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Attempts on the ‘life’ of Johannesburg: Ivan Vladislavić’s Use of the City Portrait Genre

Abstract: This article examines the changing practice of urban portraiture in reference to a selection of postmillennial texts written by Ivan Vladislavić. These generically diverse texts trace and reflect on transformations sweeping Johannesburg after the fall of Apartheid, to some extent a metonymic representation of South Africa. An immediate impulse to inquire whether and, if so, how the writer explores the boundaries of portraiture, derives from an explicit textual and visual thematisation of the practice in two of Vladislavić’s works, i.e. the collection of “verbal snapshots” entitled *Portrait with Keys* and his joint interdisciplinary project, *TJ& Double Negative*, involving the writer and David Goldblatt, a South African photographer. The article concentrates primarily on the uses and adaptations of the city portrait genre. Vladislavić’s foregrounding of the genre category invites us to consider a series of questions: How does Vladislavić proceed with the appropriation and transformation of the traditional practice of city portrait? Do the portrayals of Johannesburg merely address the past? To what extent does Vladislavić propose contemporary adaptations of the practice? What happens to such categories as *realism*, *accuracy*, and *likeness*? What knowledge does portraiture generate? Finally, the article reflects on whether Vladislavić responds to the need for a new epistemological project in rendering the urban.

Keywords: Vladislavić, Johannesburg, genre, city portrait, imaginary, epistemology

1. Introduction

A second generation immigrant of Croatian origin, Ivan Vladislavić represents a new group of writers after Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee and André Brink. Often labelled as postmodern, he remains a distinctly individual voice focusing on the life of ordinary people and probing the possibilities of writing after Apartheid. Born in Pretoria, Vladislavić considers himself a “foreigner” in Johannesburg, an important statement reminiscent of analogous distinctions among natives, aliens and

foreigners in the multicultural London of the early seventeenth century.¹ A short story and nonfiction writer, novelist, journalist and editor, he has authored works that pose problems of genre classification. Winner of the Sunday Times Alan Paton Award for Nonfiction, *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & what-what* (2006)² is categorised as a collection of “nonfiction,” “pieces,” “vignettes,” “snapshots,” “talk of the town,” poems, personal essays, short stories and a novel. *Exploded View* (2004) is perceived as a novel, novella or collection of four stories while *TJ & Double Negative* (2010) consists in an interdisciplinary project joining *Bildungsroman* with a set of photographs. Finally, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) is a novel in three parts. As a writer and editor, Vladislavić belongs, with Wilhelm Boshoff and Wopko Jensma, to the writers who “insistently work ... with alphabetic print, and the printed, as material” (Helgesson 2006: 86) so that the paratext and, in the case of *TJ & Double Negative*, the typeset and design, are designed by the author(s). In all of the texts, the iconic city of Johannesburg remains in the centre of attention.³

Rather than being commissioned, since the mid-sixteenth century the city portrait has been a popular genre produced for “consumption,” which means that its aim has been to address a broader audience or readership. Urban images have been popularised through the art of printing to become a most frequently produced category (Maier 2015: 2–3). This does not exclude luxurious commissions, among them the project preserving Rome negotiated and documented in the correspondence between Raffaello Santi, Baldassare Castiglione and Pope Leo X (*Giovanni di Lorenzo de’ Medici*). City portraits have been both artistic and non-artistic representations of urban space — fiction and nonfiction — a cultural practice of rendering a certain, contemporary perspective on urban environment. Jessica Maier calls them trendsetters (2015: 14) enabling the artists and communities to express larger cultural attitudes, public images tailored to make specific political statements and signifying intentionality. Vladislavić’s post-apartheid Johannesburg in *Portrait with Keys* is no longer immersed in the grand narrative of black versus white. It is a labyrinth and palimpsest in one, an edgy landscape navigated by individuals, a non-cohesive image defying simple categorisations and a text complementing

¹ Jean E. Howard comments on the categories used for the description of the dynamic human topography in seventeenth-century London, a classification comprising the spectrum of migrants and natives, a complex demographic image which makes its way to London comedy. Vladislavić’s categorization and the seventeenth-century are strikingly similar in their understanding of such terms as „foreigners”, “natives” or “aliens”(8–9).

² The book was originally published in South Africa under the title *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & what-what*. The first American edition published in 2009 appeared under a new title: *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. This article quotes from the American edition.

³ In parenthetical references, the following abbreviations of the titles are used: RS for *The Restless Supermarket*, PK for *Portrait with Keys*, DN for *TJ & Double Negative* and EV for *Exploded View*.

more explicitly political statements, notably those voiced by black writers.⁴ Even in *The Restless Supermarket* the relics of the old regime give in to the discovery of a multiplicity of languages, including the voices of migrants from Eastern Europe, to produce "complexity".⁵ What Vladislavić endeavours to capture is an "elusive metropolis" whose plethora of registers renders the task of a neat overview impossible.

This article aims to explore Vladislavić's complex relationship with the format of the city portrait genre by showing how the author appropriates the traditional matrix of portrait to grasp the massive transformations in Johannesburg's urbanity after the fall of Apartheid. City portraits, it is assumed, may generate cognitive imaginaries involving both historical material and a contemporary perspective, a process which requires negotiations the traditional portrait genre may not always encourage. Therefore, this article enquires into the "attempts" Vladislavić undertakes in order to examine his response to more recent epistemological propositions of rendering urbanity as a broadly conceived *urban space*.

2. Portrait addressees: consumers and viewers

Trying to draw a map of Johannesburg, the narrator in *Portrait* explains that the city is spectral and "no more than a mnemonic" (PK 33) — a device aiding memory retention and retrieval. Walking the city, the first person narrator accompanies Chase (a character) in his construal of a map of what is either no longer there or will soon become a distant location and, in that way, merely an object of desire. In the past, addressees of city portraits, visual and verbal, were often those who had the desire to see absent, far-away places whose splendour could be admired and praised either in visual images or in verbal forms of encomium. Among city portrait consumers Maier mentions especially antiquarians, pilgrims, tourists and citizens, eighteenth-century literati and scholars (2015: 14). Topographic city portraits produced for pilgrims and tourists were reifications of narratives by depicting the city as seen by the traveller on his arrival or departure. Even if taking the form of serious treatise, the portrayals addressed an audience of literati rather than professionals (Maier, 58). Hence, accuracy, if important, served a narrow elite for military purposes; it did not appeal to broad audiences as a significant quality. On

⁴ Anette Horn mentions Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2011: 5) as a match for Vladislavić's writing. A black memory engaging image of the iconic city pervades Mongane Wally Serote's "City Johannesburg".

⁵ "Complexity" or complex city is a relatively recent category which draws our attention to the city as a smart, intelligent organism whose infrastructure involves various systems of communication, especially those operating in the digitalised, non-territorial world, where the former concepts of time, space (distance), and community must be re-defined. Complexity encourages experimentation with narrative modes and intermediality, e.g. in Foer's fiction, though some texts appear as classical print narratives. While Vladislavić's *TJ&Double Negative* experiments with media, *Portrait with Keys* plays with the borderland of fact and fiction and genre.

the other hand, great care and “diligence” (Maier 2012: 126) were desirable, as were resemblance and recognisability which, nevertheless, admitted fiction. Not without a tinge of irony, as a complementing view, is the fact that Vladislavić’s writing on Johannesburg appeals mainly to intellectuals. Still, in *The Restless Supermarket* the consumers of the city profile are thematised in their diversity. The novel juxtaposes Aubrey Tearle, the first person narrator, with a crowd of new city consumers. Among them are members of the fictitious Café Europa as well as the multilingual and multicultural flow of African and non-African “arrivals” taking over the city centre. Tearle’s expectations are explicitly antiquarian. Like the famous John Aubrey, the author of the *Brief Lives and Miscellanies* (1690),⁶ Tearle insists that the dying city, image and text, should be studied, preserved and incorporated into the present — an impossible task (RS 289, 249, 174–5, 152–3, 112–113, 30). Writing his treatise, blending topography and typography, the retired proofreader of telephone directories strives to create an immaculate image for nostalgic connoisseurs. Disputing abstract linguistic questions, relying on dictionaries and rejecting the current usage of English, he becomes increasingly immersed in the past. Indeed, it is only the antiquarian cum proofreader who is attracted by the urban panorama, a drawing of the city profile displayed on the wall of Café Europa, becoming its sole viewer. The portrait of Alibia (RS 16) does not render Tearle’s “home” (RS 25), as he considers himself a true Johannesburger “born within sight of the Hillbrow Tower” (RS 25). However, the difference between the two urban portraits — Alibia and Johannesburg — is collapsed once we discover that their imaginaries are fictitious — at the time of Tearle’s birth the Gerhardus Stridjom Tower did not exist. To confirm his identity, the proofreader tries to persuade us of the powerful “retrospective effect” (RS 25) of the Johannesburgian imaginary hoping perhaps that its power of prospective enunciation will protect the city against change. It is only at the end of the book that Tearle, having survived the Dionysian bash, follows Merle’s advice to correct his viewing position and to look south “on the bright side” of the “highways coiled like cables” and the lights “squirming and wriggling and writhing, like maggots battenning on the foul proof of the world” (RS 298). In the last glimpse of the city, the consumer of ideogrammatic urban portraits is persuaded to abandon the Lynchian imaginary and to discover that the city is a living organism eschewing and disrupting the symbolic patterns. As opposed to the nostalgically antiquarian viewing, the crowds of consumers entering Johannesburg either in the *The Restless Supermarket* or in *Portrait with Keys* remain unaware of the Lynchian proposal of imaginaries and, safe in their short-sightedness, re-name and re-define the use value of objects, locations and landmarks. While Marymount Nursing Home aspires to become a new landmark (PK 17), relics collected among

⁶ Aubrey Tearle is modelled on John Aubrey, an antiquarian whose nostalgic attitudes were discussed by Susan Stewart (139).

ruins, such as "a shard of pottery, a crap of wallpaper, a hairclip, a doll's shoe" acquire value worth exhibiting and memorialising (*PK* 60).

3. Portraits past and present

In the Renaissance, the term "portrait" as an equivalent of *imago* or *simulacrum* was used for a wide range of subjects. Louis Marin notes the meaning of "pro-trait" as putting forward, substituting, extracting or abstracting to emphasise, in the act of portraying, the dynamic relation between the individual and the "model in the epistemological sense" (204). Most consistently the art and craft of portraiture has applied to images of people and cities whose representations "shared the nomenclature" (Maier 2012: 711, Marin 204). The requirements involved antiquarian, artistic and technical skills such as the usage of perspective and the improvement of cartographic and surveying methods. City portrait or *ritratto* has often been compared to life-writing. The conflation of the human and the urban in portrait also pervades contemporary texts, notably Martin Crimp's *The Treatment* (1993) and *Attempts on Her Life — 17 Scenarios for the Theatre* (1997) where it endorses the concept of identity. The exploration of Anne's life-story as treatment or scenario is immersed in a network-like imaginary of New York and what might be defined as "planetary urbanism" in *Attempts*. Endeavours to reveal Anne's mysterious identity in portraiture, drafts or sketches, depersonalise and reify the protagonist reducing her to an aestheticised object in the mediated network, to a "character" in scenarios and to an object, a mythical automobile. The nexus of the human and the supposedly inanimate urban in portrayal reveals a rich spectrum of uses. Giandomenico Romanelli's *Portrait of Venice* (1997) presents a cultural tour of the most remarkable urban developments, introduces the reader to the works of architects and painters, and to the monuments of the city's prominent families and rulers. In that way the author draws an iconic city map, a city portrait according to Louis Marin (204), an ideogrammatic view offering a selection of isolated monuments as an extension of a no longer existing *camera regis*. The city becomes an emanation or enunciation of the symbolic as well as of the prominent citizens from the past and in that way becomes, indirectly, their portrait. To memorialise the multifaceted identity of Rome as perfect, Leonardo Bufalini removed some less important buildings from his profile. Assuming responsibility for the alterations, at the bottom of the map the architect and surveyor appended his self-portrait.

In *Exploded View*, *The Restless Supermarket* and *Portrait with Keys*, Vladislavić follows these traditional strategies by removing significant elements from the skyline. The paratextual images on the covers of *Exploded View*, *TJ&Double Negative* and *Portrait with Keys* correspond to the concepts articulated in narratives and descriptions. The South African and the American editions of *Portrait with Keys* follow the Humphrey Repton system of overlays to show "before" and "after"

views. While the first captures the demolition of the Van Eck building, the latter reveals the new skyline. Both *The Restless Supermarket* and *Portrait with Keys* refer to disappearing or displaced landmarks, such as the fictitious Café Europa and the factual Carlton Centre. *Double Negative* foregrounds, in its very project, in its title and cover design, the technique of multiple exposure, a superimposition of iconic and verbally rendered cityscapes. The *Exploded View* has a detail from Mary Wafer's painting as its cover image — the *Bridge* echoes the closing view of Johannesburg from the earlier published *The Restless Supermarket* and ties in with the pervasive motif of technical drawings, the exploded views and blueprints mediating Johannesburg in *Exploded View*, no longer a bounded city but a sprawling city or a case of planetary urbanisation. Like in Bufalini's city profile, in *Portrait with Keys*, a non-fiction series of snapshots, the first person narrator can be identified as either the empirical or the hypothetical author. *TJ&Double Negative*, if considered autofictional, identifies the authors of the urban portrait in the fictionalisations of Vladislavić and Goldblatt in the characters of Nevil Listner and Samuel Auerbach. Though most of the early modern portraits concentrated on architecture, rendering the city in terms of its people or citizenry is becoming increasingly common in writing. However, the selection of representative city dwellers is highly premeditated. While London plays and comedies (e.g. *Eastward Ho!*) trace the inflow of new inhabitants, playing on multiculturalism and multilingualism, tragedies pose serious political questions concerning the role of citizenry, e.g. in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* Sicinius asks, "What is the city but the people?" (3.1.198), and focus on politically significant *personae*. The shift from geography to chorography — from macrocosm to microcosm — encourages interest in human topography, an approach prominent in a contemporary bestselling urban portrait, in Norman Davies's *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City*, where the narrative acknowledges the plurality of languages and denominations as well as the names by which the city has been addressed (xvii, 10–11). Vladislavić, in *The Restless Supermarket*, assumes an analogous policy revealing the multiplicity of languages, a cultural and ethnic hybridity. Against the background of the devolution of English, and thus a loss of linguistic purity, the Johannesburgers are heard speaking a spectrum of indigenous languages (*RS* 12, 29), Afrikaans, hybrid *urban vernaculars* (*RS* 91, 92) and other language variants peculiar to immigrants called newcomers, arrivals, Bogeymen, Bohemians and vagabonds (*RS* 129, 138).

4. Portraits: texts, drawings, maps and keys

Diverse forms of publications have been categorised as city portraits, or "living portraits," (Maier 2012: 60; Tarte 93; Wilson 245–47), including engravings, drawings of views, panoramas, real and imaginary maps, as well as horizontal projections. Marin points out that "[c]ity maps were once called city portraits" and if

this is so, one should inquire about their "enunciation," their "self-representation" as representatives of the individual cities (204). He inquires about the hidden, theoretical underpinnings of the symbolic and empirical representations. Christian Schmid emphasizes that urban portrait involves "research guided by theory" whose essential tool of analysis is the map (193). Leon Battista Alberti's survey, *Descriptio urbis Romae*, consisted of both a cartographic and a descriptive part. Kendall B. Tarte observes that the overlap of the written and the visual domains extends to the very noun "portrait", which "refers to images of towns or, generally, to examples of physical space" (93) which, in verbal form, consist of extensive descriptions often following the viewer's eye (93, 117, 233). In this light, late sixteenth-century *descriptio* finds merely a further development in Michel de Certeau's "spatial practices."⁷ To sum up, city portraits seem to appear in three major categories: (1) texts of topographical and historical interest with a focus on toponyms and philology; (2) visual representations which, like Raphael's, strive to represent the city in drawings; and (3) cartographic or chorographic maps and plans.

The first two categories are indicative of a split along antiquarian and architectural lines whose potential fusion can be traced in Raphael's epistolary treatise and plans for putting Rome into drawings. As opposed to the medieval pictograms, in the Renaissance the city becomes an urban environment, a "unified fabric" (Maier 2015: 45). A reflection on the "enunciation" underpinning the two approaches, the antiquarian and the visual, pervades Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* and is personified by the two figures of Tearle and Spilkin, whose conversations, unlike the historical ones, fail to produce a unified image. While Tearle represents the philological interest, Spilkin's professional background ties in with the visual approach. In the production of urban portraits, antiquarians relied on texts, inscriptions, coins and books, while the managerial responsibilities relating to production were often given to powerful *editore* like Antonio Blado whose publishing house and printing shop were commissioned to prepare Bufalini's portrait of Rome. Vladislavić's Tearle is primarily a retired proofreader of telephone directories whose task of correcting has become increasingly difficult as a result of the shifting reality, changes affecting both *urbs* and *civitas*. Though retired, he is overwhelmed by a hermeneutic obsession and a strong concern for linguistic purity, and he proofreads not only books, documents and the press but the materiality of the *city* and its inhabitants and, in that way, displaying his editorial and authorial ambitions. For the Johannesburgian antiquarian "there were unique insights to be gained into the city and the ways of the inhabitants" from the Johannesburg Book (telephone directory) (RS 129) as well as from "other fruits of his long career," a documentation including diverse papers, "clippings ... from newspapers ... magazines and journals,

⁷ De Certeau emphasizes the totalizing panoramic effect of ocular inspection and in such terms refers to the Medieval and Renaissance visual concepts, which is not entirely true of urban portraits, especially in writing. On the other hand, the philosopher does imagine the mobile, traveling eye in the process of reading (92, 170, 176).

and books ... photostatic copies... handwritten quotations; ... And then also gazettes, programmes, handbills, posters, wedding invitations, menus. ... unusual things, collector's items" (63–64). Moreover, it is Tearle's antiquarian desire, fuelled by a nostalgia for heritage, to save a mural, a city portrait from the wall in Café Europa, the "last outpost of symbolization" (17) : to dismantle it, number, pack, and transport it to a new location, like London Bridge, in order to have it reassembled (16). The only possible location for this project is either the past imaginary of Johannesburg or Tearle's utopian life-project. The retired proofreader's authorial ambition motivates him to the writing of "The Proofreader's Derby," an eccentric monument to his life achievement, a city description and his intellectual autobiography in one. Whether in the *descriptio* of Part One of *The Restless Supermarket*, preceded by a quotation from William Hazlitt's essays,⁸ or in Part Two, which holds Tearle's work, the cityscape is reduced to a text whose style and correctness are evaluated. Hence while in Part One the panorama is stylistically disturbed by its central landmark, the Hillbrow Tower, an enormous, "vulgar parking meter" (93), in Part Two the view is "perfectly punctuated by parking meters and kiosks, so elegantly phrased ..., so idiomatically proper" (194) — it is a good piece of writing. The linguistic and stylistic purity matching the perfect sense of urban and communal order, designed by Tearle, dissolve as a result of the printer's catastrophe, a trivial accident (196). The text becomes irretrievable. The antiquarian's sole knowledge of Johannesburg derives from the process of reading documents and deciphering the city in reference to the outdated standards and imaginaries whose disappearance he documents as errors (e.g. the lack of "seating arrangements," 21). Radical adherence to language standards renders the task of adaptation impossible and the textual portrait dissolves.

As a proofreader of the city, Tearle focuses on detail. Himself in need of a good pair of glasses, he is pleased to note The Madiba's familiarity with spectacles, only to realise that the man could hardly see in them. Reflecting on the leader's "myopia," "shut-eye" (167), he writes a letter to the editor of the *Star* to warn against the danger of errors and the confusion that could result from putting on ill-suited spectacles. However, the true specialist in eyesight, its examination and cure is not Tearle but Spilkin, the "retired optician," "optometrist" and "ophthalmologist" (53). Although Tearle believes that what proofreaders and opticians have in common is the eye (53), his spectacles, "horn-rims thirty years old and not to be bought for love or money" (54), do not guarantee correct vision. In addition to the "antiquarian" spectacles, the proofreader suffers from various defects rendering his vision imperfect. Spilkin notices his companion's amblyopia and astigmatism (54). While the former affects both eyes, the latter, "lazy left eye," distorts signals

⁸ The epigraph to the whole book is signed by Tearle, the hypothetical author, who redirects the reader in search of happiness to the utopia of the dictionary. The epigraphs to Part One and Two derive from William Hazlitt's "On the Conversation of Authors" and "On Pedantry." Knowing the world means reading it, making emendations and correcting errors.

from one eye and when untreated in its early stages encourages the brain to ignore the blurred images mediated by the malfunctioning apparatus. The proofreader's faulty eyesight acts as a form of censorship. Another defect of vision diagnosed by Spilkin is monoblepsia, denoting a "condition in which vision is perfect when one eye is used, but ... indistinct when both," a term the proofreader finds puzzling and checks in the *Concise* (232, 238–9). Tearle's poor and distorted eyesight disqualifies him as an expert on long views and city panoramas. J.C. Peters, referring to Vladislavić's homonymic games, comments on further consequences of the man's monoblepsia, namely Tearle's inability to see when faced with another "I" as well as a peculiar form of colour blindness which allows for the perception of one colour only (52), a condition which prevents the proofreader from seeing and assimilating the post-apartheid hybrid imaginary of Johannesburg. Spilkin's visual expertise, on the other hand, is indicative of his ability to see three-dimensionally and therefore to understand and accept change more readily. *The Restless Supermarket* is exceptional in its juxtaposition of the philology driven antiquarian attitude and the much less explored visual strategies. It is the later *Portrait with Keys* that develops Tearle's visual experience, which is gained during the daily "constitutional," a routine walk around the Civic Theatre, Constitution Hill and the Fort. The historical and current significance of the places is obscured by Tearle's myopia and monoblepsia, curiously prioritising the puzzle of the pink elephant's ear, the mysterious *objet trouvé* (20, 28) and another detail. In *Portrait with Keys*, the walks performed by another character narrator, evolve into a series of routes, after De Certeau, revealing preference for the pavement perspective and commenting on the epistemological futility of bird's eye panoramas, aeroplane flights (*PK* 102–103) and Carlton Centre (*PK* 30–31) long views. The vignettes discover the city through encounters with its increasingly diversified inhabitants — linguistically, culturally and economically — whose otherness would have terrified the antiquarian. For Tearle they were errors and monstrosities. *Double Negative*, in its collection of low key photographs, like the vignettes, encourages the investigation and reshuffling of the order of the picks so that their correspondence with the autofictional *Bildungsroman* becomes a difficult match and, ultimately, a puzzle. The emphasis in *Exploded View* is on the imaginary of expanding blueprints. Overall, the prevalent tendency is to pass from the predominantly textual to a variety of visual strategies.

Maps, plans and blueprints have been perceived as a distinct category of city portrayal whose task is more than wayfinding⁹ or documentation. In her investigation of city portrayal, Maier refers to Ptolemy's significant differentiation between geography and chorography (2015: 5), a division reflected in Davies's title *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City*. Accordingly, chorography stresses the analogy between the human and the urban, the human body and the city map.

⁹ By "wayfinding" I mean orientation and choosing the way in an urban environment, a consistent use of cues, clues inherent in the spatial grammar and logic of the city.

Therefore the decomposing Alibia in *The Restless Supermarket* becomes a body, “savaged flesh” with “puncture holes and lacerations” (189). Traditionally, the physical had to be balanced by the symbolic, *urbs* in rapport with *civitas*, aiming to harmonize the visible *urbs* with the invisible qualities of *civitas* defined by human associations if portraits were to be considered “distillations of identities” (Maier 2012: 718).¹⁰ Richard Kagan refers to Cicero as either the author or the populariser of the complementary notions of *urbs* and *civitas*, leading to the understanding of cities as “assemblies and gatherings of men associated with justice” (20). Never a mere record of appearance, the cartographic portraits revealed their theoretical, ideological, political and moral underpinnings — sometimes, simply, the citizen’s virtues. Their deciphering required knowledge often prompted either by *descriptio* or provided in the keys.

Clues and keys become a significant motif in city portraits, often brought to the viewer’s or reader’s attention, as in Vladislavić’s *Portrait with Keys* and in Lucantonio degli Uberti’s *Fiorenza* (ca 1510), a city portrait executed after Francesco Rosselli and featuring the famous “chained” city. Regular cartographic maps have keys, i.e. explanatory charts, but many “keys” are metaphorical. The collection of landmarks in Uberti’s portrait (the palaces, churches and walls), Kagan proposes, is emblematic of the virtues of the citizens of Florence (23). On the other hand, the chain with a lock, it can be argued, represents the law that helped serve to make the city a “united” and civil community. While the chain, like the city walls, constitutes bounded urbanity, the key to this order is the legal system, a *descriptio* containing regulations. Mapping, in that way, becomes a clue to an understanding of the city order in moral (or legal) rather than merely pragmatically technical (survey) or aesthetic terms (Schulz, 462–72).

Exploded View, in its portrayal of the expanding city, focuses on the sprawling Johannesburg tracing the disintegration of a bonded city concept, a process viewed by a statistician taking the national census, an engineer disputing with the authorities, a constructor and an artist significantly obsessed with holocaust. Ultimately, though blueprints and technical visualisation pervade the four stories, the book is not a study of Johannesburg’s sewage system but inquires into the condition of the community as *communitas* in the context of the alienating conurbations and gated estates. Key(s) to the understanding of the maps are in the human topography affected by the process of urbanisation. The textual cityscape of the *The Restless Supermarket*, in turn, makes use of a different set of keys as it relies on dictionary utopias, notably on *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (20), and on etymological research. Hence dictionary entries provide keys to the textual city. Tearle’s fear and confusion are associated with the loss of keys, i.e. instructions in the form of dictionary and encyclopaedia entries which cannot be updated to the current usage

¹⁰ In *The Restless Supermarket*, the identity of both the proofreader/author and his Johannesburg is in the utopia of the dictionary and in the ability to trace the roots of words in etymology (30). Identity formation and urban space become a frequently discussed topic.

in time for him to understand the surrounding fluid urbanity (the unstable map). Moreover, the conservative antiquarian insists on using keys that no longer address the cityscape. With the arrival of new inhabitants, language standards subside, rendering the reality even more incomprehensible for the proofreader. The prospect of having to proof-read texts in languages he is not familiar with is beyond his imagination. Johannesburg appears to him impenetrable and "puzzling." Doing crosswords or playing language games becomes a real challenge (55, 146). With the "enunciation," i.e. the city manual, being entirely unreliable, the proofreaders' derby is no longer possible. The crumbling rules are mirror-reflected in the shifting and self-deconstructing city image:

The nightwatchman Gideon offered to lend me a hand, and I had to give him the abridged version of my talk on his responsibilities, which were to open and shut the door for the tenants of Lennar Mansions and to guard their fixed and movable assets ... What was fixed anyway? There were people, deprived creatures, without garages, who resorted to chaining their cars to trees. (RS 115)

Everywhere the trends were the same: not just rushes of missing spaces or jutting hyphens or simple transpositions, but massive disturbances and transformations that seemed somehow wilful, that actually resisted correction. ... Unbeknown to him, Munnery was also awake in the early hours. He'd burnt a barrel of midnight oil, drafting and redrafting the maps of the city centre, reattaching the numbers of the houses to the proper doors and gates, reorienting the points of the compass. (RS 197)

Quietly, to avoid causing panic among the people ... Toyk made a cursory examination of the surrounding block. He discovered that several other buildings had wandered away from their official locations. (RS 199)

Tearle's daily constitutional, the only discernible pattern of his mobility, a walk performed for the sake of health, shows him circulating around the centre of Hillbrow and around the Fort, a former prison, whose locks and keys are no longer in use to maintain the old order. The loss of the keys to the city can only be mourned and nostalgically remembered. Playing with the concept of keys to an either invisible or nonexistent map of Johannesburg, *TJ&Double Negative* brings together two "private" sources, Vladislavić's autofiction and Goldblatt's non-professional, low-key photographs: description and visualisation. Here, the key is the predominant tone of each photograph. In the appended selection it is the low-key that reveals to the reader the dark scenes through heavy contrast and thus conveys the hidden drama from which the textual seems to withdraw. The keys to the project are in the visual material. Finally, *Portrait with Keys* foregrounds the problem of instructions most prominently. Keys and locks appear in the text as motif and detail in multiple contexts of safety, prevention, absurd accumulation of commodities, and storage (for example, 67, 55, 115, 141). As opposed to the clearly defined Vatican City keys of heaven, the keys to the Golden City of Johannesburg are multiple and highly personalised. Graham suggests that the appended itineraries provide textual keys to the city like in a tourist guide (2008: 337) but

the comparison with tourism entails a tourist attitude on the part of the walker, an attitude which assumes a lack of deeper involvement and responsibility, a problem Graham does not address. More importantly perhaps, the itineraries in *Portrait with Keys* are vaguely interrelated pieces which do not guide the reader anywhere. They can be compared to entries or key-holes rather than guided tours, or “bubbles” that the reader ventures to enter and unlock by reading may be another option. Like in Jonathan S. Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (8–9, 39, 41, 282, 295), the keys may offer false clues the more so as with the multiple keys provided in all of the texts, the map of Johannesburg remains an elusive mystery suggesting that the city, in spite of these efforts, remains amorphous, unmappable and therefore incomprehensible. There is no underlying, homogeneous moral statement or law. Neither can a set of virtues be easily distilled from the dispersed, discarded images. The broken images, the displaced seminal landmarks and the flooding waste alike, function in both *Portrait with Keys* and *The Restless Supermarket* as ruins and as such they provide clues and keys to the understanding of Johannesburg’s *civitas*. The ruins of Rome have been depicted in numerous portraits pointing to archaeology as a study of *civitas* in a dialogue between past and present. The *garbology* a reader follows in *Portrait with Keys* appears to be a variant of archaeological excavations emphasising, however, the importance of what has been ignored so far, namely the excess of otherness. *Mementoes to District Six* exhibits these ruins, the “worthless things made to seem precious,” “a breath of her childhood” (PK 81), traces of once insignificant private lives. The themes this empirical and symbolic heap of things and images confronts are the universal themes of loss, memory and death. In this way Vladislavić’s portraits subscribe to the anonymous portrait whose inscription on the banderole reads: “How great I [Rome] once was, now only the ruins show.” In the postapartheid context, such an inscription might be ironic unless the city is conceived as necropolis.

5. A “living portrait”

It is often noticed that with his strong tendency to thematise language, Vladislavić cannot and is not perceived as a realistic writer (Helgesson 2004: 777). Still, likeness, resemblance, accuracy and exactitude are important categories in the understanding of the genre of portrait. Commenting on Aretino’s theory of the genre, Norman E. Land indicates the differentiation between *replication* (imitation of nature) and *illusion* (conceived as likeness and a “sense of things”) suggesting that both must be present but that “true realism” takes place when the figure conveys the inner qualities or the “soul” of the sitter rather than their mere external appearance (1986: 217). Artistic intervention, perfecting or discovering invisible qualities, transcends pure replication focused on exactitude. Modern prejudice associates cartography with objectivity while associating pictorialism with artistic license.

City portrait can be located within this broad spectrum of craft and art. The Renaissance *ritratto* meant plans, pictures and descriptions. It involved both replication and illusion addressing at the same time the problem of fiction and fabulation. While Bufalini's maps, Maier argues, were grounded in topography and therefore perceived as fiction, i.e. a mask of truth, Christian van Adrichom's *Jerusalem* was classified as fabulation and therefore lacking credibility (2012: 130). Resemblance matters either as index to the invisible enunciation (topographic roots, for instance) or "interior character." External likeness as outward semblance for its own sake becomes less important than the complex quality of "being lifelike," i.e. authentic and true. The requirement of authenticity gives rise to the rhetoric of authenticity. In city portraits the effect of *ad vivum* is achieved with the help of various strategies. John Stowe's *A Survey of London* has been perceived as a "portrait of a living, seething place" due to the quality of its witness experience defined as a combination of "both a bird's-eye view and a sidewalk perspective, pulling back and zooming in" (Wall, 104). Vladislavić's attempts at drawing a lifelike portrait of Johannesburg involve diverse strategies and the question of realism does not seem essential. In *Portrait with Keys*, classified by critics as either fiction or non-fiction, fact and fiction coexist for instance artistic landmarks are both authentic and fictitious. While the Voortrekker Monument (35) or the *Apie* (73) are authentic, Jeff's "wall of remembrance" and the *tomasons* are fictitious insertions mediated through the authorial voice, fictions ironically pedagogical in their indexical reference to knowledge of the city. In *TJ&Double Negative* the black and white photographic material becomes an authenticating strategy which validates an autofictional text. The "accuracy" of the photographic documentation may function as enticement to read but the "inscriptions of power," the enunciation, concealed by the factual is conveyed by the fictive. With the exception of *Exploded View*, the texts overwhelm the reader with detail but, significantly, refrain from the objectifying, totalising exactitude of patterns and maps whose knowledge, paradoxically — though perhaps in line with Jorge L. Borges's "*On Exactitude in Science*" — verges on dangerous fabulation.¹¹ Attempts to grasp the city in *descriptio* (RS) or blueprints (EV) end in failure:

Egan always found it strange to set foot for the first time in a place he knew from the plans. It was like folding out of two dimensions into three. You could almost hear the creases popping as you broke through the barrier. Sometimes it was disenchanting. You had convinced yourself, looking at the neatly inked blocks on the paper, at the street names ... that the place was rather pleasant. You imagined gardens, shady avenues and parks. And then you got there and found rows of impossibly small houses, not a leaf in sight, dust everywhere... (EV 56–57)

On the other hand, the points of view assumed by character narrators and the authorial voice are clearly defined in their mobile pavement perspective in an effort to ensure authenticity. The stable long views from Tearle's apartment, Café Europa

¹¹ The maps, called "Unconscionable Maps" (Borges, 325), whose hyper-exactitude renders them useless are morally condemnable for their excess.

or Carlton Centre, like the cartographic fictions, either belong to the past imaginary or turn out to be deceitful. In edgy cities, as Leon Kruger observes, “portraits” probe the edges between old and new (192).

6. Memorialisation, portrait and self-portrait

City portrait is primarily a commemorative genre, a monument, often a testament and a preservationist manifesto whose aim is to capture something “worth remembering” (Maier 2012: 716), to show a specific moment in time and to remove it into a timeless realm. While the desire to preserve Rome in drawing pervades Raphael’s epistolary treatise/preface, the desire to preserve the memory of Johannesburg before the fall of Apartheid and at the time of its demise impregnates especially Vladislavić’s *The Restless Supermarket*. Tearle strives to protect the mural depicting an ideal multicultural city and to preserve the imaginary Alibia in *descriptio*; Goldblatt captures the decades of life in Johannesburg in his photographic collection while *Portrait with Keys*, written over several years, documents change in its tiny vignettes. On a metafictional level, *The Restless Supermarket* investigates the need for a memorial, something visible to be left behind, “something of lasting value to which [Tearle’s] name might be attached” (30) and a monument to the disappearing standards vaguely but persistently associated with Johannesburg’s imaginary. Commemoration is often yoked with idealization. Rosselli’s *Forenza* (1510) was a grand commemorative work and so is the city on the wall of Café Europa. Tearle’s work aims to commemorate, with considerable nostalgia, the times whose loss the narrator mourns but which his friends gladly part with or ignore their disappearance.

The *The Restless Supermarket* drips with post-apartheid nostalgia, a subject which has gained interest by the analogy to post-communist “ostalgie.”¹² Vladislavić notes with irony the spreading of the nostalgia business which sweeps Berlin and Johannesburg (*RS* 249). In a comment on nostalgia, Graham observes that imagining a new Johannesburg where the walls do not function as “fixing mind-sets,” does not entail forgetting the former divided city (2008: 339). In an interview with De Vries, Vladislavić dissociates himself from heritage nostalgia claiming that it should necessitate an “active remembering” and what he describes as a “self-conscious, critical kind of nostalgia” moving towards an “ethical interpretation” which shows awareness of the “conditions that make [the citizens’] access to consoling histories so unequal” (De Vries, 11). In *The Restless Supermarket* the impossibility of restoring Alibian life and “returning to the past” concludes the efforts of editors and boffins from the Proofreaders’ Society (225). Without referencing Svetlana

¹² Nostalgia in South Africa, a vast subject, requires a separate discussion the present article cannot afford.

Boym, Vladislavić seems to evoke her notion of reflective rather than restorative nostalgia and thus the need to dwell on longing and belonging (xviii). Memorials in Vladislavić's writing, and thus the commemorative undercurrent in the portrayal of Johannesburg, should therefore animate absence and loss, which is the regular task of the genre, to reshape the present. In this sense, Graham argues rightly, Vladislavić's fiction "has much to teach a country struggling to memorialize its painful past" (2007: 92). The pedagogic goal Vladislavić formulates provides an important reason for his persistent interest in the genre whose educational potential as a manual and guide to the present and future has been recognised (Donald, 274–75).

By its mere presence city portrait "verifies the existence of a lack" (Effusia et al. 1) and makes the absent present, e.g. the cities of Rome, Venice or James Thomson's "The City of Dreadful Night," and other cities of death. City portrayal, following de Man, could be conceived in terms of a dynamic process of giving face and defacement, figuration and disfiguration, as Effusia proposes, producing fiction and dismantling it in an unending series of attempts to replace the absence or fill in the gap in the cultural imaginary. The issue in *Restless Supermarket* and *Portrait with Keys* is not a lack of narrative but, on the contrary, the abundance of often contradictory or unrelated, revising narratives the books make available to readers in the process of giving face and defacement. Drawing Johannesburg, especially in the *The Restless Supermarket*, *Portrait with Keys* and *TJ&Double Negative*, Vladislavić becomes involved in ongoing revisions or corrections where the city imaginaries meet with an expanding openness to different ways of being in the city, a mode which deconstructs the former mindsets. The portrayal of the city becomes, in two different ways, a self-portrayal. The city that should be experienced via changing social imaginaries becomes, in *The Restless Supermarket*, a city experienced in the process of the narrator's self-portrayal in relation with the materiality of the city mediated by texts. On the other hand, in *Portrait with Keys*, where the dialogic inquiry for directions invites diverse interlocutors, it is the city itself offering its self-portrait through social imaginaries, once called the *civitas*.

In the *The Restless Supermarket* the narrator, Aubrey Tearle, obsessed with his own self, becomes a fictional construction which melts into the cityscape so that the cityscape becomes a projection of his mindscape. Not only Alibia but also Johannesburg appears to be a "city of the mind," the mind of an editor who works on the city's mindset, correcting it in accordance with purist standards he believes should be preserved in the typeset of the Book of Johannesburg. Associations with other cities of the mind, notably the New Jerusalem, and the affiliation of the Book with the Bible, are quite obvious. Worth recalling is the darker aspect of the story, the "other" city of Enoch founded by the unfortunate Cain (Genesis 4: 16–17). The latter belongs to the daemons, the newcomers. Tearle, a frequent visitor to Café Europa, contemplates its city portrait only to notice that the mural contains a conflation or superimposition of his own head and one of the landmarks. No longer certain whether he can trust his eyesight, he relies on the sense of touch

to examine the resemblance [1]. This decision indicates the arrival of the somatic cognitive imaginary. Tearle's head is rendered accurately and even if treated as an illusion/fiction, it points to the symbolic, to the city as the proofreader's and author's imaginary. During a subsequent visit, his head casts a shadow on the city and Johannesburg becomes a city in the shadow of his mind, its shadow [2]. If conceived in Platonic terms, the image asserts the imperfect condition of the city and the godlike position of the proofreader. Due to his professional habits, Tearle's mind materialises in the printer's proof. Still, it fails to materialize once "The Proofreader's Derby" does not reach the press. The destruction of a typeset in Alibia [3] lets us imagine the catastrophic consequence of an irreparable dissolution of a "mindset," here the typeset, a printer's imaginary or a comic version of the once grand narrative:

[1] ... my fingertips have memorized every square inch ... of my scalp... I knew my dome's shape exactly and strange to say, it perfectly matched the hill that beetled over Alibia. Indeed the hill might have been a study of my head, cast into relief against a permanent sunset. (RS 26)

[2] A shadow, which matched the hill in every particular, although it was marginally smaller, lay upon the painted surface; and turning slightly, I saw that it was the shadow of my own head. ... perhaps I had never sat in exactly this spot before, and a unique combination of variables had produced a unique optical effect ... its shape echoed the hill's [shape] perfectly. (RS 151).

[3] ... the printer's devil at the Alibian *Star* was a young McCaffy ... it was his duty to carry the galley proofs of that day's edition from printing works to the council chambers, where an official ... would read and approve them ... The next day the dead boy sprawled in the wreckage of his scooter, with a babble of broken type from the wicker delivery basket scattered around. (RS 196).

The new social imaginary strikes back. It responds to the dominant proofreading mindset struggling to resist its surveillance by upsetting the controller and altering his own image. Though Tearle remains adamant in his refusal to recognise the legitimacy of changing language standards, we can see him surrounded by the growing numbers of new visitors to Café Europa — clients whose language usage is "current"— until the place changes its character entirely leaving no space for the romantic "conversation" of authors, critics and editors. It is in his external appearance that the unaware proofreader adjusts to the tramps, scavengers and hobos realizing, to his amazement, that he is one with the "collectors" stealing supermarket trolleys, i.e. he has become part of the social imaginary he has been trying to ignore or keep at a distance:

[4] I caught my breath and came to a more sober assessment of my situation: I, Aubrey Tearle, proofreader Emeritus, was walking through the streets in broad daylight, in command of a stolen supermarket trolley. What was happening to me? (RS 116)

[5] all I could see in the tiles was a swarthy smudge. ... boot polish on top of everything. Perhaps I would need an operation, like The Madiba, to restore my sense of sorrow. (RS 272)

The proofreader's whiteness has been tainted and he begins to contemplate an operation that could change his mindset.

The city murals as well as the imaginary city in "The Proofreader's Derby" are utopian. Michel Beaujour points to the close relationship between self-portrait and utopias (16), both haunted by the fantasy of a "blissful city" (17). The self-portrait Tearle imagines is located in the utopian Alibia, the city of his dreams. Drawing and writing Alibia, Tearle is curiously predetermined to focus on his own portrait. This self-centredness is rooted in the monoblepsia diagnosed by Spilkin, the eye disease which metaphorically compels him to insert the "I" (eye) rather than the "we" rendering the relation between the editor and Alibian utopia even more intimate. Utopia and self-portrait, writes Beaujour, are "constructed around an absent structure — vanished places, disrupted harmonies" (17) — an absence also celebrated by city portraits. All of the modes — portrait, self-portrait and utopia — invoke atemporality. Ironically, however, in *The Restless Supermarket* the lost harmony, depicted so accurately in the mural, seems to refer to the times of Apartheid. Both self-portrait and utopia are cut off from a *real* referent, from the realism Vladislavić so consistently shuns. Both refer to texts, so that the book in its materiality is "their body and tomb" (Beaujour 18), a rudimentary assumption of *The Restless Supermarket* project. Although, further on, Beaujour argues that self-portrait, unlike utopia, fails to stand against the impact of the violent outside, in *The Restless Supermarket* both the utopian city and Tearle's self-portrait [1,2] ominously blend in the mural and, ultimately, yield to change [4,5]. Self-portrait, utopia and city portrait are all geared towards generalisations and allegories such as civic virtues. The memory they evoke is therefore intratextual supplanting genuine memories by textualised remembrance. Indeed, Tearle's past is locked up entirely in books and documents he has proofread, the only experience he recalls. Private life and childhood memories are absent. Both utopia and self-portrait, Beaujour contends, produce a *mimesis* of another type of *anamnesis* which he associates with *metempsychosis* (21). If so, it can be argued that, for good reasons, events from Tearle's individual life are eclipsed by recollections of "entire culture," i.e. dictionary knowledge, directories, the imaginary of the Lynchian¹³ bounded city with a proper ideogrammatic collection of urban monuments.

The essential function of city portrait is to memorialise, very often in a call-and-response relation with other cities, i.e. in the role of *paragone* or a paradigmatic city. While Rome as *caput mundi* constitutes a paradigmatic city *par excellence*, Johannesburg takes the role of a paradigmatic city for Africa (Graham 2008: 340). Still, Tearle anchors the great postapartheid migrations and the ensuing ruin in Roman history, "the sack of Rome" (121), which activates the cultural memory of *abitato* and *disabitato*, the inhabited and the deserted parts of the city, the memorialisation of the past and the prospects of renewal. The literal and metaphorical *disabitato* can be either musealised and turned into an ideogrammatic map or inhabited, as in

¹³ I refer to Kevin Lynch and *The Image of the City* where recognition and production of landmarks (83) yields a panorama, an underpinning enunciation which can be referred to as the city "imaginary" in cultural and not psychological terms.

Portrait with Keys, with the aid of new monuments such as the new signs of the city (64), exhibitions (32), commemorative collections of ruins such as “Momentous of District Six (81), Ndebele patterns (26–27, 87) and the work of contemporary artists (86). Johannesburg responds to London where Hilbrow Tower stands for “our very own Bow Bells,” according to Spilkin (*RS* 25) as well as to Berlin after the fall of communism (*PK* 13), and Vienna (*PK* 126–27).¹⁴ Helgesson points to the “Johannesburg as Paris” genre (2006: 81) in African literature. The comparisons contribute to the formation of a cultural memory, a larger resource that, indeed, obscures Tearle’s private recollections and impedes a successful reworking of the traumatic past that could lead to a genuine sense of private reconciliation.

The blending of city portrait, self-portrait and utopia is complex in juxtaposing a larger memory to be recovered and brought to light, and an individual to be saved from self-forgetfulness. Immersed in a system of cross-references, Tearle fails to understand his own “historical emergence” (Corrigan, 167) until, in the Dionysian “Goodbye Bash,” he faces the enigma of metempsychosis and the need for individual self-construction. As Vladislavić evokes William Hazlitt and the romantic tradition, in romantic terms Tearle, his self, may re-invent itself via meta-reflection and so can, presumably, the nation. The use of the city portrait genre reveals the extensive urban and social imaginaries burdened and bound by intratextual networks.

7. The question of a paradigm shift

Earlier portraiture consists in an artistic and craftsman-like representation of *urban space*, a cultural practice whose diverse aims include the understanding of significant events in context, notably by indicating a “contemporary perspective.” Therefore, change in negotiating urban space and drawing city portraits depends considerably on the understanding of *urban space*. Instead of the traditional, allegorical concept of the bounded city, resting on the division between the specific and the general (civic virtues, imaginaries, paradigmatic cities, ideogrammatic concepts, models of landmark collections, visual regimes, blueprints), contemporary “portraits” focus on rendering openness, “complexity” and illegibility. The “contemporary perspective” undermines the preceding cultural practice. In both *The Restless Supermarket* and *Exploded View*, the opening pages signal the dissolution of the earlier concept city by signalling a disruptive mobility in the spheres of *urbs* and *civitas*: “The boundaries of Johannesburg are drifting away, sliding over pristine ridges and valleys, lodging in tenuous places, slipping again” (*EV* 6). Egan, an engineer, knows “every square centimetre of Hani View on the plans” but, aware of the discrepancies between blueprints and materiality, he consults Mazibuko asking for directions to the R562 (*EV* 53). Like the proofreaders, unable to contain the

¹⁴ Caraivan comments on this comparison in a reference via Elias Canetti (229).

proliferating errors in *The Restless Supermarket*, the engineer is in no position to catch up with adjustments, errors and road damage multiplying beyond his control (EV 59–60). In civic terms, the narrator in “Villa Toscana” feels surrounded by Nigerians he identifies as “aliens” in contrast to the more familiar “indigenes” (EV 5). Among white South Africans African languages are outside familiar cultural practice as no more than 2 per cent of them speak a minimum of one (EV 25). The growing sense of estrangement persuades Tearle to read the familiar city lights as unfamiliar worms and to perceive the cityscape as a jungle with the now lost outpost of symbolisation, Café Europa. To conclude, the allegorical practice of reading urban space becomes unproductive in Vladislavić's attempts to portray Johannesburg as is the adherence to related visual concepts proposed in later times by Kevin Lynch and, to some extent, Michel deCerteau.

Instead of the former allegorically organised space, Lev Mannovich proposes the concept of *augmented* space and augmented reality, i.e. “the physical space overlaid with dynamically changing information, multimedia in form and localized by each user” (219). In this way space is perceived as “data dense” and admits a complexity and multidimensionality exceeding the visual regime based on geometry, optics, geography and chorography. Mannovich suggests the possibility of a paradigm shift, a new model of interpreting and thus the need of a new poetics. This, Avram argues, would also require a new model of visibility (88). In Vladislavić's writing, the shift could be traced in the “Crocodile Lodge,” the last part or closing story of *Exploded View*, where the character, a billboard contractor, immersed in doing business, is plugged into various networks, “a map of sensations keyed to his body, to the ball of his foot pressing the accelerator pedal and the palm of his hand lazing on the gear level” (159). The traffic regulation system he tries to follow with the help of traffic lights and other signs, determines his mobility and general behaviour. He turns out to be the object of “an experiment in inculcating sensible driving habits” whose aim is to make him attentive to regulations and “willing to take instructions” (169). The instructions are printed in italics and delivered either by a Global Positioning System or a traffic report system. Visually they form paratextual inserts, which strengthens the effect of an ontologically alternative reality supervising the character. Another virtual reality the contractor subscribes to is the world of the adverts he mounts, where the headlines announce the arrival of “improvisations on the material world” (178). Even the contractor realises the hyper real quality of the advertising world where nothing “was truly itself” (178). Moreover, the character is also a classical *phoneur* whose life depends on and is guided by mobile communication. The loss of the cellular costs him the loss of his car and a beating he earns from the muggers. The profit, on the other hand, consists in his disentanglement (201) from all the non-territorial media spaces providing illusory knowledge and rendering the traditional spaces dangerously less significant.

Central to the understanding of the new concept of urban space is the feeling of estrangement which allows for a revision of prejudgements and a commencement

of a genuinely new process of knowing the urban space, an epistemological adventure starting in the non-territorial. In *Portrait with Keys* disorientation, the idea of not being at home, and the benefits of getting lost are acknowledged in the opening vignettes (*PK* 17). Knowing the boundless city takes place through its un-knowing due to unpredictable encounters with urban dwellers and strangers. As opposed to what Ferreira-Meyers writes about the need for a map in *Portrait with Keys* (43), it is not the map but giving directions to a stranger that provides one of the precious opportunities to share more than the hard-won knowledge of urban space (*PK* 16). A portrait of contemporary urban environment, Berit Michel observes, operates on the level of social networks within the city and global networks the cities form part of (111), networks Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid prefer to define as complete or planetary urbanisation (173). Urban space rather than the city becomes an intersection of itineraries, as in *Portrait with Keys*, followed by the people who gather and pass through. The anchoring landmarks, events and central character-guides become insignificant. In *Alibia (RS)* the flood and crumbling walls of a once bounded city destabilise and displace all the landmarks. The pylons in *Portrait with Keys* stride across the *veld* announcing an obliteration of the city/country dichotomies to, finally, announce a complete urbanisation (35). A key to knowing the new urban space is the human topography, the former *civitas*, but in its infinite diversity. Instead of a guide — Aubrey Tearle, Spilkin and the narrator in *Portrait with Keys* do not function as *cicerone* — there is a crowd of interlocutors whose stories overwrite the architecture of the *urbs*, as in Vito Acconci's *Storytelling and Architecture*. Urban space is personalised due to the diversity of stories and encounters, for instance in the route entitled "Liars and thieves" the reader finds "hunters-gatherers," "roamers," "scavengers," "cannibals," "poachers," "hawkers," and "garbologists" assuming a participatory model in which the reader also shares by choosing his own order of vignettes or photographs. De Certeau's practice, in this more recent model, is likened to artistic practice which makes the reader aware of the multiplicity of organising patterns.

Conclusion

In his attempts at drawing a portrait of Johannesburg, Vladislavić calls upon the familiar, totalising concepts and deeply ingrained imaginaries only to revise them and question their legitimacy by revealing a discrepancy between the former theorisations of urban space and the need for a contemporary perspective. Grids, like the census questionnaires in *Exploded View* (26) are employed in the construction of portrayals, the process of "unlocking" Johannesburg — an epistemological venture geared to reveal the truth, i.e. to arrive at the currently valid enunciation underlying the modern Afropolis. However, the constructed imaginaries, as a cultural practice, are continually revised. Collapsing the aerial with the pedestrian perspective Vladislavić thematises the shift of interest from imaginaries resting on geography and chorography to

human topography and augmented space, a process paralleled by the devolution of the English language and the proliferation of "other" alternative languages and cultural imaginaries. In order to understand the present cultural practice, it is necessary to reveal the imaginaries remembered as the past. In this respect the portrait genre is a vehicle for retrieving what is "worth remembering." On the other hand, when assuming a homogenising policy, the portrait buries under the layers of former cultural practice, the diversity of voices and perspectives. In that way, the portrait genre becomes a serious hindrance in the process of reconciliation. City portraits rather than "figments of imagination," writes Andreas Huyssen, are "part of any city's reality", because the way inhabitants act in the city and perceive it depends on how they think about it (3). The most recent imaginary Vladislavić construes engages a multitude of perspectives and subject positions, an everyday practice dense with a territorial and "non-territorial" cacophony of voices — a promising participatory model.

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