Marija V. Lojanica¹*
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Philology and Arts

TOWARDS A NEW POETICS OF URBAN SPACE

The paper focuses on the ontological and narrative aspects of contemporary urban experience as simultaneously realized within two domains: actual and virtual. Examining the issue on the multidisciplinary horizon of spatial studies, we have attempted to establish a tentative analysis platform relying on Ricoeur's concept of identity, be it human or urban, as produced within the continual process of self-narration. Such an approach has enabled the bridging of various scientific disciplines (urbanism, digital esthetics, ontology, cultural studies, and literary theory) and theoretical viewpoints (structuralism, poststructuralism, phenomenology, etc). Accordingly, the paper has treated the ontological status of cyberspace as an architectural and urbanistic issue, all the while concentrating on the following: inhabitability potential of cyber environments, identity and community formation in virtual worlds, and the possibility of reviving the poietic aspect of technological production. The exploration of the multifaceted narrative identity of contemporary city thus became a vantage point from which to interpret not only the past, present and future of our urban environments but also human narrato-ontological premises.

Keywords: narrative, ontology, spatial theory, urban, cyberspace

"The absence of joy is the biggest threat to our society."
Will Alsop

In 1993, a British fiction and comic book author Neil Gaiman wrote a seemingly unassuming reflection on urban ontology:

Occasionally I idle time away by wondering what cities would be like, were they people. Manhattan is, in my head, fast-talking, untrusting, well-dressed but unshaven. London is huge and confused. Paris is elegant and attractive, older than she looks. San Francisco is crazy, but harmless, and very friendly.
It's a foolish game: cities aren't people.
Cities exist in location, and they exist in time. Cities accumulate their personalities as time goes by. Manhattan remembers when it was unfashionable farmland. Athens remembers the days when there were those who considered themselves Athenians. There are cities that remember being villages. Other cities – currently bland, devoid of personality – are prepared to wait until they have history. Few cities are proud: they know that it's all too often a happy accident, a mere geographical fluke that they exist at all – a wide harbour, a mountain pass, the confluence of two rivers.
At present, cities stay where they are.

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1 marija.lojanica@filum.kg.ac.rs

For now cities sleep.

But there are rumblings. Things change. And what if, tomorrow, cities woke, and went walking? If Tokyo engulfed your town? If Vienna came striding over the hill toward you? If the city you inhabit today just upped and left, and you woke tomorrow wrapped in a thin blanket on an empty plain, where Detroit once stood, or Sydney, or Moscow?

Don't ever take a city for granted.

After all, it is bigger than you are; it is older; and it has learned how to wait...

Gaiman's text is one of many that constitute the contemporary spatial discourse, which, during the late 20th century, became a theoretical dominant within humanities. The theoretical shift in question is usually perceived as a radical turn within the epistemological, esthetic, and ontological theoretical matrices, and it appears to be as dramatic as the structuralist or poststructuralist that preceded it. Denouncing the importance of temporality and historicity as categories crucial for the subjectivity, and more generally identity constitution, this new approach started interpreting the phenomena of material, spiritual, and psychological reality through the lens of spatial dimension. Profoundly influenced by the structuralist inauguration of semiotics as the omnipotent theoretical apparatus, a totalizing spatial discourse was thus generated – text is understood as space and space as text. Intrinsically multidisciplinary in its orientation, spatial theory became a humanities melting pot of sorts, merging the tenets of philosophy, cultural and social studies, architectural theory, etc. into a single scientific discipline. Consequently, if you are contemplating space today, you are, in fact, contemplating culture, society, and subjectivity (Lojanica 2020: 87-98).

Although considering the temporal dimension of urban ontology, unlike most other texts belonging to the discourse of spatial theory, Gaiman's brief essay is particularly poignant, not because of its originality: it merely continues the aforementioned vein of thinking about the interconnectedness of identity and spatiality, and, more specifically, further attests to the typically Western preoccupation with the nature of the urban. What makes this text remarkable, however, is the publication in which it first appeared, or, dare we say, its "location". Namely, the players of the city-building simulation game *SimCity 2000*, developed in 1993 by Maxis, who clicked on the query option of the library asset they chose to build in their city, might have discovered Gaiman's text on the personality of cities. The essay was hidden, like an Easter egg, within a virtual library, in a virtual city, within the space that simulates, or, depending on the viewpoint, transcends the urban experience as we know it.

In an attempt to approach the issue crucial for the paper, the one that might be termed "contemporary urban experience", or at least to posit a tentative analysis platform, we have by now, though implicitly, evoked seemingly divergent disciplines: urbanism, digital esthetics, and literary theory. Furthermore, the opening paragraphs have addressed the problem concerning the constitutive importance of the spatiotemporal positioning of cities as cultural and ontological phenomena within contemporary humanities. Unavoidably, pertinent to the issue at hand is also the poetics of simulation since the identity

of the spatio-ontological domain within which the paper will operate is constituted at the intersection of the physical and digital. Without even venturing into the domain of specifically created urban environments, like those developed for or while playing computer games, is it possible to think of a "real-life" city today without considering its Google Earth or Google Maps alter egos? Assuming that the production of space is an inherently poetic activity (Barthes 2016), and that computer games are in essence a spatial practice (Aarseth 2007: 44), the interpretative horizon that presents itself as the most appropriate is that of literary, or more precisely narrative theory. Accordingly, so as to identify the connecting tissue between the seemingly disparate discursive practices and mutually exclusive viewpoints, the paper will interpret the multifaceted urban identity relying on Ricoeur's hypothesis of the concept of selfhood as produced within the continual process of self-narration, that is to say, self-figuration and self-interpretation (Ricoeur 1990). The narrative identity of urban entities – stories we tell of cities and stories cities tell, be them literary, spatial, or digital – thus becomes the vantage point from which to understand not only the past, present and future of our habitat but our habitus as well.

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So where exactly are cities waiting out the rumblings of the changing times? Are these waiting rooms places, spaces or non-places? And how is the wait to be measured? Etymologically and semiotically speaking, the sharp distinction between the spatial and temporal dimension is an artificial one, for the word *space* is derived from Latin *spatium* denoting: "room, area, distance, stretch of time". Moreover, according to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, the first lexicological definition of the lexeme *space* refers to a period of time and also its duration. So without even delving into the long-standing Western metaphysical tradition of thought on spatiotemporal issues, it becomes apparent that human relationship with time and space is riddled with controversies, paradoxes, and blank spaces. Hence, the exclusively spatial ontological interpretation of cultural phenomena as promoted by the poststructuralist theoretical matrices becomes highly susceptible to critique, as do all other metaphysical and post-metaphysical systems relying on the radical separation of the two concepts.

It is precisely the intrinsic link of temporal and spatial relationships, as epitomized in Bakhtin's chronotopic dialectics and further examined by Paul Ricoeur, that engenders the totality of our ontological, cultural and existential experience. Ricoeur's "human", i.e. cultural time, as the ontologically constitutive synthesis of cosmological and phenomenological time – time as succession and past-present-future interface (Ricoeur 1990 [vol. 3]: 109) – is to be understood as a composite temporal framework, and in order to grasp the complexities of subjectivity, an integrative interpretative platform must be identified. For if "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricoeur 1990 [vol. 1]:

3), then the binding tissue of essentially disjointed constituents of our "lived reality" is none other than the narrative practice. According to Hayden White tropological structures penetrate "to that level of consciousness on which a world of experience is constituted prior to being analyzed (White 1973: 33). Time configured as a narrative determines the narrative reconfiguration of selfhood, so the consequential narrative emplotment becomes the sole dwelling of the being[2].

The integrative force of narration is what explains the "kinship between memories and places", an "inseparable tie between the problematics of time and space" (Ricoeur 2004: 41). For Ricoeur, the act of inhabiting is "the strongest human tie between the date and the place" (Ricoeur 2004: 42) because spatial phenomena, specific localities, urban entities can only be experienced when read. In other words, only when the elements of spatial reality are superimposed on the map of our emploted nodes of imagination and memory, when the integration of the constructed and the narratively reconstructed occurs, can both human and urban ontology become legible. According to Ricoeur space is actually temporality, or more precisely, one of its types, inasmuch as the numerous overlappings between the "narrated" time and "constructed" space occur under the rule of emplotment. On the other hand, Derrida interprets the spatiotemporal controversy from a seemingly opposite viewpoint: "architecture is not a matter of space but an experience of the Supreme which is not higher but in a sense more ancient than space and therefore is a spatialization of time" (Derrida 1997: 304). However, the two perspectives, although apparently divergent, express the same sentiment towards the nature of our dwelling place: in our discursive reality, in which "writing is a way of living" (Derrida 1997:303), the opposition between time and space, or for that matter the precedence of one over the other, has no longer any validity, for they both constitute the dialectics of shared cultural experience. The act of inhabiting is what transforms space into a meaningful place which is parallel to the act of narrating time, and the convergence of the two engender culturalized spatiality and temporality. Even more so, the dwelling itself, in the Heideggerian sense, implies the inseparability of human and spatial ontology for space

> is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space;* for when I say 'a man', and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name 'man' I already name the stay within the fourfold among things (Heidegger 1971: 154).

Urban development thus becomes akin to intertextuality, and urban ontological or onto-narratological structures become similarly inextricable from those of human subjects inhabiting and reshaping them. Unsurprisingly, Ricoeur would conclude that

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2 "On the one hand, in effect, our temporal ways of inhabiting the world remain imaginary to the extent that they exist only in and through the text. On the other hand, they constitute a sort of transcendence within immanence that is precisely what allows for the confrontation with the world of the reader." (Ricoeur 1990: 6)

it is on the scale of urbanism that we best catch sight of the work of time in space. A city brings together in the same space different ages, offering to our gaze a sedimented history of tastes and cultural forms. The city gives itself as both to be seen and to be read. In it, narrated time and inhabited space are more closely associated than they are in an isolated building. The city also gives rise to more complex passions than does the house, inasmuch as it offers a space for displacement, gathering, and taking a distance. There we may feel astray, rootless, lost, while its public spaces, its named spaces invite commemorations and ritualized gatherings (Ricoeur 2004: 150-151).

Understood as such, city becomes a vast spatiotemporal network of movement and interaction, circulation and meandering of meaning, a narrative interface of sorts, but, most importantly, it achieves its urbanness only through the lived and shared experiences. Being a place of gathering, or, dare we say, communion, Ricoeur's conception of a city is not dissimilar from that of Lefebvre, who identifies the collective as solely capable of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991: 115). Critical of the spatial theories that insist on the highly codified and codifying semiotic representations of urban space which, according to him, lead to producing fetishized abstractions of cityscape reducing the world to a series of blue-prints (Lefebvre 1991: 131), Lefebvre's Marxist phenomenology advocates the revival of interest in sensorial perception, human body, and its organic connectedness with the space it inhabits. Although Anri Lefebvre is disdainful of the discursive approach when interpreting urban systems, he, nonetheless, just like Ricoeur, insists on the social and communal aspect of city-dwelling as the dominant property of urban identity.

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"Cyberspace can be seen as an extension, some might say an inevitable extension, of our age-old capacity to dwell in fiction, to dwell empowered or enlightened on other mythic planes, if only periodically, as well as this earthly one."
(Michael Benedikt 1992: 6)

The coinage *cyberspace* is of literary origin and is credited to William Gibson, who first used it in his short story "Burning Chrome" (1982), which, after the publication of *Neuromancer* in 1984, entered both popular lexicon and theoretical discourse. According to fictitious history, cyberspace evolved from the virtual world of military simulations, but its real origin, as Gibson explained in one of his interviews[3], is in fact contemporary video arcade games and computer-graphics programs. It was a perfect word according to Gibson: "it sounded like it meant something, or it might mean something, but as I stared at it in a red sharpie on a yellow legal pad, my whole delight

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3 *Live from the New York Public Library,* an interview with Paul Holdengräber, April 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae3z7Oe3XF4

was I knew it meant absolutely nothing". More importantly, it resonated with the perceived dictum of the times that indicated the need to devise a novel chronotope for SF narratives because the exploration of deep space no longer seemed to bear any relevance.

The first operative definition of cyberspace[4] was devised by Gibson himself: "a 3-D chessboard, infinite and perfectly transparent" (Gibson 1987: 168), which he later revised into:

> a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (Gibson 2000: 51).

Espen Aarseth, one of the leading figures in the field of cybertextual and video game studies, highlights the mentioned importance of fiction as the birthplace of a cultural and even ontological sign of times, pointing out how Gibson, before the digital culture theorists, has seen the digital future and identified the computer game as one of its main roots (Aarseth 2007: 143). Originally, the ontological positioning of cyberspace in regards to the actual one was conceived as being on the vertical axis – being parallel to the actual world and occupying a different ontological plane altogether thus directly juxtaposing the supposed real space. However, as the chronotope transcended the literary realm, the need for reexamining and redefining its spatio-ontological features grew. Aarseth insists on the dialectical nature of the two spatial dimensions claiming that cyberplaces are generated regions in space and cannot exist as parallels of real, three-dimensional space, bearing in mind that cyberspace and other such phenomena (e.g. computer games) are constituted of signs and are therefore already too dependent on our bodily experience in and of real space to be "'hallucinated' as space" (Aarseth 2007: 44). Virtual worlds created for or while playing computer games are heavily reliant on the semiotics of our actual environments, seeing that they are in essence computer-mediated representations of space, but, at the same time, the ludic aspect of games raises the need for deviation from the reality as such so as to make the illusion playable (Aarseth 2007: 47). Perceived as spatial allegory, deeply rooted in traditional, dare we say analogue practices of spatial production and

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4   Since the initial phases of theoretical inquiry into the vast field of digital culture in the early 1990s, cyberspace has been defined over and over again. Nowadays there are as many definitions as there are theoreticians. So as to specify the usage of the term in the context of this paper, we will quote a clarification of the issue provided by Marie-Laure Ryan in her book *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*: "The term *cyberspace* is now mainly associated with the Internet, but for the participants in the *Conference on Cyberspace*, held in Austin, Texas, in 1990, it covered a wide range of applications of digital technology that included computer-generated environments – virtual worlds proper – as well as networking" (M. L. Ryan 2001: 49). Accordingly, cyberspace as referred to in this chapter of the paper corresponds to the original usage of the word and is used in an overarching manner, connoting various forms of digital environments, online or otherwise.

venturing into the spatial (digital) beyond, cyberspace can indeed be interpreted as the latest evolutionary stage of our being-dwelling, an "inevitable extension of our age-old capacity to dwell in fiction". It is not a space of passive data: its communication channels connect to the real world allowing cyberspace navigators/dwellers to interact both with the real and virtual. Consequently, cyberspace has become a multi-dimensional and meta-spatial network of symbolic content in its totality, integrating fictional, meta-fictional, historical, meta-historical, cultural, architectural, architextual, archetypal and mythical signs and codes. "Billowing, glittering, humming, coursing, a Borgesian library, a city; intimate, immense, firm, liquid, recognizable and unrecognizable at once." (Benedikt 1992: 2)

Evidently, apart from being computer-mediated, networked and spatially navigable multi-user environments, virtual worlds are characterized by the possibility of synchronous interaction between users and between the user and the internal and external world. Such complex dialectics generates another important feature of the cyberspace landscape: inhabitability. As Lisbeth Klastrup notices, this property is what differentiates them from the represented worlds of traditional fictions, which are worlds presented as inhabited by real people, but not actually inhabitable (Klastrup 2003: 101). She perceives virtual worlds as "lived stories in social spaces" in which the participation in common narrative provides a basis for community formation. She further states that

> "this aspect of being in the world, which is related to the experience of time, history and community development within the world. Having lived in the world for so long that you have had significant experiences or experienced significant changes you have shared, your story of 'the world as lived' can, retrospectively, become a compelling story to be told" (Klastrup 2003: 103).

What we are faced with is a Heideggerian interpretation of cyberspace as a *dwelling*, a manifestation of the particular manner in which Dasein is in the world. As discussed above, dwelling as being and being as dwelling imply the interconnectedness of man and space, of the spatial and temporal; it implies belonging, presence, engagement, and familiarity. And, noticeably, the production of meaning in these worlds is achieved through the communal lived experience, all the while being both narrative and narratable. Apparently, "joyfully dwelling in the virtual world" (Klastrup 2003: 100) is not that dissimilar from being a city-dweller, an inhabitant of narrativized and culturalized spatiality and temporality.

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"Often is the structure of Los Angeles compared to the structure of a microprocessor, that is to say a complex interweaving, composed of transfer and storage surfaces, through which, in great speed,

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information travel, that will, after they have traversed several other surfaces, settle down in some small buildings." (Blanquard 2003: 103)

And what about our modern real-life cities? What about those hubs of urbanness, once beacons of enlightened ideologies? Is the experience of joyful dwelling even a possibility in those crazy, fast-talking, unshaven, elegant and confused metropolises? According to poststructuralist spatial theory – no, for the narrative of the late 20th-century city reads more like a bleak, dystopian phantasmagoria than Barthes' "modernist poem". Urban space is often perceived as a transformed into dematerialized and deterritorialized imploding network of non-places (Augé 1995) – locations devoid of their anthropological and historical dimensions, marked by transience and ephemerality, unable to imbue the human subjects inhabiting them with the sense of meaning and purposeful identity, reducing them to monadic entities instead. In these hypermodern and hyperreal chronotopes, everything – surfaces, edifices, time, space, movement, people – has become fragmentary, hermetic, self- and pseudo-reflecting (Jameson 1991, Baudrillard 1999, Soja 1996). Surrounded by antiseptic suburban utopia[5], characterized by segregation, exclusiveness, uniformity and consumption rather than production (Mumford 1970: 215-217), contemporary metropolis, along with its citizens, is suspended in the state of permanent disorientation in a technologically generated synthetic space-time simulacrum (Virilio 1991: 26). Anthropometric laws become null and void, architecture and urbanism are transformed into their antipodes: anti-architecture and anti-urbanism, while people themselves, confounded and lost, become objects of information proliferation and dissemination. Buildings seldom carry meaning, men seldom sense communion. It seems as if, after millennia, architecture stopped being "an experience of the Supreme".

Maybe it was just about that time that cities started sensing the rumblings Gaiman mentioned in his brief meditation. In the early days of digital theory development, when the elation with possibilities cyberspace offered was riding high, numerous theoreticians recognized the need to reexamine the nature of our urban environments since it increasingly started showing the signs of hybridization with the virtual worlds. For Marcos Novak, a scholar and self-proclaimed transarchitect, exploration of cyberspace could initiate radical spatial deconstruction for it offered the opportunity "to uncover previously invisible relations by modifying the normal mapping from data to representation" (Novak 1992: 225). The crisis of representation and implosion of meaning recognized by the previous generation of thinkers, was, in fact, a crisis of

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5 A paper by Biljana Vlašković Ilić "Black Death in Heterotopia: Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Langland" offers an interesting exploration of marginal urban spaces as heterotopic catalysts of crises, the plague in that particular instance. Concerned with as to why "the outbreaks of such diseases are confined to heterotopic spaces" (Vlašković Ilić 2020: 62), the text in question might provide a valuable insight into diachronic analysis of the mentioned utopian-dystopian dialectics of para-urban spaces, thus opening the opportunity to reassess the ontological status of virtual worlds as potential heterotopic domains.

human poietic abilities and potentials. If city once was a poem that extended the sign, as Barthes claimed (Barthes 2016: 234), it had obviously lost that capacity since signs themselves had become devoid of any signifying potential. Buildings as manifestations of and shelters for our poetic, subconscious, and archetypal structures and impulses, as Bachelard and Jung perceived them, fell prey to the all-encompassing practices of utilitarian spatial manipulation that dictated the violent eradication of the poietic from the technological. In consequence, Novak recognizes the opportunity to restore the inherent union of science and poetry within once unthinkable, yet the fertile landscape of hypersurfaces – those integrating the actual and the virtual; determining the location of cyberspace and the location of humans within this informational environment is an architectural issue. For him "cyberspace is a habitat of the imagination. Cyberspace is the place where conscious dreaming meets sub-conscious dreaming, a landscape of rational magic, the locus and triumph of poetry over poverty, of 'it-can-be-so' over 'it-should-be-so'" (Novak 1992: 226). It is a "poetry inhabited, and to navigate through it is to become a leaf on the wind of a dream" (Novak 1992: 229). Seen as such, cyberspace conforms with the tenets of narrative spatio-ontological theory: for humans to *be* they need to *dwell*; for cities to *be* they need to *sing.*

As the membrane between the two domains – actual and virtual – becomes increasingly permeable, some might even claim eradicated, the need for redefining the poetics and ontology of the city grows. Urban space, super-imposed and reflected on the smartphone screen or experienced through a video game console, has been showing signs of growing digitization for decades now, which has, in turn, opened unprecedented opportunities for seemingly original forms of social organization and (sub)cultural identity formation. One might even go as far as to say that hybridication of the informational web architecture with the web of urban loci could restore the communal aspect of being-there and being-with. Seen as the last in line of exponents of the narrative architectural practices, video games, MMOGs (massively multi-player online games) in particular, as new spatio-ontological paradigms, have spawned new communities. As Pearce and Ryan (Ryan 2001, Pearce 2003) notice, virtual worlds of video games are, in essence, descendants of 20th-century amusement parks, both being spatial media. They, Disneyland in particular, promised to recreate the idealized and nostalgic experience of the communal street life of small-town America, yet failed to deliver the full immersion into a lived experience. More a testament to "the postmodern fascination with the playful spirit" (Ryan 2001: 298) and simulacra feigning to offer a false representation of reality while, instead, "concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (Baudrillard 2006), amusement parks, although offering an illusion of authenticity and immersion, could not facilitate community formation and identity creation. Or, as Pearce notices: "Unlike at Disneyland where every visitor is a 'guest', in MMOGs, every guest is a 'resident', a citizen of the online world" (Pearce 2003: 203). Narrative environments with unique poetic structures, massively multiplayer online games offered a higher level of in-world

interaction than was ever possible in their antecedents, and became public places, comparable to urban gathering places: medieval squares, Renaissance piazzas, early 20th century Paris cafés... Such narrative environments, allowing not merely the participation in the pre-developed virtual worlds but also its further construction, became hotbeds of productive activity: generating spaces went hand in hand with generating meaning, identity, and community. Moreover, their ongoing interaction with the "real" world, caused the overall change in spatial perception forcing us to reexamine the very nature of "the real" and "the lived". And yet again, narrative structures played the role of binding tissue... As an example of such social dynamics within virtual worlds, Pearce refers to the following example:

> When *Uru* [avatar driven, puzzle-adventure game; author's remark] closed in early 2004, not wishing to see their communities destroyed, players from the game immigrated en masse into other virtual worlds where they began to re-create numerous cultural artifacts of their former "home." Members of the "*Uru* diaspora" in *Second Life* created a near-exact replica of *Uru*, while another group of *Myst* fans created a totally original *Myst*-style game (Pearce 2003: 204).

So, here we are, "community", "immigrated", "diaspora", "cultural artifacts of former 'home'"... Let us offer a further example: the virtual world of *Second Life* Pearce mentioned, sometimes categorized as a MMORPG, yet without a set conflict and objective, is often described as a user-created, community-driven experience. Launched in 2003, it had about one million active users at its peak[6]. What is interesting, however, is that in 2007, the island nation of the Maldives opened its embassy in *Second Life*[7], the first of its kind. Soon, Sweden followed suit. As Reuters reported: "The opening of the embassy was attended online by Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, in the form of an avatar, and at a real life press conference in Stockholm"[8].

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> And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,
> Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;
> (Rev 21: 10-11)

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6   Source: https://www.lindenlab.com/releases/infographic-10-years-of-second-life
7   Source:https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tiny-island-nation-opens-the-first-real-embassy-in-virtual-world-c3phsx2n2r0
8   Source: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-secondlife-idUSL3034889320070530

Cyberpunk, previously mentioned in this paper as the birthplace of the concept crucial for this analysis, is usually interpreted as the continuation of the adventurer-hero literary tradition seeing that the protagonists of such texts traverse various microworlds (cyberspace being one of them) on what is essentially a quest of reexamining and redefining ontological borders. Gibson calls them "cybernauts", Sterling, in *Schismatrix*, "sundogs"[9] – both, evidently, establishing an analogy between navigating virtual worlds and physical movement, specifically seafaring. For cyber- is dynamic in its essence: the prefix is derived from Ancient Greek *kybernan* denoting steering, piloting, driving, governing... Cyberspace exists within and thanks to movement. Far removed from the static, coherent, immutable, and complete world image of ancient epic chronotopes, it is merely the newest addition to the long list of ontologically dynamic loci that we have constructed since our expulsion from Eden. Deeply rooted in narratives about yearning, our cities are, accordingly, as virtual as our digital worlds. Moreover, if Gaiman perceives some cities as crazy, others elegant, or confused, then, following the argumentation conducted in this paper, we might claim that they all have one feature in common: cities – actual, fictional, or digital, the distinction is immaterial – are wanderers, maybe migrants, or perhaps flâneurs, just like those who inhabit them, driven by the desire so well defined by Baudelaire: to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home... Heidegger's dwelling place thus remains a lofty, archaic, idyllic utopia never to be achieved.

The stories about cities and the stories cities tell are inextricable from the narrative of humanity. It is a weaving spun of many yarns: time and space, body and mind, mind and spirit, archetypal patterns, mythological matrices and ideological constructs. The city can be read as an allegory of dreams of progress that is to come and nightmares of progress realized; of the innocence lost and wisdom gained. These stories are stories of disillusionment and despondency, of hope and rapture. If there is one thing mankind has been striving towards for millennia then that is the ability to call a place "home". For the exiled we indeed are. This yearning has informed all our endeavors and driven us into the realms unimaginable. Cyberspace, as the final frontier, is understood by some as the last in the long line of human attempts to reach the Heavenly City (Benedikt 1992: 18), an inclusive domicile, resplendent in its immaterial transparency. So where might these visionary dreams about the digital pearly gates lead us? Towards the transcendence of mortality and materiality, once and for all? Towards the long-awaited renaissance of the poietic impulse that has been banished from our materiality, and without which we have lost our ability to play and rejoice? Maybe towards the preservation of our shared dwelling place within the fictional? Or, perhaps, towards the final triumph of the Cartesian logics and utter dematerialization of the human principle? Whichever viewpoint one might subscribe to, one thing is undeniable: there are rumblings, things are changing. And, yes, what if, tomorrow,

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9   The analogy between "sundogs" and "seadogs", another adventurer-hero model, is recognized by Brian McHale in *Constructing Postmodernism* (McHale 1992: 248).

cities woke, and went walking? But then again, what if they are learning to walk as we speak...

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Марија В. Лојаница
КА ЈЕДНОЈ НОВОЈ ПОЕТИЦИ УРБАНОГ ПРОСТОРА
Резиме

Рад се превасходно бави онтолошким и наративним аспектима савременог урбанитета који се симултано манифестује на две равни: стварносној и виртуелној. Испитујући овај проблем у мултидисциплинарном контексту просторних студија, покушали смо да успоставимо обједињујући теоријски оквир унутар којег бисмо сагледали специфичности савременог урбаног искуства, ослањајући се при томе на Рикерову хипотезу континуираног процеса самонарације као доминантног конститутивног фактора идентитетских структура, било урбаних, било хуманих. Овакав приступ омогућио је успостављање корелација између различитих научних дисциплина (урбанизам, дигитална естетика, онтологија, културологија и књижевна теорија) и теоријских становишта (структурализам, постструктурализам, феноменологија, итд.). Сходно томе, текст интерпретира онтолошки статус сајберспејса као архитектонски и урбанистички проблем, фокусирајући се на следећа питања: да ли је могуће сагледати сајбер просторе као потенцијална станишта, на који начин се конституишу идентитети и заједнице у виртуелним световима и да ли је ревитализација поиетичког аспекта технолошке производње могућа у овим окружењима. На овај начин, анализа комплексности наративног

идентитета савремених градова отворила је могућност интерпретације не само про-
шлости, садашњости и будућности урбаних ентитета већ и нарато-онтолошких пре-
миса хуманитета.