TRAVELLING DISCOURSE – THE MOBILITY OF VISION IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

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Abstract: Exemplary for Joyce's reputation as a cosmopolitan writer would be his mobility of vision and perspective; it is the mobility of the writer as an exile and a traveler in continental Europe, it is the mobility of language shift that he encounters or it is the mobility of fictional discourse that often features as the interplay between writing and reading in a text like Ulysses. This cosmopolitan free circulation of discourse is regarded upon as a mark of Joyce's all-inclusive modernism, and additionally as an Irish trope of wandering. Travelling discourses accompany a better understanding of Joycean fiction as a dynamic system in itself; its many changes and swings (polyglotticism, contortions of phrase, flowing style) are possible precisely because of the nature of these writings as texts in motion.

Keywords: mobility of language shift, mobility of fictional discourse, cosmopolitanism, texts in motion

James Joyce's cosmopolitanism is often read against the question of "production of space" in writing urban literature, by way of which Dublin becomes a "Weltstadt" defined as "a topos of the imagination where the city become the world" (Harding 2003: 133). In Georg Simmel's view, the urban dynamics – that is so often presented with Joyce's fiction – offers no advantage to the individual consciousness divided between the inclusion and the exclusion of the city from the sphere of everyday life. In the changing "centripetal and centrifugal" perspective[1] on the urban landscape, the city is regarded as "overwhelming", unbearable and more suitable for what Christopher Butler terms "pessimistic" writers like Gissing and Conrad.

Desmond Harding contributes to the critical appreciation of Joyce's urban cosmopolitanism, in that the writer expresses a "recuperative" view of Dublin conceived as "the center of modern consciousness, and that modern consciousness is an urban consciousness" (Harding 2003: 57). The same would be argued by Kenner, who identifies the interdependence of modernism and the urban imaginary especially in the reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*[2]. When taken far from the "centre" as a point of reference, individual consciousness is challenged by the encounter with the "otherness" of the ex(external)-metropolitan space. Christopher Schedler defines this position (outside the centre, but looking at it) as "border modernism" – understood as "a product" of the "other" space, where exile writers whose cultural backgrounds interact with what they perceive as being different: "(…) modernism does look surprisingly different when one leaves the metropolis and stands not in the province

[1] "For Simmel, the centripetal and centrifugal stimuli generated by the conditions of city life – 'modernity' – resulted in an almost unmanageable assault on the sensory capacities of all individuals regardless of class." – Harding 2003: 81

[2] "The deep connections between modernism and modern urban rhythms are nowhere more evident than in *Ulysses*" – Hugh Kenner qtd in Eysteinsson 1990: 20

(…), but on the border – the marginal space (…) beyond the metropolitan space, where distinct cultural groups come into contact and conflict.” (Schedler in Cain (ed) 2002: XI)

Schedler evokes Fredric Jameson’s own reading of *Ulysses* as a metaphor of another “border modernism” “in which the aesthetic of metropolitanism is projected onto Ireland, a space where the First and Third World meet, a space no longer central” (Schedler in Cain (ed) 2002: XIV). Raymond Williams studies the point of contact between the immigrant artists and the role of the metropolis by claiming that there is a sense of new “community” that these artists assume as a sort of suprastructure in the metropolis:

> The most important general element of the innovations in form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasized how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants. At the level of theme, this underlies, in an obvious way, the elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, which so regularly form part of the repertory. But the decisive effect is at a deeper level. (…) the artists and writers and thinkers of this phase found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practices. (…) To the immigrants especially, with their new second common language, language was more evident as a medium – a medium that could be shaped and reshaped – than as a social custom. (Williams in Middleton (ed) 2003: 9)

Our aim is not to deny Dublin’s central position in Joyce’s writings, nor is it to apply a sociological conceptual frame as a reading exercise, but rather to conclude that fictional space – in Joyce’s texts – is prone to an intrinsic mobility of narrative and discourse and to the critical permeability of various theories and schools. It is the variety of critical perspectives that allows for several interpretations of the city as the picture of authentic Dublin and Dubliners, as a mock-image of Irishness or as a cosmopolitan transposition of an Irish city. Bernard Benstock is careful to absorb any of these tendencies, in his writing of *‘Ulysses’ without Dublin*, a demonstration of the well-tempered critical reconstruction of the city, avoiding both the author’s claims for the documentary composition of fiction and the critics’ rushed judgments on the margins of the Dublin’s inauthenticity: “Joyce’s boast to Frank Budgen that “if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be constructed out of my books” certainly attests to Joyce’s penchant for accuracy whenever possible, but he could hardly have expected such reconstruction to have taken place from the reality he credits most, the Mabbot street scene and Molly’s soliloquy.” (Benstock in “James Joyce Quarterly” 1972: 101)

Benstock is versed in reading between the lines of Joyce’s allegations and identifies – where necessary – Joyce’s interspersed allusions and ironic treatment of the subject. Dublin’s fictionalization is such an example of Joyce’s efforts to safeguard the image of the city from its parochialism, by the use of “irony and detachment” (Benstock in “James Joyce Quarterly” 1972: 107). It is in this safe manner that Joyce manages to offer its readers a glimpse at Dublin’s multi-layered structure and postbinaristic nature: “Joyce’s Dublin persists as a microcosm of the modern city. Joyce had commented that the city was both a national capital and yet a relatively small community in which the citizens knew each other well enough for

him to create the interaction of his characters." (Benstock in "James Joyce Quarterly" 1972: 115)

Critics such as Enda Duffy or Garry Leonard have explored Joyce's *dromomania* (see Rickard in "European Joyce Studies" 2001: 105) characteristic of Joyce's protagonists, while at the same time, comparing them to Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*[3]. Rickard's reading of the political determinants supports the view that political identities are as mobile and shifting as the narrative itself, and, moreover, that they are part of a larger project that Joyce successfully finalized with the writing of *Finnegans Wake*: "Joyce creates models of urban, hybrid identity that (…) allow language and narrative mimesis to wander as the novel slips its own boundaries and goes "on the road" stylistically, loosening the limits of the self and setting the stage for the radical disjunctures of *FW*." (Rickard in "European Joyce Studies" 2001: 109)

As a consequence, the mobility of his fiction also speaks about the dynamics of identity formation and reconfiguration, whereby Irishness is converted into the Europeanism of "pluralistic and open forms of identity" (Rickard in "European Joyce Studies" 2001: 110). Here, Rickard comes closer to David Spurr's understanding of the construction of space and its reflection of identity formation as an interplay of forms and parameters: "(…) both architectural space and the space of consciousness are sites of a continual struggle among the competing claims of individual freedom, nationalist aspirations, and imperial authority." (Spurr 2002: 18) If the text is the manifestation of artistic consciousness, then the space of the city becomes the space of the text that hosts its authorial consciousness as the *Deus ex machina* who is continuously downplayed by the textual energies mushrooming as style. Spurr compares the urban configuration to the body of the "literary text" with its "linear but irregular patterns" (Spurr 2002: 18). If previous critics referred to the text in terms of "mobility" and "dromomania", Spurr prefers the notion of "circulation" – seen as "the constant movement of persons and objects in all directions within a defined space" (Spurr 2002: 29). Opposing Foucault's modern *site* to the more stable, less mobile, term of *place*, Spurr privileges the city's self-imposition as protagonist of fiction, as self-reflexive authority, if we are to evoke – like Spurr – de Certeau's assertion that: "(…) the city is "simultaneously the machinery and the hero of modernity", meaning that the city generates the historical conditions of modernity while it also becomes a mythic construct in the discourse of modernity." (Spurr 2002: 29)

For this reason and for many more, Joyce's texts have been chosen as examples of self-reflexive pieces of fiction, in which the element of modernist innovation makes room for individual consciousness to pervade the structure of writing in many forms, and for the self-referentiality of the text feeding on itself. Self-reflexivity (also termed by Monika Fludernik as self-referentiality) appears in the modern novel as a result of "constant juxtaposition, of *montage*" and of "stylistic parody" (Fludernik in Zach; Kosok (eds) 1987: 294-5). For Fokkema, the use of self-reflection is a sign of aesthetic inclusion, a symptom of modernism and its "metalingual" functions: "Apart from epistemological doubt, metalingual criticism may serve as a criterion to separate Modernist from non-Modernist texts (…)" (Fokkema 1987: 39)

[3] Rickard appeals to Peter Barta's comparison between the *flaneur* and the *badaud* – the latter being defined as the "more anonymous and less respectable urban walker", while the former is more characteristic of Joyce's fiction in that "The flaneur is always in full possession of his individuality" - Rickard in *EJS* 2001: 106

Fritz Senn studies the nature of textual self-reflexivity in noting that it is “a trademark in much recent story-telling” (Senn 1995: 119) and in identifying it in fictional reconstruction from within its own structures and items: “Joyce’s later works, in particular, seem to have a self-awareness of their being artifacts. *Finnegans Wake* comments continually on its own nature, and infelicitous exculpations are never far off. *Ulysses* also more and more denounces itself as narrative scheming. Asides like ‘As said before’ and even ‘as said before just now’ (*U* 11.519, 569, 763) are conspicuous avowals of the creator’s handiwork.” (Senn 1995: 119) Self-reflexivity can be said to support the successive aspects of reading and writing as/in fiction, where Joyce’s characters are described either reading or writing in a process of intense communication, whereby the text itself seems to ex-communicate itself from the pages of the book. Here are just a few of the *titbits* of textual self-reflexivity in *Ulysses*: “Stephen writes on the beach with whatever comes to hand; all day, Bloom reads headlines, hoardings, and announcements in the street; and in ‘Wandering Rocks’, a chapter that is overseen by the travelling discourse of the throwaway as it floats down the Liffey, Stephen and Bloom turn over books standing up in the street.” (Connor 1996: 66)

There is certainly a blend of discursive cosmopolitanism (with all its liberties of phrasing and style) and discursive “familiarization” (with fragments of textual repetition, copy-paste techniques and self-reflexivity as attextuality) in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The most mobile of all Ulyssean episodes (*Wandering Rocks*) registers a few such examples. Let us take the mobility of the details concerning the young woman’s removal of the twig from her skirt:

> The young man raised his cap abruptly: the young woman abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig. (*U* 10.200-2)

or

> The young woman with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig. (*U* 10.440-1)

If *Wandering Rocks* functions by way of contraction (in the form of the several vignettes of Dublin life), *Aeolus* is known for its expansiveness of style and discourse, despite its apparent fragmentation into smaller paragraphs with headlines. There is an implicit staged communication of the “machinery” that is given voice, translating itself to the readers as a proliferation of uncontrolled message:

> The machines clanked threefour times. Thump, thump, thump. Now if he got paralysed there and no-one knew how to stop them they’d clank on and on the same, print it over and over and up and back. (*U* 7.101-3)

The same episode plays with the double register of the orthographic and the phonetic in a passage advancing the possibilities of the text’s feeding on itself or feasting on wordplay:

> It is amusing to view the unpar one ar alleled embarra two ars is it? double ess ment of a harassed pedlar while gauging au the symmetry with a y of a peeled pear under a cemetery wall. Silly, isn’t it? cemetery put in of course on account of the symmetry. (*U* 7. 166-70)

Towards the end of *Oxen…*, in the parody of the American evangelist style, Joyce's text recuperates the travelling words of the throwaway from *Wandering Rocks* and transports it to complete the genesis of the English language chronologically regenerating itself in a global language that is hardly familiar anymore and that anticipates the style and linguistic cosmopolitanism of *Finnegans Wake*:

> Christicle, who's the excrement yellow gospeller on the Merrion hall? Elijah is coming! Washed in the blood of the Lamb. Come on, you winefizzling, ginsizzling, booseguzzling existences! (*U* 14.1579-81)
> "Full of my breadth from pride I am (breezed be the healthy same!) for 'tis a grand thing (superb!) to be going to meet a king, not an everynight king, nenni, by gannies, but the overking of Hither-on-Thither Erin himself, pardee, I'm saying." (*FW* 452.24-8)
> "Numerous are those who, nay, there are a dozen of folks still unclaimed by the death angel in this country of ours today, humble indivisibles in this grand continuum, overlorded by fate and interlarded with accidence, who, while there are hours and days, will fervently pray to the spirit above that they may never depart this earth of theirs till in his long run from that place where the day begins, ere he retourneys postexilic, on that day that belongs to joyful Ireland" (*FW* 472.28-35)

Space expansion – just as space contraction – is yet another instance of *trompe l'oeil* in which the strategies of fictional representation select just parts of an insinuated whole that is displayed and anticipated or merely hinted at in between the limits of the page. Hither-on-Thither Ireland, an island expanding over the sea and covering most of the world, speaks of Irish emigration, of a centrifugal disposition as colonial dispersal. The opposite is suggested in the "postexilic" return to an Ireland to which Joyce also referred in *Exiles*, with a somewhat tender overtone[4], a return that is not envisioned in idyllic lights, but rather in the skeptical perspective of one who experiences and renders exile and emigration in the space of fiction. That is why "Irish writers and intellectuals in the twentieth century have returned to Joyce's exile out of a need as well as a desire to rationalize their own diasporic existence" (van Mierlo in Gibson; Platt (eds) 2006: 195). Any attempt at mapping exile would become ambitious projects of formulating a history and a map of the world in its entirety.

The feeling that texts have the power and the structure of world-generating is encountered by readers such as Joyce's close friend Jacques Mercanton, who once confessed of having experienced the apprehension of an entire creation by merely looking at the surface level of manuscript pages of *Work in Progress*:

> When I perused a page of the manuscript of "Work in Progress", I did not imagine the unfolding of history but rather a foreshortened image of the creation of the world. Certain passages remained intact, just as they were

[4] "Not the least vital of the problems which confront out country is the problem of her attitude towards those of her children who, having left her in her hour of need, have been called back to her now on the eve of her longwaited victory, to her whom in loneliness and exile they have at last learned to love." – *Exiles* (142) qtd in Wim van Mierlo – in Gibson; Platt 2006: 186

> written at the beginning, like particles instantaneously crystallized and fixed in their eternal forms. Other areas were in a state of continual flux and fusion, and it seemed that nothing would work to stabilize them; one sentence had recently been split up by a few new words, which in their turn had engendered a new sentence. (Mercanton in Potts 1986: 221)

This certainly reminds us of Crawford's symbolic mapping of Phoenix Park in the margins of a newspaper; the impression of both frozen and dynamic elements building up the picture of a world stems in the reader's own photographic eye, in his mapping of the map. Trying to give a certain spatial form to such a form-preoccupied novel as *Finnegans Wake* could signify framing fiction in a manner that to a certain degree imitates an authorial gesture. Reading is once again a form of writing, a technique of reforming and rearranging the space of fiction with all its data.

Spatial dissolution and coagulation in the act of reading are other ways of saying that "the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterriterialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world." (Deleuze; Guattari 2004: 12) Since territory is prone to several modifications when shifted from historical to fictional, is can be understood that holding on place as a centre of reference is merely a utopian belief. Joyce's Dublin is a constant, not a variable in his writings, but its perpetual expansion or contraction, its mapping, so to say, account for its instability and mutability.

The "foreshortened image of the creation of the world", as a result of mapping techniques, requires a constant revisitation of real geography and a permanent interplay between various degrees of appropriation. Zooming in and out of the specific place provides a better view of both the details and its overall image. It is precisely from afar that space is foreshortened in its entirety and for a wholesome comprehension. Ireland' contraction and expansion in two of Joyce's novels are the results of a spatial distantiation and an aesthetic close-up to a reality that is frequently conveyed in varying linguistic registers.

Mapping spatial distance as exile can be performed with the help of aesthetic means which betray the existence of an aesthetic distance. Joyce's spatial distantiation from Ireland was doubled by his aesthetic looking back on a country as foreshortened in the image of Dublin, also known as the writer's "universal city of the mind". Labeling it as a "city of the mind" means leaving its historical value at the background of a larger story about the definition of an artistic identity:

> The aesthetic distance that Joyce introduced into his autobiographical narrative after his exile, then, extends the need for distance represented by the exile into the very method of his book: just as he needed the actual distance between Dublin and Trieste in order to return to his past to rewrite, Joyce came to need the aesthetic distance he finally created in his autobiographical narrative between his protagonist and himself in order to "recreate" himself as an artist. (Jay 1984: 122-3)

Abstracted from the reformed space of his writing, Joyce's authorial voice echoes his participation in the creation of fictional worlds from "behind", "beyond" and "above" their

limits and above the margins of his own biographical individuality. His creative self clings on, returns to Dublin as to a centre of his fictive projections, in order to sequentially rewrite, refashion it and himself with it. This strategic self-absorption beyond the historical reality and its fictive rendering justifies critical evaluation in terms of "transhistorical", "transcultural" (Harding 2003: XI) narrative with reference to Joyce's elusive political or ideological belief. By balancing the real and the fictive, the author relativises both and claims none as fundamental narrative.

Both fictive and real, historical and imagined, Joyce's Dublin essentialises in-betweenness at various levels: social, political, ethnic, aesthetic. Dublin is the "dear, dirty" city, the paradoxical blend of provincialism and metropolitan dynamics, the loathed site of parochial stereotypes and the reimagined home of exiled artists. Conveying its in-betweenness can only be completed by positing the reader both inside and outside Dublin, both in its social network and underlying urban mechanisms and outside its geography, its walls and limitations, with the help of a foreshortened image, with an artifice that turns Dublin into a "map". In doing this, Joyce chooses to become part of a series of writers whose allegedly modernist aesthetics creates narratives of the city, of urban space, thus mapping cosmopolitan places and internationalist spirits of artists and individualities.

Joyce's Dublin, and through it Ireland - even though less engaged in the political events of the first decades of the twentieth century – come out and act out other socially, ethnically relevant connections between colonizer-colonized, margin-centre, cosmopolitan-provincial. Double-deckered themes and features of urban life and urban prose have basically generated a space of debate for critics who either look for nationalist traces in Joyce's writing, or general internationalist, transhistorical values that go beyond his Irishness or Irish-Englishness.

No matter how particular or universal, how small or large, how close to the readers' eyes or how far from critical sight and fictional representation, Dublin has proved sufficiently generous for further exploration, both in fiction (the city appears in all of Joyce's books, *occasional* writings included) and in theoretical framing and analysis (different critics speak of varieties of Dublin as Hibernian metropolis, Irish capital, European capital of culture, international city if not metropolis, centre of modern and modernist consciousness or perfect display of urban architecture, corner of nationalist manifestoes or place for anti-nationalist, anti-Catholic and anti-institutional creeds). All in all, Dublin remains a "classical city" in that "Ulysses" is also for us the classical, the supreme representation of something like the platonic idea of city life", due to the fact that it "is not exactly the full-blown capitalist metropolis, but like the Paris of Flaubert, still regressive, still distantly akin to the village, still un- or under-developed enough to be representable, thanks to the domination of its foreign masters." (Jameson in McCormack; Stead (eds) 1982: 134-5) Despite the ironic dimension of ideologically-framed assertions, it is only right to admit that the Irish capital of 1904, a time when the question of emigration was still problematic, could not have been exploited and explored as aesthetically successful as the cities of other modernist artists on the Continent.

Sketching the features of a "classical city", one would necessarily bear in mind the model, the urban pattern of the Greek *polis* with its *agora* of intense social networking and philosophical debate. In Fredric Jameson's understanding of a "classical city", Dublin is

relevant insofar as all the levels of its representation are interspersed, overlapped in cross-sections imitating the actual performance of forms of communication:

> The classical city is not a collection of buildings, nor even a collection of people living on top of one another; nor is it even mainly or primarily a collection of pathways, of the trajectories of people through those buildings or that urban space, although that gets us a little closer to it. No, the classical city, one would think – it always being understood that we are now talking about something virtually extinct, in the age of the suburb or megalopolis or the private car – the classical city is defined essentially by the nodal points at which all those pathways and trajectories meet, or which they traverse: points of totalisation, we may call them (…) (Jameson in McCormack; Stead (eds) 1982: 134-5)

In this particular aspect of the city as socializing milieu lies the significance of such a textual depiction of urban space in its incessant movement, with its resonant rhythm and its modernist translation of a sense of change (industrial political, economic, social); the beginning of *Aeolus* is illustrative for the way in which the modernist "classical city" is offered on the open stage of fiction with the help of a zooming in and out of the streets and the Dublin infrastructure: "Before Nelson's pillar trams slowed, shunted, changed trolley, started for Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey, Clonskea, Rathgar and Terrenure, Palmerstone Park and upper Rathmines (…) Right and left parallel clanging ringing a double-decker and a singledeck moved from their railheads, swerved to the down line, glided parallel." (*U* 7.1-12)

Recording their dynamics in the economy of the literary text – which in itself brings all descriptive elements together as "points of totalisation" – does not necessarily hint at recuperating territories, but repatriating some of their characteristics in the space of fiction, in Dublin as the imaginary homeland of urban energies rather than the Irish capital hosting Nelson's pillar as a pole of Irishness. Joyce offers his readers the portrait of a city with the "modern consciousness" that was aware of a synchronic adherence to a type of aesthetics, and which is an "urban consciousness" (Harding 2003: 57), in the end. Joyce's authorial consciousness cannot leave aside such urban details that give Dublin its consistency, its history as evolution and transformation of place, since the "concentration of habitations, crowds in the street, and cultural institutions in the city has always had its excitements, and what Joyce sees in expanding Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century is no more than an intensification and variegation of such excitements, with the trams, the telegraph, the printing press accelerating the back-and-forth movement of people and information that has been manifested in cities through the ages." (Alter 2005: 139)

The negotiation of meaning between classical-modern(ist) has found with Joyce and his urban (re)creation a different significance, in that modernist preoccupations with urban forms coagulate in what would later become a recurrent (traditional, and, therefore, classical) point of interest. A modernist "classical city" – the fictive residence of a modernist spirit and an exiled writer – comprises and echoes the author's double vision: an integration, an appropriation of the city's "map" and a distantiation from it.

Coming back to an image that has an autonomy of its own, that exists inside as well as outside the fictional frame and whose validity and authenticity can be checked at any time is

not an easily achieved task. One of the theorists of urban space, Jane Jacobs, insists that "Designing a dream is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination" (Donald 1999: 121). Quite interestingly, Joyce's preference for visual representations (in painting, for example) addressed pictures with a narrative structure in it, images that could tell a story (Jolas in "James Joyce Quarterly" 1974: 103). This taste for the eventful and the narratologically conditioned representation is explained by Hillis Miller's phenomenological apprehension of space: "Space is less the already existing setting for such stories, than the constitution of space through that *taking place,* through the act of narration. What, then, is the nature of these space-producing events? Do they simply map spaces or represent events? Not really, suggests Miller. Rather, they project events onto space. To gloss Lefebvre's concept of representational space, they generate a narrational space." (Donald 1999: 123)

Telling the story of a place ("space-producing events") might work on a logic of linguistic production (single coding); remembering the story of a place implies a double act of fictionalization (double coding). If memory can be conceived as "performative act" (Donald 1999: 125), the unfolding of the narrative layers is part of the process of space recreation. Space as memory (as the depository of its historical configuration) becomes the memory of space when rewritten, when fictionalized. Joyce's work, therefore, maps Dublin with a mind to convert it into the representation of memory as space; fictionalizing memory does more than project memory as space. What Joyce's Dublin retains and offers its readers can be read as the urban dimension of authorial memory and migrant reterritorialization.

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