

HETEROTOPIC CAFÉS AND URBAN RESISTANCE: A READING OF THE NOSTALGIC PARISIAN CITYSCAPES OF MODIANO AND DEBORD

*Cafés heterotópicos y resistencia urbana:
una lectura de los paisajes urbanos nostálgicos
de Modiano y Debord*

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RESUMEN: En este artículo se analiza el papel del café en la novela de Patrick Modiano *In the Café of Lost Youth* (2007) a través de un examen de los problemas que se implican en la renovación de este espacio tan altamente cargado en términos sociales de la cultura francesa. El autor aporta cierto alivio a la vida urbana contemporánea. A pesar de la notable falta de compromiso social por parte de Modiano, mi hipótesis es que su cita de uno de los filmes de Guy Debord invita a reexaminar la concepción situacionista del café como un espacio crucial, en el que acontece una resistencia a las políticas capitalistas. Es necesario tomar en consideración tanto la concepción histórica como la concepción cultural sobre el café, que conducirá a concebirlo como una heterotopía foucaultiana. Estas obras indican una ausencia de espacios urbanos permeados

por una otredad tan vital y, a través de una mirada nostálgica, evocan el deseo de una espacialidad urbana renovada.

Palabras clave: Patrick Modiano, Guy Debord, Café, Heterotopía, Ciudad.

ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the role of the café in Patrick Modiano's novel *In the Café of Lost Youth* (2007), examining the problems involved in renewing this highly socially charged space of French culture. The author brings into relief contemporary citylife, where people are dispossessed of their spaces. In spite of Modiano's ostensible lack of social engagement, I argue that his quotation from one of Guy Debord's films, encourages a re-examination of the Situationist conception of the café as pivotal ground, where resistance against the politics of capitalism, can take root. It is necessary that both the cultural and historical conceptions of the café as critical social space be taken into account. The café is then conceived as a Foucaultian heterotopia. These works point to the absence of city spaces still permeated by such vital otherness, and by way of the nostalgic glance, they evoke a yearning for a renewed urban spatiality.

Key words: Patrick Modiano, Guy Debord, Café, Heterotopia, City.

In this essay I will analyze the role of the café as a re-emergent space in contemporary French culture. The café is not in itself a new space within the Parisian urban cityscape, but it has recently become the focus of a renewed and altered attention. Although the historical role the café has enjoyed over the past centuries in European culture remains a fundamental aspect in the way we conceive it nowadays, New Europe cannot avoid addressing the café's postmodern revival (both in terms of artistic and cultural production, as well as in everyday life) as something different. The Parisian café, having recently seen declines in attendance, still retains a significant role in the Parisian landscape and in Parisian everyday life, and is experiencing a critical moment in its definition as a social space. I don't suggest that contemporary culture is trying to define the café's previous role as a place in which ideas are diffused and discussed, but rather seeks to evoke precisely this absence of the café as a familiar meeting point, this absence of a space where real political resistance against the all-encompassing power of hegemonic capitalism developed. My working hypothesis is that the nostalgic re-appropriation of this space found in two French writers, the novelist Patrick Modiano, and the philosopher and activist Guy Debord, leads their readers and audience into an «other space». Following upon Michel Foucault's lecture «Of Other Spaces», I consider the appearance of the café in the works I discuss as a «heterotopias», a counter-site in the ultra-organized

space of contemporary Paris, a discontinuous and subversive, but socially defined, spatiality. The nostalgic gaze of these writers upon the café implies also what Foucault defines as an *effet de retour*: by seeing a site where one is not, and, I would add, a site where one cannot be any more, one is finally compelled to see and reconsider oneself in the place where one actually is. After visiting the cafés of Modiano's work *In the Café of Lost Youth* (2007), and of Debord's film *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni* (1978), our return to the devalued, banal, and stereotyped image of cafés present in cosmopolitan contemporary Paris leads us to perceive not only the emptiness of the modern café, but also to the need for new spaces, whether emergent or re-emergent, that can assume the café's historical functions in New Europe's postmodernist context.

I

The setting of the novel by Modiano is the Paris of the 50s and 60s, a Paris of transformation, of reconstruction, of economic recovery. This period coincides with Modiano's lonely childhood, a period full of solitary wanderings around a city to whose dangers he was both attracted and repelled as a young man, as he explains in one of his interviews (Garcin).

However, the story of *In the Café of the Lost Youth* does not focus on the city's physical transformations. Rather, the four narrators of the novel describe a Paris where they used to live at one particular age of their lives, focusing particularly on the area of the Carrefour de l'Odéon, where the café Le Condé is situated, and where they encountered its many strange customers. Two of the narrators, Louki, and her boyfriend Roland, are also the main characters of the novel; the other narrators being a student, a regular at the café, and a detective, engaged by Louki's husband, who is trying to find her and bring her back home. Each narrator recollects past events. The café is the place in which the story unfolds, and where the reader first meets the protagonists, in an atmosphere of mystery and suspense. In the present we only know that most of the youth of Le Condé is now «lost» (which, as can be implied, means either dead or in prison), and Le Condé has been shut, a leather shop built in its place. In spite of the absence of any polemic tone, I argue that the metamorphosis of this place points to a capitalist appropriation of urban space. Although Modiano is not politically engaged, and although he is far from taking a swipe at the capitalist development Paris underwent during the last four or five decades, the cogs of the narration undeniably move through a juxtaposition between the time of the story, when the café existed, and the time in which the story is recounted, in which commercialization has altered this intersection

in the middle of St-Germain-des-Près, finding as we do today the window of the leather-shop, a symbol of the area's surrender to commerce. The four characters refer to events, people, and places now irremediably lost. There is therefore no authorial intention of dealing with a political subject, which appears far from Modiano's interests. Ideological disengagement, however, does not necessarily translate to the absence of political views and consequences. The nostalgic tune guiding the separate narrations stems from the transformation of the Odéon intersection, the disappearance of both place, Le Condé, and person, Louki, and the metaphorical, scanty ruins of a lost past whose memories now emerge.

If we assign a social function to Modiano's café, it is important to understand how such a function manifests itself. The café embodies a magnetic field bringing the young characters together. Since the continual mental process of mapping Paris is hard work, the owner, Bowling, keeps a register in which he writes down the names and the addresses of all customers. He envisages the way they walk from their houses to Le Condé, just as the student-narrator conceives of this very possibility of Bowling holding a secret map on which the usual path of each customer has been traced. Nonetheless, this project reveals itself as fundamentally flawed: the student-narrator is aware the customers don't give their real addresses. Moreover, Louki and Roland move from flat to flat again and again. In which space do they really dwell? How can we establish their trajectories on our secret map? Modiano seems to be pointing to a larger problem: the end of dwelling as existence, the end of characters fixed in place. Along these lines, our Parisian café serves not as an intended meeting point of collective importance, such as the Notre Dame, the Louvre, etc. It is a place where customers who do not exactly dwell anywhere find one another, a place where each finds himself almost at random, taking refuge from a downpour, or during an endless wander through the Parisian streets. The social function of the café seems to lie in its capacity of creating ties among the displaced.

There is something more subtle the novel reveals about this space. In contrast to the characters' living spaces, it is in the café where familiar relationships can actually develop. How do these characters approach the many spaces in which they live? Roland defines these spaces of domicile as «neutral zones», and is in fact the author of a book, *Les Zones neutres*, finding inspiration for it in the lectures on the occult he attends. Louki and the others all have mysterious origins, and change their housing continually, never living in one place for long, in contrast to the traditional conception of the Parisian dweller. Their housing always remains anonymous, with few furnishings and little comfort or embellishment. These neutral zones

function as spaces of isolation. It is difficult to describe their appearance, for we are not provided with much detail besides the case of Louki and her husband's house in Neuilly, within the more comfortable Parisian suburbs. And even here we find the place unadorned, so sad that it is unidentifiable as a couple's residence. The alternating flats in which Roland and Louki live are supposedly of the same fashion, on a much smaller scale, with no pictures on the walls and only a few pieces of second-hand furniture. These features, this narrow environment, ultimately convey an idea of isolation, recalling the confines of a prison. Moreover, the word *neuter*, deriving from the Latin *ne-utrum*, means neither this one nor the other, seeming to indicate 'something which is not there,' reinforcing the notion and actual presence of non-being, non-existence. Homes become bare, anonymous, unfamiliar. This transformation of the private dwelling triggers its opposition to the café. Le Condé becomes the place where our city dwellers can develop some kind of human relationship. Although it would be difficult to consider these relationships familiar in the traditional sense, they should be considered as the maximum of sociability these characters obtain in their lives.

Before examining the setting of Modiano's café, I propose a short historical overview to illustrate the gap between Le Condé and the conventional idea of the café in Parisian and European consciousness. In the novel, the café is the place of sociability, or what assumes the role of sociability in Modiano, as well as being in this lost Paris a poetical source. In order to better understand Modiano's and Debord's newer conceptions of this stratified setting within French culture, let us pursue a short reflection upon the typical Parisian café.

Within the Parisian environment, the café is a place where people who do not necessarily know each other can meet, create new relationships, discuss subjects related to their communal urban life. Since the Renaissance, when French society began consciously providing for its public life, actively participating in its shared domains, Paris has seen the birth and diffusion of the café. If coffee, as a newly introduced beverage, was initially served in dives and taverns, more fashionable and more sumptuous spaces soon began to be introduced along with it, spaces which utilized various architectural and decorative elements in a particular way so to produce a variety of effects, in keeping with the patron's taste (sounds, visuals, smells, verbal effects). The café alters its appearance according to its time period as well as according to its specific urban location. The most diverse historical contingencies are at the origin of the success of some cafés rather than others. If the *rive gauche* favoured the development of a kind of café devoted to literature, such as the Procope, there was also, with the rise

of banking, commerce and capitalism, a rival desire for a more luxurious, more fashionable kind of café, with customers oriented towards politics and social issues, the Palais Royal being the foremost example. As a «school of freedom», the café has always been a place for the practice of the critical spirit, where newspaper readers gather, and where citizens not infrequently oppose themselves to official institutions. In the European imagination, the café has clearly been associated with Enlightenment ideas and democratic discussion. A prestigious Italian paper, founded in 1764 by Pietro Verri in Milan, bore the title *Il Caffè*, a word which carried the ideas and aspirations of some of the most important Italian intellectuals of the time.

Le Condé, considering its location at the Odéon intersection in the heart of St-Germain-des-Près, an area which owes much of its development to the presence of its cafes, carries a more picturesque and singular aura, enhanced by an historical overlapping. It is an area where one can still find the main publishing houses of France. It teems with all sorts of bookshops. Several generations of intellectuals have strolled through and settled here, beginning in the last decades of the 19th century, moulding Paris into a world capital of culture. This dream was realized in such cafés as Café Flore, Les Deux Magots, and Le Bonaparte. Here one met writers and painters who dictated the aesthetic tastes of fin-de-siècle culture and the Modernist avant-gardes that followed. It would be impossible to cite a satisfactory list of the many in this group: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Picasso, Hemingway, Michaux, Joyce, Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Aragon, Modigliani, Gide, Breton, are but a few. These intellectuals transformed the café into a sort of office, a laboratory for ideas. During the Occupation, many of these St-Germain-des-Près cafés became places where rebels, anti-fascist conspirators, and partisans would meet to find comfort and shelter.

As a public space devoted above all to sociability, how does the café present itself within the city's texture? The café was always conceived, as Benoit Lecoq states, as the «extension of the Parisian *rue*, it is the forum where somebody comes to test his own verve, to fortify his hopes, and heal his grief» (874). The opinion of city-planner Michel Vernes is very similar, for him it is space for anonymity and diversion. Van Doesburg, creator of the Aubette in 1923, says: «The architecture must abolish all distinction between inside and outside and must not oppose any resistance to the movements of body and soul» (Vernes 1987, 89; my translation). It is around this time that within many cafés doors, windows, and walls were removed «To make room for a continual space, which seems to aim at emerging from the *rue* from which it is separated by a simple glass wall» (Vernes 1987, 89). Around the thirties Charles Siclis wants the architecture of cafés

to express «the result of several forces», one of them being inertia: «The passer-by would like to have a drink at the harbour of rest by the edge of the road. But prolonged rest will inconveniently tire its beneficiary, if forces coming from the exterior world do not stimulate him. Relaxation of the body and amusing work of the soul are the states of mind which the café is supposed to convey» (Vernes 1987, 89). The café sought to ensure the most direct connection with the street, which was realised via the terrace. These principles of maintaining visibility in both directions led to the café's absence of barriers, as well as its installation of mirrors within to reflect the light of the newly introduced multicolour lamps in the same fashion as the luminosity was gathered and spread from outside. «The freedom of use of the café, and its bareness and simplicity, oppose themselves to the fatality of the fixed civil domicile and its meticulous and tyrannical bulk», states Michel Vernes (1987, 89). Even more strikingly, Verne concludes that «The café must affirm itself through its comfortable *neutrality*. It must foster banality and become the standard of collective imagination. What a café has is its insularity» (95).

According to the historical trend delineated above, the concept of neutrality should be associated with the café. Modiano, however, defines home, not the café, as the neutral location, situating the café as the primary familiar place for his characters. Why does Modiano invert these spatial values in his novel? *Le Condé* is described as a place not receiving much light at all. Louki usually enters via the «door in the shadow»; in a picture a photographer has taken, the girl is captured in the light and is thus better illuminated, with the effect of bringing her café environment, necessarily very dark, into contrast. Even the function of the café's windows seems to break with the historical trend of connecting the café with the street outside, it being said that a passer-by would have to lean very close to be able to see anything within. From such details, we can infer that *Le Condé* does not contain the typical, enticing features of cafés usually found represented in the gaudy color pictures of tour guides, or on the institutional city-branding websites of St-Germain-des-Près. Moreover, the customers of *Le Condé* have nothing in common with the stereotyped, well to do, cultivated intellectual typical of St-Germain-des-Près, they are more genuine and even down and out. Who are they? The first narrator conceals the fact of his registration at the prestigious *École des Mines* in order to conform to the educational norms of the others. A few, Tarzan, Jean-Michel, and Fred, claim to having had problems with the police, while a girl, Houpa, states that she has escaped from a house of correction. The author aims at describing a place whose fascination lies in its capacity to attract customers with aberrant and mysterious identities, while the atypical separation erected between the

street and its interior is not avoided as subject, but particularly stressed, in an attempt to redefine the Parisian café as a closed space, a kind of nest that welcomes and protects its cosmopolitan and impoverished clientele, with otherwise little support or reference in their lives.

II

Our altered conception of the café in Modiano takes its inspiration from the epigraph found on the novel's first page: «In the middle of the path of true life, we were surrounded by a dark melancholy, which many sad and mocking words have expressed in the café of lost youth» (Modiano 9; my translation). This is a quotation from Guy Debord's film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*. The relationship between Modiano's fiction and Debord's theory and practice of psycho-geography has already been explored by Lynn Higgins, who focuses on the author's tendency to allow places to communicate past feelings in *Dora Bruder* (1997). The posterior novel we are examining calls for a new consideration of this problem. Matthieu Rémy, an expert on the Situationist movement and Guy Debord, points to the relationship between Le Condé and the most important café found in Debord's life and works, Chez Moineau, once a place very similar to Modiano's imagined café. Rémy also provides autobiographical information on Modiano, in particular concerning his youthful contact with this disturbing and disquieting café (Roche 2009, 199-206). It was a place frequented by criminals and undesirables socially banned in Paris. It also attracted foreigners and social outcasts from all over Europe. Ironically, although far from having the intellectual attributes of other cafés, this suspect space maintained the international status typical of the Parisian café.

We know the area was full of similar cafés, one of them was the dubious La Pergola. Another, called Le Condé, existed close by but without the same bad reputation. Modiano likely borrowed this name because the term *condet* is slang for policeman in colloquial French. This nuance therefore alludes to the threat the authority embodied for these cafés.

Debord himself explains the value he finds in these cafés. In *Ecology, Psycho-geography, and Transformation of the Human Milieu* (1959), he argues that psycho-geography allows juxtapositions of different groups within the same zone, not conceiving of a fixed population in a single area. Debord clarifies what he means with an illuminating example. If Saint-Germain-des-Près is a bourgeois area, he nevertheless points out that the presence of 50 to 100 people on the street and in the presence of some cafés, which effaced the place's entire mode of middle-class life, the real inhabitants not maintaining any true contact with the street. This trend

transformed the area, rendering it unique, eventually a tourist attraction due to its originality, eccentricity, and spontaneity.

It is clear that both Modiano and Debord are concerned with an authentic and emotionally charged cityscape. For the former, the death of such a place allows its fictional conjuring up, with memory seeming to be the ultimate form of resistance against the aggressiveness of history. For the latter, the disappearance of such places and the entire transformation of the urban milieu have political implications, evidence as it is of capitalism possessing the city, of the triumph of the commodity over everything, representing the final act in the process of alienation of inhabitants from the area they inhabit. It represents political failure, citizens losing control of their own space. Thus the café's communal value, the reason why it can be evoked as a re-emergent space, lies in its nostalgic aura.

For which kind of protest is the café conceived? The film from which the quotation above has been cited is a highly engaged one. In it, Debord analyzes the capitalist system in which everybody is involved, showing our subjugation as a slavery, claiming this modern slavery as more subtle, as we are unintentionally led to participate in it without really knowing we are a part of it, while believing we are enjoying the advantages of this loss of control over our lives into the bargain. Pitted against this modern form of exploitation, only very few have been able to rise in opposition. Protest was carried out by Debord and the Situationists, their slogans echoing from behind the barricades during the movements of 1968. *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, being a work of social and political analysis, is not a conventional film at all: images flow across the screen without a seemingly direct relation to the ideas an off-screen speaker, Debord, is expressing. In some cases, a metaphorical reading of images can be made. Captain Custer and his troops are shown during savage and bloody assaults against the Indians. Terrorists such as Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, criminals such as Lacenaire or Robin Hood, are often shown and idealized throughout the film, pointing to a resistance against authority. The city of Paris becomes a modern Troy, a city whose true citizens lose their freedom day after day. If the dominant power has nearly concluded its seizure of the city in an almost martial operation, the ultimate thing people who live the «true life» can do is set up, at whatever cost, a line of communication to impede domination. The expression «lost youth», used by Debord, is, in its turn, taken from the French author François Villon, who uses this expression in describing the youth who form the avant-garde of the army, running the most dreadful dangers in battle.

Throughout the film's imagery, hostile metaphors are much used, seeking to stress the idea of revolutionary action and the boycott of

institutional activities. When we are introduced to «The Café of Poets», we are led into a place which is deeply concerned with the destabilization and disturbance of political programs. As confirmation of this, in one shot, the police make a raid in a café, ready to retaliate against the dissidents inside, who are finally forced to show their documents, a sign of their surrender.

However, Debord is not seen as the usual habitué of places such as this. What is the relationship between the dissidents inside and Debord? The director admits having drunk the same wine they did. Evoking the alcoholic drink, the typical beverage of comrades-in-arms, from Archilochus up to the present, Debord models himself as a companion to the rebellion. The difference is that wine becomes here an instrument of perdition, establishing collaboration between resistant groups surely, but also isolating and socially condemning them as lost youth. Conscious of their limited forces and the difficulty of the task of subverting the social and economic order, the Situationists are, literally, the *enfants perdus* of Villon's front lines, irrevocably destined to defeat, disappearance, and loss of control over St-Germain-des-Près, and all of Paris. Their inability to compromise makes them sacrificial flesh to the world of the commodity. But the Situationists, who appear in many photographs in discussion in front of a glass of wine, are obviously also interested in establishing the café's historical role as a place not only of social rebellion, but of communal discussion, a familiar place where true life can be evoked.

It would be interesting to learn more about the relationship between Debord and the culture of those marginal cafés, and the way in which protest and political resistance was conceived, organized, and practiced. A paradigm illustrated by James C. Scott focuses on one specific moment in this organization of resistance: the passage from «hidden transcript» to «public transcript». When protest is first conceived secretly, in private, when dissatisfaction with the powers that be is expressed almost silently, looking in private for collaboration, hoping to create a wall of opposition, a hidden transcript is created, becoming fundamental for the aggregation of dissidents and involving a wide range of physical and verbal acts. After a gradual transformation, this transcript surfaces in public life, opening up a possibility for the revolution it seeks to spread. Debord seems to point to the café as a place where the passage from hidden transcript to public transcript becomes possible.

An excellent parallel of Debord's café would be St. Petersburg's Café Saigon. During the Soviet era, the customers of the Saigon constituted a «grey zone», an interstice where an alternative, carnivalesque world became possible. Even if no concrete political program was advanced, an unwritten code was formulated, permitting dissidents the right of assembly and the

exchange of social behaviors not exactly in tune with the dominant socialist code. Strikingly, KGB agents also frequented the café, which demonstrates the difficulties involved in maintaining the café as a place where hidden transcripts can be formulated.

Was it merely the customers' eccentric way of life that allowed this possibility? Did their strange and extravagant ways of writing, for example automatism and lettrism, contribute? Neither Modiano nor Debord probe the question thoroughly, but if in the works of both authors the café was a place kept under control and eventually shut down, it is probable that it was also seen as a place in which protesters assembled, and that the way of life it promoted was in some sense effective in questioning bourgeois expectations and plans, especially in a central area like St-Germain-des-Près. Moreover, Modiano does not aspire directly to strike any political target, and Debord, too, at this point of his life, in the late 1970s, appears disenchanted with the real possibility of overturning capitalism, the society of the spectacle, instead aiming to examine the values and styles of life of psycho-geography.

III

The main element which shrouds the cafés of both Modiano and Debord is nostalgia. In what way do their two evocations participate in the modern discourse concerning the café's renewed spatiality and altered social function?

In line with the definition given by Foucault in his short 1967 lecture, *Of Other Spaces*, first published in 1984 shortly before his death, the café can be situated as a heterotopia. Every society, according to Foucault, creates these counter-sites, these heterotopias, which are strictly organized spaces projected outside the real world. In contrast to utopias, which by definition do not physically exist, heterotopias exist both materially and immaterially. They function in such a way that they simultaneously «represent, contest, and invert» all the real spaces of a culture. Foucault uses the mirror as metaphor for heterotopia. The mirror reflects one's person into an actual physical space (thus differentiating it from a utopia), but the image there nonetheless exists in virtual space. The main principle of heterotopias for our interests at present, and perhaps the most striking and problematic, is what Foucault calls their *effet de retour*, their tendency to return onto the real. By seeing oneself in a space where one is not, one is afterwards induced to look at the space in which one actually is with the same heterotopic gaze, rendering the real also illusory, and consequently precarious.

We consider the cafés of Modiano and Debord as heterotopias due chiefly to their past historical and now idealized functions, whose absence remains to strike and challenge the changing population of New Europe who enter them. With the further unification of Europe, and the confusion over identity and culture it implies and arouses, the heterotopic element of the cafés Modiano and Debord evoke is thrown into further contrast. Their heterotopic cafés, in the fictional present, projected into the past, contrast significantly with the café's actual spatiality. These heterotopias, more or less openly, seek to denounce the sterility of the contemporary European metropolis, and its lack of direct contact with the *true life* of the city.

Presently, cafés are being abandoned by Parisians to such an extent that French cultural and economic institutions are launching campaigns to promote them as relevant social spaces. But in which fashion are these complex and stratified entities approached? The company «France Boissons» has a series of advertisements seeking to remake the image of cafés. In one, a large group of girls crowd around a meek, lucky, and light-hearted teenager; in another, a woman reveals the fact she is pregnant to her mother; in a third, a girl is offered an engagement ring; the last depicts a typical café, a mature man, encouraging some young men at the bar to use condoms. These promotional advertisements depict reassuring everyday life situations, where one is projected into a world of traditional values, where the café is equated with one's home, where one can see the effort of «domesticating» the café. In quite opposite fashion, the conceptions of Modiano and Debord oppose this process of domestication. First of all by demonstrating that the concept of urban dwelling itself is much more complicated and nuanced, and then by highlighting their cafés as cradles of anti-conformism and possible rebellion, they point to these growing absences in the real cafés of the outer world, their parallels in the outer world being those not only of Paris's past, but Europe's.

It is important to note again that this conception of the café by Modiano and Debord is not expressed polemically. It is rather their tone, which can be defined as nostalgic, which conveys it. Both of their glances upon the past carry a sense of submissiveness, a feeling of loss. Svetlana Boym's distinction between two types of nostalgia will be useful here. Their memory of the café does not aim at restoring to the present such a café; there is no intent to reconstruct something of the past, for what they perceive, they perceive as undeniably lost. Thus we should look at what Boym calls «reflective nostalgia» (2001, xv-xix). Here, our interest in the past implies not only the experiencing of a loss, but also consciousness of a number of new possibilities in the present, connected with our remembrance. To cite Svetlana Boym:

Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn't exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past «might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality». The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, non-teleological possibilities of historic development. We don't need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination: reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness (2001, 50).

We find the same planes of consciousness awakened by the heterotopias of Modiano and Debord, which, as experiences of fictional spatiality, involve not only the yearning for that other space lacking in the urban Europe of today, but also for a new and different time. In this context it is interesting to note that for Foucault heterotopia often implies heterochronia.

The heterotopia present in the *Café of Lost Youth* does not refer only to an opposition between place or site and counter-site. The contrast between Paris's past cityscape and its contemporary one eventually prompts a positive feeling for the possibility of a change within this desolate panorama, devoted once more to hope and human values. Thus, the projection of heterotopia and its subsequent feeling of nostalgia enter into a profound relationship, underlining the needs related to Europe's post-civil spatiality, and hinting towards a natural outburst of energy and reaction to the current dispossession and displacement of European citizens.

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