

## Mapping the Media of Aleksandar Hemon's Diasporic Time-Geography

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**Abstract:** This article brings spatial theory, diasporic culture, and media studies together in a cross-platform reading of Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon's work. Addressing the underexamined spatial consciousness of diaspora through an engagement with both print and electronic sources, it argues that Hemon's novels and websites render diasporic space in terms of "time-geography," which represents places as loci for multiple histories of migration. Diasporic time-geography produces several perspectives (local, global, national, diasporic) on shared space, which are further compounded when Hemon's novels *Nowhere Man* (2002) and *The Lazarus Project* (2008) are read comparatively with their websites. I argue that Hemon's diversiform approach to space assumes coherence when read as a critique of nationalist spatial models. In particular, his use of text, image, and interactive web design to represent the spaces of cities such as Chicago, Sarajevo, Lviv, and others contests the spatial abstraction of the nation-state as described by Henri Lefebvre. Against this abstraction, Hemon's work understands space as a concrete social production inflected by past, present, and future population movements.

**Keywords:** American literature, diaspora studies, media studies, spatial theory, transnational literature, Aleksandar Hemon

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In the penultimate section of Aleksandar Hemon's novel-in-stories *Nowhere Man* (2002), the Bosnian immigrant Jozef Pronek tears apart the Chicago apartment he shares with his live-in girlfriend. His actions expel the rage and frustration he has internalized as a result of the vio-

lence besetting his home city of Sarajevo and the difficulties he faces as an immigrant to Chicago. As Pronek lies weeping and bloodied on the apartment floor, the narrator tries to soothe him with the following statement: “Let us just sort through this destruction. Let us just remember how we got here. Let us just remember” (221). This statement advocates a form of palliative memory-work: it addresses “how we got here” by situating the wreckage of the apartment, and Pronek’s responsibility for this wreckage, within a chronology of diasporic displacement.

The injunction to connect Pronek’s immediate surroundings to longer histories of dispersal encapsulates my argument in this article, which addresses the relationship between space, time, and migration in Hemon’s work. Pronek’s situation echoes the author’s own experience of displacement in Chicago following the outbreak of hostilities in Sarajevo in 1992, which he has explored in his journalism, short story collections, novels, essays, and web projects. However, while these web projects yield crucial insights into Hemon’s corpus and its trenchant commentary on diasporic migration, they have received no scholarly attention to date. This is partly because of Hemon’s contemporaneousness and partly because of their status as paratexts to his major works, and yet it also suggests the interpretive difficulties raised by narratives that stretch across several media. Contemporary scholarship has not adequately addressed these difficulties, and as a result, the multimodal analysis I undertake in this article has implications for criticism of a variety of texts that have related components distributed across multiple platforms for advertising or other purposes. These web projects contribute to the spatial critique Hemon undertakes in his novels and disclose productive connections between diaspora studies and spatial theory.

Although the latter intersects with theoretical fields including Marxism, feminism, phenomenology, and more, my argument draws on a common feature of these fields noted by Michel Foucault, who sees the emergent “epoch of space” as related to increasingly prevalent conditions of global dispersal: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (22). As his mention of “the dispersed” implies, dias-

pora studies are in a unique position to explore the lived implications of this “epoch of space.” While the earlier diaspora scholarship associated with what Sudesh Mishra calls the “scene of dual territoriality” (16) tended to take this position for granted by reusing the spatial models of homeland discourses, this article builds on more recent work by scholars like James Clifford and Avtah Brah. For these and other authors, the internally differentiated histories of diasporic communities require equally differentiated models of space that build on Foucault’s notion of “simultaneity” in their refusal to “be mapped on a single plane” (Clifford 43). In particular, Brah’s concept of “diaspora space,” which he describes in terms of the “intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, and psychic processes” (208), forms a touchstone for my emphasis on the palimpsestic narratives developed in Hemon’s print and digital work and their prioritization of spatial diversity over homogenous in-group relationships to a nation-state.

My view of Hemon’s aesthetic, which I call “diasporic time-geography,” builds on Brah’s intersectional sense of diaspora space by attending to the layered and contrasting representations of urban spaces in Hemon’s corpus. More specifically, though, this time-geographical aesthetic invests spaces like Chicago and Sarajevo with a sense of accrued time that highlights their ongoing, dynamic, and relational construction. Hemon’s work challenges us to understand spaces at discrete points in personal and world-historical time while also viewing them as nodes in overlapping migration histories; the diversity of spatial expression found within and across Hemon’s body of texts assumes coherence when read as a critique of nationalist spatial models that seek to limit this same diversity. This critique becomes more accessible and more nuanced when his novels *Nowhere Man* and *The Lazarus Project* (2008) are read alongside their hyperlinked, visually multiform digital paratexts.

It is necessary to detail the nature of Hemon’s critique before addressing the specific contributions of his paratexts. The early pages of *Nowhere Man* provide an instructive overview. To begin, the title works in multiple registers but applies principally to Jozef Pronek, whose experience of dislocation is written in seven sections that detail the major

fissures characterizing his life at different times and in different places. While tied to specific cities and dates, these sections do not follow in chronological order and switch between locales (Chicago, Sarajevo, Ukraine, and Shanghai), genres, and narrators. The novel commences in Chicago in 1994, with its narrator, an unnamed Bosnian immigrant to the city, walking through his apartment building. He tries to imagine the building's spaces in his absence: "The frighteningly simple thing was that when I was inside nobody was on the porch: the green plastic chairs convened around nothing" (Hemon, *Nowhere Man* 5). The narrator relays a sense of fearful awe over the seemingly infinite endurance of this porch through time. As a diasporic transplant, he sees himself and his surroundings in terms of independent trajectories: they exist separately and work in different timeframes (temporariness in the case of the narrator and stability in the case of the porch).

The narrator's commentary on the way to a job interview once again evokes his feeling of spatial misalignment. While riding a city bus, he thinks about a friend who was murdered in the Bosnian war:

I used to have a friend—he was killed by an accelerating piece of shrapnel—who liked to think that there was a quiet part of the universe where a body could have a steady velocity, going in the same direction, at the same speed, never stopping or entering a gravitational field. This bus, for instance, would have moved with smooth, pleasant velocity down Touhy, not stopping at the lights, on to Lincolnwood, Park Ridge, Elk Grove Village, Schaumburg, Hanover Park, and onward through Iowa and whatever there was beyond Iowa, all the way to California and then over the Pacific, gliding across the endless water until we reached Shanghai—we would have all got to know each other on this ship, we would have gone all the way together. (10)

This passage juxtaposes an accelerating piece of shrapnel with the steady movement of a bus that glides through space. The narrator acknowledges the fantastical elements of his imagined bus trip as he describes how the bus stops for a man crossing the street with a heavy carpet. In contrast to the imagined bus, the narrator's real bus stops, waits, and

lumpers from storefront to storefront before arriving at a Chinese restaurant called the “New World,” where the narrator disembarks, alone.

Against the shrapnel’s links to traumatic displacement and temporal rupture, the bus’ “smooth, pleasant velocity” perpetuates a fantasy of limitless, frictionless space that resonates with Henri Lefebvre’s conception of space in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre sees space in the age of the nation-state as a complex social production that masks its origins and effects by appearing either independent of psychic life or born *sui generis* from mental projections. In both cases, the tendency to fetishize space as something that is fundamentally unrelated to society and culture results from the state’s implementation of “abstract space”: “As a product of violence and war, [abstract space] is political; instituted by a state, it is institutional” (Lefebvre 285). For Lefebvre, abstract space relies on a false impression of “absolute space” (94) that sees space as a neutral backdrop against which social life proceeds independently. He describes the premises of absolute space in the following terms:

To criticize and reject absolute space is simply to refuse a particular representation, that of a container waiting to be filled by a content—i.e. matter, or bodies. According to this picture of things, (formal) content and (material) container are indifferent to each other and so offer no graspable difference. Anything may go in any ‘set’ of places in the container. Any part of the container can receive anything. (170)

Under the rationale of absolute space, diasporic displacement simply transplants the “content” of diasporic populations into another geographic “container,” with consequences for neither content nor container. This situation serves the interests of the state, which must distribute its power evenly across diverse people and places to maintain hegemony. Such an even distribution of power requires the projection of homogeneous experience over a great distance in order to undercut the manifold lived realities of local spatial embedding.<sup>1</sup>

By depicting Pronek’s Sarajevan childhood, *Nowhere Man*’s second chapter cannily details the workings of state space and the sense of monolithic national identity it perpetuates. The narrator describes the

maps adorning Pronek's classroom wall, including one of England "with London like a wound in its side, ruptured blood vessels stretching towards Scotland and Liverpool" (Hemon 36). The violent incorporation of several spaces into the generalized nation-state of "England" suggests that the spatial abstraction in the seemingly objective practice of cartography belies the political power yoking together such distinctive regions. The mechanisms producing such abstraction are observed in Pronek's school lesson plan: "[T]hey learned that Nature was everything that surrounded them; that Tito was president; that the most important thing in our society was preserving brotherhood and unity; and that our planet was in the Solar system, which was in the Milky Way, which was in the Universe, which was everywhere, much like Nature" (36). In this consummate model of state space, nature is bound up in Tito's rule and Tito's rule is projected onto the cosmos, which is then recombined with Nature. The state, as adumbrated in Pronek's early lesson plans, thus collapses "local" and "global" scales to represent its rigorously patrolled national space as a uniformly applicable spatial model that is thought about (and lived) everywhere in the same way.

Against this model of space, the formal structure of *Nowhere Man* (which draws on the genre of the short story cycle by assembling nine relatively independent chapters that hold little in the way of linear narrative or narratorial continuity) emphasizes Pronek's embedding in specific spaces at specific times. The high degree of contrast between Pronek in Chicago and Pronek in Sarajevo produces significant gaps in characterization, as chapters alternate between representations of Pronek (young and old, near and far, confident and fearful, loved and anonymous) that are deeply embedded in the cities of Sarajevo, Ukraine, and Chicago. The combination of gaps in character and instability of place mobilizes Hemon's spatial critique: for instance, once uprooted from the secure space of his childhood in Sarajevo, Pronek echoes the first section's narrator in contemplating the space of his Chicago apartment and conveying astonishment at the indifferent endurance of space over time (he even employs the narrator's language on page 193).<sup>2</sup> Their sense of mutual isolation from the adopted spaces of their own Chicago homes reflects the degree to which the "everywhere" of state space, which once

provided the implicit backdrop to the security of their lives in Sarajevo, has become newly inaccessible to such diasporic “nowhere men.”

Diasporic displacement thus illuminates the constructed, social nature of space (i.e., the extent to which space extends from local practices that rarely translate across distance, except as an artificially produced imposition). In this view, space is deeply enmeshed in specific cultures, such that no space can ever be “absolute” except as a representation manufactured and distributed by particular systemic forces. Such interplay between space and culture accounts for many of the difficulties that diasporic migrants encounter; at the same time, it offers a hard-won opportunity to disclose and critique spatial paradigms that might otherwise remain deceptively transparent. To this end, the geographer Edward Soja advocates for the notion of “Thirdspace,” which challenges the homogeneity of state space:

Combining the real and imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other a priori, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of “counterspaces,” spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning. With its foregrounding of relations of dominance, subordination, and resistance; its subliminal mystery and limited knowability; its radical openness and teeming imagery, this third space of Lefebvre closely approximates what I am defining as Thirdspace. (68)

Following Lefebvre, Soja argues that local and marginal “lived spaces of representation” can generate new political stances by employing their plurality to contest the totality of state space. It is in this sense that Hemon’s work constitutes a spatial critique, especially in its use of different representational strategies both within and across several media. I understand these strategies as an effort to corral several interrelated dimensions of spatial experience into a series of situated perspectives on the complexities of diasporic migration. Hemon notes the following in “Mapping Home: Learning a New City, Remembering the Old”: “My displacement was metaphysical to precisely the same extent to which it

was physical. But I couldn't live nowhere. I wanted from Chicago what I had got from Sarajevo: a geography of the soul." In its equal concern for physical and metaphysical spatial knowledge, Hemon's "geography of the soul" demands multivalent strategies of spatial representation and critical approaches attuned to how full disclosures of space (as real and imagined, verbal and non-verbal, psychological and political) contest the universalizing tendencies of the state.

In response to these demands, I refer to Hemon's mixed-media migration narratives in terms of what I will call "diasporic time-geography." Associated with the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, time-geography views social behavior as an outcome of movement through both space and time. Adding to the spatial models of Bertrand Westphal, Andreas Huyssen, and Mikhael Bakhtin, time-geography employs a visual methodology that proves highly applicable to the configurable spaces in Hemon's work. Hägerstrand argues that in "time-space the individual describes a path," and the resulting "life-path" can be shown graphically (10). Although Hägerstrand's emphasis on the retention of individual identity across pathways is problematic in the context of diasporic migration, his emphasis on rendering a multidimensional compound of space, time, identity, and movement usefully articulates spatial difference-through-time as a constitutive feature of diasporic identity. With this framework in mind, we can return to the novel to explore more concretely how Hemon's juxtaposition of spaces at different points in time both critiques the static spatiality of the nation-state and frames diasporic spatial consciousness as a project that seeks to reconcile seemingly neutral spaces with histories of twentieth-century violence.

*Nowhere Man's* time-geographical orientation is seen most vividly in the book's final chapter. Pronek does not directly appear in this chapter; instead, he is subsumed into a frame tale that stretches his personal displacement onto a wider canvas of violent uprooting in the twentieth century. The chapter comingles Kiev circa 1900 with Shanghai in 2000. It abruptly shifts from an account of the life of the fictional Evgenij "Captain" Pick (loosely related to the real Evgenij Mihailovich Kojevnikoff) to the honeymoon of the narrator from the novel's first chapter before concluding with an ominous and disorienting fever-



dream in which Pick, the narrator, and a recurring, ambiguously symbolic mouse occupy a Shanghai hotel room. Pick's story is a collection of historical and biographical details assembled into an elaborate tale rooted only partly in fact. He deploys an opportunistic nationalism to build up a life of degraded luxury around the Cathay hotel in turn-of-the-century Shanghai. Pick's manipulative storytelling and the theatrical streak marking his stage name "Eugene Hovans" are always put in the service of justifying atrocities in the name of imperial power; this power operates by bringing distant places like Shanghai into the absolute space of a cultural nationalism best exemplified by the "blood-curdling nostalgia" of Pick's signature song lyric, "Do not close your eyes, Mother Russia, for it is not time to sleep" (Hemon, *Nowhere Man* 242). Eventually, however, geopolitical changes force him to abscond from the area. Later, he returns to the city and finds it changed beyond recognition: "He goes back to Shanghai and attempts to restore his network to serve the Americans, but to no avail—Shanghai is not the same, and it never will be" (239). Pick is thus, like the novel's other "nowhere men," expelled from national space: he slowly fades into random sightings before disappearing from history. In this case, his expulsion results from the ascendancy of a new colonial overseer that imposes a familiar model of spatial hegemony rooted in the mechanism of absolute space. And as the space of Shanghai is drawn into another false universalism, the legacy of violence and global displacement it inherits from men like Pick risks disappearing from view.

At this point, the narrative reassumes the first-person voice of the unnamed narrator from the first section, who is honeymooning in Shanghai. The text's shift from Pick's biography to this more recent voyage creates a palimpsest between the characters at the exact spot of their spatial convergence: the newlyweds are staying in room 741 at the Peace Hotel in Shanghai (formerly the Cathay Hotel), which was Pick's home during his time in Shanghai. The narrator reflects on his own relationship to the space of the hotel and on the extent to which Shanghai has changed since Pick's time: "We stayed at the Peace Hotel, which used to be the Cathay, and we liked it—they changed our towels regularly, the staff who could speak English always asked us how we

were, and we would tell them, for they seemed to care. Pretty soon, we started referring to our hotel room, room 741, as our home” (240). The lawless space of Shanghai, formerly a nexus of intrigue well-suited to a man like Pick, has given way to the unreflective, ahistorical sheen of global capitalism, which creates tourist sites couched in homogeneous service standards and voiced in English, the global language of business.

Once the narrator thinks of the Peace Hotel as “home,” his meditations on Shanghai develop a sense of vulnerable contingency. Time-geography, for Hemon, underscores the basic instability of a concept like “home” and instead attempts to establish continuity by presenting spaces as loci for multiple pathways through time. The narrator’s recognition that spaces change over time aligns with his recognition that the identities rooted in such spaces are equally subject to change. While meditating on the ghosts of the Cathay/Peace Hotel, he feels a nagging anxiety associated with the figure of a mouse. The mouse merges with the narrator’s body and tries desperately “to get out” while the narrator chooses “to get up” (242). The novel concludes with an act of movement ambivalently offered as resolution and invokes its first chapter, in which Pronek watches the narrator pick up a mouse, who bites him. Reflecting on the incident, the narrator later states that Pronek looked “as if he knew all along what would happen” (26). Perpetually homeless and susceptible to predatory violence, the mouse links the several narrators of *Nowhere Man*, all of whom (excepting the narrator from the second section) feel such a creature clawing at their chests. The only antidote to such a feeling of being plucked up and suspended weightless in space, it seems, is the spatial memory-work (“let us just remember how we got here”) that the narrator suggests, in the book’s penultimate section, Pronek should engage in. The narrator of that section *is* a mouse, which Pronek has badly injured after (spontaneously, violently, but not unpredictably) smashing up his Chicago apartment. The mouse’s efforts to soothe him suggest the aims of Hemon’s diasporic time-geography: rather than associate diasporic space with the discrete, generalized geographies employed in, for example, William Safran’s discipline-defining “Triangular Relationship” (91),<sup>3</sup> *Nowhere Man* instead renders space as a material index of disjunctive histories of movement. This does not erase

the violence and vulnerability associated with the mouse; on the contrary, it aims to recover the transnational histories of such violence and vulnerability embedded in local places through a potent, time-centered critique of the homogeneous space of the nation-state.

The structure of *Nowhere Man* thus disrupts the linear time and spatial continuity associated with state space; and yet, by bringing disparate points of space-time into proximity, it also generates unexpected connections between characters and places that together coalesce into an oppositional Thirdspace orientation. In this way, Hemon charts space as a relational concept that traces routes of historical departure and arrival while also refusing to arrange these routes into a straightforward narrative of cultural assimilation. Reading *Nowhere Man* alongside its website, which offers “interactive guides” to the novel’s major cities as well as two additional stories, elucidates this approach to space, with two critical addenda: first, the website’s visual and procedural rhetoric connects the novel to non-verbal representations that speak to the material, sensuous nature of space, and second, its emphasis on user interaction suggests a creative dimension to its spatial critique. By allowing readers to revisit the space-times of *Nowhere Man* through a highly configurable and visual interface, Hemon’s website multiplies the variable migratory pathways associated with diasporic time-geography. And when read contrapuntally with the novel, the website helps orient the gaps and connections of diasporic space toward a critique that draws on the resources of comparative media studies.

As noted, the site bills itself as an “interactive guide” to the cities of Chicago, Sarajevo, and Shanghai. This self-billing raises several questions: What sights does it showcase? How does it represent these cities? What interpretive strategies are required to account for its interactive elements? Folding the website into a more capacious discussion of diasporic space in Hemon’s work helps address these questions. Clicking on the section titled “WHERE” opens up a browser window with three images (see fig. 1), one from each of the cities in question.

Clicking on images from “Chicago” or “Sarajevo” takes the viewer to separate pages full of images from specific locations within these cities. These images are hyperlinked: clicking on them takes users

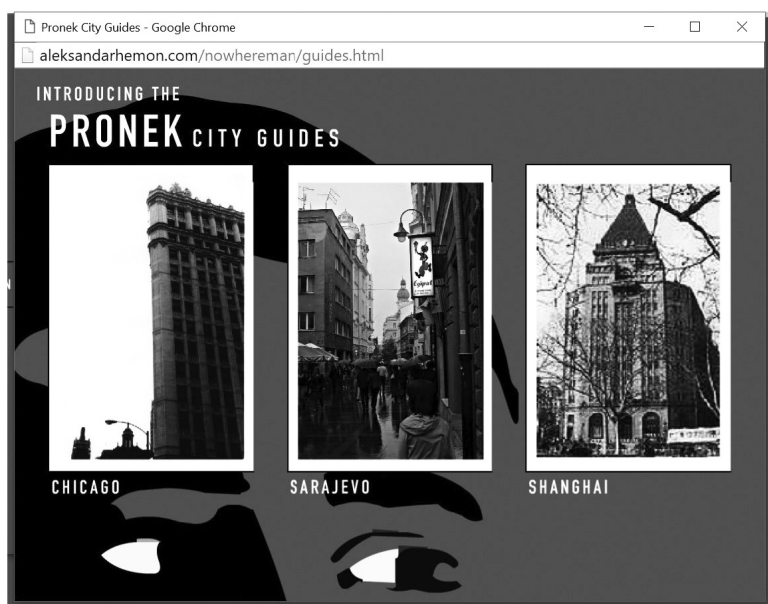


Fig. 1. "WHERE," Hemon, *Nowhere Man*

to yet more windows with images accompanied by excerpts from *Nowhere Man* pertaining to the location in question. Again, the high degree of user interaction bears mention: readers can navigate these spaces by visiting each link individually and in the order of their choosing; alternatively, they can move through a more linear sequence by following the pre-established arrangement of images embedded in the browser window.

The Chicago images, all but one of which are by Velibor Božović (who also contributed photographs to Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*), are in black and white, while the Sarajevo images (attributed to "SDMD") are in color. The color contrast between these images envelops modern Chicago in an anachronistic historicism and showcases Sarajevo as a more vibrant present. Such a contrast refuses the traditional narrative arc of cultural assimilation (which inevitably ends with a new homeland) and favors the nostalgic vibrancy of a lost homeland space observed in many diasporic return narratives; more broadly, it foregrounds

the temporal dimensions of urban space. A third point of spatial-temporal contrast results from clicking on the Shanghai image, which takes users to the Peace Hotel website and a panoramic, user-controlled, real-time view of the city from the roof of the hotel. The Peace Hotel website offers a more dynamic, commercialized, and depopulated sense of space than the still images from Chicago and Sarajevo. The webcam's hyper-presentist perspective produces a new sense of perpetual immediacy through its real-time control functions; in addition, it offers an alternative sense of movement that mirrors the rhetoric of transnational capitalism, which promises travelers unrestricted freedom of motion while also fixing them within a highly-controlled system of managed perspective. Because of their encounters with the images from Chicago and Sarajevo and the fragmentary structure of *Nowhere Man*, readers are better able to reflect on the strategies by which the web stream's representation of space effaces the history of the Peace Hotel. More specifically, when read alongside the novel's description of Shanghai in the early twentieth century, the web stream invites readers to reflect on the chasm separating its static treatment of contemporary time and space from the dynamic and deeply unsettling histories of movement shadowing its past and present occupants.

These materials multiply the diversity of spatial representations in the novel *Nowhere Man* while simultaneously contributing to the synchronic coherence of its time-geographical critique of state space. They also provide a unique view of the contingency of this coherence, which in the case of the website is manifestly temporary and based on user participation. All three city guides, for example, are embedded in independent browser windows that can be examined in isolation or laid atop one another. In theory, readers could have the three city guides opened simultaneously and arranged as a palimpsest (see fig. 2).

The configurable nature of this platform requires a spatially conscious way of reading the fragmented excerpts from the novel and asks readers to create multiple, shifting connections between the spaces in question. The website is thus continuous with the novel in presenting highly disparate fragments of space-time, but the connection of these photographic fragments through browser windows on the shared space of a

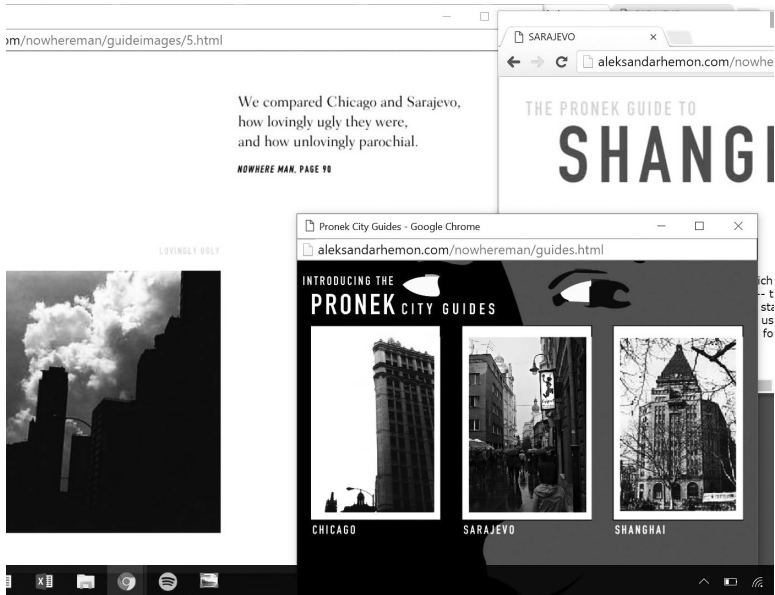


Fig. 2. Screenshot of Three City Guides, Hemon, *Nowhere Man*

screen produces an equally strong sense of cohesiveness. These multimedia fragments can be arranged in many possible ways, and the photographed cityscapes create an impression of material embedded in lived social space that proves different from the impression given by the novel in its concentration on the visual, non-verbal aspects of space. The re-deployment of the novel's contents in this website creates an effect that binds photographs to the imagined spaces of *Nowhere Man's* narrative and positions Hemon's diasporic time-geography as a charged response to the question of "how we got here."

In an interview I conducted in 2013, Hemon described how his interest in hypertext fiction led to the "very, very modest" website for his first collection of stories, *The Question of Bruno*, and from there to the website for *Nowhere Man*, which did not fully meet his ambitions: "We never had enough time and money to do that website right." However, the experience did prioritize the interplay between text and image in what later became *The Lazarus Project*. For Hemon, splicing photogra-

phy and language is “essential to how the book works,” and as a result, he did not want to simply “peg photos to the text.” In his words, “*The Lazarus Project* [website] came out of that.” Crucially, when asked to elaborate, Hemon noted that “the way I think about books and *The Lazarus Project* is as spaces.” For this project, he wanted to “allow or force the reader to several possible paths,” and the website accompanies the novel in rendering many potential ways of moving through space (Personal interview). As my readings demonstrate and this interview reinforces, the extent of formal, thematic, and even compositional co-action between *Nowhere Man*, *The Lazarus Project*, and their websites makes them a natural interpretive pairing. In particular, the distinct approach to certain aspects of diasporic space in *The Lazarus Project* offers a necessary rejoinder to the false impression of a completely fixed binary opposition between state and diasporic space.

*The Lazarus Project* relates two primary narratives: the “Brik” section (set in the present) and the “Lazarus” section (set in the early twentieth century). Brik, a displaced Bosnian writer living in Chicago, becomes interested in the story of Lazarus Averbuch, a Russian Jew who fled the Kishinev pogroms to Chicago, where he was shot under dubious circumstances by the Chief of Police. Hemon interweaves these two narratives through textual allusion and visual montage. These strategies evoke the traumatic reverberations of displacement that stretch from Lazarus to Brik, and yet the novel ultimately relies on key differences between these narratives to avoid the cyclical dynamic of traumatic displacement that can reify lost homelands in generations often far removed from the original experience of migration. The Lazarus storyline, for instance, is written in a third-person omniscient narrative voice, while the Brik storyline assumes a first-person limited perspective. Their geographical trajectories also differ: the Lazarus storyline takes place solely in Chicago (a New World immigration tragedy), while Brik crosses back over the Atlantic (a homeland-return narrative). Their time-geographical trajectories thus display several differences, and yet the shared ground upon which these characters often (literally and metaphorically) stand draws such differences together into a diasporic critique of state space in all its manifestations.

My emphasis on spatial critique departs from related work by critics like Søren Frank, who notes a dialectic in recent migrant writing that produces a sense of global spacelessness and, in response, a corresponding “placial” sensibility. Applying this dialectic to *The Lazarus Project*, Frank argues that it animates the novel’s central paradox: “[O]n the one hand, movement seems to exclude or transcend place, but on the other hand, and as a direct consequence of this exclusion, movement triggers a compensatory urge for re-emplacement and the conjuring up of specific places through specific languages” (73). Diasporic time-geography, as I describe it, works from a similar conjuncture of movement and place; Frank’s interest in the “conjuring” of space through language (and photography) also relates to my interest in Hemon’s multimodal expressions. However, I view the abutment of these verbal and non-verbal spatial expressions as intrinsically directed toward a multiplication of spatial orientations and, by the same logic, a discernment of the manifold operations of state space. In the case of *The Lazarus Project*, this includes locating such operations in certain strains of discourse about diaspora.

The novel begins with a statement of epistemological limitation anchored at a determinate point in space-time: “The time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain” (Hemon, *The Lazarus Project* 1). The narrator (presumably Brik) describes Lazarus’ path through Chicago on the day of his murder. While Lazarus’ memories of Kishinev occasionally intrude on the narrative, readers are given no access to his own interiority; everything is narrated by or focused on someone else. And so, in contrast to the guesswork characterizing descriptions of his internal life, the narrator meticulously renders Lazarus’ trail through Lincoln Park, up to and including his arrival at the house of the Chief of Police. At this point, the main narrative voice splinters: another voice intercedes in italics, as the popular media (in the guise of *Chicago Tribune* reporter William Miller) begin reframing the story by describing Lazarus as a “vile foreigner” with a “cruel mouth” and “determination terrible to behold” (8). This highly stylized racism remains the only available archival testimony to Lazarus. Brik turns to Chicago’s architecture, environment, and urban planning for a better perspective on Lazarus. In



this attempt to understand Lazarus by retracing his movements through the city, the novel establishes a theme of spatial resurrection that intertwines the Biblical Lazarus, Lazarus Averbuch, and Brik's resurrection of Lazarus for a Bush-era reading public. Resurrection implies a liminal passage that both connects and divides spaces (here and there) and times (before and after): it connects multiple space-times through relationships of death and rebirth while also dividing them via the transformative nature of displacement.

*The Lazarus Project* thus employs a time-geographical approach to narrative structure that views space as fundamentally shaped by the complexities of several different diasporic passages. Brik's storyline begins as he encounters Rora, a photographer friend from Sarajevo, at a Bosnian gathering in Chicago. Later, the two photograph the city and visit its former Jewish quarter. As Brik tries to locate Lazarus amidst the city's continual urban rewriting, he observes that the area has been utterly transformed since Lazarus' time. For Brik, this rebirth elides testimonies to the racial violence of Chicago's past, violence that nevertheless remains present in the new forms of segregation and gentrification marking its spaces. His pursuit of an increasingly overwritten past leads Brik to the conclusion that to understand Lazarus, he must return to Lazarus' place of origin. Rora prompts this idea: "You should go back where he came from, Rora said. There is always a before and an after" (46). As we will see, Rora's comment contains hidden depths, but Brik accepts his suggestion at face value: "Rora was right: I needed to follow Lazarus all the way back to the pogrom in Kishinev, to the time before America. . . . I needed to step outside my life in Chicago and spend time deep in the wilderness of elsewhere" (46). Brik wants to view space as a container for time: he desires to reverse the flow of time-geographical movement and access the past in spaces of departure and arrival. On one hand, Brik's nostalgia for lost spaces constitutes a time-geographical critique of the unchanging nature of state space fully in line with my reading of *Nowhere Man*. On the other, *The Lazarus Project* undercuts Brik's position by emphasizing that diasporic return narratives can also partake in the logic of absolute space, even when they emphasize the rupture of traumatic displacement.

Brik initiates such a state-centric narrative when he emends his and Rora's return-migration to start from Lviv, Ukraine. Brik's grandfather came from the nearby area of Krotkiy, which Brik—as a result of family lore—associates with a mythological convergence between self and place. However, the “wilderness of elsewhere” (69) that Brik and Rora encounter in the darkening streets of Lviv assumes an unexpectedly menacing aspect. This menace results from the disjuncture between Lviv's reputation in Brik's family memory and its present-day reality. Such a “wilderness” exists in relation only to the orderliness of nostalgic memory, which fixes Lviv as a space of permanent departure for Brik's personal migration history. The gap between past and present, marked on the streets of Lviv, reveals Brik's primary intention for the trip, which is to preserve the past in space as an antidote to the passage of time. Brik's need to find Lazarus reflects a need to lose himself, or rather, to lose the portions of himself that are increasingly interwoven with the lived space of Chicago. In this sense, his “Lazarus Project” represents a homeland-reclamation diasporic return narrative, which opposes and even refuses the “after” category of displacement by rooting identity in the unchanging space of “before.”

Such return narratives depend on seeing selfhood as a fixed center able to resist the influence of space and time. Brik describes this perspective:

Everybody imagines that they have a center, the seat of their soul, if you believe in that kind of thing. I've asked around, and most of the people told me that the soul is somewhere in the abdominal area—a foot or so above the asshole. But even if the center is elsewhere in the body—the head, the throat, the heart—it is fixed there, it does not move around. When you move, the center moves with you, following your trajectory. You protect the center, your body is a sheath; and if your body is damaged, the center is exposed and weak. Moving through the crowd at the bus station in Chernivtsi, I realized that my center had shifted—it used to be in my stomach, but now it was in my breast pocket, where I kept my American passport and a wad of cash. I pushed this bounty of American life

through space; I was presently assembled around it and needed to protect it from the people around me. (177)

Brik understands identity as a center that must be protected by one's bodily and mental apparatus. His description of being "assembled" around the two totems of American life suggests that an exogenous force has overwritten his Bosnian identity, much as the buildings in Chicago have been overwritten since Lazarus' time. Brik's fascination with the overwriting of urban space builds from his belief that identities subjected to the pressures of involuntary migration require insulation from the influence of people, places, and time. Displacement thus produces a desire for such insularity, and yet it also reveals the degree to which identity and space are always already embedded in changing time. Brik confronts this aspect of time precisely as a result of his failed return narrative. Instead of recapturing his own identity in space, his return migration reflects the extent of his own change over time. He tracks this change in his encounters with the dynamic nature of Lviv and later Sarajevo, which refuse to be fixed within his own chronology of displacement. Brik transposes this urge to protect his "center" to an urge to protect Sarajevo from change, even when changes of this kind alleviate residents from the more immediate experiences of ethnic war. Sarajevo functions as a container for Brik's pre-American life because he views the city in terms of his lost (and deeply missed) capacity for spatial abstraction: "So I had a crazy, liberating feeling that my life was neatly divided: all of my now in America, all of my past in Sarajevo. Because there is no now in Sarajevo, no McDonald's" (208). Viewed in this binary way, as a container, Sarajevo assumes the generalizing abstraction associated with state space.

Rora, however, challenges Brik's tendency to reify spaces in his own biography by invoking these spaces' autonomous timelines. In particular, he refutes the idea that Brik's current state, or "now," must map onto Sarajevo in order for the city to fully participate in the present: "What you see is what you see, but that is never everything. Sarajevo is Sarajevo whatever you see or don't see. America is America. The past and the future exist without you" (209). Rora's argument is a powerful coun-

terpoint to Brik's desire to make places conform to his own personal experience. In this line of thinking, while Brik's time-geographical path winds from Sarajevo to Chicago, it must inevitably interact with numerous other spatial perspectives on Sarajevo, including those of people who know the city purely in the context of Brik's "after" category of displacement.

*The Lazarus Project* thus employs time-geographical collage work to foreground the operations of state space in homeland return narratives, which rely on the same universalizing logic that defines the bordered space of the nation-state despite avowing a position outside this bordered space. By intertwining its Lazarus and Brik narratives, Hemon's novel foregrounds the temporality of space; this strategy both undermines Brik's assumptions about the stability of identity and land and introduces a perspective on diaspora that creates unlikely identifications (for example, between Brik and Lazarus) through the very diversity marking time-geographical networks of migration. Following from the chapter divisions of *Nowhere Man*, the double-helix structure of *The Lazarus Project* elaborates on this perspective, which extends through Hemon's multimodal work that visualizes networks of diasporic movement.

The book advances such a project through its photographs: it contains some images taken from the Chicago Historical Society, while Božović captures others. In both cases, the images are in black and white and without dates. There are pictures of Chicago and Sarajevo, along with profile shots of assorted persons, including Lazarus. As noted, these photographs are a major part of both *The Lazarus Project* and its meta-novel "The Lazarus Project," which is presumably written by Brik, with photographs by Rora. The close relationship between text and image in *The Lazarus Project* (which compounds and sometimes confuses space, time, and personal identity by focusing on cities, archives, and characters) is further established by the novel's website. In a transmedial gesture, it transfers the novel's text and thematic content into a more configurable platform, which according to its written introduction constitutes another version of the novel, or "project." The configurable nature of this website platform multiplies the time-geographical migration trajectories simultaneously developed by the novel's parallel timelines and use of

photographs. To begin, the website's first flash page overlays an open eyeball against an eyelash-silhouette of the Chicago skyline (see fig. 3).

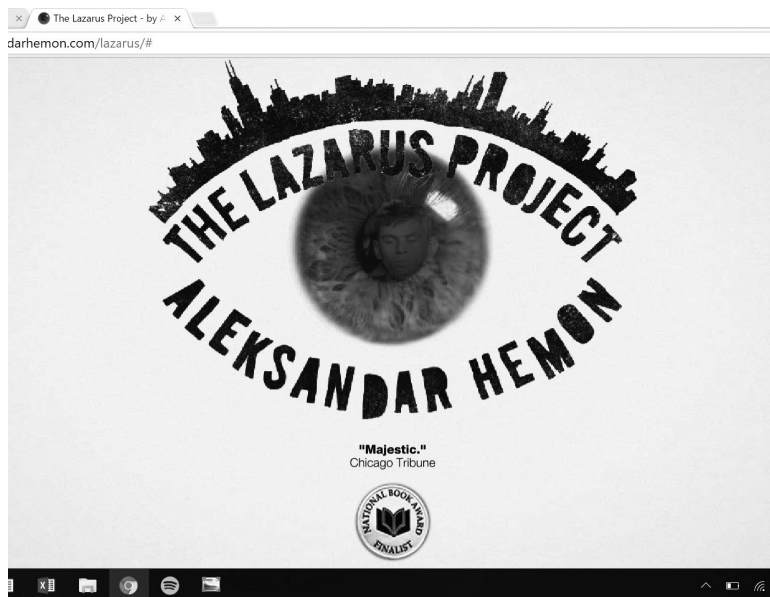


Fig. 3. The Lazarus Project Website Opening Page,  
Hemon, *The Lazarus Project*

Dragging the cursor over the eyeball violently shakes the eyeball, and passing the cursor specifically over the iris produces an image of Lazarus, suggesting the reader/user's participation in the action of "locating" Lazarus in the contemporary space of Chicago. Clicking on the eyeball (the eyeball-as-portal is also a key trope of the *Nowhere Man* website) links to another page, which opens a browser window against a black backdrop overlaid with photographs; this window includes an introductory paragraph comprising promotional points, a description of the novel's interlocking narratives, and a brief overview of the website. Clicking "Proceed" zooms in on an inverted version of the novel's first photograph paired with the novel's first sentence. The sentence is hyper-linked; following the link causes the screen to pan toward the upper left

and settle on another photograph accompanied by another hyperlinked excerpt. Clicking on this link triggers another movement to yet another photograph. These links shuttle users in seemingly random directions, with no spatial orientation and no indication of chronological beginning or end.

In the upper right corner, however, there is an interface consisting of four directional arrows and a center button. Clicking on the arrows takes users toward the next photograph in that direction, while clicking on the button zooms the perspective out to encompass a bird's-eye view of the grid of photographs (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The Lazarus Project Website Graph Layout,  
Hemon, *The Lazarus Project*

The slideshow, like many on the web, offers users the option to view either a full or short version of the project. Hemon's website thus plays on broader digital media conventions, whose unique tempos (full or short) and directionality (left to right) contribute to the dynamic combination of space and time developed by diasporic time-geography. The

website's full version plays straight through a series of photographs and text and feels more like a linear narrative. But when read in light of the potential for innumerable user-controlled photo-essays, the website creates a sense of contingent space-times that underscore the disjunctive networks of diasporic time-geography. These networks suggest the degree to which diaspora engenders multiple spatial attachments that can never be reduced to the kind of single, linear experience implied by Brik's reconstructive homeland journey. The website hyperlinks a total of 143 pictures in this way, presenting readers with characters, places, and times whose meaning relative to one another can shift when arranged differently through user control and/or automation. Also worthy of mention is the site's music, which opens with an atmospheric accordion melody (evoking mournful Old-World nostalgia) and gradually fragments into a sample-heavy astral-industrial *mélange* that ends nowhere near its promised beginning. The interlaced effects of time, movement, and tone experienced when traversing these images encapsulate Hemon's montage-like diasporic time-geography and reiterate not only the formal structures that counterpoise Lazarus/Brik and various Proneks but also the juxtaposition and simultaneity found more generally in the transnational temper of the spatial turn that these structures echo.

These images and their control interface suggest an attempt to represent the variable links between discrete space-times by collating spatiotemporal fragments across several narratives and media; and yet, precisely through their variability, these fragments coalesce when read as a spatial critique of state space. Ultimately, Hemon's work responds to spatial abstraction in the same voice of the dislocated mouse of *Nowhere Man*: with the time-geographical imperative to "[l]et us just remember how we got here." The narrator's inclusive use of "us" enlists readers in this effort, and yet the diasporic time-geography imagined by readers will only be as expansive as the materials in their possession.

In closing, I would like to return to Hemon's *Nowhere Man* website, which includes a link to the website for the Peace Hotel in Shanghai. Originally this link offered a controllable live video stream whose dynamic sense of space I analyze above. As of March 2017, this stream is

defunct; it thus leaves Hemon's page with an intriguing lacuna and alters the overall tenor of *Nowhere Man's* spatial critique with its conspicuously absent presence. While the website remains partially accessible via the Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine," the live video feed is no longer functional (see fig. 5).

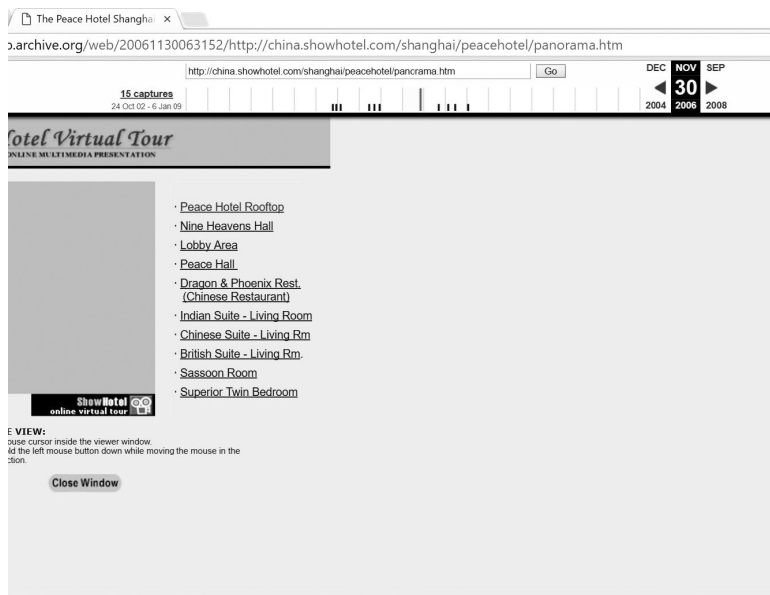


Fig. 5. Peace Hotel Defunct Website, "Wayback Machine," The Internet Archive

The website's erasure reasserts the contingency associated with time-geography, even for this ultra-modern boutique hotel, and in that respect, its archived "ghost" unintentionally reinforces my overall arguments. The unexpected doubling of meaning associated with this erasure is also more generally representative of the interpretive value of electronic paratexts, which require the kind of transmedial analyses undertaken in this article to fully account for the complexity of the diasporic spatial critique developed in Hemon's work.



## Notes

- 1 For the sake of clarity, the remainder of this article will use “state space” to refer to this projection, combining the several analogous spatial mechanisms/terminologies (i.e., “abstract space,” “absolute space”) that Lefebvre employs.
- 2 After surveying the contents of his studio apartment, Pronek notes that “everything was precisely as he had left it. The amazing thing was, he thought, that when he wasn’t there, nobody was there—the space he occupied was empty when he was elsewhere” (193).
- 3 Safran’s research emphasizes how mythologies surrounding the origin point for diasporic communities circulate in continual negotiations between three distinct entities: “[d]iaspora/host country/homeland” (93).

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