Iraq conflict—with its images of openness and vastness of desert(ed) space leading to political and human concentration and closure (the Baghdad “ring”)—supply a case study of sorts, after a first look at the language that arranges experience by shaping both space and what occurs within it. A set of distinctions will jump-start the enquiry.

The first distinction concerns logical status: while space is a condition for experience, territory is a product of it. Thus territory is not a kind of space. Its proper domain is culture, history and politics, and we must look for it in maps and art and video clips rather than in “the world” to which maps and videos refer. And yet territory is not a place, either. A place is named: territory is tentatively labeled—not wholly differentiated, in fact, from territories elsewhere. Through naming, place makes its claim for a
distinctive membership in language. Calling something a “territory” is like the title “Untitled” of so many works of art: “Untitled” is a title, but not a name. It signifies a performance of dubious differentiation, of setting apart a chunk of experience as distinct, yet it allows it scant semantic content and thus avoids fully appropriating it. Territory lives between and to the skewed side of space and place. A place is populated, human, familiar even when surprising in several idiosyncrasies. Its paradigmatic case is the city, whether republican or religious or plutocratic. But territory is an Anticity, a terra nullius where people are part of the scenery, not subjects with political claims or individual identities. They inhabit not a place but territories: like rocks, air, oil. They belong to the background on which civilization goes out to act: conquer, move through, develop. The businessman in Saint-Exupery’s Le petit prince appropriates stars that have distinct names and are thus places, never the spaces between them. Although that may be a source of capital as any other, while nameless it cannot be commodified and rests ignored by any political power that builds on capitalistic language. A city is built; territory is taken, never “constituted”; it is bought, conquered, swindled away (respectively: Louisiana, Australia or the West Bank, anywhere west of the Mississippi). Unlike the legal category of res communes – goods that belong to all and therefore to no one in particular (air, light, non-copyrighted artifacts of human creativity, the meanings of texts) – territories are res nullius, nobody’s property until propertized by those with a mind, will, and language that generate the appropriation and ultimately transformation. Consider an example: the “territorization” of Iraq by the western media. Our world-view and maps express Um:Kasr, Basra, Baghdad. Territories are the void between the places, referred to in terms of what they are not, such as a distance from place: “120 kilometers south of Baghdad.” Power expects territory to behave like an empty medium, the ether of 19th century natural philosophy. Not a place, but the absence of place and thus of the language of place. In old maps, on the margins that signify the borders of knowledge and thus of the possibility of action, we read the ominous warning: hic sunt dracones or here be dragons. It is a demarcation of language as well as of phenomena: the manipulable v. the shifting, mysterious, dishonestly dangerous. In our time, such as in the Iraqi desert (but also in the Paris-Dakar race), when territories turn out to be significant obstacles for the fluent movement of machined troops, power’s language is enraged, outraged,
insulted: territory acts up. It proves resistant, it is a thing rather than a passive vacuum surrounding the cities which are the coveted places, that really count. This goes all the way to Euclid: a formal language that defines a line as a distance—an obstacle, a problem—between two points, i.e., places.

II.

Unlike the city, there can be nothing holy about territory: commentators who claim that, confuse territories either with places that they contain or for the romantic notion of wilderness—a different cultural construct, extremely influential in renaissance and modern art, as well as a driving aesthetics of several nationalistic projects (Schama 1995). Nor may territories find themselves in utopian vocabularies, because territories are not constituted through membership or participation in any republican or other project and utopia must therefore ignore or alienate it. Territory is the embarrassing plane outside of utopia. With colonialism, the City set out to transform it.

Territories’ legal status as res nullius—a thing that belongs to no one but that may be appropriated—famously emerged during the renaissance and early modernity as the conceptual and legal foundation for colonialism. But the distinction between city and anticity goes back to the renaissance, and nowhere more so that in utopian art. For lack of proper conceptualization, renaissance pre-colonial art has no coherent visual language with which to represent territories. Around the place there is nothingness—not merely space, but a threatening disorderly mess that rational minds (and no one possessed minds more rational than renaissance artists) cringe from. On the outskirts of the city there is worse than nothing—there lies the dragon of rational society, the anticity. No dialogue is possible between city and anticity, the former closing itself hermetically, the second oblivious of any sense of place. In fiction, culture may simply ignore: “travelers are advised that maps of the Shire often leave the surrounding territories blank” (Manguel and Guadalupi 1987:351, discussing the geography of Tolkien’s The Hobbit). More complex, art both brings out and glosses over the tension. Bellini’s St. Jerome in the wilderness transforms his surrounding to a place through sheer devotional presence (figure 1). We should not mistake this differend for a simple tension between culture and nature, holy and profane (or for followers of Rousseau, corrupted and innocent), for these
were the very same artists who revered nature through the eyes of St. Francis of Assisi. Even the saint of wilderness who looked to nature for a source of Pythagorean harmonies and divine manifestation is linguistically signified by a name of a place, a birthplace, a dwelling.

Territory had to be imagined and invented as part of the great movements of colonialism and imperialism, which, on top of being political, military and economic, were also intellectual and cultural. In fact, to say that colonialism applied language to territories is imprecise at best, as territory had to be imagined for colonialism to be invented. Space was parcelled without becoming place. Territories began occupying the new scientifically imagined face of the earth. Cartographers thrived. Geography became respectable, a subject for rational/national efforts and drives. Territories immediately became connected
with motion, discovery and “finding” rather than with the older, proper notions of invasion and conquest. While Roman law invented the doctrine of *res nullius* – the thing that belongs to no one – its initial applications to land were limited. Not great travelers, the Romans preferred to conquer rather than “discover.” A millennium and a half later, Europeans “discovered.” Once *terra nullius* became the organizing principle of reference to territories, “territorian” people might have well been invisible. The cognition of colonialism gave rise to its own modes of perception. Calling this “ignoring” or “purposeful oversight” is missing the point. The territorial people *qua* political persons could (and frequently did) stand right in front of the colonists’ faces and still not be seen, as long as the new language and imagination of territories informed the mind that there were none there.

III.

Territories are not true members of geography. They are not appropriated by reflection and self-exploration, but as something “other,” which geography is *about*. The science of space came to territories as an invader; the language of subjectivity and participation, like Christ in Carlo Levi’s novel referred to above, did not come to territory. Territories are *somewhere else*, non-places. True, some of the cultural, political and historical functions of geography are to transform territories into place. By this I do not invoke Locke nor Marx, i.e. models of appropriating nature and transforming it (through labor, conquest, consciousness), nor the talk about non-places following Augé (1995). This may require a clarification, namely what this essay is *not* about, as it uses the term “non-place” in a sense different from quite a bit of recent literature.

According to Augé, non-places such as shopping malls, airports, highways and other uniform or anonymous media for consumerist action exist in an indivisible continuum of experience with places: “In the concrete reality of today’s world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together” (Augé 1995: 107). The context—that of “supermodernity”—is very different from that of the present study, where the relation of place to non-place often suggests a break in the continuums of language and of visual representation. Unlike Augé’s non-places, the concept of “Territory” is not another compartment of experience in the grid lived by place-bound
people, nor an all-too-accessible locus for uniform, consumerist non-action. For all their alienation, Augé’s non-places are first and foremost all-too-accessible and easily recognizable as part of our normal lives. Yet the West’s approach to territories is always about something “other.” Territories are non-places that remain largely uncharacterized and possibly impossible to characterize. They are not appropriated by normal language and the exposure of the Western consumer (or even citizen) to them is always through the mediation of media rather than through direct experience.

Territory is a cultural entity to begin with; its transformation in history, language and art is from one cultural status to another: from the thing that is other and that culture relates to in aboutness terms, to place that has a claim for membership in culture. Western culture has developed the required language, a language of claims and justifications: what claim can you form? What things may be claimed?—anything that wasn’t before: material and political control, identity, progress, resources. Propertization is the main axis: just as in our times we discuss the commodification of the spectrum of radio waves and other “natural” assets (e.g., in the context of the communication industry), moving them from res communes to res nullius to possession. Already, tongue-in-cheek entrepreneurs would sell you “real” estate on the moon (figure 2; see also www.moonshop.com, www.lunarregistry.com, www.lunarembassy.com/lunar/index2.lasso.) It is tongue-in-cheek rather than sheer nonsense because our cultural grammar recognizes the transaction as possible and possibly valid, even if it seems silly or funny given legal and other contingencies of recognition and enforceability (for legal analysis see Dunk et al., 2004.) Territory can be taken from people (Bedouins, native Americans) whose language does not follow such grammars or distinctions, who cannot form precise proprietary or other established legal claims, or who have developed different relational languages of non-places within their own culture, sometimes building their narratives on strong temporal rather than predominantly spatial elements (Basso 1996).
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ZONING: Proposed Tourism (T-1), Scientific Industrial (S-1), Operations Base (O-1), Light Industrial (L-1) and Commercial Industrial (C-1).

Figure 2: One of several Moon Real Estate “agencies,” at www.lunarregistry.com. Imitating the language of mere terraen real estate ads, it even provides zoning details.

The spatial typification of territories and their obscure inhabitants (both frightening and attractive in their strange, sometimes virile ways) can be studies through various artifacts that such frames of reference produce. One such context is legal, and the artifacts are texts that are legal “opinions.” Thus in the 1992 Israeli case of Israel v. Ze’ev – in which a settler from Shilo, in Samaria, was convicted for shooting and killing a Palestinian shepherd – space and movement in place (inside the settlement) are totally different from space and movement in the antiplace, the territory “surrounding” the place. In fact, within territory nothing much ever occurs: movement is from there, it becomes discernible, worthy of linguistic signification (and of legal attention) when it is towards
place. In this case some Palestinian shepherds came too close for comfort to Shilo, described as empty of most of its male inhabitants during this time of day (they were at work); the defendant, armed, opened fire and killed one of them and wounded another. He didn’t mean to, he contended—all he wanted was to frighten them away (back into territory, from which they came), and it was everyone’s bad luck that he was a lousy shot, an immigrant from Brooklyn (another place) with rudimentary and inadequate firearm training. The settlement is place: its inhabitants and structures are differentiated, movement within it can be precisely described, it is described as a perimeter encircled by both a fence and a road. The Palestinian shepherds, on the contrary, are not reported as coming from anywhere. They emerge. They emerge from the undifferentiated territory as if from nothingness, then “circle” the settlement like so many sharks, their very lack of typification, of biography and even of adjectives is menacing. That the court managed to overcome this typification and uphold the conviction for manslaughter resulted from a certain approach to the evidence, but also goes to show that spatial and other semiotic typification need not be deterministic in relation to either cultural descriptions or judgment (for a fuller account and analysis see Yovel 2004). Representational and narrative biases can be resisted (if not always and altogether overcome) by deliberative and reflective agents who resist the world-view imposed on them by language, its institutional and performative context and “common sense.” We realize this when we approach reading, cogitating and interpreting not as an individual’s hermeneutic adventure but as a form of collective action, emphasizing the “horizon of expectations” that is the backdrop constituent of meaning (Jauss 1982, Yovel 2004).

IV.
When then was territory invented, and where can its invention be witnessed? The very humble indication I wish to provide comes from the art history. An examination of a modern—and to an extent pre-modern—genre of devising utopian cities and architectures for perfect geographies, reveals a subtle tension between city and the anticity. In the ambitiously detailed Ideal City by an artist (or artists) from the school of Piero della Francesca (1480), geometrical alleys intersect with wide boulevards; it is both specific and nowhere, a generic place barely relating to space, with no hint of the possibility of
the anticity (figure 3). It is an architectural expression of rationality itself, its manifestation in space, *order* in the service of mankind.

![Ideal City](image-url)

**Figure 3: Ideal City** by an artist (or artists) from the school of Pierro della Francesca (c. 1480)

Without resembling, *Ideal City* invokes such illustration-maps as the *View of Jerusalem* in Hartmann Schedel’s *Weltchronik* (Nuremberg, 1493): a circular, concentric, hermetic, walled in city (figure 4). There is no indication of anything outside the place; the form is so claustrophobic that there barely *is* space—the forms seem suspended in an imaginary medium. Not being a map (although a strict differentiation between artistic and scientific representations of space is probably unhelpful), we do not even have a benefit of the warning *hic sunt dracones.*
Schedel’s Jerusalem is military and religious; Ideal City is republican and mercantile; yet neither imagines the anticity. That is no longer the case a century later, after Magellan, Columbus and Vespucci overwhelmed Europe with territory. Peter Bruegel’s The Tower of Babel (1563) is fused with the non-place, visible from the top of a never-completed leviathanesque structure (figure 5).
Modern renditions, obviously influenced by Bruegel’s work, have a much easier time with the “background,” ignoring or reducing it to mere landscape. The non-place became so differentiated from place, that for the modern artist it is simply another matter altogether, irrelevant in the depiction of place. Ziv Qual’s phallic *Rage Over Babylon* (2006), a 3D computer graphic work, owes to Bruegel its commitment to detail and the emphasis of human activity in the forefront of civilization ran amok (i.e., the tower), but not its commitment to treating and representing the non-place, beyond a cavalier notion (the snowy mountains behind palm trees) of displacement (figure 6).

![Figure 6: Ziv Qual, Rage Over Babylon (2006). © Ziv Qual](image)

Back to the renaissance: a rudimentary illustration of *The Philosophical City*, taken from Bartolomeo del Bene’s *Civitas veri* (1609) is telling: surrounding a circular, walled, wheel-shaped city featuring five boulevards in a star formation (in clear contrast to the
Roman hegemony of the cardo maximus), what lies outside the city, while wholly different in its form, surprisingly resembles the city’s own matter (figure 7). While the city is an island in territory it is also a chunk of the ocean. Although walled, it is not hermetic. The possibility of expansion is suggested by the projection of the boulevards from the center outwards. This is a city that will send armies and import merchandise, but in its confidence it neither seeks nor will allow intercourse with the anticity. If “The world is all that is the case” (the first sentence in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, as much a philosophical and linguistic manifestation of perfection as the Civitas veri is spatially and formally) then territory—which has no history nor biography nor proper name—is neither. The Civitas veri is ready to perform its colonial function, supply territory with a reference and grid, and thus it requires a new language of territories for its domination of the anticity. Its apparent visual affinity with such modernist-utopian projects as Nicolas Ledoux’s Ideal City of Chaux (1804) is misleading; by the early 1900’s surrounding territory is already shaped, surrendered, nonmenacing (figure 8).

Figure 7: Bartolomeo del Bene, Civitas veri (1609)
Ledoux’s vision is at last familiar to us. Still utopian, its faubourgs (a “fake-place,” Forsbourg, “foris-burgum”) have spawned suburbs. The radical divide within Western geography between place and non-place is bridged, even idealized. It became even more urgent to identify non-places elsewhere, to satisfy this vacant cubicle within language. Nowadays, such significations of the radical divide so casually framing the renaissance works discussed above can exist only in fantastic or surrealistic visions (figure 9).
V.

In *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben describes a category of “Being-outside, and yet belonging: this is the topological structure of a state of exception.” (Agamben 2003: 35). While Agamben’s topic is writes the sovereign and its relation to law, he formulates as succinctly as any the essential relation of territories to discourse. In political jurisprudence, the “state of exception” model regards the sovereign as inherently unbound by law: it defines the sovereign as that whom “decides on the state of exception”—an inherent dictatorial element denied or overlooked by liberal theories of sovereignty (the origin of this position is in Carl Schmitt’s influential work, *Political Theology*). The point I wish to make here is that territories are a perpetual state of exception. In fact, had this essay began with observations from political theory rather than spatial semiotics, this is how we would have begun: with territories as existing outside and yet belonging. A apparently political philosophy also requires its own set of inside/outside metaphors. We use the Schmitt/Agamben modality, but in reverse. Instead of it being the constitutive characteristic of the sovereign—the carrier of Schmitt’s “decisionism” (i.e. the power that decides on exceptions rather than one what merely follows or may be “applied” from the normative order)—we use it as the most precise categorization of territories offered by political theory.

When they wish to suspend constitutional constraints on treatment of terrorism suspects, CIA agents use geography rather than law: they fly them outside the US—into territories—because “out there” a state of exception exists in which they are no longer bound by legality (“extraordinary rendition” is the term used in legal jargon).1 The US Supreme Court dealt ambivalently with the status of territories as perpetual “states of exception” when it wavered on the application of constitutional and other protections to detainees in Guantanamo prison, due primarily to its location.2

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2 Although the prison was obviously controlled and operated by the US government, it was “out.” When Habeas Corpus rights were granted to detainees in *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507 (2004), the basis for the decision was the petitioner’s status as a citizen of the United States, not the fact that he was held by the US in a US-controlled
Territories, then, are a product of discourse, of a political and jurisprudential talk. They are not subject to definition so much as express resistance to definition. The anticity and the non-place cannot be defined as city and place can, because lack of definition (and thus of membership in discourse) beyond shiftable, manipulable determinations, is precisely what the contrast with place and city require.

In itself, the fact that we have geography—a discourse of place and its affiliated and derivative phenomena—is not a sufficient condition for territories to exist. Geography is mobilized and used by legal discourse, just as the latter uses, for its own purposes and in its distinctive ways, any other social or natural science. However, that fact that geography (the discourse) exists, allows law to use it for those purposes just as the existence of psychiatry allows law to use it for the purpose of determining liability in some case (it translates the normative “responsibility” to the scientific “mental capacity.”) Law is parasitical on science; as moderns we generally accept science as benevolent because that seems better than to base our judgments on mere traditions, bias and thinly veiled “common sense”. Yet as Edmond Kahn warned (in the context the dubious social science applied in *Brown v. Board of Education*), there is no guarantee that social science would be, on the whole, progressive. Our ability to draw maps is germane to everything we do with maps. Territories started when we could distinguish between spatial categories, when our imaginative language started talking of in-out, belong-stranger, and the other dichotomies so favored by deconstructionists.

Deconstructing the in/out relations embedded in any artifact (and in the case of the city, as with texts, or court trials, or sports events, constitutive of it) has become a very popular practice. Yet as Derrida warns us, the relation is always complex: even language is misleading. Not because the definition of “in” requires, presupposes and co-constitutes “out” as such; but because of the very semantico-referential usage of the terms, as if they could be any *as such*. For nothing is “in” or “out” but for some performance that renders it so; and the performance both recognizes the logical status and interdependence of in/out as well as embeds the abstract concept in a specific social or textual context or practice (the contexts, of course, both multiply and overlap). In (oops!) other words, the territory. Only in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, 548 U.S. 557 (2006) did the court use language that denied Guantanamo’s “state of exception.”
language of in/out entails an interpretative practice; yet what may count as such an interpretative practice depends less on presupposed requirements (what J.L. Austin would term “felicity conditions,” Austin 1962) than on the symbolic and communicative relation, i.e. that said practice in fact performs both according to the logic of in/out yet constitutes it qua social and communicative reality. The in/out is a logical relation (transitive and symmetrical yet not reflexive—nothing is either in or out in relation to itself); yet how it is played out cannot be determined from the logical relation alone. There are no “felicity conditions” for these performative practices. Thus Derrida (1972), Frazer (1922), Harrison (1903) and others analyzed the fearsome practice of pharmakon—which the Hebrews called se’ir la’azazel, or the scapegoat: how the Athenians and other Hellenic people would signal out one or more of their own people as a pharmakon and, either annually or when dire conditions called for it—plague, draught, wrath of the gods—would march him (or her, or them, for mostly there were two) outside the city limits, having first offered them sweetmeats and wine, and then beat or flog them to death with ritual branches and shoots. Derrida (1972) puts a lot of store on the fact that the representative of the out, the pharmakon that must be expelled, was chosen from within and by the in, the polis. Intra muros/extra muros: the pharmakon is both holy and obscene, as the term was used to signify both medicine as well as the poison to be extracted from the city and thrust out to territory. The pharmakon is a tribute to precivilization, a sacrifice to the non-place—the anticity—but also an act of recognition and of purification. That could not have been the lot of Oedipus: civilized, all too civilized, he would not qualify as a suitable pharmakon (but didn’t he arrive at Thebes, emerge from the outside, where he did terrible deeds?)—and his banishment to Colonus, a quasi-place that is not quite a non-place nor an anticity—signifies that precisely. In the opening lines of Oedipus in Colonus the autoblinded “martyr of truth,” banished from the city, tries to have the place/non-place depicted to him (“what is this place?.../ Country or town?”) to which Antigone strangely replies not by referring to the location itself, but by talking of what can be made out on the horizon, namely an unknown city. It is in fact Athens, but that information is useless to Oedipus: he requires to know the nature of the place, not its name, continuing to inquire “what is this place?” rather than “what place is this?” (line 53). What other attributes the location has—its dedication to the Furies and overall
scariness—satisfy Oedipus that he has not reached another city or indeed place at all, yet nor has he, like the pharmakon, been committed to territory, to the anticity. Oedipus has once before roamed territories, and it was there, on a lonely road, a non-place between two places (Corinth and Thebes) that this excellent man exploded murderously, killing the man whom he would later discover was Laius, his father. Colonus itself is not res nullius—the rule of Theseus of Athens extends there—but in an awkward way that requires the ruler to come out from the city proper. This suits Oedipus just fine; he no longer seeks a place to colonize and appropriate – or so, at least, he pretends. He is content to have wondered to a location neither place nor non-place, which beckons the city (it is visible for those who, unlike Oedipus, can see) yet, while not part of City, nor is it territory. For straight away Antigone speaks of “a kind of sacred precinct” (line 15) that is naturally accommodating: there is “a seat of natural rock” (line 18) How clever! Nature simulates the comforts of civilization, and while out we may at least sit comfortably and talk a little as if this were an in; it is Oedipus’ presence (which he presently makes known to anyone who might care to know, playing a coy game of courting with the chorus of locals) that partially civilizes the place. The performance is that of taking in, the opposite of the pharmakon. This may prove dangerous for the place taking him in: Thebes is a case in point. Oedipus, the anti-pharmakon, alarms the elders of Colonus: it is one thing casting pharmakon out and away in a purifying ritual (involving violence, beating, unbearable physical pain, killing and burning of the corpse), quite another to allow anything as dangerous as Oedipus in, even if in is only to the in-between quasi-place that is Colonus (Oedipus and his guide know better than to attempt refuge in a true place, a city). Cunning Oedipus claims that all he requires is the grace of a proper burial (line 591), and who can deny that to any man; but experienced Theseus is incredulous. Oedipus’ sheer presence is simply too powerful not to worry about. In the meantime Oedipus makes it what no one before has considered or dared, namely a dwelling, almost a place. Oedipus’ travails follow a formal geography, cast in terms of city and anticity, properly ending in a non-place yet non-non-place either (the law of double negation does not apply here: a non-non-place is not a place). It is still firmly within the reach of civilization, as both Oedipus and the polis play a dangerous game of in/out from which the blind ex-king will never emerge.
Examining the *pharmakon* aspect of spatial, political and narrative dimensions in several of Kafka’s works is especially illuminating (consider those that take place in place-non places such as *The Penal Colony, The Castle* and key portions of *Amerika*). One such fable is especially striking. In a narrative awash with weirdness and horror, the end of Joseph K—the protagonist of *The Trial*—is particularly weird and horrible. Yet in some sense it conforms to the structure of the *pharmakon* as Derrida reads it. Exactly one year after his legal “case” began, K sits in his room, clad all in black, solemnly expecting the executioners (of whose arrival he should have had no real way of knowing) to fetch him and finally do him in. I wish to emphasize two points. First, that K’s execution is the only part of the action that is not conducted within the city proper, as K is marched (or does he march willingly?) to an old deserted quarry outside the city, where the highly ritualized killing takes place. Second, the significance of K’s nudity: before slaughtering him, the executioners have him undress and take possession of all his cloths. The *pharmakon* is taken to a non-place to be cast off, actively participating in the ritual, and the last civilizing vestiges of his in-status, his cloths, are removed and later returned to the city.

We put both literary texts down and pick up the newspaper to glance at the non-place dwellings of our own times: such, for example, are the huge makeshift masses of habitat set up by poor laborers in Paraguay or Cambodia or the Philippines, misnamed “shanty towns,” essentially piles of refuse precariously set up on poles above swamps that triple as drinking water, sewage, and medium for transportation. These are the non-places of our times, so much more inhuman, brutal and anonymous than anything that could have been imagined by either Sophocles or his protagonist—the wise, disillusioned old man wasting away his dying days in the dwelling of the Furies at Colonus.
VI.

I now return to the matter of conceptualization with which we began—the “deep structure” of such political and discursive phenomena as mass media, obviously a prime vehicle of conceptualization and a prominent form of collective action in our times. Relying on media representations always requires a certain “horizon of expectations” for interpretation, to return to Jaus’ (1982) terms. We call this shared, fragmented, uneven framework for interpretation “culture” or “ideology”: the sum total of beliefs and approaches that tacitly inform and supply value judgments, “common-sense” and a sense of obviousness. Perhaps a parable will fit to introduce the pattern. We spoke of representation (geography), science and conquest: let us turn to a category not less prominent, namely love. With Barthes (1972), consider the young person, wandering the streets, feverishly asking himself: “Am I in love?” How innocent yet curious: in order to understand, fully appropriate & interpret intimate experience to himself, he requires the application of a concept. He therefore must think that the concept of love is something he has a better grip on than on love. The application of the concept validates the experience. This is the blueprint I wish to use for territories as well: there are no territories prior to the emergence of the concept, which allows for representations as it meets experience.
(below I bring some further, if scant evidence from art history). While space is a condition for experience, and the city is a project within culture, territories are the thing “outside” that requires a special referential language of expression. In a sense this pattern is well known and need hardly surprise anyone. In the beginning, after all, was the word: God has created “light” (the concept of light, the word for light) prior to creating light. The primacy is not merely temporal but ontological. “Let there be”: the same performance apply to the very notion of existence. Culture has imposed its precedence of conceptual language and of linguistic performance over phenomena even on God. And thus we require from mass media to shape out language, feeding us ideologically informed representations of territories and labeling them: “West Bank,” “Iraqi desert,” “The Outback.”

Consider Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities, in which cities are always presented firstly by their names and the categories they are classified by – a modernistic exegesis of imagination with scant, if any role for the non-place. Nor is there, in Kublai Khan’s discourse with Marco Polo, any struggle over language or naming. Both speakers assume that the language they speak is perfectly suitable to express both the traveler’s reports and fantasies (Polo) as well as the listener’s ironical doubts (Kublai and the readers). It almost seems as if the names are attributes of the places themselves, rather than of the language that signifies them. This lack of metalinguistic awareness is in itself a metalinguistic condition for ideological talk (Mertz & Yovel 2000), a “felicity condition” of successful performance (Austin 1962). This means that to be able to talk in a certain way—i.e. a languages and thus geography of places only, as in Invisible Cities—requires a certain lack of awareness of the linguistic performance. Bourdieu (1977) has noted that for some institutions and social structures to be able to function requires a general unawareness of their true functions in society, and this is true also of many linguistic structures (Bourdieu 1982).

“Real” places were named and renamed as part of monumental struggles, always involved imaginary futures, projects and visions: “Constantinople” and “Istanbul;” “St. Petersburg” and “Stalingrad” and back again; “Jerusalem” and “Aelia Capitolina” (the name given it when Hadrian’s legions razed the city in 131 AD). The naming of places is baptismal and determinative (Kripke 1980). There seems to be much more ongoing
struggle over non-places: is a certain tract of land (but in what sense is it “the same,” situated in such diverging national narratives?) the “West Bank” or “Judea and Samaria” or “Palestine” or “Eastern Eretz-Israel” or “the Occupied Territories” or “the Liberated Territories” or, indeed, “the Territories” tout court? Territory politics are best manifested in Territory’s resistance to naming. No general language—to use a helpful term coined by the literary theorist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1986)—is possible where contentious ideologies form geography. We set something aside to make it meaningful, as cultural and linguistic. Thus it exists not “there,” where cartographers look for it but “here,” in our minds as an intersubjective construct. Obviously, speakers who battle over such linguistic denotations consider the linguistic performance politically significant. But this significance is tricky: for while ideologues of all kind strive to express world-view—and more often than not, a comprehensive and exclusive world-view—by such language, language many times serves to obscure rather than express politics. Thus the technical legal term for “the territories” in Israel is “the Area” (Ha’ezor): mocked for its assumed neutrality and never used by anyone other than state organs, it is nevertheless the language spoken in legislation, in the courts, etc. Likewise, “Zone A,” “Zone B” expressed post WWII division of Berlin exactly by such neutral, technical usage. The Israeli novelist David Grossman termed this a “word laundry”: the cleansed language that appears semantically neutral, yet in its assumed neutrality conveys a political meaning, namely that the place is a normal place and the acts done there are normal acts (Grossman 1987:44-5). In non-totalitarian states, the state does not maintain a monopoly over language. It becomes, in effect, one more player among many on the linguistic board, its language of choice to be resisted or validated by other players within the civil society, with the news media and in some instances intellectuals occupying relatively influential positions.

Obviously: people who live in territory do not call it territory. Territory is the relation of place to non-place, that an “outsider” refines and imposes. To say that territories have their own histories, their own languages is almost too obvious to state. Territories “as such” exist in the geography and imagination of non-territorians, not in those of territorians. Territories’ proper place is the intersubjective world of communication, imagination, and language, not the physical crust of the earth. “It’s all in
the mind”: yet the mind itself is not the solitary protagonist of Descartes’ adventures in meditation but, as Nietzsche more than anyone else has shown, a player who imports concepts and representations from the public sphere. This essay is part of the public sphere, and in a sense I, myself drawing from the fractured worlds of representations and concepts in which I am cast, participate: imagine and invent territories as I write and shape.

VII.
Can we apply this framework to a cursory analysis of the spatial language required for certain phases of the Anglo-American war in Iraq? Casting it in standard colonial terms would be anachronistic even as the neologism “Empire” requires differentiation from the old “imperialistic.” The initial American vision of the war was all about movement through something reduced almost to pure space. Amazingly, such wars begin almost always with a sense of joy over swift movement (a sensation that Joyce (1993) claimed was universal). Encountering sandstorms and some stiff military and paramilitary opposition, American media has reacted less with surprise and more with indignation and a sense of insult. There were proper places in Iraq, that had to be taken—the so-called fortified Baghdad “ring,” for instance—and mere territory had no business interfering with a movement that is towards place. How could the American army’s movement get stuck in such non-place territories, aspects of geography that Calvino’s Invisible Cities take little bother to warn from? For a while the Iraqi desert shook perceptions. Reports became blurred, language was not ready to come up with satisfying representations, and the marketers of language—mass media, the White House, an array of commentators—were offended. Everything sounded ironic, an unfair play of obstruction upon the required elegance of swift movement through vacuum. Territory was not supposed to occupy attention and effort, to require power to overcome. That it did—so was the general notion of American and British media—was not a mistake of the planners (as some heretical voices suggested) but rather aberrant territory itself acting up, sidestepping its natural role. This later transformed into the language of “insurgency”: instead of realizing that in fact this was the war waged by Iraq’s prior ruling caste, Western media talked of the phenomenon as an aberration, a breach of the rules of engagement, the
performance of people too ignorant or too stubborn or too nasty to realize that they had been defeated.

VIII.
There is an untitled sketch by French graphic genius Moebius (a.k.a. Jean Giraud, creator of such works as The Hermetic Garage and The Incal) that in its simplicity both concerns these themes and offers an alternative, ironic spatial language that I find liberating (figure 12). Giraud, an artist of fantasy and science fiction, uses minimalist, carefully placed plays of horizontal and diagonal lines to create a multi-space, a dimensional matrix that mixes and goes beyond spatial, temporal, and cultural parameters. In his work the Kantian categories are not differentiated from culture and from psychology: movement, space and time interplay just as do inexplicable passions, drives and curiosity. It is not merely the artist or his interlocutors who are curious about the possibilities of reality and expression, but art and narrative themselves take on an active role of exploration. (In this Moebius projects the type of multidimensional libidinous energy that Dali strived to achieve and that Chagall’s work constantly hints that it could if it would, but mostly won’t.) In this particular drawing, the viewer approaches the dubious place from high up, flying in low from the top right corner. The scene is approached as if from the tight cockpit of a fighter jet. In the middle of a vast plane stands a mighty structure that invokes both the Parthenon and the Église de la Madeleine in Paris. It is familiar as any in western culture, complete with its colonnade of Doric capitals, elaborate pediment, and wide steps. But wait—on the building’s roof lies sleeping…Snoopy? Certainly: huge and immobile, the oversized figure of one of the most recognizable figures of American popular culture cannot be mistaken. Everyone knows Snoopy (but who is everyone?), and in this case, due to one of popular culture’s most successful merchandising campaigns, “knowing” entails a relation to “owning”: if we have not read or watched Peanuts strips or cartoons then we bought pajamas or mugs or government-issued postal stamps with Snoopy images on them, or at least envied others for having them. Peanuts characters are an epitome of modernity: the worlds they inhabit are almost entirely imaginary. Subjectivity is so powerful, the only function of the “real” is to supply it with image-material for fantasies (figure 11).
Figure 11: Snoopy “flying” his doghouse into battle with the “Red Baron.” United States Postal Service, 2001, from a drawing by Charles M. Schulz.

Figure 12: Moebius (a.k.a. Jean Giraud), untitled (1992) (or is it Untitled?). © Moebius

Were we deluded then? Does Moebius’ work depict not a place of worship but really a doghouse? All other indications are to the contrary, including flocking worshipers, whose
movement contrasts Snoopy’s immobility (he’s asleep, or perhaps petrified – the worshipers don’t seem to notice him). Yet strangely, the temple has not stopped functioning as such. It is both the outside of a classical temple and—because Snoopy sleeps on top of it—the inside of a doghouse of a mammoth beagle. Both holy and secular, in and out, human and animalistic, deserted and inhabited, modern and ancient, historical and fantastic, serious and humorous, childish and adult, transitory and altogether atemporal, it defines the territories around it as much as being defined by them.

It is a high form of joke: an ambiguity that is not solved, but persists, without paradox. The truly radical effect of Moebius’ art is not that a plurality of narratives can explain it or be generated from it. It is rather that once we overcome an initial cognitive confusion we no longer require an interpretative or explicative narrative. Art offers what it really can: an emancipation from interpretation and rationalization. It is not about making sense or nonsense, it isn’t claiming anything except, perhaps, to challenge all our traditional ways of looking, Jaus’ “horizon of expectations.” We are offered a world where intolerant struggles over narrative and territorial notions—which in modernity have become interconnected although, of course, not identical—are silly or even impossible; where violence has no language to rationalize itself. City and anticity interlock, and even if they still differ we let go of Calvino’s insistence on describing and capturing reality through language. We live, worship, and are bewildered in both. The sphinx speaks but its performance does not register as a riddle, as anything requiring a solution. Here, in this transcendence of conceptual language, a certain finalization is offered to the quest for the ideal city, and with it to its corresponding polarity, the alienation and objectification of territories.

IX.

This essay explores some aspects of the concept of territories as well as some cultural and linguistic conditions for territories-talk. It connects this language to a certain history of representation and performance. Like any critique, it is driven by a motivation to rationalize talk and discourse. Territories-talk is old—it reaches to the constitutive foundations of modernity and perhaps to Hellenic lore—but talk about the talk, territories meta-talk as it were, is relatively new. Such talk does not consist in transcending culture.
or in the purification and synthetic reconstruction of systems of representation (a-la political correctness). On the contrary, it is a critique within culture, part of an attempt to open up, enrich and cultivate its languages. This text is therefore presented both as a commentary and a case of what it comments upon.

Notes
1 Sam Keith’s short-lived comics series *The Maxx* features an inner-city homeless protagonists who escapes his everyday disempowerment to an inner world where he acts out the role of a mythological hero. The action takes place in typical territory, although it is named after a fashion: referring to it as “the Outback” places it as both belonging to the world of geography and to that of fantasy; the real.imagined status of the place/non-place owes mostly to the performance of reference/naming. To clarify, there is nothing specifically Australian about Maxx’s “Outback”: it is inhabited by idiosyncratic creatures of Maxx’s mind—or Keith’s, for that matter—and there isn’t a kangaroo in sight.

2 The concept of metalinguistic awareness now means diverging things in different traditions (linguistics, narrative analysis, cognitive psychology). It generally pertains to the level of linguistic performance that shapes linguistic practices (originally, the metalinguistic level was conceived as “language about language”; further developments now focus on the constitutive rather than descriptive functions of metalinguistic performance. In view of work in linguistics since the so-called “linguistic turn,” the metalinguistic level is an obvious site for ideological framing of first order linguistic practices. For elaboration and a bibliographical apparatus see Mertz and Yovel 2001.

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