RHIZOMATIC CITIES IN ITALO CALVINO'S *INVISIBLE CITIES*

SAMBIT PANIGRAHI

Abstract: Italo Calvino's highly successful novel *Invisible Cities* thoroughly explains Deleuze and Guattari's famous postmodern concept of rhizome. The cities in the novel do not possess a fixed and coherent structure; rather they exude a structurality that is immensely fleeting and continually evolving. Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities* which ironically precedes Deleuze and Guattari's book *A Thousand Plateaus* clearly demonstrates the defining characteristic features of rhizome through the unusual and seemingly incomprehensible structure of the individual cities. There have been scanty critical responses in the past regarding the rhizomatic behavior of Calvino's cities, despite an extraordinary abundance of critical works existing on Calvino's writing. The rhizomatic patterns of Calvino's cities, it is believed by the author, need further critical attention. Rhizome, through its perpetually unstable structural modeling, perhaps most effectively demonstrates our utterly disarrayed postmodern condition of existence where any desired structural stability and coherence is a virtual impossibility, and of this trait, Calvino's cities in the said novel are the principal demonstrators. Based on these precepts, this article intends to analyze how Calvino's cities in the novel, with their perpetual and immense structural variabilities, exude before the readers a typical postmodern world that wholesomely discards the very idea of structural coherence and stability.

Deleuze and Guattari's collaboratively introduced concept of 'rhizome' in their classic philosophical treatise *A Thousand Plateaus* is a suitable demonstrator of our disarrayed condition of postmodernity. As is well known, rhizome is their devised model that explains the relentlessly fluctuating nature of a postmodern structure. It resembles a tuber or a moss and has a thoroughly unsystematic and unregulated growth without a fixed beginning or an end. Rhizome is basically a model that escapes a rigid and non-modifiable structural principle thereby remaining perennially open to unremitting changes and modifications. It is a

system that contains numerous heterogeneities and multiplicities inside itself and gets persistently ruptured and dismantled, thereby continually generating new and different structural formations. Rhizome is opposed to the arborescent model or the tree-model which, with its immovable roots and branches, imposes fixity and resoluteness on any structure or system of knowledge. It is therefore a creative, non-linear and non-hierarchical model that attributes a structure with a free and unbounded flexibility of movement. Its fleeting, center-less, incoherent and directionlessly flowing structurality is indeed a potentially subversive nullifier of many preceding generations' self-styled and unbounded confidence in coherent model-making. Rhizome, which, according to critic Charles J. Stivale, inflicts "a provocative assault on the systems of structuralist [...] signification" (20) is a potentially disruptive threat to any stable, coherent and manifestly identifiable structure that boasts of its own firmness and inflexibility.

In this context, Italo Calvino's famous novel *Invisible Cities*, a unique specimen of the writer's eclectic neo-realist experimentations, seems to exemplify the failure of model making substantiated through the 14th century Italian traveler Marco Polo's recreational retellings, before Kublai Khan, of the cities he visits. The cities defy structural coherence and absolution; they elude signification for they are nothing but a discontinuous chain of fleeting signifiers; they are rhizomes with flowing structures. They neither have any concrete structural presence, nor do they exude any stable epistemological grounding, as critic Teresa De Lauretis pertinently observes that they have "no presence, no origin, no moment of plenitude, and no absolute form of knowledge" (25).

Kerstin Pilz is one of the rare Calvino's critics who explore conceptual associations between Calvino's cities and rhizomes in their critical writings on the author. Her excellent article "Reconceptualizing Thought and Space in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*" which offers an overall analysis of different models of labyrinth and diverse notions of space explored by the writer in the said novel remains an inimitable masterpiece amongst works in a similar direction. Pilz, in this article, while citing the instances of a few cities including Eudossia, Penthesilea and Olinda, pertinently remarks: "The topography of Calvino's cities indicates that the real, even in the form of man-made architecture, is resistant to rigid structuring. The lay-out of a city—the result of chance and the process of historical layering—is more akin to a naturally grown labyrinth like that of a rhizome" (115). However, it must be mentioned that her article, which is remarkable and path-breaking by its own rights, does exclude significant and defining rhizomatic

characteristics such as 'deterritorialization and reterritorialization,' 'map without tracing' and a rhizome's merger in the 'plane of consistency'¹ in a scenario where the elicitation of these rhizomatic qualities by Calvino's cities is recurrently abundant in the text. Based on these precepts, this article intends to re-examine the cities as rhizomes in the above-mentioned novel with particular emphasis on a few of the aforesaid fundamental and essential rhizomatic qualities of which Calvino's cities are principal demonstrators.

To begin with, the most preliminary feature of a rhizome is multiplicity in place of singularity and a binary-producing arborescence. A rhizome exudes multiplicity and diversity—a trait of which the city of Dorothea is one of the initial exemplifiers: it facilitates our preliminary initiation to Calvino's complex and uncanny postmodern world crammed with illimitably proliferating rhizomes that problematize and disrupt any imminent possibility of structural coherence for the cities. In Dorothea, the narrator's initial and presumptive attribution of a finite and symmetrical pattern to the city meets, after many years though, a counterfactually ironic subversion through his own remedial acceptance of the city's veiled multiple openings: "but I know this path is only one of the many that opened before me on that morning in Dorothea" (Calvino 8). These late revelations reassert a rhizome's repudiation of singular and restrictive symmetrical patterns and its concomitant embrace of multiple asymmetries, radical diversities and unregulated proliferations: "The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions [...] Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (Deleuze and Guattari 14).

The fundamental basis of a rhizome's trademark structural instability is its radical non-reliance on a genetic axis or deep structure, on a rigid and non-modifiable formula or codification that threatens to bind the structure through a single, unifying principle:

¹ A 'plane of consistency,' in the Deleuze and Guattari scheme of things, is a plane of immanence that contains all multiplicities; it is a plane that does not have any form or substance; it contains only flowing lines that consume all directions and dimensions; it is a plane that Nature is. Deleuze and Guattari explain: "The plane of consistency or of composition is opposed to the plane of organization and development. Organization and development concern form and substance: [...] But the plane of consistency knows nothing of substance and form: [...] In another sense, consistency concretely ties together heterogeneous, disparate elements as such: it assures the consolidation of fuzzy aggregates, in other words, multiplicities of the rhizome type" (558).

a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure. A genetic axis is like an objective pivotal unity upon which successive stages are organized; a deep structure is more like a base sequence that can be broken down into immediate constituents, while the unity of the product passes into one another. (Deleuze and Guattari 13)

As is evident from the above quote, the rhizome is all against massifications, unifications and codifications, of which Zora provides another example through its ready defiance of all attempts to impose on itself a systematic and enforceable structural signification. Zora, a city that is known for its remarkable and formulaic structural ordering for which it can be easily remembered “point by point, in its succession of streets, of houses along the streets, of doors and windows in the houses,” however cannot continue forever with its supposedly unalterable structural concord despite forced to “remain motionless and always the same” (Calvino 13). Its unifying organizational formula that runs through its body like an unalterable “musical score” (Calvino 13) and its systematic structural ordering manifest through the all-inclusive honeycomb-image² are found to be unsustainable in the end. Zora’s compulsive disintegration thus symbolizes a rhizome’s emancipation of space from the principles of rigid structural determinism into a transgressive and unrestricted free flow beyond ruptured boundaries.

A rhizome is known for its territorial open-ended-ness and inconclusivity, its resistance to restrictive territorial formations and its radical disorganization of space from an inflexible geometrical ordering into a profuse and unregulated explosion and implosion³ of space, as seen in the city of Zoe. It is a city which is “without

² Zora is initially described through the image of a honeycomb where one could systematically place ideas and things: “This city which cannot be expunged from the mind is like an armature, a honeycomb in whose cells each of us can place the things he wants to remember: names of famous men, virtues, numbers, vegetable and mineral classifications, dates of battles, constellations, parts of speech” (Calvino 13). The honeycomb like structure of Zora, which is an emblem of systematic organization, however cannot be maintained for long because of its subsequent structural disintegration.

³ Explosion and implosion are typical Baudrillard’s terms which refer to the erasure of the distinction between private space and public space in today’s world dominated by media images, such that the external public space implodes into the private space whereas the restricted private space explodes into the external public space. Similarly, the city of Zoe, because of its absence

figures and without form” precisely for which a traveler travelling into it “has nothing but doubts,” neither is he able “to distinguish the features of the city” as they “also mingle” (Calvino 29). This indeterminacy is reinforced through the narrator’s exemplary inability to “separate the inside from the outside” (Calvino 29)—a scenario that substantiates a rhizome’s typical insubordination to territorial enclosures and foregrounds its recurrent and slick elusiveness to shapes, outlines and features. The rhizome unleashes on a structure “a force of pure transgression” (Sheehan 36).

The structural indeterminacy reappears in Cecilia, at a later part of the text though, where its flippant and elusive space “stretches between one city and the other” (Calvino 137) in a way that the individual cities remain potentially indistinguishable. It is ratified through the narrator and the goatherd’s conjoint declarations of their inability to determine perceivable territorial differences between individual cities: “‘That cannot be!’ I shouted. ‘I, too, entered a city, I cannot remember when, and since then I have gone on, deeper and deeper into its streets. But how have I managed to arrive where you say, when I was in another city, far far away from Cecilia, and I have not yet left it?’” (Calvino 138). Cecilia’s structural inconclusivity is a reassertion of what Karen Kaplan rightly calls a rhizome’s “anarchic relationship to space” (87).

A rhizome, confirm Deleuze and Guattari, does not comprise fixed points or positions, rather interfused lines and segmentaries forming a complex pool of heterogeneous connections—an “interlocking web” (Kurokawa 1028) which however remains subject to a furtherance of structurally reformative transformations:

Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. (Deleuze and Guattari 23)

The city of Ersilia, notably, enacts a similar process and reduces itself into a constellation of interconnected strings—an interconnection that grows even

of boundaries, is not able to separate its internal space from its external space in a scenario where the former explodes into the latter and the latter implodes into the former. This is in concurrence with the notion that a rhizome has neither an inside nor an outside.

“more complex” (Calvino 68) with more subsequent dismantlings rocking the city. The process involves the city’s multiple and infinitesimal miniaturizations such that it turns into a cluster of residual and fragmentary lines and segmentaries, as in case of a rhizome: “The multiple *must be made*, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available—always $n-1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted)” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). The strings form assemblages in Ersilia—assemblages that increase Ersilia’s dimensions to infinity. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: “An assemblage⁴ is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points and positions in a rhizome, such as that found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (9). Earlier in Chloe, we have encountered similar shifting rhizomatic networks of lines, arrows, stars and triangles instantly generated by the flickering exchanges of glances between casually meeting city dwellers in a scenario where “connections spread and multiply rather than being constrained by imposed and inflexible hierarchies” (Grant 70).

Esmeralda is another exemplary rhizomatic city in Calvino’s omnibus collection of cities where its representational multiplicities explore a three-dimensional proliferation through the tangled interconnections between its labyrinthine transport system—where the itinerant can choose from amongst a multidimensional “network of routes” (Calvino 79)—, its labyrinthine underground secret networkings and its crisscrossing areal trajectories woven by the swallows’ prolonged and continual flights. Interestingly, the rhizomatic complexity of the city’s transport network is sufficiently complimented by the secret and proliferative “underground passages” that pierce the “city’s compactness” (Calvino 79) like spokes of a wheel and, also, by the innumerable parabolic networks woven by the continual flights of the swallows in the air. By this multidirectional influx and flow of lines and segmentaries appropriately represented through intercepting, intersecting and interjecting roots and canals, underground passages and crosscutting areal flight-routes in Esmeralda, the city truly assumes the form of a rhizome as Deleuze and

⁴ Rhizomes are essentially made of assemblages which are formed by constituents that are randomly assorted and are movable and can be displaced and replaced amongst other bodies. Assemblages are not static and sedentary entities; rather they are mobile and inherently modifiable ones such that they advocate fluidity, exchangeability and multiple functionalities. Calvino’s rhizomatic cities are replete with a plentiful of such assemblages.

Guattari explain: "The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms [...] [through] ramified surface extension in all directions" (7).

These rhizomatic networks explained above encompass, interconnect and interpenetrate the terrestrial, the subterranean and the celestial firmaments. It is seen in the cities like Eudoxia, Beersheba and Andrea. Eudoxia, which initially provides an overwhelmingly symmetrical structural design represented through a corresponding carpet-image, however provides at the end another disruptive rhizomatic image of its own where it outlandishly maps the apparently unmappable universe with all its enormity and variabilities and spills like a "stain that spreads out shapelessly" (Calvino 87). Beersheba—a city which is "accompanied by two projections of itself, one celestial and one infernal" (Calvino 100)—forms rhizomatic interconnections between its terrestrial and celestial firmaments. The terrestrial Beersheba connects, through the prolonging routes of the human bowels, to an underground Beersheba rising like "twisted spires" (Calvino 100) and also to the celestial Beersheba whose flying away "long-tailed comets" (Calvino 101) open up new channels of connections into unfathomable celestial space. Andrea, likewise, forms a rhizome with the sky through symbolic interconnections with the latter in a scenario where an implosion of interstellar spaces and designs flood into the city which repeats the fluctuating movements of stars and constellations in the sky. We have encountered earlier similar terrestrial/celestial rhizomatic interconnections in Kublai's dreamy visions of Lalage—a city of rising spires—in a scenario where the moon, deviated from its fixed planetary orbit, forms rhizomatic connections to many of the city spires' apexes. These terrestrial/celestial interfusions do not leave these firmaments as separate and disconnected spheres any more, but rather as mutually connectible and interpenetrative ones. It becomes possible both for the unfettered growth of the city spires which break away, like lines of flight,⁵ from the Earth's sedimentary topographic grid and for the deviant movements of the moon which, like another line of flight, loosens from its predetermined trajectory in celestial space and connects to Earth's projections.

⁵ Lines of flight are the factors behind a rhizome's deterritorialization. A rhizome breaks or ruptures along the line of flight which flees into the plane of consistency; it never allows a rhizome to settle down into a permanent structural stability even though centripetal forces of reterritorialization are constantly at work. If one looks at the cities of Calvino, it is observable that the cities are perpetually ruptured by lines of flight constantly destabilizing the formers' inherent efforts to stabilize themselves into structurally coherent and stable units.

It must be mentioned at this juncture that Calvino's presentation of the rhizomatic "Principles of connection and heterogeneity" (Deleuze and Guattari 7) is not just confined to space, but also extends to multiple temporal coordinates: Marco's sojourn to Laudomia is a glaring testimony of this heterotopic⁶ spatio-temporal mix-up. Laudomia, which manifests through a conglomerate triplicate—the city of the living, the city of the dead and the city of the unborn—, exhibits recurrent inter-territorial, inter-spatial and inter-temporal movements, interminglings, shufflings and reshufflings to create an intricate rhizomatic maze where spatial and temporal zones no more remain restricted and separate, rather mingle, coalesce and intersperse in a way that the three different territories remain virtually indistinguishable. As an example of these cross-territorial, cross-provincial and inter-generational admixtures, the tangled existence of the living and the unborn in Laudomia is spatially represented through the city's jumbled-up demographic structure where the unborn are interspersed amongst the living and are traced in "invisible hordes" in "every pore of the stone" whereas every funnel in the city is filled with "millions of persons who are to be born" (Calvino 128). It is also discernible that these fusions create, alongside multiple temporal hodgepodes, by blurring the distinctions between past, present and future and then mixing them up in the web-like spatio-temporal loop that is constantly on the move inside the city. The city thus turns into a rhizome constituted by interlocked spaces and mingled times.

We also find similar rhizomatic spatio-temporal shiftings, combinations and networkings generated during Marco's conversation with Kublai at the beginning of Part 7 of the book. Here both, equally unsure of their exact spatial positioning, become parts of concurrently occurring hazy, non-chronological, spatio-temporal shifts within flashes of instants (with the movement of their respective eyelids up and down). Marco, while conversing with Kublai in the garden, simultaneously continues moving, "without a moment's pause," along a river "green with crocodiles" and also along "distant bazaars" while Kublai, in correspondence with

⁶ Michel Foucault in his excellent article "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" differentiates between utopia and heterotopia in a scenario where the former represents a unified and singular spatio-temporal field whereas the latter represents a social space that is spatio-temporally heterogeneous and diversified. According to Foucault, "the heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other [...] Heterotopias are linked for the most part to bits and pieces of time, i.e. they open up through what we might define as a pure symmetry of heterochronisms" (334). Heterotopic space is rhizomatic in nature where a particular space creates multiple overlappings of diversified spaces and different times.

Marco's somewhat improbable spatio-temporal displacements, also keeps shifting between the "porphyry fountains" and "the fields of battle" (Calvino 93) and the garden in which he and Marco are presumably conversing. While sitting inside the garden's confined space, Marco and Kublai keep on generating these implausible transgressions that rupture and outstrip the garden's actual and confining spatio-temporal grid thereby forming infinitely stretchable rhizomatic spatio-temporal matrices during their conversation.

A rhizome, one must not forget, is not a composite structure, but a fragile assortment of its components which nonetheless can regenerate into new and independent rhizomes, as happens in *Fedora*. It is a city that is filled with many breakable and reconstitutive dimensions of itself; it has an infinitely regenerative structural capacity such that it, as Gian Carlo Ferretti puts, "decompose[s] the totality in multiplicities" (qtd. in Francese 87). The initial *Fedora* which disintegrates with time into various fragmentary parts of its own is preserved, nonetheless, through many of its symbolic and representational mini-models where they could burgeon into bigger *Fedoras* corresponding to the visitor's varying fantasies. Thus the mini-models that represent a multiplicity—which has already been exemplified by the crisscrossing roads opening into the city—can rebuild *Fedora* through legion varying forms, thanks to the fluctuating imaginations of the seers. It results in what could be idiomatically termed as a "schizoanalytic metamodelisation" (Guattari 58)⁷ of the original city, to borrow a fashionable postmodern coinage from Felix Guattari. Through what looks like an archetypical postmodern blurring of the reality/fantasy distinctions, *Fedora* not only enunciates its symbolic breakability into multiple mini-models, but also demonstrates its relentless structural metamorphoses into a rhizomatic pool of "transformational multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari 13).

Fragmentation, dislocation and reconfiguration are the prime features of a rhizome—traits which are brilliantly substantiated by the city of *Eutropia* through

⁷ See Felix Guattari's discussions on schizoanalysis which rejects all pre-existing practices of systematic model-making that is based on fixed and determinable spatio-temporal coordinates. According to Guattari, "in place of the traditional logic of sets described univocally (where one always knows without ambiguity whether or not an element is included) schizoanalytic modelisation substitutes an onto-logic, a mechanics of existence whose object is not circumscribed within fixed, extrinsic coordinates; and this object can, at any moment, extend beyond itself, proliferate or abolish itself with the Universes of alterity with which it is compossible" (65). Schizoanalytic metamodelisation is rhizomatic in nature for its perennial ability to transgress any structural fixity or confinement.

the self-initiated and continual disruption of its own mythic centrality. The eclectic structural formations of the city is that of a 'plateau' (a conceptual metaphor for rhizome that Deleuze and Guattari have admittedly borrowed from Gregory Bateson) in a scenario where they delineate the former as "a continuously, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end" (24). We learn that Eutropia is "not one city but many [...] scattered over a vast rolling plateau" (Calvino 56) where multiple and dithering displacements, interminglings, exchanges, shufflings and reshufflings between the city's fracturing internal spaces, its recurrently migratory people and their continually changing professions create inside the plateau a rhizomatic matrix in perpetual motion.

A rhizome's archetypal elusiveness to predetermined centrality—underscored by Eutropia's exemplary center-less-ness—puts in place "an acentered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system" (Deleuze and Guattari 23). This is precisely why the rhizome is Deleuze and Guattari's suitable metaphor for the postmodern world as Laurel Schneider rightly comments: "it is this non-linear, a-centered mode of relation that makes the rhizome such a productive metaphor for Deleuze and Guattari" (178). Observably, Eutropia's 'center-less-ness' is also an assertion of French philosopher Jacques Derrida's fundamental and axiomatic poststructural dictum: "the center is not the center" (90).

Notably however, Eutropia's eternal instability is attributable not just to the infinite matrix interwoven by its fracturing internal configurations and its locomotive citizenry's diversified trajectories, but also to the city's endless subjection to deterritorializations and reterritorializations. Eutropia is frequently deterritorialized through the movement of its citizens, like lines of flight, from one city to another whereas it is also continually reterritorialized, at another level, through its preservation of the "same scenes" through changed actors, of the "same speeches" through "variously combined accents," and of "identical yawns" through "alternate mouths" (Calvino 56) in a way that amidst all changes, "Eutropia remains always the same" (Calvino 57). In these progressive and retrogressive multidimensional drifts, Eutropia exudes a continual 'becoming'⁸ rather than being stubbornly

⁸ The concept of 'becoming' that has predominantly surfaced in the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari is key to understanding the innumerable structural and identity-related changes, instabilities and variations that postmodernism ostentatiously advocates. Nietzsche's cosmology is based on the idea of a ceaseless becoming to which the cosmos subjects itself. Deleuze and Guattari have categorically followed the Nietzschean

stuck to a non-modifiable structural stagnation. This unique city is a rhizome made of “dimensions in motion” (Graafland 30), as it “connects and assembles in movement” (Klei 48).

Eutropia's continual deterritorialization and reterritorialization remind us of similar processes occurring in Sophronia, Clarice, Leonia, Theodora, and Olinda. In Sophronia, for instance, an annual and periodic alternation between the structural dissolution and reconstitution of the two halves of the cities attests to the above-mentioned processes that are continual, relative and mutually exclusive: “How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?” (Deleuze and Guattari 11). In addition, during their relentless structural disintegrations and reconfigurations, the two halves of the city readily become part of what Deleuze and Guattari, while explaining the similar mutational inter-substitutions between the wasp and the orchid,⁹ would term “veritable becoming”¹⁰ (11) in a scenario

line of thought and have used the concept of ‘becoming’ to dismantle the notions of fixedness and unchangeability dictated by the Western arborescent episteme. Becomings, for Deleuze and Guattari, are not restricted to any particular field; they can be geographical, territorial, spatial, temporal, human and non-human. Paul Sheehan rightly comments: “Deleuzian becoming thus defies any kind of stability—physical, conceptual, spatio-temporal. It is a plateau of thought that aims to unleash a force of pure transgression” (36). The cities in Calvino's *Invisible Cities* perfectly and relentlessly embody the very notion of ‘becoming’ for their continual elicitation of territorial and structural changes, modifications, reversions and metamorphoses.

⁹ The deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the two halves of Sophronia is perhaps similar to Deleuze and Guattari's demonstration of similar processes occurring between the wasp and the orchid. According to Deleuze and Guattari “the orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome” (11). It forms, they continue: “a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying” (10).

¹⁰ As has been mentioned earlier, Calvino's use of becoming is not just confined to space, territory and inanimate matter, but also to the human and the animals in a way that they form rhizomatic interconnections between one another in a universal process of ‘becoming’ that

where one becomes the other and vice versa. Deleuze and Guattari, while explaining more on the inclusive nature of this ‘becoming’ that accommodates coexisting but oppositional forces, comment:

Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; [...] There is neither imitation or resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (11)

Like Sophronia, Clarice also undergoes similar processes and prevaricates between “more decadences” and “more burgeoning[s]” in a scenario where the first Clarice is irreplaceably maintained as “an unparalleled model of every splendor” (Calvino 96). In a similar vein, the city of Leonia’s continual deconstruction occurs through the expansive and exclusionary rupture of its territory (through the expulsion of its waste at the periphery) followed by its dramatic reterritorialization through the city’s re-inclusion of its rejected goods. Theodora, likewise, creates an equally parallel and shifting alternation between the world of human and that of the non-human fauna through the latter’s deterritorializing destruction followed by its reterritorializing re-emergence after “many eras of supposed hibernation” (Calvino 144). On the whole, these cities, by continually deterritorializing and

constitutes the functional aspect of a rhizome. These ‘becomings,’ as Deleuze and Guattari would ascertain, are very much part of Nature, which itself is a “plane of consistency or composition” where “participations of this kind” (285) keep occurring. These “becomings” form a “symbiosis” in Nature involving “entirely different individuals” (Deleuze and Guattari 285). Deleuze and Guattari, while explaining more on this type of ‘becoming,’ continue: “it makes the rat become a thought, a feverish thought in a man, at the same time as the man becomes a rat gnashing its teeth in its death throes. The rat and the man are in no way the same thing, but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer that of words, in a manner that is no longer that of forms, in an affectability that is no longer that of subjects” (285). The human and the animal form a rhizome in Nature’s ‘plane of consistency or composition’ where they continually become each other. The city of Marozia, for instance, is full of similar human/animal ‘becomings’ amongst its perennially transformative human/rat/swallow population; the city is a rhizome in Nature’s ‘plane of consistency’ where such ‘becomings’ are very much the constituent parts of the former. Moreover, it is also observable that the city also undergoes continual deterritorializations and reterritorializations through these recurrent ‘inter-species’ shiftings, transformations and alternations. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s words, the process “continually makes and unmakes their assemblages” (285).

reterritorializing themselves, behave like rhizomes. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. [...] You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject. (10)

Rhizome's most expressive defiance of structural coherence is its transformational dismantlement of the Western arborescent model. In this context, one can examine the continual non-arborescent structural metamorphosis of the city of Olinda, which however is purposively attributed with an initial image of arborescence. It is equally remarkable to take a note of Calvino's exemplary demonstration of the dissolution of Olinda's arborescence, a demonstration that predates a similar one provided by Deleuze and Guattari years later in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. Though cursorily, Pilz mentions in her article Calvino's wishful rejection of Western arborescence, nevertheless, she does not sufficiently explain its complex mechanism. Before entering into a detailed analysis of Olinda's steady structural disintegration, we must mention Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions of the same of a rhizome:

Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and tortuous lines of n dimensions and broken directions. Conjugate deterritorialized flows. Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergences establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions. Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency. (12)

The subversion of Olinda's arborescence dramatically follows Deleuze and Guattari's explained processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Olinda spreads out through the proliferative growth of its trunk in "concentric circles" (Calvino 117) through the annual addition of rings or layers at its periphery. Interestingly however, new centers are formed at the outer edge with their respective new peripheries spreading out in all directions—outward, inward and up, below and sidewise—in a scenario where these new circles at the periphery rupture, lengthen and prolong the old Olinda while expanding in all directions. In the end, the old Olinda is replaced with "a totally new Olinda" (Calvino 117) which leaves the former's initial arborescence thoroughly unrecognizable. In a similar context, Deleuze and Guattari, while resolutely dismissing the 'tree' as a representational model of the western thought, comment: "To be rhizomorphic is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but to put them to strange, new uses. We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They have made us suffer too much" (17). The rhizome thus ends what Simon Malpas and Paul Wake would call the "long theoretical domination of tree-like models of thinking" (245–246) in the West. It is understandable that the rhizome's disregard for structural arborescence heralds nonsystematic and anti-methodical regimes in Western epistemological practices as Mario Vrbancic claims that a rhizome is "an antisystem that would not be trapped in [...] [any] rigid formations" (313) whereas Francois Zourabichvili calls the rhizome a manifestation of "the method of an anti-method" (qtd. in Lambert 63).

Amidst all of Olinda's recurrent and multidimensional structural disintegration, it is notable however that the new Olinda "in its reduced dimensions retains the features and the flow of lymph of the first Olinda and of all the Olindas that have blossomed one from the other" (Calvino 117), a scenario that unequivocally refers to an already-happened act of reterritorialization inside the city. This reterritorialization, in turn, is an implication towards Olinda's denial for complete abandonment of its arborescence and foregrounds its relentless and tendentious return to originality. On a careful scrutiny, it is also discernible that Olinda's relentless self-disassembling growth and the concomitant preservation of its originality metamorphose into a body of transformational multiplicities (that is why I have used the word 'transformational') where its initial arborescence and its transcendence coexist with a perpetual interactivity. In other words, the city, like a rhizome, simultaneously exudes the possibilities of both the preservation

and transformation (and of course not total destruction) of its arborescence. A rhizome is imbued with such inherently conflictual qualities as Deleuze and Guattari comment:

There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome [...] There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots. [...] Moreover, there are despotic formations of immanence and channelization specific to rhizomes, just as there are anarchic deformations in the transcendent system of trees, areal roots and subterranean stems. (16–22)

A rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a map without tracing—a concept that is the theoretical adjudicator of the former's rejection of spatial and territorial finality and its self-exposure to cartographic changes, modifications, experimentations:

The rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*. [...] What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation. [...] It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectible in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting. (13)

In this context, we need to read keenly into the many connotative gestures imbued within the map possessed by the Great Khan—a map which is discussed at great length towards the conclusive portions of the novel. The map, as Marco deciphers it, is a complex intermixture of real and identifiable places on the one hand and unreal and unidentifiable places on the other in a scenario where these places are copiously interconnected, as in case of a rhizome: “every place can be reached from other places, by the most various roads and routes, by those who ride, or drive, or row, or fly” (Calvino 125). We are informed that Khan's atlas possesses an abstruse intermixture of Marco's actually visited cities and places (including

Constantinople, Samarkand, Granada, Lubeck, Paris and Urbino etc.) and his unvisited and, of course, the narrator's fantasized cities that are geographically unverifiable (Cuzco, Mexico, Novgorod or Lhasa etc.). But what is most noteworthy in the map is Calvino's coveted attempts to present it as a 'map without tracing' where he initially displays the former as a rigid, constricted and non-expandable cartographic terrain full of tracings (representing real cities) and then displays all possibilities of their total transgression (through the representation of unreal cities). For the purpose we need to examine Marco's initial descriptions of the atlas:

The Great Khan owns an atlas whose drawings depict the terrestrial globe all at once and continent by continent, the borders of those most distant realms, the ship's routes, the coastlines, the maps of the most illustrious metropolises and of the most opulent ports. [...] The traveler recognizes Constantinople in the city which from three shores dominates along strait, a narrow gulf, and an enclosed sea. (Calvino 124).

Marco's initial reading of the map is a clear recognition of fixed borders and routes, of territorial enclosures that pervade the former's cartographic field while simultaneously stratifying it into specific and restricted spatial zones. Interestingly however, his subsequent inclusion of seemingly unreal and geographically unverifiable cities in the map, as has been mentioned, is indicative not only towards the former's transcendental features through which it transgresses its own incarceration by real spaces, but also towards the gross repudiation of the ideas of fixed geographical tracings presented earlier. Deleuze and Guattari, while emphasizing on similar qualities possessed by a rhizome, comment: "The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. [...] What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real" (13). Thus the map, as critical geographer Bruno Bosteels points out, "is never just a mirror of nature. It is neither an adequate imitation nor a transparent reflection of a stable territory already existing elsewhere" (147); it is, as Deleuze reaffirms in his exclusive book entitled *Foucault*, filled with "points of emergence or of creativity, of unexpected conjunctions, of improbable continuums" (42–43). In firm corroboration to these ideas of post-modern fluid cartography, the Great Khan's map, for its simultaneous possession of the real and the imagined cities, is no more a mirror-image reflection of real

territories or spaces; it is a negation, if we use a Baudrillardian phraseology, of “the cartographer’s mad project of an ideal coextensivity between the map and the territory” (167). The map thus transforms into a complex field interwoven with real and imagined spaces; it becomes a rhizome, a map without tracing.

Further, a close look at Marco’s recognition and perusal of various places and their attendant events on the map would reveal the former’s generation of a symbolic spatio-temporal matrix on its body where there are not only improbable and surreal spatial displacements, exchanges and superimpositions across different territorial frontiers, but also are many concurring temporal muddles ending up in the map’s conversion into a thoroughly de-stratified spatio-temporal loop. The fact that Marco, “while speaking of Troy,” is able to “give the city the form of Constantinople and foresee the siege which Mohammed would lay [there] for long months” (Calvino 125) (an event that happened nearly one hundred and thirty years after Marco Polo’s death) not only enunciates his virtual reshuffling between different geographical spaces across dissolved spatial frontiers, but also in a way inaugurates the typical postmodern reshuffling of different temporalities into each other. It is also a revolt against the rigid determinism of history and its misguided attempts to bind space and time in its pincer-like captivating grid. So Kublai’s atlas is quite exactly like a rhizome that is tendentiously replete with multiple combinations, displacements, internal exchanges, shuffling and reshufflings across divergent spatial and temporal coordinates on its terrain. This is precisely why it is a map and not a tracing. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: “The map is open and connectible in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. [...] A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back ‘to the same’” (14).

Moreover, Marco’s description of a yet unvisited and to-be-explored city almost at the end of the novel reinforces a rhizome’s ‘map without tracing’ character. The city, which Marco describes at the end, appears before us through his hazy and unclear mappings of its enigmatic and slippery terrains that are roughly constructed by his fragmentary visions and glimpses randomly assorted by him through his imaginative eyes. This is precisely why Marco “could not draw a route [which would have been nothing but a fixed ‘tracing’] on the map or set a date for the landing” (Calvino 147). His rough and indeterminate outlining of this mysterious landscape moves imperceptibly through “a brief glimpse,” through “an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape” and through “a glint of lights

in the fog” in a scenario where the city is constructed through the random and bricolage¹¹-collection of “fragments mixed with the rest” and of “instants separated by intervals” (Calvino, 147). In addition, his mapping of the city which is “discontinuous in space and time” (Calvino 147) tends to form another spatio-temporal loop (the text, as we have seen earlier, is replete with many such loops) that expands and gets scattered while indiscriminately moving to and fro perhaps like a patch of oil.¹² Thus, the city is conceptualized and presented before us as a ‘map without tracing’ for it is territorially indeterminate yet present, shapeless yet traceable, constructible yet reversible. The misty and fluctuating nature of the city is reflective of similar characters exuded by a rhizome for: “The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable” (Deleuze and Guattari 23).

It is also pertinent to observe here that the rhizomatic interconnections formed by the map extend along racial and ethnic lines as well. The emergence of the city of San Francisco from the combination of the cities of Pera and Galata, its conversion into the capital of the Pacific in the future, the mixing up of the races of “the yellow and the black and the red” with the “surviving descendants of the whites” (Calvino 125) etc. generate strange and improbable combinatorial networks not only across unstable spatial and temporal coordinates, but also across racial and ethnic fronts. These multiethnic and multicultural combinations are akin to myriads of cultural, ethnic, racial and ideological interfusions that define

¹¹ ‘Bricolage’ is a term that is used in various branches of study including fine arts, philosophy, literature etc. to denote a random method of construction by using the means at hand. It is also a concept which Derrida uses in his classic poststructural essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” to explain writing as a bricolage construction of language. Marco’s unclear mapping of the unexplored city that he talks about almost at the end of the text, similarly, is a bricolage construction of the fragments of images and times that flicker before him in momentary glimpses. Thus the city, like a rhizome, is not carefully constructed, but rather randomly assorted from whatever fleeting and momentary visions of it Marco could capture.

¹² It is Deleuze and Guattari’s master metaphor for a rhizome’s unregulated and irregular growth along its exteriority. Rhizome’s spilling over along its ruptured boundaries like a patch of oil shows its inherent defiance to any regular and concrete pattern of movement.

the rhizomatic social configuration of America today.¹³ These combinations—spatial, temporal, racial, ethnic—reassert the map's ability not only for creative extensions of its own territory but also for the generation of infinite combinatorial possibilities (as seen in case of a rhizome) from supposedly finite spaces.

The exclusive rhizomatic character of the map, discussed in this article at some length by now, however is most expressively demonstrated by the narrator's conclusive comments on the same. The narrator, while describing the endless production of cities in the last page, comments:

The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins. In the last pages of the atlas there is an outpouring of networks without beginning or end, cities in the shape of Los Angeles, in the shape of Kyoto-Osaka, without shape. (Calvino 126)

The conclusive remarks of the narrator, as is seen above, establish the map as the container of an endless 'catalogue of forms' (Calvino 126) on its trans-territorial cartographic body. Undeniably, it establishes the atlas as an unstoppable city-producing machine which, like a rhizome, resists any closure or finality for we encounter, in the map's last page, an "outpouring of networks without beginning or end" (Calvino 126)—networks which are crammed with shapeless cities like Amsterdam and Kyoto-Osaka. Thus the map, as it looks, is a free flowing spatial field that defies territorial enclosure; it is without a beginning and an end; it is a spatial intermezzo; it is a fluid field where the 'real' and the 'imaginary' coalesce so as to enable the former to transcend its own physical and spatial incarceration. Such endlessly transformative quality of a map makes it, as critics Rita L. Irwin et others rightfully denote, the rhizome's apt metaphor: "The metaphor of a map is another image used to describe rhizomes, for maps have only middles, with no

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari define the American social configuration as a rhizomatic one for it provides space for different people and divergent ideas to coexist in what could be called a multicultural medley. Deleuze and Guattari, while emphasizing on the rhizomatic character of the American social organization, comment: "nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside" (21).

beginnings and endings? they are always becoming” (71). So, a rhizome is something whose starting and ending points are not known; it grows in between; it is “something that develops ‘*au milieu*’: in the middle, in between” (Holland 56) or, as Herman Rapaport puts, it is “a level without climax” (138).

At the end, it must not be forgotten that a rhizome, through its infinite structural disintegrations, finally merges into a “plane of consistency” (10) which, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, is the ultimate and inclusive container of all multiplicities. It is an open spatial field of absolute deterritorialization where all multiplicities flatten and merge into the plane that looks like a sheet of paper:

All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a plane of consistency of multiplicities [...] The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. [...] The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of [...] of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet. (Deleuze and Guattari 10)

Of the flattening of multiplicities on a plane of consistency, the city of Moriana is an excellent example. It is a city that spreads out shapelessly like a rhizome through numerous proliferative multiplications of its own image and finally merges onto a ‘plane of consistency.’ It becomes flat, like a plane sheet of paper as the narrator, while brilliantly explaining this rhizomatic city’s ultimate merger onto the above-mentioned plane, comments: “From one place to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertory of images: but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other” (Calvino 95).

In the final analysis, Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities* contains many individual cities that, in fact, are rhizomes in themselves. Through Marco’s visionary reconstructions of his visited cities before Kublai, a rhizomatic pattern evolves and spreads out through the textual landscape of the novel. The cities’ collective subjection to continual structural indeterminacies does indicate towards postmodernism’s fundamental non-reliance on centered structures, a theme that is further actualized through their clear elicitations of rhizomatic signs and features. Rhizome is an undeniably exclusive postmodern concept and the succinct emergence of rhizomatic patterns in Calvino’s narrative in *Invisible Cities* undoubtedly

strengthens his claims to postmodernity—an issue that has nevertheless been subject to never-ending critical debates and discussions. I would end up by claiming that Calvino, through his brilliant elicitation of cities as rhizomes in his novel *Invisible Cities*, remains one of the important writers of postmodernity.

Ravenshaw University

WORKS CITED

- Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." In *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, edited by Mark Poster. Stanford U P 1988. 166–184.
- Bosteels, Bruno. "From Text to Territory: Felix Guattari's Cartographies of the Unconscious." In *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, edited by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998. 145–174.
- Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. Trans. William Weaver. London: Vintage Books, 1997.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Semiotic Models, Invisible Cities." *Yale Italian Studies* 2.1 (1978): 13–27.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Continuum, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge. Harlow, England; New York: Pearson, 1988. 89–103.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neil Leach. London; New York: Routledge, 1997. 330–336.
- Francesse, Joseph. *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York P, 1997.
- Grant, Iain Hamilton. "Postmodernism and Science and Technology." *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Stuart Sim. London; New York: Routledge, 1998. 65–77.

- Graafland, Arie. "Of Rhizomes, Trees, and the IJ-Oevers, Amsterdam." *Assemblage* 38 (1999): 28–41.
- Guattari, Felix. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Bloomington, IN: Indiana U P, 1992.
- Holland, Eugene W. "Deterritorializing 'Deterritorialization': From 'Anti-Oedipus' to 'A Thousand Plateaus'." *SubStance* 20.3 (1991): 55–65.
- Irwin, Rita L., Ruth Beer, Stephanie Springgay, Kit Grauer, Gu Xiong and Barbara Bickel. "The Rhizomatic Relations of A/r/tography." *Studies in Art Education* 48.1 (2006): 70–88.
- Kaplan, Karen. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourse of Displacement*. Durham: Duke U P, 1996.
- Klei, Alice van der. "Repeating the Rhizome." *SubStance* 31.1 (2002): 48–55.
- Kurokawa, Kisho. "Toward a rhizome world or 'Chaosmos'." In *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*. Vol. III. Edited by Gary Genosko. London; New York: Routledge, 2001. 1027–1034.
- Lambert, Gregg. *In Search of a New Image of Thought: Gilles Deleuze and Philosophical Expressionism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012.
- Malpas, Simon and Paul Wake (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Pilz, Kerstin. "Reconceptualizing Thought and Space: Labyrinths and Cities in Calvino's Fictions." *Italica* 80.2 (2003): 229–242.
- . *Mapping Complexity: Literature and Science in the Works of Italo Calvino*. Leicester, England: Troubador, 2005.
- Rapaport, Herman. "Vietnam: The Thousand Plateaus." *Social Text* 9.10 (1984): 137–147.
- Schneider, Laurel C. *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*. London; New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Sheehan, Paul. "Postmodernism and Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor. Cambridge; Cambridge U P, 2004. 20–42.
- Stivale, Charles J. "The Literary Element in 'Mille Plateaux': The New Cartography of Deleuze and Guattari." *SubStance* 13.44/45 (1984): 20–34.
- Vrbancic, Mario. "Burroughs's Phantasmic Maps." *New Literary History* 36.2 (2005): 313–326.