Common knowledge automatically associates Canada with snowshoes, Newfoundland with fishing, Vermont with hills (in this case the attribute is etymologically contained in the name), and so on. It would in a sense be *ungrammatical* in this context to associate Vermont with ranches, or Texas with fishing or the woods, even though, objectively, there are certainly fishermen and woods in the real-world Texas. Ensuring its own intelligibility by copying the encyclopedia, Whitman's catalogue at the same time reinforces or corroborates the encyclopedia, reassuring us that our associations are correct, that the image we have of North American places corresponds to what is really to be found there.

Postmodernist fictions, by contrast, often strive to displace and rupture these automatic associations, parodying the encyclopedia and substituting for "encyclopedic" knowledge their own *ad hoc*, arbitrary, unsanctioned associations. Examples of such unsanctioned, skewed attribution may be found in Donald Barthelme's story "Up, Aloft in the Air" (from *Come Back, Dr Caligari*, 1964), where the cities of Ohio have been assigned attributes which, if not quite impossible, are certainly unlikely, anti-verisimilar: Cleveland is associated with dancing, Akron with transistor radios and "ill-designed love triangles," Cincinnati with "polo, canned peaches, *liaisons dangereuses*," and so on.[9] This skewing of attributions is a matter of degree. Thus, Barthelme's Ohio is unlikely, but Kenneth Patchen's in *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (1941) is a bizarre impossibility, an exotic land where as recently as 1924 cannibalism was practiced.[10] Falling in much the same category is Chad in Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa* (1974), a country to which Abish has managed to assign a beach, although the real-world Chad is landlocked; and Israel in Ronald Sukenick's *98.6* (1975), a tissue of deliberate misattributions:

> In Israel there are places where the jungle comes down to the sea and this is where I like to eat lunch. They have beach cabanas there you can have a long leisurely meal cooled by the breezes coming in from the Mediterranean as you watch the submarine excavation projects. Despite the jungle and the deserts inland Israel has perfect weather all year round it has to do with air currents generated over the Afar Triangle on the Red Sea. . . . Here in Israel we have no need of cars. . . . Automobiles have long been exiled from the cities and towns where transportation depends on various beasts of burden camels burros oxen. . . . We have an extensive monorail system and colorful barges make their way among the canals.[11]

In Israel, of course, there are *no* places where the jungle comes down to the sea, for there is no jungle, nor any monorails or barges or canals either; no more than there are roasting pits for the preparation of human flesh in Ohio, despite what Kenneth Patchen says.

In short, Sukenick's Israel, like Patchen's Ohio or Abish's Chad, has the same status as the Paraguay of Barthelme's story by that name (from *City Life*, 1970):

> This Paraguay is not the Paraguay that exists on our maps. It is not to be found on the continent, South America; it is not a political subdivision of that continent, with a population of 2,161,000 and a capital named Asunción.[12]

This Paraguay of Barthelme's is the *negation* of the Paraguay of the encyclopedia – in this case, of the actual encyclopedia, the place where facts of the kind Barthelme cites (only to negate them) are to be found. "This Paraguay," Barthelme continues, "exists elsewhere." Precisely; it exists in the zone.

Ohio, Oz, and other zones

The zone sometimes appears where we least expect it. In Ohio, for instance. In the literary imagination and the popular imagination alike, Ohio has long maintained, as they say, a low profile. Its "image" is one of colorlessness and poverty of associations. It is middle-American in every sense: middling in its landscapes and natural phenomena, culturally middling, sociologically middling – not, one would think, likely raw material for ontological improvisation. Yet, as we have seen, a number of postmodernist writers *have* chosen to improvise on the theme of Ohio: Patchen in *The Journal of Albion Moonlight*, Barthelme in "Up, Aloft in the Air," Davenport in "The Invention of Photography in Toledo." The zone of Ohio, it would appear, is a recurrent feature of postmodernist writing, a *topos* in both senses, geographical as well as rhetorical. But why Ohio in particular? And, more generally, why do a few favored geographical areas seem to recur as zones throughout postmodernist fiction?

The reasons are various. Behind each of the recurrent zones lies a different historical-cultural explanation for its place in the repertoire of postmodernist *topoi*. For example, in order to understand why Ohio, of all places, belongs to the postmodernist repertoire, we need to take into account the semiotics of American space in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For early nineteenth-century culture, and its imaginative writers in particular, America was organized into two adjacent worlds, the world of "civilization" and that of the "wilderness," separated by an ambiguous and liminal space, the "frontier" – a prototypical zone. This frontier zone fascinated American writers, not just those like Fenimore Cooper who located their narratives on the frontier itself, but also those who transposed the liminality and ambiguity of the frontier from geographical space into other spheres – Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, even Edgar Allan Poe. The characteristic form for all these writers was the romance, which the critic and literary historian Richard Chase has described as

> a kind of "border" fiction, whether the field of action is in the neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness, as in the adventure tales of Cooper and Simms, or whether, as in Hawthorne and later romancers, the field of action is conceived not so much as a place as a state of mind – the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle.[13]

The geographical frontier retreated westward ahead of advancing settlement throughout the nineteenth century. With the closing of the frontier, and the effective absorption of the wilderness space by civilization, American writers were forced to reconceptualize and imaginatively restructure their country. This process of reimagining American space has continued well into the twentieth century, for instance in texts like Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted

River" (from *In Our Time*, 1925), Faulkner's "The Bear" (from *Go Down, Moses*, 1942), Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), and Thomas McGuane's *Nobody's Angel* (1982). Such texts have sought to recover the frontier, sometimes nostalgically or elegiacally, sometimes in an ironic mode.

But there is another approach to the reconceptualization of American space, one undertaken earlier than these modernist examples, and on the margins of the literary system rather than at its center. Its *locus classicus* is L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), a book intended for children. The Land of Oz, as everyone must surely know, is a fantastic self-contained world, encompassing several dissimilar realms. Baum locates it somehow *within* the state of Kansas – an impossibility, since its land-area must surely exceed that of Kansas. In effect, Oz is the frontier zone, but a *displaced* frontier; no longer marking the extreme western limit of civilization, the zone now stands at its very center, the geographical middle of the continental United States. Baum has reacted to the closing of the frontier, and everything it stands for in American ideology, by *reopening* the frontier in Middle America.[14] This strategy of reimagining America as an *interior* frontier clearly struck a responsive chord in the popular imagination; witness the extraordinary mythological status of the Hollywood movie version of *The Wizard of Oz*, which both exploited and helped consolidate the status of Baum's original.

All this helps explain, I think, the function of Ohio in postmodernist writing. It has gained a place in the postmodernist repertoire not by virtue of being Ohio as such, but by virtue of being typically middle-American – like Baum's Kansas, which is its functional equivalent. The American zone is the "Zone of the Interior."[15] Its strangeness and liminality are foregrounded by its being located not on the edges of the continent, but at its center. It is the historical descendant of the frontier zone, transposed to the flat, middling (in every sense) American heartland.

It is this version of American space, the Oz version, so to speak, rather than the elegiac lost-frontier version, that recurs throughout postmodernist writing about America, for instance in Michel Butor's *Mobile* (1962), Ronald Sukenick's *Out* (1973), Raymond Federman's *Take It or Leave It* (1976), and Angela Carter's quasi-science-fiction picaresque novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Federman's American zone is, like the Manhattan of Spark's *Hothouse by the East River* (1973), a world under erasure. His narrative promises a classic transcontinental journey like those in, say, Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957); his hero's itinerary from East Coast to West is even plotted on a map; but none of the westward journey ever actually materializes. Preempted by an arbitrary and unforeseen turn of events, the promised journey slips from its ontological status of anticipated fact into the limbo of the merely hypothetical; it is canceled, erased out of existence. In Butor's *Mobile*, the American zone is shaped by *homonymy*; here geography is at the mercy of the play of the signifier. Butor's text leaps back and forth across the continent, radically disrupting geographic continuity, its displacements triggered by *identity of place-names*: we leap from Concord, California, to Concord, North Carolina, at the other extreme of the American continent, then to Concord, Georgia, then Concord, Florida, and so on. As in Davenport's "Invention of Photography in Toledo," similarity or identity at the level of the linguistic signifier has been

allowed to derange and remodel geographical space. Butor also uses the irregular spacing of typography on the pages of his text to represent or simulate geographical space in an oblique and distorted way. Sukenick in *Out* similarly constructs an analogy between page-space and geographical space, but his analogy is more straightforwardly iconic, less oblique than Butor's. As Sukenick's protagonist moves westward across the American continent, the pages of the text become increasingly blank, until the moment of his embarkation upon the Pacific Ocean, when the text literally vanishes into the void of the empty page. Finally, Angela Carter has constructed what may be the paradigmatic representation of America as the zone. The hero/heroine of *The Passion of New Eve* travels from east to west across a future America devolved into warring city-states, each zone-city embodying a different "possible order." Approaching the end of this journey, Carter's protagonist reflects that since leaving New York she/he has

> lived in systems which operated within a self-perpetuating reality; a series of enormous solipsisms, a tribute to the existential freedom of the land of free enterprise.[16]

"A series of enormous solipsisms": it could be a characterization of Calvino's Empire of the Great Khan, or Pynchon's zone – or, indeed, of the Land of Oz itself, the "innocent" precursor of postmodernist heterotopian America.

Other recurrent postmodernist zones have different historical roots. Take, for example, the postmodernist use of Latin-American space. We have already seen examples from Barthelme ("Paraguay") and Cortázar ("The Other Heaven"), and this does not even begin to take into account the other major writers of the so-called "boom" in South American writing, including García Márquez, Fuentes, and Alejo Carpentier, among others. Clearly, Latin America constitutes another postmodernist *topos*, a favored zone. Just as clearly, however, the historical conditions of Latin-American postmodernism differ radically from those in North America. The frontier experience has not left nearly as deep a mark on the conceptualization of Latin-American space as it did in North America; nor has Latin America yet joined the ontological landscape of advanced industrial society (described in the preceding chapter) as fully as the United States has. We must look elsewhere for the formative conditions of the Latin-American zone.

These can be found, I think, in two mechanisms which converge upon the reinvention of Latin America as a heterotopia. The first mechanism involves the conceptualization of Latin America as *opposite* to the European world (including Anglo-America), Europe's other, its alien double. This dualism, Europe vs Latin America, runs right through Latin-American culture itself, of course; indeed, it even runs through the personal experience of many of the Latin-American "boom" writers, a number of whom – including Cortázar, García Márquez, Fuentes – are or have been expatriates from their native lands. The theme of dualism is explicit in Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del metodo* (*Reasons of State*, 1974), in which a Latin-American dictator, connoisseur of European (especially Parisian) culture, shuttles back and forth between the two continents. Elsewhere, however, the Europe/Latin America dualism appears at a deeper level than that of theme. It constitutes the