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# “The City that Truly Counts” – the Meaningful Cityscape of Jim Crace’s *Six*

**Abstract.** Jim Crace’s ability to create both authentic and poetic geographic and topographic renderings has led critics to coin the term “Craceland” to denote these idiosyncratic settings that appear other and relatable at the same time. His narrative power lies in his ability to render places and spaces which, in spite of their wholly fictitious character, evoke a strong feeling of plausibility and familiarity. His milieux are never abstracted from the human element, and his stories examine the close link between his protagonists and the places they occupy or move through, thus emphasising the experiential and emotional dimension of space and place. *Six* (2003), his seventh novel, set in an unnamed imaginary present-day city, follows the fate of Lix Dern, a celebrated actor and a father of six children, in his life and career. Along with *Arcadia* (1992) and *The Melody* (2018), *Six* ranks among its author’s urban novels which explore the diverse aspects of the interrelatedness between modern cityscape and its inhabitants’ mental and physical existence. By using humanistic geography and phenomenological geocriticism as its theoretical points of departure, this paper attempts to analyse the roles the city assumes in conveying the novel’s principal thematic concerns, as well as to demonstrate how *Six* differs from Crace’s other two urban novels.

**Keywords:** Jim Crace, *Six*, experience, humanistic geography, mapping narrative, phenomenological geocriticism

## 1. Introduction

In each of his novels, Jim Crace has created an imaginary landscape or cityscape whose function transcends that of a mere background in which the story is set. Regardless of their historical and geographical disparateness, the milieux of his stories are easily conceivable and relatable for readers. The simultaneity of this familiarity and otherness is thus the idiosyncrasy of what has been labelled “Craceland” (Begley, “A Pilgrim in

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Craceland”), and although Grace himself is rather dismissive concerning this term, he admits to having an intense spatial sensibility and likes to refer to himself as a “landscape writer” (Guidarini, “An interview with Jim Grace”). The fact that by assuming a metaphorical role his settings are a constituent of his stories’ meaning is reflected in that they are inherently endowed with the human element: in most cases they reflect the human content – qualities, experiences, moods, emotions – on a symbolic level, thus emphasising the fundamental interconnectedness between spaces/places and their occupants’ states of mind. Moreover, such metaphoricity of the storyline always responds to acute present-day concerns by means of “provocative and complicated parallels with our own world” (Shaw and Aughterson 4).

Despite the above-mentioned diversity of locations and historical periods, it is possible to identify a small group of Grace’s novels with a similar spatial and historical setting – those taking place in a modern city. *Arcadia* (1992), *Six* (2003) and *The Melody* (2018) are all urban novels set in the second half of the twentieth century and which depict typical aspects of modern city life, while also contemplating the transformations and resistances of their actual environment. By integrating the sociological and urbanistic perspectives into its narrative, the first explores the various consequences of the insertion of a shopping mall into the city centre planning for the cityscape as well as for the inhabitants. The latter also touches on the theme of insensitive and profit-seeking reconstruction of a traditional part of a town and its immediate psychological, socio-economic and environmental impacts on all the afflicted subjects. Both novels thus contain an indisputable political dimension in the sense of being concerned with acute social and ethical issues of globalized capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

*Six*, on the other hand, lacks this engagement as it primarily focuses on the personal and intimate history of its protagonist in his home city. Therefore, though it is not entirely devoid of the political element either, the fictitious urban space of the novel, with its external manifestations, rather serves as an ingenious mirror image of its protagonist’s private and professional life and, in consequence, of his experience(s) and states of mind. With reference to the insights of experiential and phenomenological approaches to textual spatial representation of Yi-Fu Tuan, Robert T. Tally and Eric Prieto, this paper attempts to argue that in *Six*, more thoroughly and systematically than in *Arcadia* and *The Melody*, Grace draws a distinct parallel between a character’s existence and the physical urban environment in which this existence takes place. By doing so, it also demonstrates how this experiential cityscape is made an integral part of the novel’s thematic framework.

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2 Being an unconcealed leftist, Grace professes the writings of George Orwell as “one of his major literary influences” (Battersby, “The Melody by Jim Grace”).

## 2. Experiential and Phenomenological Conceptions of Space

Humanistic geography attempts to find a way of successful articulation of how human experience(s) affect our perception and interpretation of “space and place as images of complex – often ambivalent – feelings” (Tuan 7). Experience, as the humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan notes, is a “cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs reality,” ranging from the direct sensory perception to the “indirect mode of symbolization” (8). As such, it comprises both emotion and cognition, which may not be as opposed as is commonly believed, but rather interlinked and complementary moments of an experiential continuum. Although experience connotes a degree of passivity in the sense of undergoing something that befalls one, it can also have a connotation of activity in the sense of overcoming obstacles and perils, of “ventur[ing] forth into the unfamiliar and experiment[ing] with the elusive and the uncertain” (Tuan 9). In either case, experience implies the process and ability to learn from what one has gone through.

At this point, a distinction between space and place should be drawn. Space is a more general and abstract notion. Place, on the other hand, is a particularised, localised and familiarised space; one which is endowed with meaning. Space is concretised into place by “being named” by the flows of power and negotiations of social relations of its occupants (Carter et al. xii), thus making place “a setting to which individuals are emotionally and culturally attached” (Altman and Low 5), a “calm centre of established values” (Tuan 54). While the enclosed and humanised place is associated with dwelling with its motionlessness and constancy, the more boundless space implies movement as the fundamental “ability to transcend the present condition” (Tuan 52). And so, the first invites personal or even intimate experience of a longer-term habitation, while the experience of the latter is given by the ability to move between and via the places and objects that compose it.

Open space may have ambiguous connotations – for some, it is a symbol of freedom, having enough room and opportunity for action; for others, it can be intimidating as they feel exposed and vulnerable in it, as well as uncertain due to the absence of fixed tracks and patterns of meaning. Spaces are not always spacious and unpopulated; their antithetical attribute is crowding. However, even the sense of crowding can be subjective and not directly proportional to population density – sometimes a city appears less crowded than a small town or village where one may suffer under the permanent surveillance of watchful neighbours. Also, the feeling of crowdedness tends to be frustrating and irritating, yet, under certain circumstances, being a part of a crowd can be thrilling and reassuring as well. Satisfactory human existence requires both the boundedness of space and constraint of place as it has the form of a “dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom” (Tuan 54). Although the direct experience

of place gives rise to a natural emotional bond with it, our ability of abstract thinking and symbol-making allows us to form a similarly strong attachment to enormous places and spaces with which our immediate experience is limited or even non-existent.

A more systematic literary critical approach to space is geocriticism, which explores how different recipients engage with the spaces and places that are formative for them, as well as how their spatial experience is translated into textual discourse and its interpretation. This originally geo-centred practice<sup>3</sup> focusing on real-life environments has gradually bred its more ego-centred variants which have turned their attention to psychological determinants of the experience of both actual and fictitious literary spaces. Robert T. Tally has developed the concept of “literary cartography” as a form of narrative which takes into consideration the social and psychological experience of space/place and the possibility of reflecting such spatial experience through a wholly imaginary literary environment. Such “mapping narratives” both map the spaces of human experience and are mapped by them, or, more precisely, by its interpretations and contexts through which they make sense to readers (“Introduction: mapping narratives” 3). Such practice can thus elucidate “how the ways in which we are situated in space determine the nature and quality of our existence in the world” (Tally, “On Geocriticism” 8) by examining narratives which render and reflect this situatedness.

Tally’s approach is further developed by Eric Prieto’s phenomenological geocriticism, which examines space/place as a manifestation of the dynamic interpretation of consciousness and world, as well as the impact the environmental constraints of space/place have on the human psyche (“Geocriticism, Geopoetics, Geophilosophy” 25). Central to his spatial analysis is the concept of the *entre-deux*, or in-between, places, which have assumed a particular significance in what he sees as the transitional character of the contemporary world of ongoing social, cultural, technological, demographic and environmental transformation. These *entre-deux* places that do not comply with our idea of well-established spatial categories, and are therefore often misunderstood, dismissed and overlooked as defective deviations from the norm, represent a viable trope for textual representation in that they contain a latent dynamic and productive potential for innovation and development (Prieto, “*Literature, Geography*” 1). These borderland, interstitial sites only amplify the inherently “contestatory and dialogical” (Prieto, “*Literature, Geography*” 14) value of place which comes into being as a result of the struggle between diverse, often contradictory, projections of discursive meanings based on the given historical, geographical or personal context of the contesting percipients’ experience.

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3 Developed at the beginning of the millennium by the French scholar Bertrand Westphal, geocriticism takes the actual spaces/places at the centre of debate and draws on their textual representations in order to grasp them more thoroughly.

### 3. The City of Balconies, Kisses, Mathematical Truth, and Light

*Six* tells the story of Felix Dern, a successful middle-aged actor, flamboyant and confident on the stage but shy, timid and reclusive in privacy, a man endowed with unfortunate fertility, thanks to which, as the novel's opening line says, "[e]very woman he dares to sleep with bears his child" (Grace<sup>4</sup> 1). Consequently, as it focuses on some twenty-two years (from 1979 till 2001) of his adult life and the relationships with the mothers of his six children – all of them in some sense unwanted – the narration is a contemplation on love in its diverse metamorphoses and with its paradoxical compound of robustness and fragility. Moreover, it is the story of the city in which the whole novel is set, and in which the protagonist was born and bred. All these three thematic layers – Felix's life, love, and the city – are intrinsically intertwined and thus generate corresponding combinations, from which those involving the latter one are of interest in this paper: Felix's life and the city, and the city and love. However, importantly for our purposes, *Six* also touches on the theme of the city as such, that is, abstracted from the other two thematic concerns, which links it with *Arcadia* and *The Melody*.

The unnamed present-day city in *Six*, like those in *Arcadia* and *The Melody*, is wholly fictitious, though its vivid descriptions, European-like layout and the fact that it lies in a country with an authoritative establishment may evoke in readers a feeling of familiarity. The narrator repeatedly implies that the city has experienced better times in the past, using phrases like "once famous" (S 3), "infuriating" (S 12), "dull" (S 18), "neglected and contented" (S 100), "lacklustre" (S 134), "regular and regulated" (S 138), "hazy and exhausting and unkind" (S 152) to describe its current nature and state of affairs. With its elegant historical architecture, the city used to be known as the "City of Balconies" (S 7), an alluring nickname allegedly given to it by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Its recent history, on the other hand, appears to have been rather unpromising due to the nature of the governing regime and its restrictive impacts on the city's development. One of its brighter moments occurred in 1979, when the tight civic atmosphere temporarily loosened, and people went out to fill the streets and public places to relish their unexpectedly gained freedom. By coincidence, the popular *Life* magazine organised their photographic project "Fifty Cities of the World" on one Sunday that fell within this short-term surveillance release, and so the photojournalist made a series of photos of happy people kissing one another, by which he caught the place's current spirit, yet the new, cheerful headline it gave it – the "City of Kisses" – could hardly be seen as fitting for the city in general.

Another moment of the city's international fame came towards the end of the year 2000, when its magistrates announced that the city would spectacularly welcome the new

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4 All quotations from *Six* follow the Penguin edition of 2004 and are henceforth abbreviated in parentheses as S.

millennium mathematically correctly, that is on the night from 31 December to 1 January 2001, unlike the rest of the world, which had already done it, erroneously, a year before. The “city that truly counts” (S 183) hoped that such an occasion would draw crowds of visitors eager to spend their money there, but, in reality, only a few math enthusiasts, curiosity seekers and academicians arrived, showing little interest in tourist attractions, restaurants, bars and night-clubs, which is why the only palpable outcome of this event was yet another nickname, this time that of the “City of Mathematical Truth, the Capital of Calendar Authenticity” (S 183). And finally, in early 2001, the international *Geo* magazine launched another take on the Fifty Cities of the World project, this time aerially photographed from helicopters. As the photographer opted for the night perspective, the city’s latest title is the “City of a Million Lights”. And so, ironically, unlike the historical one, all the modern labels either misinterpret, disregard or simplify the city’s actual character and *modus vivendi*, showing the popular culture industry’s inability and reluctance to inquire into serious and complex issues.

#### 4. The Political and the Personal City

Although far from being a political novel per se, *Six* possesses a distinct political undertone. Chronologically speaking, the story begins with the unexpected and short-lasting period of loosening the socio-political situation in 1979, “the year the post-war ban on public demonstrations of affection [...] was lifted” (S 8). Yet, the most intensive period of relief and thaw from the tight grip of the authorities’ controlling measures came in 1989 during the so-called “Big Melt” or “The Laxity” when, having been satisfied with the capital the City of Kisses had gained from tourists and foreign companies over the past two years, the city governors for once concentrated on their life in luxury rather than on maintaining public order. The streets were suddenly full of life and energy, and soon turned into a boisterous spree when it was suddenly possible to walk freely without IDs, and to organise unrest and demonstrate without much fear of being “disappeared” (S 76, 78). The citizens are again driven onto the streets at the end of the story, twenty years later, but this time by the devaluating impacts of a financial crisis. During “the week of the Banking Riots” (S 2), massive demonstrations and the presence of the police and the army in the centre divided the city centre in two halves – the commercial and banking part on the east side of the river, where the largest protests took place, and whose boulevards were often reminiscent of a combat zone, and the historic quarters on the other side of the river, with their narrow streets, known as the Hives, which remained virtually untouched.

Even though these larger historical circumstances play a part in the novel, Grace’s narration continuously fuses the political with the personal as each of these events is somehow linked with Felix’s lived experience. In 1979, in the City of Kisses, the young Lix is, in accordance with *Life*’s portrayal of the city, kissing and making love to an

unknown woman he met in a bar during a one-night stand, resulting in his first child being conceived. Two years later, still a student, Lix discovers his unorthodox self when he suggests the abduction of the chairman of an American company which intends to donate seven million “dirty dollars ... made from low wages in the Far East” (S 79) to the university to modernise its campus. However, rather than by the Big Melt and the leftist idealism of the young anarchists, he is motivated by his desire to impress Freda, the campus beauty and one of the most revolutionary students. And so, even though the abduction plan turns out to be a failure, Lix eventually gets what he longs for, yet by which he also begets his second child.

At the “proper” beginning of the millennium, on New Year’s Eve 2000, Lix, in the city centre streets, decides to follow his later wife Mouetta so as to be close to her at the turn of the year, but gets caught up in the crowds, loses sight of her and, later that night, mildly drunk, has casual sex with a fellow actress right on the stage, an act resulting in his fifth child’s conception. And, finally, during the 2001 Banking Riots, after a series of coincidences caused by police activities against demonstrators, Lix and Mouetta find themselves stuck in their car for a night in an empty carpark where, after their sleep-over, they engage in hasty lovemaking that produces his sixth, and last, child.

In *Six*, the (hi)story of the city coincides with that of Lix Dern’s affairs and paternity. At the very beginning of the novel, metaphorically referring to the weather, the narrator suggests that the city may, in some cases, be an accomplice of the historical tumults taking place in it and, in consequence, a crucial mover behind some of its inhabitants’ life-changing decisions and acts: “Sometimes our city ..., with its deep parks, its balconies, and its prolific and disrupting river, like any other city, seems to have a climate of its own, a window of clear sky, perhaps, unshiftable for days, or more commonly a random storm attracted to the concrete and the bricks while all the countryside around is calm” (S 3). Indeed, for Lix’s personal life, the city at times has had a special climate in which clear sky has taken turns with rapid storms, each of which, by different means, has resulted in his fathering of a child. Only one such occasion has a truly natural cause: when due to unceasing rains the river floods the city streets in 1987, and Lix with his newly-wed Alicja deliberately choose romantic confinement in their rented attic flat by refusing to get in a rescue boat, during which her first child is begotten. In terms of Tuan’s conception of experience as comprising the elements of the passive, the active and the learnt, Lix’s personal life manifests prevalingly the first two: things not only happen to him, but he is also able to strive hard and venture to tackle the risky and the unfamiliar so as to get what he longs for. The same, on the contrary, can hardly be said about the latter as he does not seem to learn a lesson from any of his paternal misfortunes and, when he finds himself in another situation of a similar kind, emotions and sexual desire rather than attained knowledge take control of his acts. His love life thus parallels the episodic yet all the more turbulent blasts of the city’s climate, meteorological as well as social. He

thus may be cursed with looming potency, but the city with its whims is always there to allow it to take its course.

## 5. On Loving and Dwelling

The most apparent instance of the above interconnection between the city and the protagonist's personal life and, moreover, combined with the narration's following, or mapping, his psycho-spatial topographical movement around the cityspace, is the progression of Lix's places of residence, the most telling examples of the above definitions of place as a site of one's intense emotional and intimate attachment. These places, together with their location in the city, always parallel not only his current socio-economic status, but also his frame of mind. Because it traces both the geographic trajectory of Lix's habitation around the city and the mutual influence between these places and his experience in and of them, *Six* can be taken as an example of Tally's mapping narrative. Therefore, the narration makes use of showing how the protagonist mentally and socially settles in and identifies with these places of dwelling in order to better capture the then character of his being-in-the-world perception.

At the chronological beginning of the story, the young Lix occupies a "democratic modest fourth-floor room among the tenements down on the wharf, with not only skylight views across the newly named City of Kisses towards the river but also a narrow glimpsing view from his box kitchen into Cargo Street, where now there are boutiques and restaurants instead of groceries and bars and 'working folk'" (S 55). Although it is a tiny, cramped attic flat in what at that time was a low-class edge of the city, one an unmoneyed student can afford to rent, through the two limited window views it also reflects Lix's ambition and future achievements: the skylight view of the city with the river suggests that his dream of living in the historic centre in a balconied apartment overlooking the river is already "within his view," while the kitchen glimpsing view of a street that in the near future would be transformed into a fashionable avenue foreshadows his professional success as a famous actor.

This "old fourth-floor student room-'n'-kitchen near the wharf" (S 120) then witnessed the conceptions of Lix's first two children. Although the first occasion was accidental, it turned out more satisfactorily than the second, long intended and much wished-for one. And while in the first case the role of the city was rather conventional – that of a site of countless random and anonymous encounters of strangers desiring non-committal intimacy – in the second it served much more as an instrument of a quirk of fate. The whole incident is ironic and tragicomic from the start as Lix, a one-time reactionary out of love and lust, is in reality far less keen on committing crime in the name of leftist revolt than Freda, just as he is far keener on having sex with Freda than she is with him. On the one hand, by doing "its buttons up" and letting Freda down (S 104, 84) through the hostile weather and the Polish demonstrators causing a police blockade of the centre,



the city is merciful to him and saves him from having to abduct the chairman. On the other, it inadvertently throws him into a ridiculous short-lived romance with the zealous beauty who in a domineering manner uses his body for her own sexual pleasure while imagining a “real” hero from her favourite 1968 Prague Spring photograph, yet, which makes the surrogate Lix the father of her only child. Moreover, Alicja, one of the leaders of the Poles’ riot which obstructs Freda’s partisan schemes, later becomes the woman at Lix’s side and the mother of his two succeeding children.

Lix’s relationship with Alicja undergoes a progress from initial tenderness and mutuality to gradual emotional detachment, alienation and separation, which is also reflected in their places of living. As Alicja proudly refuses her father’s money, the newly married couple, full of youthful idealism and sense of independence, have to content themselves with a modest and ill-kept unbalconied low-ceiling attic flat situated in a very busy part of the town. This flat is still far from an ideal one, yet it corresponds with the rising curve of Lix’s personal and career prospects of a happy husband and aspiring actor, in love with his wife and his job: though hardly larger and cosier than his fourth-floor student apartment and with no river view either, it is closer to the centre, to “the grander embankment residences they’d aspired to” (S 120), and it also has a door onto the roof where they can relax and enjoy themselves in privacy, “[s]omewhere to be expansive and look out across the city” (S 120), a lookout bonus, metaphorically suggesting the broadening of Lix’s life horizons, incomparable with the two narrow window views in his old place. It is also where their first child is conceived, a few years earlier than they had intended, but at least out of a loving wedlock.

Some five years later, however, the situation is completely different: the confident and successful Alicja, a working mother and an active local politician, is no longer dismissive of the “tainted Polish cash” (S 157) and so the family moves in the “Beyond,” a new luxurious village-style extension of the suburbs on the east side of the city. For Lix, though also prospering professionally with his first Hollywood contract, the Beyond – a place without any spirit and very much unlike the home of his dreams – has ruined everything: not only is he profoundly unhappy there far away from his beloved theatre, friends and historic centre, but it also seems to have deepened their marital crises, making them two individuals living in divergent worlds of incompatible values and interests. And so, although they keep their little attic apartment as their “city centre pied-à-terre” (S 155), it is merely a feeble reminder of their better times as Lix uses it for sleepovers after late performances, and Alicja for meeting her lover. Yet, symptomatically, even the luxurious villa Lix detests becomes a *locus delicti* of his fertility when the burglary of their house wakes in the almost split couple a false momentary attraction which results in one final act of lovemaking, thanks to which the birth of their second child precedes their divorce.

Eventually, the middle-aged, celebrated actor Lix lives in the place of his dreams – a spacious apartment with a balcony with a direct river view “in the city’s ancient heart

of squares and stone, and narrow streets and balconies” (S 199). However, blessed as he counts himself as an actor and dweller, his personal life is far from happy for ever since his divorce more than seven years before, he has led a solitary and celibate life, which has filled him with self-doubt and timidity. It is as if his mediocre love life was the price to pay for his gorgeous place of living, and the chain of subsequent events only confirms this ironic whim of fortune: it is only when he reluctantly leaves the comfort of his flat that he meets and falls in love with his future spouse Mouetta, it is outside the flat that his last two children are begotten, and, perhaps most importantly, when Mouetta finds out she is pregnant, she quickly admits that now she has all she has longed for and her “husband’s feelings do not really matter anymore. His purpose has been served” (S 211), and it is not much of a promising outlook for a satisfactory married life for Lix, once again. And so, just like his shabby student room and the attic flat with the rooftop leisure zone, Lix’s balconied river-view apartment may mirror his professional success and his optimistically shaded state of mind of a person “capable of love” (S 13), yet it is also likely to witness how such promise goes up in smoke under the pressure of love’s complexity and capriciousness.

## 6. Experiencing the City’s Altered Forms

Like Grace’s other novels, *Six* assumes an experiential perspective concerning the rendered places/spaces, mainly when something unusual is happening in or with the city. In such cases, the narration echoes the two underlining principles of phenomenological geocriticism: first, how the depicted occasions, and their transformative impact on the cityscape in particular, affect the protagonist’s mind, and, second, how the cityscape reflects the upheavals of its inhabitants’ collective psyche. The two most elaborated upon events in this regard are the great flood of 1987 and the celebration of the numerically true new millennium. When the river overflows its banks into the streets and squares, almost all the citizens welcome this overnight violation of the fixed routines, enjoying “the city’s altered forms” (S 131) that, despite their humid discomfort, seem “better fun than Dry and Safe and Unremarkable” (S 132). For the weary and regulated inhabitants, the calamity, though more menacing with each day, is seen as an “unexpected wonder, too rare and beautiful to miss” (S 132), one which lures them into the flooded streets rather than forcing them to stay in the safety of their homes. In the absence of any realistic prospect of political easing, the flood, which so unsettles the otherwise unflinching authorities, represents for the city a unique opportunity for release to some extent comparable with “The Big Melt.”

On the fifth day, even Lix and Alicja hurry out of their apartment to enjoy this excitement and the spectacle of things going wrong. They walk down the streets full of people on an unplanned holiday, taking pleasure “in the drama of the streets with all the other addicts and devotees of the flood” (S 138), many of whom gleefully revelling in

watching the expensive and prominent parts of the city submerge. Lix soon realises that the flooding waters viewed from above from their rooftop sanctuary are more appealing and less threatening than in reality, where moving along the crowded streets and the high walkway, with their counter-flows of nervously shoving pedestrians and the swollen river only a few feet away, is much more risky and erratic. Yet, in spite of this tension and urgency, the atmosphere among those eagerly watching the scene from the footbridge is joyful, as if they have just found out that “the problems of the world were river-born and would be swept away and out of view” (S 138). Though not directly involved, Lix and Alicja become fascinated by the paradoxical festivity, as well as the sudden possibility to experience their hometown in its uncommon metamorphosis:

The pedestrian bridge was still busy, though. The walkway was a perfect gallery for the city’s *enfants du paradis* to observe the drama, feel the spray, even, watch the rare and disconcerting spectacle of traffic-free bridges. These were images of old. Pre-motor car. The walkway’s ironwork, which earlier had groaned almost silently from the burden of so many workers, now creaked and grumbled out loud as it shrugged itself back into shape. It had never carried such a weight before or hosted such a cheerful party of sightseers. (S 139)

Eventually, it becomes obvious that even the walkway will soon have to be closed, too, and the city will remain paralysed and sliced into two parts by the river. Yet, it is not until a small incident happens – a woman’s hat falls into the water – that the onlookers on the bridge leave their spot. It is as if the rapidity with which the hat disappears in the water and resurfaces fifty metres downstream brought the gapers back to senses and forced them to clear the most dangerous area.

Although the expected multitudes of foreigners do not appear to celebrate the mathematically correct new millennium in the Capital of Calendar Authenticity on New Year’s Eve 2000, the streets are full enough with locals eager to enjoy the fireworks and other forms of amusement originally prepared for tourists. Still, Lix is not much drawn into the streets, toying rather with the idea of spending the night on his large, enclosed balcony, watching the fireworks. However, it is only until Freda, accompanied by her cousin Mouetta, spitefully approaches him with their son George after his evening performance, that the circumstances start to get out of his control. And so, after Freda, George and Mouetta leave the theatre, the embarrassed Lix quickly reconsiders his plan for a lonely night and, instead, sets out to follow the trio as they are making their way through the busy Hives towards the river front so as to rectify the impression he made on both George and Mouetta.

Once again, the city is not on Lix’s side, being only twenty minutes before midnight and the crowds of people hurrying to the embankment to take the best places to relish the light and firework show, which is why he has to settle for the embankment steps

from which he can watch the three of them from afar. Yet, his disappointment does not last for long, as when the fireworks go off and the onlookers cheer up, he realises how comforting, exhilarating and liberating being a part of an anonymous city crowd can be under certain circumstances:

The first cascade of light exploded like a drum solo. [...] Everybody smiled at once. That's what we come to cities for. Even Lix was animated now and happy in a complicated way. Whatever his personal turmoil, the turmoil of the old town was for the moment more insistent and exuberant. Being there amongst the crowd was more cheering than any Best View from a private balcony. Nobody bothered him. Nobody seemed to recognize his muffled face. Nobody asked for signatures. If anybody shook his hand, and many did, it was just the greeting of another wine-fuelled celebrant who'd shake the devil's hand and not care less. (S 205-206)

He is thus fully experiencing the city's paradoxical potential for providing the feeling of ease and recuperation despite the absence of intimate attachment to place and spaciousness, as these are provisionally substituted by engaging, though illusory, amiability and togetherness. Yet, for the hopeful Lix, with his positive attitude to life, this fleeting break from his gloom suffices to lift his spirit and endow him with new stimulus to turn his eyes to the future, for which he is immediately rewarded by catching sight of Mouetta's smile and a sympathetic glimpse in her eyes over the heads of the fellow-celebrants.

Although the novel does not present any public *entre-deux* places in Prieto's sense of the term, it does feature two examples of Lix's personal in-between places, which reflect different phases of his marriage with Alicja, and which are unlike also because one occurs to him by means of natural extremity, while the other is of his own making. The first is their flat during the great flood, which makes the garret a temporary islet of their young love separated from the rest of the town by high water. The precious character of this unexpected isolation is underlined by the ironic observation that thanks to the historical centre being swallowed by the flood their dwelling has, at least for a while, the wished-for river view. Thus, for a few days, the flat with its rooftop view assumes a liminal character: inside and outside the cityscape and its transformations, a calm and timeless sanctuary within the city's historical tumults. Later, the escapades of his life make Lix establish a different kind of in-between refuge where he could hide from the constraints of his professional career as well as from his marital troubles, in the form of the Debit Bar, his ever reliable "home-from-home" (S 213). Since he is no habitual drinker, the bar is for him a place in which he can momentarily forget his worries. After Alicja forces him to move to Beyond, he decides to retreat to this private zone even more intensely by hiring what is known as the Hesitation Room, the "windowless private cellar beneath the Debit's public areas" (S 157), where he organises informal meals for his friends from

the theatrical world, a much-welcome escape from his disliked snobbish residence and deteriorating relationship with Alicja. The importance of the Debit Bar for Lix is one more time demonstrated at the end of the story when Mouetta wants to celebrate her pregnancy, planning to try a new, fashionable bistro. However, although he loves his wife deeply and feels no impending crisis in their marriage, he still instinctively steers her to his favourite bar, as if he felt the need to keep the family affairs on his home territory so as to retain more control over them for a change.

## 7. Love and the City: Conclusion

What all three of Crace's urban novels share is the construction of a meaningful cityscape through an incessant intersection of its public and private dimensions. They present a story of a city, its historical development and somewhat disturbing status quo along with the personal history and psychophysical experience of its individual dwellers. However, *Six* differs from *Arcadia* and *The Melody* by its absence of an explicit political agenda. Although the political situation of and in the city determines much of its story's action, it is not the author's major concern. While the other two novels offer outspoken criticism of commercial and consumer capitalism through the depiction of its harmful impacts on the city's public areas and, in consequence, on the well-being of its inhabitants, *Six* focuses on the interconnectedness of the city and the protagonist's personal life. Paramount examples of this interconnectedness are the various parallels between the city's spatial properties and the course of the protagonist's life, and the corresponding rendering of some of the story's crucial scenes. As a result, the bounded place – defined by its occupants' appropriation and emotional attachment – rather than the space has been the central focus of this paper. However, the space, in the form of the city as such and its spatial manifestations, is never absent from the analysis either, as they always condition and, in return, are conditioned by the protagonist's lived experience. The novel thus exemplifies Tuan's persuasion that in order to be harmonious, human existence needs a satisfactory reconciliation between the two momentums of spatial experience: the enclosed and the spacious, the given and the unrestrained, the secure and the unpredictable.

By outlining the socio-political development of the city for more than twenty years, the story points out the ironic discrepancy between the pop-cultural and commercial labels the city has been attributed by the media and tourist industry and its actual reality. Neither kisses, nor mathematical truth or light metaphorically capture the spirit of the place, but rather turn out to be ready-made simplifications whose purpose is to sell an alluring image of a city that, in fact, does not exist. All the political or historically momentous happenings in the city, no matter how minutely depicted, are meaningful chiefly in connection with the twists of Lix's love life, particularly with his productivity of conception: no matter the variety of outcomes of such events, the outcome of his intimacies is thus always the same. Therefore, his experience, as depicted in the novel, is restrained to what befalls him and

how he struggles to surmount the unpleasant and undesired incidents he is exposed to, but not so much to his capacity to take away some useful lesson from the suffered mishaps. This is also the reason why the city is so rarely “on his side” but seems to add its “share” to his misfortunes. His unintended conceptions thus should be taken rather symbolically as one but seven “deadly wounds” inflicted upon him for his obstinate incorrigibility.

Another interesting instance of Grace’s use of spatial poetics in the novel is the mapping narrative which explores the correlation between the trajectory of the protagonist’s personal life and his places of residence as they always, more or less directly, reflect and are affected by the ups and downs of his current existence and experience. And last but not least, like in *Arcadia* and *The Melody*, this close link between uncommon events and the characters’ emotions and states of mind allows Grace to employ an experiential approach to the rendering of such interconnectedness. However, unlike *Arcadia* and *The Melody*, as it does not deal with a forcible transformation of public space, *Six* does not feature any emerging and dynamic *entre-deux* places as Prieto defines them, but rather Lix’s two private in-between hideaways – his and Alicja’s first flat during the flood and his favourite bar – which manifest their transformative and transgressive potential only within his own personal life.

In spite of its solely urban setting and sensibility, *Six* is a novel in which the human element precedes other parameters of the cityscape. Unlike *Arcadia* and *The Melody*, which can be described as stories of a city through the fates of its selected inhabitants, *Six* tells a story of love through selected individuals on the background of the city they inhabit. It is a story of how the city draws those who seek love, just as it draws raptors in search of prey (S 214), in spite of such promise’s frailty and uncertainty. And in the end, symptomatically for Grace, the actual city is of little importance as the narration assumes a more general perspective. When referring to the eloquence of the City of a Million Lights photographs in *Geo* magazine, the narrator observes that “[t]hey tell of people going home. They tell of love and love-making, of children, marriages and lives. You think, But this could happen anywhere. It does” (S 220). It certainly does, but there are not that many contemporary novelists capable of combining the personal and the spatial, the experiential and the topographic, the private and the public, the individual and the collective so as to address the nuances of the universal human condition like Jim Grace.

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