

**THE ARCHITECTURAL VOID:
Space as Transgression in Postmodern
Short Fiction of the Fantastic (1974-
2010)**

A thesis submitted for the award of

Philosophiae Doctor

Presented to

Dublin City University
Academic Year 2013

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DECLARATION

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*This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who provided its foundations from
beginning to end.*

ABSTRACT

THE ARCHITECTURAL VOID: SPACE AS TRANSGRESSION IN POSTMODERN SHORT FICTION OF THE FANTASTIC (1974-2010)

Patricia García

This doctoral thesis looks at the relationship between narrative space and Postmodern manifestations of the fantastic short story. The Fantastic is viewed here as distinct from other non-mimetic forms such as fantasy or science fiction, and understood as an incursion of an impossible element within a realistic frame shared by narrator and reader.

The importance of narrative space in the construction of textual verisimilitude has been recurrently emphasised, especially after the so-called Spatial Turn in literary studies. However, whereas this relation between space and mimetic effect has received considerable scholarly attention, the relation between space and fantastic effect has to date not been appropriately explored, neither within the emerging field of Geocriticism nor in theoretical and thematic studies on the Fantastic. This thesis fills the existing gap, through the exploration of how narrative space is employed to disrupt the realistic effect of the literary text. The fantastic transgression becomes a phenomenon arising from narrative space.

The frequently asked question of ‘Where does the supernatural take place?’ is substituted by those of ‘What fantastic event does space provoke? How is it rhetorically constructed? And what are its interpretations?’ To answer these questions and illustrate that this phenomenon is transnational, this study necessarily needs a comparative angle including texts from diverse socio-cultural traditions. Although textual precedents can be found, a central proposition here is that the unprecedented presence of this phenomenon is unique to the Postmodern Fantastic. Fourteen sample short stories written between 1974 and 2010 are presented as archetypical of this phenomenon and have been analysed under the light of literary theory, while also drawing from spatial theories developed in fields such as anthropology, sociology, physics and architecture.

This selected corpus serves as a model for systematising literary space as transgression, structured in four chapters: ‘body’, ‘boundary’, ‘hierarchy’ and ‘world’. Paralleling narrative with an architectural piece, these four suggested categories are four basic spatial ‘steps’ in the architectural configuration of any literary work. They are four spatial principles of any realistic text, which at the same time derive from the four fundamental phenomenological and philosophical aspects of human spatiality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for making this project possible. First of all, my kindest acknowledgements go to both my supervisors Jean-Philippe Imbert and David Roas for their patience and generosity all this time. They have shown to me that academic research can always be taken with a sense of humor. Their energy on this project has been a fundamental referent for me; without their professional and personal support, this thesis would certainly have been a much less creative and enriching experience.

I would also like to thank my home institution, Dublin City University, in particular the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, and also the Irish Research Council for trusting this project with funding.

I am also very grateful to all those authors with whom I have been in contact throughout these years, who showed their enthusiasm and even provided me with their original works by email and post. Among them are Jean-Paul Beaumier, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Ángel Olgoso and Claude-Emmanuelle Yance. I appreciate the help of the publishing house L'Instant Môme for putting me in contact with some of their published authors. Furthermore, I would like to thank Jacques Finné (Universität Zürich) and Jean Marigny (Université de Grenoble), Norbert Spehner (editor of *Marginalia*), and Frederick Tygstrup (University of Copenhagen) for their helpful feedback regarding my subject of research.

I am immensely grateful to all those friends who suggested critical readings and literary texts and encouraged philosophical debates. Special thanks go to Adrián for introducing me to the world of quantum physics and for his ability to always draw bridges across disciplines; to José and to Azra for being a model reader of my work, and to Basia and María for making research a much less lonely activity. I also very much appreciate the support of all those friends and family who provided me with a change of scenery, generously offering me their houses in different countries during times of study and writing. And I remember with gratitude all those friends who provided me with nothing but constant support throughout this research.

Finally, my most special and warmest thanks go to my parents for their invaluable practical help as personal secretaries every time I was in need of quotations, books or documents (which was very often), and most importantly, for not expecting anything from this research other than it making me happy.

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“Le nid de l’homme, le monde de l’homme, n’est jamais fini. Et l’imagination nous aide à le continuer.”

[“Mankind’s nest, like his world, is never finished. And imagination helps us to continue it.”]

(Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace*)

“En el palacio que imperfectamente exploré, la arquitectura carecía de fin. Abundaban el corredor sin salida, la alta ventana inalcanzable, la aparatosa puerta que daba a una celda o a un pozo, las increíbles escaleras inversas, con los peldaños y balaustrada hacia abajo.”

[“In the palace that I imperfectly explored, the architecture had no purpose. There were corridors that led nowhere, unreachably high windows, grandly dramatic doors that opened onto monklike cells or empty shafts, incredible upside-down staircases with upside-down treads and balustrades.”]

(Jorge Luis Borges, “El inmortal”)

INTRODUCTION

Jorge Luis Borges once remarked that reality would be coherent only if it had a centre, a map, a structure (interview with Alifano 1983, in Mualem 2012:23). This is why even the canonical Borgesian spatial form, the labyrinth – a construction made to confuse man, according to him – is still an image of hope. As he rendered it, as long as it had ‘an architecture’, the real was not chaos. As long as reality was constructed (or ‘constructible’), it was manageable by the human.

This vision of reality as being constructed by the subjects who inhabit it – far from the Positivistic real as objective, immutable and scientifically decipherable – sums up the relativist Postmodern *Zeitgeist* to which Borges’ fictions and essays have been doubtless precursors. But what is most interesting is that this notion of a constructed real is not so recent after all: in fact, it can be traced back to the Greek root of the word ‘architect’ (*arkhitekton*). From the Greek *arkhe* (“the beginning” or “origin”) and *arkhon* (“the ruler”), and *tektion* (“builder”, “creator of artifice”), this term suggests how the origin was transformed by the architect into a defined, and thus a habitable, space for the human being. By setting boundaries to the world, the architect constructed a space for man to dwell in. The architect in Western civilisation had the power and skill (*tektion*) of manipulating the origin (*arché*) into ‘liveable’ space. And what is remarkable from this etymology is that the action of ‘building’ is not only understood as giving material shape to physical space but also as ‘raising’ reality from the origin.

Apart from the foundational idea of reality as a human construction, this etymology asserts the importance of spatiality in human experience. Space – in particular the articulation of space – is presented as a way for the human being to organise the world around him. And at the same time, this also suggests that category of space is a construction. This is a radical departure from the predominating tradition in Western culture for centuries, in which space is regarded as a simple container where the human being dwells; a given,

objective and measurable entity, uniquely perceptible in its mathematical dimensions. Space, according to this etymological reading of the word ‘architect’ (and architecture), is constructed by the human for the human.

The present study, anchored on a parallel between architecture and literature as arts of building an artificial reality, is born from both an observation and a hypothesis. The observation is that the literary Fantastic – understood here as the incursion of an impossible element within a realistic frame shared by narrator and reader – is found not only in haunted houses, remote castles and further Gothic enclaves of the late 18th and early 19th century; neither is it satisfied with migrating into the city as occurred at the turn of the 19th century with the acceleration of Modernity, nor restricted to appearing in our contemporary spaces, like metro stations or airports. There is a modality of the Fantastic which, if envisaged in a few short stories of the 19th century such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” (E.A. Poe 1839), and greatly influenced by the metaphysical Fantastic of Borges and the everyday Fantastic of Cortázar, is consolidated within the corpus of the last decades. In the texts belonging to such modality, physical space does not provide the frame for the Fantastic to appear: space *is* the Fantastic. Holes which make invisible who finds them, structures which entrap and devour the individual, elastic constructions with fluctuating distances between each other, intermittent buildings which disappear and reappear as they please, tunnels that compress distances, compartments which invert the logical order of the big in the small, spaces that suddenly multiply... are some of the examples of this textual phenomenon. In this modality, the impossible element, instead of taking place *in* space, is an event *of* space, bound to some architectural element or to the (normal, logical) physical laws governing this dimension.

On the other hand, the hypothesis rather stems from a philosophical preoccupation. This one concerns the definition of physical space and its relation to fictional and factual reality in the Postmodern context which this research examines. I will first dedicate some paragraphs to outlining the relevant aspects of this context in order to illustrate how the hypothesis came

to be formulated.

The ‘Spatial Turn’ in Postmodernity

In the past decades a large sum of literary scholars (e.g. McHale 1987; Ryan 1991; Álvarez Méndez 2002; Ainsa 2006; Westphal 2007 [2011a]) have demonstrated how the reconfiguration in our way of understanding space in the late 20th century has not only accentuated the significance of narrative space within the literary text, it has also prompted a reconfiguration of the category of the real, which inevitably affects its counterpart – the fictional. This has led to a form of literature which bears the label of ‘the Postmodern’.

The term ‘Postmodernism’ or ‘Postmodernity’ (the first one leaning towards an aesthetic movement; the second one, rather focused on the historical aspect, a distinction avoided in this thesis since both aspects are not easily separable) has been a polemical category in literary and cultural theories. Whereas it is not my intention to contribute to this debate, it may be useful to determine what is understood under this label in this research, and then to apply it to the more constricted and relevant frame of the Postmodern Fantastic. Following McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Postmodernism is understood here as the shift of dominant, from the epistemological concern shaping Modernism (how can knowledge be attained?) towards a characteristic ontological one (What is ‘real’? What is not ‘real’? What is a world? How does a world come into being?). This change of the dominant is particularly present within cultural and aesthetic productions of the late sixties till present date. This preoccupation with the nature of reality, leading to an examination of the relation between reality and the fictional text, also forms the foundation of the Postmodern Fantastic.

Positivist claims of an objective reality that is external to the individual can barely hold up today, given that even scientific research has now been proven to be vulnerable to the subject performing it. The major breakthrough originated with Einstein’s Theory of Relativity (1905 and 1915). He

demonstrated that time and space were inextricably bound up with each other, redefining the structure of physical reality into a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Apart from time, space was also affected by mass, in particular by the presence of high density mass, which caused it to wrap. This was the end of the Newtonian certainty of time and space being absolute, uniform categories, independent from the physical contents of the universe. This perspective, which dominated the scientific scene for over 300 years, yielded to the relativist model. Even more revealing, from a philosophical point of view, were the later discoveries of quantum mechanics, of which Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy (1925) is of particular importance. According to this principle, at subatomic level, the behaviour of the object an observer is monitoring is necessarily impacted by the presence of this observer. As Heisenberg himself recognised, this was a definite shift away from Positivistic idealism of the 19th century. Science was forced to recognise its own limitations and paradoxes. In consequence, the idea of an attainable, absolute model of knowledge vanished in favour of a view of the real as inevitably deriving from how the subjects in it perceive it. Once more, as in the etymological figure of the architect, the subject recuperated the virtue and responsibility of being the artifice of his own reality.

But relativism was to propagate beyond the realm of physics. Einstein's Nobel Prize formula concerning the equivalence mass-energy was a crucial step towards the atomic and digital age. In just a few decades, its repercussions infiltrated everyday life in the form of a technological revolution that deeply affected our conceptions of distance and location. This technological revolution has made it possible today to transmit large amounts of information across long distances in a matter of seconds through microchips, lasers and other such devices. Parallel to this, phenomena of wide reaching impact like the atomic bomb accelerated a global consciousness and prompted a redefinition of human geography. The Second World War created large volumes of immigration across geopolitical borders; the Cold War announced a quick succession of states and further geopolitical restructuring, boosted by

the fall of the Iron Curtain and the enlargement of the EU. In the socio-urban domain, the reconstruction of the post-war urban landscape originated a new model of contemporary city. In the historical one, de-colonisation advocated for the end of a single centre of reference in favour of a multiplicity of points of view. All these events have increasingly rendered evident that the notions of identity and culture cannot be ascribed to a single stable territory. Geography is not only physical place where the human being is located; it is also his historical, sociological and political space.

If the advances in physics and a series of historical confluences have reconfigured our vision and experience of space, it has also given rise to an unprecedented interest in this dimension within academic discourses; the so-called Spatial Turn in Social and Human Sciences sought reassertion of space balancing the critical focus on history and time. The once reassuringly neutral category of space is by no means ‘naturally given’. A wide variety of scholars have highlighted the importance of spatiality as a dimension of the human world. Space, an intimate (Bachelard 1958), social (Lefebvre 1974, De Certeau 1980, Augé 1992), political (Foucault 1967), urban (Soja 1989), architectural (Virilio 1991), sexual (Massey 1994), cultural (Jameson 1990) and economic (Harvey 1990) category, has become an important key to understand human history and its artistic products. It is now widely accepted that the spatial is one of the crucial elements in any foundation of knowledge – and it has been this social phenomenon that paved the way to the Spatial Turn in narrative.

The relatively recent interest on the spatial dimension in literary theory breaks from a whole tradition that prioritised time over space. This primacy of the temporal was to a large extent due to a generic distinction between spatial and temporal arts, which positioned literature within the temporal ones. From this angle, the literary text is a succession of words and sounds (temporal), while sculpture and painting show a collection of objects juxtaposed in space and apprehended simultaneously. Space in narratives often seemed to have no further functions than to supply a general background. One of the pioneers to oppose this approach to space was Joseph Frank in his essay “Spatial Form”

(1945), where he discussed various Modernist works whose technique of juxtaposing simultaneous events created what he termed “spatial forms” (1945). In 1955 Maurice Blanchot offered his philosophy of spatiality of the literary text in *L’Espace littéraire*. Later on, Mikhail Bakhtin appropriated Einstein’s time-space to create the concept of the “chronotope” (1937), an element that combines spatial and temporal clusters indicating the structure and evolution of a literary genre. In the field of traditional narratology, various essays (Hamon 1972, Zoran 1984, Ronen 1986) emphasised that the function of spatial descriptions was an aspect deserving study independent of time rather than subordinated to it. This was followed by numerous studies (e.g. Moretti’s literary cartographies 1998, 2005; Ryan’s cognitive approach to narrative 1991, 1993) which have emphatically asserted that the spatial dimension is as important as the temporal one in the literary text.

The Spatial Turn in Comparative Literature studies crystallised with the emergence of Geocriticism, a method which prioritises the representation of literary spaces and their interrelation with referential reality. Its founder, Bertrand Westphal, has argued how space becomes a fascinating subject of analysis especially within the Postmodern context, when the mimetic crisis renders the relation between referential and fictional space more complex than ever. This pioneer study, however, omits how this might be traceable within the Postmodern forms of the Fantastic.

The Postmodern Fantastic as a Phenomenon of Space

A large volume of texts which nurture from this ontological constant characterising the Postmodern has given rise to a specific form of the Fantastic which has been labelled as Postmodern Fantastic. While its fathers would already be Borges, followed by Cortázar, it consolidates across different literary traditions during the late seventies. What gives coherence to the texts under this category is the following: whereas the impossible element still operates in a presumed ‘reality’, shared by both narrator and reader, this reality

is revealed as chronically unstable and weak; a construction marked by codes of routine and social conventions. If this ‘ontological weakening’ may seem to be a mere abstraction, in the fantastic text this materialises in the form of specific, recurrent traits. Without being exhaustive (since the next chapters are dedicated to exploring this question), how the Fantastic event is received by the protagonists can be mentioned as a mode of example. He or she barely shows any surprise or consternation, in sharp contrast with the terrified characters found in Poe’s or Maupassant’s Fantastic. In the Postmodern Fantastic, more often than not, the intratextual receptor takes the impossible in a natural manner, as one of the many oddities of this eccentric world he lives in.

It is important to emphasise that the Postmodern Fantastic, just as the Postmodern, is not a radical departure from the tradition founded by the 18th and 19th century masters. Since it does not seem to reflect this continuity, I am inclined to avoid the term ‘neofantastic’ (Alazraki 1983), now frequently found in the academic scene. As the analytical chapters will show, the Postmodern Fantastic not only incorporates new motifs deriving from the cultural and literary contexts; it also integrates traditional motifs but with a distinct Postmodern angle.

Apart from the banalisation of the fantastic event, a typically Postmodern literary technique also found in the Fantastic is that of metafiction. This can be explained in relation with the Linguistic Turn, which distrusted the ability of language to refer to reality. Once again, a fundamental precursor of this model of the Fantastic are Borges’ fictions, for example for his use of intertextuality to question the notion of originality, of ‘truth’ and of ‘reality’, a paradigmatic example being “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” (1961).

The critical attention which the Linguistic Turn obtained from scholars of the Fantastic and the lack of attention which the Spatial Turn received led me to the following hypothesis:

Just as it has been demonstrated that the Linguistic Turn profoundly affected the Fantastic in terms of themes, motifs and plot structures (“the

Fantastic of Language”, Erdal Jordan 1998; Campra 2001; Casas 2010; Rodríguez 2010), could not the same be attributed to the Spatial Turn? Would space – demonstrated to be a fundamental category in human experience of reality, as well as a tool to convey the impression of textual realism – not be a vehicle to reflect this turn in an aesthetic form? And if so, how?

These questions remained to be examined within the critical corpus of the Fantastic and, in conjunction with the observation described above, led to the formulation of the present thesis:

Within the last decades there has been an unprecedented rise of short stories in which the impossible element is bound to space: space not as scene of actions but as the impossible element performing the fantastic transgression within the storyworld. Without a doubt, this phenomenon has textual precedents. However, it is only from the late seventies onwards that its presence has been observed within a multitude of cultural and literary traditions. Furthermore, it is in this Postmodern context, when the dimension of space has been re-evaluated from a socio-historical, scientific, philosophical and literary angle, where this phenomenon is most in need of investigation.

What this study offers is a systematisation of this phenomenon which, in an analogy with the Fantastic as a phenomenon of language (“the Fantastic of Language”), I call ‘the Fantastic of Space’. It refers to a form of fantastic transgression which does not take place in space but which is related to space itself. Therefore, the frequently asked question of “Where does the supernatural take place?” is here substituted by those of “What fantastic event does space provoke? How is it rhetorically constructed? What are its interpretations?”

Selection of Corpus and Structure

To explore these questions, a vast corpus of literary texts of the Fantastic was initially examined. This included short fiction and novels that embraced a range of countries and languages but followed a common denominator: in all

of them narrative space disrupted the realistic effect of the literary text. This led to a selection of fourteen sample short stories written between 1974 and 2010 which are presented as archetypical of the four thematic lines developed here.

A fundamental step in deciding on the methodology was the realisation that the phenomenon of spatial transgression relegated cultural markers of each literary tradition to a secondary position. Paradoxically, from the point of view of the Fantastic of Space, it was of little importance whether a text belonged to the French, Spanish, Peruvian or Belgium Fantastic, as many texts showed thematic and structural parallels beyond their national origin. This demonstrated a shift from the interest in 'place' (understood as socio-cultural location) towards a preoccupation with 'space' (understood as a global physical dimension). This contrasted, however, with the very few studies dedicated to the Fantastic from a comparative angle and working across national borders. The re-emergence or consolidation of the Fantastic during the eighties in the literary traditions incorporated in this research is now an accepted fact in criticism of the Fantastic. But the large amount of literary publications of uneven quality in the past decades perhaps discouraged scholars to embrace a more diverse corpus focused on a literary phenomenon and not limited by geographical borders.

To illustrate this transnational phenomenon, this study necessarily needed a comparative angle that would include texts from diverse socio-cultural traditions. These embraced both the foundational ones of the traditional Fantastic, such as the French and British, as well as those of the more modern variety as seen in the Quebecois and Spanish schools. In this manner, national divergences are not prioritised in order to point out the thematic convergences of this phenomenon located within the specific frame of the Postmodern Fantastic.

While the issue of geographical space has been overcome, the limited extension of the selected corpus can be explained in accordance with the tradition of the Fantastic. The corpus was restricted to short fiction since a

short frame seems to be the most appropriate vehicle for the Fantastic. First, it has to be borne in mind that in the origins of the Fantastic, the physical medium very frequently conditioned the content. Many of the founders of the Fantastic in the 19th century started writing their fictions as newspapers columns, where brevity was not only a virtue but also a requirement. Second, based on condensation, rupture and unity of effect, the frame of the short story is perfect for the narratives of the Fantastic (see Carpentier 2007). This is a significant difference from other forms of the supernatural; in particular fantasy and science fiction, which frequently take the form of novels, sagas, and series of volumes. In contrast with the always realistic setting of the Fantastic, these need extension to build the illusion of an ontological and logical storyworld alien to the world the reader knows (e.g. the world of hobbits in Middle-Earth [*Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien 1955], the lands of Earthsea as in Ursula K. Le Guin's sagas 1964-2001, and the mythical continent of Westeros in *The Game of Thrones* [Martin 1996]).

As regards to the structure of this study, the first chapter is of a theoretical nature. In it, the field of the Fantastic is defined in further detail and presence of the issue of narrative space in critical studies of the Fantastic is examined. This is followed by a methodological model of textual analysis, based on existing studies on literary spaces (notably Natalia Álvarez Méndez 2002 and Bertrand Westphal 2007 [2011a]) and adapted to the study of the fantastic transgression. This methodology conceives literary space as an interdisciplinary sign, encompassing the situational, syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, and always nurturing from (and nurturing to) the extratextual context. Before proceeding to textual analysis, the chapter closes with a conceptual distinction between what could be called 'the Fantastic of Place' (where the impossible happens in space) and 'the Fantastic of Space' (where the impossible element is spatial). This last concept is the backbone of the next four analytical chapters.

Following the metaphor of reality as 'an architecture', fictional reality is conceived here as an architectural object. In this 'architext' (expropriating

Genette's play on words, 1979), the author is the one who founds a reality and erects a world with rhetorical tools, and the reader, the one who recreates this world in the act of reading. As established, in the Fantastic this world follows the postulates of realism – the space built by the author has to be identified by the reader as similar to his extratextual reality. Only then, in a realistic frame, can the fantastic transgression take place (see Chapter 1, section 1).

The four suggested categories are four basic spatial 'steps' in the architectural configuration of the literary work. These are four spatial principles of any realistic text, which at the same time derive from phenomenological, philosophical and architectural studies of human space.

To start with, the writer – like the *arkhitekton* – creates a space for the characters and other elements to be lodged. Each of them occupies a position, a place where every material object of this storyworld is. The dimension of space is inextricably related to that of body and subject for the very simple reason that subjects need the physical space to be in: transferred into the fictional world – characters need narrative space to exist. Therefore, Chapter II (*BODY: (not) Being in Space*) is dedicated to exploring the relation between body and space, since it is the body the referential axis through which the subject can set distances between himself and his surroundings. This principle is central to the phenomenology of experience by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), which inspired a whole current of architectural thought. Adding to this the spatial philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1951), Chapter II combines the notion of physical position – in the textual world, emplacement of the character's body – with its existential dimension. To analyse how this relation is transgressed, I refer to Frederic Jameson's (1991) and Anthony Vidler's (1991) analysis on Postmodern architectural space as a weakening of the corporeal and existential experience. The resulting textual transgressions of bodies in space are therefore 'dis-locations', which lead to diverse modalities of subjects who are forced to redefine themselves in relation to their unusual – Fantastic – position in space.

Second, after creating a dimension for characters to be, the architect-

writer will also need to erect ‘paper monuments’ as Hamon describes them in his work on literature and architecture (1992:8). To differentiate, partition and distribute these elements around, a system of defining spatial frames is set, thus the notion of ‘boundary’ is a fundamental referential element in constructing an articulated, realistic environment. As anthropology of space reminds us, the *limes* was one of the first principles through which primitive civilisations identified their space as their world (see Bollnow 1963). And so the experience of the real cannot escape the notion of ‘boundary’. Chapter III (*BOUNDARY: Liquid Constructions*) is dedicated to analysing the various ways in which physical boundaries that define space between objects and buildings are altered. In the context of Postmodernity, this phenomenon ties in with what the architects Paul Virilio (1991) and Bernard Tschumi (1996) refer to as the ‘liquefaction’ of the Postmodern built environment. Several analogies will be noted between their notion of architectural ‘liquefaction’ and the examined textual transgressions of the spatial boundary.

Third, the elements in this textual world also need to be distributed into hierarchical levels. If the principle of hierarchy in architecture defines interlocking components, also in the literary text the writer’s architectural skills involve establishing how the different elements relate to each other as container and contained, part and whole. This refers to organising the spaces in that storyworld as, for example, an object into a room; a room into a house; a house on a street, etc. The disruption of this apparently simple hierarchical logic is the subject of Chapter IV (*HIERARCHY: Spaces Inside-Out*). As they have been widely analysed in Postmodern literary criticism, the strategies of metalepsis and metafiction (disruption of fictional levels) are left aside here to focus on how the transgressions of architectural hierarchies, including the interplay between referent and replica, bring the notion of referentiality to the fore.

Lastly, the space the architect-writer has configured encompasses a set of rules establishing how its components relate to each other. In its fullest sense, this space is a textual world which their characters conceive as their

reality. Drawing critically from Possible World Theory (Eco 1984; Pavel 1986; Ryan 1991; Doležel 1998), Chapter V (*WORLD: Ontological Plurality in the Postmodern Fantastic*) is centered on the transgression of the scheme of one single, referential ‘world’, characteristic to any realistic text. It is in this chapter where the ontological shift of the Postmodern culminates in the fantastic text.

Since there is no existing scholarship on space as fantastic transgression, the encountered challenge was to avoid lists of isolated spatial metaphors and recurrent settings within the Postmodern Fantastic. Instead, this structure was an exercise of abstraction to determine forms in which realism (and reality) and fictional space are co-dependant. In this way, the inverted task could be carried out: determining how realism was transgressed through space. As a result, I believe these four suggested themes do not only affect large numbers of narratives – thus their applicability is extensive – but, more importantly, they also embrace and provide a structure for derivative transgressions such as physical disappearance in space or of spaces, animations of buildings, or alterations of distances, volumes, and dimensions.

It has to be acknowledged that these four categories are neither mutually exclusive, nor do they present a complete and finalised model for the topic at stake. This is based on two aspects: first, by being distinct and yet complementary, these four themes provide coherence and multiple points of connection. Second, to claim that this structure covers the topic entirely would be a philosophical imposture. It would be misleading to pretend to resolve the complex nature of human space and its relation with textual models of reality in a limited number of categories. Nevertheless, conscious of these limitations, the present study wants to draw a comprehensive systematisation on the relevance of literary space to construct and thus to transgress narrative realism. In so doing, my primordial aim is to demonstrate that the dimension of space can operate as a fundamental component of the fantastic transgression in the text.

Finally, if architecture in the etymological sense is a foundation, a

construction of reality, 'the Architectural Void' seemed an appropriate metaphor for the phenomenon that this thesis aims at systematising. The dimension of space here does not provide reference, structure or orientation. On the contrary, space becomes a-referential, a-structural, disorienting. It weakens the impression of a consistent reality. Therefore, by transgressing the constructed realism within the text, all the examined spatial transgressions have one aspect in common: they attempt to unmask the frail foundations of the so-called reality, which man, precarious architect of his world, has set.

CHAPTER I

TOWARDS A THEORISATION OF THE FANTASTIC TRANSGRESSION AS A PHENOMENON OF SPACE

1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SPACE AND THE FANTASTIC

1.1. Delimiting the Fantastic

The Fantastic (here capitalised as a noun and not capitalised as an adjective) is a much-disputed term and, due to the lack of consensus over what it implies, any study dealing with this literary form necessarily needs to devote some attention to its diverse definitions. It is used both loosely and restrictively; in literary criticism as well as in popular culture it has acquired a number of connotations in relation to literary texts with supernatural elements. From the large list of studies seeking to define the Fantastic, two lines can be distinguished: one employs it as a *hypernym* of the various narratives with a supernatural element, while in the other it features as a *hyponym* of the supernatural. Therefore, this second one claims a more restrictive definition distinct from other narratives in which the supernatural appears.

This research is anchored to the conviction that not every narrative form in which a supernatural creature appears or supernatural event takes place is constructed in the same way. And, most importantly, not every literary text seeks to provoke the same effect during the reading process. As a consequence, in the present study 'the Fantastic' designates a narrative form that differs from other neighbouring ones such as fantasy, the Gothic, the marvellous and science fiction. Since my approach to the Fantastic has been extensively theorised, a brief summary of the most relevant theoretical perspectives will suffice to delimit the field of this research.

1.1.1. Fantastic as an Umbrella Term

A large sum of scholars, many of them within the North American academic and literary traditions, does not regard the Fantastic as a specific narrative form distinct from other literary manifestations of the supernatural. Instead, this term is often employed interchangeably with that of 'fantasy' to

refer to texts that “deviate from [that which is considered] consensus reality” (Hume 1984:21). From this perspective, fantastic literature is set in contrast with realistic or ‘mimetic’ literature, and embraces a variety of forms including fantasy, horror, the Gothic, fables, the marvellous, science-fiction, fairy-tales and folktales, and myths.¹

Representative of this view are the studies by Rabkin (1977; 1979), Hume (1984), Cornwell (1990), Attebery (1992) and Armit (1996).² This is also the perspective adopted in many studies on narrative space that mention the Fantastic (e.g. Doležel 1998; Álvarez Méndez 2002; Ryan 2006; Westphal 2007 [2011a]; see section 2 in this chapter).

While it may be of interest when constructing a theory of the Fantastic based on its psychoanalytical implications, for example, this approach to the Fantastic as an umbrella term for the supernatural presents various problems. First, if the presence of the supernatural is enough to define the Fantastic – the supernatural being a synonym for the Fantastic – it embraces a large corpus of work that bear so little in common at the level of structures, themes, and effect such as *The Odyssey* (Homer ca. end of 8th century BC), *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare 1603), Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, *Dracula* (Bram Stoker) or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez). This aspect was already remarked on by Todorov, who argued for a more precise understanding of the Fantastic:

We cannot conceive a genre which would regroup all works in which the supernatural intervenes and which would thereby have to accommodate Homer as well as Shakespeare, Cervantes as well as Goethe. The supernatural does not characterise works closely enough, its extension is much too great. (1975:34)

¹ The body that best represents this approach is the *International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts* (IAFA), which organises annual academic conferences in the United States. Its program is to a very large extent focused on Anglo-Saxon literatures, and mainly encompasses themes related to the study of fantasy and science fiction. The main outcomes can be found in the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*.

² While Rabkin points at the need for a more specific definition, his theorisation still remains rather diffuse, as the following excerpts show: “Talking plants -and (Komodo) dragons for that matter- are not inherently fantastic; they become so when seen from a certain perspective [...]. One of the key distinguishing marks of the [F]antastic is that the perspectives enforced by the ground rules of the narrative world must be diametrically contradicted” (1979:4-8).

Second, defining ‘fantastic’ as that which departs from realistic conventions necessarily points at the notion of *mimesis*. However, the opposition between realist/non-realist, or mimetic/non-mimetic, is not sufficient to characterise different forms of literature. This research is based on the assumption of a realist ontology, and also on a distinction between the actual and the fictional. All fiction could be regarded as mimetic; this does not imply that a literary text is a faithful imitation of the factual world, but rather that a literary world is never completely disengaged from the extratextual world (thus it is never non-mimetic). Even the fantasy worlds of *Lord of the Rings* (J.R. Tolkien 1949) are mimetic in the sense in that they derive from the author’s and reader’s factual world. At the same time, every literary text could be regarded as ‘non-mimetic’ in the sense that it is always imaginary: no matter how loyal it is to the extratextual referent, even realistic texts are a fictional invention. It is, as Doležel puts it, “a bidirectional exchange, [with a textual world] with ‘material’ drawn from actuality, [while] in the opposite direction, fictional constructs deeply influence our imaging and understanding of reality” (2008:prologue,x). Therefore, the opposition mimetic/non-mimetic is not very fruitful when aiming for a definition of the Fantastic – every literary text generates a fictional world, both based on factual reality and with invented elements.

Third, apart from the mimetic fallacy, a further problem that the Fantastic as umbrella term presents is that the referent – extratextual reality – is taken as stable and thus context-independent notion. In this thesis, the idea of reality is shifted away from the certainties of it being a stable and objective category towards it becoming a negotiated social construction,

[...] a kind of collective fiction, constructed and sustained by the processes of socialisation, institutionalisation, and everyday social interaction, especially through the medium of language. [...] an arbitrary convention given the appearance of permanence and validity through time and habit. (Berger & Luckman 1967:37-40)

This central point in Postmodern thought has been convincingly argued by the sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann among others, and will reappear in the final part of the coming section.

1.1.2. The Fantastic as Specific and Context-Related Narrative Form

In relation to the just mentioned, it is safe to establish that any theorisation of the Fantastic forces a reflection on what is considered as ‘real’ in a particular context. This leads to a second angle on the Fantastic, which is the perspective endorsed in this thesis for the following reasons:

First of all, a context-specific perspective of the Fantastic enables a more precise examination of the genesis and evolution of this narrative form. As a large amount of scholars of the Fantastic have reiterated (e.g. Castex 1951; Campra 2001; Roas 2001, 2011), the categories of realism/fantastic have a history, and our modern understanding of ‘real’ and ‘impossible’ only materialised in the Enlightenment. The impossible as an ontological (and literary) category appears in a rationalistic context where miracles and prodigies are eliminated as possible explanations of reality. In contrast, in the mid-18th century, a substantial body of literary works arose “as compensation of an excess of rationalism” (Caillois 1975:23).³ It is this socio-historical moment that marks the genesis the Fantastic, initially sharing roots with the Gothic English novel as seen, for example, in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Jan Potocki’s *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, 1761–1815). In an increasingly secularised and rational society, the Fantastic entered the literary sphere to interrogate the aspects which science and reason could not answer. Using the same techniques as realistic literature (e.g. realistic settings and devices to enhance the verisimilitude of the narration), the narratives of the Fantastic sought to destabilise the presuppositions of this overwhelmingly Positivistic angle.⁴

³ Unless the official translated title is quoted in the bibliography, all translations are mine, including critical and literary works.

⁴ For a concise and yet comprehensive overview of the philosophical and scientific paradigms

Later in the mid-19th century, the Fantastic develops in its structures, themes and motifs, predominantly in the form of short fiction with a few exceptions.⁵ This evolution is marked by works such as E.T.A. Hoffman's *Fantasiestücke* and *Nachtstücke* (1814-1816), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), Guy de Maupassant's short stories and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), to mention only some representative authors which played a fundamental role in the consolidation of this narrative form.⁶

Based on this historical angle, and in contrast to the all-inclusive ahistorical perspective on the Fantastic discussed in the previous section, a more restrictive and focused approach to it – with specific features and a determined historical starting point – has proliferated in Europe as well as in South America.⁷

The scholarly variety endorsing this perspective converges in one element: for all of them the Fantastic arises in a realistic world in which the supernatural itself is not integrated as a natural law but as a disruption of this realistic environment. The Fantastic is the only form in which the supernatural element is presented as impossible within the text, thus transgressing that which was taken as real within the text, a textual reality which imitates the factual one. It provokes a disruptive effect upon the reader which forces him or her to revise (metaphorically speaking) his assumptions on empirical reality.

which paved the way to the birth of the Fantastic in the mid-18th century, see Roas (ed.) (2003:10-15).

⁵ On the converging history of the Fantastic and short fiction narratives, see the study by Carpentier (2007).

⁶ There is no critical consensus as to whether the Fantastic is a way of narrating, an aesthetics, a mode, a hypoggenre, or a genre. This debate is largely based on the very definition of what a literary genre is and how restrictive this notion is taken to be (see Torodov 1975:2-27). For a comprehensive review of this issue, see Castro (2002:25-33). In this research, I prefer to step aside from this argument appertaining to genre theory, and, taking a prudent distance from the term 'genre', to use the more neutral expression of 'narrative form'.

⁷ The key role that the French critical school played in its groundings is to be noted (see Fournier Kiss 2007:11). With the French translation of Hoffman's *Phantasiestücke* (Fantasy-pieces) as *Contes fantastiques* (Loeve-Veimras 1829), the term "fantastique" entered the French critical scene. It later became systematised in French literary theory by various scholars, who have concentrated on its history (Castex 1951), themes (Vax 1960; Caillois 1975), structures (Todorov 1975), and socio-cultural context (Bessière 1974).

At an early stage of criticism of the Fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov already insists on the distinct characteristics of it in opposition with other modes of the supernatural. His theory is based on the premise that it is a moment of hesitation on the part of the reader, between accepting the supernatural as possible within the fictional universe and denying it:

The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by forces unknown to us. The [F]antastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. (1975:25)

In this respect, the Fantastic is something between a realistic and a marvellous text while being neither of them. The problem, later remarked in criticism, is that this definition of the Fantastic as a ‘moment of suspension’ helps very little to understand its functioning. Furthermore, while the hesitation premise is applicable to a particular type of the Fantastic based on an ambiguous denouement (Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, for example), it does not embrace other canonical works where the supernatural is neither provided with a logical explanation (for example, as it may all have been a dream), nor is it part of a magical universe (e.g. as the characters of Count Dracula and Dr. Frankenstein’s monster).

Yet, Todorov’s study is still considered one of the most influential theorisations of the Fantastic, providing a useful frame for rhetorical devices, themes and motifs that recur in this narrative form. And most importantly, it is to be praised for introducing the debate of what the Fantastic is into the academic scene. Later on, this theory has been revised and the hesitation premise is now discarded with consensus. A large variety of theoreticians of the Fantastic, such as Bessière (1974), Jackson (1981), Erdal Jordan (1998), Campra (2001), Roas (2001, 2011) or Bozzetto (2005) to name a few, regard the Fantastic as a *conflictive opposition* between the natural and the supernatural.

Following this train of thought, the Fantastic is understood in this research as a transgression of the real; a transgression which is an intratextual phenomenon but which is also tightly related to the pragmatic dimension of literature.

As an intratextual literary phenomenon, it consists of breaching the internal laws initially assumed in the text to govern the fictional world. The fantastic element or event always generates a conflict, because it is presented as an exception within the textual reality and thus disrupts the logic that rules that storyworld. This contrasts with other literary forms of which the supernatural is an accepted part of the codes ruling the storyworld. Therefore, this approach to the Fantastic makes it possible to exclude utopic, dystopic, or fantasy architecture like the Land of Oz, Narnia or Middle-Earth.⁸

Verisimilitude is a structural premise of the Fantastic. The Fantastic is fundamentally a transgression of what Roland Barthes tags as the “effect of realism” (1968). This has led some scholars to also refer to this transgression as an effect (the “fantastic effect”, see Roas 2001; 2011). The text must rely on the assumption of a “real” world, which is what we understand as “reality”, codified by our laws of reason and social conventions. Several literary devices are employed to convey this impression of veracity or authenticity: one of them being spatial markers in descriptions, and real spatial referents.

The space in which the Fantastic develops is built as the image of the world of the reader: the reader has to recognise the setting as a realistic one. The pragmatic dimension that has been noted in relation to literary realism (e.g. Iser 1978, 1980; Eco 1979; Villanueva 1997), has also been emphasised in relation to the Fantastic (e.g. Bessière 1974, Roas 2001, Reisz [in Roas 2001] and Campra [in Roas 2001]). The Fantastic text needs the collaboration of the reader. Through a constant referential reading, the reader identifies that the reality of the text is similar to his empirical one; and yet, that the supernatural element is a problematic exception within this realistic frame.⁹

⁸ A useful reference guide for these fantasy types of literary spaces is *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Guadalupi and Manguel 1981).

⁹ On the pragmatic dimension of the fantastic text, Bessière establishes that the Fantastic “is

As an exception within a realistic frame, the Fantastic always questions what is considered as ‘real’ by a negative definition. As Campra puts it: “while for the ‘real’ an autonomy is postulated, the concept of ‘fantastic’ is uniquely defined in negative: it is that which is not” (Campra 2001:154). This coincides with Jackson’s “negative rationality”, where the Fantastic is only to be conceptualised “by negative terms according to the categories of realism: impossible, un-real, name-less, form-less, un-known, in-visible” (1981:21).

Since this research conceives the category of ‘reality’ as a socio-cultural construction and, as a consequence, it is taken for granted that this construction will change throughout historical periods under the guise of different – aesthetic, scientific, philosophical – paradigms. These evolutions will materialise in the literary text. Converging with Iser’s definition of the literary text (1980:73), my approach regards literature as revealing the fissures of the predominating thought system (or world-view construction) of a particular time.

The Fantastic is a particularly excellent source to examine this socio-cultural construction of ‘the real’ as it reveals the artificiality of this constructed model of reality through the irruption of the impossible. One of the central intentions of this present research is to reaffirm that different socio-cultural paradigms of the real generate different textual forms, whose difference can be traced precisely in how the dimension of space functions in them.

This is why a theorisation of the Fantastic which disregards an ontological reflection within a specific socio-cultural frame is incomplete.

born from the dialogue between the subject with his own beliefs and its consequences” (2001:86). Similarly, Reisz mentions that “when confronting the fantastic events within the parametres provided by factual reality, the reader states its incompatibility” (2001:7), and Roas insists on the need for a referential reading as part of the fantastic effect, an element which forms the core of his theory on the Fantastic (2001; 2011).

1.2. Space in Theories of the Fantastic

1.2.1. The Uncanny

One of the first scholars to hint at the importance of the spatial dimension in relation to the Fantastic is Freud in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919). From the German word *unheimlich*, this term is understood by him as an experience oscillating between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the self and other. Paradoxically, it is both the known and open, and the secret and repressed. According to the German etymology, the ‘un’ (negative prefix)-‘heimlich’ (homely) evokes the underlying disposition of the familiar to turn on the subject and suddenly become estranged from him. It is also the expression of something repressed, being once familiar, thus fusing the idea of home (*Heim*), consciousness (when bringing it to the surface), familiarity and strangeness. His contribution to the Fantastic is that by analysing the anxiety aroused by uncanny experiences, he establishes a distinction between the Fantastic and the Marvellous. While the latter does not arouse anxiety, the former, based on the intrusion of the supernatural in a realist context, reawakens in the subject beliefs held in childhood which were forcibly repressed.

This psychoanalytical perspective on the Fantastic uncanny already indicates a spatial characteristic of this narrative form: the domain of the self. The uncanny, just as the Fantastic, arises in a space where the individual recognises himself; a domain the subject recognises as home, which through the fantastic element, becomes unfamiliar. Therefore, this early essay points at what was mentioned in the previous section on the definition of the Fantastic: the reader needs to identify with the space described in the text. Similar to phenomenological approaches to human and textual spatiality, the Uncanny echoes Gaston Bachelard’s philosophical conceptualisation of “lived space” (1994). This philosopher has, in a large variety of works, highlighted the importance of space as dimension in which the subject identifies himself, a

dimension always depending on a subject who is affected by and in turn affects space. Therefore, this essay can be considered as a pioneer in the study of space and the Fantastic since, far from treating spatiality as a static dimension, Freud's Uncanny intrinsically demands the participation of the subject who actively experiences this dimension by contrasting it with his factual reality.¹⁰

Freud's concept of the Uncanny distinguished two lines of thought in relation to the Fantastic and space that are present to this day. On the one hand, the oscillation between familiar and unfamiliar, between the known and the unknown, brings forth the importance of liminality. On the other hand, the spatial dimension is an essential tool in the construction of the domain of the self; that is, the realistic environment which any fantastic text necessarily needs.

1.2.2. The Liminal

The notions of boundary and 'inbetweenness' are predominant within the theories on the Fantastic. Building on this, many scholars have studied the Fantastic as a form of expressing otherness and marginality. The critical attention to space from a theoretical angle has almost exclusively been centred on the liminal, emphasising how this narrative form does not adhere to established boundaries, genres, moral codes, cultural taboos, etc. For example, for Prince and Guillaud, the Fantastic belongs to "the genres of the limit, border and to the literatures of transgression or breach of this limit or border" (2008:synopsis). This is also Jackson's view of the Fantastic (1981), who regards it as a materialisation of an alterity, hence its subversive function of the cultural order. Similar is Armitt's theorisation of this narrative form, centred on the liminal. Based on Freud's *The Uncanny* and Kristeva's

¹⁰ Vidler applies Freud's concept to Postmodern architecture in *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992), a work of high interest when studying the Fantastic from a comparative angle. In order to explore how the uncanny materialises in (factual) architectural form, Vidler first recurs to 'textual architectures' of tradition of the Fantastic, for example the mansions of "The Golden Pot", "The Deserted House" (E.T.A. Hoffmann) and of "The Fall of the House of Usher" (E.A. Poe), which he regards as paradigmatic for the 'architectural uncanny'.

Strangers to Ourselves (1991), Armitt takes the dichotomy inner/outer to establish the body (with fixed physical boundaries) as the centre of the spatial system. From her perspective, the Fantastic problematises and deconstructs these binary oppositions. Her psychoanalytical reading of the Fantastic leads her to establish the importance of space in this narrative form, with the conclusion that “all fantastic fictions of otherness become projections of the uncanny derived form that primary site of boundary negotiation which marks us all as aliens and exiles” (1996:8).

The list of studies focusing on the liminal is extensive (e.g. Rust 1988; Brittmacher 2006; Gama-Kahlil 2008; Ruthner 2012) but while this notion helps conceptualise many of the recurrent motifs and rhetorical devices of the Fantastic (the threshold, the monster, the *revenant*, etc.), space in most of these studies is approached metaphorically. From the perspective of the liminal, the notion of ‘fantastic space’ becomes a metaphor for that which oscillates between the known and the unknown, a space that Bellemin-Noël calls “*fantasmagorique*”, between the physical and the immaterial (2001:108). As best seen in Armitt’s quote, the central problem of these approaches, is that their concluding definition of the Fantastic is ambivalent, as it can be applied to other forms of literature, or even to literary experience in its broader sense (see Blanchot 1955).¹¹

For this reason, the intention of this thesis is to avoid the metaphorical uses of ‘space’ to prioritise a literal understanding of this term, and to examine how the physical dimension of space (narrative space) functions in relation to the Fantastic effect.¹²

¹¹ A further example of this conceptual ambiguity regarding the Fantastic and space is quoted by Todorov: “The [F]antastic explores inner space; it sides with the imagination, the anxiety of existence, and the hope of salvation” (Schneider, in Todorov 1975:36). This view coincides with Gilbert Durand’s “fantastic space”, a space conceived as a metaphor for the imaginary (“Fantastic space, the site of our imagination”, 1999:391).

¹² On the metaphorical uses of the concept of space in narratology, see Ryan (2012:3-4). A clear example which illustrates the metaphorical conception of ‘time’ and ‘space’ in the Fantastic is *Espacios y tiempos de lo fantástico* (Andrade *et. al.* [eds.] 2010). Here these two dimensions are quoted to indicate the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach of its articles (“This volume explores the various modalities [of the Fantastic], crossing countries

1.2.3. Space as Realistic Frame

Very much in line with the liminal, one of the spatial aspects that recurs in studies of the Fantastic is the notion of referential boundary as an inherent condition of this narrative form. As the following excerpt shows, this aspect draws on Foucauldian philosophy, in that it conceives the idea of ‘transgression’ as co-dependant with the limit:

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. (Foucault 1999:60)

In relation to the interconnection between the ‘limit’ and its ‘transgression’, Caillois regards the Fantastic as a form where “the supernatural appears as a rupture of the universal coherence. [...] it breaches the stability of a world in which the laws were taken as rigorous and immovable” (1975:15). For Cortázar it is “the only way of crossing certain limits, of settling in the territory of the other” (1983:66). Similarly, Todorov asserts that “the Fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it” (1975:158); Jackson establishes that “the fantastic text is essentially preoccupied with limits” (1981:48); and Erdal Jordan explains that because the Fantastic is always a transgression of two orders (real/unreal), “the sense of boundary – differentiation – is inherent to that of transgression” (1998:34). Almost exactly, Campra asserts that the notion of border, of impassable limit for the human being, is a preliminary of the Fantastic: “Once the existence of two orders of reality has been established, the role of the Fantastic consists in the transgression of this limit” (2008:29).

All these quotes point to a crucial function of space within the Fantastic: that of referentiality. Considering that a realistic environment is a pre-requisite of the fantastic transgression, narrative space has been recognised

and temporal frames” [2010: synopsis]).

as a fundamental tool to reproduce the “effect of realism” (Barthes 1968:84-89), or “referential illusion” (Villanueva 1997:105-108). This is the same procedure found in literary realism, where detailed topographical descriptions of (at times) real spatial referents help the reader recognise the space described as a familiar setting (see Álvarez Méndez 2002:37). In this respect, Roas for example, insists on the need of emplacing the story in real places (2001:26), and Campra emphasises the detailed description of spaces as one of the central techniques to enhance the verisimilitude of the fantastic text (2001:176).

Also approaching space as a realist setting but from a diachronic perspective, other scholars have examined the topographical changes within different spatiotemporal coordinates (Jackson 1981; Aguirre 1990; Prince 2003; May 2006; Fournier Kiss 2007). These studies emphasise the ‘chronotopic’ nature of the setting, in the Bakhtinian sense, and demonstrate that the choice and representation of setting is not accidental: the evolution of the Fantastic as a specific narrative form can be traced by analysing the recurrent topoi in specific temporal frames whose symbolic charge can be understood in relation with the socio-cultural context.¹³

All the perspectives so far outlined on the Fantastic, whether of a psychoanalytical, structural, or chronotopical nature, converge in one aspect: the underlying question regarding their approach to narrative space is related to the type of space where the fantastic event occurs. In all of them, the dimension of space is regarded as the locus of the fantastic event. While this idea will be further expanded in sections 3 and 4, at this stage it is worth noting that to this date there has been no systematic study which has attempted to invert the aforementioned relation ‘(fantastic) event in space’ into ‘space as (fantastic) event’. This change of focus pursued by my research will demonstrate that space can operate as a fantastic element and thus as a central

¹³ See in this respect Jackson’s outline of the Gothic enclosure and the transition towards the “metropolitan nightmare” (1981:47) with the rise of Modernity. This is studied more in depth by Fournier Kiss (2007) in her work on the European metropolis as a site of anxiety at the turn of the 20th century. She demonstrates that this changing moment in history, regarding how the city was perceived socially and culturally, generates a change of setting in the Fantastic. Thus the Fantastic leaves its traditional position of remote castles and cemeteries and installs itself in the city.

theme of the transgression.

1.2.4. Space as Fantastic Theme

Studies in which space is treated as a thematic category of the Fantastic are scarce and not systematic. In early studies on the Fantastic, space is not even mentioned, since as Todorov indicates, their thematic approach is uniquely concentrated on the fantastic creature (see Scarborough and Penzoldt [in Todorov 1975:100]).¹⁴ Later on, some scholars worked towards a more coherent scheme, focused on transgressions of the fundamental laws of human experience. Unavoidably, space is to be included there as a category. And yet, it is not fully developed as such, giving it distinctly less relevance than others. Vax vaguely mentions it as part of one thematic group: causality, time and space (1960:30), and Caillois confuses the levels of thematic abstraction, where, for example, his theme of “creature from the beyond” (1975:28-32) is developed into various subcategories (the condemned spectre, the dead, the vampire, etc.), while space is not represented as a whole category but as a single motif: as the disappearance of physical space, whether room, apartment, floor, house or street, and the modification of three-dimensionality.

Another recurrent problematic feature in scholarship of the Fantastic is that ‘space’, if mentioned at all, is not considered as an autonomous thematic category. Instead, it is frequently introduced as necessarily annexed to other fantastic motifs. Todorov’s study regards it in conjunction with the transformation of matter (1975:107-123), once more viewing space as a dimension modified by the fantastic event (1975:119). Other scholars present space as an annex to the transformations of time, or in some studies, spatial transgressions are even seen as side-effects of the transgressions of time (e.g. Berthelot 2005:26). In so doing, space and time are treated as one single

¹⁴ Scarborough’s list, for example, covers ‘modern ghosts’, ‘the devil and his allies’ and ‘supernatural life’ (in Todorov 1975:100). Similarly, Penzoldt establishes a list of fantastic themes that encompasses ghosts, phantoms, vampires, werewolves, witches and witchcraft, invisible beings, the animal spectres (in Todorov 1975:100). In both cases, space is omitted as a motif and as a thematic category.

category, fused under the tag of ‘spatiotemporal alterations’.

Considering these approaches to space in critical studies of the Fantastic, this research will demonstrate that space can function as an independent and prolific thematic category within the Fantastic:

First, while both space and time are overlapping categories in the experience of factual reality, nothing prevents us studying them in isolation in the literary text. This artificial but potentially productive isolation can help better understand their performance within the fantastic transgression. Furthermore, not every fantastic transgression of space implies a transgression of the temporal dimension and vice versa (see section 4.2.).

Second, very few studies deal with how different thematic clusters evolve according to different socio-cultural aspects. Todorov’s serves as an example of a de-contextualised thematic approach, disregarding the socio-cultural context in which different themes might be more present or evolve. There are two remarkable exceptions as regards these two aspects. Campra is one of the few scholars who regard space as an independent thematic category. Approaching the Fantastic from a linguistic perspective, she locates space in her “categories of enunciation”, which are composed by the subject (me/other), tense (now/past/future) and the spatial categories of “here/there” (Campra 2001:165). However, space is from this perspective reduced to the “here” and “there”, a fact which does not embrace this dimension in all its complexity, and disregards spatial principles such as the “part of” and “inside of” (hierarchy). Also Caland, in an article entitled “*Partition, répartition et fonctions de l’espace dans la littérature fantastique*” (“Partition, Distribution and Functions of Space in Literature of the Fantastic” 2003), sought to systematise the function of space as autonomous category. Converging with the thesis of this present research, Caland outlines the evolutions in the perception of space in the last decades. This leads her to highlight that this dimension becomes particularly problematised in the Fantastic after the mid-20th century. From this basis, she develops some thematic lines of spatial transgressions recurrent in the contemporary Fantastic (space as an annex of time, space as a

question – fourth dimension/a hidden dimension/parallel worlds/disappearing of physical space, elastic space –, and space as monster). Despite the fact that her suggested themes do not follow a particular methodology or systematisation, this article has to be praised for introducing the dimension of space as fantastic transgression, and most importantly, as a thematic category in itself, being of particular relevance in the context of the Postmodern Fantastic.

From this review it is evident that, within the theoretical corpus on the Fantastic, the importance of the spatial dimension has been acknowledged from various angles.

Liminality, while providing interesting perspectives on psychoanalytical aspects of this narrative form, treats space in its metaphorical and symbolic dimension and provides very little insight into how this dimension participates in generating the fantastic effect at a textual level. The same applies to diachronic perspectives on the fantastic topoi, which concentrate on the situational and metaphorical level of narrative space.

The studies which analyse how narrative space enhances the effect of verisimilitude do provide useful ideas on rhetorical strategies at the discourse level. However, what strategies are employed to construct space not as realistic frame but to turn it into an impossible element remain to be examined.

Yet, none of these perspectives examine space as a potential generator of the fantastic transgression. Conversely, space as thematic category, if mentioned at all, has not been fully developed into a coherent study. Where it is acknowledged as an independent category, it appears in lists of themes and motifs that do not embrace the complexity and potential of this dimension to generate the fantastic transgression. In addition, how the transgressions of space may be of particular relevance to the Postmodern period is an aspect that needs further development.

2. METHODOLOGY: SPACE AS INTERDISCIPLINARY SIGN

When establishing a typology of transgressions of space in the Fantastic, the method of textual analysis will need to embrace narrative space in all its complexity. Existing methodologies on space in narrative offer limited help for carrying out this study, as they tend to centre their approaches on realist literatures (e.g. Hamon 1972, Ronen 1986, Soubeyroux 1993, Pimentel 2001 and Álvarez Méndez 2002).¹⁵ The Fantastic, if mentioned at all, appears as an ambiguous category, very often referring to any form of supernatural intervention.¹⁶ The result is that there is no comprehensive model to analyse space in relation to the Fantastic, this last considered as a particular narrative form and not as a meta-category for the imaginary or supernatural.

Nevertheless, some of the recent contributions to the analysis of space in narrative have been central to the methodology proposed in this thesis, which is anchored on two premises:

(a) narrative space is a sign. No matter how faithful it is to its referent, it is always fictional, created through various textual strategies and recreated by the reader when presented with it.

(b) the representation and function of narrative space is not only to be examined at textual level; the extratextual context also plays a fundamental role. As will be shown, my four examined transgressions of space in the Fantastic (chapters II to IV) are tropes of particular recurrence and significance

¹⁵ In traditional narratology, there have been key essays such as Hamon's work on literary descriptions (1972;1991) to demonstrate that the setting is not simply filler material. Also Ronen's essay (1986) is of importance regarding the role of space in the structure plot. While these studies do establish space as an important category of the literary text, they exclusively work from a narratological perspective (thus restricting space to its presence in the discourse) and predominantly focusing on the construction of literary realism. As Westphal notes (2007:49), the same can be said about Bakhtin's model of the chronotope. This concept disregards how the literary space reports to the extratextual referent.

¹⁶ Álvarez Méndez refers to the Fantastic within the dichotomy "referential/fantastic" (2002:82). This is a common view, which reflects an ambiguous understanding of the Fantastic (section 1.1.1), as well as endorsing the mimetic fallacy. Within the Theory of Possible Worlds (Pavel 1986, Ryan 1991, Doležel 2008), the Fantastic is also regarded as an umbrella term. Doležel, for instance, does not make any distinction among supernatural worlds, as if taking for granted that all forms (science fiction, the Marvellous, the Mythical, the Fantastic) have the same macrostructural construction.

in the Postmodern context. Therefore, these tropes can be regarded as ‘symptoms’ of this socio-cultural era.

To analyse how each of these tropes are created with textual discourse, Natalia Álvarez Méndez’ *Espacios narrativos* (2002) is one of the most comprehensive works published to date. This is due to the extensive theoretical base on the issue of narrative spaces in literary theory, to the author’s ability to determine areas in which previous studies are incomplete, and most importantly, to her proposed methodological model, which embraces the spatial dimension in all its complexity. Therefore, this work merges the studies centred on the description of the spatial dimension (e.g. Hamon 1991), those approaching the issue from a purely narratological perspective (e.g. Zoran 1984, Ronen 1986, Bal 2009), those providing symbolic and phenomenological perspectives on spatiality (e.g. Bachelard 1958, Durand 1969; Gullón 1980; Ainsa 2006) and those which prioritised the temporal dimension (e.g. Genette 1972) or which studied spatial clusters exclusively in relation to time (e.g. Bakhtin 2003).

With the central premise that a place, once it enters a narrative universe of a book, becomes a sign, Álvarez Méndez works on the assumption that space is an element of the many in a fictional structure. This leads her to design a methodology based on four dimensions of what she calls the ‘spatial sign’: (a) the situational (space as referent), (b) the linguistic (space as signifier), (c) the semantic and actational (space as signified), and (d) the pragmatic dimension (the space of the act of reading). Whereas her methodology of analysis is developed in the frame of the realistic novel, it is also of applicability to short fiction of the Fantastic, with a few considerations which will be outlined shortly.

The second approach which will complement this methodology is Westphal’s geocritical method (2007 [2011a]). These four dimensions are also present in his work. But from a comparative literature angle, his perspective points to the need of interdisciplinary approaches when dealing with Postmodern narrative spaces.

2.1. Situational Dimension: Location

This first dimension focuses on the selection, disposition and organisation of locations. It can be regarded as a sort of mapping exercise or inventory that contrasts fictional space with its extratextual referent. This is what Westphal analyses in his chapter on the issue of referentiality (more extensively tackled in Chapter IV, section 1). In the present study on the Fantastic, this is the simplest level of analysis, since, as mentioned, a realistic setting is always a pre-condition for the fantastic transgression. Nevertheless, in my corpus, the choice of setting will be of more relevance to the fantastic transgression than it may seem at first sight. As short stories such as “La casa” (José B. Adolph 1975) or “Dejen salir” (José Ferrer-Bermejo 1982) will show, a seemingly unremarkable location as an ordinary house or metro station is quite exceptional and thus significant in the history of this narrative form.

2.2. Linguistic Dimension: Discourse

This dimension deals with space as signifier – “the sum of signs accumulated in the text” (Álvarez Méndez 2002:67) constructed with rhetorical strategies and transmitted to the reader by semiotic channels. Here it is important to keep in mind that even if it has an extratextual referent, once space is on the page, it is always an invention, a fictional entity. Therefore, this section focuses on devices used to recreate a three-dimensional space with the two-dimensional medium of the page. This comprises various aspects such as the inherent selectivity of literary language (Zoran 1984) in contrast with other arts such as sculpture, where space can be displayed from more angles simultaneously. Important are also devices that construct space, not only through the visual, but also through the other senses (the geocritical ‘polysensoriality’, Westphal 2011a:132-136), as will be best seen in the Fantastic in short stories like “Los palafitos” (Ángel Olgoso 2007).

This section also includes how the signifiers are organised on the page (Ryan's "spatial extension of the text" 2012:15-17; Álvarez Mendez's "textual space" 2002), an aspect that might be of more relevance to surrealist texts and other avant-gardes than to the study of the Fantastic. Yet, it is of importance in texts such as the Möbius strip of "Lost in the Funhouse" (John Barth 1969) and the calligraphy found in the protagonist's diary of "Rien n'a de sens sinon intérieur" ("Only Inner Sense Makes Sense", Claude-Emmanuelle Yance 1987).

Since most of the studies regarding the dimension of the signifier (including that of Álvarez Méndez) are focused on the rhetorical construction of realistic spaces, they have limited applicability to the issue at stake: the construction of an impossible space. In my study, further rhetorical devices are introduced, some of them based on studies which prioritise the linguistic dimension of the fantastic transgression (Casas 2010, Erdal Jordan 1998; Campra 2001; Rodríguez 2010). Since there is no study analysing the rhetorical configuration of spatial transgressions, some of the strategies I analyse are original contributions to this linguistic dimension (e.g. 'threshold sentence', Chapter IV, section 2.2.).

2.3. Semantic-Actuational Dimension: Story

Just as a character, space can play a role in the evolution of the events within the story. Thus it may be an important structural element that conditions the plot. A good example of this is found in the analysed short story "Trastornos de carácter" (Juan José Millás, 1989), where a specific place leads to a plot frequently encountered in detective fiction: the so-called 'locked-room situation'. This dimension examines how the Fantastic is presented within the structure of the story and how it might permeate the plot: for example as a graduating linear order, or introduced *in medias res*.

At the same time, as sign, spaces have a semantic charge. Westphal reminds us that the topos comprises multiple layers of meanings carved over

time (semantic content). For this purpose, this dimension encompasses studies on spatial imagery from phenomenological (e.g. Bachelard 1958), anthropological (Durand 1969) and symbolic (Gullón 1980) perspectives. This should help elucidate the metaphorical meaning of certain topoi.

Furthermore, this dimension also pays attention to the intradiegetic reception of this spatial transgression. Is it horror, bewilderment and surprise that it causes in its textual receptor? This will reveal important differences between classical forms of the Fantastic and the Postmodern Fantastic.

2.4. Pragmatic Dimension: the Reading Time

Finally because space is narrated (when the author writes it, when it is published, the historical context it makes reference to, the context of the implied reader), its symbolism is mobile.

To avoid a purely narratological study, it is particularly important in the case of the Fantastic – a narrative form with a strong pragmatic dimension – to follow Álvarez Méndez and incorporate the context of the implied reader into the analysis. It is the reader who complements textual spatiality with his/her knowledge on factual reality and interpretative capacity. If the previous sections were centred on the intraliterary sphere, this one puts it in relation and contrast with the extratextual domain. This will imply two aspects: first, how this type of spatial transgression is to be understood in the history of the Fantastic as narrative form. Second, it will analyse how the implied reader may perceive the fantastic transgression. This would encompass the cognitive processes carried by the reader when faced with the Fantastic, an aspect which would demand a different methodological approach to the literary text and is outside the scope of this research.¹⁷ The relevant aspect of the pragmatic

¹⁷ Cognitive Narratological Studies (Fauconnier 1997; Ryan 2003, 2012) have demonstrated that we grasp narratives of any length not only in time but in space too. These studies do not attempt to deny the essential temporal nature of the literary text but to foreground the spatial structures and motifs of the literary text that also take place in the very act of reading and structuring information. Ryan, for example, refers to this aspect in relation to the reader's cognitive activity when facing wholly imaginary landscapes: "readers assume that the narrative world extends beyond the locations named in the text and that there is continuous space

dimension is the context of the implied reader, or the space in which the reading act takes place, what could be called: ‘the reading time’.

The major contribution of the so-called Spatial Turn has been to demonstrate that the dimension of space is far more intricate than assumed, precisely because it is not just ‘out there’, objective and immutable to historical and cultural changes. If from a mathematical perspective, space is a relatively stable category, from a humanist angle space is a concept with a history. Proof of this lies in the diverse ways of understanding this dimension in Ancient times, Medieval space, the space of the Renaissance, or of Modernity.¹⁸ Therefore, since “space is inscribed in time, within the diachronic, within History” (Westphal 2011b:65), a spatial perspective on the Fantastic has to necessarily take its sister category into account: the temporal dimension.

Space evolves with the different socio-historical periods, which generate different paradigms materialising in the literary text. Changes in the way space is perceived by the human being modify the *Weltanschauung*, and necessarily affect the very construction, both factual and aesthetic, recreations of it. While a lot of research has been carried out on either the interrelations between Postmodern space and the fictional constructions of the real, or on Postmodern paradigms of the real and fictional space, these observations have not been explicitly applied to the study of the Fantastic.¹⁹

Therefore, any analysis of narrative space implies a proper understanding of the socio-historical frame that determines how space is perceived in a particular era. In each section, the relevant works outside the

between them, even though they cannot fill out this space with geographic features” (2012:12).

¹⁸ In this respect, Bertrand Westphal traces the etymological evolution of the term ‘space’ and reminds us that “space has not always been a spatial concept” (2011b:63). Medieval languages, for example, did not have a proper word to express it. Similarly, Jammer (1993) comes to the conclusion that the concept of physical space is inherent to the human imaginary since our origins. It is only in the Renaissance, when space is separated from a metaphysical perspective coming from Aristotle, that it is conceived in relation with physical phenomena. Also emphasising its contextual shifting nature, Harvey (1990) traces the historical line of space based on economic factors.

¹⁹ Among the many critical works working from this angle are *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space* (Francese 1997), *Landscapes of Postmodernity: Concepts and Paradigms of Critical Theory* (Eckhard et. al. [eds.] 2010), *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time*

frame of literary theory inform how the conceptualised spatial tropes, or spatial transgressions, relate to the extraliterary Postmodern context, including anthropological, architectural, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, and cultural analyses on human spatiality. These, which will be discussed in further detail in each chapter, are of particular relevance to contemporary transformations of the nature of space, and will provide light to the Fantastic short story.

This last aspect relates to the key premise of Bertrand Westphal's comparative method to analyse the interactions between space and literature. As he establishes, geocriticism is necessarily bi-directional: it examines the role of space in literature (which corresponds to the situational, linguistic and semantic dimension) as well as the role of literature in extratextual space (which relates to the pragmatic dimension).

Geocriticism is a field which relates to spatiality in literature and in reality, as well as in other disciplines. Although he does not focus on how space might affect the representation of space in the Fantastic, Westphal demonstrates that different paradigms of space in factual reality generate different textual representations of it. Conversely, textual space influences our perception of real spaces.

This leads him to claim for a necessarily interdisciplinary method for the representation and function of narrative space, which will be crucial when analysing the various tropes in the Postmodern Fantastic.

While the study of the Fantastic is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, the lack of transcultural perspectives with a wide range of corpus must be noted. There is a significant dearth of comparative approaches beyond geographical boundaries. Many studies deal almost exclusively with an Anglo-Saxon corpus, and on a limited amount of canonical authors (e.g. John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover), most of them working with a rather ambiguous definition of the Fantastic (e.g. Olsen 1987; Cornwell 1990; Attebery 1992). Other studies are restricted to the

in Contemporary Fiction (Smethust 2000) and Westphal's *Geocriticism* (2007).

contemporary fantastic in a particular geographical area (e.g. Québec by Grossman 2004; Great Britain by Horstkotte 2004). These studies have theorised on the Postmodern Fantastic establishing that it is a global phenomenon. And yet they are restricted to a particular literary tradition. In order to show that the Postmodern Fantastic is a phenomenon that affects various cultural traditions ranging from Europe to America, my study on the spatial dimension in the contemporary Fantastic incorporates texts from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

Before proceeding to the textual analysis, a final conceptual distinction needs to be established. Even in the texts which are significantly space-centred, narrative space does not always have the same function within the fantastic transgression. Due to the particular configuration of any fantastic text – the real and the supernatural in a problematic coexistence – a further question needs to be addressed: how does narrative space relate to the transgression of the realistic laws in the fictional world? It is when addressing this question that we observe significant divergences on how space “influences the fabula” (Bal 2009:139). This renders the categorisation of ‘space as theme’ insufficient when dealing with narratives of the Fantastic, and opens up a conceptual ground that has not been properly explored to date.

3. THE FANTASTIC OF PLACE

3.1. Place-Centred and Space-Centred Transgressions

Mieke Bal, one of the few narratologists who has recognised (if not in the context of the Fantastic) a function of narrative space beyond that of a mere container of action, traces a distinction between “frame of action” and “thematized space” (Bal 2009:139). She reminds us that whereas the function of space in many texts can be predominantly situational, in others it is “an object of presentation itself” (2009:139). Then it becomes central to the plot as well as within the discourse, in so far as it “influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space” (2009:139).

In this sense, there is a large variety of examples in the history of the Fantastic where space appears ‘thematized’. In these examples, the questions of where the action happens (situational function), how this place is described (discursive level) and how it influences the characters and the events (story level) are fundamental to fully comprehending the text. Among early works, we find the seemingly abandoned Venta Quemada Inn from *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (1804), E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Deserted House” (1817), Usher’s mansion (“The Fall of the House of Usher”, E.A. Poe 1839), the reappearing door of “The Door in the Wall” (H.G. Wells, 1911), and many Lovecraftian enclaves such as Innsmouth, Arkham, Dunwich and Kingsport. As regards early Postmodern texts, there is Jorge Luis Borges’ aleph (“The Aleph”, 1949), Julio Cortázar’s condemned door at the hotel Cervantes (“The Condemned Door”, 1956) and the mansion from “Casa tomada” (“House Taken Over”, Julio Cortázar 1944), exercising an inexplicable power upon its inhabitants just as Shirley Jackson’s Hill House does (*The Haunting of Hill House*, 1959). More recent examples comprise John Barth’s entrapping maze (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 1969), the devouring house of José B. Adolph (“La casa”, “The House”, 1975), the stairs which only go upwards (“La escalera de Sarto”, “Sarto’s Stairs”, Ricardo Doménech 1980) and the Möbius shaped metro station of “Dejen salir” (“Exit”, José Ferrer-Bermejo 1982), to quote but a few fantastic narratives where space is a thematic protagonist.

However, within this list of works, narrative space, even if thematically central, does not always perform the same function in every text.

In order to establish a clear differentiation between the ways in which space intervenes in the fantastic transgression, I propose two theoretical models: the Fantastic of Place and the Fantastic of Space. While there is a wide range of critical analysis from a multitude of academic perspectives on the binary of space/place (see Jammer 1954; Bollnow 1963; Lefebvre 1974; Carter *et. al.* 1993; Casey 1997; Westphal 2007 [2011a]; 2011b), a brief – and perhaps oversimplified – conceptualisation drawing from the relevant sociological and anthropological sources will suit my purpose, which is to

concentrate on the application of this binary to the study of fantastic transgressions.

From the Greek *topos* and the Latin word *locus*, designating the locality ‘where something is placed’, the notion of ‘place’ stands fundamentally for the articulation, or materialisation, of ‘space’. Anthropologist Marc Augé (2008:36-43) argues that ‘place’ has three characteristics: identity, relations (to each other, to what frames it is imposed by the human being) and history. Therefore, from an anthropological perspective, the idea of ‘place’ is a human invention, constricted by ritual markings that invest it with meaning and attached functions and values. Philosopher and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has extensively dealt with this distinction in *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (1977):

Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning is imposed. Enclosed and humanised space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values. Human beings require both space and place. (1977:54)

This quote sums up the central distinction concerning space/place, a conceptualisation which also became the starting point of Bertrand Westphal’s geocritical method for Comparative Literature studies (2011a). ‘Place’ is understood as framed space, and ‘space’ as a wider entity constituted by the physical properties of these places and by how these places relate to each other. Space is articulated and divided into places and conversely places are located in space.

The same approach to the differentiation between place/space is found in Westphal’s second geocritical work (2011b). Based on Deleuze’s and Guattari’s geophilosophy (1980), Westphal regards ‘space’ as smooth and open, while ‘place’ is striated and closed. The greatest explorers – Ulysses, Columbus – have always aimed at “transforming an unspeakable space in a common place” (2011b:171). Westphal explains this binary place/space as metaphor for the relation Penelope/Ulysses in the *Odyssey*. Penelope, while

keeping the hearth, is “the sedentary of Ithaca [...]. Immobile in her island, immobilised by her pretendants who besiege her palace” (2011b:68), she remains (*demeurer, demur*, from the Latin *mora*: ‘to remain’, ‘to linger’) the static and stable element. In contrast, Ulysses’ journeys are metaphorical expansions of the boundaries which constrict the ‘place’. While Penelope symbolises the “closed place” (2011b:70), Ulysses is “the open space” (2011b:68-71).²⁰

To summarise the aforementioned perspectives, in relation to the relatively precise idea of place, space is an abstract physical category composed of a set of relations and dimensions. Places, in contrast, are constricted by a set of frames which define their physical shape, make them mathematically measurable, and allow them to be mapped or localised within a coordinate system.

As the passage quoted shows, Tuan also remarks that ‘place’ and ‘space’ are not concepts that exclude each other. And yet, their distinctive nature will be of particular importance to the two models of the fantastic developed in this chapter. Since narrative space consists of both places and spaces, the crucial difference is that of *where* the dramatic effect of the fantastic is directed: place-centred fantastic stories focus on a particular site (or a group of them), and on what occurs *in* it (or them). Therefore, in the model conceptualised as the Fantastic of Place, a site acts as receptacle of the supernatural.

This contrasts with the other model. The Fantastic of Space deals with a more complex fantastic transgression, since it affects the laws of space. Space is what causes – and not what hosts – the fantastic transgression.

A clear example with which to illustrate this distinction is “La casa” (“The House”, 1975) by Peruvian José B. Adolph (analysed in detail in

²⁰ A similar example is provided by Vernant (1983:126-174), who explains this binary with the Greek deities Hestia and Hermes. Hestia represents the centre of the domestic sphere, she is the keeper of the circular hearth which denotes the navel tying the house to the earth. Hermes is her antagonist. God of the liminal, the wall-piercer, he is the centrifugal element, the messenger who can cross boundaries and displaces freely across them. Hestia is the central point, the place, Hermes the messenger who represents ‘space’ with no constricting boundaries.

Chapter II, section 2). The action is set in a seemingly normal house in an unidentifiable city. As the story unfolds, we are told how this building devours its occupant, a random man who, on his way to work, had been unexplainably drawn to it. Since it is in one way or another the catalyst of the fantastic, space here cannot be reduced to a tool to construct the realistic environment of this story. As regards the transgression, the key question to be addressed is: what is of more importance, the house as ‘place’ or as ‘space’? What is to the fore is not the fact that the action is happening in this particular place. Rather, the fantastic transgression resides in the physical impossibility of a space literally devouring a man. Thus, this short story works as an example of the Fantastic of Space: a literary phenomenon where the normal laws of physical space ruling our extratextual experience are not respected.

3.2. Atmospheric Function: The Suitable Surroundings

The first characteristic of place-oriented transgressions can be traced back to the philosophical and aesthetic importance endowed upon the setting within the Gothic-Romantic tradition of the Fantastic. This was highly influenced by Edmund Burke’s aesthetics of the Sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The Sublime, as Burke understood it, appeals to primal passions, anticipates our reasoning, and consequently terrifies since it is never fully graspable. This theory is embodied in the Gothic enclave, primarily devoted to conveying an uncanny atmosphere by being typically isolated, hard to access, and in decay, between life and death: “silent, lonely, and sublime” (Radcliffe 1992:227), just as Emily described her first glimpse of Montoni’s castle in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Central features of the Gothic enclave – high intensity and physical threat, symbolic projection of the character, man’s supreme sensitivity when in isolation – reflect an understanding of ‘place’ as an ideal *medium* for the exceptional to be experienced. From this angle, the (architectural, geographical) characteristics of certain places are considered as facilitating the apparition and perception of events beyond the boundaries of human reason.

A short story that clearly shows this relation between place and event is “The Suitable Surroundings” (1891) by American author Ambrose Bierce. Consider the following excerpts:

[...] Let me ask you how you would enjoy your breakfast if you took it in this street car. Suppose the phonograph so perfected as to be able to give you an entire opera,—singing, orchestration, and all; do you think you would get much pleasure out of it if you turned it on at your office during business hours? Do you really care for a serenade by Schubert when you hear it fiddled by an untimely Italian on a morning ferryboat? [...]
My stuff in this morning’s *Messenger* is plainly sub-headed ‘A Ghost Story.’ That is ample notice to all. Every honorable reader will understand it as prescribing by implication the conditions under which the work is to be read. (Bierce 2004:100-101)

In this short story Mr. Coulson, a writer, challenges his friend Mr. Marsh to read his recently published ghost story (which I will refer to as ‘the manuscript’). But in order to achieve the desired effect he asks Marsh to read it in what Coulson considers “the suitable surroundings”: “You are brave enough to read me in a street car, but—in a deserted house—alone—in the forest—at night! Bah!” (2004:101). For that purpose, the writer suggests the abandoned Breede’s House, which has the reputation of being haunted after the owner committed suicide there. Marsh spends the night in it but next morning his corpse is found in the house with the manuscript. It turns out that this manuscript is not a ghost story at all: it tells about the suicide of Breede on that same night, the 15th July, and the reasons that drove him to this act.

The circumstances of Marsh’s death are not clarified and this opens up the ground for rational or supernatural interpretations. While he might have been killed by old Breede’s ghost, it is also suggested that he might simply have died during the night, scared by what he was reading and, most importantly, terrified by *where* he was reading it. This has led some scholars to state that “the significance of the location” is enough to generate Marsh’s mortal panic attack (T. Blume 2004:183). His death at the ‘haunted’ house may be attributed to the psychological fear connected with those ‘suitable surroundings’, as the title indicates: namely, the associations triggered in his

mind by the place in which he is reading the manuscript.²¹

Bierce, through Mr. Coulson's voice, condenses explicitly the spatial conventions of the ghost story: a silent night broken by the screech-owl, a dilapidated house reputedly haunted, lost in the woods, and entered alone in the dark with only the dim light of a candle as help. In so doing, he is playing with the idea that certain events need a specific frame, or place, to generate the desired effect.

In relation to the Gothic topos, Bierce's short story also foregrounds that which the reader may associate with a particular 'place' after decades of literary tradition. The writer character chooses 'Ghost Story' as subtitle to his manuscript and, accordingly, adds: "Every honourable reader will understand it as prescribing by implication the conditions under which the work is to be read" (2004:100). He is ironically capturing a long tradition of the Fantastic based on the conviction that the aim of the literary text, in particular of the short text, is to provoke a specific effect – generally of fear – in the reader. Therefore, in order to achieve this effect the atmosphere generated by the place of the action is equally or even more important than the actual events narrated. This echoes the famous words by H.P. Lovecraft, stating that "[a]tmosphere is the all-important thing" (2008:19):

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. *A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present*; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and *portentousness* becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain. (Lovecraft 2008:19, emphasis added)

As this quote exemplifies, this author gives high priority to the construction of

²¹ Of importance is not only the physical place where the ghost story is read by Marsh. The time and date of the action were also carefully chosen by the author. The original publication in the newspaper *The Examiner* was timed to coincide with the manuscript's central event, the 15th of July. Furthermore, Bierce changed Marsh's original "reading time" of the ghost story from ten o'clock to a more 'ghostly' twelve o'clock. It has been suggested that this was done not only to respect the convention of this fateful time but also to evoke an atmosphere of complete darkness among the reader because ten o'clock mid-July may not be fully dark in

a particular atmosphere in the Fantastic. In consequence, the setting – including selections of places and descriptions – becomes a medium to generate this “portentousness”.²² Many of Lovecraft’s fictions are exemplary of this. Consider this initial paragraph from *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* (1932). Its opening anticipates the strange case of Randolph Carter, who disappears by transcending the human tridimensional perception of space and time:

In a vast room hung with strangely figured arras and carpeted with Bokhara rugs of impressive age and workmanship four men were sitting around a document-strown table. [...] in a deep niche on one side there ticked a curious coffin-shaped clock whose dial bore baffling hieroglyphs and whose four hands did not move in consonance with any time system known on this planet. *It was a singular and disturbing room, but well fitted to the business now at hand.* (Lovecraft 2005:264, emphasis added)

Note how the use of the atmospheric and the premonitory bears notorious parallels with Bierce’s story. In particular, the last sentence captures how the environment is used to generate a sense of the extraordinary projected in this room where the events will be narrated.

Caillois also refers to the use of what could be called ‘uncanny setting’ to suit the Fantastic, an element which contrasts with other neighbouring genres such as the fairy tale. He mentions that this effect is partly triggered by a place of action that conveys from the start a sense of mystery and foregrounds the strange actions to come:

We are never dealing with cheap housing or mirrors purchased in department stores: the [F]antastic is not about mass production, anonymous or interchangeable. The mystery must start from the beginning. (Caillois 1975:18)

Although it is not true that these settings are a condition of the Fantastic, certainly this notion of ‘fearfully extraordinary place’ very often features in

Northern countries (T. Blume 2004:181-183).

²² Note that in the Spanish Alianza edition of this essay (1984), Lovecraft’s term “portentousness” is translated as “*sensación de presagio*” (feeling of anticipation), which highlights the image of the premonitory generated by the atmosphere.

fantastic stories. A recurrent strategy to put the spotlight on a particular place is to contrast it against an unremarkable background. Its anomalous presence is indicated with words like “particular”, “odd”, “strange looking”. This is very clear in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Deserted House” (1817). In this story, the house where the action will be developed catches the protagonist’s attention because it “contrasted strangely with the others surrounding it”, an idea reiterated later: “You can imagine how strange such a house must have looked in this street of wealth and fashion. [...] An unoccupied house in this avenue was indeed an odd sight.” (1996:461).

Lovecraft’s shunned house also stands out in a quiet and orderly neighbourhood:

[...] Now the irony is this. In this walk, so many times repeated, the world’s greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre was obliged to pass a particular house on the eastern side of the street; [...]

[...] Neighbouring houses, it must be added, seemed entirely free from the noxious quality. (“The Shunned House”, 2005: 90-92)

In the presentation of the shunned house, which occupies a great deal of the narration, Lovecraft mentions that ironically, it was the master of horror E.A. Poe who frequented that house in his walks, also making reference to “The Fall of the House of Usher”: “[that house] equals or outranks in horror the wildest phantasy of the genius who so often passed it unknowingly, and stands starkly leering as a symbol of all that is unutterably hideous” (2005:90). This intertextual element reinforces the idea of the uncanny and perverse house. Also in the opening paragraph, Lovecraft alludes to Poe’s theory of composition, in particular to what I read as the interrelation between places and events to generate the Fantastic, an idea that features in a very similar manner in “The Fall of the House of Usher”:

From even the greatest of horrors irony is seldom absent. Sometimes it enters directly into the composition of the events, while sometimes it relates only to their fortuitous position

among persons and places. (“The Shunned House”, Lovecraft 2005:90)

[...] there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. (“The Fall of the House of Usher”, Poe 2004:200, emphasis in the original)

The use of ‘place’ in order to generate a particular effect coincides with Edgar Allan Poe’s influential essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846). Poe’s practice of the short story is strongly conditioned by his belief in the unity of form and effect: every element is directed towards the provocation of a single effect which will be concentrated in the final resolution. Therefore, the effectiveness of that which is told will depend on how ‘suitable’ the elements of the story are, including the location and the atmosphere. The best literary example of this theory is the narrator’s arrival at the Usher mansion, where the duality of house/family and its imminent downfall is already metaphorically anticipated by the “barely perceptible fissure” (see “anticipatory metaphorical image”, Casas 2010:12):

Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn. (Poe 2004:201-202)

Out of all the traditional fantastic topoi, one of the most classic ones in the popular imaginary is the haunted place, an excellent example of the atmospheric function of space. Examples from this motif abound from the origins of the Fantastic, with *The Castle of Otranto* (Horace Walpole 1797) to recent texts, such as “1408” (Stephen King 2002) and “Lost Boys” (Orson Scott Card 1992); from the room (“The Jane Fonda Room”, Jonathan Carroll 1995), the house (E.T.A Hoffmann’s “The Deserted House” 1817), and the castle (*Dracula*, Bram Stoker 1847), to the inn (*The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, Jan Potocki 1804; “The Inn at Shillingford”, John Connolly 2004),

or the cottage (“The Unnamable”, H.P. Lovecraft 1925; “The Suitable Surroundings”, Abrose Bierce 1891). As expected, this topos has been the subject of many critical works, which have insisted on its atmospheric potential. Anthony Vidler (1992), for example, discusses the correspondence between Freud’s concept of the ‘uncanny’ and the haunted house as commonplace of the Fantastic in his chapter “Unhomely Houses”. Significantly, his chapter opens with a quote by Freud where the adjective ‘haunted’ is equalled with ‘uncanny’: “Some languages in use today can only render the German expression “an *unheimlich* house” by “a haunted house” (Freud quoted in Vidler 1992:17).²³ The haunted house, deriving from the Gothic ghost story has indeed become one of the paradigmatic motifs showing this idea of the premonitory: a place that evokes the desired disturbing atmosphere and invokes the supernatural.

Taking distance from this tradition of the uncanny literary topos, a large variety of short stories are emplaced into a completely ordinary setting (e.g. “The Tale-Tell Heart”, E.A. Poe 1843; “Who knows?”, Guy de Maupassant 1890). Particularly in the second half of the 19th century, the fantastic setting distances itself progressively from this Gothic horror enclave that ‘calls for’ the supernatural. Then the location of the action seems to be precisely the least important aspect in the generation of the Fantastic. Instead of being in the foreground, location acts as an unnoticed backdrop where the supernatural surprisingly arises. This ‘ordinariness’ of the setting became decisive in the evolution of the Fantastic (see Roas 2011:15-20, and Fournier Kiss’ thesis 2007). A very good example of this is Gregory Samsa’s paradigmatic metamorphosis, which suddenly takes place in his own room:

‘What’s happened to me?’ he thought. This was no dream. His room, a *normal human* room except that it was rather too small,

²³ As mentioned in section 1.2.1, Vidler takes “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a paradigmatic example of the motif of the haunted house. While this text condenses many of the Gothic features, as Vidler outlines (1992:17-20), to conclude that the house is haunted is to oversimplify the function of narrative space in this complex text (see section 4.1. of this chapter).

lay *peacefully* between the four *familiar* walls. (*Metamorphosis*, Kafka 2009:91, emphasis added)

However, this does not imply that the place of action is not important to the plot. Its situational function is still central but, to some extent, it is being reversed: instead of being the site which evokes this premonitory sensation, it is a place which the reader does not directly associate with the supernatural.

In the corpus of the Fantastic of Place, the place of action plays a central role in the narrative, particularly due to the attributes attached to this enclave. However, it has to be born in mind that no matter how relevant its atmospheric function is in the story – whether terror-inducing or ordinary – the place itself is physically normal and not impossible in accordance with extraliterary laws. Although the place of action might initially be presented as exceptional – as it is the case of “The Nameless City” (H.P. Lovecraft 1921) and Jorge Luis Borges’ city of “The Immortal” (1949) – it is later revealed that this anomaly is due to the exceptional phenomenon it hosts and not to its own physical impossibility. Instead, as in the classic motif of the haunted house, another element (the ghost, for example) breaches the realistic laws.

The atmospheric function of a place in the narrative is a key aspect in texts such as “The Suitable Surroundings”, where action (that what is told) conditions where it is told and vice versa. Whether ordinary and terror-inducing, a particular backdrop is central to generating the desired effect of fear, disturbance, or surprise. This is a tradition which, as shown, Bierce mocks and pushes further in his short story. The place itself is foregrounded in the action since it ‘allows’ it to take place, as is the case in “The Suitable Surroundings” where, to use Lovecraft’s formula, “Atmosphere is the all-important thing” (2008:19).

3.3. Framing Function: The Threshold

In section 3.1. it was mentioned that an inherent property of ‘place’ is that it is constricted by a system of frames to make it measurable and

localisable. The physical boundary is a fundamental way of articulating space into a defined place. Thus the notion of ‘boundary’ is a spatial tool to circumscribe, while it also avails as a reference for spatial oppositions such as up/down and in/out. Without a referential notion of ‘boundary’, ‘space’ would be otherwise incomprehensible and unattainable: there would be no volumes against which bodies could be measured and compared. Equally, the notions of ‘distance’ and ‘location’ would have no meaning in the absence of a referential system of coordinates.

In his essay “Bridge and Door” (1909), Georg Simmel sees architecture as the art of creating passages and refers to the defining function of the boundary. Bridge and door are envisaged as framing devices that enable transit from one space to the other. The door presupposes the segregation between inner and outer; the bridge defines both sides to reaffirm the possibility of crossing. Bridge and door, as Simmel regards them, are like spatial archetypes which capture the double nature of the boundary: separating and simultaneously connecting bordering areas.

In the textual world, as Ryan (2012) has emphasised, physical boundaries are amongst the most fundamental elements of narrative space in creating and defining “the physically existing environment in which characters live and move” (2012:8). At this point, a distinction between two types of boundaries might serve to show how this principle functions differently in the Fantastic of Place and in the Fantastic of Space. This difference lies in that which will call a ‘stable’ versus a ‘fantastic’ boundary (this last one is examined in more depth in Chapter II).

The human being constructs his reality by establishing boundaries that segregate the unknown and the threatening (Roas 2011:35). In human history we find literal examples of this process. Particularly illuminating in this respect was the Roman foundational rite (Rykwert 1988:58-61). The initial appropriation of land took place after it had been localised by tracing a line. After that, a *Mundus* (‘world’ in Latin), was established. This was a circular trench excavated for ghosts, spirits and other non-human creatures to be

literally 'buried'. This receptacle of the supernatural, as Rykwert remarks, had an essential function in the Roman foundational ritual. After various ceremonies, this hole was sealed with a stone and then the city was named. Three times a year, however, the *Mundus* was ceremonially opened (1988:59) to reconcile the two worlds, and the spirit of the dead will come among the living. During the days that the *Mundus* stood open (*dies nefasti*), no serious economic activities were allowed, as they were considered days of chaos. What is significant of this foundational ritual is that the taking possession of the ground was carried by disassociating it from the supernatural and unexplained. The *Mundus*, and in particular the boundary that sealed it, was there to delimit, and in so doing, to control the supernatural. And only after that boundary was established, space became place: the city was founded.

This ritual very clearly exemplifies the relationship between the notion of boundary and that of the supernatural. The clearest example of a stable boundary is the motif of the threshold in the Fantastic.²⁴ While it is often a site in which a high emotional intensity is concentrated, indicating "a moment of crisis, at an unfinalisable – and unpredeterminable – turning point" (Bakhtin 2003:61), in the vast majority of cases the threshold frames the access into the supernatural. The function of this form of boundary is to provide a stable spatial frame to separate the realistic and the fantastic domains, but in itself there is nothing physically impossible about it. This is the case of the mysterious entrance to "The Deserted House" (E.T.A. Hoffman 1817), H.P. Lovecraft's doorstep at "The Thing on the Doorstep" (1937), the courtyard's threshold featuring in "The Man on the Threshold" (J.L. Borges 1949) and the door interconnecting the narrator to the Fantastic in "The Condemned Door" (Julio Cortázar 1956). Even so, its recurrence within the Fantastic calls for a more detailed analysis as to the various functions it may have within this narrative form.

Campbell (1948) and Doležel (1998) have drawn parallels between the motif of the threshold and the heroic mythical structure, an aspect that could

²⁴ Further analysis of this motif within the Fantastic can be found in Ceserani (1999:107-108),

explain why it is such a recurrent motif within narratives of the supernatural.²⁵ According to Doležel (1998:187), the mythical tale has an impenetrable boundary only crossed by exceptional creatures; the hero, for instance. This physical line also frames two ontologically different domains (natural and supernatural) that are opposed to each other by relationships of power and accessibility.²⁶

Many elements of the mythical schema are embedded in the structures of the Fantastic. An example is the motif of the excursion from the known towards the supernatural, when the character leaves his ordinary environment in order to discover something, answer a call, or resolve a problem. Very frequently found in Gothic tales of remote places and castles, the action is started off by the physical displacement of the character. This is what Campbell calls “the crossing of the first threshold” (2008:64-80). For example, the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1931) decides to travel towards Innsmouth intrigued by the rumours of the Arkham’s villagers, regarding the secrecy about Innsmouth’s origins and inhabitants. The following extracts show how in these threshold crossings there is an emphasis on the deictics specifying spatial location, which separate the character’s ordinary environment from the unknown place:

3 May. Bistritz. —*Left* Munich at 8:35 P.M., on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have *arrived* at 6:46, but train was an hour late. Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse which I got of it from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go very far from the station, as we had *arrived* late and would start as near the correct time as possible. (*Dracula*, Stoker 2003:5, emphasis added)

and especially in Castro (2002:122-166).

²⁵ Once more, it is necessary to distinguish here between thresholds in literature of the Fantastic and thresholds in other neighbouring forms, such as fantasy or fairy tales. For example, in the fantasy book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (C.S. Lewis 1950), although the realistic world is separated and connected with the supernatural through a passageway, the latter does not provoke an ontological reflection on the side of the characters. The wardrobe and Narnia are not presented as breaking the laws of the actual world because they both co-exist as possibilities in the universe of the text.

²⁶ The relation between the motif of the threshold and heroic journey in myths is examined in detail by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008:41-80).

I arrived *here* yesterday, and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking. I am already *far north of London*, and as I walk in the streets of *Petersburgh*, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves and fills me with delight. (*Frankenstein*, Shelley 2008:9, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, in *this* mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. [...] A letter, however, had lately *reached me in a distant part of the country*—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. (“The Fall of the House of Usher”, Poe 2004:200, emphasis added)

Due to its double nature, the threshold is as much a departure ‘from’ as an access ‘into’. Crossing that limit symbolises going through or across what should be impenetrable, which is another characteristic the Fantastic inherits from the mythical narrative schema. They reflect points of conflict: the entity crossing it is preparing itself for a new code, such as the Rue d’Auseuil, from the French ‘at the threshold’, which separates the city from the fantastic abyss (“The Music of Erich Zann”, H.P. Lovecraft 1921).

This articulation of two domains where different codes rule, is related to the anthropological concept of *limen*, the Latin word for threshold. As the classic studies of Arnold Van Gennep (*Les Rites de passage*, 1909) and his successor Victor Turner (*The Ritual Process*, 1969) noted, entering into a different stage or confine implies a process of dissolution of identity where the individual is forced to abandon the previous beliefs and referents. The threshold is a symbol which indicates a state of being between two different existential planes:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner 1969:95)

In many texts thresholds are both ontological frames as well as narrative frames, which structure the discourse and the plot, since this separation between the ‘here’ and ‘there’ increases the tension of what lies behind. “Listen now to what I am about to tell you” [...] (Hoffmann, “The Deserted House” 1996:461), “And now, as if called into life by my entrance into the mysterious house, my adventures began” (1996:466).

The framing function of the threshold finds an analogy in Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846): “A close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention” (2004:681). As Carringer has suggested (1974:508), Poe’s idea of ‘framing’ to enhance the desired effect could explain his choice of enclosed spaces, as well as the use of a concise narrative form – the short story – to concentrate the plot on a single effect.

The threshold, therefore, is an element to direct the tension towards that which is ‘before’ and ‘after’. This is very clearly seen in the opening paragraphs of “The Boarded Window” (Ambrose Bierce 1891). In this short story, the window is the element that concentrates the various turning points in the narrative – it is the subject which seems as a catalyst for the frame-story:

[...a window that] was boarded up—nobody could remember a time when it was not. And none knew why it was so closed [...]. I fancy there are few persons living today who ever knew the secret of that window, but I am one, as you shall see. (2004:109)

As seen in this short story, the threshold – the boarded window – functions as something which enhances the suspense, directing the attention towards the question of why it is boarded (“the secret of that window” [2004:109]).

In other texts, the threshold facilitates the supernatural apparition. “Climax for a Ghost Story” (1919), by the English writer I.A. Ireland, may serve as an illustrative example. In this very brief story which I reproduce, a locked door holds a man and a girl inside a room. As it reads, after a brief exchange of words, the girl exits the room by traversing this door:

“How eerie!” said the girl, advancing cautiously. “—And what a heavy door!” She touched it as she spoke and it suddenly swung to with a click.

“Good Lord!” said the man. “I don’t believe there’s a handle inside. Why, you’ve locked us both in!”

“Not both of us. Only one of us,” said the girl, and before his eyes she passed straight through the door, and vanished. (Ireland, in Manguel 1983:49)

This text very clearly exposes how a physical border, impenetrable to humans, is crossed by the ghost. What then is physically impossible, the door or the girl? It is this girl who is attributed with the supernatural characteristics necessary to cross through this door, but the door itself is not endowed with such supernatural power. Thus this threshold is not the element which transgresses the physical laws of reality.²⁷ As in the very large majority of traditional stories of the Fantastic, the threshold is either that which facilitates the access into another domain or, as in “Climax for a Ghost Story”, this physical boundary is transgressed by another character. In all these cases, what is important is that it remains a stable frame of the realistic environment: it is a referential architectural element.

3.4. Time-Condensing Place

Mexican writer Octavio Paz once said that architecture was the least corruptible witness of history.²⁸ In this thought he captured an essential attribute through which ‘space’ is transformed into ‘place’: time. In line with this emphasis on the temporal, Philippe Hamon also mentions that “[If] the notion of *place* is only a function of memory, if even the most significant of buildings is always a monument, [...] then memory is only a function of architectural spaces” (1992:3).

Regarded as the architectural articulation of space, the notion of place

²⁷ Another example of this feature is found in “Les Traces” by Jacques Sternberg (1974). Here, the narrator perceives how an invisible presence crosses several thresholds, starting from the garden’s gate, towards his room’s window and door.

²⁸ “Para mí, la arquitectura es el testigo insobornable de una sociedad” (Paz 1983:33).

is characterised by its relation to the temporal. As Westphal puts it, places are “stratigraphic”, meaning that they are time-layered, condensing a long history (“the stratigraphic vision”, Westphal 2011a:137-143). A sense of past and the imprint of history is what confer them with a sense of identity. This is what informs the theory of “non-places” formulated by sociologist Marc Augé (2008). These are transitional and functional areas, such as airports, metro-stations and shopping centres, whose lack of collective history and social bond distinguishes them from the traditional ‘anthropological place’.

The relation between place and time is a recurrent characteristic of the Fantastic of Place. A common feature of the stories belonging to this model is that the central locus of the action functions then as the site that frames a story back in time as seen, for example, in the motifs of the saga and family tragedy. The place of action, the house for example, is portrayed as a container of a story to be discovered, frequently connected to a traumatic episode from the past. In that respect, we could say that, in terms of plot, a ‘place’ stands for ‘time’.

Jameson notes this aspect particularly in relation to the traditional ghost story, what he sees as “the architectural genre par excellence, wedded as it is to rooms and buildings ineradicably stained with the memory of gruesome events, material structures in which the past literally ‘weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’” (1998:185). Also Berthin highlights two literary strategies of the Gothic – anachronism and analepsis – as deriving from the themes of the question of origin and family secrets related to a place (2010:67-83).

A classic example of what I call time-intensive places is E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Deserted House” (1817). The house with which the narrator is obsessed matters for the history it contains. This setting is the thematic channel of a secret from the past to be discovered. Another classic text is Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839). As mentioned earlier, the mansion of Usher literally embodies a whole familial structure and history to the point where the end of the Usher descent line is paralleled by the downfall of this

building.

A further example would be M.R. James' "The Haunted Dolls' House" (1925). In this text, a doll house preserves and reproduces an old family history of the Ilbridge's House when it becomes alive at night. By researching the city archives, the narrator finally discovers why the house presents this supernatural animation. Also following this pattern, the narrator of "The Shunned House" (H.P. Lovecraft 1937) goes to the city archives to carry detailed genealogical research on the history of the building, which will help solving the mystery. In another story from the same author, "The Unnamable" (1925), Carter tells his sceptical friend about a creature that haunts the dilapidated house they are facing. In order to convince his friend about the truth of the supernatural, Carter specifically appeals to this idea of place containing many layers of lives across time: "[..] how can it be absurd to suppose that deserted houses are full of queer sentient things, or that told graveyards teem with the terrible, unbodied intelligence of generations" (2005:83).²⁹

H.P. Lovecraft certainly makes this time-condensing feature of place a central theme of his creative production, as reflected in the stories that form the Cthulhu Mythos, this extraterrestrial race who once ruled the Earth and now is found in places like Innsmouth and Arkham. The imprint of time is frequently the source of cosmic terror, the temporal portrayed as an "unspeakable" excess contained in a physical place, as this fragment from "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" reflects:

[...] the thought of such linked infinities of black, brooding compartments given over to cobwebs and memories and the conqueror worm, start up vestigial fears and aversions that not even the stoutest philosophy can disperse. (1993:231)

²⁹ Stephen King also appeals to the history embedded in places in his story of the haunted hotel room "1408", which later became a feature film directed by Mikael Håfström (2007): "[...], every writer of shock/suspense tales should write at least one story about the Ghostly Room At The Inn. [...] hotel rooms are just naturally creepy places, don't you think? I mean, how many people have slept in that bed before you? How many of them were sick? How many were losing their minds? How many were perhaps thinking about reading a few final verses from the Bible in the drawer of the nightstand beside them and then hanging themselves in the closet beside the TV?" (King, Introduction to "1408" 2002:329).

A similar pattern can be seen in this passage from “The Nameless City” (1921):

Not even the physical horror of my position in that cramped corridor [...] could match the lethal dread I felt at the abysmal antiquity of the scene and its soul. (2005:39)

The structure of the stories with time-condensing places is very similar and consists of: (a) presentation of the fantastic mystery, (b) some research activity to find clues as to what happened, and (c) final discovery of the cause of the Fantastic. The revelation comes in the end, which often restores the place to its normality, as in “The Shunned House” (“The next spring no more pale grass and strange weeds came up in the shunned house’s terraced garden” [“The Nameless City” 2005:115]).

Furthermore, the supernatural may not only be constricted to a particular place, but also to a particular time: the place also dictates the ‘when’, like that nocturnal music of Erich Zann, which invoked the abyss at the Rue d’Auseuil (“The Music of Erich Zann”, Lovecraft 1921). A traditional motif that best illustrates this combination between space-time is ‘the overnight stay’, as for example the Venta Quemada Inn, deserted during the day and diabolic at night, where Alfonso stops to rest in *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (1804). Also in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1931) the narrator has to spend the night at the strange Gilman House, despite the fact that “[n]one of the non-natives ever stayed out late at night, there being a widespread impression that it was not wise to do so. Besides, the streets were loathsomely dark” (1993:230).

Summing up, enhancing the temporal dimension, the place of action serves to activate the Fantastic. But this place is not the supernatural element in itself. Nevertheless, it is still central to the story, since the narrative tension is constructed through its attributes (atmospheric function). Its physical frames and thresholds serve to direct the attention towards what the place contains. Lastly, very frequently the tension of the plot is concentrated on what

happened in that particular physical structure – that is, on the temporal.

Having outlined the functions that I consider essential and recurrent in this model of the Fantastic of Place, let us proceed to show how they interact in the literary text. A short story that serves as a convenient prototype of the features described in this model of place-centred fantastic is “The Nameless City” (1921) by H.P. Lovecraft. In it the place of action is given a great deal of importance from the start, and very clearly acts as a channel of the fantastic apparition without it being fantastic in itself.

3.5. “The Nameless City” (H.P. Lovecraft 1921) as Prototype of the Fantastic of Place

“The Nameless City” was one of Lovecraft’s favourite stories and is a great example of the relevant role of narrative space in the disclosure of the Fantastic. Because he introduces the figure of the mad Arab poet Abdul Alhazred for the first time, this text is often considered the first of Lovecraft’s Mythos stories, telling of an extraterrestrial civilisation discovered through a series of bas-reliefs, later developed in “The Call of Cthulhu” (1926) and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931).

The story concerns an explorer who relates his discovery of the “nameless city” in the Arabian desert, where he investigates the history of a lost human race. Until then, this ruined city had remained hidden to humans but kept alive by the folklore of the locals. While the narrator explores the architectural features of this city – in particular the disposition and size of chambers and their decorations – he discovers that this city is the home of an ancient and immortal extraterrestrial civilisation that lurks in its undergrounds. Lovecraft was inspired by an article on “Arabia” in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In particular his attention was drawn to “Irem, the City of Pillars, invisible to ordinary eyes, but occasionally and at rare intervals, revealed to some heaven-favoured traveller” (Joshi 2005:407).

What is particularly well-constructed in this piece is that through the explorers’ movements in space, the supernatural is revealed. The city, centre of

the action, also plays a central role in the evolution of the plot. Consider the first paragraph:

When I drew nigh the nameless city I knew it was accursed. I was travelling in a parched and terrible valley under the moon, and afar I saw it protruding uncannily above the sands as parts of a corpse may protrude from an ill-made grave. Fear spoke from the age-worn stones of this hoary survivor of the deluge, this great-grandmother of the eldest pyramid; and a viewless aura repelled me and bade me retreat from antique and sinister secrets that no man should see, and no man else had ever dared to see. (“The Nameless City”, Lovecraft 2005:30)

With these opening lines, the presentation of the city prepares the reader for that which will be narrated. In this quote, the three mentioned characteristics of the Fantastic of Place are activated.

First, as regards to the atmospheric function (a), the very first line abruptly establishes the place as anomalous (“I knew it was accursed”). Second, as regards to the threshold as tension-consensing motif (b), the silhouette is revealed through the sand, suggesting some mystery the explorer is drawn towards (“I saw it protruding uncannily above the sands as parts of a corpse may protrude from an ill-made grave”). Third, it is also a site that encapsulates time (c); an event belonging to a remote episode of human history (“antique and sinister secrets”). After the initial paragraph, these three functions are elaborated further throughout the entire short story.

(a) Atmospheric function of the setting:

The strange environment surrounding the city is activated from the start through its remote location in space (“a parched and terrible valley”, “afar”) as well as in time (“age-worn stones”, “this great-grandmother of the eldest pyramid”). To establish the uncanny atmosphere surrounding the city, two main discourses predominate: the liminal, and the excessive, both of them disfunctions of the notion of referential boundary.

The city is presented as a corpse, “protruding uncannily”, through two reiterated natural elements – wind and sand – whose imprint is left on the city

and its surroundings to convey this impression of forgetfulness and indefiniteness. It is a “crumbling and intarticulate” (2005:30) place with “many secrets of ages too remote for calculation, though sandstorms had long effaced any carvings which may have been outside” (30). The expression of “a viewless aura” (30) is suggesting something that is only sensed but not physically present. Therefore, the image that the city is evoking is that of a spectre, lurking between life and death, half hidden in the desert and half shapeless, half real and half legendary, “told of in strange tales but seen by no living man” (30).

From the moment the narrator enters, we discover that there are elements that exceed human spatial and temporal references: the city is too low for human size and too old to be placed in our time-line (“the antiquity of the spot was unwholesome” [31], “the abysmal antiquity” [39]) but also too developed to be pre-historical. It is a place located at the margins of human time (“There is no legend so old as to give it a name” [30]; “uncounted ages” [30]).

Lovecraft refers to the technique of anamorphosis – the distorted sense of proportions and dimensions – to bring forth the indescribable confrontation with an un-natural place (“too regular to be natural” [33]). With its murals outreaching the human understanding of images, it seems not to be erected and decorated by humans, nor designed for humans to inhabit it.

(b) Framing function of the threshold:

The presence of the threshold is particularly extensive in this text. Starting off with the motif of the excursion, this first departure from the traveller’s ordinary environment is immediately activated and repeated during the story (“I defied them and went into the untrodden waste with my camel” [30]).

Also, the changes between chambers and corridors, and the various levels of floors serve to reinforce the idea of the anamorphic physical structure: its overall proportions cannot be embraced due to the many “changes

of direction and of steepness” (34). Each door, tunnel and further spatial frames increase the tension and suspense of what is behind and marks the turning points in the action. Particularly effective in this text is the progressive revelation of the reptile race reflected through the different rooms, temples and thresholds the protagonist accesses (“Very low and sand-choked were all of the dark apertures near me, but I cleared one with my spade and crawled through it, carrying a torch to reveal whatever mysteries it might hold” [32]). Since the narration is homodiegetic, the reader follows the slow discovery of the Fantastic along with the protagonist in every new chamber.

The city, a place composed of a multitude of thresholds and rooms, regulates the pace at which the secret is discovered and every step forward is a step further towards the final revelation. Although progressively imprinted in the spaces the explorer comes across, the fantastic effect is placed in the end, which coincides with Todorov’s formula of temporal arrangement in the Fantastic (1975:87). This increasing tension culminates with the discovery of the last chamber, containing an aperture into a phosphorescent void.

The motif of the abyss frequently appears in Lovecraft’s fiction at the very end of the story, as in “The Shunned House” and “The Music of Erich Zann”. This spatial figure reflects Rosemary Jackson’s idea of the Fantastic as a space of non-signification, as “a zero point of non-meaning” (1981:42), that “moves into, or opens up, a space without/outside cultural order” (42). The Lovecraftian abyss is the space of nothingness, the unspeakable, that area which finds no human referents because it is beyond language. In another of his short stories, the character who incarnates reason and logical intellect believes “that nothing can be really ‘unnamable’” (“The Unnamable” 2005:83). In “The Nameless City” this aspect is very clear in the title. There is no word for the city, “that unvocal place; that place which I alone of living men had seen” (31), “the nameless city that men dare not know” (34). Further, this aspect is also reflected in the many expressions of vagueness and imprecision, when the narrator tries to describe the city: “vague stones and symbols” [32]; “obscure and cryptical shrines” [32]).

(c) The time-condensing site:

The Nameless City functions as a time-condensing site, in that it hosts a lost civilisation outside of the historical frame of humanity. Imprinted in the odd murals and architectural features, that which worries the protagonist is how to locate this city within human history. This appears even more clearly towards the end:

My fears, indeed, concerned the past rather than the future. Not even the physical horror of my position in that cramped corridor of dead reptiles and antediluvian frescoes, miles below the world I knew and faced by another world of eerie light and mist, could match the lethal dread I felt at the *abysmal antiquity* of the scene and its soul. (39)

It is important to note that as the story evolves the strange features initially attributed to the architecture of the city are then displaced to its inhabitants. The last pages of the story are dedicated to describing the forgotten supernatural civilisation lurking in the city. The same techniques applied to architectural form at the beginning are then employed in the characterisation of this extraterrestrial race. The excessive and liminal is present in their bodies (“their heads, which presented a contour violating all known biological principles” [36]), as well as the indefinable (“the horns and the noselessness and the alligator-like jaw placed the things outside all established categories” [36]; “Monstrous, unnatural, colossal, was the thing—too far beyond all the ideas of man to be believed except in the silent damnable small hours when one cannot sleep” [41]). The encounter with the forgotten race is used to raise the issue of mankind’s fear vis-à-vis the alien, indicative of Lovecraft’s cosmic terror and leitmotif in his fiction.

In conclusion, in “The Nameless City”, the setting is very important in relation to the disclosure of the fantastic element. ‘Where’ it happens is as important as ‘what’ happens. The supernatural is not only anticipated by the atmospheric description of the city but also projected on the city’s physical structure. “Far, ancient and forbidden” (34), the city puts the reader “into the

frame of mind appropriate to the sentiment of the piece” (“The Suitable Surroundings”, Bierce 2004:100). The architectural features of the city intensify its exceptional aura and regulate the story tempo. The city is the portal onto the supernatural buried under its surface, waiting to be disclosed through an infinity of framing walls, tunnels, and other threshold motifs that regulate the pace in which the discovery takes place.

A last question concerning narrative space remains: to what extent is the city supernatural? The impossible element of this story is not the city but that which it contains. There is in the end nothing impossible about the city as physical space, despite its strange proportions, location, multiple thresholds and excessive antiquity. All these features are lately explained by the creatures that inhabit it. This short story is a very good example of the features of the Fantastic of Place. As shown, this model that describes the sum of fantastic texts that foreground the atmospheric, delimiting and temporal use of a particular site as host of the supernatural intervention. Event is tightly conditioned by place, and vice versa, the locus of the action advances that which will happen there.

4. THE FANTASTIC OF SPACE

Following on from the Fantastic of Place, this section develops a contrasting theoretical model where space – also central to the plot and discourse – is, however, the element provoking the fantastic transgression. Particularly interesting is that this transgressive function performed by narrative space can exclusively take place within one single literary form: the Fantastic. As it will be shown, this implies some functional characteristics of how narrative space intervenes in the breach of the physical laws of the literary world’s realism.

4.1. Space as Agent

In his study *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), Tzvetan Todorov refers to the risk of reading the Fantastic in poetic or allegorical key. There is no fantastic transgression when the impossible event is treated as a mere rhetorical figure (thus not as a fact or event) within the text.³⁰

This characteristic is extremely important for the transgressions operated by space. In the text, there must be sufficient clues to read the physical transgression of space as literal and not as figurative. Therefore, the principal features of this present model of the Fantastic of Space is that the metamorphosis of space from realistic into impossible has to be presented as a phenomenon, and is not to be reduced to a simile or metaphor of a descriptive passage, or symbol of a mental state. To illustrate this, I suggest two contrasting texts in which the personification of space is presented as rhetorical in the first case and as factual in the second one.

Consider for example, the following sentence from “The Nameless City”: “When I came upon it [the city] in the ghastly stillness of unending sleep it looked at me” (2005:30). As referred in section 3.2, this short story deals with the discovery of an extraterrestrial civilisation inhabiting this forbidden place. While it could be initially read as literal, after reading the entire text the reader knows that the image of a watchful city is rhetorical. The expression “it looked at me” is used in a figurative sense to convey an uncanny aura of being vigilant to foreigners.

In contrast, consider now the following passages from the devouring house of “La casa” (“The House”, José B. Adolph 1975):

[...], he realised he had lost his left hand, apparently sucked up and dissolved into the wall. He watched the clean stump with

³⁰ “If as we read a text we reject all representation, considering each sentence as a pure semantic combination, the fantastic could not appear. [...] If what we read describes a supernatural event, yet we take the words not in their literal meaning but in another sense which refers to nothing supernatural, there is no longer any space in which the fantastic can exist” (Todorov 1975:60-66, emphasis in the original).

surprise and fear: a blood stain was growing on the wall. The hand did not exist anymore. [...] the house would eventually be satisfied. [...] the tiles were segregating parts of his organism which had been previously devoured [...], the house vomited. (Adolph 2009:587-588)

As these excerpts show, this house is portrayed as literally the supernatural subject. It becomes a fantastic space because it has the agency of provoking events – and not just evoking them, as happened in section 3.1. ‘Events’ are understood here simply as “the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors” (Bal 2009:6) and ‘agent’ as that which performs an action or act, and influences the course of events; “those [elements] initiating these processes, and more specifically, influence the patients, modify their situation (improving or worsening it), or maintain it (for the good or the bad)” (Prince 1987:4).³¹

While in literary theory agency has been a function traditionally attributed to human characters or to ‘humanised’ entities, such as talking animals and animated objects (see Prince 1982:71; Margolin 2005:52; Bal 2006:12), many short stories of the Fantastic remind us that a space can also be an entity capable of causing action and events. “La casa” is a good example of this, and it is also a feature of every sample text analysed in the following chapters dedicated to the fantastic transgressions operated by space.

4.2. Space over Time

Since time and space are two interrelated coordinates in our experience of reality, in the fantastic text both are often disrupted simultaneously. However, it is important to note that it is not the case for every short story of

³¹ I am aware of the subcategories within the term “agency”. Mieke Bal for example refers to the differences between “actor” (“the agent that acts”), “actant” (who makes the action move forward”) and “character” (“the actant in his own individuality, with the broad meaning conferred by tradition”) (Bal 2006:36). Herman distinguishes between “participants” and “non-participants” in the storyworld (2002:115-69). Similarly Prince refers to “existents” (passive) and “events” (active) as two basic constituents of the story (1987:28). For my part, I will use the more general term “agent” to designate the phenomenon of space as an intervening entity in the action.

the Fantastic. While this might seem an obvious fact, surprisingly, it has not been treated so in thematic studies, where both categories appear as a single fantastic theme ('spatiotemporal transgressions', see section 1.2.4.).

4.2.1. Time

When the temporal line is subverted, space is modified as a result of it. This is clearly seen in the motif of the loop into the past or the future. The temporal displacement also implies a spatial displacement, resulting for instance in a juxtaposition between a space in the past and his present or future version. However, is this to be regarded as a transgression of time as well as space? Consider for example "La noche más larga" ("The Longest Night", José María Merino 1982), where a character tells of how he arrives at a house to seek shelter from the rain and spends the night there. When he wakes up, the same house presents symptoms of sudden decay: ruins, cobwebs, dust, rotteness and rust. What was only a night's sleep for him resulted in a time lapse of 20 years. As a result, the house the narrator expects to find when waking up is the same house but much later in time, so also much older. So in this story, there is nothing fantastic about the two houses; they are two physically and logically possible spaces. The transgression, however, is located in the chronological time line. Time has contracted or expanded - depending on how we regard it - and the change of spaces is a result of it. These types of temporal transgressions would appertain to a hypothetical model of Fantastic of Time, which just as the Fantastic of Space, remains to date to be systematised.³²

4.2.2. Space-time

Another possible transgression affects the physical laws of space as well as the dimension of time. This is the case of "Los palafitos" ("The

³² An exception is David Roas' article "Cronologías alteradas. La perversion fantástica del

Palafitos”, Ángel Olgoso 2007), which will be analysed later in Chapter V. The character enters an impossible village, which does not respect his (and the reader’s) dimensions of time and space. Getting to this village is not just a leap in time, but a whole different world, very similar to ours, but where the history of humanity has undergone a different fate.

The space-time continuum is also modified in Julio Cortázar’s “The Highway of the South” (1966). Not only are the characters entrapped in an impossible ever-expanding traffic jam, but also the weather seasons are accelerated. Similarly, “The Other Haven” (1966) by the same author, unifies two places and two different historical moments (Paris in the late 19th century during the Franco-Prussian war/Buenos Aires after the Second World War). Another canonical example is the meta-time and meta-space captured by Jorge Luis Borges’ *Aleph* (1949).

As mentioned in section 1.2.4., nothing prevents us from isolating the dimension of space from that of time. Therefore, in the stories which present this double transgression of time and space within my corpus, my analysis will foreground the representation and transgressive function of narrative space over that of time.

4.2.3. Space

Narrative space is always dependant on narrative time, in the sense that the spatial distortion is progressively disclosed to the reader through the sequential unfolding of the text. However, not every transgression of the spatial dimension implies a transgression of the temporal one. There is no temporal disruption when the house of “La casa” (“The House”, José B. Adolph 1975) is devouring its inhabitant, nor as the museum-house of “El museo” (“The Museum”, José María Merino 1982) prevents the tenant from leaving. In these two examples, our human sense of chronological time still rules. It is the animation of space that provokes the breach of the laws of

tiempo” (“Altered Chronologies. The Fantastic Perversion of Time”, 2011).

reality. Similarly, in another text, “La Banlieue” (“The Suburbs”, Jacques Sternberg 1988), we are confronted with the multiplication, at every corner, of the café where the narrator is supposed to have a date. These multiplications coexist simultaneously in the present, and so the temporal line is not altered by this fact. This feature is the core of the Fantastic of Space.

In conclusion, unlike the other model where I outlined various forms in which narrative space functioned in the story, in this model the function of space can be pinned down to a single one: in all the stories that belong to the Fantastic of Space, there is a rupture of the spatial laws which rule our extratextual reality (which the textual one imitates). However, this does not mean that every fantastic transgression of space functions equally.

While the following sections examine in detail different transgressions of space, there is a motif which integrates the four proposed thematic lines: the fantastic hole. Its functions will be examined in “Mi hermana Elba” (“My Sister Elba”, Cristina Fernández Cubas 1980), a text that serves as prototype for this figure.

4.3. THE FANTASTIC HOLE: “MI HERMANA ELBA” (“MY SISTER ELBA”, CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ CUBAS 1980) AS PROTOTYPE OF THE FANTASTIC OF SPACE

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter (section 1.1), since its origins during the Enlightenment period, the concern of the Fantastic has been to give voice to what precisely the discourse of reason could not codify. A recurrent visual and textual image that very clearly illustrates this is the hole. As Neus Rotger suggests (2003), the figure of the hole embodies the subversive essence of the Fantastic, in that it perforates the rational discourse of the Positivist conception of reality, which predominated during the 18th and 19th century. The fantastic hole reveals the inconsistencies of a (supposedly) coherent and solid structure. This quasi organic metaphorical relation between the perforation and the Fantastic makes this motif an

archetype of the Fantastic of Space.³³

The first dictionary entry and most common understanding of the word 'hole' is related to cavities in material structures ("perforation of a solid surface", Collins English Dictionary). Extended, this definition can be applied to biological structures; that is an empty hollow space in an existent organ (Oxford English Dictionary). Leaving aside the issue of biological voids and psychoanalytical theory, extensively discussed in Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud is right to point to the symbolic potential of holes: they evoke an anxiety through their multiplicity of meanings through their lack of explicit reference, or 'void'. The hole reminds us of a presence through the ascertainment of its absence; it is precisely this oscillation between absence and presence, not as dichotomy but rather as coexisting principles, that renders the hole a transgressive figure in the human imaginary.

Useful to elaborate on this aspect is Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia". In his essay "Of Other Spaces" (1967) he analyses the way different civilisations have dealt in spatial terms with 'the different' or 'extraordinary'. According to him, this has been carried by situating them in what he calls "heterotopias", these being physical containers (with or without clear geographical markers) where "individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (1986:25). Heterotopias are places that society allocates to individuals in state of crisis (death and cemeteries, madness and psychiatrics, etc.). However, Foucault's use of the heterotopia relates to the socio-historical dimension and not the literary one. For this reason, I prefer the more restricted notion of 'fantastic hole' as archetypical image of the Fantastic of Space, which nevertheless draws from the Foucauldian heterotopia.

The fantastic hole can be understood as a heterotopic figure in that it is the physical form of the non-empirically perceptive or rationalised: that which does not fit within a given socio-cultural frame. Also, it is a liminal space

³³ Note the parallels with Grivel's conception of the Fantastic as "arising from the visual crumbling of a place previously conceived as full: the place does not hold, one knows, its substance dissipates, wilts, disintegrates" (Grivel in Fournier Kiss 2007:143).

which transgresses binaries, articulating absence and presence, oscillating between the lack of meaning and the excess of it.

There are various examples of how in history man has dealt with the unknown in a 'heterotopic' way. In some Ancient cosmologies, the hole was a symbolic projection of the unknown. What could not be scientifically explained was assigned a space, both devoid of specific referents and below or beyond the visible confines of their territory but at the same time a constituent part of it. This is, for example, Anaximander's model of the universe, as consisting of a dark boundary (the sky) pierced through by holes (stars) that were seen as windows revealing the mysterious fire beyond it. Another example is the aforementioned *Mundus*, (section 3.2.), a cavity in which the 'supernatural' was safely contained.

Returning to the fictional text, the representation of this perforation of human reason often coincides with the metaphor of a physical structure that disappears; an unexpected hole in material space. An example is the house of "La casa feliz" ("The Happy House", José María Merino 2004), a building that disappears as it pleases just when it is about to be inhabited. This nomadic structure refuses to be bound to the physical laws that anchor it to the ground.

This is also related to a recurrent motif which I call the 'pierced map', namely when the place in question is nowhere to be found in the maps. This is for example the case of Castle Dracula (1847):

I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey Maps. (*Dracula*, Stoker 2003:6)

Innsmouth,

Any reference to a town not shewn on common maps or listed in recent guide-books would have interested me, and the agent's odd manner of allusion roused something like real curiosity. ("The Shadow Over Innsmouth", Lovecraft 1993:217)

and the Rue d'Auseuil,

I have examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I know that names change. I have, on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place, and have personally explored every region, of whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I know as the Rue d'Auseuil. ("The Music of Erich Zann", Lovecraft 1984:56)

Elsewhere the fantastic hole works as an extension of reality by adding other dimensions. Example of this is Joe Hill's "Voluntary Committal" (2005). In a complete ordinary environment, a child builds a cardboard construction that leads to an unknown dimension from which no-one has ever returned. Another variation of this motif takes a real extratextual space and perforates it. This is the case of the Naples of *La Porte des enfers (Hells' Door)*, Laurent Gaudé (2008). In this novel, which tells of a mother who travels to it in search of her lost child, various orifices arise in different areas of the city that connect it with the underworld.

Another important nuance is that because the hole hides, it evokes. This idea of potentiality heightened by their 'excess of meaning' can be interpreted in the Heideggerian sense. They can be regarded as potential sources of anxiety since they frame an absence (physical, ontological, epistemological). As the German philosopher suggested, "[a] boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (Heidegger, in Bhabha 1994:1).

Precisely this is the central theme of "La casa ciega" ("The Blind House", David Roas 2010). The character becomes obsessed with the inside of a boarded house he sees from the train in his regular journey to work. Anxiety increases when he realises, through his binoculars, that the boarded windows and doors of the house are fake, painted on the surface. The boarded house functions as some sort of Pandora's box. Even if the story cannot be said to be strictly from the Fantastic since there is nothing explicitly impossible, the protagonist's fear is symptomatic of an ontological uncertainty related to that which he cannot see: an empty and blind space to project a multitude of possibilities. Illuminating in this sense is Westphal's statement that "to point

at/to demarcate [*signal*] emptiness, it is to start filling it” (2011b:77).

The hole can be considered as paradigmatic figure of fantastic transgressions of space because in it the four thematic lines suggested in this thesis are captured. First, the hole makes the *body* disappear from its exterior; it swallows it up (Chapter II). Second, the hole challenges the ordinary framing function, the physical *boundary*, by perforating a solid space (Chapter III). Third, it is an inversion of logical *spatial hierarchies*, since its inside could be unexpectedly larger than its external dimensions (Chapter IV). Finally, it can act as a whole *world*, extending what is presented as reality in the text into a further dimension (Chapter V).

From the various texts that could have been selected to illustrate how the fantastic hole works as paradigm of the Fantastic of Space, “Mi hermana Elba” (“My Sister Elba”, 1980) by Cristina Fernández Cubas is the most adequate, since this motif does not appear only in the referential dimension of space, indeed it also affects the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions outlined in the methodological model (section 2). This fact will enable to extend the connotations of the hole of a surface to a view of reality which recurs in the Postmodern Fantastic.³⁴

In the story “Mi hermana Elba”, the narrator, Elba’s sister, finds her old diary after a long time. In it she had described her childhood among the now dead Elba. After their parents’ divorce, the two girls had to go to an isolated boarding school. There, in the company of another student, Fátima, they find some areas that are invisible to the rest and that make them invisible for the rest. After the summer, Fátima and the narrator start getting disinterested in these special areas. Meanwhile Elba is moved to another school for special children and is increasingly ostracised by her sister. The story ends with Elba’s

³⁴ This text gives the title to Fernández Cubas’ first volume of short stories (1980). It is now well established that the publication of *Mi hermana Elba* had a large impact on subsequent growth of the Fantastic in Spain (Castro Díez 2000; Andres-Suárez and Casas [eds.] 2007, Casas; Roas [eds.] 2008). The fiction of this author has attracted the attention of international scholars, who have focused on other aspects of her work (e.g. Folkart 2002; Glenn and Pérez 2005). In addition to this, Fernández Cubas’ fiction is most relevant when dealing with the use of narrative space, especially for her skill in generating uncanny atmospheres (e.g. “La noche de Jezabel” [1983]). Her atmospheric constructions often evoke those by Edgar Allan Poe,

sudden fall from a balcony, while the sister writes how quickly she forgets this tragic event. The text closes with a perverse sentence in the diary (“TODAY IS THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE” [2008:73], capitals in original), written by her on the day of Elba’s funeral, as she gets a kiss from the boy she fancied.³⁵

4.3.1. Location: the Hideouts

The main location where the action is set is a boarding school of an enclosed order of nuns. This convent is a rigidly structured space, both by physical frontiers (e.g. the outside fence, the closed order’s door, permitted and prohibited zones) and disciplinary regulations.³⁶ Breaking with the constricted frame of the convent, these hideouts from external reality provide, in contrast, the means for the girls to extend their vital space and escape from the rules.

It is important to keep in mind that a logical explanation for these fantastic spaces is not provided in the text; it is not specified, for example, in retrospective, that these invisible and ‘invisible-ing’ spaces were invented by them. On the contrary, there are various scenes that reaffirm the impossible nature of these as a fact. From the start, these ‘voids’ exclude them from the logical rules of the real world, and so they are the fantastic agent of the story.

4.3.2. Discourse: the Exception

These hideouts are referred to as an extension beyond their confined space (they are “worlds without limits” [67]) and as an escape against monotony (“refuges” where they have “a strange immunity” [66]). But most

whose work she mentions as inspirational source (Beilin 2004:127-147).

³⁵ All translations from this short story are mine.

³⁶ The narrator even alludes to this isolation with the sentence “nothing could exist outside from those cold marbles, from the fruit-trees in the garden or the carob trees that flanked the entrance” (2008:59). Note the recurrence of the microcosm topos in Fernández Cubas’ fiction, for example the closed nuns’ order of “Mundo” (“World” 1994), the remote tower of *El columpio* (*The Swing* 1995), and the house of “La ventana en el jardín” (“The Garden’s Window” 1980).

importantly, these are the spaces of alterity against the norm. It is in this last aspect where the discourse on the Fantastic is located. From the start, their existence is incomprehensible for the narrator, and not viewed as a natural part of that environment. These “mysterious conducts whose understanding escaped [them]” (66) challenge the discourse of reason:

All sorts of images of the dangerous adventure I just lived were still spinning in my head but, above all, a large amount of questions for which, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find any satisfactory answer. (65)

Since these spaces constitute a referential void, they have no precise word allocated in our compendium of signifiers. Their semantic construction is made through the technique of *catachresis*: they are assigned a term (and concept) of something existing in the actual real world which bears physical and conceptual resemblance with them. In this respect, note the variety of *catachrestic* designations to refer to them: “hideouts” (66), “conducts” (66), “paths” (67), “refuges” (69), etc.

Another rhetorical strategy to designate these impossible spaces is that of ‘semantic impertinence’. This strategy juxtaposes semantic fields which are, if not incompatible, at least unconnected (Erdal Jordan 1998:115; Casas 2010:11-12). Some of them are “good” because they never “fail” (66), some of them are ancient (66), some are “small but safe” (66) and others are “spacious and cosy” (66).

As a consequence, their physical attributes are already creating a cognitive dissonance in the reader that will be even more sharpened by the spatial principles these hideouts alter. These spaces cancel spatial dichotomies, in this case location here-there, by being both simultaneously. The holes are neither here nor there. This is best captured in the sentence: “We were there but we weren't. Even if you thought we were there, we weren't there” (65).

4.3.3. The Perforated Story

One of the functions of these fantastic spaces in the story is to help trace the protagonists' relationship and personal evolution. They function as leitmotif of the different stages in their lives and their interest in them ends with the arrival of adolescence. Considering this relation between fantastic hideouts and the characters, an allegoric reading of the story is very tempting. These spaces could be interpreted as projections of children's wishful thinking. Thanks to these 'invented' areas, they then extend their allowed zone of action, and can transgress the mandatory boundaries imposed by adults. This is precisely the interpretation line of Castro Díez (1992) and Beilin (2004), who regard these holes as symbols of children's need for protective and imaginary sites.

However, there are enough elements within the text indicating that the fantastic element is not to be read as purely metaphorical (as liminal moment between childhood and adolescence). For instance, their discovery and their existence are explicitly described as surprising and ontologically problematic. This 'fantastic' reading reveals an insight into the issue of memory and time that has a lot in common with the Postmodern context this thesis deals with. To argue this point in section 4.3.4., it is necessary to appeal to the fundamental role of the diary where the narration is found.

The diary is a discursive space that intensifies the verisimilitude of the event; it is an intimate testimony in first person. But, for the same reason, it enhances the subjectivity of the narrated facts. It is from the start composed of memories but also of passages that cannot be remembered. This is clearly represented in the first page of the short story, in which the narrator juxtaposes the process of reconstruction with some impediments her memory poses. Some passages and fragments in the written diary can be "illuminated by memory" (55) and others remain in the dark. Specially, what is missing is the thread correlating the various elements concerning Elba's death and the narrator's reaction to it.

This passage closes the first section just before the diary's story starts, and indicates that the adult character is about to access memories of her childhood and her sister Elba. However, in this process of reconstruction that memory necessarily implies, she just possesses her memories from the past, vulnerable to the modifications of time, and the diary, unaltered as an object but whose content is equally obscured by the passing of time.

Since we are dealing with a two-level framed narrative, the figure of the reader is doubled up: the extratextual reader (us) and the intratextual reader, i.e. Elba's sister as an adult who is re-reading her old diary. The extratextual reader might expect that the present perspective of the past events will help clarify and, most importantly, connect the open questions in the story: for instance, the nature of the fantastic hideouts, Elba's mysterious powers and lethal fall from the balcony, and the strange reaction of the main character, who quickly forgets both the hideouts as well as Elba's death. But the story does not satisfy these expectations. The present perspective on what is told in the diary does not help generate a tissue of logical connections between these open questions. On the contrary, part of the disturbing effect of the short story is that the adult narrator remains incapable, or unwilling, to fill in these blank areas with meaning. It is as if the very motif of the hideouts was transposed into the space of the diary.

It is useful here to recall Wolfgang Iser's well-known concept of semantic gaps (1978a). According to him, narrative tissue is necessarily incomplete since it is based on selection of information. It is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. The act of reading, the reader's response to the text, helps weave connections between those loose ends and also elaborates causal relationships silenced in the text. It is the figure of the reader, according to Iser's view of literature as tissue, which infers meaning and fills in these gaps. The active and creative reader is the one who gives the texts its consistency, not dissimilarly to that illusion of consistency provided by physical space. This is what Iser calls "consistency-building" (Iser

1978a:291). “[the reader] seek[s] continually for consistency, because only then can he close up situations and comprehend the unfamiliar”.³⁷

If this theoretical insight is transposed to “Mi hermana Elba”, the reader’s gap-filling exercise (establishing connections) is largely deterred since many of the causal relationships remain ‘unfilled’. This process affects both the intratextual as well as the extratextual reader. Neither the character nor the reader is capable of filling these crucial gaps in the narration, in particular those centred on causation (What did cause Elba’s death? Why did the narrator quickly forget about Elba’s death?) and ontology (What is the nature of the hideouts?).

The Fantastic is then not only present in the physical hideouts described in the text but also, at story level, these blank spaces leave the causation of events unresolved. This last reflection asserts the relevance of this short story within the panorama of the Postmodern fantastic, since it portrays a view of reality that is in fact removed from it as solid structure.

4.3.4. The Porous Reality

Drawing an analogy between these invisible corners and the act of remembrance, the text offers a view of memory as being intrinsically composed by blind angles. These gaps, open cracks of an old diary, prevent a complete recuperation of the past, and in so doing, prevent a coherent way of understanding the present identity. Thus, the text evokes an image of memory as being composed by a great deal of dead angles that prevent *reconstructing* the past. Memory is a faulty and perforated tissue precisely because every history is in itself a story, always implying a subjective selection of information. By the very act of remembering, even one’s own past will then be

³⁷ “[...] the reader, in establishing these interrelations between past, present and future, actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. These connections are the product of the reader’s mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself – for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc. [...] This interplay obviously does not take place in the text itself, but can only come into being through the process of reading [...] This process formulates something that is unformulated in the text and yet represents its intention” (Iser 1978b:278-287).

an incomplete testimony. This view of history as being necessarily a subjective construct evokes Lyotard's theory of the end of Grand Narratives (1979), a philosophical insight that strongly influenced the Postmodern ethos for calling into question the 'truth' of any official and universal discourse or mode of representation. This way of understanding reality as constructed narrative implies that subjectivity is inherent in any discourse aiming at legitimising history and other fundamental epistemological constructions of Western culture. Narrative is then always an incomplete testimony of reality, and since our means of expressing the real is narrative, all views on reality are necessarily incomplete.³⁸

This is perhaps the key idea underlying this text, in that the perforation of physical solid space through the fantastic holes is paralleled with that of narrative as a vehicle to refer to a (necessarily) incomplete reality. This approach to memory also denotes a view of the human mind as composed of these pores that prevent us from fully comprehending some phenomena that take place in factual reality.

The blank areas or holes inherent to the view of reality suggested in "Mi hermana Elba" are also found in other Postmodern short fictions of the Fantastic. In this idea is where it can be considered a paradigmatic text of the Postmodern Fantastic.

Another illustrative example is "L'Erreur" ("The Mistake", 1974) by Jacques Sternberg, a short text that tells of a man who returns home to realise that his building, number 64, has disappeared. On his street, number 62 is now adjacent to number 66. Even in the unlikely event that his house was demolished during the day, there should be an empty surface between 62 and 66 indicating that his building took up space. The fantastic hole, thus, is not only the absence of the building but that impossible cancellation of space between the neighbouring buildings 62 and 66. What is remarkable is how the character tries to make sense of the fantastic event by attributing it to a trick

³⁸ Architect and sociologist Virilio extrapolates on Lyotard's correlation between narrative and reality, to physical space. In so doing, Virilio denies the idea of physical space as a stable, objective dimension and goes as far as to establish that it is also a constructed narrative, a

played by his mind, “an error on his conscience, something forgotten” (“L’Erreur”, Sternberg 1998:94), as if a loophole in the structure of his memory had been projected onto physical reality. Their characters attribute the impossible disappearance of his house to some trick his mind plays on him.

This view of human psyche as mysterious, fragile and misleading is already present, for instance, in Guy de Maupassant’s fantastic short stories (“Who Knows?” [1890], “Le Horla” [1887]). But what confers Fernández Cubas’ and Sternberg’s texts with a modern aura is that in their stories the psyche is not viewed as a source of anguish and madness as is the case with the 19th century French author. Instead, their characters accept this mental ‘erosion’ in a surprisingly natural manner. This feature, which will recur in the sample short stories of the next chapters, presents an approach to the (Post)modern subject as someone who is conscious and certain of his mind consisting of mental ‘slippages’. He is aware his consciousness is as intermittent, porous and unreliable as the strange phenomena he perceives in factual reality (such as a fantastic hole discovered in a boarding school or a building which vanishes unexpectedly). This presents an interesting inversion of the traditional fantastic scheme that portrays a character as a *victim* of the impossible occurrence, to a subject who is at least partially also a *causing agent* of the Fantastic; in other words, a subject who is conscious of his own limitations in the apprehension of the real. This point, central in the Postmodern forms of fantastic narrative, will keep reappearing in the other texts analysed in this thesis.

5. SYNTHESIS

This chapter offered an overview of the critical works which deal with the Fantastic, here defined as a specific narrative form distinct from other literary forms of the supernatural. The Fantastic here designates the incursion of an impossible element in a realistic frame and which always implies a

“discourse of measurement of a reality visibly offered to all” (1997:389).

reflection on what a particular society views as ‘real’.

As established, scholarship of the Fantastic has approached narrative space from various angles but to date there is no comprehensive study specifically on how the dimension of space is involved in the disruption of the realistic effect. On the other hand, scholarship on space in literature has been predominantly centred on realistic texts, devoting very little attention to the just mentioned feature. Based on existing methodologies, a model of textual analysis has been outlined which will help determine the construction, function, and meaning of the diverse fantastic transgressions of space. This model is anchored on the basic premise that narrative space is a sign, with four dimensions: the referential one, the signifier, the signified and the pragmatic one. This last dimension also takes into account the space of the implied reader, or put differently, the context in which this text is generated and it makes reference to. Therefore, this dimension necessarily calls for an interdisciplinary method which integrates the relevant perspectives on space outside the field of theory of literature.

Since narrative space does not play a fixed role within the narratives of the Fantastic, two theoretical models based on a distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’ have been suggested. While ‘space’ is here taken as an abstract category which comprises physical laws, ‘place’ is understood as a definable and localisable entity. This distinction, if applied to the fantastic transgression, accounts for two ways in which narrative space can operate. While in both models narrative space is a thematic protagonist, its function within the Fantastic is diametrically opposed in the two cases. In the Fantastic of Place narrative space is seen as the *host* of the fantastic agent, while in the Fantastic of Space, space is the *agent* of the transgression, provoking the breach of logical laws. This differentiation points to different thematic and functional aspects arising from fantastic transgressions in which narrative space plays a role.

In the first one, space functions as a stable dimension reinforcing, or being ‘part of’, the reality effect. The place of action, no matter how uncanny

or how mundane, acts as the frame of reference of the real. Thus, its physical laws (for example three-dimensionality, distance, hierarchy) are not altered.

In the second model, space is the transgressive element in itself. Therefore, it questions the laws of reality established in the text and so, the tension is displaced from the particular place of action towards the transgression undergone by this dimension.

Although not systematically, various studies have drawn attention to the representation of 'place' and its evolution in the Fantastic. However, the fact that the fantastic transgression can be a phenomenon performed by space – the Fantastic of Space – has been almost completely neglected, with very few exceptions. Finally, just as the function of narrative space differs from one model to the other, it is also true that not all transgressions of the Fantastic of Space are just a single one. A further analysis of this second model necessarily implies a more abstract reflection on how space intervenes in the human – and textual – construction of reality. For this purpose, the following four chapters are concerned with four central spatial principles in the construction of human spatiality: 'body', 'boundary', 'hierarchy' and 'world' are the four proposed abstract categories which will be obliterated by the fantastic transgression.

These four categories meet within one single motif: the fantastic hole. While it is true that this motif is found throughout the history of the Fantastic, how it is treated in the Postmodern Fantastic reveals a paradigm which will reappear throughout the next chapters. As seen in the short story by Cristina Fernández Cubas, a world very similar to ours is built but with unpredictable holes that are constantly overlooked. Underlying this is a view of reality as an inherently porous construction, containing a variety of gaps that our human cognitive apparatus is incapable of deciphering. "Our minds are permeable to forgetfulness", says the protagonist of "The Aleph" (Borges 1999:286). Cristina Fernández Cubas herself summed this thought up in her short story "Mi hermana Elba" and even more explicitly rephrased it in an interview as follows: "for me, the so-called reality is full of black holes" (interview by Paula Corroto, 2011).

CHAPTER II

BODY: (NOT) BEING IN SPACE

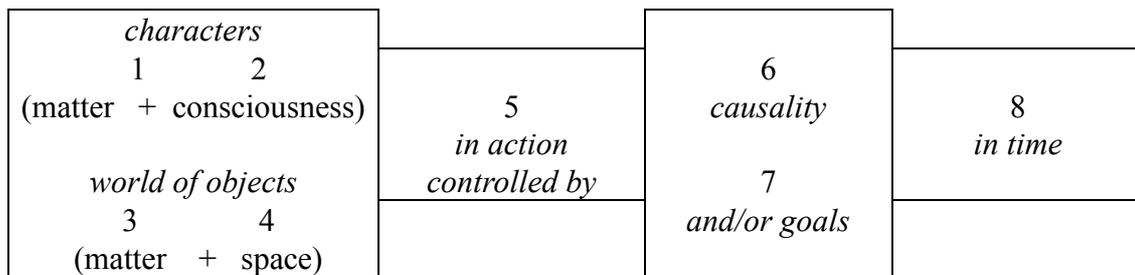
“There would be no space at all for me if I had no body” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty)

1. SUBJECT, SPACE, REALITY

In the volume *Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur (Space and Movement in Literature*, Hallet; Neumann [eds.] 2009), dealing as the German title indicates with space and movement in literature, the editors emphasise how the notion of spatiality (*Räumlichkeit*) is correlated with that of spatial experience (*Raumerfahrung*): there is no space without movement, this one perceived as the dynamic act of a subject who observes it and not necessarily as physical displacement around it (2009:20-21;66). Accordingly, space cannot be dissociated with the corporal experience of the one who perceives it. For this reason, the co-dependence of body and narrative space should be taken into account in any study on textual spatiality. As much as there is no space without a body who experiences it, as Merleau-Ponty's quote opening this chapter argues, there is also no body if there is no space for it to be in.

The first exploration on how space is involved in the fantastic transgression is dedicated to perhaps the simplest, and yet fundamental, principle of human spatiality: we are in space. The selected short stories play upon the spatial notion of position and emplacement of bodies in space. Therefore, this first chapter will leave aside the widely explored physical transformations *in* space in the narrative of the Fantastic (the double, monstrous metamorphoses), to focus on transgressions of the human body provoked *by* space.

Remarkably, this basic premise is overlooked in the model of reality used by Todorov's study (1975). Aware of the need to draw a thematic study based on abstract categories and not on concrete images or motifs (1975:101), his outline is anchored on a scheme of the real formulated by Witold Ostrowsky in "The Fantastic and the Realistic in Literature: Suggestions on How to Define and Analyse Fantastic Fiction" (in Todorov 1975:102), and comprises eight categories, which I reproduce:



According to this schema of human experience, space is a category in which only objects are located, disregarding the physical emplacement of characters. But, are characters not also in space?³⁹

This significant omission can be complemented by including space as a category in which both characters or objects are; since especially in narrative of the Fantastic, objects are frequently animated, thus endowed with the potential agency of human characters. As a consequence, by introducing space as a dimension of human spatiality, the ground is opened for a thematic field on the transgressions of physical bodies (whether objects or characters) and/in space.

Todorov's scheme raises another problematic aspect: space is viewed as a category whose "transformation" (1975:119) is just the *effect* of another transgression: namely the juxtaposition between mind and matter. Todorov's first thematic model – the "themes of the self" (1975:107-123) – is concerned with "the relation between the man and the world" (1975:120) and derives from a distinction between the physical and the mental. These themes include transformations of space, this one only quoted as one of the possible "transformations", with no reference as to how this occurs (1975:119). The transgression of these two categories results in the "collapse (which is also to say the illumination) of the limit between matter and mind" (1975:114). Todorov's themes of the self originate from the separation between the realm of physical reality, and that of imagination. However, the subject, apart from

³⁹ One of the explanations for this model scheme is that Todorov is prioritising the temporal (the plot) over the spatial. While everything happens in time (category 8), the dimension of space is restricted to the emplacement of objects (and thus, as a neutral setting or physical stage). This view of literature has been precisely the point of departure for scholars advocating for the 'Spatial Turn' in literary studies. Furthermore, as regards to Todorov's model of reality: could objects not also be characters within the plot? If objects were characters in a story, according to Todorov's model, would they not be in space?

the ‘psyche’, is also a physical entity, a body embedded in external physical reality, an aspect which he omits. The transgressions of the body are for him a side-effect of the collapse between the *imaginary* (the mind) and the *tangible* (the body). But his thematic approach ignores the collapse between, put simply, two *tangible* aspects: the body and the physical dimension (the corporeal and. physical space).⁴⁰

Todorov’s ‘mind-centred’ thematic grouping works very well with 19th century texts based on visions and manifestations of madness, as his examples show (Nerval’s *Aurélia* [1855], Gautier’s “Hashish Club” [1846]), to which we could add Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887). And yet, this grouping does not embrace the transgressions of physical location which are found in the more modern model texts analysed in this chapter.

Before proceeding to the analytical sections, it is worth remembering how the triad space/body/subject has proved to be central in the schemes of the real interpreted under the lens of phenomenology and existential philosophy, as seen in, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy on spatiality of and in human existence and in Martin Heidegger’s existential approach to space, particularly as exposed in his piece “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951).

Merleau-Ponty extensively elaborates on the perception of reality through the body in his work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), where he develops a phenomenological insight on reality, understood as an experience mediated through our senses. At the heart of this experience, he argues, is the body. In his view, the human body is a starting point that anchors all spatial relationships and experiences of distance, direction and location:

When I say that an object is *on* a table, I always mentally put myself either in the table or in the object, and I apply to them a category which theoretically fits the relationship of my body to external objects. Stripped of this anthropological association, the word *on* is indistinguishable from the ‘under’ or the word

⁴⁰ Even the motif of the double, dealing with a transgression of subject and body (in space, and not provoked by space) is considered by Todorov as an outcome of the mind. (“We all experience ourselves as if we were several persons – here the impression will be incarnated on the level of *physical* reality.” [1975:116]).

‘beside’. (1962:101, emphasis in the original)

As expressed in this quote, physical space is an experience both perceived and constructed by the individual’s corporeal awareness. Of particular significance are the notions of dialogue and interrelation between space and body – two entities that need each other to construct the experience of material reality. The spatial environment is produced by the subject and the subject is produced by space, the core idea of Merleau-Ponty’s work, captured by formulas such as “the body is our anchorage in a world” (1962:144), “I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world” (70) or “the body is our general medium for having a world” (169), and the initial quote opening this chapter.

Pursuing the same line of thought and deeply inspired by the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, architectural scholars and human geographers – among whom are Rasmussen (1959), Ching (1975), Tuan (1977), Pallasmaa (1996) and Saldarriaga Roa (2002) – have applied Merleau-Ponty’s views on spatiality to built space. On this basis, they have argued that architectural space does not exist independently from the experience of the body:

We believe that the most essential and memorable sense of three-dimensionality originates in the body experience and that this sense may constitute a basis for understanding spatial feeling in our experience of buildings. (Moore and Yudell in Ching 1996:227)

The world is reflected in the body, and the body is projected in the world. [...] Understanding architectural scale implies the unconscious measuring of the object or the building with one’s body, and of projecting one’s body scheme into the space in question. We feel pleasure and protection when the body discovers its resonance in space. (Pallasmaa 2005:45-67)

These excerpts converge in one idea: without this projection of the human body into the built environment, the so-called physical reality cannot be apprehended. From a phenomenological angle, the body is the starting point of

(spatial) experience, and serves as a referential axis to establish spatial structures (vertical-horizontal, left-right, top-bottom), which are the positions of the body extrapolated onto the coordinates of space (see “The natural coordinate system”, Bollnow 2011:44-54).

From this perspective, when regarding material space as a sensorial experience, the co-dependence between body and space is asserted. Within the textual realm, since spatiality appeals to the senses, it necessarily invokes the position of the subject who perceives it.

Therefore, the experience of (factual and textual) reality is inextricably linked with how the body perceives space, and conversely with how it perceives itself in space. As Finnish architectural scholar Juhani Pallasmaa expresses, “architecture strengthens the existential experience, one’s sense of being in the world, and this is essentially a strengthened experience of self” (2001:41). From these views it can already be inferred how, in the transgressions of space in fantastic narrative, the dyad body/reality will be of importance.

Embedded in this last quote by Pallasmaa is an idea that had been developed earlier by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The existential awareness of ‘being’ (a ‘subject’) through this dialogue between body and space is the pivotal thought of his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951). As the title indicates, Heidegger elaborates on the existential relationship between being and dwelling, originating from the sensible dimension of the built environment. By ‘dwelling’, he means ‘to inhabit the world’. But more importantly, the corporal experience of ‘being in space’ is equated with the act of being aware of the self. In other words, the subject perceives himself by the space he occupies. The notion of ‘being’ for Heidegger inseparably encompasses this double existential and situational dimension, opposition that unlike other languages (e.g. the Spanish *ser* and *estar*), the English and German language merge into one single verb (to be; *sein*). He resolves this by simply adding a spatial deictic (‘*da*’, German for ‘here’ and ‘there’), resulting in his central term *Dasein*.

Heidegger thus stresses the interrelation between ontology and position, between *being* and *being there*, and this idea is at the core of the model literary texts of this chapter. In this process of construction of subject, the notion of boundary is once more crucial, in this case in the sense of body limits. The awareness of physical boundaries (corporeal space) is interrelated with the awareness of having a position in the world. To know that we exist is to know that we have a body that inhabits space and generates space, a thought that coincides with Merleau-Ponty's view of corporeal perception as a way of stating 'I am in the world'.

What these phenomenological and existential analyses of space remind us of is that the notion of physical reality (whether textual or actual) cannot be segregated from that of emplacement, or physical position. At the same time, the relation between 'space' and 'body' is fundamental in the construction of identity, this one understood here as the awareness of the 'subjective'.

1.1. The Postmodern Fracture of the 'Bodily Analogy'

While the phenomenological and existential analysis is rather a-temporal and stays on the margins of socio-cultural particularities, in the past decades there has been an increase of scholarship dealing with how this relation between the corporal and the spatial is put into question in the Global era. This topic has been strongly present in the Postmodern discourse of Human Geographers, seeking to understand how the dialogue between body and built space fails particularly in the late 20th century. Two representative examples are Jameson's cultural analysis of Postmodern architecture (1991) and Vidler's psychoanalytical approach to what he calls the "modern uncanny", also in relation to built space (1992).

The mutating relationship between body and space, according to Jameson, is best seen in Postmodern architectural space. Taking the architecture of Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles (architect: Portman, 1974) as the paradigm, Jameson draws a parallel between this building and a text (or texture) whose meaning is to be completed by the movement of a body.

He concludes that the elusive and disorienting nature of this building repels the human figure: it deconstructs hierarchies and the body cannot anchor itself in it. There is no possible orientation, apprehension of materiality, distance and spatial depth. This is paradigmatic of what he denominates “Postmodern hyperspace”, a spatial experience that exceeds human perceptual capability; a phenomenon of disengagement between the body and space, which profoundly affects the experience of the real. The Postmodern production of space, as Jameson asserts, “has come to be felt as incompatible with the representation of the body [...] The privileged space of the newer art is radically antianthropomorphic” (1991:34), indicating an “alarming disjunction between the body and its built environment” (1991:44).

Vidler’s view on the subject matter largely coincides with Jameson’s, but to some extent is complemented by providing a chronological explanation of this phenomenon of corporeal fracture. Vidler also establishes that the Postmodern (what he calls ‘late modernity’) has given rise to a progressively disengaged relation between space and body. Going back to Vitruvius (80–70 BC-15 BC), for whom the experience of space arose from human finger, palm and foot, in architectural history the view of built environment as embodiment of the human body had predominated for centuries. The dialogue between body and built space finds its canonical example in “the golden section”, that perfect proportion and scale where space and body feature in a harmonious dialogue, which fascinated artists and architects since Antiquity. Towards the 19th century, there is a progressive shift from the body taken as the origin and essence of harmony. Increasingly, the Modern – and even more so the Postmodern – body no longer serves “to center, to fix, or to stabilise” (1992:70).

This gives rise to a conception of material space as progressively detaching itself from the human figure. Architecture starts being conceived as an organism embodying states of the body and of the mind in the 19th century, influenced by the animistic ideals of Romanticism. It is during the last decades of the 20th century that this process accelerates. The idea of space no longer

surrendered to the sovereignty of the human body crystallizes in Postmodernity. This period leads “inexorably to the final ‘loss’ of the body as an authoritative foundation for architecture” (1992:70). Ultimately, the bodily analogy is “abandoned with the collapse of the classical tradition and the birth of a technologically dependent architecture” (1992:69).⁴¹ The consequence leads to what Vidler calls the “architectural uncanny”: the strange experience of built space perceived as animated, and also the strange experience of the perceiving subject as not being reflected by physical space.

Both Jameson and Vidler discuss two aspects that are of special interest to the fantastic transgressions at stake in this chapter: first, they emphasise the loss of human dominance over the spatial environment, a phenomenon – as they argue – particularly prominent in Postmodernity. Second, a central argument is that the fracture between body and spatial experience weakens the experience of ‘being’, also weakening the experience of factual reality. Once more, they assert that the subject’s impression of reality and of himself is altered when the body/space relation is fractured, which in the literary analysis will be reflected in the fantastic transgression of the harmony between body and space (‘the bodily analogy’).

2. SPACE AS PREDATOR: “LA CASA” (“THE HOUSE”, JOSÉ B. ADOLPH 1975)

Anthropophagy has been a source of strong fascination among anthropologists, psychoanalysts and sociologists. In this section, physical space is not an inanimate background but has a different ontological status: it is endowed with the qualities of an (animated) creature. The textual examples that follow have in common some type of space, for instance a house or a room, presented as an entity capable of devouring the human subject. This spatial theme might send the reader back to the vampire or other blood sucking

⁴¹ The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas brings this idea to the extreme in his article “Junkspace” (2002), where he argues that the loss of the ‘bodily-analogy’ in the late 20th century is related to the growth of a ‘de-humanised’ architecture, largely based on technologically dependent “bubble” buildings, such as the air-conditioned shopping centre.

fantastic creatures, for which the human body is a vital source. “Le Jardin malade” (“The Sick Garden” 1941) by Michel de Ghelderode, Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Richard Matheson’s *Hell House* (1971), Anne River Siddons’ *The House Next Door* (1978) and Stephen King’s “1408” (2002) are texts that present the figure of an evil and all-powerful space, capable of destroying whoever enters or finds himself in it. Finné, in reference to the American fantastic, notes that this motif of the predator-place only appears in the late 20th century, precisely when the figure of the ghost haunting a place leads to another motif without ghost: space as (an evil) protagonist. These works are for him classic portrayals of the dangerous, vampire, perverted, or sadistic house (2006:11-44).

A much more unusual and interesting text is “La casa” (“The House”, 1975), by Peruvian writer José B. Adolph.⁴² This short story breaks with some traditional associations regarding the portrayal of the predator (as evil or menacing), the reason of this human depredation (typically to keep itself alive or eternally young), and the subject’s reaction to such an act (with fright or fear). “La casa” offers a clear example of the transgressive relation between space and body with a simple plot line: the story concerns a character referred to as A., who, immersed in his daily journey to work, finds himself inside a house he had never been to before. What seems to be an ordinary house quickly turns out to be a predator-place, a fact that is realised when he experiences his body being slowly devoured by this house. I had previously mentioned this text as an example of agency of space in the fantastic text

⁴² Harry Belevan devotes a chapter to this author in *Antología del cuento fantástico peruano* (*Anthology of the Peruvian Short Story*, 1977:160-171). The Peruvian literary journal “Tinta Expresa” has dedicated a dossier to the work of this author (2010). Despite the fact that this author is acclaimed as one of the masters of the Peruvian Fantastic in the 20th century, his work has gone quite unnoticed in other countries, with only few exceptions. This omission could be due to the fact that most of the critical attention has focused on the part of his *oeuvre* that falls into the conventions of the science fiction narrative (Lockhart [ed.] 2004:3-6). Nevertheless, some of his short stories undoubtedly correspond to my definition of the Fantastic, one of them being the selected story. Firstly published in *Mañana fuimos felices* (*Tomorrow We Were Happy*, 1975), “La casa” has been recently included to represent the author’s fiction in the very comprehensive collection of the Peruvian Fantastic *La estirpe del ensueño: Narrativa peruana de orientación fantástica* (*The Lineage of Dreams: Peruvian Narrative of Fantastic Orientation*, 2009). The introductory articles to this volume provide an overview of the Peruvian Fantastic as well as of how José B. Adolph is placed within this literary tradition.

(Chapter I, section 4.1.). Following the proposed methodological model (Chapter I, section 2), a closer look is now devoted to the four dimensions to examine how narrative space intervenes in the fantastic transgression.

2.1. Location: a Random House

In this short story, there are two central spatial frames: the exterior and the house. It is in this last one where most of the action is concentrated. The function of the exterior frame is mainly to emphasise that the house is located in an ordinary neighbourhood. Right at the beginning, the reader is told that the character ends up in this house because he deviates from “the sweet monotony of the known path” (2009:585).⁴³ This expression already serves to segregate two domains: the known space, located in the exterior, and the exceptional, which will be found in this particular house, whose characteristics, at least at first glance, are completely unremarkable.

In the first paragraph, the author brings forth the mundanity of the setting by describing the character’s routine trajectory, where he passes by “every morning” (2009:585). He takes his everyday setting so much for granted that only “a true catastrophe” (2009:585) would make him aware of any modification in it.

The choice of a banal setting in the story establishes a contrast with the literary topoi of the haunted house and other classic horror doomed spaces. Very little is devoted to the description of the house itself, or to specify its geographical location. Apart from a few details that establish the house as one of many in a normal neighbourhood, there are no spatial referents; neither street nor city names help us determine where the action takes place. Furthermore, there is initially nothing fearful or strange about it. On the contrary, it is an unremarkable house, and as any other, it contains domestic objects such as vases, rugs, mirrors, paintings and “heavily worn-off furniture” (2009:586), all of which create an impression of an ordinary building inhabited

⁴³ Since there is no official English translation of this short story, all translations are mine.

and taken care of by someone.

Another important spatial element is the threshold of this house. The function of this threshold contrasts with the importance it is often given in classic fantastic fiction (Chapter I, section 2.2.). This is a significant difference with the Fantastic of Place, where this physical boundary differentiated both domains and acted as the frame or turning point in the plot when it was going to be crossed. While here the threshold is still a physical boundary segregating the natural from the supernatural domain, how and when it is crossed by the protagonist is as imperceptible as it is irrelevant. Instead, a strange ‘logical’ concatenation is implied: because the character is distracted, he ends up entering this supernatural domain of the house. The character is suddenly aware that he is in a different ontological domain and there is no anticipation, nor description of him accessing the house. In the text, the spatial frame of the exterior (“the sunshine” [585]) is suddenly replaced by that of the interior (“the pleasant darkness of a closed building” [585]).

2.2. Discourse: Oxymorons

As little attention is devoted to the descriptive features of space as it is to the subject who is in it. One of the few details provided about the protagonist is his name – solely an initial “A.,” (probably for “Adolph”, paralleling Kafka’s classic “K.”. I will return to Kafka’s influence in the next section). Therefore, the major part of the rhetorical devices are not concerned with *where* or *who* but with the interaction between the two – subject and space –, more specifically to *how* the devouring process takes place.

The brutal and explicit devouring process contrasts with the submissive reaction of the character. The action starts with a force that makes him naked, narrated with the passive form omitting the agent causing it: “his cloths were being taken off” (586), “he was being dragged towards the living-room” (587), “he was being attracted towards the second floor” (587). Finding himself naked in a foreign house does not cause alarm in him but “indifference” (587)

and a “sensual curiosity” (587), ending up in a “semierrection” (587). This strange reaction turns to anguish when he realises it is the house that is causing his body to disappear, a fact that he quickly determines as irreversible (“the impossibility of keeping totally isolated from the house and its intentions” [587]).

From the moment A. decides he cannot fight the house (or so he thinks), he resolves to celebrate with relief his physical dissolution. To express this, a variety of references to the semantic field of comfort irrupt in the violent scene. But these oxymoronic words are not figures of speech, they reflect a reality: he is enjoying his own physical destruction. That which is being told and how it is told seems disjointed (see “semantic impertinence”, Casas 2010:11). This is what forms the central discursive construction of the Fantastic in this short story.

His head, about to be eaten up, lay “reclined in a *luxurious* manner on the fresh pillow” (588, emphasis added), “From now on he would be the tributary of the world, but vice versa. He would have liked to cross his hands around his neck; he did this gesture mentally” (588), “through the inclined ceiling slid, with a tender goodbye, the half-closed hands” (588). This joy with which the character accepts his physical destruction gives the horrific scene a grotesque touch of humor, especially when the character starts considering the practical advantages of not having a body:

A. sighed, comfortable, relieved. He started analysing, quickly, his possibilities in the world, his reinsertion, the easiest way to arrange his disability pension. [...] What did the loss of arms and legs mean? Did he ever really use them? And concerning his sexual organs, was man not essentially intelligence and soul? (588)

The contrast between the dynamic cannibalistic act and the passive and happy attitude of the character is even more accentuated in the final scenes. The house starts vibrating, “while it devoured the slim body of A., who closed his eyes, smiling...” (588). The tale closes with the atomisation of his body into pieces that the house expels into the exterior, while the remains of his eyes

“gave a delirious gaze at the impeccable and cozy ceiling” (588). The “delirious gaze” (588) and the two adjectives “impeccable” and “cozy” once more reinforce this idea of an individual who welcomes the physical dissolution of his body, absorbed by this house.

Another disjunction is centered on the tempo. The abrupt and quick disappearance of the character’s body parts is juxtaposed with the calm ambiance and tempo surrounding the devouring, as seen in these excerpts:

It was as if a solicit butler urged him, with quiet paternalism, to take off his jacket. (586)

The bed started to vibrate making him sleepy, while it devoured with infinite patience [...]. (588)

Equally disconcerting is the character’s submissive and positive attitude to this act. This is highlighted by the lack of discourse on evil or horror surrounding both the house itself, as well as the actual event. This fact could also be regarded as oxymoronic: very frequently the motif of the ‘doomed’ space appears hand in hand with that of the ‘evil’ space. In this way, the supernatural features of a space are explained with its desire to harm (physically or psychologically) its inhabitant, thus the plot is centered on how to escape from this diabolic space. Among the various examples which were mentioned in the introduction to this section 2 (e.g. *The Haunting of Hill House* [1959], Matheson’s *Hell House* [1971], King’s “1408” [2002]), the best example is Anne R. Siddons’ house (*The House Next Door*, 1978). Amidst the quiet and perfect American suburban life, this house is capable of corrupting those who enter it, by pushing them to commit adultery for example. The house/neighborhood relation is based on the categories evil/good, therefore the entire story deals with how to avoid the perverse influence of this building. Instead, in “La casa”, the devouring is not presented as ‘evil’, as it could be expected, but as surprisingly ‘pleasant’. The anthropophagous act is portrayed with absolute lack of moral judgment.

2.3. Story: Banalisation of the Fantastic Event

As to what role space performs in the story, this is a good example of a fantastic text which does not prioritise place or character but a category of space, or a ‘spatial event’: the anthropophagous act by the house. All in it is presented as banal: the figure of the predator is an ordinary place; the finality of the action seems random, and third, the character ends up accepting this supernatural destruction with passivity, even joy.

These three elements point to the tradition of the Fantastic inaugurated by Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, in which the physical transmutation is accepted by the character with abnegated passivity. In Adolph’s short story, why this house devours the body of the protagonist is not even alluded to, and very much in tune with Kafka, the source of anguish is precisely the randomness of the act. He finds himself “without terror or joy” (585) in the grips of this devouring-place. The influence of the Czech author is also explicitly stated in the epigraph preceding the story:

I want here to thank the involuntary complicity of Franz Kafka, who elaborated the idea that follows in one of his memorable letters to Felice. In the meantime, many other authors have dealt with the topic, folklorising it amongst growing minorities; today no one will be surprised by it, a fact that makes it more anguishing than ever to me. (“La casa”, 585)

What “idea” or “topic” Adolph is referring to in connection with Kafka is not specified. He could be addressing the figure of prison space, in whose complex structure and mechanisms the subject is entrapped (e.g. *The Castle* or *The Trial*). He could also be pointing at the theme of physical mutation or effacement, central in *Metamorphosis* (the only work in which it is explored in the mode of the Fantastic), “A Hunger Artist” and “In the Penal Colony”.⁴⁴ In a diary entry, Kafka blends in the motif of a threatening space with that of

⁴⁴ After some research, the original source of inspiration could not be identified; according to B. Adolph, it was Franz Kafka’s letter to Felice. However, I discovered instead an entry in his diary (1913) where Kafka describes a scene that quite clearly coincides with the central idea of

corporeal devouring, in an image that bears strong parallels with the anthropophagous space of “La casa”:

To be pulled in through the ground-floor window of a house by a rope tied around one’s neck and to be yanked up, bloody and ragged, through all the ceiling, furniture, walls and attics, without consideration, as if by a person who is paying no attention, until the empty noose, dropping the last fragments of me when it breaks through the roof tiles, is seen on the roof. (Kafka 1965:291)

This anguishing Kafkaian dream illustrates the horror of being mutilated, without possible resistance or escape. But most importantly, the agent of this physical transgression bears no personal connection with the victim. In Kafka’s paragraph, what is causing this mutilation is almost banal: simply “a house” (1965:291) with no further spatial markers.

In tune with this thought, in Adolph’s story the function of space is displaced from the ‘where’ it happens to the ‘what’ is causing it, from setting to agent. As in *Metamorphosis*, the relevance of the subject within the story concerns that which it is not anymore: a human body.

This corporeal transformation, or destruction, in “La casa” reveals the existential dimension of the supernatural.⁴⁵ Yet, what distinguishes Adolph’s treatment of this event from Kafka’s one is significant. It relates to the character’s reaction in “La casa”. He does not only accept his de-humanisation with passivity (as Gregor Samsa does); he even celebrates it with joy. This fact leads to two further questions: first, how is the reader expected to react to this portrayal of the supernatural? And second, how can this pleasant physical erasure be interpreted in the light of the context in which this Postmodern story was written?

the short story.

⁴⁵ Scholars have noted that food in Kafka’s life (Boa 1996:53-54) and fiction (Osborne 1967) is frequently charged with an existential dimension – a paradigmatic text being “The Hunger Artist”, who fasts simply because he cannot find the food he likes. His fasting has a deeper meaning, interpreted as a struggle for self-realisation, and a statement of him as individual, with his own demands and desires (Osborne 1967:51).

2.4. The Body-Less Subject

If the subject accepts his new existential and ontological state in a natural manner, the reader's reaction is expected to be quite different. The oxymoronic construction of the scene and the randomness of it are what will make the transgression particularly abrupt, surprising and unpredictable for the reader, who is scandalised by the events taking place, and by how they are perceived by the character. Apart from the lack of finality, there is no transition scene marking when and how the character has entered the house, or why that particular space and time coordinates. As mentioned, this is a significant innovation on the traditional motif of the all-powerful, doomed or evil space, in which finality and causality are explicit.

Even more scandalous for the reader is the character's joyful apprehension of his own brutal destruction. A., after a brief moment of panic, resigns himself to his new condition, and trades his physical position in the world in exchange of a better plane of existence. Strangely, A. is certain that losing his body does not equate death. In a moment of epiphany, he realises that by being body-less, he will occupy a 'better' position (if not physical, existential) in the world. Thus, getting rid of his body, a mere accessory and unnecessary nuisance, is a fact that he ends up welcoming with great relief.

Kafka's "involuntary complicity", as Adolph writes in the epigraph, is indeed strongly present in "La casa", both in the theme itself as well as in its random and illogical elements. Kafka's use of the fantastic element marked a turning point in the Fantastic by emphasising the natural acceptance of the supernatural event by the character (for example in *Metamorphosis*), while this supernatural event would still be presented as problematic within the textual world, and so conceived as 'fantastic' (and not as 'marvellous') by the reader.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Todorov's study ends with the polemic statement that the Fantastic in literature of the late 20th century is forcefully dead. His main argument is that the category of 'real' (and thus textual realism) disappears in a context where "we can no longer believe in an immutable, external reality, nor in a literature which is merely the transcription of such reality" (1975:168). Taking Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as the turning point of this paradigm shift, he argues that the Fantastic no longer exists since fiction has already become reality. In this light, all (Postmodern) literature would be considered 'Fantastic'.

But Samsa's supernatural metamorphosis globally expresses an existential anguish over exclusion. And this seems to be overcome in Adolph's text by precisely accepting the new supernatural condition of being body-less. In so doing, Adolph's text shows both a continuity (the supernatural is accepted with abnegation) as well as a rupture (while it is accepted, it is not threatening and even celebrated) with the Modernist tradition of the Fantastic, which is certainly typically Postmodern.

In "La casa" this new state of being incorporeal is not presented as a potential sign of exclusion but of inclusion. A. shows a decisive lack of fear of being rejected by society; instead he quickly starts thinking of possibilities of "re-adaptation" (588) and the advantages of his new plane of existence. What is suggested in the text is that by accepting this irremediable and illogical situation, the subject finds his position in the physical world. Physical devouring is no threat because the body is presented as unnecessary. But what definitely renders the reader into a state of stupefaction is that, the idea of not occupying a physical position is still conceived by the protagonist as an ontological possibility.

What is more, this experience is ecstatic, very clearly shown at the end of the story. In the process of his body being torn apart, A. embraces with joy his imminent body-less condition ("maybe it will be more comfortable to live away from the fruitless tensions and threats of the world: without moving, without acting, without enjoying and without suffering" [588]), and still he exclaims in the last paragraph: "life is beautiful" (588).

3. SPACE AS HUMAN MAGNET: "HABITANTE" ("INHABITANT", PATRICIA ESTEBAN ERLÉS 2008), "EL MUSEO" ("THE MUSEUM", JOSÉ MARÍA MERINO 1982)

If "La casa" ended with the image of a subject who, without a body, surprisingly still retained his consciousness, the next two short stories present a character who fully surrenders to the influence of the place he is in. This place exercises a control over the character's willpower, as a sort of 'Magnet-

Space' which prevents him from leaving it.

The bond between a character and a place is one of the key themes in, for example, the canonical "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), where the family line is literally embedded in the house, so much so that the end of the family line is manifested by the crumbling of the house. The transgression of Poe's text relates to a common conception of nature as organism in Romanticism, where space is a metonymic or metaphoric expression of the character. The unity between nature and human being is literal in this short story, where environment and character are one single united and co-dependant entity.

The sample texts selected for this section also play on this correlation but, in contrast with the Romantic ideal, subject and space are not in harmonic equity. The impossible element is centred on the domination of space over individual, to the point where physically leaving it becomes impossible, resulting in an irrational and unavoidable attachment to this place.

An earlier allusion to this transgression is found in the previously mentioned novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (Shirley Jackson 1959). However, the attraction force of space, although suggested, is explained as part of the various evil characteristics of this Gothic mansion, as the following excerpt shows: "The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once" (1999:33).

The story tells of an old and remote house with a history of deaths and other strange occurrences. A group of four people resolve to spend some time in it to discover more about its hauntings. Among them is Eleanor, the most fragile one of the group and catalyser of the supernatural. The attracting force of the house manifests when she drives towards it. Despite warning voices, she cannot help but enter the house. Also, despite her colleagues' advice to leave the house for her own mental health, she is determined to stay, and ends up developing a strange bond with it that will crystallise in the macabre ending of the tale: immediately after leaving the premises, she crashes into a tree and

dies.

As the story develops, the authority of the building over its inhabitants becomes clearer. It has its own specific norms that have to be obeyed and respected: “‘The linen,’ Mrs. Dudley said, ‘belongs in the linen drawers in the dining room. The silver belongs in the silver chest. The glasses belong on the shelves’” (1999:101). The repetition of “belong” shows that the house is portrayed as a space with elements that appertain to it, with their specific emplacement and function, as if they were the organs of a body whose distribution cannot be altered if they were to function properly. With this system of rules, the mansion is presented as a closed-off system. The house is a world apart, with its own rules. Even the characters refer to the house as a desert island, a figure of isolation very much related to that of the microcosm (“‘We are on a desert island,’ said Luke. ‘I can’t picture any world but Hill House,’ Eleanor said” [151]). The idea of the microcosm, with its own rules and elements, is what leads to establish this place as sharply segregated from the outside geographically, and most importantly, ontologically.

As a self-sufficient and closed-off organism, what inhabits this house becomes an integral part of it. Whoever is in it is stripped from his independence to act and think. This idea is transmitted through the image of an all-powerful space that is not willing to let any of its inhabitants go: “The house. It watches every movement you make (85)”, “The gates are locked. Hill House has a reputation for insistent hospitality; it seemingly dislikes letting its guests get away” (67). This is most clearly seen in the last scene, as Eleanor dies the instant she is exposed to the exterior. Outside of the house-organism, its parts cannot survive: “I *won’t* go, she thought, and laughed out aloud to herself; Hill House is not as easy as *they* are; just by telling me to go away they can’t make me leave, not if Hill House means me to stay.” (245).

Shirley Jackson’s novel is an early example of space being a transgressive element in fictional reality: Hill House goes beyond its traditional role as an inanimate physical container and becomes a subject with a specific agency: namely, the capability of mesmerising the character and

exercising an unavoidable power of attraction towards itself. Despite this fact, the treatment of this fantastic space, regarding the choice of setting, semantic construction and function in the story cannot be said to be too innovative. As Finné (2006:25) and Aguirre (1990:93) have pointed out, Jackson's text stays very much within the conventions of the Gothic haunted house frame. This is seen, for example, in the geographical isolation, intricate labyrinthine structure of the building, the uncanny aura surrounding it and the motif of "the purposeful exploration of the haunted house to determine its true nature and restore it to its original condition" (Aguirre 1990:93). All this leads to the conclusion that even if Hill House is presented as an impossible element in the novel, what is at the foreground is itself as topos. There is hardly any development on how this building alters the physical laws of space by obliterating human control over itself.

A more innovative use of the motif of the magnet-space is found in two recent short stories selected as models for this section. The first text is "El museo" ("The Museum", 1982) by José María Merino.⁴⁷ The second one is "Habitante" ("Inhabitant", 2008) by Patricia Esteban Erlés.⁴⁸ These two short stories are very clear examples of the figure of the magnet-space, and offer a distinctive treatment of the fantastic element that is closer to José B. Adolph's presentation of the devouring-place in "La casa" than to Shirley Jackson's Hill House. As an exception to the rest of the sections, focused on one single model text to develop the subject matter, two short stories are combined here since,

⁴⁷ The Fantastic is one of the favourite narrative forms of José María Merino, as seen in volumes like *Cuentos del reino secreto (Short Stories of the Secret Realm, 1982)* – to which this text belongs –, *El viajero perdido (The Lost Passenger, 1990)*, *Días imaginarios (Imaginary Days, 2002)* or *Cuentos de los días raros (Short Stories of Strange Days, 2007)*, to name only a few works composed almost in their totality of fantastic narratives. His contribution to the Postmodern Fantastic has attracted critical attention (Andres-Suárez 1997, Alonso 2000, Roas in Andres-Suárez and Casas [eds.] 2005), while other studies have been centred on more general aspects of his work, not always paying detailed attention to the fantastic component (e.g. Candau 1992, Chan Lee 2005).

⁴⁸ Patricia Esteban Erlés is a young yet already established voice in the contemporary fantastic short story scene. In her stories, the Fantastic recurs, but with a distinct innovative approach to traditional themes, as the analysis will demonstrate. This has qualified her to be included within the most influential new voices of the Fantastic in the recently published anthology *Perturbaciones. Antología del relato fantástico español actual (Disruptions: Anthology of the Contemporary Fantastic Short Story, 2009)*.

while both are grounded on the same theme, they present different ways of approaching it.

3.1. Location: Strangely, Home

José María Merino's "El museo" tells of a young anthropologist who visits his uncle in a small village in Spain. This uncle had set out to create a museum with all sorts of everyday objects of his house. During the visit, the uncle offers to bequeath it to his nephew. Accepting this offer, however, requires a permanent stay at this museum-house. For the nephew – who is the narrator – this idea of being confined to an isolated country-house is ridiculous, as it goes against his anthropological curiosity to travel the world. And yet, initially only for a short while, he ends up accepting the offer. From then on, leaving the museum becomes impossible for more than 40 years. All that time, despite his plans of going somewhere, an irrational force keeps him tied to this space.

The museum-house is then the main setting of this story, located in the Valley of Omaña, a rural area of the Spanish Province of León. The entire volume where the story is collected devotes a great deal of attention to spatial descriptions, choosing real extratextual spaces to strengthen the effect of a realistic environment. However, it is important to remark that Omaña, for example, is less relevant as topos than as realistic space. The fact that the author has chosen a specific real place to set his stories is not so much to leave proof of the magical potential and superstitions of this location, as some critics have claimed (Candau 1992:43). Instead, as regards to the fantastic effect, this referential setting is employed to strengthen the effect of verisimilitude. As Roas emphasises, it "would work equally well (talking exclusively about the fantastic dimension) if his stories were set in Madrid, Barcelona or Cádiz" (Roas 2005:162).

Equally mundane is the setting of "Habitante". In this compilation (*Manderley en venta, Manderley on Sale*), spaces are also important; more

specifically interior space functions as leitmotif, as written on the back cover: “*Manderley en venta* is a book of interiors [...]. In almost all of them, the house, life indoors, has a prominent role in the narration; it is one of the characters, silent but constant”.⁴⁹

“Habitante” is the only short story of the volume where a place does not only host the Fantastic but is an active agent of the transgression. In only five pages, the author manages to create a disturbing scenario that culminates in a surprising ending. A young woman finds precisely the exact apartment she had been looking for, an idea that is recurrently emphasised. In this apartment, there are still some remaining traces of the last owner (her name on the metal plate, her black swimming suit, her marks left on the chopping board), Virginia, who drowned in the swimming pool. So far, the story could represent anyone’s experience of moving into a new place, being aware of the fact that it previously belonged to someone else. However, the last lines of the story turn this seeming normality upside down: when someone rings the doorbell one evening asking for Virginia, the protagonist unexpectedly answers that she will be down in a second, puts on the black swimming suit and leaves the apartment.

The story presents thus many open questions and a variety of readings: did the protagonist assume Virginia’s identity? Was she somehow driven to the house to replace Virginia? Will she undergo the same fate as the previous inhabitant? The author could be playing with the classic motif of the exchange of identities, as Julio Cortázar’s short story “Lejana” (1951). However, Virginia’s character is scarcely developed, just as the narrator’s. The same applies to the locus of the action. In contrast with the specific setting of “El museo”, here very little is mentioned about the location of the apartment. The reader only knows that it is number 27 on Hobson Street, located in a compound with a swimming-pool. These few details are contrasted by the extended account of the relation between the house and the narrator.

⁴⁹ Since no official English translation of these two short stories was found, all translations are mine.

What is remarkable about the settings of both stories is precisely how unremarkable they are: a countryside house and a modern urban apartment. Similarly to “La casa”, and in contrast with Jackson’s intricate Gothic Hill House, there is nothing extraordinary about the buildings themselves, other than the random attraction they seem to provoke in the two protagonists.

It is not the setting, but another aspect that is striking: it is related to the concept of home. In “El museo”, ‘home’ is a museum of “undecipherable domesticity” (1982:150), whose “appearance of being lived” (1982:150) strikes the character from the start. Also peculiar is the title of “Habitante”. Even though the apartment is the heart of the action, “inhabitant” inherently alludes to how a particular place is *lived*. Inhabiting means appropriation of space as habitat, this being reflected as the apartment from the start perceived, strangely, as home. Therefore, the fantastic element in these short stories is not just a place with supernatural qualities as in “La casa”: what is at stake here is a question of relation between ‘home’ and ‘inhabitant’.

3.2. Discourse: the Physical Bond

Any physical body in this space is conceived as an integral part of it, in order to preserve this “strange harmony” (1982:150) among the elements that belong to this space. The fantastic relation between body and space is based on a specific understanding of the word ‘belonging’. The Oxford English Dictionary differentiates between three contexts in which the verb ‘to belong’ appears:

- (1) “to be the property of” or “to be dominated by”;
- (2) “to be a member of”, and [*usually with adverbial of place*, emphasis in the original] also to “have an affinity for a specified place or situation”;
- (3) referring to emplacement, once more with an adverb of place, “to be rightly placed in a specified position”.

While only the last two definitions refer to ‘belonging’ in a spatial context (to

be part of, and to be located), in these two short stories spatial belonging is understood as in the first sense. Position in space is equated with being part of space, being dominated by and being a property of it.

The fantastic relationship between subject and space is constructed around three elements. First, there is the image of a strange attraction between character/house, best observed in “El museo”. The second strategy refers to an excessive familiarity between the two, an idea more developed in “Habitante”. Third, this space is portrayed as an organism with its own rules, an aspect strongly present in both stories.

In “El museo”, the power of attraction of space upon the body is explicitly described as the character plans to leave for the first time on a trip. As he says, “all efforts to get away from the house and the valley were pointless” (1982:156):

I perceived then an unexpected irritation in me. Looking at the path that wound down the valley, I sensed my look and my presence being reclaimed by the museum as a fervent wish not willing to let me leave. I realised that I could not go, and told the valet to unload the luggage.

That was the first time that I felt mysteriously tied to the museum, [...]. [...] to be entrapped in the domain of an arcane power that did not allow me to move away [...]. (156)

As these quotes show, the house is portrayed as a strong magnet over the human body from the very moment he resolved to live in it, with expressions from a domain which the reader does not associate with the semantic field of inhabiting a space (“semantic impertinence”, Casas 2010:11) as, for example: “mysteriously tied to the museum” or “the domain of arcane power”.

While the plot of “El museo” is elaborated on this attracting force, what is striking in “Habitante” is that the character and the building are in a relation of ‘excessive familiarity’ from the start. The short story begins *in medias res* – “It cannot be possible” (2008:53), an expression that plays upon a double reading between astonishment vis-à-vis a coincidence, or when faced with something impossible. This sentence is uttered by the protagonist, at the start, who finds out that the building which had captured her attention a while ago is

now for sale. The ambiguity of this first sentence is extended to other expressions such as “it is precisely what I was looking for” (2008:53), “unmistakable, it cannot be another one” (2008:53). She then circles the newspaper ad, an action equated with the establishing the confines of this space that, she is certain from the start, belongs to her (“to delimit my territory” [54]). The idea of premature possession, before she has even moved in, is best expressed in the sentence: “This apartment is morally already mine” (in the Spanish original, literally “*ya es moralmente mío*” [55]). As if the house represented her system of values, or even as if the house represented her, the adverb ‘morally’ stands out in this sentence. Another element that stands out is the temporal ambiguity between “is” and “already”. Once more, this ambiguity may not be random: the expression can be taken literally as present tense, indicating that she belongs there even before having physically been in it. This would explain her anxiety over someone else taking the apartment *from her*, and not just before her (54-55).

Furthermore, this excessive familiarity is reinforced with the use of the articles. From the beginning, without introduction, it is directly referred to as ‘the’ house, a definite article that makes it exclusive and univocal (“The house is unmistakable” [53]). The definite determinant presupposes that it is not the initial encounter with this building, even when in reality it is.

As the story evolves, this idea of the house belonging to her is inverted to her belonging to the house, an aspect presented in “El museo” from the start. Drawing from the Gothic Romantic idea of space as microcosm or organism, in this story it even has its ‘personal’ system of norms. There are various details indicating that the interior of the building has to be preserved as it is; it does not tolerate any modifications from the side of the narrator. For example, the house of “Habitante” reclaims its original wall colour: after the protagonist starts painting one in blue, she feels a strong urge to revert it back to its original white colour. Only then is she at peace (“I sigh with relief when I finally get to leave it as it was before” [56]). In “El museo”, the elements that belong to the museum relate to each other in “a strange harmony” (1982:150),

as if those objects that otherwise would never be related formed a coherence. Also, the presentation of space as organism is reinforced by its sharp segregation from the outside: “The world is still out there, waiting for me. A world different to the museum. After forty years, six months and seventeen days” (1982:158).

3.3. Story: the Stratigraphic Space

One of the central functions of the museum and the house in the short stories is to convey the idea of cyclical plot. In this sense, time also plays a role in the Fantastic. The house and the museum are generators of a temporal transgression, this being the strange repetition of events, which Freud identified as a source of the uncanny (“persistent recurrence”, Freud 1993:145). In both cases, the imprint of the past is fundamental. In geocritical terms, the “stratigraphic” property of space (Westphal 2011a:137-143) – the history embedded in the house and the museum – is a responsibility that weights on the characters. Only by appointing the next successor can the protagonist of “El museo” leave this space for good, as it happens in the end. The protagonist of “Habitante” also ends up repeating the steps of her predecessor.

The temporal mark on space is immediately brought to the foreground by the title itself, “El museo”. His original owner decided to make a museum of his own life, represented in a vast catalogue of objects in what otherwise is an ordinary house. If the notion of museum appeals to the need to preserve identity over the passing of time, it also implies that the memories are objectified so that they can be exhibited to the exterior. The Bachelardian view of home as the site of intimacy and self-development is turned upside-down: domestic space is converted into a display window for voyeurs. Founding this space is like constructing their own prison and so the character abandons his dreams and personal needs to dedicate himself entirely to the preservation of the museum; the subject becomes an object within the museum.

The protagonist of “Habitante” also succumbs to the past embedded in

the house. She answers the call for Virginia, puts on the swimming suit and goes down, maybe following the same fate as the previous inhabitant, who herself might also have followed someone else's steps. As in Adolph's "La casa", and Merino's "El museo", there is no intention to rationalise the situation, or to resist it. The building exercises its power of attraction, persuasion and, at least in "Habitante", possibly lethal agency over the subject. Also, this space has its own rules by which the human has to abide. And, finally, it does not only contain a story from the past but generates its repetition: the character is entrapped not only in the confines of this place but also in the confines of its history.

Even if both houses are presented as physically unremarkable, they have a mesmerising, overpowering force upon the human characters, to the point where these spaces bend the individual's will power. Once more, what matters is not the specific place, but what it causes and how it distorts the laws of reason: the fantastic element is found in the magnetic force of a space presenting an illogical, irresistible attraction and submission. The subject, in exchange, is presented as an entity whose willpower and independence to act freely is annihilated. The temporal charge of space accentuates the image of, literally, a burdening chain preventing free movement. The subjects are conditioned by the past, embedded within the four walls of the space he and she inhabit. This could be read as a hyperbole for isolation, and dependence on one's own comfort zone, which leads to a type of paralysis when attempting to leave, just as the character of "Eveline" in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914).

Back to the Heideggerian correlation between 'living' and 'being', in both cases 'living' is equated with a loss of individuality – 'physical position' inside these buildings means 'possession from these buildings'. Thus fantastic transgression could be regarded as a literalisation of the Heideggerian 'being', merging the existential emplacement with the physical. Being (*located*) inside literally means being (*part of*) the inside. The characters are then urged to accept the implications of being the 'inhabitant' of this space, "with all the horror it hosts", as the epigraph of "Habitante" anticipated.

3.4. The Mind-Less Body

In spite of plot differences, divergent locations and endings, in both short stories the protagonists abandon who they are to replace the previous inhabitants; what is more, in “El museo” the character already finds another substitute. Not only do the characters surrender from the start to the power of attraction exercised by the house, they also hand themselves over to its will, and become part of its story. This is a significant difference from the Romantic conception of space – as an organism at once with the subject and mutually influencing agencies. Here space inhibits and overcomes the subject. This is expressed by the motif of being attached to a particular place, of not having any free will in it and, literally, of losing capability of physical movement away from it.

Just as the vampire may need human victims to survive, this doomed space always requires a human captive. A further example where the same motif is presented is “La habitación maldita” (“The Doomed Room”, 2004) by Fernando Iwasaki. In this micro short story, the protagonist spends the night in a hotel room. During the night, something awakens him whispering that, this time, he will be the one staying. Only by finding a successor, the next host to spend the night there and take up his position in this room, will he be liberated from it.

Overall, “El museo” and “Habitante” can be regarded as an inversion of the notion of subject seen in “La casa”. As described, the character of “La casa” welcomes the disintegration of his body with joy and as a relief, because being body-less for him does not imply not having a position in space. In these two short stories however, the characters are completely deprived of their own individuality. Consciously in “El museo” and rather unconsciously in “Habitante”, they cease to be *subjects* to become *subjected* to the space they live in. As a consequence, the fantastic transgression of space is not only referring to a physical annihilation as in “La casa”, it points to a more

profound ontological domination: they become simply a 'self-less' entity.

In the final text of this chapter, the dissolution of the body (as in "La casa"), and physical and mental surrender (as in "El museo" and "Habitante"), merge into one last figure – possibly the most radical of all transgressions of emplacement.

4. PSYCHASTHENIA: "THE ENORMOUS SPACE" (J.G. BALLARD, 1989)

From all the fantastic transgressions of body in/and space dealt with in this chapter, this last one is perhaps the most complex. This transgression can be labelled as 'psychasthenia' for the reasons that will be outlined shortly; psychasthenia refers to a subject incapable of demarcating himself/herself from the physical environment. While it once more reminds us of the Romantic collapse between mind and matter which Todorov described, this theme also affects the physical body. The Fantastic arises when, by mimicking space, the human body becomes the space it occupies, and as a result, the notion of position or physical emplacement ceases to exist.

Among the representative authors of the Postmodern Fantastic, there is one who presents one of the most extended explorations of this theme: British James Graham Ballard.⁵⁰ This author's interest in juxtaposing material reality with the psyche was already stated in his essay entitled "Which Way to Inner Space?" (1962), where he indicates: "the biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is inner space, not outer, that needs to be explored" (Ballard 1962:117). In this quote the author was specifically referring to the traditional forms of Science

⁵⁰ The critical overtones of Ballard's constructions have enabled him to transcend the literary sphere to become one of the greatest 'fictional architects' of the Postmodern world, providing clear proof of how the study of narrative spaces in literary theory and architectural criticism are two fields that feed from each other particularly in this Postmodern context. Jean Baudrillard for example refers to *Crash* (1973) as a basis to explain his theory of simulacrum in his influential *Simulacra and Simulation* (1980:115-119). Fredric Jameson praises Ballard's alienating constructions repeatedly as clear warning lessons on the risk of being absorbed into the high-tech impersonal space around us (1991:369). Also, in literary criticism, a great deal of scholars regard Ballard's work as constituting a "forum for contemporary debates" (Delville 1998:6), addressing how the subject's disaffection from others and from himself is related with

Fiction, manifesting his desire to move away from them and exploit in his writing the potential of this genre as a means to self-exploration. This idea gave birth to one of the most distinctive features of his prose: Ballard's 'psychogeographies' – fusion of mind and built environment – are illustrated in the following excerpts of two of his most famous short stories:

It was almost as if the barriers between the deepest levels of the nervous system and the external world had been removed, those muffling layers of blood and bone, reflex and convention. ("The Gioconda of the Twilight Moon", 2006:114)

[...] this island is a state of mind. ("The Terminal Beach", 2006:30)

As these quotes show, when the boundary between the external world and internal perception of the character is diffused, there is no sense of objective tangible reality, only "a state of mind" (2006:30). This feature has prompted a great deal of scholarship focusing on the influence of Surrealism upon his construction of territory. Therefore, landscape approached as an externalisation of the psyche and the unconscious (see Delville 1998, Baxter 2009).

Ballard exploits the fictional built environment as a mirror of the psychological alienation of the character and clearly states in his fiction that physical space affects the perception of the self. In this sense, a leitmotif of his fiction is the exploration of how a particular physical structure influences the ones inhabiting it, dictating social patterns of (uncivilised) behaviour and annihilates the experience of individuality. Ballard's use of narrative space has been consistently regarded as one of the greatest exponents of the Postmodern non-place (e.g. Augé 1995), with a constant accent on how these modify the human's psychological stability. Motorways (*Crash*, 1973 and *Concrete Island*, 1974), vast shopping malls (*Kingdom Come*, 2006), empty parking lots and swimming pools (*Cocaine Nights*, 1996) and other structures that are at times devoid of cultural and historical features "displace and evacuate the accretions of 'anthropological place'", as Luckhurst states (1997:131). Always very critical of the contemporary built environment, if there is one central aspect in

the architecture surrounding him.

the literary universe of J.G. Ballard, it is that narrative space is never innocent, a fact that makes him essential in any study on literary space in a Postmodern context.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the selected short story, it may be useful to dedicate some attention the term ‘psychasthenia’. From the Greek *psykhe* (soul, mind) and *asthenia* (weakness), although it is no longer used in psychology, psychasthenia was a term that referred to a mental pathology of the mind related to anxiety and obsessive-compulsive syndrome.⁵¹ Most important here, however, is how this term was employed by the sociologist and scholar of the Fantastic Roger Caillois in an article entitled “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (1935). Although in this instance he does not refer to the Fantastic itself, his idea of psychasthenic experience bears strong parallels with the topic developed in this section.

Caillois starts by asserting the importance of distinction in any form of knowledge:

Among distinctions, there is assuredly none more clear-cut than that between the organism and its surroundings; at least there is none in which the tangible experience of separation is more immediate. (1938:86)

He then proceeds to wonder what causes the phenomenon of mimicry in the natural world, since there is evidence that shows how physical fusion cannot simply be attributed to a desire of self-preservation from predators. His hypothesis is quite daring: this behaviour of species, which includes mechanisms such as chromatic mimicry (colour copy) and homomorphy (adaptation from form to form), is not simply a strategy for survival. It is pathological. This pathology is what he terms as “legendary psychasthenia” (1938:111), it essentially being “a disturbance in the perception of space” (1938:111). But because space is for Caillois indissolubly both perceived and represented, the phenomenon is far more complex.

Psychasthenia is a mechanism that juxtaposes the perceived with the

⁵¹ Ian Jakes, *Theoretical Approaches to Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996:63-75.

represented experience of space, the mental with the physical. Simply put, the entity thinks it is the space it occupies. While Caillois is referring to a pathology in certain type of animals, psychasthenia is a notion that can be productively extrapolated to the fantastic text. It designates a distortion taking place when the subject begins to regard himself not as self but as space. But, very importantly, a psychasthenic experience is not only a mental disruption, it also involves an actual physical transformation: the subject's body mimics, is transformed, into the space it occupies. And so the notion of emplacement – of body in space – vanishes:

It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself. (Caillois 1938:110)

Of particular interest is Caillois' description of how this mechanism affects the notion of individuality, or of 'being'. As mentioned in the introduction, it is a basic phenomenological and existential premise that man distinguishes himself from the surroundings by being aware of the position his body occupies. Caillois mentions that psychasthenia is not a mere technique of camouflage; it is also a mental transformation that necessarily implies some self-renunciation to be assimilated into the environment:

Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. (1938:111)

Taking this into account, it can be understood why the concept of psychasthenia has been recently readopted in the field of urban sociology to refer to the dissolution of the subject in vast extensions of space:

[...] a state in which the space defined by the coordinates of the organism's own body is confused with represented space. Incapable of demarcating the limits of its own body, lost in the immense sea that circumscribes it, the psychasthenic organism

proceeds to abandon its own identity to embrace the space beyond. (Olalquiaga, in Soja 2000:151)

As exemplified by this paragraph, in her book *Megalopolis* (1992), Celeste Olalquiaga uses the term of “psychasthenia” to discuss a form of urban malaise in the experience of the contemporary urban environment. Also the subject of Ballard’s text perceives himself, not devoured and not dominated by space, but as being *incorporated* into the physical space surrounding him. The fantastic event affecting the character of the model story can be interpreted as simply a mental delusion but, in any case, it has a physical impact on the body of the character.

The story is told by a narrator who, by shutting the door of his house and not leaving it again, cuts all contact from the outside world after divorcing his wife. Determined to live from the means this space provides (food remains, animals, humans), he soon realises the physical boundaries of this house are increasingly expanding. This expansion is viewed by him as a sort of epiphany which enables him to access a ‘truer’ reality embedded in the space of the house; furthermore, by locking himself into the freezer, he waits for the final integration into this ‘truer’ reality which is his ever-growing house.

Although it is suggested that all the events might just be hallucinations of a man in a state of physical and mental deprivation, this is never specifically clarified. Therefore, this text can be considered a limit case of the Fantastic, since the supposedly impossible event (the physical disappearance in space) can be read as a mere perception of a character in a state of mental dysfunction. If we accept this rational explanation of the Fantastic element, this short story would be labelled as the “pseudo-fantastic” (Roas 2011:62-67). Roas uses this category to refer to narratives which employ the structures, motifs and devices of the Fantastic but where the impossible event is in the end rationally explained (e.g. resulting from a dream or madness).

In this case, the idea of madness is a strong candidate in the potential explanation of the supernatural phenomenon. For instance in the end, the character goes as far as locking himself into the freezer, waiting for the final

physical dissolution and transcendence. However, no further details are given after this scene: whether he is found dead after, fact which would demonstrate his psychological disturbance, or whether he really is incorporated into his house, fact which would demonstrate the impossible event, is not clarified. There is, therefore, no explicit rationalisation of the fantastic phenomenon, which retains the ambiguity as to how this is to be read. This situates this narrative along the lines of “Le Horla” (Maupassant 1887) and *The Turn of the Screw* (Henry James 1898), in which the reader oscillates between interpreting the supernatural as a phenomenon of the mind – and thus “pseudo-fantastic” – or it as a fact taking place in the story – and thus as a fantastic element.

4.1. Location: the Privatopia

“The Enormous Space” (1989) is located in one of the most recurrent tropes in the fiction of J.G. Ballard: the gated community. The entire action is set in a suburban house, where the protagonist is entrenched. This residential area reproduces the pattern of many other novels and short stories: it is turned into a sort of cocoon disengaged from the norms and codes ruling the exterior. The subject, once in the confines of a closed-off system, becomes immediately part of the social structure dictated by it. A clear example is the 40-storey apartment block in London from Ballard’s novella *High-Rise* (1975). This building has schools, shopping centres, banks and swimming pools – its interior caters for every need and provides every comfort for its inhabitants, who rarely leave it. The architectural structure of the building corresponds to the vertical social structure within it. Similarly as in the previous ‘magnet-spaces’, the harmonious analogy between building and inhabitant does not hold. When lifts, stairs and other ‘organs’ of this building collapse, the entire community hosted in it break down in fits of violence and anarchy, which corrupt this “vertical city” (*High-Rise*, 2006:9). This pattern is repeated in many other works, such as in the suburban colony of *Concrete Island* (1974), the ex-pat holidays complex of Estrella de Mar in *Cocaine Nights* (1996), the

one in Las Palmas in “Having a Wonderful Time” (1978), and the business-park of Eden Olympia in *Super-Cannes* (2000).

This recurrent topos in Ballard’s fiction has been tagged as “privatopia” (Davis 1990; McKenzie 1994; Soja 2000).⁵² This term designates a form of urban development segregated from public zones – particularly prominent during the late 20th century. Privatopias are areas protected by physical, restrictive and exclusive boundaries, for example, by restrictions on access through cameras or identity badges, the paradigmatic example being Silicon Valley (California, USA). From a socio-urban perspective, the privatopia is less of a *place* (or topos) than a spatial *phenomenon*: it is a reactionary symptom against the dissolution of boundaries in an increasingly globalised urban space. This provokes a proliferation of niched or fortified cityscapes, which also produce fortified individuals, key theme of Ballard’s short story. Ballard’s recurrent privatopias are experiments to test the limits of psychological cohesion among the communities and individuals they enclose, and frequently prove to be failed contingent structures. “The Enormous Space” is, however, one of the few texts (along with “Motel Architecture”, 1978) in which this is explored with the mode of the Fantastic.⁵³ This topos will reappear in Chapter V, with the text “Une dure journée” (“A Hard Day”, Jean-Paul Beaumier 1988), but as part of a different spatial transgression.

The socio-urban privatopia is strongly anchored in the utopian enclave,

⁵² Soja refers to this phenomenon as follows: “Centrifugally spinning ever outward from the Forbidden Downtown is a growing constellation of luxury island sanctuaries, residential areas with ‘clout’ enough to partition themselves off fearfully from the real and imagined spaces of the criminalized poor” (Soja 2000: 313). Soja’s theorisation of the privatopia is largely based on Davis’ *City of Quartz* (1990), who discusses this phenomenon within the frame of Los Angeles: “[N]ew luxury developments outside the city limits have often become fortress cities, complete with encompassing walls, restricted entry points with guard posts, [...]” (1990:244-6).

⁵³ The recurrence of the gated-community topos may have its original source in the writer’s own life: he himself states this in his most autobiographical works *Empire of the Sun* (1984), *The Kindness of Women* (1991) and *Miracles of Life* (2008). Ballard grew up in the Shanghai International Settlement, where ex-pats carried on with their lives as if they were still in their home country, reproducing the patterns of British lifestyle “with all its snobberies and social divisions [...] brandished about like the badges of an exclusive club” (*The Kindness of Women* 1991:41). After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, he was displaced into the Lunghua Internment Camp, once more a strongly isolated space, which may have inspired various of his novels and short stories.

a topos that is both differentiated from the exterior as well as protected from it. While both utopias and privatopias allude to the same principle of separating the dystopian by establishing clearly defined limits away from it, there are, however, significant differences between both concepts. Literary utopias are very often places with no extratextual spatial referents, and outside the scope of time (eternal or atemporal). Privatopias, on the contrary, are anchored in specific temporal and spatial coordinates: generally suburban housing estates, increasingly so during the second half of the 20th century. The utopian enclave is very much related to the literary tradition of exotic exploration and travel narratives (Jameson 2007:18), one of the best examples being *Gulliver's Travels* (1735). Utopias are generally founded on the premise of displacement into a geographically isolated area, often unreachable by land (Thomas More's island, 1516) if on this earth at all, that is (St. Augustine's *City of God*, 412-426 A.D.). But while the utopian impulse crosses boundaries and moves towards the exterior (the need to explore), the privatopia imposes boundaries with walls, barriers, cameras and other closures to build a retreat from the exterior.

The privatopia is a concept that very well defines the setting of "The Enormous Space". Ballard's suburban house is part of the urban landscape but its integral and autonomous status is achieved through the mechanisms of definition that are described in the next section.

As with the motif of the magnet-space, a parallel with the Romantic tradition of projection man/environment can be seen, as well as a retreat for personal exploration. Yet in this short story, a natural environment is not what constitutes the cosmic experience but a simple suburban house – one of the many and same-looking ones in a housing estate in the outskirts of London.

4.2. Discourse: Construction of the Microcosm

In this short story, one of the most interesting elements is that the Fantastic is not given as an external fact which suddenly appears, as is the case

in most fiction of this narrative form. In contrast, the fantastic properties of this house are progressively 'built' by the protagonist, in a process embracing three stages: delimitation of the fantastic territory, purification from the exterior, and achievement of autonomy.

First, the retreat from the outside is conveyed through expressions such as "closing the door" (2006:698), "to secede from" (698), "to break off", (698), and "to shut out the world" (698). This last one is of particular relevance since it denotes that the separation from the exterior is not only physical. It also implies a more profound existential differentiation from the rest: "by closing the front door I intended to secede not only from the society around me [...] I was breaking off all practical connections with the outside world" (698). In this process, the threshold of the door is very important: the character defines his house as his personal world. Thus, he conceives the threshold a physical and ontological boundary that will define it against the exterior and will turn it into a space with its own system of values:

[...] I could change the course of my life by a single action. To shut out the world, and solve all my difficulties at a stroke, I had the simplest of weapons – my own front door. I needed only to close it, and decide never to leave my house again. (698)

Much like a ritual of territorial possession, space is delimited, the "declaration of independence" tapped (698), his "regime" "stabilised" (700), and so is his microcosm founded.

Once this is achieved, the character exposes this newly founded space to a process of depuration, conveyed through images of "erasure" (700), incineration (700-701) and elimination ("I have pulled down the heavy curtains" [701]). His previous life is literally burned, including "passport; birth, degree and share certificates" (700) among other "[d]ocuments of a dead past" (700-701). After this process of cleansing, for the first time the motif of the light as a liberating agent appears as that what provides security and stability. The house reaches a state of purity when he removes the curtains and other accessories: "Light has flooded into the rooms, turning every wall and

ceiling into a vivid *tabula rasa*” (701). The figure of the *tabula rasa* best transmits this desire to abolish who he was before facilitating a fresh start in a new world. As if the building was physically liberated from the outside, it “can breathe” (701), (“The rooms seem larger and less confined, as if they too have found freedom” [701]).⁵⁴ This space is perceived by him as a state of purity, consisting simply of the “essential elements of existence” (701), these being light, time and space. He even contrasts his situation with that of Crusoe to emphasise this process of purification:

In every way I am marooned, but a reductive Crusoe paring away exactly those elements of bourgeois life which the original Robinson so dutifully reconstituted. Crusoe wished to bring the Croydons of his own day to life again on his island. I want to expel them and find in their place a far richer realm formed from the elements of light, time and space. (700)

In his study on Utopian Literature, Jameson writes that a perfect world only acquires definition against the horrendous world it excludes. The utopian enclave arises as a demarcation of a smaller ground when society outside is presented “as a bewildering chaos, whose forces are indiscernible” (2007:14). Similarly, in Ballard’s text there is a prominent ‘demonisation’ of the exterior. In the story, the lethargic exterior world is in sharp contrast with the character’s interior life: “the lack of any response reflects the tranquil air of this London suburb” (697), “a more limited world, [...] that everlasting provincial melodrama called ordinary life” (704), the outside world that pretends to intrude his sanctuary with junk-mail, give-away newspapers among other “irrelevant messages” (703).

The house goes from being an ordinary suburban construction, to being founded as microcosm segregated from the exterior, to finally becoming a self-

⁵⁴ The motif of the blinding light is often an element of personal epiphany in the poetics of Ballard, possibly deriving from his own personal experience. As he expresses in *Empire of the Sun* (1984), for Ballard the explosion of the atomic bomb was followed by liberation from the camp. Jordi Costa notes that in the film version of this book, Spielberg devoted special attention to this element when shooting the transformation from the child into an adult (2008:22).

sufficient system, independent from the external world with its own sources of food and maintenance. To achieve this, the character is determined to feed from what the house provides, so when he has exhausted the food, he feeds from the intruders that fall in his traps, such as neighboring pets and visiting human beings: “I would depend on the outside world for nothing. I would eat only whatever food I could find within the house. After that I would rely on time and space to sustain me” (698). This is what for him is conceived as freedom, from the exterior, and most importantly, from himself: “Above all, I am no longer dependent on myself. I feel no obligation to that person who fed and groomed me, [...]” (701).

In contrast with the Romantic ideal of self-exploration in a state of isolation, the psychasthenic experience starts with this self-renunciation to the house. The house starts integrating the character. In this final stage, the house, now internally cohesive and an externally independent organism (at least from the character’s perspective), is definitively established as an active character within the plot.

4.3. Story: One-Person World

As in Adolph’s “La casa”, in this short story the entire action is concentrated on the relation between one single character and one single space. This type of textual dynamics can be best understood with what Doležel denominates a One-Person World (Doležel 1998:37-73). This storyworld typology applies, for example, to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) – a novel also quoted in Ballard’s text. The validation of the One-Person World is decisively achieved by the elimination of any other points of view (1998:37). The One-Person World macrostructure is organised upon the principle of a single space for one individual, or employing Doležel’s terminology, a one story-world with one single character. The totality of the action is transmitted from the point of view of this character, with no contrasting external comments.

Doležel mentions that although theoretically stimulating, One-Person

Worlds are quite limited in their narrative potential and can be quite tedious due to their lack of interpersonal conflict to generate plot turns (1998:74). In “The Enormous Space”, however, there are several textual mechanisms compensating for this. The integrity and singularity of the house is challenged several times through various attempts of human interaction (his ex-wife, the policeman and his secretary). These occur in liminal spaces, thresholds, windows and doors that frame and protect the founded microcosm. The presence of these ‘viruses’ break the stability reigning over the character’s sanctuary and this unexpected confrontation with the external world provokes a subsequent crisis. As soon as they leave, he feels once more how the house “relaxes its protective hold [on him]” (704).

The realisation of the Fantastic first takes place when he discovers that the house is literally growing (“the rooms *are* larger” [704]) This impossible displacement affects the idea of body as referential point: the house “pull[s] back” (705), “sheers away from [him]” (705), “pushed back” (705), “the house enlarges itself around [him]” (707). He becomes increasingly incapable of keeping grasp of this space, as condensed in the fantastic motif of the ever-expanding house: “Already I can feel the walls of the kitchen distancing themselves from me” (708), “already the walls of this once tiny room constitute a universe of their own” (708), “the almost planetary vastness of this house” (708).

Progressively, the house is taking over his sense of being himself, expressed with the double meaning (existential and physical) of being or getting lost (“losing myself in my own home” [705]). To comprehend the meaning of this ontological dissolution it is useful to recall that the typology of the One-Person World is strongly based on the figure of the microcosm and of the island. In terms of narrative space, the microcosm is extremely interesting because it challenges the hierarchy of spaces: a microcosm is a reduction of the world around it (Chapter IV). This character’s private storyworld, although in theory part of a larger space (it is *in* the city), is perceived by him as bigger and more complex than the exterior. The microcosm also has a strong affinity with

the trope of the island. Gullón locates the origin of the insular symbol in the magic circle, a popular motif to trace a visible protection of what it contains (1980:28).⁵⁵

The expanding microcosm-house strongly evokes an urge to be protected from the exterior: “This conventional suburban villa is in fact the junction between our small illusory world and another larger and more real one” (“The Enormous Space” [706]). The character is eager to transcend into what he considers a higher reality by physically merging into this space he has created.

4.4. The Cocoon-Subject

Ballard’s character is neither capable of nor interested in mapping his position in external physical space; this leads to what Caillois calls a “depersonalisation by assimilation to space” (112). It is this loss of position in space equated by the loss of individuality that destabilises the character’s experience of reality.

For the literal incorporation of the subject in space, there is no lack of examples in fantastic narrative. If the existential dimension is less elaborated, a similar transgression takes place in “Valle del silencio” (“Valley of Silence”, José María Merino 1982). The disappearance of Marcellus is later ‘resolved’ when his friend realises he had fused into the rock of a cave:

[...] under the humid moss that Lucius Pompeius’ fingers separated, an eyelid appeared and an eye opened after that amazement of absolute self-absorption. [...] Marcellus’ body had incorporated in the very substance of the valley. (1982:84)

Another character who undergoes a similar fate is the narrator of “Le Corps éparpillé” (“The Scattered Body”, Michel Dufour 1991), who wakes up one morning feeling his body not only dispersed all over the room, but *being* each

⁵⁵ On the history and symbolism of the spatial form of the circle, see Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

object in it: “Besides, in my position, I cannot go too far. As an object that one ends up forgetting by force of habit, I am from now on part of the setting” (1991:100). “The Enormous Space” is, however, the example which most clearly elaborates on the existential and ontological distortion deriving from this corporeal dissemination.

As mentioned in the beginning of the analysis, some motifs of this text strongly echo those of the Romantic tradition where the individual seeks isolated retreat in nature to explore his sense of individuality. However, Ballard exploits this in a distinctively Postmodern fashion: the sublime experience takes place nonetheless in an ordinary suburban house. What is of relevance is how the subject appropriates this otherwise undifferentiated space and ‘constructs’ it as not only a personal and unique enclave, but also as supernatural. This is also an unusual presentation of the Fantastic: instead of it being an external factor, it is the subject who makes it happen (whether in his mind or taking place in physical reality). The story develops from the initial animation of space (the house realised as an organism), to the actual spatialisation of the individual. And so, unlike the Romantic ideal of synthesis between individual and space, isolation does not strengthen the experience of individuality: it leads to a (happy) dissolution of the self.

The character shifts from a need to be in a personal space toward an urge to become that space, “finding at last the still center of the world which came to claim [him]” (709). The end of this short story, where he decides to lock himself in the compartment of the freezer to finally dissolve into the space he has created, resembles very much the end of another short story by Ballard: “Motel Architecture” (1978). Here, the character, who lives secluded within a solarium, kills himself “eager to merge with the white sky of the screen in which he would be rid forever of himself, of his intruding mind and body” (“Motel Architecture” [2006:516]). Also this subject waits for the ultimate physical dissolution into space precisely because it will entail a transcendental experience. But a transcendence to what? The experience of disappearing in space is taken by him as the announcement of an imminent

cosmic revelation: the ‘true’ dimensions of the world it encircles. This dualistic conception of an external weaker ‘real’ and an ideal ‘real’ strongly recalls the Platonic view of the physical world as ontologically inferior to the world of ideas. The gradual disassociation from the world that the house excludes enables the protagonists to access a ‘reality’, “which the visual centres of our timid brains have concealed from [him]” (“The Enormous Space” [707]). It also recalls the Platonic process of *anamnesis*: what the characters assumed as their perfect world shatters, leading to the remembrance of a metaphysical more ‘truer’ realm, beyond the empirical physical world.

The question is *what* or *where* is this ‘truer’ reality? This ‘more realistic real’, according to him, is to be found when he dissolves into the house. The protagonist’s body is obsolete; it ceases to be regarded as a necessary anchor to external reality. He is happily entrapped into this cocoon. He becomes his one and only reality, “uncluttered by the paraphernalia of conventional life” (705). Therefore, by giving up his human ‘position’ in the world, the subject is upgraded beyond that polluted, unreliable, and “over-worked hologram called reality” (702), revealing this typically Ballardian dismissal of the accepted (and constructed) idea of external reality.

The whole story can be read as a man being secluded in his own psyche. The physical space of the house stands for him, a metaphor to indicate that he remains locked into his mind, with no interaction with the exterior reality. He refers to this in the last paragraphs: “By shutting out the world my mind may have drifted into a realm without yardsticks or sense of scale” (709). The segregation from the physical exterior is equated with a loss of grasp as to what is considered ‘real’. If external reality is despised and distrusted, the only ‘true’ reality for the character is interior. There is no exterior, objective reality; only a subject who creates his own perception of it, an idea which will reappear in the short story by Claude-Emmanuelle Yance (Chapter III, section 2).

5. SYNTHESIS

This chapter has examined the transgressions of the notion of ‘position’ and ‘subject’, on the basis that a body in space is not to be correlated solely to a physical emplacement, but also to an existential one. The selected short stories play with the transgression of a body that can move freely in space. In so doing, this fantastic distortion cancels the primary function of narrative space as “the physically existing environment in which characters live and move” (Ryan 2012:8).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a great deal of scholarship has insisted on how the demarcation of body from space has a crucial double dimension: the apprehension of reality on the one hand (an aspect that is always attacked by the Fantastic transgression), and the experience of the self, on the other. Drawing from the central philosophical postulations of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, being in space (physical dimension; *estar* in Spanish) is equated with being (*ser*) in the existential sense. Therefore, the transgressions of the physical position inextricably have an existential dimension which affects the notion of being a subject. What unifies the analysed disruptions of a body in space is a concern for the way the subject perceives himself *in* the world. They demonstrate how position is the experience of the self, and as a consequence, disruption of the position will lead to an existential reformulation of the self in space.

All the four analysed texts play upon the fracture of the necessary dialogue between the corporeal and the spatial in the experience of the real. Recalling Jameson’s and Vidler’s theses explained at the beginning of this chapter, in these literary texts the loss of the authority of the human body over built environment is highlighted. This is expressed through different fantastic transgressions which provided variations on this failed inscription of the human body in space:

The anthropophagous space devoured the protagonist body, but transcending the classical motif of the evil space, the perception of this event

by the side of the narrator distanced a great deal from horror and fear. The reader might also be surprised at the (oxymoronic) assertion of a body-less entity which – or should we say *who?* – still experiences himself as subject in space.

The magnet-space attacked the freedom of movement of the body in space. This was presented as a subject who could not release himself from the physical and mental influence of a particular place.

Finally, the psychasthenic experience described the incorporation and dissolution of the subject into space. As a consequence, the literal inscription of body in space observed here can be regarded as the most radical transgression of a subject who perceives himself as such through and in space. The fantastic transgression of psychasthenia, therefore, affects the physical, existential and ontological dimension: the subject ceases to *be* (in the three senses) in space to *become* space.

If the body is a central referential axis in order for man to apprehend the physical space around him, this apprehension is carried by demarcating himself from the external world (hence the double physical-experiential dimension). The process of demarcation inherently refers to the notion of ‘boundary’, which will be subject of analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

BOUNDARY: LIQUID CONSTRUCTIONS

“Men manage reality by their constructions” (Ihab Habib Hassan)

1. CIRCUMSCRIPTION, STRUCTURE, REALITY

In order to apprehend what surrounds him – what we call ‘reality’ – man strives to articulate it in a more or less coherent system. In this process, a central spatial ally is the notion of boundary. An illustrative example of this phenomenon goes back to the historical evolution of the concept of space from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It is in this last period where the rise of geographical knowledge was largely made possible through the techniques of measurement of physical space (and time): the compass, the telescope and the Ptolemaic map brought drastic changes that reconfigured the world-view. As Harvey reminds us, the Ptolemaic map played a central role in the Renaissance, since it located all the countries of the world in a single spatial frame, and in so doing presented “the globe as knowable totality” (2008:246). By imagining what the globe would be if looked at by a human eye, Ptolemy was also implicitly reasserting the ‘objectivity’ of optics, and the capability of the individual to truthfully represent what he or she sees. With a (supposedly) objective representation of space, it was conceived as conquerable, containable and, most importantly, as anchored within a stable reality.

This delimitation of space through knowledge, which equates to a self-proclaimed domination of reality – space, time and nature –, was a necessary condition for human development. It favoured the emergence of some of the most influential theories on spatiality (Copernicus, Galilei, Descartes), culminating in the scientific revolution of the 17th century, in particular with Newton. This need of delimitation as a synonym for knowledge and control over reality was captured by one of the most famous quotes by Galileo Galilei: “Measure what can be measured, and make measurable what cannot be measured” (in Gaarder 1994:157).

It is through the notion of a referential boundary that the spatial oppositions like ‘up/down’, ‘in/out’ are conceived. Without it, space becomes an incomprehensible and unattainable ‘something’: there would be no volumes against which bodies could be measured and compared. Equally, the notion of

distance and location would have no meaning, in the absence of any referential system of coordinates. As Roas reminds us, man needs to “enclose (*acotar* in the Spanish original) his world in order to function in it” (2011:35). In consequence, the human perception of reality necessarily needs a stable and referential boundary through which orientation, measurement and articulation are possible.

The field of anthropology of space offers plenty of examples of how, in the history of humanity, the experience of the real has been equated with that of bounded space. Anthropologist and philosopher of space O.F. Bollnow shows how the horizon – a fusion between the body and the boundary as axis of the spatial experience – was a physical as well as an ontological limit for many ancient civilisations (“[...] beyond the borders of the known inhabited realm, the world simply stops”, Bollnow 2011:60). Drawing on Brunner’s study on the concept of space in ancient Egypt, Bollnow emphasises that only the space delimited by the human eye was conceived as an ontological possibility; as their ‘reality’. Beyond that founded terrain was the surrounding chaos, conceived as an unknown domain that did not belong to the real. Rather than a ‘space’, this chaos was “spaceless” (2011:61).

Another example of the same phenomenon is found in the scheme of the real of Ancient Greece. The *horos*, boundary, limit or frontier, is what articulated the otherwise boundless and chaotic something. The *horismós*, or horizon, was the limit of physical space that the eye could meet (the *Kosmos*), and beyond this articulating boundary laid the inapprehensible; the infinite (the *Kaos*).⁵⁶

Westphal also emphasises the literal association between the horizon and the physical border – or limit(ation) – within the medieval concept of space (2011b:68-93). Man was not allowed (nor was he capable) of

⁵⁶ The Platonic *horismós* is the boundary between the world of ideas and the sensible world. Most interesting here is Aristotle’s view of the *horismós* as that which divides the *Physis* (that which is seen) and *Metaphysics* (that which cannot be seen). Beyond that *horismós*, scientific knowledge is impossible. Therefore knowledge is equated and dependant upon the *horismós*. There is no science beyond and without that boundary (*Le Problème de l’être chez Aristote*, Pierre Abuenque 1962).

transgressing that boundary. The act of doing it was considered an ontological and epistemological heresy, a fact which will be completely modified during the voyages of discovery in the Renaissance.

Embedded in this spatial idea of construction of a reality is once more the etymological root of the term ‘architect’ described in the introduction to this thesis; the one who transforms the formless origin into a structure the human being can rely on. This sort of divine figure articulated and organised our reality by confining space “so we can dwell in it, [creating] the framework around our lives” (Rasmussen 1995:10). Building space, therefore, was originally conceived as a god-like activity which provided mankind with the experience of being on a structured, solid reality. This also coincides with the existential dimension of space highlighted in Chapter II: architecture, in its etymological sense, provided the existential awareness of ‘being in time’. As for example the anthropologist Marc Augé has argued, a central function of built space, at least originally, has been to organise society’s concepts of time and space:

Without the monumental illusion before the eyes of the living, history would be a mere abstraction. The social space bristles with monuments – imposing stone buildings, discreet mud shrines – which may not be directly functional but give every individual the justified feeling that, for the most part, they pre-existed him and will survive him. (2008:49)

Back to the literary realm, at this point it is necessary to clarify the difference between what I call a ‘realistic’ and ‘fantastic’ boundary. In the textual world, as Ryan (2012) has emphasised, physical boundaries are amongst the most fundamental elements of narrative space in creating and defining “the physically existing environment in which characters live and move” (Ryan 2012:8). In the absence of consensual terminology, I borrow from Ryan’s definition of “spatial frames”, as “the immediate surroundings of actual events, the various locations shown by the narrative discourse or by the image (Ronen’s “settings” [1986]; Zoran’s “fields of vision” [1984])”, delimited by two elements: spatial boundaries (clear-cut or fuzzy) and hierarchical relations

(being within a space) (Ryan 2012:9). Despite their terminological differences, Ronen's, Zoran's, Bal's and Ryan's approaches to narrative space converge in one aspect: they analyse how physical space *constructs* the storyworld. All of them refer to the stabilising function of spatial frames to articulate and reinforce the "reality effect" (Barthes 1968).⁵⁷

Indeed these spatial frames are a crucial realistic device in the building of a fictional world. The notion of boundary in a realistic text is perhaps so intuitive and taken for granted by both author and reader that it is not until these are de-stabilised (for instance, through the Fantastic), that the reader is aware of how important their architectural function is. Given the complexity and extension of the theme of spatial frames as 'unstable' or 'transgressive', this chapter will exclusively be dedicated to the notion of boundary articulating these spatial frames. I will return to hierarchical relations of spatial frames in the following chapter.

A number of examples, all of them extracted from realistic texts, might clarify the difference between stable and unstable frames. Mieke Bal, for instance, establishes that there are only two possible relations between characters and space in terms of location: situated in a frame or outside a frame (Bal 2009:134). Through this frame, the dichotomies of being 'inside/outside' are established.

For hours, he wandered through the dark forest. All of a sudden, he saw a light. He hurried towards the house and knocked on the door. With a sigh of relief, he shut the door behind him a moment later. (Bal 2009:134)

In this quote boundaries enhance the textual realism because they help the reader (re)construct a visual image of this described narrative space. Present in all realistic texts, this is performed intuitively. The frame of a door separates the inside (house) from the outside (the forest). Thanks to this, both inner and

⁵⁷ Bal explicitly refers to spatial frames as a 'stabilising' device in which the reader can locate the action: "[...] information concerning space is often repeated, to stress the stability of the frame", [...] as opposed to the transitory nature of the events which occur within it" (Bal 2009:140).

outer spaces are meaningful categories. Their opposition confers both spaces with a wider symbolism – in this case inside is the domain of safety, contrasting with the threatening exterior. Another example of stable boundary is the motif of the threshold I referred to in Chapter I (section 3.3.). In the texts mentioned as examples, the function of this form of boundary is precisely to provide a stable spatial frame to separate the two domains. At times it separates and joins the natural from the supernatural domain, at other times it might be the limit against which the transgression operates. For example, by the ghost that crosses the physical frontier of a door or wall.

In contrast, some narratives call into question the boundary as constructing relations of distance, reference and location. Quim Monzó's "La força centrípeta" ("Centripetal Force" 1996) and David Roas' "Excepciones" ("Exceptions" 2010) are clear – and complementary – examples. The first story describes a man who, every time he tries to cross the door of his house, is back in his leaving room. Roas' story constitutes the other version of this: the protagonist fails to enter his house. The spatial dichotomy of in/out is thus invalidated: since 'inside' is not a possibility for the character, 'outside' loses its meaning in opposition to it. Similarly, Jacques Sternberg's "L'Étage" ("The Stairs", 1974) represents the invalidation of the dichotomy of up/down. Every time the character goes up these peculiar stairs, he finds himself immediately back on the ground floor. This figure can also be read as a form of transgression of the principle of hierarchy (being inside of) and will be further elaborated in Chapter IV under the label of 'The Möbius Effect' (section 3).

The same principles are used in the impossible buildings painted by M.C. Escher (e.g. *Belvedere Litograph*, 1958), by Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Prisons* (1750) or Sandro Del Prete's *Inverted Chessboard* (1975). In all these constructions, the very notion of boundary for 'inside/outside', 'here/there' and 'above/under' is cancelled out. This gives rise to a series of visual topological paradoxes.

Also playing with the visual confines of structures, but in the literary text, is Shirley Jackson's already quoted Hill House (1959). On various

occasions, in order to describe the unnatural aura of the mansion, she employs the technique of anamorphosis. From the Greek *ana-* (change) and *morphe* (shape, form) this technique refers to the distortion of the spatial form. And yet, it does not necessarily imply a fantastic transgression in the literary text. As it is the case with Hill House, Jackson creates the impression of an asymmetrical shape, depending on the angle the mansion is looked at from:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned hill House into a place of despair, [...]. (1999:34)

However, this technique plays upon the aesthetic dimension of the building to enhance the uncanny atmosphere but it is not transgressive per se. The impossible nature of Hill House is not attached to the physical construction and shifting structure, but rather to the psychological effects that this construction has upon its inhabitants.

1.1. The Postmodern Abolition of Permanence

Within the Postmodern context, the notion of referential boundary has been contested in multiple ways. For example, Ihab Habib Hassan's opening quote to this chapter expresses the need of a new construction of literary history, since the traditional methods of literature prove, inadequate to represent the actual context (see *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* 1971). The idea of 'construction' later became central in theorisations of the Postmodern, viewing any construction as a subjective exercise of interrelating separate elements. The act of articulating produces a coherent discourse (an embraceable structure in terms of space) but also a constructed discourse and thus always vulnerable to be conceived from a particular angle and point of view.

In the Postmodern discourse of Human Geographers, represented by

Marc Augé himself, Paul Virilio, Bernard Tschumi and Edward W. Soja among others, it has been stressed that this organic function of architecture to reassert an ordered and structured experience of space has undergone a drastic change in the late 20th century. Particularly urban sociologist Paul Virilio has extensively elaborated on the ‘liquefaction’ of physical space through the rise of digitalisation, vehicular technologies (conquest of space by transport systems) and transmission technologies (conquest of time by electromagnetic means of communication). According to him, this phenomenon leads necessarily to a new conception of dimensionality, in that boundaries cease to be stable and permanent, and in so doing announce “the end of the vertical as an axis of elevation, the end of the horizontal as permanent plane” (Virilio and parent 2000:v). A practical application of this theory is found in his essay “The Overexposed City” (1997), where he elaborates on the transformation of the late 20th city from bounded, defined space towards a limitless, formless entity.

Virilio recalls how previous methods of physical enclosure, such as gates and walls, have been abolished by electronic systems of surveillance. These constitute, in his view, the new (intangible, liquid) boundaries of the late 20th century. The idea of physical consistency previously attributed to these delimitation systems is now, as he outlines, constantly challenged by immaterial devices.

Most interesting is the outcome of this transformation. According to him, this lack of physical boundaries leads to the loss of traditional stability of spatial categories such as ‘inside/outside’, ‘near/far’, which leads to a weakening impression of material reality: “a world devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion” (Virilio 1991:13).

Along the same line of thought, Bernard Tschumi, scholar in architecture and sociology strongly influenced by Virilio, elaborates on this correlation between lack of physical boundaries and dis-jointed experience of the real in his volume *Architecture and Disjunction* (1996). Tschumi’s thesis coincides with Virilio’s in that the acceleration of digital technology challenges

what he calls “the appearance of permanence” previously provided by built space (Tschumi 1996:216):

[...] architecture was first the art of measure, of proportions. It once allowed whole civilisations to measure time and space. But speed and the telecommunications of images have altered that old role of architecture. Speed expands time by contracting space; it negates the notion of physical dimension. (Tschumi 1996:216)

In an era where the foundations of “solidity, firmness and structure, and hierarchy” are not to be taken for granted (Tschumi 1996:218), architecture has in their view lost its function of enabling man to structure his surroundings and in so doing, apprehending the real. This thesis leads Tschumi to ask: “How then can architecture maintain some solidity, some degree of certainty? [...] No more certainties, no more continuities” (1996:219).

In his view, urban life is no longer regulated by physical boundaries “delineating a coherent and homogeneous whole” (1996:217). Instead, TV, electronic surveillance, and computer-generated images ‘dis-articulate’ and in so doing, ‘de-realise’ our apprehension of physical space. Echoing Virilio’s words, Tschumi states that “[t]he abolition of permanence confuses reality” (1996:218).

Very similar is Soja’s theorisation of the “Postmetropolis”, as a form of Postmodern urban development where “[t]he boundaries of the city are becoming more porous, confusing our ability to draw neat lines separating what is inside as opposed to outside the city; between the city and the countryside, suburbia, the non-city” (2000:150).

All these perspectives point to a distortion, or confusion, of the human experience of reality caused by disarticulation of physical space, but not to a proper transgression of this reality in the sense in which “transgression” is understood in this research (as a destabilisation of the real by the supernatural). Only in the fantastic text in the realm of fiction can this *distortion* of the real be represented as a *transgression*. The aim of this chapter is then to show how

this “abolition of permanence”, a central thought in Postmodern discourse in the fields of urban sociology and architecture, is translated into the literary realm.

All the short stories examined in this chapter destabilise the assumption of realistic physical boundaries established in the textual world. The structure of this present chapter is divided into three textual models. Their common thread is that the notion of stable boundary is transgressed with various techniques and plot devices and, as a result, so is the representation of reality as a graspable, reliable, orientating and consistent structure.

The fantastic transgression of “Rien n’a de sens sinon intérieur” (“Only Inner Sense Makes Sense”, Claude-Emmanuelle Yance 1987) questions the very possibility of generating objective referential systems through it. The absence of a stable referent is as disorienting as the multiplication of boundaries interconnecting places, as the third section will show with the example of “Trastornos de carácter” (“Personality Disorders”, Juan José Millás 1989). Finally, the motif of the absent boundary in space generates a vertiginous image of reality as boundless structure, as illustrated by the text “Tandis que roule le train” (“As the Train Goes”, Éric Faye 1997).

2. THE ELASTIC BOUNDARY: “RIEN N’A DE SENS SINON INTÉRIEUR” (“ONLY INNER SENSE MAKES SENSE”, CLAUDE-EMMANUELLE YANCE 1987)

“Rien n’a de sens sinon intérieur” tells of the following fantastic event: the narrator, a figure who remains anonymous during the whole story, has found the diary of the protagonist, Jean-Denis Vijeau.⁵⁸ In it, the latter has

⁵⁸ This short story from Quebec author Claude-Emmanuelle Yance was first published in *Mourir comme un chat (To Die Like a Cat 1987)*. It was then included in the compilation *Le Fantastique même: une anthologie québécoise (The Fantastic Itself: a Quebecois Anthology 1997)*, a collection providing evidence of the energetic fantastic tradition at present in Quebec while also extending into the general characteristics of this narrative form beyond this literary tradition and in a necessarily more global context. A large variety of anthologies and critical studies demonstrate the consolidation of the Fantastic in Quebec at present. For further anthologies, see *Anthologie de la nouvelle et du conte fantastiques québécois au XXe siècle (Antology of the 20th Century Quebecois Fantastic Nouvelle and Short Story, Eamond 1987)* and for critical overviews specifically on the Postmodern Fantastic in the Quebecois literary tradition, see “L’écriture fantastique au Québec depuis 1980” (Lord 1993a/b), *Récits*

written with precision of the strange spatial experience that ended his life. Starting with a loss of balance sensed when looking through the window, he records how he sees the landscape progressively shrinking. The two buildings on both sides have been slowly approaching each other to form an elliptical shape. Aware of the risk of it being just an impression of his subjective perspective, he sets out to rigorously measure each displacement. The marks on the window leave no doubt that it is indeed happening. Later he realises that the phenomenon is not only taking place outside his window – it has also affected the interior of his room. The furniture on both sides is being displaced towards the chair where he sits, at the centre of the room. Finally, the ellipsis reaches his body, as stated in his last record. He is found a bit later with the diary, dead and huddled up on his chair.

2.1. Location: Exterior, Interior and Body

One of the first elements to be noted regarding the location of the story is that it could take place in any city, on any street and in any apartment building. Specific cultural and geographical references to Quebec are avoided, apart from the detail of the heavy falling snow. Other than that, there is a clear lack of explicit spatial referents. The locations of the text are constructed mainly by the technique of extension, thus prioritising generic nouns (“the room”, “the landscape”, “his chair”).⁵⁹ By so doing, the attention of the reader is directed not to the emplacement of the action but to space and the role it performs in the events to come.

Therefore, instead of ‘places’ it is rather more useful to think about ‘domains’ of action. Exterior, interior and his body are the three spatial domains central to the action. As Vijeau writes, the problem is “between his

fantastiques québécois contemporains (Contemporary Fantastic Tales from Quebec, Laflamme 2009) and “Le postmodernisme dans le fantastique québécois” (“Postmodernism in the Quebecois Fantastic”, Grossman 2010). See footnote 82 for an overview of authors and works central to this tradition.

⁵⁹ Since no official English translation was found, all translations of the three sample short stories in this chapter are mine.

landscape, his window and himself" (1987:21), and how they relate to each other is significant to generating the fantastic transgression. These three areas are separated by physical frames: the exterior and interior through the window, and the chair that is Vijeau's reference to the later shrinking of the room. Window and chair are the frames against which the progressive ellipsis of the buildings and furniture is measured. Also, these frames fail as contingent physical boundaries; the various buildings outside merge towards the window, the phenomenon trespasses the physical exterior into the physical interior and finally the room shrinks over him. This compression of physical space gives three figures: the ellipsis, the circle and finally the hourglass, symbols that will be analysed in part 2.3.

So that the reader understands where and how the fantastic phenomenon has arisen, maps are drawn and described on several occasions by Vijeau in his diary. These provide evidence of the impossible event taking place, validating it as "almost as certain as a photography" (20), and tracing a precise reconstruction of "the field of vision of the witness" (20). This view has different plains: a factory at the front, house and garage at the centre, and the background. As the narration advances, depth and width begin to contract towards an ellipsis. In the second stage, when this shrinking enters the interior of the room, Vijeau himself draws the layout of the room in his diary, so that his testimony can be better understood and contrasted. The room, although rectangular, seems elliptical because of the pieces of furniture in each of its corners. From the centre, Vijeau observes and records, with black marks on the floor, how the distance between the furniture is being reduced.

All these realist spatial techniques indicate, first, that we are located in an ordinary environment; second, that the person witnessing the event has carried out rigorous research and tracking of it in his diary; and third, that the impossible movement of buildings did indeed take place considering the maps and measurements drawn.

2.2. Discourse: the Diary

A crucial space in the story is that of the diary. Vijeane's adventure is recorded in this discursive space which gives his account of the story and triggers the comments of the narrator when reading it. The latter insists that what he reads is only 'one' perspective of the facts: "Certainly, it is important to remember that we do not dispose of other witnesses, the only version of the facts that we could evoke is that of Vijeane" (25). But at the same time, the narrator emphasises the precision and scientific account of how this impossible event is told, which enhances its veracity: "his intelligence regarding the moves of the phenomenon is extremely precise" (27).

It is in this diary where the linguistic construction of the Fantastic can be explored. Through this object, we learn how the character himself strives to articulate this progressive loss of referential boundaries of the physical space around him. As is frequent in fantastic narrative, the discourse of the 'unspeakable' is employed. The first entry in Vijeane's diary clearly shows this:

Indefinable sensation, painful, this morning, at my window. How could I say? I try to find the words which... Not an absence but ...Something that worries my eyes. (19)

Another strategy Vijeane employs to express that which has no referent in human vocabulary is the approximate comparison, a technique which was also used to designate the fantastic holes of "Mi hermana Elba" (*catachresis*, Chapter I, section 4.3.2.): "some sort of loss of balance" (19), "like in a vertiginous fall" (20), "like the form of an eye" (22). However, the indetermination prevailing in the discourse of the focalisor (Vijeane) contrasts with rational and scientific discourse, mainly confirmed by the narrator who is interpreting the diary:

Vijeane has decided to study the subject in a methodical manner.
(19)
He will take great care of noting all his observations, [...]. (20)

[...] he is seized by the evidence of the facts. (23)
[...] observation ground, point of view, elements of the cause,
interest of the observer, all are renewed. (25)
[...] his intelligence over the phenomenon is extremely precise
even if he ignores the cause. (27)

This oscillation between the unspeakable and the identifiable, the subjective and the objective, will be a key aspect to comprehend the wider meaning of the fantastic transgression.

Vijean's tracked experience accelerates in the diary, from a feeling of dizziness and instability to a "vertiginous fall" (20), when he realises that the distance between the buildings is fluctuating: "The notion of space, or more precisely of distance, is formulated the third day but at the beginning in a negative manner and almost without the awareness of the observer" (21). This is captured by a series of verbs and nouns that indicate movement and change of states, like "a continuous displacement", "to swerve", "becoming" and especially the recurrence of the adverb "towards" ("*vers*").

Apart from movement, "*vers*" also captures the idea of relation; it indicates movement of two distinct bodies towards each other, or more specifically of relative motion. At first, the buildings outside approach till their distance and distinction is cancelled. Second, the change from the fantastic contraction of the exterior towards the interior is already anticipated by the ambiguity of the sentence "once installed *within* the phenomenon [...]" (25, emphasis mine). Vijean is then irremediably incorporated into the phenomenon, a fact also portrayed through relational expressions: "the link ("*le rapport*") established between the shape of the landscape and that of his eye", "the concordance between word and reality" (21-22), and notably with the repetition of "the rapprochement", indicating both physical movement towards each other, as well as an ontological connection of two things being similar to each other.

Imitating the structure of a vortex, the final move between bodies is that of contraction. This progressive annihilation of distances is described by him as "the strangling of the environment" (26), where the chair ("a sort of

little island for the shipwreck” [26]) is the only object left until the “dangerous process of alteration by the ellipsis starts attacking his body” (27).

The diary is not immune to this vortex. The space of the page mirrors the transformations taking place in physical space. This is when the concept of “textual space” (Chapter I, section 2.2.) is of high relevance. The “oppressive” (27) alignment of the signifiers also reflects the fantastic event: his writing projects this anguish through a frenetic and disjointed calligraphy (“fragmented, as if it was out of breath” [27]).

2.3. Story: Relative Frames

In terms of functions performed by narrative spaces in the plot, the first one is to help define the character of Vijeane. As discussed in the previous part, the discourse on subjectivity is juxtaposed to that of obsessive search for objective validation. Vijeane has tracked his experience using a scientific method of rigorous measurement and taken precautions if the conditions were not favourable (by the snow, for example). His attitude towards the event portrays him as a rational, ordered and meticulous being, remaining sceptical of the event till he has found enough evidence:

This study, which he wanted without flaw, is not facilitated by the season, he still notes, the slightest snow fall could distort the relation established by sight and render vain every attempt to conclude. (22)

He has the habit of sharp demonstrations, rigorous argumentation. And, in a certain way, he distrusts everything that touches upon impression, everything that relates to feelings [...]. (23)

The disclosure of the fantastic phenomenon is carried by only one focalisor – Vijeane. Although another character is reading the diary, we follow what has happened through the eyes of Vijeane in a linear order, a strategy that serves to build the suspense. The events are carefully structured in three almost symmetrical time-frames of a month. These three stages of the phenomenon

(landscape – interior – body) correspond with the following moments indicated in the diary: 8th of January, when he notices it, mid-February, when he realises the event, 8th of March when it affects the room, 8th of April, when it gets his body. Also, there are three symbolic spatial forms that follow these time-frames: first, the ellipse indicates the progressing movement towards its own interior. Then, the circle surrounds him like a “prison that closes up around him”. Finally, the circle leads to what resembles an hourglass, a figure irremediably appealing to the temporal dimension. Also note the similarity between these forms and the shape of the number eight, date in which he records his experiences on the diary. It is in this last stage where the collapse between interior (the character) and exterior (physical body) culminates.

The three frames of reference against which the phenomenon is measured –window, chair, and him – are very important in the story, since they raise doubt about objective distances. This issue of subjective measurement is recurrent and fundamental throughout the whole short story, as the following excerpts show:

[...] to know first in relation to what the building has moved or rather in relation to what one could measure this displacement.
(22)

The possible rapprochement between the shape of the landscape and that of his eye concretises the most feared trap of his observations: subjectivity. (22)

The character and the narrator are at all times aware of the observer’s limitations to portray a phenomenon in an objective manner. “Is it not then an illusion to believe in the possibility of an objective and impartial search?” (23). Both the narrator as well as Vijeane are conscious of the impact of the observer upon the event observed, an aspect which strongly evokes Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, a theory that in the early 20th century definitely helped challenge the Positivist conception of scientific knowledge as absolute, neutral, and independent from the observer (see Introduction).

2.4. Reality as a Subjective System of Boundaries

The fantastic transgression of this text is constructed on a literal correlation between the subject's perception of physical space and the form of that physical space. In other words, the Fantastic arises from equating the exterior with the interior apprehension of space. First the landscape adopts the form of the protagonist's eye, then the room does, and finally he feels his body taking the shape of a shrinking ellipsis, circle or hourglass. The boundary that articulates these spaces, against which they are measured and distinguished from each other, and from the observer, is constantly mobile. In the end, he is incapable of determining any distance (literally) between his body and the physical surroundings.

In an article on architecture in the Quebecois text of the Fantastic, Simone Grossman mentions Yance's short story as an example of subversive architectural constructions. She asserts that by portraying the built environment as "incapable of organising rationally space" (2004:157), this short story attacks the "rationalisation of the real according to the rules fixated by engineers" (Grossman 2004:156). Built structures, central to giving the impression of order and fixity explained at the beginning of this chapter, fail here to articulate space in a comprehensive referential system.

However, the question to ask here is whether Yance's text deals only with architecture. Underlying the issue of architectural form is also a more profound conception of the notion of boundary in the scheme of the real.

Behind the fantastic figure of the 'fluctuating boundary', the author is saying, as the title indicates, that experience can only be attained from an interior point of view, and thus it will always be subjective. The transgression presented in this short story builds on the idea that a particular point of view shapes the perceived, a notion which can be traced back to the realm of Physics with Heisenberg principle, and which became a core principle of Postmodern thought. Yance's text questions the very notion of an objective boundary against which to measure and verify what is taking place, or what is

real. Instead, any system of boundaries is necessarily attached to an observer who establishes it.

Vijean's impression of the built environment swings; it lacks consistency and fails to remain articulated and ordered. It describes a progressive loss of physical form, structure and reliable boundaries against which to *locate* himself. This last point is crucial: the notion of boundary that differentiates buildings and dictates distances between them ('here/there', 'outside/inside') is movable, hence the feeling of vertigo face an unstable system of spatial coordinates and references. This results in the negation of a verifiable experience of the real with referential relations of distance and location. Instead, these seemingly objective systems of reference are always conditioned by the observer. At the end the boundary collapses between observer and observed. This correlation between interior and exterior space is equated with the fusion or cancellation of the dichotomous 'objective/subjective' perspective. As captured in the title, everything is interior, everything is subjective. With no referential and stable boundary against which to contrast his views, as the title indicates, the only reality that is possible is interior. If everything is subjective, everything is only interior, and thus questionable. Or what is worse, if everything is subjective, then nothing 'is', or as the first part of the French title says: "rien n'a de sens" ("nothing makes sense"). This thought strongly contrasts with the Renaissance and Positivistic view of the boundary as a stable entity in the construction of the real I referred to in the beginning of this chapter. It dismisses the notion of a universal point of view, and thus the objective validation of perspective and knowledge. Under this lens, all system of thought is then always subject to the perspective from which it is looked at. A quote which synthesises this view belongs to Nietzsche, premature Postmodern philosopher, and was formulated in his work *The Gay Science* (1882) as far back as the late 19th century:

How far the perspectival character of existence extends, or indeed whether it has any other character; whether an existence without interpretation, without 'sense', doesn't become

‘nonsense’; whether, on the other hand, all existence isn’t essentially an interpreting of existence [...], the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself under its perspectival forms, and solely in these. (2001:239-240)

Ultimately, Yance’s story offers the following paradox: there is no space without a subject who perceives it, and conversely there is no subject without a referential system of boundaries in which he can locate and define himself. But, as examined in Chapter II, subject and space are interdependent entities. Deprived of objective boundaries, both space and subject cease to differentiate from one another. Therefore, this short story could be also read as a form of ‘psychasthenia’ (Chapter II, section 4), in which the body becomes the external physical space it occupied: in this present text, literally, by adopting the spatial forms the protagonist perceived.

3. THE FANTASTIC RHIZOME: “TRASTORNOS DE CARÁCTER” (“PERSONALITY DISORDERS”, JUAN JOSÉ MILLÁS 1989)

Also drawing on a relational perspective on space is the next sample text – “Trastornos de carácter” (“Personality Disorders”, Juan José Millás 1989).⁶⁰ In this case, however, the interconnection established is not that of ‘subject/space’, but between different physical spaces that in factual reality are (or are perceived as) not adjoining. By interconnecting locations which should be distanced, this fantastic distortion questions the reliability of how we perceive spatial boundaries. Therefore, this fantastic transgression interconnects (or cancels) space which our real world atlases would show as

⁶⁰ This short story is by Spanish author Juan José Millás. The relationship between this author and the Fantastic is perceptible in a large variety of his short story volumes and novels, such as *Primavera de luto* (*Spring in Mourning* 1989), where the sample short story is found, in *Ella imagina* (*She Imagines* 1998), *Cuentos a la intemperie* (*Stories Out in the Open* 1997), *Los objetos nos llaman* (*The Objects Call For Us* 2008) and *Lo que sé de los hombrecillos* (*What I know about the Little Men* 2010). Within the critical corpus dealing with the fiction by Millás, the articles by Knickerbocker (2000), Casas (2009) and Roas (2009), as well as Knickerbocker’s book *Juan José Millás: The Obsessive-Compulsive Aesthetic* (2003) stand out. These works provide a useful insight on various motifs and themes which also appear in “Trastornos de carácter”, such as the wardrobe as space of intimacy and enclosure, the themes of otherness and identity, and what Knickerbocker calls “obsessive-compulsive” stylistic devices, visible for example in the reiteration of expressions.

non-contiguous and unrelated, giving rise to a form I call ‘the fantastic rhizome’. This concept is inspired by Deleuze’s and Guattari’s rhizomatic view of reality (1988), where traditional hierarchies and binary logic are dissolved in favour of multiplicity and interconnectedness. Their conceptualisation of the rhizome is inspired by structures in the natural world, where there is no referential centre or point of origin but points of contact, with inter-relations instead of relations of hierarchy: “in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one” (2004:12). Drawing from this philosophical approach, underlying the sample short story is a view of the real being a system of connections rather than circumscribing boundaries.

This spatial transgression bears strong resemblances with the theme of the multiverse, originating in theoretical physics and referring to multiple interconnected realities coexisting in time and space. Since the multiverse is a theme dealt with in more detail in Chapter V, the present section is restricted to the concept of boundary. Therefore, the focus is not on *juxtaposition* or *superimposition* of two or more realities, but on an *interrelation* between physical spaces belonging to the same plane of reality.

The volume of short stories where this sample text is found, *Primavera de luto* (*Spring in Mourning*, Juan José Millás 1989) is strongly based on the theme of the interconnecting boundary. As expressed on the back cover, although this is a compilation of short stories, there is one aspect giving it a sense of continuity and allowing it to be read almost as a novel. This is precisely the idea of interconnection – between characters, identities, situations and expressions. A very clear passage that synthesises this is the opening of “El clavo del que uno se ahorca” (“The Nail from which One Hangs Himself”):

Does man keep in his memory the stairs that he went up and down throughout his life? Could he ever get to know – on the last stage of his life – if these stairs, even if far away from each other, would lead to the same place? (1989:67)

The short stories are elaborated with a very similar structure, always ending

with the phrase “ah, well” pronounced by a narrator who resigns himself to accept the odd occurrences in this life. Millás plays on various figures of symmetry and recurrence including character types (e.g. ‘the neighbour’), and the relationships between lonely and isolated human beings. The short story that best represents the topic of this section is “Trastornos de carácter”. It describes the relationship between Vicente Holgado and the narrator, both neighbours in a standard, impersonal apartment block in the city of Madrid. In this scenario, they bear each other’s company until Vicente Holgado suddenly disappears. The narrator finally reveals that his neighbour had discovered, in his wardrobe, one of the conducts communicating all wardrobes of the world and got lost in it, unable to find his way back to his apartment.

3.1. Location: the Modern Apartment

From the start, the reader is located in a specific city: Madrid. This particular location is, however, not as relevant as its connotations as a big city. In this city, the two main characters live, we are told, in their very small apartments. The trope of the modern urban apartment is a recurrent setting in the fantastic fiction of this author, and very frequently appears to enhance the character’s alienation from society as well as to introduce a note of criticism to this sort of modern constructions that disrupt the individual and his perception of the surrounding reality. The small, sterile apartment is central, for example, in “La casa vacía” (“The Empty House”, Juan José Millás 1994), where a character is deeply affected by moving from his big house into a modern isolated apartment. Bored of his daily life and isolated from human contact, he creates a character that he obsessively observes. It is an image of a woman that he projects onto the empty flat opposite his apartment to the point that he believes her existence is real.

Similarly, in “Trastornos de carácter” the action takes place in a very ordinary urban landscape the reader might easily identify with. A mundane setting is essential to reflect Millás’ presentation of the Fantastic. While it is

still perceived as *impossible* according to the laws of logic, it is not *unlikely* in such a crazy place that the contemporary city is, whose inhabitants “have to face the numerous manifestations of the strange that a city like Madrid daily produces” (“Trastornos de carácter”, 1989:34). The ending of “Trastornos de carácter” clearly illustrates this understanding of the Fantastic:

From these pages I would like to issue a call appealing to the kindness of all people, first, to keep their wardrobes clean and presentable, and second, if ever when they open one, they find in it a subject dressed with a fragile pyjama and a sad face as I have described, recognise that it is my friend Vicente Holgado and report his whereabouts as soon as possible.

Ah, well. (1989:38)

Even once the cause of Vicente’s disappearance has been revealed, the narrator, who had so far remained sceptical, issues this public appeal to the population, urging them to check their wardrobes in case Vicente was there. This fact builds an even stronger aura of everydayness around the impossible element, bringing it closer to the everyday domain of the reader. The way it is presented, all that is needed to be a potential part of this fantastic network of wardrobes is to have one at home.

The wardrobe-net is juxtaposed with the previous state of confinement; Vicente lived in his small apartment, a domain highly structured and controlled by routine habits and barely consisting of any interaction with the outside world. In this constricted environment, those interconnected channels expand their living space. In this interplay between confinement and extension is a criticism, as previously mentioned, of the modern alienated individual who rarely leaves the comfort of his four walls, a situation that necessarily leads to a “personality disorder”. In the present short story, the narrator specifically addresses this issue first by referring to the apartments as “holes” (31) or “boxes” (32), (“in the narrow living room, impersonally furnished, in the corners of which was a hole we called kitchen” [31]), and then by claiming that it destabilises people’s mental well-being:

I still haven't met anyone living in a carpeted and narrow apartment who hasn't suffered serious personality disorders between the first and second year of entering this sort of attenuated death that living in a box is. (32)

Isolation, routine, impersonal environments and how they affect the individual and his perception of the reality surrounding him are aspects that have already appeared in other texts, notably in J.G. Ballard's notion of the 'privatopia' (Chapter II, section 4.1.).

3.2. Discourse: Reflections

Already at the start of the apartments' description, there is a hint at the fantastic event to come. The figure of the "anticipatory metaphorical image" (Casas 2010:12) is a frequent linguistic device of the Fantastic, which I have already mentioned in relation to "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Chapter I, section 3.2.). This strange connection between the two adjoining apartments is described as "a disturbing speculative relation" (31). Both apartments are not only extremely similar but are also progressively seen as a replica of their owners: "The speculative relation I mentioned between his apartment and mine had extended recently to finally reach us" (31).

The wall here is the key frame that, beyond articulating physical spaces, also acts as a mirror between the two subjects, very much like Faye's glass-window between the two rolling trains: "[...] when going to bed, I toyed with the idea of my friend doing the exact same things as me, at the same time" (31). This mirroring game to construct the relation between both apartments becomes particularly important when the neighbour disappears. Just as their apartments, Vicente and the other character are almost the same individual. The ongoing question that haunts the narrator is "who reflects who"; who is the "shadow" (35) of the original. Very much in line with the Baudrillardian hyperreality (1981), this presents a dislocation in which the logical relation between original and copy, or subject and his image, is put into question. Vicente's absence triggers a severe crisis of identity for the narrator,

who feels orphaned without his counterpart. This is expressed with the figure of a mirror that now does not reflect back.

Apart from the visual interplay between image and reflection, the semantic construction of narrative space is also largely based on another sense: hearing. When the wall separating both apartments prevents them from seeing each other, it is sound that connects both physical spaces. To evoke the notions of Vicente's presence and later absence, the auditory predominates, reaching its peak with Vicente's permanent disappearance, described as "a scandalous absence" (34). Sound filters through the physical boundary of the wall. We are told that the narrator is only aware of having a new neighbour when he hears him playing music on the other side of this wall. Conversely, Vicente's absence is experienced by the lack of noise across the walls:

One day, when I returned from work, I couldn't hear neither Vicente's record player nor his TV or any of the other noises he generally made when wandering around in his small apartment.
(31)

Sound also works as an "anticipatory metaphorical image" (Casas 2010:12). As an entity capable of transgressing physical boundaries, it mirrors the fantastic transgression of channels connecting physical spaces.

Another element that extends beyond physical boundaries is the wardrobe. The reader is immediately alerted to something unusual regarding this piece of furniture when Vicente refers to it for the first time as "spacious", an adjective that belongs to the semantic field associated with wardrobes, but then also as "comfortable" (36), an adjective that surely clashes within this semantic field ("semantic impertinence", Erdal Jordan 1998:115; Casas 2010:11-12). Every time Vicente spends time in the wardrobe his eyes capture "the blurred reflection of cities, villages and people obtained after a long trip" (37). The impossible attribute of this wardrobe is a paradox: its physical boundaries extend the space they confine.

3.3. Story: the ‘Locked-Room Situation’

The role accomplished by these narrative spaces points to a classic plot structure within detective fiction: the so-called ‘locked-room mystery’, as the narrator himself explains, “consisting of situating the victim of a crime within a room whose possible exits have been sealed from the interior” (34).⁶¹ The reader is confronted from the start with the following mystery: Vicente disappeared leaving a strange ‘crime scene’; no trace or clues are found in his apartment, and what is more, it is locked from the inside. The “locked-room” situation is an excellent example where spatial frames are an active element generating a plot: because all of these walls frame and seal the inside, the logic behind this spatial disposition needs to be solved.

The action to follow will be devoted to finding a logical explanation clarifying these circumstances. But, in this short story, what is the logical revelation at the end? The difference with the classic detective story is that the final confession does not clarify the situation by means of a rational explanation tying all the loose ends. Instead, this text fuses the detective model with the Fantastic. Although there is an explanation to the case, this one is not logical but impossible according to our realist laws: Vicente has vanished within the (imperceptible to the rest) ramifying structure interconnecting the world. The narrator, forced to accept the extraordinary, expresses his resignation at the end of the story with the formula: “ah, well”. These words of resignation vis-à-vis the Fantastic – closing each short story of the volume – emphasise a reversal of the detective story pattern, which usually provides a satisfactory logical end and a sense of closure.

3.4. The Network Reality

As shown, the fantastic transgression operated by physical space in this

⁶¹ Representative literary works for the ‘locked-room situation’ are “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (E.A. Poe 1841), *Le Mystère de la chambre jaune* (*The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, Gaston Leroux 1907) and *The Valley of Fear* (S.A. Conan Doyle 1915).

text deals with the boundary as interconnecting element. A further example of this transgression would be Juan José Millás' "Oraciones metro a metro" ("Orations from Metro to Metro" 1997), a text in which the author plays with the idea of the metro as means of transport that compresses physical distances. The fantastic transgression is precisely the literal expression of this; one of the passengers gets on in a station in Madrid and gets off a little later in Paris ("One day I took the metro in Pirámides [Madrid] and exited in Saint-Sulpice, which is in Paris" [2001:30]).

The spatial figure of channels through which one can quickly transit from one place to another find an analogy with the "compression of time-space", Harvey's famous formula characterising a Postmodern paradigm of space (1990).⁶² This figure is strongly conditioned with the rise of network systems – for instance the World Wide Web – interconnecting multiple points in space, compressing time and space. In the text, this idea is expressed with a literal 'compression' of distances. If the right frequency or "conduct" (1989:37) is found, it is possible, for example, "to reach within seconds the wardrobe of a house in Valladolid" (37). The character just has to get into the wardrobe to cover a wide distance in a short time. The interesting aspect of this short story is that this spatial figure is equated with the structure of the mind. Vicente says that he discovers these conducts when he realises that they are not a place but a "state of mind" (38). Vicente's capability for appreciating these channels is presented not merely as unusual, but as extraordinary. This means that it is incompatible with the others' 'normal' perception of space. His disappearance remains unsolved by the rules of the 'ordinary' world. Also, an important characteristic of the wardrobe network is that it does not correspond with how humans comprehend spatial structures, hence Vicente's difficulties in returning home through this magma of channels whose spatial form is not codified for the human mind. From then on, once he is capable of interconnecting the otherwise disconnected elements, he can travel around this

⁶² Apart from Manuel Castells' illustrative work on the sociological aspect of this topic (*The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996), an illustrative article on figure of the network as contemporary paradigm of space is "From Surfaces to Networks" (Warf in Warf and Arias

network. On a more abstract level of meaning, it could be said that he can mentally create links with elements that the others perceive to be isolated. In contrast with those who “cannot see beyond their noses” (35), Vicente has the capability of discovering these confluences. Through this, there is not only a reference to the capability of the mind to transcend material reality, but also of material reality being composed of channels that the human mind constantly overlooks. Only some (supernatural) individuals (just like Elba, “Mi hermana Elba”, Chapter 1, section 4.3.) are endowed with the capability to move across channels that others cannot detect.

4. THE ABSENT BOUNDARY: “TANDIS QUE ROULE LE TRAIN” (“AS THE TRAIN GOES”, ÉRIC FAYE 1997)

Also attempting to destabilise the idea of physical space as objective structure is Éric Faye’s short story “Tandis que roule le train” (1997).⁶³ In this case, the notion of boundary is transgressive because it is absent where it is expected to be present. In the selected text, the author draws on the figure of unlimited space, or rather, on a space with no conceivable limit. This presents various similarities with the canonical Borgesian infinite structures (e.g. “The

[eds.] 2008:59-76)

⁶³ For the book of short stories where the sample story was published, *Je suis le gardien du phare et autres récits fantastiques (I Am the Lighthouse Keeper and Other Fantastic Short Stories 1997)*, the author was awarded the French literary prize Prix des Deux Magots (1998). And yet, the fantastic fiction of this author remains to be discovered by scholars of the Fantastic. In the introductory note to this collection, the author indicates that his use of fantastic elements is not a random choice. For Faye it is the best narrative form to express the central concern of the volume, summed up in the question: “[c]an the man of the end of the 20th century still hide from the world, escape from the plural to benefit from the singular and become a free electron?” (1997:3). In all the short stories of the volume, the fantastic element plays a central role in interrogating the position of the contemporary man in the late 20th century, his quest for individuality and his relation to the globalised environment around him. The existential question – who is the contemporary man? – is translated in spatial terms as ‘what is his position in this contemporary world?’ Three leitmotifs run throughout the volume: first, the voyager, main character of every story; second, the images of displacement, what Faye expresses as “the praise of escape” (1997:3), and third, the topos of the no-man’s land. This voyager arrives at forgotten places to be confronted with areas populated by communities abandoned and forgotten by the rest of the world. The influence of Kafka is perceptible in the parable-like structure of the stories, containing very simple plot lines but very rich symbolic imagery, as well as the recurrence of typically Kafkaian motifs, such as the presence of authority, the unreachable destiny and the perpetual search (for example the station of “Tandis que roule le train”, or the summit of “Frontières”).

Library of Babel”, 1941; “The Book of Sand”, 1975), and it touches upon a dislocation of spatial hierarchy by introducing a larger frame within a smaller one; the infinite within a finite reality (see Chapter IV). Edgeless-ness, however, is not necessarily conceived in this chapter as a form of infinity. French author *Éric Faye* confronts us with the following anguishing situation: ever since they can remember, a community of people, of which the narrator is a part, has been entrapped in a train that is in permanent motion. This train has been rolling for a long time, maybe for eternity. In it, a whole structure of a society has learned to live with normality. Although the narrator has never been outside, he knows he is on a train and can imagine what it looks like because there is another train running parallel to his. This last one reflects his own train on the windows. There is no certainty as to where the two trains are heading. Many years ago they were promised a destination, but some of them, discouraged, are giving up hope on the train finally stopping. Meanwhile, the train continues to roll and its passengers do not question why.

While an allegorical reading would be possible, there are enough elements within the text presenting this situation as fact within the fictional reality, thus also justifying the ‘fantastic reading’ of this situation – that is, as impossible and not as allegorical.

4.1. Location: Trains in a Plain

One aspect which gets the reader’s attention from the start is the lack of geographical features determining where the action is emplaced. All spatial information is concentrated on three general zones: the train where the narrator is located, the opposite train, and the exterior. The *voyageur* immerses us from the beginning in the only world he has known since he was born, that of his train, as clearly expressed in the opening paragraph of the story:

I have never seen what our train is like from the exterior. Like a number of my fellows, I was born in it, grew up there and it is there where my life is. (1997:13)

Despite the awkwardness of this situation, their life on this train is, in the broader sense, very similar to our factual reality. Families reside in compartments, there are marriages, graduations and the same type of societal rituals the reader is familiar with.

Through the opposite train that goes parallel at the exact same speed to his, he can just but “imagine” (13) what his own train looks like. The narrator, Anton, even has a Platonic love in the opposite train, a female counterpart named Antonia (I will be returning to these Platonic figures of symmetry in section 4.4.).

The window separating the interior of the trains with the exterior is a boundary that concentrates a great deal of meaning, since almost every action takes place in it. That frame is what connects the everyday of both trains, and yet it is an impenetrable boundary that isolates the realities of both trains from each other and from the outside: “I would love that spring melted the glass windows down. One has to believe that something more persistent than frost insisting on separating human beings from each other” (14).

The lack of spatial referents to locate us is compensated by some guiding temporal allusions. Once more, it is the window that enables them to identify the passing of time. For example, winter is recognised because it obliterates the silhouettes of the people in the other train.

These trains roll on a seemingly endless railway. The exterior is vaguely defined, referred to only as the plain. This journey could end, they were told, when they reach the promised station, a moment they view as “the decisive moment” (16).

4.2. Discourse: Us, Them, Limbo

The three central spatial domains – the narrator’s train, the parallel train and the exterior – are constructed upon three contrasting semantic fields: the first is the space of the known, the ‘us’; the second is the space of ‘them’; the third is a state rather than a suspended space, a ‘limbo’, where no referents or physical characteristics are specified.

Regarding the first one, throughout the text the narrator refers to it with the first person plural pronoun (“our train”, “we roll” [13]). It is not only a physical frame, but a whole domain with values of culture and identity attributed to it: “It is there where my life is” (13). Also, note how the French expression “*chez nous*” (16) locates a space of a collectively constructed social reality he identifies with.

The discourse on boundaries is very significant. The train is a sort of incarceration and, as the narrator describes it, static despite being in constant movement: “each of us remains in an assigned compartment and we don’t feel like checking what is happening at the front or back” (15). It is also formed by a rigid pattern of societal conventions to be followed, as the various expressions of mechanic succession show: “My comrades, by lassitude or conformism, married. One after the other, they resigned themselves and married one of our own women” (15-16).

The parallel train is the space of the other, combining the figures of homology and alterity. The first is represented by expressions that equals them, “they too” (14), “to them too” (14). The second is composed by antithetical expressions that juxtapose one with the other: “the other train” (13), “us and them” (14), “Andonia is the love of my life *for* she is on the other train” (15, “*car*” in the original; emphasis mine). The combination of these two figures can be read as the Platonic conception of the other. Only because they are in different trains, they can reflect and complement each other. It is ‘them’ that allows the ‘us’ to be perceived and identified, so the other (train) serves literally as a mirror. This exchange of reflections is, according to the narrator, crucial to keeping the passengers in a balanced state, (“[a]s if our carriage, during those moments, had the clarity of a mirror, we send to our interlocutors the same pieces of information” [14]).

Finally, the construction of the third space, the exterior, is remarkable precisely for its lack of characterisation. It is only mentioned once, as being a monotone plain (17). Other than that, it remains vague, indefinite, without materialisation. If the other train is the image of self-reassertion, the exterior is

constructed upon a doubt: it is the realm of the “perhaps”: “Perhaps we will reach the station. Perhaps the landscape will change, maybe we will leave this plain” (17).

An important aspect is how the passengers have dealt with this absent boundary and this utter impossibility to locate their ever moving train. The characters have elaborated various hypotheses on this potential moment that will interrupt their situation, the most popular one being the story of the station. This station is equally intangible and located in a remote moment in time. However, the narrator emphasises at all times that the existence of this station as a physical reality might also be a question. It might simply be an invention, just as a myth originating from popular folklore to explain what they cannot understand or know for certain:

We, the younger ones, don't know anymore what distinguishes the myth from reality. We soon will doubt the existence of that day to come, and we already doubting the existence of a station. (17)

This station is thus a matter of interpretation. Some of them interpret this final frontier as a utopia, some as a home of sorts, heaven, or Promised Land: “a welcoming station with clumps of flowers” (14), which immediately triggers parallels with the image of the Wandering Jew. In contrast with the undefined exterior space, this wishful thinking about the station as the point of arrival is expressed in verbs that indicate a specific location in space (“to reach *the* station” [17], emphasis mine) and in time, (the day of arrival).

Another legend depicts this dead-end as a cliff leading the train to fall off. This contrasts with the collective image of the station as a place of arrival. It is in this evocation of the cliff where, for the first time, the word “void” appears: “we will dive into the void” (17), which is the final sentence of the short story.

As long as the train moves on, the final point remains, for good or for bad, an open question. Since the end might be worse than being in this ceaseless movement, it is this sense of doubt which keeps them “on board”

(14), while it is also what generates a strong sense of anguish.

4.3. Story: the Endless Space

This text is an excellent example of how a restricted spatial frame, presented by a narrator whose focalisation is also restricted, does not only delimit a physical space but, as in here, a whole ontological domain. And the characters, from the start, are already located in this different ontological domain. This is clearly seen in the first sentence, where the word ‘train’ can be replaced by ‘world’ or ‘reality’:

I have never seen what our *train* is like from the exterior. Like a number of my fellows, I was born in it, grew up there and it is there where my life is. (13, emphasis mine)

The train thus is a synonym for their bounded idea of reality; a world with its own community of inhabitants, rules, codes and system of beliefs. In this train, our world as readers is recreated. The characters have accommodated the codes of our empirical world in this compressed space of action. Apart from the societal rituals, we learn that this microcosm also contains character-types, all of them defined by their attitude towards the final limit. There are the spiritual guides (“who will guide them to the frontiers of the spirit” [15]); the anxious ones who wait impatiently ready to leave at any moment (“ready for something” [16]); the sceptical, narrator included, who hesitate about the very existence of this end; and the nihilistic, who think of this limit as an abyss into the void. Reaching the station symbolises reaching an ‘end’ in the double sense of the English word as ending and goal. For some, this end will reveal the purpose of their trip. For others, the final destination is nothing other than a proof of their pointless trajectory.

One of the most astonishing aspects of the short story is that the very nature of the fantastic element is never brought into question. The logic of the situation they are in is never challenged: how come this space is never-ending and how is it possible for the train to keep moving for such a long time? The

fantastic element does not only fail to cause surprise but is, from the start, assumed as an unavoidable 'given' condition. In so doing, the physical impossibility of this boundless space is kept in the background to bring forth other issues: 'who they are', represented in the symbolic relation of both trains; and 'where they are going to', represented in the various legends on the final limit.

4.4. Reality as an Arbitrary System of Boundaries

At this point, we arrive at the core of this fantastic transgression of space, expressed in the figure of space with no conceivable end boundary. The philosophical evocations of Faye's story are manifold. This text could very well be a modern version of Plato's theory of ideas, more specifically expressed in the parable of the cave. A confined community (cave/train) can only catch glimpses of reality through the exterior silhouettes projected onto the boundary of their world (cave wall/glass window). However, in contrast to Plato's clear two-fold view of the real, the very existence of a higher reality existing outside of their confined world of experience is not a certainty. It remains a mere possibility. For the characters of Faye's text, that external reality might not be anything other than a constructed discourse "that ramifies in a delta of nuances, of different versions, it slowly acquires a status of legend" (17), whose origin and purpose might be to alleviate this uncertainty.

The cosmological evocations bear strong similarities to Borges' "The Library of Babel" (1941), whose infinite and boundless nature is dealt with by structuring it in a number of galleries, corridors and bookshelves, an arbitrary system of boundaries "which, repeated, becomes order: the Order" ([1941] 1999:118).

The existential overtones of the story are also undeniable. The experience of being is equated to the doubt of the boundary, the surpassing of boundaries. The existential angst provoked by the lack of an envisageable physical dead-end. The text then captures this experience of existential vertigo

when exposed to a space with no boundaries. What is more, this spatial image of the void denies teleological time in favour of a cyclical never-ending one, as in a form of eternal recurrence, where teleological time is inconceivable.

Most important, however, is how the characters have chosen to deal with this situation. The society of the train shows that this lack of boundary is necessarily compensated by the invention of it. This is carried out by creating conventional systems that regulate both the interior of the train, in the form of social rituals, as well as the collective imaginary of the passengers, as the invented “something at the end” (14). Within that ever-moving, boundless and ultimately questioned external frame of reference, which might be called ‘reality’, the passengers have constructed their ordered and embraceable structure. The text suggests how, when confronted with the endless (both limitless and pointless), man might handle this disorienting and disheartening situation by creating artificial boundaries, structures, compartments, to orientate himself within the space he is placed. So this text suggests that conventional, societal, *human* construction of the real confront the thought of no end, no purpose, illustrated here with the metaphorical image of the inexistent train station.

This model of the real that the text portrays can be applied to other fantastic texts. In a shorter and less elaborated form, the motif of the never-ending railway is used by Jacques Sternberg in two microstories. “Le Tunnel” (“The Tunnel”, 1974) is centred on the confusion of the passengers in a train yet to leave the tunnel it entered some time ago.

[...] I remembered all of a sudden, the train crossed in full engine a region of plains and endless fields, without any hill, without any relief. From then on, one single question haunted me: in what direction exactly was the tunnel being crossed? (1998:84)

As this passage describes, this provokes a profound dislocation as to their whereabouts and most importantly, as to what awaits at the end of this tunnel. Here, the notion of vertigo is also present by the elimination of the vanishing

points that enable establishing a sense of perspective, thus creating a sense of suspension. Bearing much in common with Faye's story, this sense of suspension provoked by homogeneous never-ending surfaces is an aspect that Jorge Luis Borges once called "horizontal vertigo" in a conversation with Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (in Vicente 1999:29). When Borges envisaged the Argentinian pampas, this vast extension of flat land where the eye meets no end, he said it provoked in him a sensation of "horizontal vertigo" as he could not determine any spatial end when situated in this endlessly extending landscape in nature. Recently, in urban sociology, this concept has been adopted to designate the subject's anguish when realising the enormous extension of the contemporary megalopolis, whose boundaries extend beyond what meets the human eye.⁶⁴

Similarly, Sternberg's "La Sanction" ("The Penalty", 1974), a microtext that combines the Fantastic with the absurd, tells of the punishment of being placed in a never-ending railway in a tunnel. The condemned, in anguish, run towards an end that never arrives. Once more, this text captures the idea of how the lack of an embraceable end is a sort of existential "punishment" as the title indicates. Another example is "La escalera de Sarto" ("Sarto's Stairs", 1980) by Spanish author Ricardo Doménech. A professor of Art History discovers a very peculiar architectural piece: some stairs which "serve only to go up" (1980:36). These stairs have no final point, since they keep ascending infinitely. Once the subject accesses it, this "evil" (1980:32), "unheard-of" (32) structure invalidates the opposition of up/down, as well as that of inside/outside.

Finally, it is worth remembering that if space can be understood and used as a boundary to structure our (otherwise boundless) physical experience,

⁶⁴ This metaphor in relation to the Borgesian poetics of the infinite has been explored by Henry Vicente in *El vértigo horizontal (Horizontal Vertigo)*, 1999). In the socio-urban context, see Richard T. Ford ("The vertigo one feels in LA comes not from vertical but from horizontal distances: the multiplication of boundaries (...) makes it impossible to conceive of any absolute boundary, any sense of place. Centre and periphery become meaningless in a sweeping map of topography" ("Spaced Out in L.A.", 1993:88), and Juan Villoro's "El vértigo horizontal. La ciudad de México como texto" ("The Horizontal Vertigo. The City of Mexico as Text", in Muñoz, Spitta [eds.] 2003)

so is time. Two texts are representative of this: the canonical “The Highway of the South” (1964) by Julio Cortázar, and “Ignición” (“Ignition”, in *Los demonios del lugar*, 2007) by the Spanish author Ángel Olgoso. In the latter, Olgoso captures very well this fantastic distortion provoked by the image of being suspended while in movement. The plot is simple: a man is entrapped with an attendant in a lift that does not seem to move or to stop. In this situation, the suspension of the temporal and spatial is expressed with images of reference-less: “the trip becomes never-ending” (2007:110). “I ignore how much time has passed. [...] Will it still be Friday? (2007:110), “My fingers are away light years away from the alarm button” (111), in a moment of suspension in space where also time “has lost its appearance and purpose” (112). Most clearly, the oxymoronic expressions “Still hours./Motionless disorientations” (110) once more serve to cancel both time and space as articulating elements. Also Cortázar’s text does not only build upon the idea of the lack of suspension in and through space, but also in time. He constructs a scenario where millions of cars are trapped in a literally endless traffic jam near Paris. The end cannot be envisaged, and they remain there during the rapidly succeeding stations. Once more, as in Faye’s train, the lack of spatial vanishing points is rapidly compensated for by their construction of ‘invented’ structures and roles generating a societal tissue to function within this extraordinary situation.

5. SYNTHESIS

This chapter was dedicated to the notion of ‘boundary’ within the spatial scheme. In the fictional storyworld, this notion is related to narrative frames which structure the different spaces composing the recreated physical environment. Having established that the ‘boundary’ is a crucial device for the human in the experience of space, I proceeded to note that it is also a realistic device within the fictional text. This impression of realism constructed by a set of spatial frames is precisely that which the transgressions presented in this

chapter sought to destabilise.

The three examined transgressions disrupted this realistic effect by showing ways in which the expected logical frames are obliterated. The text “Rien n’a de sens sinon intérieur” by Claude-Emmanuelle Yance presented shifting distances between buildings. This prevented the subject from finding any absolute position in space, metaphorically leading to his own death, strangled by the shrinking of the environment around him. “Trastornos de carácter” by Juan José Millás presented a reality that was interconnected, but whose actual connections only some characters could perceive. Lastly, “Tandis que roule le train” by Éric Faye speculated on a metaphysical angst when facing a limitless structure. There is one aspect characterising the three thematic lines: the model they present lacks the reassuring, stable and universal consistency provided by an objective system of referential boundaries. The abolition of a fixed referential point of view (what Warf calls the “Cartesian oclarcentrism”, 2009:60) leads to a relational system of boundaries, always subjected to the individual regarding it – a conception of space and with it of the real which, once again as in Chapter II, is always constructed by the subject with no further reference than himself.

Apart from the notions of distance and definition, there is a second aspect, deriving from the relational system of boundaries, which needs to be examined. This one makes reference to how spaces are organised in hierarchical order, and thus how this expected hierarchy can be transgressed, which will be the subject of next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

HIERARCHY: SPACES INSIDE-OUT

“I was astonished that such narrow courtyards, little more than long entryways, could have contained such numbers of people.”
(“The Man on the Threshold”, J.L. Borges)

1. CONTAINMENT AND REFERENCE

In the last chapter, I referred to Ryan's conceptualisation of spatial frames within narrative spaces. These spatial frames included spatial boundaries and hierarchical relations (2012:9). Given the relevance and complexity of these two elements in the narratives of the Fantastic, they have been treated separately in this research. While Chapter III dealt with the first issue – the importance of the boundary of material structures to define and articulate the spatial dimension – this chapter is focused on the latter: the notion of spatial hierarchies. Just as the interdependence between body and space explored in Chapter II, the principle of containment is also a basic relational notion of space. Therefore, the transgressions explored in this chapter modify the spatial principle of the container and the contained in that they violate the rules of hierarchical order abided by in our everyday reality.

Logically, but perhaps not remarked upon enough, the order which classifies spatial frames hierarchically is fundamental to generating the realistic effect within the literary text. When presenting or presented with a literary world that follows realistic conventions, the author or reader performs this process almost automatically, in that it is recognised or assumed that, for example, Raskolnikov's garret (*Crime and Punishment*, 1866) is contained in a larger structure (the guesthouse). This garret is at the same time part of a larger frame (the city of St. Petersburg), which also belongs to a broader space, etc.⁶⁵ The same applies to fantastic narratives, where the principle of spatial hierarchy, when it is not being violated, reinforces the realistic setting in which the impossible element then irrupts. Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) is one of the many examples where the relations of containment among spaces are not

⁶⁵ Note how narrative space, in particular the various embedded spatial frames, are employed in the opening of *Crime and Punishment* to locate the reader in a verisimilar space: "On an exceptionally hot evening early in July a young man *came out of the garret* in which he lodged *in S. place* and walked slowly, as though in hesitation, towards K. bridge. He had successfully avoided meeting his landlady on the staircase. His garret was *under the roof of a high, five-storied house* and was more like a cupboard than a room (Dostoyevsky 2000:3, emphasis added).

transgressed and yet are meaningful. After his transformation, Gregor Samsa never leaves the house again. His confinement in his room is a way to hide him, and to emphasise that he is an exceptional creature within the storyworld.

The interplay between the logical dialectic of container/contained is frequently found in folklore, by making – as P.M. Schuhl puts it in his study of the theme of containment in the Marvellous – “the large fit into the small” (1952:69). An example is the motif of the world within the world, the microcosm. An example which could be mentioned in this respect is “Le diamant” (*Feu de braise*, André Pieyre de Mandiargues 1959). In this short story the princess-protagonist falls into a little diamond by looking through it. The impossible relation between the bigger and the smaller in narrative of the Marvellous is, however, not presented as impossible within the logical rules of the fictional world. Instead, this inversion of hierarchies is the catalyser of the various adventures the princess lives through.

1.1. Tangled Hierarchies of Postmodernism

While the inversion of spatial hierarchies is an ancient motif, it had never before received so much critical attention as in the context of Postmodern narrative, which has seen an unprecedented rise of critical works addressing in particular two techniques: metafiction and metalepsis (Waugh 1984; McHale 1987; Hutcheon 1988). An inspiring precursor has been the work by Douglas Hofstadter (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, 1979) connecting Bach’s canons, Escher’s loop structures and Gödel’s logic theorems, all of which are regarded as paradigmatic for what he calls “Tangled Hierarchies” (1999:668-742). The author starts asserting the hierarchical nature of our perceptive processes at the start, and then he analyses various ways of representing a distortion of the expected logical hierarchies. As a result, various spatial forms arise where the laws of physics and mathematics are violated in one way or another to produce an incomprehensible total system. Hofstadter’s concept of “strange loop” (“tangled hierarchies”),

occurring “whenever, by movement upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started” (1999:10), is later applied by Brian McHale to the Postmodernist literary text (1987). Jumps, loops, recursion, infinite regress and self-references among the interplay between fictional levels are, as he argues, strategies of Postmodernist narratives to foreground the ontological status of fiction that characterises this literary period (1987:113). A key implication of this ontological question is that by disrupting the principle of hierarchy in the text, particularly hierarchy concerning embedded fictional levels, two of the most ancient questions of literary theory are brought to the fore: mimesis and referentiality.⁶⁶

Elaborating on the interrelation between literary space and extratextual reference, Bertrand Westphal dedicates an entire chapter in *Geocriticism* (2007 [2011a]) to the issue of referentiality. Westphal starts contesting a common view in Postmodern criticism that negates the dichotomy between the real and the fictional and denies the relation – traditionally regarded as hierarchical – of fiction as part of, and stemming from, what is our factual reality. Fiction would not be regarded as being the reproduction of the real; quite the contrary, our extratextual reality would be viewed as being produced (thus a product of) fictional discourses. In this sense, the hierarchical relation between referent and representation would be altered: the copy cannot derive from the referent (the extratextual real), since the copy is even more real or authentic than its referent or even, as Jean Baudrillard claims, the only possibility: “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1994:1).

Certainly in a contemporary context, everyday experience is heavily influenced by fictional discourses, as Baudrillard (1994) and Augé (2000) among many other Postmodern thinkers have recurrently emphasised. However, the approach of this present thesis supports Westphal’s idea

⁶⁶ As mentioned in the Introduction, McHale’s central argument is that Postmodernism is characterised by a displacement of focus from the epistemological to the ontological. The ontological question concerns directly the status of fiction in relation to this questioned reality.

(2007/2011a) stating that there is a reality which can be transmitted through the literary work, albeit the notion of reality is more contrived in Postmodern narrative. Our assumption is that any fictional product derives from reality, and fiction – not considered an exact copy of its referent, but rather as an extension or complement – is still a representation deriving from the extratextual real. This is a fundamental premise for the Fantastic to operate, both in its traditional and Postmodern manifestations. The Fantastic needs the mimetic contract until there is a breach, thus the referential illusion is maintained until the impossible irrupts (see Roas 2011:143-155). Therefore, even if the idea of reality and fiction are put on the same level by the Postmodern postulates, the reader still contrasts what is read in the text with his/her idea of the extratextual real. During the reading act, the distinction between reality/fiction prevails.⁶⁷

However, certainly within the fictional realm, this hierarchical relation can be put into question (in a Fantastic mode or not). The inversions of hierarchy are, as McHale and Westphal among others have emphasised, a strategy particularly present among Postmodern narratives: “In a context in which a strict hierarchy between reality and fiction is questioned, the excursions between them range from one level to another” (2011a:88).

The strategies of metalepsis and metafiction have been subject of attention among scholars of the Fantastic (Brooke-Rose 1981, Erdal Jordan 1998, Horstkotte 2004, Rodríguez Hernández 2010), who have emphasised that these strategies stand for the fracture between language and reality after the Language Turn, or as Erdal Jordan best puts it, they “impose the linguistic reality as option over the empirical one” (Erdal Jordan 1998:123).

In a fantastic mode, the strategies of metalepsis and metafiction have been exploited by the canonical texts of “Lost in the Funhouse” (John Barth,

⁶⁷ Possible Worlds Theory, in particular Doležel (1998), offers a clear explanation of the distinction between fictional and factual reality. Fictional worlds differ ontologically from the real world because of their incomplete nature. Since it is impossible for the human mind to think up an object (much less a world) in all of its properties, every fictional world presents areas of radical indeterminacy (or ‘ontological gaps’). For example, what was the favourite book of a particular fictional character is a question which can never be answered if it is not specified in the fictional world.

1968), where the protagonist is entrapped in a funhouse which is equiparated with the space of a book that never ends (see section 3). Also in “Continuidad de los parques” (“Continuity of Parks”, Julio Cortázar 1956) what the character reads has an effect upon the space he is reading it from – the reality of the character. The same strategies and plot line have been employed by more recent short stories, like “En el hemisferio sur”, (“In the Southern Hemisphere”, Cristina Fernández Cubas 2009), “El caso del traductor infiel” (“The Case of the Unfaithful Translator”, José María Merino 1994) and “El purgatorio” (“The Purgatory”, Ángel Olgoso 2009). These are but a few of the large amount of texts in the plots of which are embedded those Derridean ideas concerning the autonomy of the text in relation to the real, the pure self-reflexivity of language and the absence of all implication of the text in the world.

An interesting variation of the traditional metalepsis replaces the embedded fictional level with virtual space. The jumps across hierarchical levels take place between the realistic domain and the virtual one. This leads to plots where, for example, cybernetic creatures trespass into the realistic domain within the text, such as the artificial monster of “Intimidad cibernética” (“Cybernetic Intimacy”, José María Merino 2002), a creature that one day replaces his creator. Conversely, the real becomes part of the virtual in texts like “El dominio” (“The Domain”, Fernando Iwasaki 2004), a short story juxtaposing the traditional sense of ‘domain’ as physical territory, with its contemporary application to virtual space.

Apart from the strategies of metalepsis and metafiction, McHale outlines various distortions of the traditional notion of referentiality in that, within the textual world, referential spaces are combined with imagined ones. Among these he mentions the strategies of interpolation, juxtaposition, superimposition, misattribution and transworld migration. To this list, Westphal adds the strategy of transnomination, which he regards as “a way to fight against the saturation – here the ideological saturation – of the protoworld” (Westphal 2011a:108), so that referential space “saturated with

names and reprehensible realms [... can] find a new purity” (2011a:108). Another one he mentions is that of anachronism, where a referential space is integrated within a different temporal context than the one allocated in extratextual history. All the aforementioned strategies explore how a combination of referential and non-referential spaces are fused within one single text to portray a narrative world that is neither fully referential nor fully invented: this corresponds with Westphal’s category of “Heterotopic interference” (2011a:104), that is neither “Homotopic Consensus” (referential, 2011a:102) nor “Utopian Excursus” (non-referential, 2011a:108). Since McHale’s and Westphal’s aim is to systematise the strategies concerning these games of spatial reference, they do not explore how these incursions are presented within the text: whether they are portrayed as conflictive and impossible or as an integrated element within the storyworld. This explains why their examples embrace short stories of the Fantastic (e.g. Borges’ “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, 1944; Cortázar’s “The Other Heaven”, 1966) as well as other texts which are good examples of Postmodern narratives but which are not fantastic (e.g. Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* [1972] and Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* [1973]).

The aspect that concerns this chapter is not how spatial hierarchies *construct* the impression of reality in the text (realist literature), nor how they *deny* the notion of the mimetic contract (like Postmodern narratives). Instead, my focus here is on how the changes of spatial hierarchies de-automatise the reader’s relationship to space, *transgressing* the illusion of verisimilitude. This always presupposes a previously constructed textual reality that imitates our extratextual reality and which is conceived as realistic by the reader who constantly contrast it with his referential one.

Therefore, what this chapter seeks is to present games of hierarchy that go beyond the techniques of fantastic metalepsis and fantastic metafiction. The three sample texts analysed disrupt automatic associations of spatial relations of containment, not of embedded fictional levels, but exclusively of architectural (textual) space. Still, the ontological question and the notion of

spatial reference are also clearly present in the analysed corpus. As in the previous chapters, parallels with the metaphors of these transgressions are found outside the literary domain. Also among contemporary human geographers, the disruption of hierarchy and containment has been an area of greatest scholarly concentration. As will be shown, this fact once more brings forth the important interrelation between narrative spaces and extratextual spaces in any geocritical study.

The first theme, based on the text “La casa de muñecas” (“The Dolls’ House”, Fernando Iwasaki 2004), alternates the roles of the container space and the contained, the part and the whole. This principle presents similarities with Edward S. Soja’s concept of the “Cosmopolis” (2000) and Fredric Jameson’s analysis of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, as an all-embracing all-integrating space that is not part of the city “but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute” (Jameson 1990:40). The best metaphor for these urban phenomena, Soja argues, is found in literature and is Borges’ “The Aleph” (1949), a precursor to this transgression which could be called ‘the container-contained’.

Marc Augé’s theory of the non-place (1992), which concentrates on the lack of relation between a place and its surroundings, is taken to the extreme in the second sample short story. “Dejen salir” (“Exit”, José Ferrer-Bermejo 1982) proposes a cancellation of hierarchies by interlocking various spatial frames. This turns into a Möbius effect, a self-referential structure – a metro station – where inside and outside lose their polarity. Parallels are also to be found with De Certeau’s metaphor of carceral space and the automatising of spatial practices in our everyday (1988).

The last short story, “La Brume” (“The Fog”, Jacques Sternberg 1974), is an excellent example of how the logical assumptions of spatial hierarchies can be literally suspended. It juxtaposes the subjective impression of space with its objective representation, an aspect that coincides with the contrast that Bollnow (1963) establishes between lived and mapped out spaces

(“hodological” versus “mathematical” space), as well as with Lefebvre’s categories of perceived and conceived space (1974).

2. INVERSIONS OF HIERARCHY: “LA CASA DE MUÑECAS” (“THE DOLL’S HOUSE”, FERNANDO IWASAKI 2004)

What Gilbert Durand labelled as “the archetype of the *container* and the *contained* (1999:208)” in his *Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* refers to a figure that inverts the basic spatial relation of embedded spaces. The same phenomenon in the realm of fantasy narrative has been tagged as “the little-big trope” (*The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, 1999:586), named after the eponymous fantasy novel (*Little, Big* by John Crowley 1981): “In [F]antasy almost anything that can be entered - a body, book, rabbit hole or other portal, garden shop, labyrinth, underground cavern, edifice liner, forest, island, polder or otherworld - may well be bigger inside than out” (1999:586). However, once more, in narratives of fantasy and the Marvellous – removed from our model of extratextual reality – this spatial paradox is not (re)presented as a transgressive element, in the sense that it does not arouse a logical conflict within the storyworld. For example in the aforementioned text by de Mandiargues, “Le diamant”, the dramatic and thematic focus is not placed on the (illogical and impossible) confinement of a human being within a tiny object.

Returning to the confines of fantastic narrative, a precursor to this trope is the egg-shaped object of “The Crystal Egg”, by H.G. Wells (1897). This transparent egg transgresses the logical principle of spatial hierarchies since, despite its relatively small dimensions, it contains a whole society of Martians. What’s more, not only are the roles of the container and contained inverted but also those between the observer and the observed, a characteristic that will also be found in Fernando Iwasaki’s short story. The main character of “The Crystal Egg”, Mr. Cave, initially assumes he is an omniscient observer of the whole society contained in the egg, so that he has a ‘panoptical view’ over the totality of what is taking place within the egg. However, in the last paragraphs, the

position as an absolute observer is displaced to the condition of being observed. This crystal egg where he thinks he observes the Martians is in fact nothing but a medium for the Martians to gain a close view over the Earth.

Inspired by this short story that actually borders the confines of science fiction is “The Aleph” (Jorge Luis Borges 1949), an early Postmodern example of the Fantastic, and indispensable to comprehending the type of spatial transgression concerning this chapter.⁶⁸

The narrator of “The Aleph” discovers in the basement of a point in space containing all possible angles of the world: “Each thing (a mirror’s face, let us say) was infinite things, since I distinctly saw it from every angle of the universe” (1999:192). This sort of (key)hole enables a total view of space and time, it contains the world, accessible from an absolute gaze. The transgression of the physical laws of space which Borges is presenting is thus based on the following two paradoxes:

The first one is the same as the one exemplified by the crystal egg. The aleph, physically speaking, has constricted specific dimensions – like a keyhole, we imagine – but at the same time it is the container of a space larger than itself. Second, the contained is not only larger, but total and absolute, representing the paradox of containing the infinite within the finite. This is the logical problem encountered by the narrator when he has to describe the aleph: how can he express an infinite image within the finite extension of words and the limited dimensions of the page?

[...] the central problem – the enumeration, even partial enumeration, of infinity – is irresolvable. In that unbounded moment, I saw millions of delightful and horrible acts; none amazed me so much as the fact that all occupied the same point, without superposition and without transparency. What my eyes saw was *simultaneous*; what I shall write is *successive*, because

⁶⁸ Borges mentions this short story as an inspiration in the epilogue of his compilation *The Aleph*. The short story “The Aleph” is also mentioned as an example of the “little-big” trope in the *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* (1999:586). Another parallel is to be drawn with the figure of the microcosm. It coincides with the third principle of the Foucaultian heterotopia, namely the juxtaposition of various spaces into one single space. Foucault mentions the Persian garden as the most ancient example of these “contradictory sites” (1986:25) that reproduce the vast exterior into a microcosmic narrower and defined space.

language is successive. Something of it, though, I will capture.
("The Aleph", 1999:282-283)

The figure of the aleph confronts the narrator and reader with a vision where all spatial (and temporal) tools (e.g. orientation, reference and selection) that human beings possess to make sense of physical space and to represent it are eradicated. To express this impossible vision, the narrator employs different rhetorical devices: disjointed reiterations, lists of enumerations of what he simultaneously sees ("I saw"), absolute quantifiers, ("each", "every", "all"), and most interestingly for this analysis, a juxtaposition of the relationships of containment: the part and the whole are placed in the same hierarchy: "a copy of the first English translation of Pliny [...] and all at the same time saw each letter on each page" (1999:193).

"The Aleph" condenses three pillars of Borges' fiction: the word – and its limitations to transmit and represent true knowledge, time – the unreliability of memory, and the artificiality of our constructed categories of present, past and future – and space – in this particular story, illustrated by the transgression of the container in the contained. The aleph is an image of a totality, an absolute which serves to portray the limitations of man facing the infinite. This is done by creating a spatial form that reflects a view of space (and time) that the human mind cannot embrace nor codify. The One and the All are fused within one single image, "one of the points in space that contains all other points", the central theme in the philosophical universe of the author. More examples of the same principle are found in passages like "Each part of the house occurs many times; any particular place is another place. [...] The house is as big as the world—or rather, it is the world." ("The House of Asterion", 1999:221), and "There is a saying, you know – that India is larger than the world" ("The Man on the Threshold", 1999:270). Also "The Library of Babel" (1941) and "The Book of Sand" and are further examples of structures that play upon the principle of container-contained, finite in their physical dimensions and infinite in what they contain; where each part contains the whole and the whole is simultaneously part of itself.

“The Aleph”, inspired by Wells’ egg containing an entire world, represents a reduction of the space of the world by inverting the relations whole and part, container and contained. The cosmic view of the Aleph that Borges proposes has not only generated enormous literary scholarship dealing with the Borgesian figures of the infinite, and other spatial figures.⁶⁹ The Aleph has also proven to be fruitful outside the literary text. Edward S. Soja (1989) has appropriated it as a metaphor to refer to a Postmodern conception of urban space containing and hybridising multiple languages, symbols and identities. “[T]he place where, without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist” (Borges 1999:280) is for Soja a paradigmatic metaphor for Los Angeles, an all-integrating space with no discrimination, and no segregation:

Los Angeles, like Borges’ Aleph, is exceedingly tough-to-track, peculiarly resistant to conventional description [...]. Los Angeles is everywhere. It is global in the fullest sense of the word [...]. Everywhere seems also to be in Los Angeles. (Soja 1989:222-223)

A lesser known and much more recent text which also borrows and modifies a traditional motif in the Fantastic is Fernando Iwasaki’s “La casa de muñecas” (“The Dolls’ House”, 2004).⁷⁰ In this short narrative of only just over a page, the author merges the motifs of the doomed place and the animation of the inanimate, crystallising in the spatial transgression of the container and the contained. The concise form of the selected short story makes it ideal to analyse how narrative spaces intervene to generate the fantastic transgression, since in these 24 lines of text, every single word is important in the construction of the Fantastic.

⁶⁹ On spatiality in the fiction of this author, see *El vértigo horizontal (The Horizontal Vertigo)*, Henry 1999), *Figments of Space: Space as Metaphor in Jorge Luis Borges, with particular Emphasis on ‘Ficciones’ and ‘El Aleph’* (Medina 2006), *Place and Displacement in the Narrative Worlds of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar* (Tcherepashenets 2008) and *Borges and Space* (Richardson 2012).

⁷⁰ Peruvian born writer Fernando Iwasaki has a very varied creative production, ranging from humorous essays and novels to micro-short fiction. It is his volume of (very) short stories *Ajuar funerario (Funerary Trappings, 2004)* – where “La casa de muñecas” is found – that is the richest for studying contemporary manifestations of the Fantastic.

The main character and narrator of “La casa de muñecas” tells us how in an antiques shop he is captivated by a miniature house, in particular by the intricate representation of its life inside – which even includes another even more miniaturised dolls’ house. He buys it and places it in his room. At night, he is woken up by a shining light in the dolls’ house. When he approaches it, he realises that it is the miniature house within the dolls’ house that is producing this light. But the narrator’s surprise is double: the figurines of the bigger dolls’ house do not only move as if they were alive, they are as surprised as him by this light, and they run to the room where the embedded miniature is located. In the next scene, the body of the narrator is found in his room, and even though the police search for clarification, they cannot figure out what has happened. But the clue resides within the dolls’ house. A new room and figurine have now been incorporated: the narrator’s room, with everything in it including himself are now parts of the furniture in the doll’s house.

This story is reminiscent of the canonical short story by M.R. James: “The Haunted Dolls’ House” (1923). In it, the protagonist also acquires a dolls’ house in an antiques shop and brings it home. At night, the figurines come alive too, but in this case they reproduce the scene of an ancient family drama that will be clarified after some research carried out by the protagonist. As will be shown, despite being based on the motif of the doomed dolls’ house, Iwasaki’s story presents significant differences in the function and representation of this fantastic element that distances it from the traditional ghost story.

2.1. Location: Embedded Houses

In this short story, there are three houses – three crucial spatial frames, embedded within each other, like Russian dolls, until this hierarchy is transgressed. The first one is the narrator’s house. There are no spatial or temporal markers that the reader could use to locate in, other than the fact that

it is a realistic ordinary environment. In his bedroom the second frame is found: the newly acquired dolls' house, placed on his mahogany table. The architectural features of this miniature building are already an important difference from M.R. James' dolls' house, with intricate Gothic features, and conforming to the Victorian tradition of dolls' houses, designed to reflect an immaculate order, a grandiosity of wealth. These Victorian miniatures did not aim to convey the impression of everyday life but rather were built as perfect museum houses or as historical testimonies of wealthy families. While being extremely detailed, there is nothing Gothic, ostentatious or museum-like about the dolls' house of Iwasaki's story. In fact, that "appearance of being lived", to borrow Merino's phrase from "El museo" (1982:150, see Chapter II, section 3.1.) captures the narrator's attention. What makes this house so disturbingly realistic for the narrator is that it reproduces a casual everyday environment as the occasional mess shows, with even open toothpastes and scabbled notebooks on the tables. Finally, within this dolls' house, there is the miniature replica that becomes illuminated on that night.

The descriptive attention devoted to the three houses differs noticeably. While very few characteristics of the narrator's house and bedroom are given, the dolls' house is very rich in details as the following excerpt shows:

[...] on the tables the pages of scabbled notebooks with minuscule characters were spread, and in the kitchen I distinguished a cupboard full of tins and preserves with labels minitaurised by a demented artist. (2004:42)⁷¹

And while this dolls' house is already of "an obsessive richness" (2004:42), the miniature replica within it is even more "meticulously decorated as a nightmare" (2004:42). Therefore, the lower we go in this embedded spatial hierarchy, the richer the details, a strategy that perfectly coincides with that "excessive ambition for the miniature" (2004:42) that captivates the narrator, as he renders it in the very first sentence.

⁷¹ Since no official translation was found, all translations from the three sample stories in this chapter are mine.

2.2. Discourse: Polivalence of Deictics and ‘Threshold-Sentence’

As Ana Casas has shown in her article “Transgresión lingüística y microrrelato fantástico” (“Linguistic Transgression in Micro-Fiction of the Fantastic”, 2010:10-13), micro-fictions provide very rich material for the analysis of rhetorical devices configuring the fantastic transgression. Casas herself uses many of the texts of Iwasaki’s book *Ajuar funerario* to show it. Although “La casa de muñecas” is not mentioned, it is also an excellent example of the linguistic configuration of this fantastic transgression of space, in only just over one page of text. To illustrate this, let us focus on two sentences. The first one is formulated just after acquiring the dolls’ house:

The only thing that shocked me was the infinite sadness of the figurines that *inhabited it*. (2004:42, emphasis mine)

The verb “inhabit” is what condenses that which Ana Casas calls “Linguistic Resignification”, where “a metaphorical value is substituted by a literal one” (2010:12), a rhetorical device based on the Todorovian literalisation of the metaphor (1975:79). The author plays upon the various meanings of this verb: the figurines are not only placed there but they literally *live* there. As a result, the expression “the figurines which inhabited it” is foregrounding the imminent night animation, which happens in the next paragraph.

A fundamental device employed here to transgress the natural hierarchy of spaces is “Polivalence of Deictics” (Casas 2010:13), a strategy which plays upon the referent that deictics necessarily imply. There are two clear examples in the text: first, the polyvalence of the pronoun “it” (“*la*”) of the previous sentence, referring to the house but playing upon the ambiguity of what miniature house it is referring to. The same can be applied to “the” (“*la*”) in the following passage “every figurine of *the* house ran towards *the* doomed room” (42, emphasis added). Also the title “*The Dolls’ House*” (emphasis mine) is not restricted to one single referent but to multiple ones: it could be

referring to either of the two dolls' houses or even, considering the final transgression when his room is incorporated into the miniature, it could be the narrator's house itself.

The second sentence I wish to highlight appears after the narrator approaches the illuminated dolls' house at night, and just before the narrator's body is found:

I didn't realise when *they* entered *my room* (42, emphasis added)

This passage is very interesting from a structural, linguistic, and spatial point of view. First, it functions as a turning point within the plot. Second, the deictics ("they", "my room") of the subordinate clause capture a crucial ambiguity regarding the location of the subject. Nothing is specified: neither who enters nor what room is being entered – the police or the figurines. And this room could be referring to his normal room or to his newly incorporated dormitory into the dolls' house. Therefore, he could be located in one space or the other, or yet again in between both.

This rhetorical phenomenon is a remarkable device in the configuration of the fantastic effect because it combines the Fantastic as a phenomenon of language (Erdal Jordan 1998; Campra 2001; Casas 2010; Rodríguez Hernández 2010) with the subject of this thesis; the Fantastic as a phenomenon of space. This phrase, which I will call 'threshold sentence', is ambiguous, spatially speaking: it suggests that the protagonist could have already crossed into the fantastic domain, or that he is precisely in between two differentiated frames, which are also two domains. Furthermore, this liminal moment is not only happening in the textual world. It also affects what Campra calls "the reading time" (Campra 2001:186), since the reader is unable to determine where the narrator or subject of the fantastic event is located.

Finally, the change of spatial frames also affects the perspective, which is expressed by a shift in the verb tenses. Whereas the first two paragraphs of the story are told in simple past tense ("I bought", "I ran", "I saw" [42]) after the 'threshold- sentence', there is a shift to the present perfect and indicative

present: “The police has removed the body and searches for hints on the floor. [...] The figurine does not do justice to me but the mahogany table is exactly identical” (43). Where is the narrator speaking from in this final sentence? Is he now located inside the dolls’ house, regarding the scene from it? How is his voice reaching us? These questions remain unanswered, but what the reader does know is that the narrator has left the domain of reality and is now speaking from the domain of the Fantastic. This loop in hierarchical spaces also entails a change in ontological status. The protagonist is now telling and seeing from the angle of the Fantastic, a recurrent strategy used by Iwasaki in the volume *Ajuar funerario (Funerary Trappings, 2004)*, as in for example “La cueva” (“The Cave”), “Monsieur le revenant”, “Hasta en la sopa” (“All Over the Place”), and “El salón antiguo” (“The Old Living-Room”), all of which present the impossible element from the angle of he who is already in the fantastic domain: ghost, revenant, figurine, or any other fantastic creature. As Roas has remarked (section “Voces del Otro lado”, 2011:168-171), this is a general recurrent feature from the Postmodern Fantastic – in that giving voice to the impossible is a radical transgression of, as well as a new perspective to, the traditional human voice which told the fantastic event.

2.3. Story: *Mise en Abyme* of the Fantastic

The function of the dolls’ house within the story presents important differences from the precedent short story by M.R. James. Half way through the story, anyone familiar with James’ short story, or even with the traditional motif of the animated replica (of a house in this case), might think that the author is reproducing a conventional plot line: the protagonist acquires a doomed object that comes to life at night to represent some unresolved event of the past, as is the case of James’ haunted dolls’ house. This has been previously presented as characteristic of the model of the Fantastic of Place (Chapter I), where a particular place is the frame for the apparition of the fantastic ghost (framing function). It is left to the protagonist to clarify some

tragedy related to the alluring past and embedded within those four walls (time-condensing function). However, if Iwasaki's short story might initially seem conventional, it is far from that, as it presents significant differences with the traditional ghost story as will be shown.

There are more fantastic interventions other than the animation of the houses' figurines. When the miniature house is illuminated, an important detail is that the figurines inhabiting the bigger dolls' house are, like the narrator, puzzled by it. They too witness an impossible event: their miniature house becomes alive at night too. This is extraordinarily a double animation of the dolls' house and the mini-dolls' house within the dolls' house. This double animation, therefore, means a multiple apparition of the fantastic at different levels, or what we could call a *mise en abyme* of the fantastic effect. To express this, the actions of the narrator are mirrored by the actions of the inhabitants of the dolls' house in perfect symmetry: "I *ran* towards the mahogany table and terrified, I contemplated the interior of the tiny dolls' house shining, *while* all the figurines of the house *ran* towards the doomed room" (42, emphasis added).

The fantastic effect appears again in the final scene, when the narrator's room changes from being the container of the dolls' house to being a part of it, with all its details, mahogany table and himself included. Iwasaki proposes a disturbing inversion between hierarchically contained spaces where the replica – the contained, the dolls' house – turns out to integrate its referent – the container, the narrator's room. And what is more, in this hierarchical inversion, the narrator also becomes a miniature replica of himself.

2.4. The Referent-Replica

Many of the motifs developed in this section are found in other short stories that also play upon a similar transgression between referent space and its miniature, or as Durand puts it, based on "the theme of the doubled container, of the container contained [...] the theme of the swallower

swallowed” (1999:208). An example is “El proyecto” (“The Project”, 2009) by Spanish author Ángel Olgoso, where the scale model that a boy builds as a school project gains life. Also transgressing the relation between the container and contained is “Ecosistema” (“Ecosystem”, José María Merino 2002). There the narrator gets a bonsai as a present, which starts growing its own life, with miniature birds, plants and people. As in “La casa de muñecas” there is another impossible occurrence: his family is also incapable of explaining his disappearance, and never finds out his new emplacement because the narrator is now part of this bonsai ecosystem. Another text by this same author that is worth introducing here is “Nacimiento en el desván” (“Birth/Crib in the Attic”, José María Merino 1982), a title containing the double sense of the Spanish word ‘*nacimiento*’, birth and crib. The motif of a space that simultaneously acts as referent-replica is, in this text, exploited in an even more literal manner: the character builds a detailed miniature scale model of his village that he keeps in his attic. The situation gets complicated when, as the dolls’ house, the miniature gains life. Even worse, there is a connection between replica and referent – whatever affects the scale model also affects his ‘real’ village, and vice versa. This is the first transgression of ontological hierarchy, where referent and replica are enclosed in an entangled interdependence. The artisan of the miniature discovers that the strange deaths in the ‘real’ village were caused by his cat, which had destroyed some figurines and houses with his paws. This fantastic interconnection between the two hierarchically different planes, ontologically and spatially, is very clearly seen in this passage, where the narrator recalls what he witnesses in his real village after the cat attack:

The inhabitants, an elderly married couple, were among the remains of crockery and wood like forgotten figurines after a long afternoon of playing, and only the blood, covering everything, imprinted upon the scene the true stamp of the real. [...], they reminded him of the frailty of the little objects that he himself had carved, and that only a little effort of his fingers crumbled and broke into pieces. (1982:23)

This immediately triggers a dilemma in the protagonist, who starts questioning

what space, container village or contained model, is more real: “the horrendous suspicion the appearance of life had suggested to him: that the crib was the real and him only a lifeless figurine carved from the wood chip of some skilled hands” (1982:21). It is then when the word ‘real’ appears for the first time but, noticeably, only related to the scale model:

With the rhythm of real life, men and women crossed the streets, entered and left their houses, [...]. He observed the crib petrified: in the centre of the attic, the mountains, the houses, the water currents, the poplar grove, seemed to beat with an undeniable reality. (1982:21)

After this second fantastic appearance, where the referent and the model seem to have exchanged roles, there is a third transgression, the most interesting in relation to the theme of the inversions of hierarchy. Just as in “La casa de muñecas”, there is a *mise en abyme* of the fantastic effect. The protagonist goes to the attic and discovers that it was his cat that had caused all those destructions. The cat “[l]ooked at the small figurine, from whose neck hung a shredded scarf” (24), and immediately after, this sentence follows:

The figurine then ran towards the attic, arrived at the edge of the crib, caught the cat with his hand, went with him to the door and kicked him downstairs. (24, emphasis added)

This crucial passage works as Iwasaki’s ‘threshold-sentence’. The question of ‘Who is the figurine?’ can only be answered by determining where this figurine is located. That figurine could be both an inhabitant of the crib, or the artisan himself. This last hypothesis would imply a shift of perspective from the artisan, who was the focalisor up to this point, to a narrator who reveals that the artisan was, himself too, just a *figurine* of someone else’s model. He is the inhabitant of the miniature dolls’ house within the dolls’ house.

If in “La casa de muñecas” the exchange of roles between replica and referent takes place by the incorporation of the hierarchically superior space – the narrator’s room – into the hierarchically inferior space – the doll’s house –,

in Merino's text what happens is that the narrator adds at the very end another (superior) hierarchical frame to the reality of the protagonist. The village, until then presented as real within the storyworld and as referential for the scale model, is just itself a replica of another one.

The subject too, while keeping a panoptical view of his model, is at the same time observed by some other artisan. His (assumed) omniscient panoramic view turns out to be just an illusion. The reality of the protagonist is in fact nothing but a part of a broader space that contains it and treats it as a copy: a figurine in someone else's scale model, a room in a dolls' house.

These two texts play with the issue of the transgression of scale, going against the initial presumptions of how container and contained relate, and in so doing challenge what the protagonist and reader thought: that the space where the character is located was the 'real' referent to the copy. The idea of the replica that gains ontological dominance over its referent echoes the Baudrillardian notion of hyperreality, where spaces (like Disneyland, or any miniaturising model) stand out as copies without their model. For Baudrillard, the only possible reality is a copy without the substance or qualities of the original. The question to ask is whether this mirroring interplay between embedded structures implies that there is no such thing as referential real, as Baudrillard argues. Whereas there is an underlying interrogation of our preconceived relations between reality and referent, rather, the transgression that these short stories suggest distances itself from the loss-of-the-real view. Through the interchange of the container and contained, the exchange of their roles as referent and replica, the notion of referential space is not *invalidated*, but *relativised*.

The complex metaphor arising from this transgression of the container-contained could be read as a metaphysical question. What these embedded spaces suggest is anguishing: there could be more (spatial and ontological) levels, in either way: hierarchically inferior – more dolls' houses within the miniature one – or worse, what was presented as referential reality at the start, that domain where the narrator observed the dolls' house, could just as well be

a 'room' in a house contained in a larger frame where another individual witnesses another animation. This figure is very much like the character of "The Circular Ruins" (Jorge Luis Borges 1941), who while trying to dream of a man, discovers he is nothing else but the dream of another man.

First, if the miniature dolls' house is a replica of a bigger dolls' house; second, if this bigger dolls' house is a copy of the ordinary reality represented in the text, and third, if this (realistic) domain is itself a replica of the reader's extraliterary space: could the same line of thought be continued on and on? The question that this text raises is that the space of the reader – what we call everyday reality – yet referential to artistic representation, could also be just a replica of a hierarchically higher space containing it.

Metaphorically, this expresses a view of reality which is, on the one hand, referential to artistic representation and, on the other, aware of its own artificiality. These texts present a complex model of realities, all embedded within each other and all (falsely, naively) seeing themselves as the absolute referent, while just being a figurine in a scale model. The view of a central, absolute, ontologically dominant referential reality is dismantled with this fantastic transgression of the container-contained.

3. THE MÖBIUS EFFECT: "DEJEN SALIR" ("EXIT", JOSÉ FERRER-BERMEJO 1982)⁷²

If the transgression of section 2 was based on the possibility of leaping between hierarchically embedded spaces, this section concentrates on a transgression which is, to some extent, its opposite: it deals with the impossibility of accessing otherwise interconnected spaces. The character of the sample short story – "Dejen salir" ("Exit", José Ferrer-Bermejo 1982) – gets into a subway station and can never find his way back outside. By moving upwards through the levels of some hierarchical system, he unexpectedly finds

⁷² The title of this short story, with no official translation to date, necessarily misses some of its connotations when translated into English. The Spanish expression "Dejen salir" is based on a well-known formula of politeness in the metro, similar to "Exiting passengers first". However, implicit in the Spanish title is a voice requesting a way out of a situation, hence "Exit" seemed

himself right back where he started. The result is that the principles of the container and contained are cancelled by – what could be called – a ‘Möbius effect’, giving rise to a self-contained space, where outside and inside cease to be oppositional categories.⁷³

An earlier text based on this motif is “A Subway Named Möbius” by A. J. Deutsch (1950). The Möbius effect the title indicates is localised in the mysterious disappearance of a train attributed to a fold in space, a sort of fourth dimension, a space, as the mathematician protagonist asserts, “of amazing topological complexity” (1968:160) and “of a high order of connectivity” (1968:160). Another canonical literary example of the Möbius strip is John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). Barth plays with this topological figure and the physical space of the page to capture the self-referentiality of language, central point of this volume of short stories. The most explicit example is his “Frame-Tale”, composed by two lines of text, “Once upon a time there/was a story that began” (1969:1-2), which the reader is instructed to fold in the shape of a Möbius strip. Also the title story is an excellent example of the Postmodern metafiction combined with the Fantastic. Ambrose, the protagonist, ends up confined for good in a funhouse of an amusement park, and this disorienting maze is a metaphorical space for the self-enclosed nature of the work of art and a reflection upon the creative process as put clearly in the end, “[...] he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator” (1969:94). This short story, one of the most widely studied examples for the device of Postmodern metalepsis, applies the figure of the Möbius strip to fictional embedded structures as a means to question the duality ‘fiction/reality’ (McHale’s “ontological question”, see Introduction).

the most appropriate solution.

⁷³ The short story “Dejen salir” has been selected in *La realidad oculta: cuentos fantásticos del siglo XX (The Occult Reality: Fantastic Short Stories of the 20th Century)*, 2008) as representative for the Spanish consolidation of the fantastic short story during the 1980s. But also, most relevant for this present research, it was included as a paradigmatic example of an unusual treatment of the traditional fantastic distortion of altered spatial coordinates (Casas and Roas 2008:50). In this section, the analysis will look more specifically into this distortion, including how the hierarchy of built spaces intervenes to create this distortion, and finally its

“Dejen salir” is remarkable in this respect, since the self-referential element does not refer to fictional layers but exclusively to architectural frames. This fact shifts the focus from the metafictional overtones to a reflection that touches upon material space itself.

The story tells of the following event: the character and focalisor of “Dejen salir” is confined within a metro station in the city of Madrid. There seems to be no way out, as the title indicates, since he is constantly drawn back to his point of departure. Already entrapped in this looping space when the narration starts, he finally surrenders and accepts that it is not a lapse of concentration on his side but a fact: no matter how many tunnels he goes across and stairs he goes up and down, he always ends up at the same point of departure, with the same scenes repeating over and over again. There is no access back to the street and the city, which would be the higher level in the spatial hierarchy: there is no outside or inside, since it is all one single self-referential surface.

3.1. Location: a Subway Station

This short story is an excellent example of how narrative space can be used to recreate the impression of verisimilitude in fiction. Out of the whole corpus examined in this thesis, this text possesses the most detailed referential descriptions. The locations where the event takes place are carefully described, all of them having an equivalent in extratextual space. Even a reader unfamiliar with the topography of the metro of the city of Madrid could easily follow the character’s journey on a real map. After buying some tissues “in the corner Princesa-Alberto Aguilera” (1982:81), the protagonist gets on the train at the station of Argüelles, succeeded by the stops of Ventura Rodríguez, Plaza de España, Callao, and finally Sol, stop where he gets off (yellow line 3). Once at the station of Sol, he goes through the passageway to the “Mayor” exit. This amount of specific extraliterary equivalents contributes to enhancing the reality effect of an everyday scene in a big city. Gullón explicitly reminds us how the

generated metaphorical significance.

“accumulation of details – is carried so that – the reader feels himself on familiar ground” (1980:19). “[This] procedure carried by writers of realistic fiction [...] reduces the distance between the reader and the narrated, so that the reader can move naturally among the characters whose existence does not impose any suspension of incredulity” (1980:19).

Further details which are part of the everyday urban environment include ads (shoes, an airline, a drink), vending machines with chocolates and chewing-gum, benches, and bins. All these objects both enhance this reality effect and act as orientation landmarks for the character. Once the loop starts, they will keep reappearing and repeating themselves as the story evolves. This is how he knows he is back at the same spot again.

The emplacement of the Fantastic in the station of Sol is interesting since geographically, it is a neuralgic point of Madrid, and so-called ‘Km 0’ of the Spanish radial network of roads. As to the type of enclave itself, what is remarkable is that the impossible event is related to a common metro-station. This ordinary urban location – barely exploited by traditional fantastic narratives – enhances the surprise effect for the protagonist, who cannot understand how it has taken place in a journey that he has undertaken a million times before.

3.2. Discourse: Literalisation of Habit

The short story opens *in medias res*: “He surprisingly is back at the platform, now empty again, and he takes a seat on one of the benches” (1982:81). From this first sentence on, the reader is immediately immersed into the fantastic event. The character is already within this impossible self-referential structure and this is conveyed through expressions of repetition (“back”, “again”), the deictic “the” (platform), implying a previous presence, and the adverb “surprisingly”, clearly establishing that the occurred is not treated as natural within the storyworld.

As in Adolph’s “La casa” (Chapter II, section 2), where a character enters an extraordinary house during his everyday journey to work, the first

part of the short story emphasises how everything was unfolding as a usual day in the character's life. He is absolutely familiar with the space that his journey covers, where he knows "by heart the name of each and every station" (1982:84), since he has been "all his life using the metro service" (84). This force of habit will become the central element in the construction of the fantastic effect. The expressions of frequency will become literalised. Note in the following paragraph, when he is referring to the very start of the loop, how the highlighted passages indicate the imminent fantastic transgression:

[...], the train arrived *as normal* and then the stations followed each other with no incident [...]. He had gotten off calmly/confidently ("*con toda tranquilidad*") when the doors opened, being *as always* careful not to introduce his foot into the gap between the train and the platform. (81)

That "as normal", which could also be translated as "as usual" or "as always" ("*como siempre*" [81]), becomes literally an eternal recurrence. The same applies to later passages referring to "the same platform", "the same ads of the shoe brand", "the same benches", "the same vending machines" (82).

The literal effect of routine actions becomes even more explicit towards the end, where an analogy is drawn between his situation and a "carrousel horse" that mechanically "starts his path again" (85). He is compared to a "soulless puppet on the everyday platform, that platform of all eternity" (85). If these passages were decontextualised from the self-referential structure he is now confined in, they could perfectly be rhetorical figures referring to how the character experiences his repetitive routine. The fantastic hyperbole – an "exaggeration to the impossible" (Casas 2010:12) – is what converts these otherwise normal reiterated actions in the character's routine into fantastic recurrences. His only exit in the end is to leap out of this circular sequence by going towards the rails, as the same train is, once more, approaching.

The last aspect concerning the discursive construction of the fantastic effect is found in the verb tenses. The cancellation of spatial levels between outside and inside is finally a distortion of time: the character is suspended in

an eternal present. The previous events before his enclosure are told in the past tense (“he took the metro [...] he had lost some time buying tissues” [81]). However, once the circular loop starts, there is a shift to the present tense, a tense that predominates throughout the story. This tense is only momentarily interrupted by a future tense, when he describes the elements out there that he knows he will see if he leaves, and serves to recreate that impression of a stagnant present.

3.3. Story: Cancellation of Coordinates

As the story evolves, the character’s anguish over this situation grows. This is portrayed through an acceleration of movement which leads to an exaggeration of the Möbius strip figure: “he is in a hurry, he is in a terrible hurry, increasingly more terrible hurry” (83), “he goes down some stairs, goes up other ones, again, and again, and again (84). This crystallises towards the end where all the signs “form a sort of strip with no end: EXITEXITEXITEXIT” (84). This is another literal resignification of this well-known phrase found in the metro in order to let exiting passengers out first.

The transgression in this short story parallels the conception of ‘space’ captured by the German word ‘*Raum*’ – a dimension or ‘room’ for bodies to move around. The three coordinates, height, length, and depth are invalidated to suggest that there is neither distance nor extension. The protagonist goes up and down a few stairs and across some corridors and yet he is back to the same point of origin. Up and down, across and through, instead of creating a sense of space – of ‘*Raum*’ – where the character can move around, always refer back to one single position. The character is stuck in one fixed point with no possible displacement from it.

Also, the perception of the impossible element by the character is to be noted. If never naturalised – as indicated in the “surprisingly” of the very first sentence –, the character initially attributes this occurrence to himself, in particular to being under pressure caused by stress and work: “There are days

in which one's head is acting mad and things like that do happen, particularly if one takes into account some problems, a lot of things on one's mind [...]" (82). This is a similar phenomenon to the one noted in texts like "L'Erreur" by Jacques Sternberg (Chapter III, section 4.3.4.), where the fantastic event is conceived as a 'human mistake'. The protagonist of this story also knows the limitations of his cognitive abilities and is aware that it can play tricks on him, since "everyone can make a mistake, even if he had been travelling all his life by metro" (82). Of course, this justification is illogical. Furthermore, this first attempt of rationalisation is followed by a second one, this one equally irrational. Those to blame for this "unbearable event" (84), according to him, are the ones who built this structure: "those cretin architects, or engineers or whatever the fuck they are called, who made of that metro an immense labyrinth where even the most clever one could get lost" (84). Therefore, if perceived and described as impossible, the fantastic essence of this self-referential structure is first attempted to be rationalised by the character as a product of his hectic everyday life. But of course, no matter how absent-minded someone might be, it is impossible to go through a corridor and find oneself back on the same spot; regardless of how intricately the structure was built by engineers.

3.4. The Self-Enclosed Referent

The enumerated fantastic texts of the first section of this chapter used the device of metalepsis and metafiction to foreground the self-referential essence of language in the construction of reality. By establishing continuity between different fictional levels, the Derridian formula "Hors du texte, point de texte!" ("there is no such thing as out-of-the text") appeared in a literal manner.

"Dejen salir" is an exception since the notion of self-referentiality is not necessarily referring to language (although it could be a possible interpretation), but rather employed in the context of everyday material spaces.

The impossible architectural form that this text presents is that of a self-contained, self-referential structure, without it alluding to jumps between hierarchically different narrative levels. The discourse of routine is the basis for creating a tissue of locations – the platform, the corridor, the stairs – that succeed each other while the character always returns to the same point of departure. The ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and the notion of extension are invalidated. Why this shift from textual spaces to architectural ones? An insight into this question can be found in how De Certeau (1988) and Augé (2008) have employed the same metaphor – the carceral self-enclosed space – in the context of everyday sites of transition, for instance, the metro.

De Certeau regards urban transitional space as a domain of imprisonment for the individual, in that material space is turned into carceral space precisely by the force of habit, this one being produced by underlying power relations. His theory of everyday spatial practices describes how power and social discipline interact based on pedestrian automatisations in ordinary built spaces. In a chapter entitled “Railway Navigation and Incarceration”, he argues that the monotony of public transport regarding social habits and architectural space turns the citizen into an automaton “pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car” (1988:111). Very much based on Foucault’s take on architectural space and discipline practices, De Certeau regards the metro as “[a] bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible the production of an order, *a closed and autonomous insularity*” (1988:111, emphasis added). Even more explicitly, note the parallels between “Dejen salir” and the following passage: “A travelling incarceration. Immobile inside the train, seeing immobile things slip by. What is happening? Nothing is moving inside or outside the train” (1988:111). Without explicitly discussing issues of power relations embedded into everyday spaces, the short story of “Dejen salir”, does also build upon the automatization of forces of habit.

Furthermore, this metaphorical isolation from the exterior found in the figure of the carceral place appears in Augé’s theorisation of the non-place,

“meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike in Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places” (2008:63). According to Augé, a fundamental characteristic of the non-place is its lack of integration into its surroundings, an aspect exploited literally in “Dejen salir”.

Another ordinary non-place leading to a fantastic scene is the airport of Barajas (Madrid), where “Los viajeros perdidos” (“The Lost Passengers”, José María Merino 2002) is set. This disorienting gigantic space literally captures many passengers in a hurry, who try in vain to find the changeable departure gate, and so end up caught up there for good, lost and “going adrift, absent-minded and beaten” in its corridors (2002:64).

Finally, also based on a circular enclosure is the short story of “L’Examen” (1988) by Quebecois Jean-Paul Beaumier. The nightmarish structure of this strange school forces the character to return to the examination room each time he finishes the exam. The scene is looped invariably like in “Dejen salir”: “I know that I don’t have another option but to surrender, go and open that door: ‘Hurry up! The exam is going to start soon’” (42). As in José Ferrer-Bermejo story, the opening is *in medias res*: the character is already immersed in this anguishing situation, where the exterior – the open air, giving the title to the short story volume (*L’Air libre*, [*The Open Air*])– is unreachable.

4. HIERARCHY SUSPENDED: “LA BRUME” (“THE FOG”, JACQUES STERNBERG 1974)

In the last transgression, two contradictory pieces of information can be found as regards to how container space (in the text a region, coastal area) and contained space (a hotel) relate to each other. An excellent short story to analyse the configuration of this spatial transgression is “La Brume” (“The Fog”, Jacques Sternberg 1974).⁷⁴ The constricted length of the stories sketches

⁷⁴ Jacques Sternberg is a Belgian reference for the micro-story, for science fiction (as seen in his volume *188 Contes à régler*, 1988) and for the Fantastic (particularly in the volume *Contes*

the fantastic occurrence vividly, concentrating the focus on a single disruptive element and the effect that this provokes. The limited spatial extension of the text, already mentioned in relation to Fernando Iwasaki's very short story, makes it ideal to analyse the construction, function, and meaning of the spatial transgression. In it, the narrator recalls his arrival at a hotel on the coast in the middle of the night. His insomnia leads him to take a stroll to the sea. As he exits one of the entrances of the hotel, he expectedly ends up on the shore. He then decides to explore the other side of the hotel, in theory where the road that led him there should be. But on the opposite entrance of the hotel he surprisingly ends up by the shore again. Next morning the fog prevents him from finding that road and this situation extends for a long time. Even if the map and his previous topological memory of the area tell him that the road should be there, the hotel seems now to be floating on the sea. Determined to wait for the sky to clear up, he starts accepting that the fog will never dissipate, and neither will he discover his location and way out. Therefore, first, this hotel had been accessible by a road, as it features on the map. But second, the hotel seems to be segregated from the ground like an island. Which of the two spatial dispositions is then the 'true' one is the crucial unresolved question.

4.1. Location: the Lost Hotel

As main emplacement of the story, Sternberg revisits a traditional trope of horror and fantastic narratives: the character's arrival at a lost hotel in an isolated region in the middle of the night. "[...], I did not see anything anymore: the night and the fog blurred it. I took a room in the only hotel of the region. A dreary hotel, big and pale, that clung to a promontory of cliffs" (1974:85). The fog, the ocean ("the sea and the sky fused together in form of a chasm" [1974:85]), the hotel on the cliff... are all elements which generate the

glacés, 1974). The entire book is composed by stories that rarely exceed the two pages of extension, and in which the alterations of space, those of time and the metamorphoses of the body form, are thematic constants. Belgium has a long tradition of the Fantastic (*l'école belge de l'étrange*) which can be followed in the critical compilation *La Belgique fantastique* (*The Fantastic Belgium*, Baronian [ed.] 1975).

atmospheric description that opens this story, very much in line with the Romantic foggy, isolated, tempestuous *locus amoenus*.

However, the actual function of narrative space in the story is far from just being the atmospheric frame of the action. This setting will instead be the subject of the transgression. If in the traditional use of this motif, as mentioned in Chapter II, the hotel was the stage of a mystery or apparition – a building that contained and hosted the Fantastic –, in this short story the hotel of this foggy region transgresses the laws of space because as the story develops, this hotel seems not only figuratively but also literally to be lost somewhere in space, suspended on a cliff, surrounded by sea on both sides.

4.2. Figures of the Void

The visual sense is the one prioritised to construct the environment in this short story. And precisely it is also sight which prevents the reader from appreciating a full vision of the area: “I couldn’t see anything else from the landscape”, “I could only see the ocean”, “the misty sky” (85), “[t]he next day, the fog still diluted the landscape” (86). The imprecision of sight is evoked on numerous times to imply that no sense of orientation references can be reached. The boundaries defining the topological features are blurred; “the sea and the sky fused together in form of a chasm” (85), the colours of the landscape are indistinct, faded. Whereas the hotel is a solid material structure, what surrounds it is just fog. Various references to figures whose end cannot be envisaged are employed to emphasise this contrast (“behind a window which led to the void”, [85]).

The metaphorical images of the abyss that the narrator employs to describe the area become literal in the second half of the short story. These descriptions of his sensations are therefore pre-empting any action (see “Anticipatory Description”, Casas 2010:12) in that they will be transposed into the actual features of this space. “I had never had with such a certitude the feeling of having reached the edge of the world” (85), “What’s more, I must

have been on one of the extreme points of the country” (85). The clearest literalisation of the subjective experience of space is captured in that sensation that the narrator has of being in a place outside the real world, in a void “beyond time, beyond everything” (85). It initially seems to be just an impression but this desolated hotel is literally suspended.

4.3. The Floating Space

As indicated in the first part of this section, there are two central functions of narrative spaces in “La brume”. Initially it is the atmospheric mystery, gloom and isolation which is highlighted. This extends through the first half of the text, and it is very much centred upon the description of how the character perceives his arrival to this area. Hence the predominant adjectivisation (“A dreary hotel, big and pale, that clung to a promontory of cliffs” [85], “the small pier” [86]) and verbs belonging to the domain of perception (“the sensation of having reached” [85], “[...] captivated, fascinated” [85]).

This atmospheric function of narrative space is abruptly modified almost exactly half way through the story, when the Fantastic appears. The descriptions of space in the first part are interrupted by a short and concise factual sentence: “But there was no path” (86) is how the character expresses his surprise when he exits the hotel from the other side of the hotel. It is then that the stage of the action becomes the subject which transgresses the expected spatial dispositions: does the hotel belong to the region where he had arrived last night? From then on, the descriptive elements of the area are less prioritised in favour of a succession of actions that relate how the narrator tries in vain to find his way back (“In the hotel, I have found a map [...], “[...] I have tried to locate the regional route” [86]). There is also a shift in the verb tenses: it is in this second part where the indicative present and the present perfect appear for the first time (“It has already been ten days” [86]), denoting that the character is still in that lost space. This final abnegation of the

character who suffers the fantastic event is very clearly transmitted by the last sentence (“But I begin to lose all hope. Sometimes I have the impression that the fog will never dissipate” [87]).

The essence of the impossible element here – the changeable emplacement of this hotel – coincides with the classic Todorovian theorisation of the fantastic (1970), based on the hesitation between a rational and irrational explanation of the event. Either the reader accepts a natural explanation – the fog is the cause of this disorientation – or a supernatural one: the narrator is now in a place the topographical features of which have metamorphosed. Within the text, both interpretations are facilitated. The fog is to blame for his disorientation, “It would be necessary that the fog clears up so that I could know exactly where I am” (87) and/or the hotel is now not accessible by road anymore, and it is not part of the region that the map shows: “In the hotel, I have found a detailed map of the region. I have found on this map the national road on which I had arrived [...]. But it is in vain that I have tried to locate the regional route that I had taken to this hotel” (86-87).

Either way, the character is left with no points of reference to precisely where he is. Or, even worse, he does have reference points but they are useless because they are contradictory: the true location of this hotel either corresponds to the coordinates indicate by the map – and thus a realistic reading –, or it is surrounded by the sea on all its margins, all this represented by the metaphor of a lost space floating without determinable coordinates for the character and by inference, for the reader too.

4.4. The Ghost Referent

“La brume” proposes a transgression based on a space that does not seem to have the expected relation with the domain that contains it. As mentioned, the motif of the fog offers a double reading that oscillates between (a) having a realistic referential equivalent, and so being located in our mental maps of extratextual reality (hotel by the sea), or (b) on the contrary, being

located in a domain that bares no similarities with our real extratextual geography: an impossible island on a road.

As it happened with the other sample texts, this fantastic transgression also serves to generate a metaphor that destabilises the relation between referent and representation. In this case the representation of space, the “map” of the region, does not correspond with how the subject experiences the space represented by the map. It is a disjunction between Lefebvre’s (1974) categories of the “perceived” (spatial practices as experienced) and the “conceived” (representations of space), which in this case do not seem to point at the same referent, the same space. These aspects coincide with Bollnow’s conceptual distinction between hodological and mathematical space (1963). The first one – deriving from the Greek *hodos*, path-making – corresponds to the human perception of movement between two different points on a map: it is the subjective experience of space. The latter is the objective, the mapped geometrical representation of space, with constant measurable distances. If Bollnow emphasises that it is fundamental to keep in mind that mathematical and human sense of space differ, in “La brume” the transgression is constructed upon the literal disjunction between hodological distances and geometrical ones.

Further textual examples where the same transgression is found are “Dérage” (“Skid/Slip”, 1988) and “Retour” (“Return”, 1988), both from Quebecois Jean-Paul Beaumier. In both short stories, the protagonists who witness the event are on a road they are familiar with. But this time, its topography seems to have metamorphosed and the road signs do not correspond to the distance that the character thinks he has covered, as this passage from “Dérage” best shows:

[...], the driver focuses on the road that disappears immediately after them, without leaving trace of them. Then he scrutinises the night without being certain that Liliane will be there when he arrives, he does not know where. (1988:20)

The village of Brumal operates in a very similar manner in “Los altillos de

Brumal”, (“The attics of Brumal”, Cristina Fernández Cubas 1983).⁷⁵ This little village is the place where the protagonist grew up, and where she returns to in order to remember her childhood. When she arrives at the region, no one seems to know of the existence of such a village, neither does it figure under that name in the council register of towns. Whereas the village’s description is very detailed (the main square, the church, the attic within it), its location is vague. Once more, the story offers a double reading, coinciding with the Todorovian fantastic: (a) a realistic explanation – Brumal is one of the “few lost villages on the hills and practically abandoned by its inhabitants (2008:130), or (b) an impossible one: “[...] neither the name of Brumal, nor any other village that would correspond with its geographical situation, figured in the lists of parishes of any diocese” (2008:139). The degree of referentiality of those spaces is unresolved in both texts and the uncertain, contradictory position of the foggy hotel in Brumal questions how these spaces relate to the storyworld that contains them, which goes back to the hierarchical principle of how the part relates to the rest.

5. SYNTHESIS

The three sample texts of this chapter deal with the interplay between spatial hierarchies, or what is the same, with the logical connection – and expected in accordance to our extratextual reality – between container frame and contained space. It questions the logical assumptions of the hierarchical principle of a space ‘being part of’ or ‘being in’ another one. “La casa de muñecas” alternates the hierarchy between the container and the contained, what relativised the notion of absolute referent. Spatial hierarchies are cancelled in the metro station of “Dejen salir” by this self-contained and self-referential structure disengaged from the framing space containing it. At the

⁷⁵ Note, on the one hand, that ‘*Brumal*’ stands for foggy in Spanish, thus indicating a space of blurry confines and location. On the other, ‘*Brumal*’ is an anagram for ‘*umbral*’ in Spanish, i.e. ‘threshold’, liminal space between referents and thus, with no referent *per se*. For these reasons, ‘*Brumal*’ has been chosen as the name to represent the recently launched *Brumal: Research Journal on the Fantastic* (Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona).

same time, in this transgression a finite structure became infinite through the loop of the Möbius shape. “La Brume” is centred on a place whose position and integration within the larger frame is not determined. Since its representations – maps, road signs – do not seem to correspond with what the character encounters, the experience of space and the graphic representation of it are not only disengaged but contradictory to each other. Thus, their referent – the ontological nature and emplacement of the space in question – is also, like Brumal and this diffused hotel, indiscernible.

The first transgression analysed inverted these relations, the second one cancelled them and the third invalidated them by providing various contradictory possibilities. What all of them have in common is that while not referring to a transgression of fictional realities like metalepsis and metafiction, the notion of spatial referentiality is at the fore.

Also drawing on the issue of referentiality is the next chapter. Textual/factual referentiality necessarily implies an ontological reflection concerning questions such as ‘what is the original and what is the referent?’ or ‘what is real and what is copy?’ Extrapolating this to a higher level of abstraction, the following chapter is dedicated to examine the idea of a problematic plurality of realistic worlds within the literary universe, a strategy that challenges the notion of a single referential reality.

CHAPTER V

WORLD: Ontological Plurality in the Postmodern Fantastic

“Le monde est longtemps resté un. Pour mieux dire, il s’est longtemps voulu un.”

[“The world has been one – or more precisely, it has wanted to be one – for a long time.”]

Bertrand Westphal, *Le Monde plausible: espace, lieu, carte*

1. MULTIVERSES: THE POSTMODERN LOSS OF CENTRALITY

In the previous chapters, narrative space has been discussed in relation to the different elements that construct (and transgress) the textual physical reality. ‘Body’, ‘boundary’ and ‘hierarchy’ are, as shown, fundamental principles to narrative space and to the effect of textual realism. Respectively, they provide a consistent, defined, and ordered impression of the physical dimension where characters move and the action takes place. But narrative space also embraces a higher level of abstraction, which relates to the different laws and possible constituents which give coherence to a fictional world. As the proponents of the theory of possible worlds have demonstrated (e.g. Pavel 1986; Eco 1994; Ryan 1991; Doležel, 1998), narratives can be conceived in terms of storyworlds. This idea is of the utmost importance since it implies a shift of focus of narrative space from ‘physical dimension’ to it as ‘world’. Therefore, narrative space is not only the sum of that which exists within the story; it is also the ‘container’ of this totality. But also, it is not a ‘passive’ or ‘neutral’ container of existing matter: it is endowed with physical and logical laws, among others, which determine what can happen inside. From this angle, space is a frame of constraints regulating that which is contained, best captured by Irish writer Flann O’Brien in his novel *The Third Policeman* in the following sentence: “Anything can be said in this place and it will be true and will have to be believed” (2007:88).

In order to elaborate on this fantastic transgression that concerns narrative space conceived as world, some principles of Possible World Theory (PWT) are useful, while being careful to engage with them critically. Deriving from Leibniz’s *Monadology* (1714), who viewed our actual world as the realised possibility of many other possible worlds, and combined with modal logics, the proponents of PWT have identified the need for developing an approach to narrative which prioritises the ontology of fictional worlds. In so doing, they have moved away from regarding the fictional text as a temporal sequence to a perspective of literature as space, as a universe of multiple

worlds.

One of the core theoretical principles of this perspective is that any fictional text derives from the actual material world and is always engaged with it. Based on our extratextual world (“actual actual world”, or “actual proto-world”), fictional texts are structured like a solar system (Ryan’s “fictional universe”, 2006; Doležel’s “Heterocosm”, 1998), also sometimes referred to as fictional universe, fictional world or storyworld interchangeably. At the centre, a fictional world (or “textual actual world” or “textual proto-world”) is realised as an actuality within the text. This happens by providing enough information in relation to actions and characters, which confirms that what happens in it is an actual fact (within the fictional universe, of course). From this centre, many other possible worlds spring out as satellites: these are possible (sub)worlds which distinguish themselves from the proto-world of this fictional system because they are not actual. Instead, they embrace wishes and dreams from the characters, and designate hypothetical courses of events. For my study on the Fantastic, these possible (sub)worlds concerning hypothetical situations will be left aside to concentrate on the nature of the world central to the system. To simplify, this will be referred to as the ‘central world’.

The whole system, central world and derivate subworlds, is regulated by modal constraints, such as the alethic (possible/impossible), deontic (allowed/prohibited), axiological (good/bad) and epistemic (known/unknown). From this variety of constraints, what are relevant to this research are the alethic constraints. Three possible models have been outlined concerning the ontological nature of the central world, and the reader the key figure in distinguishing these three models, as Doležel, among others, insists: “Having reconstructed the fictional world as a mental image, the reader can ponder it and make it a part of his experience, just as he experientially appropriates the actual world” (1998:21). More categorically, he later proclaims: “the semantics of narrative is, at its core, the semantics of interaction” (1998:97).

First, this world can be ‘natural’, corresponding with realistic texts.

Once more, it is the reader who identifies it as natural, according to the physical characteristics of his extratextual world: it “overlaps the world of a reader’s encyclopaedia” (Eco 1979:221). These views do not only converge with the reader-oriented theorisation of literary realism (see Villanueva’s “The Realist Reading”, 1997:121-147), but also with my theoretical perspective of the Fantastic (see Roas 2001; 2011, see also footnote 9). The Fantastic cannot exist without the collaboration of the reader. It is the reader who constantly compares the information he obtains with his mental model of reality. In so doing, he identifies, through a constant referential reading, that the reality created in the text is very similar to the factual extratextual one. Only then can the fantastic transgression be perceived as impossible within that realistic frame.

Second, a ‘supernatural’ storyworld is characterised in that its ontological centre opposes what is possible in our real world. If the characters of natural worlds are physically possible counterparts of humans, “[f]ictional worlds that violate the laws of the actual world are physically impossible, supernatural worlds” (Doležel 1998:115).

Third, both natural and supernatural can be combined. These fictional universes are dyadic systems (Pavel’s “dual structures”, 1986:54-57), constructed as opposition by the alethic constraints: what is possible in one of the worlds is impossible in the other one. The structure of the mythological worlds is mentioned as the paradigmatic example of dyadic structures of the alethic modality (Doležel 1998:129).⁷⁶

Another way of approaching these dual ontologies has been provided by Ryan in an article entitled “From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds: Ontological Pluralism in Physics, Narratology, and Narrative” (2006). There she draws an overview of narratives which contain more than one ontological

⁷⁶ Westphal exposes the weakness of this theory, since Doležel oversimplifies the ontological construction of the central world without much elaboration on the notion of referentiality. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Westphal also proposes three categories (homotopic, utopic and heterotopic worlds), which would coincide with Doležel’s ontological categories. However, Westphal provides expanded variations for each of them according to the issue of referentiality (2011:99-110).

centre, and combines the theory of Possible Worlds with contentions deriving from Quantum Physics to outline different versions of the ‘multiverse’. These multiple-world cosmologies are, as she points out, recurrent features of fantasy and science fiction writing, in that they have two coexisting worlds realised as actual: one is realistic and the other one is not.

If the proponents of Possible Worlds acknowledge the possibility of various ontologies within one fictional text, none of them explore how the natural and supernatural interact within it. In failing to do so, they disregard the Fantastic as a form distinct from fantasy and science fiction, precisely by the *conflictive* coexistence of the natural and supernatural. In Ryan’s plural cosmologies of fantasy, science fiction, and historical metafictional texts, as well as in Doležel’s mythical structures, the coexistence of ontological heterogeneity is not conflictive. The characters who populate these worlds do not reflect upon, and problematise, this ontological plurality. As repeated on various occasions throughout this thesis, exactly the opposite happens in fantastic narratives.

For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to address two issues arising from these theoretical perspectives:

First: what is the difference, if any, between Doležel’s ‘dyadic structures’, composed by two domains and Ryan’s ‘multiverses’? That which distinguishes a domain from a world is neither tackled by Doležel nor by Ryan, and it seems that these two concepts are used interchangeably, particularly by Doležel.

And second: is the opposition between a physically possible/physically impossible world what sets the duality natural/supernatural, as Pavel, Doležel and Ryan seem to suggest? Put differently: is a physical impossibility the only constraint which defines the supernatural in fiction?

Let us start with the first question. As to the distinction between domains and worlds, I argue that any fantastic text presents a system composed by two domains (real and supernatural), yet not necessarily two worlds. All the previous sample short stories which have till now appeared in this thesis

coincide with Ryan's "single-world cosmology" (2006) – with the exception of "Mi hermana Elba", where the holes could be seen as worlds. There are two domains (realistic/fantastic), but the fantastic domain is contained within a central realistic world: it is an (impossible) element within it. In contrast with the rules of this realistic central world, the reader identifies this fantastic domain as a supernatural exception. The house of "La casa" is an exceptional domain within the general realistic world, and so is, for example, the magnetic museum of "El museo", Ballard's house of "The Enormous Space", Iwasaki's dolls' house, and Ferrer-Bermejo's Möbius metro station. What is crucial is that even if the character's (and by extension the reader's) perception of this central realistic world is weakened by these impossible elements, it is at all times the *only* ontological central referent: the only world.

However, in the sample short stories of this chapter, the impossible is not a part within the world (such as a house, a dolls' house, railway, or island). This is when the distinction between domain and world becomes important. The supernatural is not a domain within this world – but it affects the idea of world as a whole.

Regarding the second question, the three sample short stories will also contest the duality physical possibility/impossibility concerning narratives with more than one world. As mentioned before, 'natural' is traditionally viewed as that which is physically possible ("a possible world in which the physical laws of the actual world are valid", Doležel 1998:281). 'Supernatural' is, in contrast, physically impossible. This definition indeed is applicable to many fantastic stories, including the ones analysed in the previous chapters. All those stories presented physically impossible places, whether due to their topological features or agency upon the human character. The man-eating house of "La casa", the physical force onto the subject exerted by the museum-house of "El museo", the never-ending railway of "Tandis que roule le train" or the island on land of "La brume" were all supernatural elements based on the notion of physical impossibility as regards to the laws ruling a realistic world.

However, as the analysis of the following sample texts will

demonstrate, multiple-world texts do not have to be composed of a physically possible and physically impossible world. That is but one of the many possibilities of fantastic transgression. All narratives examined in this chapter provide physically possible models of our extratextual world. There is nothing physically impossible about them except for that they coexist; a coexistence, which as it is the case in fantastic narratives, is presented as problematic. All of them converge in that the transgression is effectuated by the apparition of another world, a fact that displaces the univocal position of the central one.

The multiplication of centres is now widely recognised as essence of Postmodern thought. As Westphal renders it:

After 1942, after 1945, after the massive diffusion of the *nouvelle* of horror, the excessively peremptory nature of a world declined in singular sprung to the eyes of those who did not want to see, nor to listen or understand. (Westphal 2011b:12)⁷⁷

As this quote expresses, the end of a unique sample of world vanished in favour of a multiplicity of possible worlds, of angles, constructions and representations of them, each of them hierarchically equal. The same thought is captured in the opening quote of this chapter, which also is the opening sentence of Westphal's recent work *Le Monde plausible* (2011b). As this author reminds us, fundamental to this shift is the concept of space as 'world', in its most abstract dimension: "To talk about the world in singular or plural is to talk about space, a space that has indissoluble links with time" (2011b:13). As will be shown, in Postmodern narrative of the Fantastic this will be expressed by a problematic shift from one fictional world to multiple versions of it.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ The idea of multiplicity of worlds and referents has been recurrently emphasised by this author. It provides the groundings of Geocritical studies in literature: "The world of modernity, supporting an 'objective' real is fragmented in a constellation of possible worlds whose representation constitutes just an approximation. Possible worlds are postmodern" (Westphal 2011b:12).

⁷⁸ Martin Horstkotte has also noted this in his study on the British Postmodern Fantastic. He dedicates a chapter to the issue of incompatible worlds, a feature that he establishes as central amongst Postmodern fantastic fictions: "a theory of binary structures, whether of time or of space, is bound to fall short of explaining the parallel worlds of the postmodern fantastic which sometimes offer three or more parallel worlds" (2004:72). His analysis, though, is less focused

2. FANTASTIC THIRDSPACE: “DAS KAPITAL” (DAVID ROAS 2010)

The short story “Das Kapital” (2010) by Spanish author David Roas is a representative example how the traditional motif in fantastic narrative of two realities juxtaposed can be much more than just a literary commonplace.⁷⁹

The narrator relates that because his flight was overbooked, he is placed for the first time in his life in First Class. His excitement and curiosity are centred on how things are experienced in this other “world” (2011:40) as he says, in particular, how the Tourist Class is viewed from the other side of the curtain. From there, he is confronted with the fantastic event: while the second class passengers are heavily shaken by turbulence, the area of first class remains literally immune to it. The Fantastic is thus elaborated on a juxtaposition of two realities – turbulences and the absence of these – within the one space of the plane.

Leaving the political implications of the short story aside, that which is of interest here is that space which comprises both possible realities. In this space of synthesis between the affirmative and the negative, two physically possible and yet excluding worlds coexist. This complex concept is present here in a simple figure: an ordinary plane of which only one half is affected by turbulence. Bearing strong resemblances with the theory of the multiverse, originating in theoretical physics and referring to multiple interconnected realities coexisting in time and space (see Greene 1999, Tegmark 2003, Kaku 1994; 2005), this short story provides the groundings for what I will refer to as

on spaces as ‘worlds’ and more oriented towards the transgression of time and history (historiographical metafiction) and of literary genres (fairy tales, for example).

⁷⁹ This narrative by David Roas has appeared in a book of short stories with the title of *Distorsiones* (*Distorsions*, 2010). The author, awarded the Premio Setenil in 2011 for this book, is today also one of the leading theorists of the Fantastic in both its traditional and Postmodern forms (see *Teorías de lo fantástico* [*Theories of the Fantastic*, 2001], *Tras los límites de lo real* [*Beyond/Behind the Limits of the Real*, 2011]). In his two collections of short stories, *Horrores cotidianos* (*Everyday Horrors*, 2007) and *Distorsiones*, the fantastic element appears in almost every piece, frequently combined with humour or the grotesque and, almost always, starting from a mundane situation which becomes distorted into the impossible. This is the case of “Das Kapital”, a short story that combines political content and humour with the Fantastic.

‘fantastic Thirdspace’. This term is borrowed from Edward S. Soja (1996), and will be employed here to refer to a physical space – in the sample story, the plane – which blends two differentiated realities.

In his volume *Thirdspace: Journeys into Los Angeles and Other Read-And Imagined Places* (1996), Soja defends what he calls “critical thirding” beyond traditional Hegelian dialectics. This concept provides a different way of understanding social relations – between history and geography, male and female, etc. – when they are inscribed in space. Thirdspace merges:

[...] subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (1996:56-57)⁸⁰

Although neighbouring it, Soja’s Thirdspace is not exactly a synonym for liminal space. Whereas a liminal space is that which articulates the ‘here’ and ‘there’, simultaneously joining and separating, Thirdspace designates a larger frame, hierarchically superior to ‘here’ and ‘there’ because in it, both are integrated. It is the space that merges oppositional logics and integrates polarities. Taking the figure of the Aleph as the paradigm for it, Thirdspace is for Soja a synthesis without diffusion of its elements. Whereas the inversion of the relationships part/whole, also present in “The Aleph” (1949), has been already treated in the previous chapter, what is of interest here is the idea of impossible synthesis.

Leaving aside the political tongue in the cheek of this short story, my focus will be on the configuration of the worlds in this Thirdspace. Following the structure of analysis of the previous chapters, I set out to explore how the trialectics are configured, where two (physically and logically) worlds are

⁸⁰ A different take on Thirdspace can be seen in Westphal’s *Geocriticism* (2007/2011a). In it, he borrows this idea to apply it to the study of space in literature. Literary space is thus an example of Thirdspace, since it is always a synthesis between the real and the imagined. Conversely, any perception of real space is also affected by fictional discourses and the literatures around it (e.g. Dublin or Lisbon).

juxtaposed forming an impossible space according to the laws of physics and logic.

2.1. Location: the Plane

The story fundamentally develops in two locations: the first part takes place on land, at an airport in Switzerland, where the character is told that his flight is overbooked and that, as a result, he has been upgraded to First Class. This domain of action helps the reader locate the story in a mundane setting.

The second and central frame of action is the plane. Inside, as any ordinary flight, first class and second class are separated by a curtain. This last element – of symbolic meaning in extratextual reality, since it segregates two socio-economic spaces – will play an important role in the construction of the fantastic effect.

As shown, there is nothing extraordinary in terms of the location of the action. Just as in many of the previously analysed short stories, the domestic, everyday setting enhances the sudden apparition of the Fantastic in those spaces where it is least expected. Remarkable, though, is that one of Augé's 'non-places' has been selected as emplacement of the action. Both airport and plane fall into the category of non-places. To recall, Augé's main thesis is that with the advance of Postmodernity (what he calls Supermodernity), the citizen spends more and more time in transit, whether shopping, travelling, or surfing the internet. This has caused the proliferation of areas, whose function is to facilitate the transit from one end to another: such as airports, railways, motorway routes, and hotel chains. A second characteristic of non-places concerns the issue of individuality: according to Augé "[a] person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. [...] The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (2008:103). Augé regards the non-place as a space where differences between individuals are diffused into one single sample: the passenger.

In this short story, however, the approach to the non-place diverges to

some extent from Augé's definition. First, if the plane is a functional space of transit, neither origin nor destination is of relevance to the plot. The entire action is concentrated on the plane as the domain of action, which leads to the second point: is this plane really a space where identities are homogenised? The different two classes in the plane are constantly highlighted from the start of the story. This is carried out not only by emphasising the different customer service the first-class and second-class passengers receive but is even more exaggerated with the fantastic transgression of space. In so doing, the story is a reminder that those non-places are not melting pots, where everyone is reduced to a single condition of 'passenger', as Augé states. Instead, they are areas where socio-economic differences are still sharply differentiated.

2.2. Discourse: First and Second Class Worlds

The two parts of the plane are constructed in opposition: what one has, the other one lacks. Yet, this schema does not refer to physical possibility/impossibility. Both halves of the plane, taken separately, are completely ordinary and physically possible. The importance lies in how they relate to each other.

Both halves are sharply differentiated by the facilities, goods served and treatment received. The world of First Class (of the First Class world, as he mentions) is constructed with superlatives that exaggerate this abundance. The seat is "enormous" (40); the food, "exquisite" (40) and "sublime"; the wine, "marvellous" (40) and "even the coffee is excellent" (40). All these positive attributes are condensed in succession into a single paragraph. Also to enhance excess, in various occasions the author reiterates the characteristics of objects which had already been referenced in the text. For example in the end, the protagonist does not just return to his seat but to his "grey leather seat" (41).

Once the character has finished his copious meal, he has the 'irrepressible temptation' (41) to approach the curtain and regard the other

side from this new, previously unseen, angle; “a question of perspective” (41). Then he sees the area of second class brutally shaking, the passengers and hostesses in panic are “holding tight to the armrests” (41), screaming, while things fall down from the head compartment. Even “the crew, sitting at the end of the aircraft, cannot repress their panic” (41). And then there is the other half: the world of First Class. This area is immersed in a lethargic state, and remains “as calm as the start” (41). He sees the passengers reading and dozing off. Also the staff seems to be drawn into this pleasant atmosphere and, in contrast with the panicking staff in second class, they carry out their duties with a “placid smile” (41). To intensify the effect, these two scenes are juxtaposed employing a cinematographic technique: the author rapidly shifts from one frame to the other on three occasions, which coincides with three paragraphs. In the first one, “[he] move[s] the curtain a bit and stick in [his] head. The scenario that appears before [his] eyes is horrific” (41). This is immediately followed by casting a look behind, to “realise that in the first class everything is as calms as the start” (41), and then, once more, he “stick[s] [his] head through the curtain again and see[s] the same hair-rising scene” (41).

2.3. Story: Entanglement

The narrator is the only one who can access and join both realities: neither staff nor the other passengers cross the boundary of the curtain. While the other first-class passengers doze off in their comfort, only he witnesses the other reality. Therefore, the protagonist is the element which allows “entanglement” (Ryan 2006) between the two realities separated by the curtain. His function is to activate them both and realise this impossible coexistence. At the very end, though, he adopts the same attitude as his “companions” (41) and returns to his comfortable seat in the calm first class and pretends “to think about the revolution” (41). This depicts an attitude towards the fantastic element which had already appeared in “La casa” and in “Trastornos de carácter”. The reaction of the protagonist to the impossible event, if initially horrified and surprised, ends up turning into passive acceptance. In this short

story, this last point is even more clearly present in the final paragraphs, where a denial of the fantastic element is also a denial of a whole social reality of shaken second-class citizens. The protagonist, a second-hand citizen himself who, as he confesses, flies First Class for the first time, ends up succumbing to the passivity of first class, “sprawled” (41) on his seat, “intoxicated with the taste of the malt” (41) and what is more, not even thinking about the revolution but just “pretending” (41) to do so.

The second element that entangles both realities is the curtain. As the reader will recall, in flights this curtain isolates the first class area from the second class one in flights, an act, that the narrator had “always perceived, from [his] second class seat, as an insult” (41). But this curtain is not only a liminal entity that segregates two physical spaces as well as two classes. In the text, it articulates the dual reality present within the plane. This aspect had already been anticipated as the character entered the plane by the sentence “A new *world* [...] opens before me” (40) (see “Anticipatory Description”, Casas 2010:12). The motif of threshold in this case is an unusual one, in the sense that this curtain, normally being just a symbolic boundary between two classes in a plane, becomes an ontological boundary of two differentiated realities. Similarly, first class and second class are not only two physical and social spaces in the plane. Their division through the duality turbulence/non-turbulence reflects two realities where different laws operate. In isolation, both of them are possible according to factual reality but what configures the Fantastic is that they are both present within one single space: the plane.

2.4. The World as Impossible Synthesis of Realities

This plane is thus an impossible space that brings together two verisimilar and yet contradictory realities. Roas’ dual plane encapsulates the concept of Thirdspace discussed above, since it incorporates the positive and the negative at once. It is a space which unites two incompatible versions of reality.

This Thirdspace does not find classification according to the contentions of Possible Worlds Theory. It is not composed by the natural and the supernatural, be it domains (Doležel's dyadic structures) or worlds (Ryan's multiverses). In the plane of "Das Kapital", two 'natural' worlds are present. As argued, the Fantastic resides in the plane as the frame where they exist at the same time.

A further characteristic of the fantastic Thirdspace is that it contests the very notion of referentiality. Generally in literature, parallel worlds are entangled by a character who shifts from his referential reality to another one, this last one presenting a version of facts contradictory to the referential one. However, in this text, which of the two realities (or worlds) is the real one? The one with turbulence, or the one without? It is impossible to answer this question. Both worlds are presented as actual and possess the same referential and ontological status. They are both real and possible: what is impossible is precisely that they are *both* real.

Further variations of the fantastic Thirdspace are seen in, for example, "The Other Heaven" (1966), by Julio Cortázar. In this story, the temporal and spatial distance between the Paris of the late 19th century and the Buenos Aires of the mid-20th century is cancelled out in a city that acts as Thirdspace. It joins two space-times: it is neither Paris nor Buenos Aires, while being both at the same time.

Another canonical example is Jorge Luis Borges' "The Other" (1972), which tells of an encounter between two Borges: one from 1918 and one from 1969. This triggers a conversation on who is dreaming who; who is subject and who is other. But this fantastic encounter is not only based on the symbiosis of two temporal moments in one instant: it also takes place in an impossible space. What makes this space of encounter impossible is that it merges two existing places in extratextual reality. In there, the notion of the fantastic Thirdspace is condensed in the motif of the bench where they sit next to each other. This bench is simultaneously (in) Cambridge and Geneva ("We are in 1969, in the city of Cambridge./ -No, [...] I am here in Geneva, on a bench, a

few steps from the Rhône.”):

I replied that the supernatural, if it happens twice, is no longer terrifying; I suggested that we meet again the next day, on that same bench that existed in two times and two places. (1999:416)

Another interesting variation of fantastic Thirdspace is present in the story “La casa de los dos portales” (“The House of the Two Portals”, 1982) by José María Merino. The abandoned house where the protagonists go to play provides access to a decaying version of their city located in a remote past. The abandoned house, a portal which joins both representations of the city, would be the equivalent of Roas’ curtain in the plane. The city works as a fantastic Thirdspace in that it ‘is’ various contradictory versions of itself at the same time: “And when I go on the street, after opening the only door of my house, I am often afraid to find myself in that immobile, corroded, infinitely sad city, which accompanies the other one like an invisible shadow” (1982:95).

Yet, contrasting with the mentioned narratives by Cortázar, Borges and Merino, “Das Kapital” is unique since it plays with the idea of Thirdspace without necessarily alluding to jumps within the temporal line. In this respect, it is worth introducing another short story by the same author: “Duplicados” (2010). Even more clearly in this short story is the parallelism with the quantum mechanics contention of quantum superposition, which establishes that a single quantum particle has the ability to simultaneously exist in multiple differential states. Whereas it is not the aim here to go further into the complex realm of quantum mechanics, the philosophical implications of this premise are quite extraordinary: a singularity can ‘be’ two or more contradictory states at the same time. This is illustrated by Schrödinger’s paradox, where a cat in a black box is alive and dead at the same time until the observer opens this box. This is explored in “Duplicados”, where a physics teacher who is about to carry out the Schrödinger’s thought experiment, puzzled, realises that the hypothetical experiment has become an actuality. The one cat in the box is duplicated: one is alive, the other one is dead. He then

exclaims: “Quantum superposition in all its splendour./ And then – I don’t find a way to express it any better -, the tissue of space has split” (2010:61). The dichotomy alive/dead is cancelled, just as it is the turbulence/non-turbulence flight. This takes place in a box, a further representation of fantastic Thirdspace, where – like the plane – excluding and irreconcilable worlds are real at once. Later on, the physicist from “Duplicados” extends what has happened inside the box to a reflection of his own ontology as an individual: “And I have started to imagine what will my other me do in that other reality” (63). This last thought leads to the next theme, where the idea of doubling the single is further explored.⁸¹

3. DUPLICATES: “UNE DURE JOURNEE” (“A HARD DAY”, JEAN-PAUL BEAUMIER 1988)

Also presenting two versions of a similar reality is the sample short story entitled “Une dure journée” (“A Hard Day”, Jean-Paul Beaumier 1988).⁸² There is an important difference, however. While in Thirdspace the notion of referentiality was indiscernible due to the co-presence of antithetical oppositions (e.g. turbulence/non-turbulence), in this section, the referent is put into question by several doublings of itself. Also touching upon issues of

⁸¹ Further insight into how the contingencies of quantum physics have modified the paradigm of the real is provided by David Roas in the section “¿Hay literatura fantástica después de la mecánica cuántica?” (“Is There Literature of the Fantastic after Quantum Mechanics?”, 2011:21-27). In it he draws from the theories by Goodman (1984), Feynman (1995), Kaku (2005) and Damasio (2007) among others, to illustrate how the discoveries of quantum mechanics and neuroscience have produced a new way of understanding what possible and impossible is. This new paradigm, however, does not mean that the ‘impossible’ is irrepresentable within the literary text: the Fantastic survives as literary form, proof of it are the many short stories quoted in this research.

⁸² Quebecois author Jean-Paul Beaumier has cultivated the Fantastic in various compilations of short stories, such as *L’Air libre* 1988 (*The Open Air*, where “Une dure journée” is found) and *Petites lâchetés* (*Small Acts of Cowardice*, 1991). He is a one of the referential authors which proves the vitality of this form in Quebec, along with other authors of the Fantastic such as Bertrand Bergeron (e.g. *Parcours improbables* [*Unlikely Routes*], 1986; *Transits* 1990), Jean-Pierre Girard (e.g. *Espaces à occuper* [*Spaces to Occupy*], 1992), Michel Dufour (e.g. *Circuit fermé* [*Closed Circuit*], 1989; *Passé la frontière* [*The Border Crossed*], 1991), Claude Mathieu (*La mort exquise* [*The Delightful Death*], 1989), Gilles Pellerin (e.g. *Ni le lieu ni l’heure* [*Neither the Place nor the Time*], 1987; *Principe d’extorsion*, 1991), Maria-José Thériault (*La cérémonie* [*The Ceremony*], 1978) and the aforementioned Claude-Emmanuelle Yance (*Mourir comme un chat*, 1987). For further critical perspectives on the Quebecois tradition of the Fantastic, refer to footnote 58.

identity, this theme parallels the classic motif of the *Doppelgänger*. But in this case, these issues are not centred on the physical doubling of the subject, but on the *space* of the subject. Therefore, the emphasis relies on how the physical reality of the character is suddenly doubled, hence providing multiplications of the original idea of one reality or world. These versions of his world are not only copies but equally referential ones, and possess the same ontological status.

“Une dure journée”, by Quebecois writer Jean-Paul Beaumier, is built upon the disturbing idea of being in (at least) two worlds, the two of them almost identical, with only a slight detail – a postcard – which allows the character to identify that he is not located in his everyday reality. As the protagonist returns home from a long day, he follows his usual sequence of actions: he opens the post-box, enjoys a glass of whiskey on the couch, and exchanges a few words with his wife Catherine, who he can hear working in the kitchen. He first notices that in his house the furniture has been rearranged, as his wife periodically does. He then discovers a postcard on the table. It is signed by Michel, a name he does not recognise, and it is addressed to M. and Mme Paul Boulard, also unknown to him. It all indicates that although it is extremely similar to his own, he is now in someone else’s house and life – he has shifted to an almost identical parallel world. The story ends abruptly there, with no indication as to how the two realities have been exchanged, where his original house is, or if he can ever return to it.

3.1. Location: the Housing Estate

Jean-Paul Beaumier has selected to emplace the action in a setting which has already appeared among other analysed short stories in this research: the housing estate (see “privatopia”, Chapter II, 4.1). The main emplacement of the action is the narrator’s house, or at least, what he believes is his house. Everything indicates that this house is part of a housing estate, composed of identical looking houses: “a bungalow looking like the other

dozens of them on this street” (1988:95). All the neighbouring houses receive the same commercial mail, all of them, as he says, addressed to the same type of profile (“last Thursday the office stank of the shaving lotion *Old Spice*: guess why” [97]).⁸³

If this setting – which could well be extracted from a text by J.G. Ballard – might seem initially unremarkable, it is a key element for interpreting the story. In an environment where the houses and inhabitants are barely distinguished from each other, the author seems to suggest that slipping into the neighbour’s life is almost natural. This idea, which will be further elaborated throughout the coming sections, presents an interesting inversion of the traditional Gothic enclave. In Chapter I (section 3.2.), I pointed at the importance of the setting within the Gothic-Romantic tradition of the Fantastic. Isolated and remote castles and mansions, atmospheres of decay and gloom were favourite locations to invoke the supernatural. This was to be understood in relation to Burke’s theory of the sublime, very influential at the time, and which suggested that the aesthetic characteristics of certain places (the Gothic enclave) facilitated the perception of extraordinary events beyond the boundaries of human reason.

However, the place of the fantastic event in “Une dure journée” is far removed from these conventions. The narrator’s house is not remote and isolated from civilisation, quite the opposite; it is at the heart of it. Also in contrast with the rich architectural features of the Gothic site, Otranto’s castle being a good example, there is nothing peculiar about the character’s house. It is just one of the many identical looking prefabricated houses. And yet, the underlying thought when selecting this setting for the Fantastic seems to converge to some extent with the 19th century Gothic ideals: namely, that certain types of places facilitate the apparition of the extraordinary. In this late 20th century ‘version’ of Burke’s aesthetic philosophy, it is not their remoteness and complex architecture which calls for supernatural experiences but precisely the opposite: just as Ballard’s short story suggested, the

⁸³ Since no official translation was found, all translations from this short story are mine.

unremarkable, homogeneous features of buildings in large residential areas seem to be the ‘suitable surroundings’ for the ordinary to unexpectedly turn into the extraordinary. Also converging with the Ballardian ethos, Beaumier seems to imply that this type of spaces synthesise a form of social numbness, which the sociologist Paul Virilio expressed as “uniformity breeds conformity” (1998:47).

3.2. Discourse: Anticipations

The homogenisation characterising the housing estate is paralleled by homogenisation of its residents. Instead of being portrayed as individuals, they are presented as ‘types’ of individuals or, even worse, as ‘a’ type of individual. The repetitions of lifestyles is best captured in the objects and goods sent to them by post. The character takes this with indignation, repeating the syntax and the expression “the same” in a sequence of sentences:

[...] are you going to brush your teeth with the same toothpaste as Mme Plourde? Gargle with the same mouth-rinse as M. Bertrand? Wash your hair with the same shampoo as your neighbour? Drink the same beer brand because you are more or less of the same age? (97)

Another important aspect is how the protagonist’s arrival ‘home’ is presented. The story abruptly starts with what is almost an everyday set phrase – “Finally! You got home. You thought that this damn day would never finish” (95) – and, immediately after, the protagonist recalls situations that have irritated him at work: “a first class nuisance (“*emmerdeuse*” in original) would not stop calling my phone [...] You know it is *very* important that I know *immediately* if there will be any delays” (95, emphasis in the original). This diverts the reader’s attention away from the first sentence, which in fact is already anticipating the fantastic event. Also anticipatory are his wife’s words when he enters the house: “Is that you?” to which he replies upset: “Evidently, who does she want it to be?/ But if you were Catherine, you say to yourself leaving

your briefcase next to the entrance, you would prefer that it was anyone else (*n'importe qui d'autre*) today" (98).

All this seems to indicate that he is so absorbed in his hard day at work, as the title says, that he is disregarding the small details around him. If not to him then to the reader, these details progressively disclose he is not in the place he thinks he is.

A scene where this is very clearly portrayed is when he opens the mail box. There he only sees what he expects to see, "Evidently, there is nothing but bills and commercial mail" (96), and laconically establishes:

After such a day at work, it is comforting to learn that a bag of ten kilos of potatoes is less expensive at Steinberg than at Provigo... yesterday you found toothpaste when you put your hand into the narrow mailbox. The other day you had the right to a new brand of tampons which were suspended on the door-handle since the mailbox was full. With a little luck, you will receive condoms soon. (96-97)

His anger prevents him from noticing the impossible elements which are already present among the commercial mail, all of which are quickly rationalised by him. A new telephone bill – which he thought he had paid already –, the electricity bill – nothing but an annoying mistake since they have oil heating –, and two misdirected letters. As he puts this post into the bins, his thoughts, which appear in brackets, already anticipate the fantastic exchange of identities: "[...] the telephone bill (you thought that you had sent to these people a check last week)" (97). The same process is repeated throughout his progressive encounter with this other reality he has slipped into: he rationalises what is different and out of place by appealing to how irritated it makes him. His door is "for once not bolted" (98), the telephone "(is never even where it should be)" (98), and if things are misplaced it is because of Catherine's "bad habit of changing periodically the disposition of furniture" (99).

The next aspect concerning the textual construction of the Fantastic is related to focalisation. It is the character himself who sees and relates the events but as if addressing himself. Even if following the actions through the

protagonist's appreciation of facts, the reader progressively realises the character's incapability to appreciate that there is something wrong. This is quite an unusual strategy to construct the fantastic tension, based on the character's self-absorption which blinds him to see beyond his "very bad day at work" (98). This irritation also anticipates the supernatural from the start, as the following passage shows: "All that is now behind you, you have closed the door, left your problems in the office (what would you not give so that this was true)" (96). Therefore, even home, his "hard day" is not left outside the door.

3.3. Story: Ascending Structure

All this serves to gradually construct the fantastic effect. The character is initially confronted with a normal situation with a few things out of place until at the very end a final element (the letter) breaks this process of rationalisation and reveals its impossibility: "Paul Boulard? But... but..." (99), definitive moment of realisation, followed by the wife's words: "Paul? Are you ready to sit at the table? Paul? Paul?" (99).

The linear construction of the impossible follows the Todorovian description of fantastic narratives. In his view, a structural characteristic of the Fantastic is that it is graduated towards a final culmination, an aspect that also forces a linear act of reading unalterably from beginning to end to make sense (1975:87).⁸⁴

In this short story, this classic ascending structure of events is to be remarked upon – it features an aspect also encountered in other sample short stories in this research. It is related to the motif of the threshold, but with a distinct Postmodern take. As argued, a characteristic of the Fantastic of Place (Chapter I) was that this physical division between spaces – for example a window or a door – also marked the access into the domain of the supernatural. Particularly recurrent among the traditional forms of the

⁸⁴ However, as various of the sample texts here which started *in medias res* have proven (e.g. "Dejen salir" and "Tandis que roule le train"), it should be stressed that this is not necessarily a structural characteristic of fantastic narrative (see Conclusion).

Fantastic was that crossing a threshold implied accessing a new space with new codes. Also, the physical threshold played an important role in the disclosure of events: crossing it was the turning point in the story. None of this is present in “Une dure journée”. Just as the observed structure in “La casa”, “Habitante” or “The Enormous Space”, there is no explicit moment that indicates the access into the fantastic domain, nor the start of the fantastic transgression. It seems to be taking place gradually, without preparation or warning. The Fantastic is only confirmed when the character realises it. Where then is the ‘impossible’ located? The effect is that the reader – just as the protagonist – is unable to confine the supernatural to a precise temporal or spatial frame (note the contrast with the Fantastic of Place). The classic correlation between a physical threshold and a temporal one in the action (turning point) is diffused.

As best seen in “Une dure journée”, it is impossible to determine when the shift of houses and identities, and so the doubling of realities, has taken place. Did it happen when he entered the building, as that initial “Finally! You got home” (95) sarcastically anticipated? Or while he performs his routine actions, such as reading the post, greeting his wife and having a whiskey on his couch? The sentence which opens the story in the original French version – “*Vous voilà arrivé à la maison*” (“You have just arrived home” 95) – best reflects the ambiguity as to where the character is located. Perhaps the entanglement between the two realities took place then, and thus this sentence would correspond with the previously introduced concept of ‘threshold-sentence’ (Chapter IV, section 2.2.).

The abrupt ending confirms that the impossible has at some stage seeped into the possible. Also frequent in Postmodern narrative is the fact that this is revealed by an unremarkable everyday object: here, it is a simple postcard not addressed to him. This confirms that space does not correspond either with his house nor his life. After finding the postcard, he does not recognise himself in this new space, and so there is no sign as to where his referential ‘home’ was. And yet, both worlds are realised with the same degree

of actuality: his house and this other house; his life and this other life. Has he become a counterpart of himself, under another name? It is important to bear in mind that the character's personal name is never mentioned. All we know is that he is not Paul Boulard: he has never been it, or he is not anymore, depending on which way it is read. Stressing the strong bound between space and identity, subject and emplacement, examined in Chapter II, both interpretations would lead to the same aspect: he is not the one he should be, which the story translates as 'he is not *where* he should be'.

3.4. The World Cloned

The spatial transgression presented in this chapter points to an erasure of the notion of one 'reality' in favour of 'realities' which coexist, and at times, are perceived in their simultaneity by someone who shifts from one to the other. Parallels of this transgression can be found in the theory of multiverses, which posits that our universe is composed of multiple simultaneously realities and yet the human being can only tune into one of them. Under this lens, what this short story would propose is a character who tangles into another one, very similar to himself and yet different. Embedded within this idea is the notion that what the human being perceives is only one of the multiple possibilities: our perception of reality, thus, is limited. Whereas what we think is 'the' reality, is just 'a' reality.

What occurs in Beaumier's short story also evokes the previously mentioned contention of quantum physics – quantum superposition – which states that a quantum particle can be in two states at the same time. To make things more complicated, another quantum physics effect – that of quantum entanglement – shows that two distant particles can react similarly to a phenomena. Even if these phenomena belong to quantum cosmology and as such are not perceptible to us in our everyday physical reality, the challenge that they mount to our system of logic is enormous. Of particular interest to this short story is the challenge concerning the dualism singularity/place: if

one element can simultaneously *be* in two different locations, is this particle still to be considered as *single* particle, or multiple ones? This relates back to the motif of the *Doppelgänger*, in that it indicates the disintegration of a – singular, individual – identity. Therefore, similarly to the doubling of a subject, this transgression of doubling of worlds suggests what was thought of as univocal is nothing else but one of the many copies of the same referent. This multiplication does not only affect the idea of single entity to reveal the frailty and constructed essence of the notion of individuality. Even worse, it attacks the whole notion of world or, what is the same, of ‘single reality’, whose central position in the fictional cosmology is displaced by multiple counterparts which are equally possible.

Another recent short story which exploited this theme is “Venco a la molinera” (“Venco, Molinera Style”, 1998) by Spanish author Félix J. Palma. Here, returning from a flight, the character realises he has slipped into another reality. This other reality is absolutely identical to his, with one exception: the word ‘chicken’ has been replaced by the word ‘*venco*’ to refer to the same animal. This generates a crisis in the protagonist, who wonders what other things might be different in this other reality. It opens up a whole new world differing from his now lost referential one in only this simple detail (at least the only he is aware of). In so doing, the text would be suggesting that, in our everyday environment, a multiplicity of very similar worlds (almost identical to each other) spring up from the least expected places.

In another short story, “La Banlieue” (“The Suburbs”, Jacques Sternberg 1988), the protagonist goes to a café where he is supposed to date someone but when he arrives there he realises that that café has multiplied at every corner: there are an infinity of them at every corner he turns into. Even a Nicole, his supposed date, is present in each of them:

Every woman living in this neither poor nor posh suburb looked like the Nicole I met in town. All of them were called Nicole Moreau. And they could not be but in the *Café au Coin*, in the junction of the *rue de la République* and *rue du Général-de-Gaulle*, since all cafés and all streets carried those names, never

another one. (1998:45)

As a result, he does not know which ones are the right coordinates and who is the right Nicole he is supposed to meet. These multiple doublings of space coexist in the present, and so the temporal line is not altered by this fact. Every singularity (the *Café au Coin*, the corner, his date Nicole) is by the end of the short story conceived as not one but as multiple ones, all of them very similar. All differences and specific references (the *Café au Coin*, the *rue de la République*) lose their specificity and become general categories (a café in a corner, a street like any other).

In “Une dure journée”, this disintegration of the classic notion of the ‘individual’ is foreshadowed by where the action is emplaced. The homogeneous colony of identical looking houses, all of which seem to have parallel lifestyles, is an ideal background, which exaggerated to the extreme, leads to the metaphor of cloned realities with barely any distinctive features that set the individual against others.

4. REPLACEMENTS: “LOS PALAFITOS” (“THE *PALAFITOS*”, ÁNGEL OLGOSO 2007)

Time, set aside to focus on space instead, also played a key role in the two sample texts analysed so far. The conflictive coexistence of two worlds also supposes an impossible alteration of the temporal line. For example, in “Das Kapital”, a plane could be affected or not by turbulence, but the two options cannot occur at the same time. In so doing, the normal course of events, which human beings have structured in the – artificial but necessary – notion of linear time, is challenged. In this final text to be analysed, time plays as crucial a role in the transgression of space as does the world. “Los palafitos” (“The *Palafitos*”) by Spanish writer Ángel Olgoso is an excellent example illustrating how the traditional fantastic motif of jumps within the space-time continuum can be adopted not only to deconstruct the notion of linear time but

also to annihilate all presumptions concerning the concept of ‘world’.⁸⁵ If, as Davies writes (1996:254), the universe can be taken as the totality of space and the totality of time, as history, space and time are transgressed here in their most abstract manifestation. When confronted by another physically possible version of the world, the character’s learnt facts about his world crumble down. Therefore, it is this short story that most directly illustrates how the notions of space and of time are two intrinsic references in the construction of reality, as physical dimension within a historical line.

The plot is the following: the protagonist and narrator, expert in botany, recalls how he gets lost during one of his frequent excursions in the countryside. On his way, he finds a fisherman “with an ancient look” (2007:45) who invites him to rest in his small village by the lake. This fact already surprises the narrator, since he knows the area very well and is certain that there are no lakes around. His arrival at the village is even more shocking: its inhabitants live in *palafitos*, those primitive wooden constructions on water. The longer he spends there, the more he realises this village has remained in the past. As the night suddenly falls, the fisherman shows him a world-map. This is a crucial moment in which the strange turns into the impossible. The map shows a world with the same geography that the narrator’s one, except for one aspect: it is exclusively populated by *palafitos*, even – and this last detail is crucial – where there were never any in the past. Confronted with this new version of the world, the protagonist sees all the certainties about his world crumble like all those historical constructions that the map omits. As in “Une dure journée”, there is no mention as to where the narrator’s world now is, or if he will ever be able to return to it. However, in “Los palafitos” the response

⁸⁵ A large part of this production by Ángel Olgoso is to be located within the confines of the fantastic short story, as seen in many of his works, such as *Cuentos de otro mundo* (*Stories of the Other World*, 2003), *Los demonios del lugar* (*The Demons of the Place*, 2007), *Astrolabio* (*Astrolabe*, 2007) y *La máquina de languidecer* (*The Machine to Languish*, 2009). “Los palafitos” (2007) has been recently compiled as one of the central exponents of Olgoso’s treatment of the Fantastic for *Perturbaciones: Antología del relato fantástico español actual* (*Disruptions: Anthology of the Contemporary Fantastic Short Story*, 2009) and his work is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars of the contemporary Fantastic as well as of microfiction (e.g. Andres-Suárez 2008, Casas 2010).

to the newly introduced reality is more developed: the short story ends with him accepting without much resistance and adapting himself to this new world of *palafitos*.

4.1. Location: the Modern City vs. the Fisherman's Village

There are two central spaces in the story, as will be shown, that are not only locations but at the end are also revealed to be two different ontological domains.

One of them is the narrator's world; with cities, concrete, and other modern elements which indicate that it converges with the reader's. The other one is the fisherman's village. In contrast, this one is portrayed as archaic, with *palafitos* on the water instead of "buildings on the ground" (2007:53), ancient traditions (barter, burials under the dolmen), materials and food (skins, tapioca, dry fish) and superstitions (the night as the moment of the supernatural), all of which indicates it is distanced in time from the referential space of the narrator.⁸⁶ If the narrator is shocked by the villager's old-fashioned culture, in the village of *palafitos*, the words concrete, brick and glass provoke a similar bewilderment. This is clearly exposed in a conversation where the narrator tells the fisherman that he lives in a concrete building of twelve floors and the fisherman replies: "I don't know those things of which you are telling me, they don't even fit into a human's mind" (2007:53), and later:

Sir, what speaks from your mouth is not natural reason. There are many things that one does not know, but an old man like me is certain of what he knows. Twelve bodies, you say? (2007:53)

In terms of their configuration, they are composed by a scheme of inversion: that which is found in one is absent in the other. And yet, this is very important, none of them is physically impossible. They do not even have different ontological qualities. Once more, as in the other texts, their

⁸⁶ Since no official translation was found, all translations from this short story are mine.

coexistence is what builds the impossibility. The fishermen's village and the narrator's city are contradictory domains which cannot coexist in the same larger frame that contains them, it being region or – as later will be confirmed with the map – within the same world. The key, however, is how they relate to each other, a relation that will be shifting throughout the story (see section 4.3.).

4.2. Discourse: Dwelling into the Fantastic

In the previous short story of “Une dure journée”, I have indicated how the motif of the threshold as a marker into the fantastic domain was absent. “Los palafitos” is once more an illustrative example of how the access into the other world is not rendered explicit with a physical boundary to be crossed, but instead it is a smooth transition which takes place without remarking its start.

Even so, in this short story the transition is present, but it is almost as imperceptible for the reader as it is for the character. There are two important rhetorical strategies to construct this, both of them related to narrative space: the first one being a poly-sensorial construction of the narrated space, which turns his walk into an absent-minded dwelling, and the second one concerning the local fauna, flora and topography.

The narrator tells us that he is strolling in nature, looking at all sort of plants, “carried by the delicious breeze that lapped against the hills” (45). He does not only recall what he sees but also what he hears, (“the exultant song of the trumpeter”, *aligrís* [45]), the textures he appreciates (“the insect-catcher leave” [45]) and the various aromas (“the aroma of hawthorn” [45]). Fully immersed in this sensory appreciation of the landscape, the character as well as the reader has already crossed into the other world without even perceiving it. This crossing takes place through a subtle detail hiding behind the mentioned species. There is an incoherence in relation to the two species, both of them presented as native to the area: the trumpeter and the hawthorn. The *aligrís* (grey wing trumpeter) is a grey bird unique to the Amazons. The hawthorn,

however, is a type of bush native to Europe, Africa and Asia, but not found in the Amazonian area. Thus, both species cannot coexist in the same geographical zone: after his description of flora, fauna and topography of the area, narrator is already located in an impossible space in the first paragraph. Significantly, the end of this paragraph is succeeded by the first intervention of the fisherman, who asks “Are you lost?” (45).

4.3. Story: Demolition of Universal History

The configuration of the two worlds and how they relate to each other evolves during the short story. This is what I will call the ontological ‘cosmology’ of this short story, borrowing Ryan’s term (2006). As the story progresses, the narrator provides different hypotheses on the existence of this village of *palafitos* in relation to the world he knows (his referential world). This notion of referential world is what will be contested in the ending. Although he progressively starts realising that this situation is impossible, it is not until the map is displayed that it is confirmed. This is the way that various dispositions of these two worlds across the story – the different ‘cosmologies’ – can be distinguished in three different phases:

At first, the narrator – as well as the reader – thinks he has encountered a strange hidden area within his world, a black hole where different rules abide. The village of *palafitos* is conceived as an exceptional place where, in contrast to the containing dry region, there are lakes. The narrator clearly puts this as “you are the exception... A very picturesque and impossible exception within these latitudes” (59). The village is then regarded as a fantastic interpolation in his idea of reality as the house of “La casa”, “Habitante” or “El museo”, or many other impossible places that have been mentioned in this research, might be. Important, however, is that the narrator’s idea of world still remains referential. Applying Possible Worlds Theory, the narrator’s world (which the reader recognises as realistic), would be the actual textual world and would still maintain his central position in the ontological system of the

text. We would be dealing with a classical ontology, or single-world cosmology, which concerns texts “centred around one, and only one, actual world” (Ryan 2006:652). In this one single actual world, an “uncertain region” (51) – the village – appears interpolated (“a Neolithic cottage stuck in a short distance of the city” [52]).

But as the narration progresses, there are too many clues that contradict this first hypothesis. This leads to a second ontological cosmology. The lake is not the only thing that does not correspond to the narrator’s referential space. In the village, the elements of modernity are still to be discovered, in particular, the evolution of architectural constructions. When the narrator exclaims that there had not been any *palafitos* in his country for centuries, the fisherman replies:

You know perfectly that there has never been in the world any constructions other than these, whether on water, on the shore, or on firm ground. Has it not always been so and will it not always be? (50-51)

This confirms that the lake village is not only a strange topographical exception in that region. The entire village reflects a regression to the past. He finds himself in the same world as his but has jumped across its historical line. Two temporal versions of the same idea of world are thus juxtaposed. But even in this case, his idea of world is still referential. As he describes his experience in the fisherman’s *palafito*, it is clear that he still keeps his spatio-temporal referent: “light of an archaic yellow”, “a millenary cavern” (56). In terms of Possible Worlds Theory, we would be dealing with a double-world cosmology, where the *same* world coexists in two versions: present and past.

This collapses when the map appears in front of his eyes, showing a world of *palafitos*, even in those regions where they were never there in Antiquity. Through this archaic architectural construction that spreads around the continents, another idea of world is introduced altogether. The fisherman’s world imposes itself as actual, whereas the narrator’s idea of world is displaced into some lost position. The narrator’s world is so displaced from its

unique position in the cosmology of the short story by the introduction of this second world of *palafitos*, where history of humanity has followed a different fate. This fact generates in the narrator a “totalising fear that abruptly appears, under our feet, the ground of certitudes” (57). And to illustrate this loss of ontological centrality, the author dedicates more than three pages to develop a metaphor on the downfall of the narrator’s referents. The architectural constructions that have shaped the history of humanity crumble in his mind: pyramids, amphitheatres and temples, castles and palaces, churches and cathedrals. This is the clearest evidence that the narrator has not leaped into a past version of his own world. The world of *palafitos* is irrefutable evidence that two worlds – the narrator’s and the fishermen – are actual; and their coexistence, impossible. With surprising ease, the narrator adapts himself to this new reality he finds himself in. The short story closes with him saying that he would like to spend the night with his wife “dressed in jute, her arms adorned with bracelets and shells, sheltered here from the open and from darkness, mutually comforted, leaning on [their] *palafito*” (62).

4.4. The World as *Arché*

The interrelation between architecture and human history is reflected through the symbolic association between ‘construction’ and ‘evolution’. The buildings which have constructed the chronicles of humanity are silenced by this unexpected world solely populated by *palafitos*. As the author indicates in an interview (in *El síndrome Chéjov*, 2009), the sought-after effect was “the progressive demolition of universal history”. Finding the map supposes a moment of absolute loss of the referential frame kept by the narrator till then. The metaphor that the text raises echoes Vattimo’s thesis (1985), who argues that Modernity comes to an end when it is not possible anymore to speak of history as something unitary or singular. At the same time, this thought also parallels Lyotard’s incredulous philosophy towards metanarratives stated in his report *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). There is not one version of History

but *histories*, all of them equally valid and dependant on the point of view they are articulated – the narrator’s developed world and the world of the *palafitos* are two co-existing and yet incompatible, hence the fantastic effect, versions of history of humanity.

Finally, to close the analytical parts of this thesis, it is worth noting how this metaphor refers back to the etymological origin of the word architecture, mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. The architect was originally the one that constructed the *arché*, who transformed the unknown into the known, chaos into cosmos. The lack of architecture, therefore, the architectural void, is equated with the end of certainties: it is an epistemological crumbling. René Descartes, in his *Discourse on the Method* (1637), employed a similar image to indicate the necessary test of ‘solid foundations’ of every certainty. For the philosopher, reason is something that man needs to construct to shelter himself from uncertainty and chaos. Tearing down the foundations is equivalent to being in the open, unprotected, homeless, and yet it is a maxim to initiate any solid and rational system of thought. This can only be attained and constructed by first returning to the *arché*.⁸⁷ (1983:63-64).

The narrator of “Los palafitos” also describes this downfall of the known with the metaphor of a descent into a void (“dissipating as collective spectres into the void”, [58]), which at the same time is a return to the origin, to the *arché*, waiting to be constructed by the *tekton*. Note also the images indicating a return into a zero point in scientific and historical knowledge:

Ages, tides, planetary orbits, Northern and Southern skies, devouring each other, return to the fresh start, to their original seed, to their intact womb. I realised that it was increasingly harder to invoke my memory, to imagine that what I could not see, to establish analogies between the evident and that which

⁸⁷ “[...] it often happens that a private individual takes down his own [house] with the view of erecting it anew, and that people are even sometimes constrained to this when their houses are in danger of falling from age, or when the foundations are insecure” (Descartes 2008:18). “And, just as in pulling down an old house, we usually reserve the ruins to contribute towards the erection, so, in destroying such of my opinions as I judged to be ill-founded, I made a variety of observations and acquired an amount of experience of which I availed myself in the establishment” (2008:27).

was becoming remote, to recover that which had not even happened. [...] The sun never browned superb domes, [...] the wind never made windmills spin around [...]. [...] calendar pages were falling like withered petals and sepals, as ashes of an inexistent time, a prelude to a type of sudden and atrocious extinction, of abysmal uncertainty, and of forgetfulness. (59)

This quote reflects how the narrator experiences the discarding of his referential frame, his foundations based on geography and history. His original idea of the world is demolished. Considering this, it is understandable that his adaptation into this new world is in the end as smooth and unexpected as the access had been. This fact seems to imply that once all referents have been destructed, once architecture has failed to provide the epistemological and ontological foundations of *a* world, a new *arché* arises. This *arché*, or pure origin, remains to be constructed and articulated by centuries of history, and as such it is to be embraced as one of the many versions the world could have turned into.

5. SYNTHESIS

The fantastic transgressions of space explored in this chapter were related to the idea of space as world. Based on some contingencies of Possible Worlds Theory (PWT), it has been observed how this technique affects the macrostructure (Doležel 1998) or cosmology (Ryan 2006) of the fictional text. Whereas realistic texts, as well as many of the traditional fantastic, present one central world around which other possible ones (character's beliefs, dreams, etc.) orbit, this type of transgression presents more than one ontological centre. The fantastic transgression of multiverse explored in this chapter finds analogies with PWT, in particular with Ryan's research on ontological pluralism in *Physics and Narrative* (2006). However, an important difference with the PWT is that dyadic structures or multiverses have been restricted to a natural and supernatural domain, the latter being configured by opposition to the former by its physical laws. In the constellation of worlds exposed in the

three sample texts, there is not a single one that is physically impossible according to our reality. All of them offered a plurality of physically possible worlds, but precisely what is impossible is their plurality.

Also important is to notice that the proponents of PWT do not recognise the Fantastic as a narrative form different from other neighbouring genres, such as fantasy and science fiction. Their category of multiverse (Doležel's dyadic structures, 1998) embraces all narratives of the supernatural equally and does not analyse if this multiplicity of worlds is presented as problematic within the text. Fantastic narratives are the only ones within the supernatural modes which present this coexistence as conflictive: or put differently, they are the only ones in which the character is aware of the (impossible) multiple ontologies offered. This leads to the questions: what conflicts do these multiple ontologies give rise to? What topics are the authors exploring through this type of fantastic transgression? What are the philosophical implications?

Whereas the motifs of juxtaposed and parallel worlds in space and/or time are not new in fantastic narrative, the way they are presented in the sample texts is what makes them innovative. The plane from "Das Kapital" offered a space of dichotomies. Their simultaneous existence was as impossible as that strange turbulence only affecting one side of the plane. None of the two worlds, in isolation, broke our physical laws of nature or of logic. What was impossible indeed is that they were inscribed in the same space. This is what I called Thirdspace, a space which synthesises two worlds whose harmony is unattainable (in this case, two social classes). This plane, itself, is the space of opposed logical actions, a fantastic space par excellence.

"Une dure journée" presented the doubling of the single. A second version of the character's world, extremely similar except for one feature, rendered evident he had shifted into a different reality coexisting with his.

Jumping across spatial and temporal realities, "Los palafitos" offered a disturbing reflection of how history and territory combined to delete the preconceived certainties regarding the idea of world and illustrated a return to

the *arché*. History was dismantled in favour of *histories*, an aspect that parallels Fredric Jameson's words regarding this subject matter: "In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson 1991:18).

In conclusion, the ontological plurality offered in the three thematic lines of this chapter expresses a Postmodern view which greatly differs with the 19th century idea of reality as something 'objective' and with set points of reference which an element or event perforates (ghost, vampire, etc.). As summarised by Bridgeman:

Space in the nineteenth-century realist novels emerges as a concrete and stable phenomenon, while in modernist fiction it is filtered, like time, through the perceptions of protagonists. In postmodernist fiction, the idea of a "world" is itself destabilised, and different spaces multiply and merge. (2007:56)

Deeply influenced by post-structuralist views on language, regarding it as something that does not have one but many referents, these texts reiterate that there are as many realities as possible constructions of it; as perspectives and mediations on it. The metaphor of the loss of the model of one single world shows the fracture or displacement of a central point of view, as the opening quote by Bertrand Westphal reflected. A singular ontology is atomised by plural ones. This is the feature found in the three sample short stories: the world as a single entity was displaced by introducing more versions of it. This made the protagonists realise that their stable and univocal idea of world, until then believed as 'the' reality, was in fact just one of many coexisting ones. As mentioned in the second sample text, this is traceable back to the figure of the double, and alludes to a disintegration of the singular and referential (identity, in the case of the double; reality, in the case of space as world). However, a different treatment of this idea arises: the singular does not simply disintegrate by the introduction of the multiple, whether similar or identical. A new vision of the singular is provided: 'the' subject and 'the' reality is now inextricably formed by multiple different versions of itself.

CONCLUSIONS: THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE SPATIAL SIGN

The present study has aimed at demonstrating the relevance and productiveness of the question of space within the Postmodern Fantastic. By showing the potential of narrative space to dismantle the effect of textual realism, this phenomenon reveals precisely what it transgresses: the importance of the spatial dimension within the human construction of the factual and textual real. This idea, if central to the Spatial Turn in the Human Sciences, was not rendered evident in relation to the fantastic text. As a result, this research was aimed at contributing to this existing gap in criticism: while the importance of narrative space in the construction of textual verisimilitude has been emphasised, and this relation between space and *mimetic effect* has received considerable scholarly attention, the relation between space and *fantastic effect* had – to date – not been appropriately explored, neither within the emerging field of Geocriticism nor in theoretical and thematic studies on the Fantastic. As a result, in addition to the four dimensions (location, discourse, story and reader) of the spatial sign, the theoretical contribution of this study relies on a fifth dimension: the fantastic function of narrative space, which instead of intervening in the construction of textual realism, is what provokes its transgression.

At the same time, the corpus analysed reflects that the Fantastic in the Postmodern context is by no means debilitated or extinct as Todorov's thesis asserted (1975:150-175). And neither did other forms such as science fiction replace it as Caillois (1975) and Bozzetto (2005:31) anticipated, nor did it succumb to the clichés of the classic horror story as Finné's study on the American Fantastic suggested (2006:7-9, indeed it is for this reason that Finné's study stops in 1985). On the contrary, the variety of authors in this present investigation confirm that, despite the still limited academic attention this form has been subjected to, the Postmodern Fantastic nowadays has a significant vitality. This vitality is particularly manifest from the late seventies onwards, when the formalisation converges at the level of authors, readers,

critics and editorial interest within different narrative traditions.

It is also true that the treatment of the Fantastic in the corpus analysed here reveals, what could be said to be, a less 'pure' Fantastic. It hybridises with other narrative forms; bringing together the absurd in "La casa" (José B. Adolph 1975), borrowing from the detective story in "Trastornos de carácter" (Juan José Millás 1989), integrating humoristic notes in "Das Kapital" (David Roas 2010) or bordering on the allegorical in "Tandis que roule le train" (Éric Faye 1997). Still, the basic trait of the Fantastic since its origins is maintained: an impossible element manifests itself within a realistic context. Also, as observed in the selected corpus, it is a Fantastic that tends to erase cultural characteristics and shows common elements beyond geographical frontiers. This is the reason why a comparative study on the Fantastic is more than ever of relevance within the Postmodern context.

Returning to the issue of space as impossible agent, a comparative approach has enabled identification of various points of intersection within the corpus in relation to the theme at stake. These points, grouped according to the four dimensions of the spatial sign, show a continuity with, as well as a renewal of, traditional motifs of the Fantastic. Finally, the observations will conclude by the new dimension that this study adds: the fantastic dimension of narrative space.

Situational Dimension: the Inversion of the Sublime Topos

In relation to space as setting of the action, a characteristic which reappears throughout our corpus is the mundane, domestic – thus unremarkable – topos. Very often, the settings of the Postmodern Fantastic are not only realistic but deliberately banal. This is transmitted through descriptions which insist on the codes of routine marking these spaces, whether an ordinary house or a metro station.

Paradoxically, this phenomenon shows an interesting parallel with the Gothic topos, typical of the Fantastic in its origins. As mentioned, the Gothic

topos feeds from the philosophy and aesthetics of the Sublime. This applied to the issue of space can be summarised as a place that acts as an ideal medium for experiencing the extraordinary. This correlation between place and event is also present in contemporary texts such as “The Enormous Space” (J.G. Ballard, 1989), “Trastornos de carácter” (Juan José Millás, 1989) and “Une dure journée” (Jean-Paul Beaumier, 1988). They suggest that where the action is set is directly related to what will happen in this location. In other words: the place of action, its ambiance, predisposes the subject to the supernatural. However, even more interesting is the fact that the contemporary location of the Fantastic is the absolute antithesis of the Gothic ideal: in contrast to those remote, isolated and, in a way, unique enclaves, the places which appeared in our corpus were suburban colonies (“The Enormous Space”), cloned residential areas (“Une dure journée”) and minuscule apartments at the centre of an overcrowded megalopolis (“Trastornos de carácter”). There is a common denominator in these scenarios: a serial fabrication of homogeneity, which instead of enhancing the sense of individuality – as the Romantic *locus amoenus* – deletes any trace of it. As mentioned, this coincides with Augé’s concept of the non-place (1992): those sites devoid of identity and history built for the subject to go unnoticed.

The fact that these types of spaces have become favourites for the fantastic apparition can be interpreted as a translation of the fears of our postindustrial society. These fears remit to a des-individualisation which the proliferation of these non-places entails, an aspect that has been on the agenda of sociologists such as De Certeau and Augé. Ballard is one of the writers in the corpus which shows more sensitivity towards this issue. In “The Enormous Space”, for example, he creates an agoraphobic character who constructs his own personal cocoon within that impersonal neighbourhood. This entrenchment seems to be the only possible way of individual experience. However, the author also warns of the possible consequences: fortified spaces breed fortified individuals and that individual space ends up being their only possible reality leading almost to madness and autism. In other texts, very

clearly in “Dejen salir” (José Ferrer-Bermejo, 1982), this threat is translated into the metaphor of becoming a robot of one’s own routine. The character turns into an automaton among the many that daily traverse those metro stations repeating the marked codes of conduct which De Certeau denounced.

These remarks point to two important aspects: first, the convergence between the Fantastic and contemporary sociological theories, and second, they confirm that the settings of the Postmodern Fantastic reflect and explore the fears deriving from the studied context.

Linguistic Dimension: Threshold Devices

At the level of the rhetorical construction of the Fantastic of Space, classic techniques of this narrative form, applied to the transgression of space, have been remarked. An example is the ‘semantic impertinence’, a technique which merges two distinct and incompatible semantic fields as in the “comfortable” fantastic wardrobe of “Trastornos de carácter” (Juan José Millás, 1989), as well as those holes which “never fail”, and make invisible he who finds them in “Mi hermana Elba” (Cristina Fernández Cubas, 1980).

A strategy to be highlighted in relation to the spatial transgression is that of the ‘fantastic polyvalence of spatial deictics’, whose paradigmatic sentence features in this last short story: “we were there but we weren’t”. The illogical concatenation of the two statements evacuates the reference of the adverb of place “there”. Where is “there”? The reader cannot establish the specific emplacement of the character, which might be in the realistic domain or might have already crossed into the Fantastic. This device has led to formulate another one: the “threshold sentence”. The best example of this is found in “La casa de muñecas” (Fernando Iwasaki, 2004) but it also appears in other texts like “Une dure journée” (Jean-Paul Beaumier, 1988). As indicated, this phenomenon combines linguistic and spatial elements and refers to an ambiguous sentence regarding the character’s position. After this sentence, it is rendered evident that he has already crossed into the fantastic domain. This

‘threshold sentence’ is thus a moment of suspension, in the classic Todorovian sense. And this ‘fantastic’ sentence also replaces the traditional motif of the architectural threshold into the Fantastic.

On other occasions, as it occurs in “Los palafitos” (Ángel Olgoso, 2007), the lack of a physical threshold determining the shift of spaces – and ontological domains – is fundamental. Instead of a recognisable access into the Fantastic, a progressive and – what is more important – imperceptible transition is generated. In order to do so, the sensorial potential of narrative space is exploited by the author; the five senses are engrossed during the walk while, distracted, character and reader dwell into an impossible zone.

As shown, also in the linguistic dimension, classical rhetorical strategies of the Fantastic are adopted, while new rhetorical devices are integrated.

Semantic-Actuational Dimension: the Subject as Architect of the Fantastic

As regards to structure of the events, it has been observed that a variety of short stories break with the classical ascending linearity which culminated with the fantastic revelation, a structure that Todorov even mentioned as a structural characteristic of the Fantastic. In “Dejen salir” (José Ferrer-Bermejo, 1982), “La casa de muñecas” (Fernando Iwasaki, 2004) or “Los palafitos” (Ángel Olgoso, 2007), the short story opens directly from within the fantastic domain, the events are narrated by a character who is already situated “on the other side” (see “Voces del Otro lado”/“Voices from the Other Side”, Roas 2011:168-171). And yet, the experience is told in retrospective. Where is the narrator at the moment of the narrating act? Should we suppose that he is still located in the fantastic domain? This disorients the reader: once again, the lack of transition-thresholds reveals an architectural void to structure the story.

In terms of how the Fantastic is received within the storyworld, there is a trend in almost all the analysed short stories: the new reality to which the characters are exposed is quickly accepted by them with abnegation, as if this shift of realities were foreseeable or unavoidable. The clearest expression

transmitting this resignation is found in those closing words of each short story of Juan José Millás *Primavera de luto* “ah, well” (“*en fin*” in the Spanish original, in “Trastornos de carácter”, 1989).

This leads to a peculiar form of facing the impossible element: the receptor tries to justify the fantastic event by blaming it on himself. This is the case, for example, of the narrator of “Dejen salir” (José Ferrer-Bermejo, 1982), who initially blames his stressful life for the situation he is in. Similarly, in a story by Jacques Sternberg, significantly entitled “L’Érreur” (Jacques Sternberg, 1974), the narrator attributes the disappearance of his house to a ‘mistake’ of his memory. This notion of the individual as source of the Fantastic differs from other narratives where the supernatural is of external kind, such as a ghost or a vampire. As mentioned previously, this presentation of the Fantastic is not new; it is inherited from a trend in the late 19th century – one of its most representative figure being Guy de Maupassant (e.g. “Le Horla” 1887). His fiction gave the Fantastic a subjective dimension, capturing the intricacies of the human psyche. But what characterises the analysed texts is that there is no hint at a mental pathology – excluding the borderline case of “The Enormous Space”. The receptor of the Fantastic is a normal subject who distrusts his eyes and memory to register correctly what he sees. Therefore, we are dealing with a subject who is more aware than ever of the limitations of his perceptual abilities, and as consequence, who is also aware of potentially ‘fabricating’ himself the fantastic experience he is being exposed to.

Pragmatic Dimension: the Postmodern Fantastic as Continuation and Regeneration

We cannot expect the character’s rapid acceptance of the supernatural to correspond with the reaction of the reader. The reader’s horizons of expectations are transgressed twice: on the one hand the fantastic event, on the other the scandalous passivity of the character. It has to be kept in mind that the contemporary reader inherits one and a half centuries of fantastic commonplaces. In order to keep surprising the reader, in the corpus the

renewal is also visible at thematic level. Classic motifs appear integrated with substantial modifications. These indicate a thematic evolution very much in relation with the prominence of space as theme. Some examples have been:

The motif of the cursed or haunted place (as seen in “The Haunted Dolls’ House”, M.R. James 1923; *The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson, 1959) is transformed into a space devoid of evil qualities or historical tragedy to justify its supernatural powers in “La casa” (José B. Adolph , 1975) and “La casa de muñecas” (Fernando Iwasaki, 2004). The persuasion these spaces have over the individual lacks finality or causality, which disorients even more the intra- and extratextual receiver.

The Romantic ideal of being at one with the natural environment is translated into a physical abdication of the subject who dissolves into his own constructed microcosm, for example, in “The Enormous Space” (J.G. Ballard, 1989).

The classic motif of the exchange of identities (e.g. “Lejana”, Julio Cortázar, 1951) now displaces the attention from the subject undergoing it to the space that produces it. Therefore, out of this motif another one arises: the ‘magnet space’, which always retains a keeper, a figure which will be continuously replaced by further victims who will perform the same function (e.g. “El museo”, José María Merino, 1982; “Habitante”, Patricia Esteban Erlés, 2008).

The double (e.g. “Le Horla” 1887) leads to the motif of ‘double space’ to emphasise that cloned spaces, such as the residential area of “Une dure journée” (Jean-Paul Beaumier, 1988) producing cloned lives.

Finally, in “Los palafitos” (Ángel Olgoso, 2007) the classic motif of jumps in the space-time continuum is not centred on displacements across diverse historical periods. Instead, a new history of the world is faced by the narrator, a new spatio-temporal reality which shakes the foundations of his world and sends him back to a zero point, to the *arché*.

Once again, the thematic treatment of the Postmodern Fantastic is in continuity with the fantastic tradition, while also indicating a regeneration of

classic motifs. Apart from the implications of space at the level of location, discourse, story and reading time, there is a fifth dimension in which these observations are reflected with most clarity. This is the fifth dimension which this study adds: the fantastic function of space.

Fantastic Dimension: the Fracture Space/Reality

The four pillars of space as the foundation of reality transmit the ontological weakening upon which the Postmodern Fantastic is anchored. As regards to the relation between body and space, and derivative interrelation between position and being, the transgressions of Chapter II have demonstrated that the loss of physical place in space is a metaphor for a dissolution which is not only physical but also existential.

In Chapter III, by obliterating the physical boundaries that differentiate the material environment, tracing any referential system of distances proved impossible. At the same time, by transgressing the spatial hierarchy dictated by the relation of container and contained (Chapter IV), the character and reader witnessed how reality became unstructured and disorganised. If these three aspects rendered the adverbs of place “here”, “there” and “in” completely devoid of meaning, the last chapter entailed a frontal attack on the ontological question. In Chapter V the idea of real world multiplied, diversified, lost its central univocal position within the cosmic fictional universe. Not only was reality less *solid*, less *defined* and less *structured*; it was not *unique*.

With this, we arrive at the final conclusions. The question motivating this thesis has been: why is the narrative of the Fantastic the optimal material to study the relationship between space and the literary text?

To answer this question it is necessary to bear in mind the bi-directionality of the factual and fictional. The literary and the extraliterary dimensions are conceived here as mutually influencing entities. Following this, it can be established that:

On the one hand, the study of the transgressions of narrative space

within the Postmodern Fantastic allows observing with clarity the interdependence between the various contemporary conceptions of space and the literary text. Examples of this have been the multiple parallelisms established between literature and other perspectives of space originating outside the field of literary theory, such as: the heterotopia (Foucault – “Mi hermana Elba”), the disjunction between body and Postmodern space (Jameson, Vidler – “La casa”), the non-place (Augé – “The Enormous Space”, “Dejen salir”, “Une dure journée”), the loss of the existential position of the subject in space (Heidegger – “El museo”, “Habitante”, “The Enormous Space”), time-space compression (Harvey – “Trastornos de carácter”), the rhizome (Deleuze, Guattari – “Trastornos de carácter”), the liquefaction of the physical environment (Virilio, Tschumi – “Rien n’a de sens sinon intérieur”), horizontal vertigo (Borges, T. Ford, Villoro – “Tandis que roule le train”), the *simulacra* (Baudrillard – “La casa de muñecas”), the carceral space (De Certeau – “Dejen salir”), the disjunction between the mathematical and the human experiences of space (Bollnow, Lefebvre – “La brume”), Thirdspace (Soja – “Das Kapital”), quantum entanglement in “Das Kapital” and “Une dure journée”, the theory of the multiverse in “Une dure journée”, and the end of a single version of History (Lyotard – “Los palafitos”).

Yet on the other, the transgression of the spatial concepts that men have established to organise their reality is a phenomenon that can only take place in narratives of the Fantastic. By examining the spatial metaphors appearing in the fantastic text, it is possible to reach a better understanding of the importance of space in the construction of reality, in particular providing a consistent surface where the body rests (Chapter II), delimiting the physical environment (Chapter III), and providing hierarchical order (Chapter IV) and ontological certitude (Chapter V).

Even so, the study of narrative space in the Fantastic is by no means finalised. During this investigation, various areas with research potential have been identified. One of them is the development of new media and its repercussion on textual space within fantastic narratives (e.g. hypertext and the

Fantastic). Also, while the present investigation has been centred on the specific historical parameters of the Postmodern, a complementary study could deal with this topic from a diachronical perspective. Since the concept of space has evolved together with the different philosophical, physical and aesthetic ideas, a history of the Fantastic in relation to the different conceptions of space across time (e.g. Newtonian, Romantic, Modernist, Postmodernist) remains to be written. According to the observations of this present thesis, it might be possible to anticipate some of the conclusions of this hypothetical study. These conclusions would not be far from the diachronic study on the conception of language carried out by Erdal Jordan (1998): just as language, and time – another dimension in need of further scholarly attention in the Fantastic narrative – the conceptions of space are a supratextual ideological element which promote change within literary periods. Therefore, understanding the evolutions of the idea of space would translate into a better understanding of the evolutionary traits of the Fantastic.

While much remains to be said on the relationship between the spatial dimension and the Fantastic, this study focused on one aspect: narrative space as transgressor of the real, which was named as the Fantastic of Space. This topic was selected because this phenomenon was considered of particular relevance within the Postmodern context. It is true that the Fantastic of Space pursues the same aim as any text of the Fantastic since its origins; the Postmodern Fantastic also wants to reveal the frailty of man's model of reality. As in any fantastic text, this disarticulation is transmitted through the fantastic metaphor. But in the studied phenomenon, this metaphor did not arise from unusual beings or objects; it was space that was presented as extraordinary.

Because it has been pivotal throughout the entire investigation, to conclude, I will proceed to synthesise why the Fantastic of Space is fundamentally a Postmodern phenomenon.

The structural and thematic constant behind the Fantastic of Space is to relativise the notion of reality by pointing to the *constructive* role space performs in it. In other words: by constructing it, space weakens the real.

While at first this may seem paradoxical, it is not so. Once again, it refers back to the etymology of ‘architecture’ and ‘architect’. Space, a primary organising principle of the real, is also the principle through which it is revealed that reality is not objective and given but constructed by the human being. He, as architect of his own reality, has built a system of boundaries, references, distances, volumes and spatial hierarchies to orientate himself in it. Space is thus undoubtedly a powerful ontological weapon for constructing both fictional as well as empirical reality. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that within the ontological questioning which defines Postmodernity, space becomes a faithful accomplice in dismantling our certainties about the real.

It can be concluded that the studied transgressions of the dimension of space transmit that if there is an ‘ordered’ reality, if there is ‘an architecture’ as Borges rendered it (see Introduction), this reality is necessarily an artifice. By destabilising the natural relation between the real and space, the Postmodern text of the Fantastic exposes space as *human* reality; a reality that man has tailor-made for himself; a work in constant motion – just as Bachelard’s nest-world from the quote opening this research – that man never stops remodelling.

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