Play, Space and Idealized Reader Constructs in Contemporary Argentine Fiction: Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Ana María Shua and Belén Gache

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Abstract

This thesis explores the convergences and divergences in the personal conceptualizations of play, space and idealized reader constructs as they are manifest in the short fictions of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua and, more recently, in the hypertext fictions of Belén Gache. The four chapters that make up this thesis offer an in-depth examination of how the narrative strategies employed by each individual author are used in an attempt to imbue the reading process with a game-like quality that serves to reduce the ontological distances between author, text and reader. As such, this thesis not only identifies key developments in the thematic and stylistic concerns of the Argentine short story, but also situates the reader's position in relation to what I call the 'narrative space'. This 'narrative space' refers to a spatially-inflected manifestation of the cognitive, imaginative and emotional experiences of the ideal reader construct that foregrounds his/her role in the co-production of narrative meaning. Such a focus not only allows this thesis to engage with each author's individual contribution to the literary politics of the contemporary Argentine short story, but also facilitates a serious consideration of the short story's ongoing dialogues with increasingly prevalent new media technologies.

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Introduction

The present thesis concerns itself with the concepts of play, space and idealized reader constructs as they are manifest in the works of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Ana María Shua and Belén Gache. Of specific interest are the ways in which the concepts of play and space - as they come to represent heavily thematized elements of the respective fictions, short fictions, sudden fictions and hypertext fictions of all four artists - actively problematize the literary politics that inform the dynamic relationship between author and reader. This introduction is comprised of six key sections. Its first and second sections outline and justify the thesis's overall position within the wider context of the study of Latin American Literature. Its third, fourth and fifth sections elucidate upon the key terminology, the methodological frameworks and the theoretical dialogues that guide the work's avenues of investigation. Its sixth and final section offers a breakdown and overview of each chapter's structure and also provides a summary of each chapter's salient arguments.

0.1 Literary Politics - A Heritage of Experimentation

This thesis offers a concise examination of how the narrative strategy of play - as it pertains to the landscape of Argentine short fiction - is used to reduce the ontological distances between author, text and reader.[1] Serving as a unifying line of enquiry across the works of all four authors is a comparative study of the concern for ludic engagement as it comes to represent a narrative strategy that problematizes the

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[1] What follows is an elaboration on the thesis' critical position within, and contribution to, the wider study of Latin American Literature, as well as a justification for the specific avenues of analysis explored throughout this study.

ontological distance between author, text and reader. As such, this thesis not only identifies key developments in the thematic and stylistic concerns of the Argentine short story, but also attempts to situate the reader's position in relation to the narrative space as well as his or her role in the co-production of such a space.

I use the term 'literary politics' in reference to Pablo Brescia's 'A "Superior Magic": Literary Politics and the Rise of the Fantastic in Latin American Fiction', published in 2008.[2] With a particular focus on the fantastic works of Jorge Luis Borges and Juan José Arreola, Brescia uses the term 'literary politics' to refer to both authors' conscious literary and critical interventions in favour of 'a specific way to approach the literary' which, in turn, 'determined the place and influence of fantastic literature in Latin American literary historiography'.[3] More specifically, Brescia asserts that:

> Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) and Juan Jose Arreola (1918–2003), engaged in an under-studied process which we can call 'literary politics', articulating an original reading convention that would in turn provide new pathways for writing. Borges' role as an anthologist for *The Book of Fantasy* and his prologues, essays and lectures promoted the dissemination of the fantastic just as much as his fiction did. In the case of Arreola, a reader of the anthology, the innovative nature of his fiction and his influence on his contemporaries and on later generations were essential to the rise of the fantastic in Latin America.[4]

This thesis shares a similar concern for instances of implicit and explicit authorial interventions and their subsequent elaboration of distinct idealized reader constructs. As such, the term 'literary politics' not only denotes authorial intervention in favour of a particular interpretive or analytical stance, but also highlights the attitudes, responses and interactions of the reader. That is, literary politics comes to represent

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[2] Pablo Brescia*,* 'A "Superior Magic": Literary Politics and the Rise of the Fantastic in Latin American Fiction', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 44, 4 (2008), 379-393.
[3] Ibid., p. 381.
[4] Ibid.

the back-and-forth dynamic of the interpretive process as it is thematized in the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache. In short, the term represents an effective means of articulating all four authors' divergent and convergent evocations of specific, idealized reader constructs, as well as the dynamic interplay that occurs between author and reader via the text.

The choice to focus exclusively on Argentine permutations of the short fiction format stems from a desire to celebrate a rich heritage of literary experimentation that continues to resonate with contemporary tenets of play. As will become clear in the following chapters, the very concepts of play and play space are marked by a deterritorializing effect.[5] Despite traditional claims to the contrary, to be discussed below, this thesis argues that play is nomadic and borderless. This is not to suggest that the instances of generic, structural and thematic experimentation elaborated upon in this thesis pertain to an exclusively Argentine phenomenon. Rather, the objective here is both to celebrate and elaborate upon the deterritorialized, nomadic and generically hybrid nature of experimental short fiction, and to posit the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache as instrumental in such processes of ludic deterritorialization. That canonical authors such as Borges and Cortázar can not only be considered alongside more peripheral artists such as Shua and Gache, but also be seen to dialogue with the primary tenets of new media technologies such as hypertext and even the video game is a testament to the genre-defying irreverence and playfulness that has come to define Argentine letters.

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[5] In Chapter III, I will discuss how Shua's sudden fictions problematize the relations and boundaries between the represented spaces of individual genres and texts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the process by which such spaces become ambiguous and indeterminate will invite certain Deleuzian parallels.

The choice to use the fictions of Jorge Luis Borges as a point of analytical departure reflects this celebration of irreverence and playfulness. Borges' particular brand of metafictional fantasy not only resonates with key ontological concerns to be elaborated upon over the course of this introduction, but also serves as a benchmark in fantastic, experimental fiction both in Argentina and in the wider scope of contemporary letters. As Brescia perspicaciously suggests, with specific reference to Borges, the 'selective importation, imitation and intertextual dialogue about literature became part of a process that turned the fantastic into an original mode of expression for twentieth-century Latin American literary history'.[6] In much the same vein, M.H. Abrams outlines similar processes of importation and interweaving in what he perceives to be Borges' prototypically magical realist fictions. In his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams reports:

> The term magic realism, originally applied in the 1920s to a school of painters, is used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel García Márquez in Colombia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Günter Grass in Germany, Italo Calvino in Italy, and John Fowles in England. *These writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.* Robert Scholes has popularized *metafiction* as an overall term for the large and growing class of novels which depart drastically from the traditional categories either of realism or romance, and also the term *fabulation* for the current mode of free-wheeling narrative invention. *These novels violate, in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic -- and sometimes highly effective -- experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic.*[7]

The focus of this thesis is not the fantastic *per se*, nor is Adams used as an eminence

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[6] Brescia, p. 381.
[7] M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), pp. 195-196), my italics added for emphasis.

in the critical response to magical realism.[8]   Rather, the processes of importation, imitation and intertextual dialogue, as they come to represent instances of literary politics that actively problematize the concept of narrative space and playful reader engagement, will be of particular analytical significance.   That is, the concepts of interweaving, fusing, blurring or outright violation of the territories of the real and the fictional, the waking and the oneiric, the serious and the trivial resonate profoundly with the concepts to be outlined presently, and subsequently discussed throughout this thesis.   Such processes not only point to an explicit playfulness or analytical irreverence in Borges' intellectual and creative processes, discussed in Chapter I, they also come to represent the inherited values of a perceptible literary trajectory that reaches beyond the now canonical works of Borges and Cortázar and towards the canonically-peripheral, hybrid works of Shua and Gache explored in Chapters III and IV.   My use of the term 'irreverence', then, is very much in keeping with Borges' overarching attitude towards literature.   In Borges' own words, Argentine artists 'manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas'.[9]

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[8] Also to be noted here is the contentious issue of Borges' place within the Magical Realist tradition. While some critics seek to better understand Borges' fictions through a consideration, or juxtaposition, of both their fantastic and magical realist traits, others choose to emphasize the fantastic roots of the author's work. Seymour Menton, for instance, claims that 'although Borges' stories have usually been labeled fantastic, a more accurate approach would be to designate some of the more authentic ones as Magic Realist and some of the more essayistic ones as fantastic' (p. 417). Sarlo, on the other hand, observes that 'the fantastic themes of Borges, which critics have universally commented upon, offer an allegorical architecture for philosophical and ideological concerns' (*A Writer on the Edge*, p. 5). For more on the discussions surrounding Borges' place within such fantastic and magical realist traditions, as well as a more thorough overview of Magical Realism, see Seymour Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', *Hispanic Review*, 50, 4 (1982), 411-426, Kim Anderson Sasser*, Magical Realism and Cosmopolitanism: Strategizing Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Stephen M. Hart, Wen-chin Ouyang (eds.), *A Companion to Magical Realism* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005).

[9] Jorge Luis Borges, *Discusión* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1964), p. 161. I wish to note that, above all, the aim here is to underline Borges' playful and spatially-conscious irreverence. The aim is not, however, to weigh in on the oft-contested issue of Borges' perceived Euro-centric or cosmopolitan artistic vision. While such questions doubtless provide fruitful avenues of investigation, they are quite beyond the purview of this discussion. For instance, in his account of Borges' perceived attack on 'the exaggerated emphasis on local color', José Eduardo González asserts that:

Thus, Borges' contributions to the literary politics of the fantastic in Latin America and beyond not only attest to the author's already well-established literary eminence, their implicit suggestion of a ludically-charged creative reading experience informs the thematic foundations of the present thesis. Long-time friend and collaborator, Adolfo Bioy Casares, attests to just such a reading experience in his prologue to *La antología de la literatura fantástica*:

> Con el 'Acercamiento a Almotásim', con 'Pierre Menard', con 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', Borges ha creado un nuevo género literario, que participa del ensayo y de la ficción; son ejercicios de incesante inteligencia y de imaginación feliz, carentes de languideces, de todo elemento humano, patético o sentimental, y destinados a los lectores intelectuales, estudiosos de filosofía, casi especialistas en literatura.[10]

As will be discussed in Chapters I and II, it is not hard to make a link between the 'imaginación feliz' of these 'especialistas en literatura' and the lusory attitude of the idealized reader-player constructs.[11] Moreover, Borges' conceptualization of the

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It is only in relation to Borges' attempt to overcome cultural dependency that we can now begin to understand his lifelong search for a unique *form*. Borges is trying to find an alternative to both a modernity that has never fully taken place in Argentina (symbolized by avant-guard literary forms) and to archaic social elements that he hopes some day will disappear (realism)' (p. 50).

On the other hand, J.M. Coetzee's *Stranger Shores* (New York: Penguin, 2001) observes that '[Stories like "El sur"] show Borges trying to situate himself more forthrightly in an Argentine literary tradition and contribute to Argentine national mythmaking', suggesting that such stories 'do in fact abound in local colour' (p. 139). For more on the analyses surrounding Borges' relationship with national identity, tradition and local colour, see José Eduardo González, *Borges and the Politics of Form* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Steven Boldy, *A Companion to Jorge Luis Borges* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013).

[10] Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo, Adolfo Bioy Casares (eds.), *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1977), p. 7.

[11] The anthology itself might be considered a manifesto of the authors' ludic approach to the literary practice. Published in 1940 by collaborators Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo and Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Antología de la literatura fantástica* presents an expansive collection of some 75 texts that, in the eyes of the three collaborators, best encapsulate the fantastic in its current state. The selection process alone, through a certain irreverence on behalf of the anthologists, provides an astute critical impetus to the generic and textual interplay and interweaving hitherto discussed. While the prologue itself is written by Bioy, the principles that inform its 'observaciones generales' are markedly Borgesian. Indeed, the implicit desire to break free of specific literary traditions and responsibilities through the

universal or the cosmopolitan, typified by a layering and overlapping of geographical,

historical and socio-political 'chitchats' as Borges calls them, provides numerous and

diverse ontological vantage points that ultimately address concerns of a metaphysical

nature:

> Que un argentino hable (y aun escribe) sobre la versión alemana de la traducción rusa de unos cuentos imaginados en el Turquestán, ya es magia superior la de esos cuentos. Es un énfasis de la multiplicidad del tiempo y del espacio, as casi una invitación a la metafísica.[12]

This is not to suggest that we continue along what Beatriz Sarlo considers to be a

'process of triumphant universalization' that has served to blunt the critical and

analytical edge of the author's work. [13]   Rather, the concept of universality, made

apparent in Borges' long-standing cosmopolitan proclivity for diverse ethno-

geographic narrative transmissions, is of particular analytical significance in that it

betrays an ostensibly spatial concern for literary territories. Indeed, Borges' evocation

of the multiplicity of time and space alludes to the literary implications of what is

essentially a spatially-inflected intertextual process. This concept of a spatialized,

transnational intertextuality, nascent in the above citations, will be more fully

considered in an examination of Shua's sudden fictions, found in Chapter III.

0.2 The Short Story

The analytical significance of short fiction, in the context of this thesis, lies in its protean

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elaboration of a reading code that is, in many ways, consciously anathema to the consensus of the time - insofar as it trumpets a reciprocal and 'continua transformación' over a fixed, unidirectional 'código general' (p. 5) - is directly informed by Borges' earlier writings.
[12] Jorge Luis Borges, *Textos recobrados 1919-1929* (Barcelona: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2011), np.
[13] Beatriz Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 2.

nature.[14] The short story is, above all, a hybrid genre, characterized primarily by a

constant state of flux. Short fiction, and by implication, sudden fiction, represent

increasingly hybrid genres that, as I will discuss in Chapters III and IV, traverse and

transgress a number of generic boundaries, configurations and traditions. Moreover,

the inherent formal and structural *intensity* of the short form shares significant parallels

with the concepts of play that will emerge over the chapters to come, particularly

Chapters II and III.

What follows is a brief account of the more salient theorizations of this narrative

intensity. For Cortázar, narrative intensity becomes a means of ensnaring the reader,

'la única forma en que puede conseguirse este secuestro momentáneo del lector es

mediante un estilo basado en la intensidad y en la tensión'.[15] Similarly, Italo Calvino

posits the concept of 'rapidita' or 'quickness' as one of six fundamental literary values

to be taken forward into the twenty-first century. Much like Cortázar's 'intensidad',

'quickness' is described as 'a question of looking for the unique expression, one that

is concise, concentrated, and memorable'.[16] Thus, short fiction champions a primacy

of concision, a strict economy of expression and a desire to achieve maximum

narrative impact. Calvino cites Borges as the archetypal *cuentista* by virtue of his

ability to approach 'the infinite without the least congestion,' employing only 'the most

crystalline, sober and airy style'.[17] This concern for the brief yet affective grasp of the

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[14] With the exception of Cortázar's *Rayuela*, there is a conscious decision to limit the analytical scope of this work to a study of the short form as opposed to the novel. To this end, Cortázar's *Rayuela* will be consulted less as a work of fiction and more as a theoretical codex. That is, it will be argued that Cortázar's seminal novel functions as a culmination of Cortázar's thematic, philosophical and general literary concerns that, in turn, can be used to inform our readings of his short fiction.

[15] Julio Cortázar, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' in *Obra crítica 2* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994), pp. 365-385 (p. 379).

[16] Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 49.

[17] Ibid., p. 50.

reader's attention can be found not only in the short fictions of Borges and Cortázar, but in more contemporary mutations of the form such as sudden fiction and hypertext fiction. The terms 'sudden fiction' and 'hypertext fiction' will be examined in more detail in Chapters III and IV, respectively.

Thus, the short story represents the perfect conduit for such narrative intensity. According to Borges and Bioy Casares, the short story represents 'lo esencial de lo narrativo,' unencumbered by 'episodio ilustrativo, análisis psicológico' and 'feliz o inoportuno adorno verbal'.[18] Likewise, Cortázar claims that 'los cuentos plenamente logrados' are defined by 'la eliminación de todas las ideas o situaciones intermedias, de todos los rellenos o fases de transición que la novela permite e incluso exige'.[19] While brevity and concision represent the idealized technical and stylistic foundations upon which Argentine short fiction has always been based, the function of the short story as 'una máquina infalible destinada a cumplir su misión narrativa con la máxima economía de medios' has taken on a new relevance in the context of contemporary cultural production and consumption. For many contemporary authors, an intensified form of this economy of expression has become something of a narrative strategy, an essential means of playful communication with the reader. As will be discussed in Chapter III, Shua's sudden fictions evoke the same intensity found in the Borgesian and Cortazarian *cuento* and, in doing so, point towards the technical and stylistic concerns of a literature fascinated by the far-reaching, ontological possibilities of brevity.

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[18] Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 2009), p. 11.

[19] Cortázar, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento', p. 379.

Ultimately, the closely-related nature of short fiction, sudden fiction and hypertext fiction make apparent the existence of what Shua refers to as 'una tradición muy consolidada en la Argentina', the effects and influences of which are felt throughout myriad literary, sociological and geographical networks.[20] It is for this reason that the present work situates itself within the context of contemporary Argentine short fiction. In the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache, we are faced with almost a century of experimentation and play within the Argentine literary heritage. Through the analysis of the ludic element as it is manifest over four distinct literary *oeuvres* spanning almost one hundred years, I argue that we are able to see how canonical authors of fantastic short fiction continue to dialogue with the evolving literary structures of play as they are present in the contemporary, canonically-peripheral and experimental genres of sudden fiction and hypertext fiction.

To this end, the present work situates itself along a similar analytical line to that outlined in Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman's *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*. Specifically, in the chapter titled 'From Macondo to Macon.doc', Taylor and Pitman outline a continued critical fascination with the far-reaching implications of Gabriel García Márquez' Macondo, as it comes to represent a 'central mythical locale in the Latin American literary landscape' that, rightly or wrongly, is often used 'as shorthand for the boom generation'.[21] Similarly, the experimental, self-referential and paradigm-shifting tendencies of the fantastic narratives of Borges and Cortázar will serve as a thematic anchor throughout this thesis. Indeed, the subsequent chapters dedicated to Shua's sudden fictions and Gache's hypertext artefacts will reveal how

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[20] Cited in Saturnino Rodrıguez, 'Criaturas pequeñas y feroces, como las pirañas: conversaciones con Ana Marıa Shua', *El cuento en red*, 18 (2008), 25–31 (p. 27).
[21] Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 84.

the literary and thematic concerns of both authors are inevitably informed by Borges and Cortázar, all the while establishing new avenues of investigation in light of their shared spatial and ontological concerns.

Likewise, this thesis argues for the continued relevance of the works of Borges and Cortázar, whose rhizomatic and spatialized narratives anticipate significant digital paradigms, all the while resisting the easy metaphors that emerge from an overestimation of the form. Indeed, it is possible to approach the fantastic works of Borges and Cortázar as early considerations of certain digital tenets such as augmented reality and virtual exploration without suggesting that both authors are merely proto-hypertextual icons of a Latin American experimentation with new media technologies. The continued relevance of Borges and Cortázar in the ever-expanding critical interest in digital forms of storytelling, such as hypertext and the video game, will be further defended and developed in Chapters III and IV. The following section now moves on to a discussion of the methodological frameworks and theoretical tenets with which this thesis dialogues and negotiates.

0.3 Exploration and Co-production - Outlining Play

As will be discussed throughout all four chapters of this thesis, the concepts of play and the play space serve to renegotiate the ontological boundaries and power configurations that typically dictate traditional reading paradigms. To this end, both the traditional and contemporary debates surrounding the concepts of play and space, as they inform the critical and analytical positions of this thesis, merit brief elucidation.

Of particular interest in relation to play are the theories put forth in the seminal works of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* and Roger Caillois' *Les jeux et les hommes* published in 1938 and 1958 respectively. Specifically, Huizinga's claims that play represents both 'a free activity, experienced as "make-believe" and situated outside of everyday life' and 'an activity entirely lacking in material interest and in utility' must be brought to task in light of their attempts to quarantine play from everyday reality.[22] Indeed, for Huizinga, one of the primary characteristics of play is its secludedness: 'It is "played out" within certain limits of time and space. It contains its own course and meaning'.[23] Some two decades later, Caillois attests to a similar separation between the imaginative and topographical spaces of play and those of seriousness in his suggestion that '[play] is circumscribed within limits of space and time which are precise and fixed in advance'.[24] From this we can infer Huizinga and Caillois' desire to quarantine play from reality, to provide it with its own, sacred or hallowed space. For both Huizinga and Caillois, one of play's primary functions, then, lies in its perpetuation of the concept of territoriality and the separation between fiction and reality.

While the postulations put forth by Huizinga and Caillois will provide an invaluable foundation for the study of play, the ontological implications of the concept, as they are manifest in the works up for discussion, are more immediately consonant with the contemporary theories posited in Jane McGonigal's *Reality is Broken.*[25] Here, play comes to represent a viable means of social reorganization, thereby rejecting the

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[22]Jacques Ehrmann, *Game, Play, Literature* (New Haven: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 34.
[23]Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1949), p. 9.
[24] Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 43.
[25] Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

notion that play exists at the margins of society and culture. McGonigal's theories will be discussed in more detail in chapter IV. Furthermore, the concepts of the cheat and the spoilsport, as they are informed by the writings of both Huizinga and Caillois, will be further developed in Chapter II.

As will be discussed over the course of this thesis, the ludic is not used to uphold and preserve the sacred frontier between fiction and reality. Rather, play is used to problematize such frontiers. As we will see in the context of the fictions and digital artefacts to be discussed in the coming chapters, play reveals a growing tension between the concepts of freedom and confinement within the narrative space, and questions the ways in which the reader, as player, is expected to address such tensions. Ultimately, play is used either as a means of reducing the ontological separation between text and reader, or else to call attention to such separations, such distances, in the hopes of eventually finding a means of reducing them.

Despite the implicitly escapist nature of play in Huizinga's study, the analytical import of the theorist's concept of 'homo ludens' – 'man' as player - must be defended as it comes to represent, in the present study, an idealized reader construct. Indeed, it is the reader's willingness to participate in the games presented by the narrative - his or her willingness to play the game, as it were - that serves to destabilize the ontological barriers between reader and fiction, thus undermining the very concept of sacred space. Such a willingness runs consonant with Bernard Suits' postulations on the 'lusory' attitude of the player as they are found in *The Grasshopper: Games Life and Utopia*.[26] According to Suits, the lusory attitude of the player refers to his/her

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[26] Bernard Suits*, The Grasshopper: Games*, *Life and Utopia* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005).

psychological willingness to accept certain play structures, rules or limitations for the overall enjoyment of the game.[27]

While this thesis falls in line with more contemporary rejections of the ontological separateness of the play space, such as those alluded to in McGonigal, I do adopt, albeit with some modification, Huizinga's concept of 'homo ludens' as means of discussing the lusory reader-player. This lusory reader construct, I will argue, stands in juxtaposition to the *serious* reader, who only serves to fortify the sacred frontier between fiction and reality, between text and reader. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II, the serious reader's relationship with the text is, as Roland Barthes suggests, characterised, by 'the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader'.[28] I argue that it is through the concept of play that we find the most effective means of addressing the authorial concerns of freedom, co-participation and reader agency as they are manifest in the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache.

Elsewhere, more contemporary concepts of play actively serve to problematize the relationship between reader and author. For instance, Robert Wilson's 'Godgames and Labyrinths: The Logic of Entrapment' not only focuses on the (often problematic) critical application of play to literary theory, the critic's notion of the godgame offers a serious, if not implicit, consideration of the effects of play on the author-reader relationship. On the 'godgame', Wilson asserts: 'A godgame occurs in literature when one or more characters creates an illusion, a mazelike sequence of false accounts,

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[27] Ibid., p. 52.
[28] Roland Barthes, S/Z (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p. 4.

that entraps another character'.[29] Such 'godgames' and their 'game-masters' will form

the basis of a study on the metaphysical detective stories of Borges' *Ficciones*,

discussed in Chapter I, wherein the misdirection of one character at the hands of

another will be treated as thematically consonant with the reader-author relationship.

Ultimately, the ludic will come to underline an interpretive dynamic more in line with

Gadamer's postulations on the ontology of play.   The theoretical currency of

Gadamer's ontological postulations lies not only in their consideration of a mutually-

inhibited realm of the imaginary, but also in its account of the reciprocal and potentially

eternal nature of the engagement encouraged within such a realm.   According to

Gadamer:

> If we examine how the word 'play' is used and concentrate on its so-called
> metaphorical senses, we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves, the
> play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces,
> the play of gnats, even a play on words. In each case, what is intended is to-
> and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. [...].
> It renews itself in constant repetition.[30]

Gadamer's articulation of a to-and-fro dynamic effectively serves to anticipate the

coming discussion of the reciprocal nature of play.   Furthermore, and in direct

reference to the concept of engagement, Jeff Malpas considers the spatial implications

of Gadamer's ontology of play:

> Gadamer takes play as the basic clue to the ontological structure of art,
> emphasizing the way in which play is not a form of disengaged, disinterested
> exercise [sic] of subjectivity, but is rather something that has its own order and
> structure to which one is given over. The structure of play has obvious affinities

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[29] Robert R. Wilson, 'Godgames and Labyrinths: The Logic of Entrapment', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 15, 4 (December 1982), 1-22.
[30] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 104.

with all of the other concepts at issue here - of dialogue, *phronesis*, the hermeneutical situation, the truth of art.[31]

With its emphasis on the process of moving away from a disengaged or disinterested acceptance of art towards a more active involvement with it, Gadamer's ontology of play helps to foreground the importance of the reader-player's involved, lusory attitude. The importance of such an attitude will become clearer still in Chapter II's discussion of Cortázar's passive readers. Similarly, Gadamer's emphasis on the ontological proximity of the play space and the potential for a continual engagement with it invites certain Bakhtinian parallels that are worth foregrounding presently:

> The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.[32]

That is, both the Gadamerian and Bakhtinian concepts of continual renewal through a dynamic, back-and-forth creative perception is paramount to the concept of play as it manifest in the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache as a process of constant co-production. Both models not only foreground the dialogic, to-and-fro nature of interpretation, in turn providing an effective and anticipatory illustration of the agonistic nature of play, they also point to the inherent inseparability of space and time within the narrative. As such, both Gadamer's ontology of play and Bakhtin's chronotope directly inform the concept of the narrative space to be discussed shortly.

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[31] Jeff Malpas, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/> [accessed 09.08.2016].
[32] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), p. 254.

In the analyses found in Chapters III and IV, critical exploration of games theory will extend to the domain of the contemporary video game. Specifically, McGonigal's account of 'feedback systems' and 'interactive loops' will be considered alongside invaluable considerations of the avatar construct provided by theorists such as Bob Rehak, Gordon Calleja and Diane Carr. Doing so will allow for a more profound examination of the concept of ontological merging or tethering as it is manifest in contemporary digital media. Indeed, a detailed discussion of the avatarial construct, as it is manifest in the hybrid digital artefacts of Belén Gache's *WordToys,* will serve to reinforce the concepts of the idealized reader construct and the ludically-charged merging of ontological territories.

While the concept of ontological merging will become increasingly clear over the course of the next four chapters, some brief, preparatory elucidation is in order. A comparative study of ontological transgression via ludic engagement - insofar as such a process comes to represent a narrative strategy (or indeed stratagem) that problematizes the ontological distance between author, text and reader - will serve as a unifying line of enquiry across the works of all four authors. The concepts of ontological proximity and ontological distance are best understood in relation to Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fictions*, wherein it is stated that 'each change of narrative level in a recursive structure also involves a change of ontological level, a change of world'.[33] In short, the concept of ontological proximity is used to refer to the reader's sense of connection with the world of the fiction, his or her sense of place within it. As will become increasingly clear over the course of this study, metaleptic transgression - as it is manifest in the works of Borges, Cortázar and Shua - undermines the typically

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[33] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 83.

hierarchical structuring of the ontological worlds that make up the text and, thus, problematizes the reader's sense of self and place in relation to the narrative space. Likewise, in the context of the hybrid digital artefacts of Belén Gache's *WordToys* and *Góngora WordToys*, explored in Chapter IV, the digital artist's conscious use of crude, avatarial constructs as a means of exploring the contested spaces of the individual 'word toy' generate a visual, and thereby literalized expression of the reader-player's sense of self and place. Thus, the notion of ontological territory, and the merging thereof, relates to the world of the reader and the world of that which is read.

0.4 Cognitive Maps and Narrative Spaces - Outlining Space

As is perhaps clear in the emerging concerns of self, place and contested space, the spatialized implications of play will form an equally vital area of intellectual enquiry throughout this thesis. As I have already indicated, traditional treatments of play that point to a spatial and ontological divide or quarantine will eventually be brought to task in the forthcoming analyses of the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache. Of particular interest presently are the ways in which the play element reinforces the latent topographical inflections of the narrative. Ryan points to the process of spatial production often inherent to the act of reading:

> As readers or spectators progress through the narrative text, they gather spatial information into a cognitive map or mental model of narrative space. Through a feedback loop effect, these mental models, which are built to a large extent on the basis of the movements of characters, enable readers to visualize these movements within a containing space. Mental maps, in other words, are both dynamically constructed in the course of reading and consulted by the reader to orient himself in the narrative world.

As will become clear, the concept of the ludic offers a more dynamic account of the spatial constructs of the work of art. Play renders the theoretical space of the narrative kinetic and open to exploration. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that the production of such spaces represents a collaborative, though often agonistic, effort between reader and author.[34] While the attempts to separate the ontological territories of play and seriousness will be substantially qualified over the course of the next four chapters, Michel de Certeau's Freudian-influenced attempts to merge the spatial with the ludic through the imaginative space of the 'mine', provide adequate foundational insight into the relationship between play and space:

> To use one of Freud's terms, the work thus becomes 'a mine', where one stocks the historical tactics relative to circumstances; tactics characterized by the 'deformations' which they bring about in a social and/or linguistic system. The literary text is like a game. With its sets of rules and surprises, a game is a somewhat theoretic space where the formalities of social strategies can be explained on a terrain *protected from the pressure of action* and from the opaque complexity of daily struggle. In the same way, the literary text, which is also a game, delineates an equally theoretic space, protected as is a laboratory, where the artful practises of social interaction are formulated, separated, combined and tested. It is a field where the logic of the other is exercised, the same logic that the sciences rejected to the extent to which they practised a logic of the same.[35]

Similarly, both the video game and the hypertext will provide a literalization of the interrelated nature of play and space. By way of example, Henry Jenkins' consideration of the 'spatial architectures' of video games; design architectures that allow players to participate actively in a story while exploring a fictional world more or

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[34] As will be discussed throughout this thesis, the term 'agonism' refers to the often mutually respectful competition (or even conflict) that occurs between reader and author during the reading process. As will become clear, the term serves, above all, to place the emphasis on the reading event itself, rather than the outcome.

[35] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other,* trans. by Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 23.

less freely, will provide invaluable insight into the ways in which new media technologies further elaborate on the symbiotic nature of play and space.[36]

With this in mind, we begin to see how the concepts of play and space come together to provide the cognitive and topological basis of the act of reading as it comes to represent a collaborative and exploratory endeavour. The inseparability of space and time, as we have briefly discussed in the context of Gadamer's ontology of play and Bakhtin's polysemic concept of the chronotope, is also evinced in later conceptualizations of narrative spatiality. Werth's 'text world', Herman's 'storyworld', and Genette's 'diégèse' all reveal a common concern for both the spatial and temporal substructures of the narrative.[37] As Ryan suggests, all of these concepts 'cover both the space-occupying existents and the temporally extending events […] referred to by narrative discourse'.[38] This thesis refers to these fictional, imaginative and cognitive spaces, as they represent co-inhabited mental arenas generated through the act of reading, by the general moniker of narrative spaces. On the topographical and architectural implications of the narrative space, Ryan observes that:

> Architecturally as well as plot-functionally, narrative space can be described in terms of the partitions, both natural and cultural, that organize it into thematically relevant subspaces: walls, hallways, political boundaries, rivers and mountains, as well as in terms of the openings and passageways that allow these subspaces to communicate: doors, windows, bridges, highways, tunnels and passes. Besides horizontal partitions, narrative can also present vertical ones, corresponding to what Pavel calls 'salient ontologies': these ontologies can oppose the world of everyday life to a world of magic, dreams to reality, images to existents or, in narratives with embedded stories, the different levels

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[36] Henry Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture' in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) pp. 118–130.

[37] For more detailed accounts of these concepts, see Paul Werth, *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* (London: Longman, 1999), David Herman, 'Storyworld' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 569-70 and Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

[38] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Space' in *The Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Fotis Jannidis, Matías Martínez, John Pier and Wolf Schmid (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 420-433 (p 420).

of fictionality. Whereas horizontal partitions divide the geography of the narrative world, vertical partitions create ontological layers within the narrative universe.[39]

Of particular interest here is Ryan's evocation of Pavel's 'salient ontologies'. [40] This concern for the ontological value of the spatial construct further elucidates the analytical currency of the narrative space. Such a space comes to represent an imaginative, topographical construction that serves to interrogate the perceived ontological distances between the world of the reader and the world of the text. As such, the term 'narrative space' is instrumental in the foregrounding of such ontologically-charged, spatial concerns.

Elsewhere, in *Avatars of Story*, Ryan laments what she perceives to be a 'dissolution of "narrative" into "belief", "value", "experience", "interpretation", or simply "content"', suggesting the need for a definition that instead 'stresses precise semantic features, such as action, temporality, causality, and world-construction'. Of interest here is not the perceived drift towards the critical or analytical vagueness of the term 'narrative', but Ryan's evocation of its world-building connotations.[41] Indeed, the analytical currency of the term 'narrative space', as will be discussed in Chapter IV, lies in this process of world-construction, all the while relying on an overall broadening of the concept of narrative beyond that of its traditional, verbally-contingent, causality-laden rigidity. To this end, the concept of the narrative space, as put forth in this thesis, does not exclude the non-verbal or the poem from its repertoire, nor does it call into question the status of the postmodern text as narrative. The term 'narrative space' does not serve to uphold or else impose a narratological, or narrativist, approach to poetry,

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[41] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2006), pp. 6-7.

prose nor a hybrid of the two.[42] Instead, the term is used to account for, or otherwise illustrate, the spatial constructs evoked, or mentally constructed, during the reader's experience of the text.

In other words, the term 'narrative', as I employ it in this thesis, does not refer to the degree of narrativity of a given work. For all intents and purposes, it represents an umbrella term for the imaginative and fictional spaces conjured up by both author and reader in the creative acts of writing and reading. As such, to address the narrative space of a remediated poem, as we will do in Chapter IV in the context of Gache's *Góngora WordToys*, is not to stake a claim on its primacy as a narrative, or even to suggest the existence of a narrative trajectory over a poetic event. Rather, the use of such a term represents an attempt to approximate the cognitive maps and schematics drawn up not only in the act of interpretation, but as a direct result of the evocative and affective impact of the work of art upon the observer. While, in the case of Gache's *WordToys*, it might be less misleading to call upon alternative terms such as 'play space' or 'story space', this thesis defends the continued currency of the term 'narrative space' on the grounds that the inherently nebulous connotations and definitions of the term effectively illustrate the kinetic, hybrid and protean nature of the texts that will be discussed throughout this study.

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[42] According to Ryan, 'Postmodern novels are often low in narrativity because they do not allow readers to reconstruct the network of mental representations that motivates the actions of characters and binds the events into an intelligible and determinate sequence. Through a structure that I call "proliferating narrativity" [...] contemporary fiction (especially magical realism and postcolonial novels) may also shift condition from the macro to the micro level, becoming a collection of little stories loosely connected through common participants' (*Avatars*, p. 10).
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Indeed, in our use of the term, narrative comes to represent a broad spectrum of experiences brought on by the ontological *rapprochement* between author, work and audience. As such, the term effectively evokes and responds to a topologically-inflected narrative of experience accumulated, or else built, over the course of the reader-player's contact with the work of art. In this sense, the present definition reveals significant parallels with Ryan's concept of narrativity as an open series of concentric circles:

> I suggest regarding the set of all narratives as fuzzy, and narrativity [...] as a scalar property rather than as a rigidly binary feature that divides mental representations into stories and nonstories. In a scalar conception of narrativity, definition becomes an open series of concentric circles that spell increasingly narrow conditions and that presuppose previously stated items, as we move from the outer to the inner circles, and from the marginal cases to the prototypes.[43]

Thus, it is in these evocations of the mental image, the cognitive construct and indeed the spatially-inflected imagery of the overlapping network of concentric circles - and not in the term's relation to the measuring of a given work's 'storiness' - that the analytical import of the term 'narrative space' is made clear. Above all, narrative space points to the spatial quality of the affective, imaginative and emotional potentialities of the work of art, as they become apparent upon contact with the reader. To this end, the protean, nebulous or 'fuzzy' nature of the term does not represent a critical or analytical shortcoming, but a necessarily loose and flexible account of the topographical uncertainty of a given work's play spaces.

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[43] Ryan, *Avatars of Story*, p. 7.

In this sense, the application of the concept of the narrative falls more in line with the definitions put forth by Monika Fludernik in *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. Here, Fludernik broadly defines narrative as 'a function of narrative texts' that centre 'on experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature'. According to such a model, narrative becomes 'a deep structural concept' that is 'not restricted to prose and epic verse'.[44] While Ryan, via Werner Wolf, argues that Fludernik's recasting of narrative and narrativity not as processes of mediation but as expressions of human experience is ultimately 'too broad for transmedial narratology', Fludernik's postulations will nevertheless achieve a particular theoretical resonance in relation to the remediated poems of Gache's *Góngora WordToys,* discussed in Chapter IV.[45] Specifically, Fludernik's conceptualization of narrative as a representation of experientiality ultimately disqualifies 'the criteria of mere sequentiality and logical connectedness from playing the central role that they usually hold in most discussions of narrative'.[46] Fludernik elucidates:

> The very concept of mediacy, since it supposedly mediates story material (plot) in the linguistic shape of narrative, needs to be reconceptualized. Like the concepts of action or plot (chain of events), narrating as a personal act of telling or writing can no longer claim primacy or priority. Both acting and telling are facets of a real-world model most forcefully present in natural narrative but nevertheless disposable on a theoretical level. Likewise, reflector mode narrative is already firmly constituted by the natural parameter of human consciousness, of experientiality.[47]

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[44] Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 19.

[45] Ryan, *Avatars of* Story, p. 231. See also Werner Wolf, 'Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and its Applicability to the Visual Arts', *Word and Image*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2003), 180-197.

[46] Fludernik, p. 19.

[47] *Ibid.,* p. 20. Elsewhere, in the online *Living Handbook of Narratology*, Jan Aber and Monika Fludernik elucidate upon the concept of the reflector as character, explaining that 'in the reflector mode, we seem to see the storyworld through the eyes of a character and there seems to be no narrator operating as a mediator'.
<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/mediacy-and-narrative-mediation> [accessed 03.09.2016].

While the current objective here is not a consideration of the critical or theoretical debates surrounding the concepts of narrative and narrativity *per se*, it is nevertheless useful to call attention to Fludernik's demand for a total reconceptualization of the concept of mediation as it typically represents a foundational element of narrative. Such a demand explicitly points to the spatial and experiential implications of the reader's contact with the text:

> Experiencing, just like telling, viewing or thinking, are holistic schemata known from real life and therefore can be used as building stones for the mimetic evocation of a fictional world. People experience the world in their capacity as agents, tellers and auditors and also as observers, viewers and experiencers.[48]

Such theorizations elaborate upon narrative space as it comes to represent, in the context of this thesis, a spatially-inflected manifestation of the cognitive, imaginative and emotional experiences of the reader upon meaningful contact with the ontological territory of the work.

0.5 Dialogues with Critical Theory

While the primary areas of focus throughout this study are those of play and space, there are a number of methodological and theoretical frameworks and debates with which this thesis, at different times and to varying degrees, dialogues. While this thesis does not rely on the wholesale application of any one particular framework, it does call upon, and intermittently dialogue with, numerous critical, philosophical and theoretical discourses as a means of illustrating its core concerns and ideas. What follows, then,

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[48] Fludernik, p. 19.

is a brief account of the methodologies and theoretical frameworks that will inform my analysis of the literary politics at work in Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache.

Of particular interest are those models that serve to highlight the problematic literary politics at work in Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache. To that end, certain Barthesian-Foucauldian-Derridean poststructural tenets, such as the reconfiguration of the author figure and the restructuring of the interpretive line, will provide significant points of theoretical inquiry throughout the thesis. Specifically, Barthes' displacement of authorial control, along with Derrida's interrogations of the concept of linear writing, will not only be of use in discussions of the complex conceptual webs that define the short fictions of Borges and Cortázar in Chapters I and II respectively, but will also dialogue with the theoretical tenets of hypertextuality as it appears in Chapter IV's analysis of Gache's *WordToys*.

Indeed, the *authoricidal* literary politics evoked in Barthes' interrogations of the Author-with-a-capital-A - 'that antecedent force of imaginative creation, invented figuratively by processes of commodification and canonization, and then rendered literally through successive acts of autobiography, biography and explanation' - will provide a strong analytical counterpoint to the cooperative and co-participatory politics engendered by the concept of play.[49] Likewise, Derrida's observations on the reconfiguratory potential of rejecting *the line* will help to illustrate a thematic drift away from linear interpretation towards a lusory, exploratory engagement with the newly spatialized nature of the text. In Derrida's own words:

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[49] Paul Kameen, *Re-reading Poets: The Life of the Author* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), p. 5.

> [B]eginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space. If today the problem of reading occupies the forefront of science, it is because of this suspense between two ages of writing. Because we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently.[50]

As will be outlined over the course of the following chapters, each author's respective works are predicated on the relationship - both cooperative and combative - between reader and author constructs. Ultimately, the concepts of intertextuality and transtextuality will replace the Derridean line with the Kristevan-Barthesian tissue, web or matrix. Such terms and concepts more effectively illustrate the topographically-charged, exploratory concerns of a literature that rejects the monodirectional, theologically - and thereby authoritatively - contingent line of meaning.

The apparent emancipatory potential of certain reader-response postulations will also therefore prove insightful insofar as they not only point to a similarly linear trajectory or interpretation, but also seek to realign the centre of power in favour of the reader. While the ludic elements of the works up for discussion in this thesis ultimately articulate a compromise between a totalitarian authorial control and the potential solipsistic mockery of certain reader-response paradigms, models such as those elaborated upon by Stanley Fish are of particular interest insofar as they point towards the articulation of certain idealized reader constructs such as the 'informed' reader. Moreover, Fish's account of the process of *decertainizing* will provide an effective illustration of the interpretive task as a journey through the text. While the linear nature of such a journey will ultimately be brought to task in Chapter I, dedicated to Borges,

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[50] Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 86-87.

Fish's account of the interpretive task of the reader will nevertheless provide an invaluable indication of the spatial implications of the reader's interaction with the text.

Additionally, the narratological concept of metaleptic transgression will be of interest insofar as the strange loops and tangled hierarchies to which such a process gives rise further reinforce the spatial and topographical dimensions of the text. The analytical currency of the metaleptic process, then, lies in its spatial implications as opposed to its diegetic underpinnings. Furthermore, the dangerous and disruptive implications of the narrative device or stratagem of metalepsis, as will be discussed in the context of Cortázar's short fictions, will further evince the process' explicit interrogation of the ontological borders between fiction and reality.

A brief exploration of intertextuality and transtextuality will serve a similar purpose. Specifically, and in particular reference to the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua discussed in Chapter III, questions of intertextuality and transtextuality will serve to reconfigure the narrative play space by opening up, or otherwise distorting its generic, and by implication, ontological, borders. In other words, if the narrative space represents a play space, and this thesis will argue that it does, then the narrative stratagems of intertextuality and transtextuality call attention to, and actively distort, the topographical structures of such a ludically-charged, imaginative space. In short, the spatial implications of Kristevan intertextuality and Genettian transtextuality, point to the function of the text as a transformational and mediating environment which will be of particular use as a means of reinforcing the concept of the text as a topographical structure in a constant state of flux. Both narratological and intertextual models will be of use insofar as their spatial implications point to the paradoxical architecture and the

topographical uncertainty of the narrative spaces of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache.

Finally, the affective significance of the concepts of topology and psychogeography will serve to further illustrate both the spatial implications of the text and the reader's sense of place within it. Bachelard's topoanalysis, as it represents 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives', is of particular interest if we take the text or narrative space to be just such a site. [51] In Chapter II, 'Houses, Homes and Hostile Spaces', we will consider the home as a spatial metaphor of the text itself. As such, Bachelard's focus on the house as both a topographical structure and a shelter for imagination - itself a 'laboratory of the possible' - will prove particularly illuminating in the context of Cortázar's 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' wherein the concepts of the house and narrative space reveal themselves to be ideologically consonant: 'If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace'.[52] This concern for the mental or psychological impact of spatial constructs is evocative of the concept of psychogeography. Often considered as 'the point at which psychology and geography collide', psychogeography will provide further means of exploring the emotional impact of spatialized concepts insofar as the model concerns itself with the processes of exploration and navigation of a predominantly mental or imaginative space.[53]

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[51] Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 30.
[52] Ibid., p. 19.
[53] Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006), p. 10.

0.6 The Game is Afoot - a Chapter Breakdown

With the primary theoretical and methodological frameworks and dialogues that inform this thesis now adequately defined, we may turn to a breakdown of the work's quadripartite chapter structure.[54] Chapter I, 'Topographical Structures of Play in the Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges' will explore the ludically-charged and often paradoxical spaces of Borges' short fiction. With a particular focus on a selection of short stories from *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, it will be argued that, in Borges, the text comes to represent a topographically-inflected structure of play. Using the spatial metaphor of the labyrinth, I will discuss how the narrative becomes a clearly defined imaginative space with which the reader-player is encouraged to interact using his/her own cognitive horizons, competences and strategies. The labyrinth, then, will be discussed in light of its function as a site of performative engagement, wherein meaning is made through the reader's playful interaction with - or meaningful exploration of - its internal, topographical structures. Owing to the labyrinthine nature of such structures, the Borgesian narrative will be treated as a textual analogue to strange loops and tangled hierarchies that pervade Escher's paradoxical architectures.   In light of the topographical irregularities inherent to the spatial metaphor of the labyrinth, the concepts of vertigo, confusion and misdirection will be of interest insofar as they come to represent consciously-employed, textually-embedded ludic strategies. Indeed, like the concepts of the finesse and the feint in competitive play, the use of misdirection will be discussed in light of its implicit suggestion of the adversarial edge of the reading

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[54] Here, it must be noted that numerous discursive and analytical threads from Chapters II and IV also form the crux of two published article pieces. Those articles are 'The Good, the Bad and the Author: Idealized Reader Constructs in the Short Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Ana María Shua' and 'Gameplay Literature: the Digital Play Spaces of Belén Gache's *WordToys*', published in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* and *Journal of Romance Studies*, respectively. It is with their permission that certain avenues of investigation are expanded upon in this thesis.

act. Specifically, it will be argued that authorial misdirection not only reinforces the importance or desirability of a worthy opponent such as the knowledge-agile reader, but also points to the same primacy of the process of mastery seen in traditional manifestations of competitive play.

In Chapter II, 'Houses, Homes and Hostile Spaces in the Short Fiction of Julio Cortázar', I will look at how the concepts of immersion and meaningful experience, as they often come to represent paradigmatic interpretive inevitabilities, are fiercely problematized in Cortázar. Indeed, I will argue that to read is not necessarily to engage in any meaningful or significant way with the text. The hostile and contested narrative spaces of Cortázar's fictions are inherently dangerous, but open to ludic manipulation and engagement at the hands certain lusory readers. In the hands of such readers, I will argue, the act of reading becomes a game-like search for tactical or interpretive advantages. As such, the ludic edge of Cortázar's fantastic narratives not only serves to forefront the concept of reader agency, but also to underline an implicit, textually-embedded disdain for the passive reader's interpretive and performative inertia. Owing to the often explicit hostility and violence of the literary politics at work in the Cortazarian text, the contested arena of the boxing ring will be posited as a strong conceptual analogue of the narrative space. In this sense, the Borgesian game's proclivity for irreverent misdirection adopts a violent and potentially lethal edge in Cortázar's short fiction. Accordingly, the lusory 'accomplice' reader is expected to retain a certain interpretive agility if he or she is to avoid falling prey to Cortázar's frenetic, narrative strategies.

Further to the paradoxical architectures and topographical irregularities of Borges and

Cortázar, Chapter III – 'Mocking the Idle Reader: Casual Play in The Sudden Fictions of Ana María Shua' - will analyse Shua's use of generic hybridization and intertextuality as a means of further disrupting the narrative play space by opening up its generic borders. As I will discuss, the concepts of generic hybridization, intertextuality and transtextuality both dictate, and render problematic, the interpretive strategies employed by the reader. Thus, such concepts manipulate or otherwise frustrate the reader's reading of the text. Shua's attempts to frustrate and mock the reader's often generically-contingent interpretive expectations actively problematize the ever-shifting boundaries of the play space, and with them, the rules by which the game ought to be played. As such, Shua's sudden fictions provide an alternative spatial metaphor to the Borgesian labyrinth and the Cortazarian boxing ring in the form of the circus. Taken from Shua's latest collection of sudden fictions, *Fenómenos de circo*, the circus further exemplifies the function of the narrative space as a contested and kinetic site of ludic engagement, all the while pointing to the ever-changing and performative roles of the reader in the co-production of meaning.[55]

Finally, relying on the remediating, decentring and performative qualities of hypertext media as a valuable hermeneutic, Chapter IV will approach a selection of hybrid digital artefacts from Gache's *WordToys* within the now apparent, long-standing literary concern for the concepts of genre, space and readerly participation. Indeed, in 'Gameplay Literature and the Literary Politics of Belén Gache's *WordToys*' I will focus on Gache's reconceptualization of the narrative space as a digitally-constructed, contested arena of play that ultimately encourages exploration and a deeper reflection on the concepts of being and presence. I will do so, however, with a belief that Gache's

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[55] Ana María Shua, *Fenómenos de circo* (Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2011).

WordToys do not represent a propagation of certain technocratic overestimations of the hypertext format, but instead offer a subversive interrogation of these very overestimations.[56] Like Borges and Cortázar before her, Gache seeks to make the reader a fellow player in an interpretive and exploratory game. To this effect, Gache's treatment of play and play space will serve to re-establish authorial presence and reconfigure the relationship between reader and author as an ongoing and potentially infinite agonistic game.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the kinetic, protean and interrelational tenets rendered literal, or else visual, in both the hypertext and the video game are, in fact, a culmination of the ideological, thematic and structural concerns that form the very basis of the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache. As such, this thesis seeks to highlight what it considers to be a clear creative tradition made perceptible through a mutual concern for the concepts of play, reader-player agency, augmented reality and ontological merging, as they continue to present new and interesting challenges to author, architect and artist alike. In doing so, this thesis celebrates the numerous ways in which canonical authors such as Borges and Cortázar, in their ludically and topographically-charged approach to the ontological tethering of the fantastic, continue to dialogue in a rich and meaningful way with contemporary methods of storytelling such as the hypertext, and the video game. With the overall structure of the thesis now in place, we turn our attention to an examination of the games, play spaces and idealized reader constructs as they are manifest in the short fictions of

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[56] The term 'technocracy' refers to the perceived societal primacy of technological knowledge. Here, and indeed throughout this thesis, I use the term to refer to certain critical overestimations of hypertext that consider the form to be a replacement for the print text. Gabriela Nouzeilles' and Graciela Montaldo's *The Argentina Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2002) warns of a 'dark technocratic age' marked by 'the fall of intellectual thinking', 'political indifference' and 'cultural alienation' (p. 507).

Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua, and the

hypertext works of Belén Gache.

Chapter I
Topographical Structures of Play in Jorge Luis Borges

1.0 Introduction

The present chapter concerns itself with the topographical structures of play in the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges. It seeks to engage with the ways in which the various representations of space, as they appear in the Borgesian short story, elaborate upon the text as a dynamic site of performative engagement that, through a number of ontologically disturbing processes to be discussed throughout the chapter, seeks to foreground the interplay between reader and author constructs.[1] This chapter will argue that the concepts of performance, exploration and interplay within what is essentially an imaginative space or cognitive site complicate traditional notions of interpretation by problematizing the reader's movement through the text. As such, one primary focus of the chapter will be the methods by which the Borgesian labyrinth and

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[1] Here, the terms 'reader construct' and 'author construct' represent necessarily general terms that refer not only to the actual reader and author, but to their avatarial, fictional and idealized manifestations within the numerous texts presently up for analysis. Exploration of ideal reader constructs is fairly common in the abundant critical analysis surrounding Borges' short fiction. In *Borges' Narrative Strategy* (Leeds: Francis Cairns Publications, 1992), Donald Shaw suggests that Borges 'writes especially for the alert reader' and that 'his tales are full of traps for the less alert' (p. 8). Likewise, in *Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), John Sturrock describes Borges' fictions as 'working models of narrative' and highlights the importance of 'reading them intelligently' (p. 3). In light of the discussion to follow, it is also worth noting Sturrock's assertion that 'Borges likens the making of a fiction to a game of chess, and it is to a game of chess that his fictions, once made, invite their readers' (p. 3). Relatively little has been made, however, of the concept of the reader's ontological proximity to the text. The idea is touched upon - somewhat indirectly - by Alfred J. Mac Adam's *Textual Confrontations: Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature* (Chicago: University Press, 1987). Here, the critic suggests that the idea that 'we and the narrator share certain experiences' represents one of the few 'givens' that make up Borges' narrative strategy (p. 139). Thus, while this chapter is informed by the critical insight of Shaw, Sturrock and Mac Adam, its ultimate aim is to engage with the methods by which ontological proximity is problematized in Borges and beyond.

its proclivity for 'ontological vertigo' serve to destabilize a wholly paradigmatic approach to literary interpretation as it is understood as a linear movement from the beginning of the text to its end.[2] Specifically, this chapter argues that the labyrinthine qualities of Borges' short stories reveal a recurring concern for the exploration of more varied and less linear spatial conceptualizations of text and narrative. It is here, then, that the topographical structures of the play space, as they will be discussed and elaborated upon in the coming chapters, find their critical and thematic foundations.

This is not to say that topographical structures of play find their origins in Borges, but rather, that in terms of the analytical trajectory of this particular thesis, Borges' recurring thematization of the concepts of play, space and textually-embedded, idealized readerly and authorial constructs provide a solid investigative basis for further discussion. The numerous accounts of Borges' embryonic hypertextuality further attest to this suitability, as will be discussed in the closing chapters of the thesis. Thus, this chapter seeks to engage with Borges' numerous labyrinths, alephs and dreamscapes as they come to represent attempts to deal with the spatial formations of the text and its implications for the reader/author/text triad.

In terms of structure, this chapter is divided into five primary areas of focus. The first area of discussion centres on the topological implications of the textual-spatial metaphor of the library in 'La biblioteca de Babel'. Specifically, 'La biblioteca de Babel' will be used to illustrate the ways in which Borges' fictions often thematize the

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[2] While it is used somewhat differently, this chapter borrows the term 'ontological vertigo' from Robert Alter's 'Borges and Stevens: A Note on Post-Symbolist Writing', in *Prose for Borges*, ed. by Charles Newman and Mary Kinzie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp 275-285: 'In story after story, Borges offers images of focused infinity, objects and contrivances that seem to mean everything and necessarily mean nothing, therefore making the mind boggle, inducing a sense of ontological vertigo' (p. 280).

spatialized nature of the text and, in doing so, problematize the reader's movement through such a space. As such, this section will argue that the library, as it comes to represent a space of infinite expansion and transformation in 'La biblioteca de Babel', becomes a visual metaphor of the Borgesian text itself.

Following on from this, the paradoxical nature of the Borgesian narrative space will be discussed in the context of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares'. In particular, the interpenetration or mutual contamination of otherwise distinct ontological territories, evoked in the fantastically-charged metaleptic transgressions and strange loops that define both stories, will be discussed a means of illustrating the author's perceptible desire to draw the reader figure into the narrative space itself.

Subsequently, this desire for the merging of disparate ontological territories will be further elucidated upon in an analysis of 'La casa de Asterión'. Here, the exploratory and performative roles encouraged by the contested space of the labyrinth will be used to suggest that the narrative space represents, above all, a site of playful engagement in Borges. That is, the narrative space comes to represent a play space, wherein the topological uncertainty and the intertextual vastness of the text-labyrinth serve to test the reader's interpretive and intellectual self-assuredness.

Further to this, Borges' self-conscious frustrations of closural features, as they are manifest in both 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' will provide further illustration of the contested nature of the Borgesian narrative play space, and, in doing so, will provide the analytical basis for the closing sections of the chapter. Specifically, the former story's subversion of holding, or otherwise attempting

to re-establish, the interpretive line is offset by the latter's exhaustion of just such a linearity. As such, both texts reveal themselves to be the obverse and reverse of the same ideological coin. That is, both texts frustrate the notion of narrative possibility and, in doing so, provide invaluable insight into the literary politics of the Borgesian narrative as it comes to represent a rigorous but agonistic, chess-like game.

1.1 Spatial Concepts and Reader Movement – 'La biblioteca de Babel'

I turn my attention now to the spatial metaphors at work in the Borgesian text. Borges' fictions are no stranger to spatial considerations. From Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 'Topographical Structures in Modern Literature' (1966) to Perla Sassón-Henry's *Borges 2.0: From Texts to Virtual Worlds* (2007), discussions on Borgesian spatial constructs have far-reaching implications for the narrative space in both its print-text and hypertextual forms. On the subject of topographical structures, for example, Enzensberger observes:

> Every orientation [...] presupposes a disorientation. Only someone who has experienced bewilderment can free himself of it. *But these games of orientation are in turn games of disorientation.* Therein lies their fascination and their risk. The labyrinth is made so that whoever enters it will stray and get lost. But the labyrinth also poses the visitor a challenge: that he reconstruct the plan of it and dissolve its power. If he succeeds, he will have destroyed the labyrinth, for one who has passed through it, no labyrinth exists.[3]

Reconstruction of the labyrinth's topographical structures, then, points to the performative and explorative role of the reader. However, the idea of success (that is,

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[3] Cited in Italo Calvino, 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' in *The Uses of Literature*, trans. by Patrick Creagh (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1986), pp. 3-27 (p. 25). My italics.

successful completion of the labyrinth) and the resulting destruction of the labyrinth is, in the context of Borges at least, somewhat optimistic. According to Donald Shaw, such notions are not only optimistic, but delimiting in their interpretive and analytical scope. Shaw writes, 'attempts to suggest that Borges' stories often have only one level of meaning and that when we have found it we have "cracked" the story in question are to be resisted as simplistic and reductive, except in the case of a few stories which are relatively unambiguous'.[4]

As will be discussed presently, the nature of Borges' narrative spaces is such that the successful exit from one labyrinth merely means entering into a newer, vaster labyrinthine structure. Like the *strange loops* and *tangled hierarchies* that pervade Escher's paradoxical architectures, exploration becomes an infinite, self-perpetuating game. Both 'Las ruinas circulares' and 'La casa de Asterión' prove to be effective illustrations of such structural and hierarchical disruptions. While the former presents a potentially infinite loop of oneiric conjuring, the latter, a direct reference to the concepts of the labyrinth and its Minotaur, frustrates closural elements by providing false exits to both the narrative and the textually-embedded labyrinth within. Both stories will be discussed in light of their closural concerns shortly. Of more immediate concern, however, are the spatial considerations put forth not only in 'Las ruinas circulares', but also in the context of 'La biblioteca de babel' and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'.

In his analysis of 'La biblioteca de Babel' Richardson highlights the spatial elements of the text by emphasising not only the dizzying topographical structure of the library

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4 Shaw, p. 3.

itself, but the apparent need to move through such a structure in search of meaning. He observes:

> This quest - depicted as a movement through space in search of a 'total book' or of the Book-Man - is a key feature in the story, serving to link the notion of the inadequacy of human understanding with the pursuit of enlightenment through mystical or religious faith. With humour and with irony, but also revealing an obvious fascination with the language of mystical and religious texts, Borges uses the idea of the search as a way of commenting on the perennial human longing for transcendental explanations of our situation.[5]

Overall, Richardson's analyses of Borgesian spatial forms prove most illuminating insofar as they not only render explicit the recurring spatial (and temporal) concerns that populate Borges' fictions, they do so in such a way that seamlessly dialogues with the wide-ranging and ever-expanding auspices of spatial theory. Thus, while this chapter's focus remains firmly on the ludic implications of Borgesian spatial formations, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Richardson's observations to the study of Borgesian spatial constructs.

While Richardson's observations on the transcendental implications of 'the search' are both perspicacious and valid, this chapter argues that the quest for meaning, insofar as it comes to represent an exploration of the library's internal structures, is a metaphor for the act of interpretation; the search for meaning within the narrative space. Thus, exploration of the library's internal structure becomes a textually-embedded representation of the reader's interpretive task, as the narrator (presumably a fictionalized Borges) suggests: 'como todos los hombres de la Biblioteca, he viajado en mi juventud; he peregrinado en busca de un libro, acaso del catálogo de catálogos;

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[5] Bill Richardson, *Borges and Space* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), p. 169.

ahora que mis ojos casi no pueden descifrar lo que escribo, me preparo a morir a unas pocas leguas del hexágono en que nací'.[6] Accordingly, 'La biblioteca de Babel', through the description of the library's vertiginous dimensions and the relative impossibility of meaningful or significant orientation, articulates a warning against an interpretive stance that merely adheres to a linear movement through a particular unit of meaning. As the narrator-Borges asserts:

> Ya se sabe: por una línea razonable o una recta noticia hay leguas de insensatas cacofonías, de fárragos verbales y de incoherencias. (Yo sé de una región cerril cuyos bibliotecarios repudian la supersticiosa y vana costumbre de buscar sentido en los libros y la equiparan a la de buscarlo en los sueños o en las líneas caóticas de la mano... Admiten que los inventores de la escritura imitaron los veinticinco símbolos naturales, pero sostienen que esa aplicación es casual y que los libros nada significan en sí. Ese dictamen, ya veremos, no es del todo falaz.)[7]

In this warning, we see a literalization of the concept of interpretation as a journey through the text. This interpretive journey, as it comes to represent a movement along or through the units of meaning that make up the text itself, is most effectively illustrated using the reader-response manifesto of Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* The main concern of this manifesto, as evinced in chapters such as 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics' is, explicitly, 'the reader's movement through the text'.[8] It is this echoing of Borges' concern for the reader's movement within or through the narrative that allows us to better grasp the spatial dimensions of the text.

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[6] Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones (*Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2009), p. 87.
[7] Ibid., pp. 89-90.
[8] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 21-67 (p. 24).

This is not an attempt to single out Fish's reader-response convictions. After all, reader-response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Jonathan Culler have made similar claims to the productive and constructive roles of the reader. In his phenomenological approach to the reading process, for example, Iser outlines a similarly creative role carved out for the reader in the act of reading. He states, '[a] literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative'.[9] Along a similar vein, Culler points to the need for a basic level of literacy competence if one is to successfully navigate a given text: 'To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tell one what to look for'.[10] Likewise, Susan Lohafer's idea of 'entering, moving through, and getting out of the story' betrays a similar concern for the reading and interpretive experience as a continuous event.[11] While later chapters of this thesis will ultimately question the reader-forward redistribution of creative control championed by the reader-response model, this chapter harnesses Fish's spatial and locomotive metaphors to reinforce the concept of the interpretive act as a journey through the lines or pathways of text undertaken by a particularly adept reader. Doing so more effectively highlights the spatial and topological structures of the Borgesian narrative, thereby allowing us to better grasp the reader's relationship with, or role within, such a space. Not only does Fish's theoretical stance account for the

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[9] Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 50-69 (p. 51). See also, Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 50-69 (p. 51).
[10] Ibid., p. 102.
[11] Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), p. 301.

reader's movement through the text, it also highlights the reader's consciously pre-emptive interpretive manoeuvres in such a way that serves to foreground the play elements presently up for discussion. According to Fish, the reader must make 'anticipatory adjustments' to a text's 'future contours' if he/she is to 'move easily and confidently' through 'what follows'.[12] In light of the discussion to come, Fish's insistence on the reader's movement within - or more specifically, through - the text is most illuminating. Fish continues:

> [The reader] is suddenly involved in a different kind of activity. Rather than following an argument along a well lighted path [...] he is now looking for one. The natural impulse in a situation like this, either in life or in literature, is to *go forward in the hope that what has been obscured will again become clear*.[13]

Thus, the search for or adherence to an interpretive path or line, as it comes to represent in Fish an invaluable interpretive procedure, is not only anticipated in Borges' fictions, but also seen as a potentially hopeless endeavour. That is, not only is the library of 'La biblioteca de Babel' impossibly vast - 'yo afirmo que la Biblioteca es interminable' - the architecture of the library is such that movement in any direction, after a sufficient number of centuries, will potentially fold back on itself:

> Acabo de escribir infinita. No he interpolado ese adjetivo por una costumbre retórica; digo que no es ilógico pensar que el mundo es infinito. Quienes lo juzgan limitado, postulan que en lugares remotos los corredores y escaleras y hexágonos pueden inconcebiblemente cesar, lo cual es absurdo. Quienes la imaginan sin límites, olvidan que los tiene el número posible de libros. Yo me atrevo a insinuar esta solución del antiguo problema: La biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica. *Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden.*[14]

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[12] Fish, p. 24.
[13] Ibid. My italics.
[14] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 99. My italics.

This is not to discredit the overall sentiment of Fish's theoretical position. Quite the contrary, pointing out the implicitly problematical notion of following the interpretive or narrative line in 'La biblioteca de Babel' serves to stress the ways in which Borges anticipates Fish's process of *decertainizing*, whereby 'going forward only intensifies the reader's sense of disorientation'.[15] Such a process transforms the unit of meaning (the line, sentence, paragraph, story) from an object or a 'thing-in-itself' to an *event*, 'something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader'.[16] The participatory role of the reader takes on a particular relevance, then, insofar as it supports Fish's later claim that 'interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing'.[17] Similarly, it is argued here that this constructive, or at the very least, participatory role forms one of primary tenets of play as it pertains to the Borgesian narrative. This 'art of constructing' is pertinent insofar as it not only alludes to the idea of readerly participation, but points to the importance of the skilled or capable reader, as Fish continues: 'skilled reading is usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is there, but [...] it is a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can thereafter be said to be there'.[18] Thus, this chapter argues that the interpretive event, as it comes to represent a constructive or participatory action, is ludic in nature. That is, the act of interpretation becomes a game, a dynamic back and forth played out by readerly and authorial constructs in the vertiginous and often paradoxical narrative spaces of the text.

So vertiginous and seemingly contradictory are the narrative spaces of the Borgesian text, in fact, that they invite significant comparison to the paradoxical architecture of

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[15] Fish, p. 24.
[16] Ibid., p. 25.
[17] Ibid., p. 327.
[18] Ibid.

M.C. Escher and Lionel and Roger Penrose. Just as the paradoxical nature of M.C. Escher's topographical impossibilities, seen in the likes of *Relativity*, *Ascending and Descending* and the ontologically disturbing *Drawing Hands*, makes escape or egress from their respective geometrical structures impossible, so too does Borges' deferral of closure frustrate the reader's interpretational movement through the text. In *Reading for Storyness,* Susan Lohafer observes how the reading of short fiction is often guided by a sense of 'imminent closure'.[19] In Borges, however, closural elements are often frustrated by the paradoxical architecture of the Borgesian narrative space. To return to 'La biblioteca de Babel', for example, the idea that the inhabitants of the library, in their quest for meaning and understanding, will inevitably come back in a circle, is indicative of this frustration. Simple movement through the text in a search for understanding will simply see the reader lost in the paradoxical topography of the narrative. Thus, movement through the narrative space is subordinate to exploration of, or interaction with, said space. For Borges, a willingness to get lost in the often paradoxical vastness of the narrative space – and to embrace the ensuing ontological vertigo - is all part of the game.

The paradoxical architecture that makes up 'La biblioteca de Babel' is one of the many Borgesian manifestations of what Marie-Laure Ryan calls a logically inconsistent world. According to Ryan, 'the most radical thematizations of space are those that involve alternative or logically inconsistent worlds'.[20] Ryan's observations are insightful insofar as they help to merge the concepts of spatial (and by implication, architectural) and narrative paradox. One significant manifestation of such a logical

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[19] Susan Lohafer, *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
[20] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Space' in *The Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Fotis Jannidis, Matías Martínez, John Pier and Wolf Schmid (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 420 - 433 (p. 430).

impossibility is that of metalepsis, 'the transgression of ontological boundaries through which imaginary creatures of pen and paper can penetrate into the fictionally "real" world of their creator, or vice-versa'.[21]   On the subject of the metaleptic processes inherent to narrative structures of the text, Ryan observes that 'logically impossible story spaces are the narrative equivalent of M.C. Escher's pictorial representations of worlds that violate the laws of perspective'.[22]   Ryan continues:

> Metalepsis can lead to a spatial effect described by Hofstadter as a strange loop: rising higher and higher through the levels of a hierarchical system, only to find oneself right where one began. But a narrative space cannot be wholly inconsistent, for fear of preventing any kind of mental representation—for fear, in other words, of losing its spatial quality.[23]

The architecturally paradoxical story space of 'La biblioteca de Babel' evokes just such a 'strange loop'. The text, through a process of metaleptic transgression, upsets the perceived solidity of the ontological thresholds inherent to the narrative. In doing so, the text draws the reader into the same paradoxical structures in which the fictional characters find themselves.[24]   As Genette suggests in his original formulation of the metaleptic process, 'the most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees - you and I - perhaps belong to the same narrative'.[25]   This 'insistent and unacceptable hypothesis' is evinced in the pages

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[21] Jannidis et al., p. 430.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] While the primary focus is on the paradoxical nature of the postmodern topologies evoked in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, McHale makes an interesting observation regarding the Borgesian text's proto-postmodern relevance: 'Such texts of Borges [...] are, it might be said, founding-texts not only of Eco's representation of a disorienting, paradox-ridden interior space, but of an entire postmodernist topology.' See Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 157.

[25] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 236.

of 'La biblioteca de Babel'. The library, with its periodical folding or looping of its own internal structures, represents a textual manifestation of a logically inconsistent world. The metaleptic tendencies of such a space dramatically reduce the ontological disconnect between the world of the reader and the world of the fiction. Indeed, at numerous points in the story, the reader is intercalated within the narrative itself:

> Todo: la historia minuciosa del porvenir, las autobiografías de los arcángeles, el catálogo fiel de la Biblioteca, miles y miles de catálogos falsos, la demostración de la falacia de esos catálogos, la demostración de la falacia del catálogo verdadero, el evangelio gnóstico de Basilides, el comentario de ese evangelio, el comentario del comentario de ese evangelio, *la relación verídica de tu muerte*, la versión de cada libro a todas las lenguas, las interpolaciones de cada libro en todos los libros, el tratado que Beda pudo escribir (y no escribió) sobre la mitología de los sajones, los libros perdidos de Tácito.[26]

While Richardson suggests that the ontological vertigo provoked by this 'surprisingly incongruous' allusion to the reader's death highlights 'our own puny status' in the vastness and diversity of the universe, this chapter argues that such vertigo primarily serves to highlight the reader's proximity to the world of the fiction.[27] The sudden reference to the reader's death, together with a later reference to both readerly function and authorial solitude - 'tú, que me lees, ¿estás seguro de entender mi lenguaje?' - serve to place the reader within the narrative space of the text.[28] In short, both references to the reader are tantamount to his/her being textually embedded within the narrative space, alluding to a breakdown in the ontological threshold between reader and text. Moreover, such instances of textual intercalation offer two significantly diverse images of the reader figure: That of the reader as observer, and that of the reader as participant in the story world. Both images will be explicated

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[26] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 92. My italics.
[27] Richardson, p. 171.
[28] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 98.

further in Chapter II's discussion of Cortázar's hostile spaces. What we see in 'La Biblioteca de Babel', then, is an attempt to place the reader firmly within the potentially infinite realm of the fictional space. In doing do, Borges reduces the ontological disconnect between reader and fiction in such a way that seemingly draws the reader into the topographical structures of the narrative. It is toward the implications of this ontological embrace or as we will now see, contamination, that we turn our attention in the context of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'.

1.2 Strange Loops, Tangled Hierarchies and Paradoxical Architecture – 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares'

In her comments on the 'spatial organization' of 'La biblioteca de Babel', Beatriz Sarlo suggests that the library represents an ordered space: 'geometrical, regular, with no tricks save at its very structure, based on a repetition of identical elements'.[29] This concept of regular, ordered space based on repetition is turned on its head in stories like 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', a story in which ontological vertigo takes centre stage, as the worlds of reader and text come crashing together. Indeed, in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', Richardson argues, 'we are treated to the prospect of the contamination of our everyday world by the impossible imaginary entities to be found in the literary creations that are Tlön and Uqbar'.[30]

The concept of ontological contamination is best illustrated through a brief analysis of

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[29] Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, a Writer on the Edge*, J. L. Borges Center for Studies & Documentation, 14/04/01 <http://www.borges.pitt.edu/bsol/bsi0.php> [accessed 10.08.2016].
[30] Richardson, pp. 195-6.

the narrative structure of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. The story centres on a fictive Borges' reading of a series of encyclopaedias that detail the social, literary and philosophical conventions of the planet Tlön. The world of Tlön, we are told, is essentially the result of a collaborative intellectual exercise undertaken by a secret society of writers in an attempt to prove that 'los hombres mortales son capaces de concebir un mundo'.[31] In short, Tlön is the product of the creative processes of reading and writing, that is, of anticipation and interpretation. The sudden, fantastic manifestations of Tlönic cultural artefacts, such as the compass emblazoned with 'uno de los alfabetos de Tlön' and the cone-like object with its 'peso [...] insoportable' not only represent what the fictionally-real Borges protagonist describes as 'la primera intrusión del mundo fantástico en el mundo real', but also provide examples of the process of ontological metalepsis at work within the narrative.[32]

Thus, Borges' narrative perfectly encapsulates Ryan's account of a metaleptic grabbing gesture that 'reaches across levels and ignores boundaries, bringing to the bottom what belongs on the top or vice versa'.[33] Ryan goes on to state that 'ontological metalepsis opens a passage between levels that results in their interpenetration or mutual contamination'.[34] Such claims are supported by the earlier writings of Debra Malina, who asserts that the function of metalepsis is to dramatize the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality. According to Malina, narrative metalepsis achieves this specifically through the disruption of narrative hierarchies 'in order either to reinforce or to undermine the ontological status of

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[31] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 35.
[32] Ibid., pp. 36-37.
[33] Ryan, *Avatars*, p. 206.
[34] Ibid.

fictional subjects or selves'.[35] This interpenetration, mutual contamination or tangled hierarchy forms the crux of the Borgesian fantastic as it is manifest in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'.[36] The fictional planet's gradual invasion of Earth not only violates the structure of the narrative, but also raises significant concerns regarding the ontological status of the reader in relation to the text. Here, it is the reader's relationship with literature, established in the first instance through his or her interpretation of the narrative, that facilitates these metaleptic transgressions. Borges himself, as he exists within the narrative space as both reader of the encyclopaedia and chronicler of the Tlönic invasion, provides a strong textual example of this concept of reader as conduit.

Unlike the bleakly inconsequential presence of the reader-protagonist of 'La biblioteca de Babel', the readerly impact on the story world is heavily thematized in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. That is, as a textually-embedded reader, Borges has a tangible, observable impact on the narrative space. Specifically, he is responsible for the onset of the metaleptic upset between the various diegetic levels of the text and, thus, is directly responsible for the topographical shifts in the narrative space. In a sense, the fictionally-real Borges becomes a textually-embedded representation of the empowered reader. It is, after all, in the act of reading that Borges - or more precisely,

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[35] Debra Malina, *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), p. 4.

[36] Over time, the Borgesian fantastic has been read in a number of ways. See, for example, Jaime Alazraki, *Jorge Luis Borges* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1796). Alazraki points to the metaphysical implications of the fantastic in Borges: 'Así, enfocados los cuentos de Borges, comenzamos a comprender que sus arbitrios y "fantasías" deben leerse como oblicuas alusiones a la situación del hombre frente al mundo' (p. 189). Likewise, in John Sturrock's, *Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), the critic suggests that Borges' breed of fantastic fiction is existential in nature: 'What his "characters" are is the result of what they do. They are no more and no less than the sum of their actions' (p. 3). In much the same vein - and in direct reference to 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' - Mac Adam, in his *Textual Confrontations: Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature* (Chicago: University Press, 1987), asserts that the story is 'a cautionary tale cut along Platonic or Nietzschean lines about the danger of fictions' (p. 145). For a more comprehensive analysis of the Borgesian fantastic and its convergences with - and divergences from - the Cortazarian fantastic narrative, see Julio Rodríguez-Luis, *The Contemporary Praxis of the Fantastic: Borges and Cortázar* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

his fictive avatar, his fictionalized or fictionally real self - becomes the harbinger of Tlönic concepts and ideals. That is to say that Borges' fictional avatar, as he exists within the fictional reality as reader, is responsible for the transmission of concepts between Tlön and Earth (or, in the broader sense, between fiction and reality). The hypertextually-inflected concepts of the empowered reader and the avatar will be engaged with more fully in Chapter IV. Of particular interest presently is the fact that the fictional Borges' reading and subsequent re-telling of Tlönic refutations of earthly, ontological concepts such as language and time ultimately show that it is the reader's interpretation of a given narrative, or his/her exploration of a given narrative space, which ultimately completes it. Accordingly, the narrator-Borges' account of certain Tlönian principles and their subsequent contamination of Borges' world is something of a fantastically-inflected representation of textual exploration. Not only does Borges' avatar allow the Tlönic elements to contaminate the fictionally real world of the narrative, it also serves as a point of entry for the reader. That is, Borges' account of the spatial dimensions of the world(s) in which he lives allows the reader to draw up a cognitive map of the story world, allowing him/her to become immersed in the narrative space. Along a similar critical vein, Marko Juvan outlines a given text's ability to activate various 'cognitive schemes of viewing':

> A fictional point of view upon a fictional space interpellates, so to speak, the subject of reading and calls her/him to *take a specific position* in the imaginary. The inter-pellated reading subject is capable of *activating cognitive schemes of viewing appropriate types of spatial structures*; he/she tries, by way of inferring, to adjust memorized schemata, which are always semantic and value laden, to the flux of textual data.[37]

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[37] Marko Juvan, 'The Spaces of Intertextuality/The Intertextuality of Space' in *Literature and Space: Spaces of Transgressiveness*, ed. by Jola Škulj and Darja Plavič (Ljubljana: Slovenian Comparative Literature Association, 2004) <http://encls.net/?q=bib/literature-and-space-spaces-transgressiveness> [accessed 14.01.16] (my italics).

Thus, in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', the reconfiguratory potential of the empowered reader is manifest in the text's call for playful, performative interaction with the narrative space through a merging of ontological territories. The ludic aspect of such a merging can be effectively foregrounded by returning to Michel de Certeau's comments on the Freudian novel, found in his *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. As suggested in my introduction, Certeau postulates on the creative and experimental functions of the narrative space, seen here as a 'mine', a safe, isolated repository of social strategies:

> To use one of Freud's terms, the work thus becomes 'a mine', where one stocks the historical tactics relative to circumstances; tactics characterized by the 'deformations' which they bring about in a social and/or linguistic system. *The literary text is like a game.* With its sets of rules and surprises, a game is a somewhat theoretic space where the formalities of social strategies can be explained on a terrain *protected from the pressure of action* and from the opaque complexity of daily struggle. In the same way, the literary text, which is also a game, delineates an equally theoretic space, protected as is a laboratory, where the artful practises of social interaction are formulated, separated, combined and tested. It is a field where the logic of the other is exercised, the same logic that the sciences rejected to the extent to which they practised a logic of the same.[38]

While the experimental and ludic functions of the narrative space as 'mine' are upheld in Borges' narratives, the isolated nature of said space, as we see in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', is under constant attack. In this respect, Borges' focus on the protean and permeable manifestations of space anticipates Juvan's postulations on the transgressive space, wherein the 'forces that transgress the logic of spatial delimitation

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[38] Certeau, p. 23.

and hierarchy often invade discrete and delimited spaces structured by spatial syntax'.[39] Juvan continues:

> These forces generate spaces of transgression - areas where different spaces dissolve, amalgamate, cover one another, or move over/through one another. By these moves, spaces lose their presence and firmness and disclose their imaginary, phantasmatic, and mobile natures.[40]

The concepts of spatial delimitation and hierarchy undergo a similar process of destabilization in 'Las ruinas circulares'. Here, manifestations of transgressive space are best explained using Hofstadter's strange loop phenomenon. It is to the ontologically upsetting implications of such a phenomenon that we now turn our attention. Indeed, 'Las ruinas circulares' provides a most effective illustration of the strange loops and tangled hierarchies formulated in Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. There is, therefore, a narratological and ideological significance to the story: The paradoxical architecture of the narrative induces a sense of narratologically-induced, ontological vertigo that essentially merges the world of the creator with that of the creation. The inversions inherent to 'Las ruinas circulares' are best explained using Douglas Hofstadter's 'strange loop phenomenon', wherein 'what you presume are clean, hierarchical levels take you by surprise and fold back into a hierarchically-violating way'. [41] We have discussed allusions to such strange loops in the context of 'La biblioteca de Babel'. Of interest presently is the sudden onset of such a loop: 'The surprise element is important; it is the reason I call strange loops "strange"'.[42] 'Las ruinas circulares' focuses on a mystical dreamer who devotes

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[39] Juvan, web.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 691.
[42] Ibid.

himself to the oneiric conjuring of another human being and is revealed, in turn, to be 'un mero simulacro', a product of the same creative process in which he is engaged: 'Con alivio, con humillación, con terror, comprendió que él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñándolo'.[43] In 'Las ruinas circulares', then, dream is tantamount to both performance and creation: 'Quería soñar un hombre: quería soñarlo con integridad minuciosa e imponerlo a la realidad'.[44]

This sudden, paradoxical blurring of creator and creation, itself something of a textual manifestation of Escher's *Drawing Hands*, not only calls into question the boundaries of the text, it also articulates an interrogation of the reader's relationship with it. There is a temptation, initially at least, to see the dreamer-protagonist, in his initial role as oneiric creator, as an easy metaphor of the authorial figure. Here, however, it is argued that the dreamer's initial delusions of creative and imaginative freedom, followed by the subsequent frustration evoked in his realization that he is but a product of some other creative process or manipulation, resonates more immediately with the plight of the reader. That is, the protagonist's delusions and frustrations echo those of the reader who has been consciously manipulated into taking a specific, interpretive stance or performative role. Such a reader believes they have, thus far, successfully navigated the topographical structures of the text-labyrinth, only to then realise, as said structure suddenly folds back in on itself, that they have been misled.

Thus, in 'Las ruinas circulares', Borges plays with the performative insecurities of the reader. By harnessing the topological *wrongness* of the text, Borges is able to trap

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[43] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 65.
[44] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 57.

the reader in a strange and transgressive metaleptic loop. As Ryan suggests: 'Metalepsis carries far more disturbing epistemological consequences than the playful subversion of narrative logic'.[45] In 'Las ruinas circulares', then, the disturbances caused by the Borgesian fantastic move beyond the mere subversion of narrative logic towards a fierce interrogation of the reader's role within, or ontological proximity to, the world of the text. Such an interrogation is best illustrated by the Taoist anecdote of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream which - perhaps unsurprisingly, given its ontological musings - is featured in Borges' *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios*: 'Chuang Tzu soñó que era una mariposa y no sabía al despertar si era un hombre que había soñado ser una mariposa o una mariposa que ahora soñaba ser un hombre'.[46]

Thus, Borges' constant inversion of reality and fiction ultimately blurs the line between dreamer and dream, between creator and creation. Such inversions illustrate Borges' desire to place the reader within the spatial dimensions of the text itself. As with the butterfly dream, Borges' concern for the merging of disparate ontological territories into one, textual play space is made more explicit still in the interrogations put forward in his essay 'Magias parciales del *Quijote*':

> ¿Por qué nos inquieta que el mapa esté incluido en el mapa y las mil y una noches en el libro de *Las mil y una noches*? ¿Por qué nos inquieta que Don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*? Creo haber dado con la causa: tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios. En 1833, Carlyle observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben.[47]

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[45] Ryan, *Avatars*, p. 211.
[46] Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 2009), p. 25.
[47] Jorge Luis Borges, *Otras inquisiciones* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 111.

In spatial terms, the strange loops and tangled hierarchies of 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares' point not only to the labyrinthine qualities of the narrative spaces as they are manifest in Borges' short stories, but also hint at the problematics of the reader's movement through such spaces. Specifically, a simple, linear motion through the text (*à la* Fish and other reader-response theorists) is rendered impossible by the ontological vertigo provoked by the Borgesian fantastic. This vertigo frustrates the closural elements of the text through the elaboration of an *ouroboros-esque* spatial metaphor. That is, the story could effectively go on forever in a state of infinite regress.[48]

The analytical significance of 'Las ruinas circulares' in particular, then, lies in its thematic insistence on the concept of a shared ontological territory within the text. Specifically, such a territory becomes a performative and potentially productive site of ludic engagement: A play space. Accordingly, immersion in the topographical intricacies of such a space infers a mutual presence of, or sudden confrontation between, authorial and readerly constructs. It is perhaps unsurprising then that 'Las ruinas circulares' should take place in an amphitheatre - 'el forastero se soñaba en el centro de un anfiteatro circular' - a performative space positively charged with ludic and, it must be said in the interest of foregrounding immanent analysis of Cortázar's short fictions, combative potential.[49] With the spatial dimensions of the Borgesian text in place, we turn our attention to a more detailed analysis of the lusory potential of such topographical structures. In order to do so, we move on from the infinite libraries, colliding worlds and oneiric amphitheatres of 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'Tlön, Uqbar,

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[48] Or as Barth and Stark put it, 'regressus in infinitum'. See John Barth, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-fiction* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 73 and John O. Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 47.
[49] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 58.

Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares' towards the most infamous of Borgesian leitmotifs: That of the labyrinth.

1.3 The Labyrinth as Play Space – 'La casa de Asterión'

As we have hitherto discussed, the narrative spaces of Borges' fictions are often such that the successful exit from one labyrinth merely means entering into a newer, more vastly labyrinthine structure. From the frustrations inherent to the strange loops and tangled hierarchies of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares' we move towards the topographical shifts provoked by the intertextual features of 'La casa de Asterión' and their subsequent role in the ontological and topographical expansions of the narrative play space. Specifically, we turn our attention to the ways in which the story's opening-up of narrative boundaries further elaborates upon the vastness of the narrative space as it is constructed by Borges. Unlike the paradoxical structures of 'La biblioteca de Babel', the colliding worlds of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and the dreamlike amphitheatres of 'Las ruinas circulares', 'La casa de Asterión' provides us with a most literal representation of space and its vertiginous intricacies in the form of the labyrinth. Of particular interest here are the ways in which the labyrinth, as it is presented in 'La casa de Asterión', forestalls or defers interpretive closure and, in doing so, becomes a dynamic site of engagement that not only refutes the static objectivity of the text, but also elaborates upon specific, idealized reader constructs.

As a thematic and structural cornerstone of the Borgesian narrative, much has been made of the function of the labyrinth. In an analysis of 'La casa de Asterión', Enrique Anderson-Imbert once observed, 'reparemos, ante todo, en que su tema - el laberinto

- es el más significativo en toda la obra de Borges'.[50]   Thus, myriad and often conflicting interpretations of the Borgesian labyrinth pervade extant critical analysis on the author's work. Such interpretations, ranging from the labyrinth as a representation of the chaos of everyday existence to its reflection of the solipsistic insecurities of humankind's innermost workings, merit further discussion before moving on to our own, ludically-charged interrogations. H.E. Lewald, for example, asserts that:

> The symbolism inherent to the labyrinth represents first of all an irrational universe whose multiplicity, or unknown factors, exemplifies a lack of order or apparent purpose. In the absence of a theological interpretation, these labyrinthic forces preclude any rational or positivistic analysis that might diminish man's bewilderment or frustration as he searches for some sense, order or purpose in the world around him.[51]

Leonard Murillo, on the other hand, provides a more introspective stance on the labyrinth: 'as a representation of the inner life of man, the labyrinth has always symbolized man's insecurity in the world and his attempts to propitiate, control, or possess the powers that seemingly decide his destiny'.[52] Carter Wheelock elaborates further on the introspective and perhaps even solipsistic nature of the Borgesian labyrinth:

> Borges' most lucid symbol of this mental isolation from objective reality is the Minotaur of 'The House of Asterion.' This story can be read coherently and meaningfully if one keeps in mind that the narrator, Asterion, is the idealist consciousness and that the labyrinth he lives in is the conceptual universe.[53]

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[50] Enrique Anderson-Imbert, 'Un cuento de Borges, la casa de Asterión', *Revista Iberoamericana,* 25 (1960), 33-43 (p. 41).
[51] H.E. Lewald, 'The Labyrinth of Time and Place in Two Stories by Borges', *Hispania*, 45, 4 (1962), 630 - 636.
[52] Louis Murillo, 'The Labyrinths of Jorge Luis Borges', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 20: 3 (1959), 259 - 266 (p. 266).
[53] Carter Wheelock, *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 27.

Stark, on the other hand, argues that if discussions on the labyrinth are limited to its role as a symbol of chaos, then 'it would be a banal image, its banality multiplied by each image'.[54] He looks instead to John Barth's description of the labyrinth as a manifestation of 'positive exhaustion' rather than the apparently 'hasty generalizations' of Wheelock's account:

> The labyrinth, after all, is a place in which, ideally, all the possibilities of choice (of direction, in this case) are embodied, and - barring special dispensation like Theseus's - must be exhausted before one reaches the heart. Where, mind, the Minotaur waits with two final possibilities: defeat and death or victory and freedom.[55]

Critical discord aside, there is a shared, emergent concern not only for the textual implications of the spatial elements of the labyrinth, but also for the potential hostility of such a space. That is, while the conclusions drawn by Barth and Wheelock differ, there is a shared, though implicit, consideration of the labyrinth as a mental, cognitive or imaginative space. Wheelock's comments, then, are useful insofar as they consider the labyrinth not as a representation of the universe, but of the mind.[56] Such a stance helps to elaborate further upon the idea of the narrative space as a mental construction. Furthermore, Barth's account of the positive exhaustion inherent to the concept of the labyrinth is, above all, an exhaustion of *explorative* possibilities; to find the centre of the labyrinth, one must first exhaust numerous dead ends and false trails.

Thus, for Stark, the labyrinth denotes a certain explorative edge. Or rather, the labyrinth demands from its willing inhabitants or visitors an explorative interaction with

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[54] Stark, p. 47.
[55] John Barth, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-fiction* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 75.
[56] Wheelock, p. 67.

its innermost structures. It is not surprising then, that the Minotaur of Borges' story should insist upon the apparent freedom to enter and explore the intricacies of his home: 'es verdad que no salgo de mi casa, pero también es verdad que sus puertas (cuyo número es infinito) están abiertas día y noche a los hombres y también a los animales. Que entre el que quiera'.[57] As Barth suggests above, however, the possibility of defeat and death at the hands of the Minotaur - the discovery of whom, we know, depends on the successful exploration of the labyrinth - or from perdition through sheer disorientation (unsuccessful exploration of the labyrinth), imbues the space with an element of danger: 'Donde cayeron, quedan, y los cadáveres ayudan a distinguir una galería de las otras'.[58] Thus, when the labyrinth is considered as a metaphor of the text, the topographical structure of the narrative becomes a necessarily hostile or contested space. Indeed, outlining the role of the labyrinth in Borges' 'La casa de Asterión' and Kafka's 'Der Bau', Cristina Grau talks of the labyrinth as a fortress-turned-prison: 'la característica más significativa que los une es que en ambos relatos, el espacio donde se desarrolla la acción es un laberinto que, concebido como construcción defensiva, acaba convirtiéndose en una cárcel de imposible salida'.[59]

The fine line between playground and prison, alluded to here, will be taken up in more detail in Chapter II in the context of the hostile spaces of Cortázar's short stories. Of more immediate concern in the present Chapter is the idea of the labyrinth not only as a representation of the narrative space, but specifically as a narrative space that - implicitly or otherwise - is home to a potentially adversarial authorial presence. In light

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[57] Jorge Luis Borges, *El Aleph* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2008), p. 77.
[58] Ibid., p. 80.
[59] Cristina Grau, *Borges y la arquitectura* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989), p. 159.

of this focus, the most telling observations on the nature and function of the labyrinth

come not from the myriad critical analyses of such a structure, but from Borges himself.

Specifically, Borges' account of the Minotaur, found in *The Book of Imaginary Beings*,

emphasises the labyrinth's somewhat paradoxical function as a house:

> La idea de una casa hecha para que la gente se pierda es tal vez más rara que
> la de un hombre con cabeza de toro, pero las dos se ayudan y la imagen del
> laberinto conviene a la imagen del Minotauro. Queda bien que en el centro de
> una casa monstruosa haya un habitante monstruoso.[60]

This emphasis on the labyrinth as house is of particular significance when considered

alongside Gaston Bachelard's postulations in *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard

asserts that 'a house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space

transcends geometrical space'.[61] Of equal relevance is Bachelard's assertion that

'sometimes the house grows and spreads out so that, in order to live in it, greater

elasticity of daydreaming, a daydream that is less clearly outlined, are needed'.[62]

Thus, the house-labyrinth, like the text itself, comes to represent a dynamic site of

engagement. The implications of a 'house that has been experienced' can be linked

not only to Borges' observations on the nature of the book that has been read (and

thus, experienced), but can also be used to anticipate the coming discussions of the

house as a *lived* and potentially hostile space in Cortázar's short fictions. Like the play

space of the labyrinth, the text essentially offers the reader a space in which he/she

can test out his/her *a priori*, cognitive, referential and interpretive strategies.

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[60] Jorge Luis Borges, *El libro de los seres imaginarios* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1978), p. 140.
[61] Bachelard, p. vii.
[62] Ibid., p. x.

For Asterión, the labyrinth - in all of its vertiginous and kinetic glory - is home. Despite the underlying hostility of such a monstrous structure and its inhabitant, we are constantly reminded of its open nature: '¿Repetiré que no hay una puerta cerrada, añadiré que no hay una cerradura?'.[63] The idea of the house expelled of its inertness through interaction, exploration and experience shares significant parallels with Borges' general sentiments on the book. Jason Wilson, for instance, highlights Borges' suggestion that 'books are inert and dead until a reader opens one and reads'.[64] Not only does this stand in stark counterposition to notions of the text's inherent objectivity, it also alludes to the narrative space as a dynamic site that invites, either implicitly or explicitly, performative and explorative engagement. That is, interaction with and experience of the narrative space deliver the text from an essential inertness. As Kearney suggests in his introduction to Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, 'the interactive function of imagination' runs contrary to the formalist ideology of the 'absolute text'. As such, the act of reading becomes a kinetic process insofar as it underscores 'a relational dynamics between beings, involving vital dimensions of intimacy, secrecy, desire and repose'.[65] Thus, interaction through interpretation and exploration gives rise to dynamic sites of performative engagement. As such, there are significant grounds to argue that the concepts of exploration, dynamism and performance imbue the labyrinth with a distinctly ludic function; the labyrinth is no longer just a house, but contested play space. It is towards this concept of the labyrinth, and by implication the text, as play space that we now turn our attention.

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[63] Borges, *El Aleph*, p. 78.
[64] Jason Wilson, *Jorge Luis Borges* (London: Reaktion, 2006), p. 102.
[65] Bachelard, pp. xxiv-xxv.

On the concept of the labyrinth as play space, Robert Wilson outlines the ludic

potential of a space seemingly designed to evoke a sense of disorientation and

bewilderment:

> In a labyrinth a character wanders, perplexed and baffled, toward a destination that may be unknown or hold unforeseen surprises. A labyrinth suggests contextual intricacies, involution and replication, and structural perplexity of many kinds: in sum, it is the massive fusion of illusion and impasse. Perhaps inevitably, it does suggest a game, or something gamelike.[66]

As in Wilson's account of the labyrinth, play is a heavily thematized concept in the

maze-like structures of 'La casa de Asterión'. Throughout the story, there are

numerous allusions to the labyrinth's function as a place of playful distraction:

'semejante al carnero que va a embestir, corro por las galerías de piedra hasta rodar

al suelo, mareado. Me agazapo a la sombra de un aljibe o a la vuelta de un corredor

y juego a que me buscan'.[67] Moreover, Asterión's mental construction of a second

self - 'pero de tantos juegos el que prefiero es el de otro Asterión' - reveals an implicit,

and perhaps somewhat conflicted, desire to share the play space of the labyrinth:

> Finjo que viene a visitarme y que yo le muestro la casa. Con grandes reverencias le digo: *Ahora volvemos a la encrucijada anterior* o *Ahora desembocamos en otro patio* o *Bien decía yo que te gustaría la canaleta* o *Ahora verás una cisterna que se llenó de arena* o *Y a verás cómo el sótano se bifurca*. A veces me equivoco y nos reímos buenamente los dos.[68]

Thus, the labyrinth, in all of its structural complexity and ludic potential, comes to

represent a topographical structure of play, the essential inertness of which is

remedied not only by Asterión's solitary games, but more importantly, by his mental

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[66] Robert R. Wilson, 'Godgames and Labyrinths: The Logic of Entrapment', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 15, 4 (1982), 1-22 (p. 6).
[67] Borges, *El Aleph*, p. 79.
[68] Ibid.

projections of a second player. The labyrinth, like the text, presents a more or less clearly defined imaginative space with which the explorer-reader is encouraged to interact using his/her own personal mental horizons.

Thematically, then, the labyrinth becomes a performative site of engagement; meaning is made through a playful interaction with or exploration of its internal, topographical structures. Thus, the true analytical value of approaching the labyrinth as a play space lies in the insistence on the performative and explorative role of the reader-turned-explorer and the implicit suggestion that such a space can be shared. This idea of a shared play space adopts a vital, ontological significance when we consider both the labyrinth and the play space as representations of the text itself. That is, insistence on the text as a play space invites the reader to participate in the game, as play becomes tantamount to ontological embrace. Thus, as with 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', 'La casa de Asterión' concerns itself primarily with the merging of the otherwise separate ontological territories of the real and the fictional, of the reader and the text. It does so, this chapter argues, in such a way that invites the reader to compete with the textually-embedded, authorial construct that lurks in the labyrinthine narrative space or storyworld.[69]

Further allusions to the ludic quality of the labyrinth are to be found in the critical discourse surrounding the story. Shaw, for instance, stresses the significance of the labyrinth's puzzle-like nature: 'The pleasure derived from problem solving is a quite different kind of pleasure from that derived from imaginative and emotional self-

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[69] For more on the concept of the storyworld, see David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). See also David Herman, 'Storyworld' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 569-570. Here, both 'storyworld' and 'narrative space' are considered to be essentially interchangeable.

involvement with personages or plots'.[70] Likewise, according to Ernesto Sábato 'los laberintos de Borges son de tipo geométrico o ajedrecístico y producen una angustia intelectual'.[71] As such, the story is not only a play space; it operates as something of a text-based toy. On the subject of the ludic properties of the Borgesian text, Anderson-Imbert observes:

> No hay duda que a Borges le divierte *jugar con el lector*, y que su técnica favorita es la del desenlace sorpresivo: contar cuentos cuya interpretación sólo se ha de revelar en las últimas palabras. Pero ¿es su propósito lúdico y nada más? [72]

It is in Borges' chess-like, narrative stratagems and their constant frustration of the reader's intellectual self-assuredness that we begin to see the significance of the text as play space in the Borgesian narrative. Not unlike the labyrinth, the chessboard is a topographical structure within which the player is able to move with relative freedom (in accordance, of course, with the rules of the game and the strategies employed by the player's opponent). It is a contested space in which two opponents fight for the strategic upper hand. It is to this game of chess that Borges invites his readers. Thus, the Borgesian text is no mere 'metaphysical joke' (though one cannot deny the idiosyncratic, mocking irony of Borges' constant pursuit of intellectual excesses, absurdities and downright dead ends), but a game of wits in which worthy players are sought out above their less knowledge-agile counterparts.[73]

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[70] Shaw, p. 8.
[71] Ernesto Sábato, 'Los relatos de Jorge Luis Borges', *Sur*, 125 (1945), 69-75 (p. 71).
[72] Enrique Anderson-Imbert, 'Un cuento de Borges, la casa de Asterión', *Revista Iberoamericana,* 25 (1960), 33-43 (p. 41). My italics.
[73] Seamus Heaney, Richard Kearney and Jorge Luis Borges, 'Borges and the world of Fiction: An Interview with Jorge Luis Borges', *The Crane Bag,* 6, 2 (1982), 71-78 (p. 77).

Of course, to describe the Borgesian text as both the labyrinth and the chessboard is, at first glance, somewhat contradictory. The potentially cyclical (as we have seen in 'La biblioteca de Babel' and 'Las ruinas circulares') and even perilous structure of the labyrinth seems almost antithetical to the rigid consistency and formalised space of the chessboard. Both are, however, susceptible the ontological upsets of Hofstadter's strange loops and tangled hierarchies. As Hofstadter suggests in relation to such strange loops 'what bothers us is perhaps an ill-defined topological wrongness: the inside-outside distinction is being blurred, as in the famous shape called a "Klein bottle"'.[74] In Borges, both the chessboard and the labyrinth, as they come to represent spatial metaphors of the text itself, are susceptible to similar ontological disruptions and instances of topographical wrongness.

While texts such as 'Las ruinas circulares' and 'La biblioteca de Babel' use this topographical wrongness to suggest a potentially infinite loop of oneiric conjuring and textual exploration, in 'La casa de Asterión' this wrongness is manifest in an intertextual vastness. That is, the topographical structure of the narrative does not necessarily fold in, or back, on itself. Rather, it expands outwards, frustrating closural procedures through a series of 'textual explosions'.[75] Such explosions expand the initial boundaries of the narrative space by producing a seemingly infinite number of false exits from the narrative. As Juvan elaborates:

> In modern writing, this force obliterates textual coherence and erases linguistic links in the spatial syntax; because of this move, the relations and boundaries between the represented spaces as well as their internal structures become

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[74] Hofstadter, p. 691.
[75] Juvan, web.

ambiguous and indeterminate. Thus the point of view is displaced and the subject-position deterritorialised.[76]

Thus, textual explosions provide a most effective metaphor insofar as they not only actively disrupt the concepts of linearity, order and symmetry, but also point to a centrifugal force, a moving outwards or a rapid expansion of the narrative space. Such a concern can also be found in stories like 'El Aleph', where the paradoxical vastness of the text is at odds with the topographical certainties of everyday reality, and 'Libro de arena', wherein the interior dimensions of the fictional Book of Sand - 'un volumen de incalculables hojas' - exceeds those of its outer dimensions.[77] In 'La casa de Asterión' however, the deterritorializing effect of this rapid, intertextual expansion has significant consequences for the topographical structure of the narrative space.[78] Specifically, the narrative space becomes borderless, as the boundaries of the Borgesian text give way to, or intercede with, other texts (or perhaps more appropriately, other narrative spaces). Not only can we find textual representations of the Labyrinth's infinite vastness in Asterion's descriptions of his home - 'es verdad que no salgo de mi casa, pero también es verdad que sus puertas (cuyo número es infinito) están abiertas día y noche a los hombres y también a los animales'[79] - but the intertextual nature of the story itself alludes to the more abstract vastness of the

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Jorge Luis Borges, *El libro de arena* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975), p. 175.

[78] For more on the origins of deterritorialization, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977). See also, Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1999): 'As one would expect, the schizoanalytic term "deterritorialization" designates, in the psychological register, the reverse of Lacanian territorialization – that is to say, the process of freeing desire from established organs and objects: one of the principal aims of schizoanalysis, for example, is to free schizophrenic desire from the nuclear family and from the oedipal representations of desire promulgated by psychoanalysis' (p. 19).

[79] Borges, *El Aleph*, p. 77.

narrative space as it quickly expands beyond the confines of the Borgesian text: '-¿Lo creerás, Ariadna? -dijo Teseo-. El minotauro apenas se defendió'.[80]

The story's final evocation of the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur opens up the narrative space beyond that of the Borgesian text. In doing so, Borges subverts the reader's quest for a text's single, extractable meaning - tantamount to a linear movement through the textual space - by opening up the text's boundaries and forestalling its closural features. In short, the reader, naturally looking for some sense of interpretive closure, finds him/herself lost in the ever-expanding ontological territories to which the text opens itself. The labyrinthine nature of the narrative space of 'La casa de Asterión' is such that the successful exit from one labyrinth merely means entering into another, more vastly labyrinthine structure. The final evocation of Theseus, for example, opens the text up to the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Both the ontological looping and the seemingly infinite expansion of the text, then, suggest a frustration of closural elements that makes bringing the game to an end problematic. In Shaw's own observations on 'La casa de Asterión', we see this constant frustration of closural elements at work: 'having reinforced our confidence in our powers of understanding at one level, Borges deftly pulls the carpet from under our feet'.[81] Such interpretive and closural frustrations come to represent an overarching narrative stratagem that, according to Shaw, 'tempts the unwary reader to jump to a conclusion'.[82] He goes on to highlight these seemingly endless frustrations:

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[80] Ibid., p. 89.
[81] Shaw, pp. 9-10.
[82] Ibid.

> We have been betrayed again. We thought we understood the story when we realized who Asterion was. Then we thought we had understood it when we reached a conclusion about the meaning of his dwelling. But now we are faced with a new problem: why is Theseus, his killer, seen by the Minotaur as a redeemer?[83]

On the subject of exhaustion and the problematics of interpretive closure, we are drawn back to Enzensberger's comments on the labyrinth. Specifically, we recall his observations on the games of orientation and disorientation inherent to the narrative, and his view that the successful navigation of the labyrinth leads to a dissolution of its power: 'For one who has passed through it, no labyrinth exists'.[84] While Enzensberger's evocation of the games of orientation and disorientation are most intriguing, his ideas regarding the dissolution of the labyrinth's power through the successful interpretation of its internal structures is problematic in the context of the Borgesian narrative. That is, the infinite, intertextually-inflected vastness of the Borgesian labyrinth - as evidenced in 'La casa de Asteríon' - finds itself at odds with this possibility of dissolution and hints at the impossibility of the labyrinth's destruction. Borges' constant deferral of closure, together with the textual explosions provoked by the story's intertextual impulses, makes cracking the story - as it represents a linear movement in and out of the text - a seemingly impossible task for the reader.

On the subject of the reader, Shaw observes that the 'enigmatic nature of the [Borgesian] story calls for careful critical discrimination'.[85] He points to the need for an 'alert reader', one capable of detecting the intertextual and metatextual implications of Borges' 'inlaid clues': 'small indications or clues, held out to the alert reader, which

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[83] Ibid., p. 10.
[84] Calvino, p. 25.
[85] Shaw, p. 8.

suggest something about how to understand the tale'.[86] Thus, while such clues point to the need for a particularly erudite and alert reader, the dynamic nature of the narrative space, as it is manifest in stories like 'La casa de Asterión', also reveals a significant ludic potential. That is, the puzzles and traps inherent to the text allude to the contested nature of the narrative space, which in turn invokes the performative and perhaps even competitive role of the alert reader. The performative role of the reader, together with the apparent hostility of Borges' textual traps, will be discussed shortly in the context of the 'super-sleuth' reader as s/he appears in 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'.

Presently, however, our interest lies in the correlation between successful movement through the text and successful exploration of the labyrinth. Such a correlation allows us to compare the alert reader to his/her performative analogue, the hero figure of Theseus. Just as Theseus, in his quest to overcome the labyrinth and defeat the Minotaur, is not seen as an enemy but welcomed as the great redeemer, so too is the alert reader welcomed into the intricacies of the narrative space and invited to best its central figure: The creator, the author. In the words of the Minotaur, 'no me duele la soledad, porque sé que vive mi redentor y al fin se levantará sobre el polvo'.[87] The ideal reader, then, becomes something of a Theseus-esque redeemer, a figure capable of ridding the author-minotaur of his essential solitude. As a textual representation of the alert or ideal reader, Theseus' exploration of the labyrinth brings the contested space to life in very much the same way as the reader's interpretation of the text. Readerly exploration and interpretation of the narrative space deliver the text and its author from an essential inertness by invoking its kinetic and ludic nature.

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Borges, *El Aleph*, p. 80.

In Borges, then, play is not used to trivialize or otherwise de-intellectualize philosophical debate. Rather, play serves as a means of seeking out the worthy reader-opponent: That reader capable of engaging with the kinetic nature of the text. Stark observes the problematical nature of the concept of play in light of its more frivolous and thereby less intellectually rigorous connotations:

> These aesthetic matters seem sombre, but Borges often treats them jocularly, because he at least considers the idea that literature is a game. This sword cuts two ways, it makes literature appear artificial, to which he assents, but it also makes it appear nonserious, not in Huizinga's sense of *creative playfulness* but in the sense of frivolity.[88]

Similarly, Borges' 'Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw' ruminates on the fine line between the adept flaunting of artifice and outright whimsy. In doing so, the author highlights a concern for the text not only as a formal or rigorous game, but also as a communicative structure that anticipates Bachelard's thoughts on the interrelational nature of the text:

> La literatura no es agotable, por la suficiente y simple razón de que un solo libro no lo es. El libro no es un ente incomunicado: es una relación, es un eje de innumerables relaciones. Una literatura difiere de otra, ulterior o anterior, menos por el texto que por la manera de ser leída: si me fuera otorgado leer cualquier página actual - ésta, por ejemplo - como la leerán en el año 2000 yo sabría cómo será la literatura del año 2000. La concepción de la literatura como juego formal conduce, en el mejor de los casos, al buen trabajo del período y de la estrofa, a un decoro artesano (Johnson, Renan, Flaubert), y en el peor a las incomodidades de una obra hecha de sorpresas dictadas por la vanidad y el azar (Gracián, Herrera y Reissig).[89]

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[88] Stark, p. 25.
[89] Borges, *Otras inquisiciones*, pp. 93-4.

Borges' assertion that the text is neither 'agotable' nor 'incomunicado' speaks not only to its dynamic, vast, and potentially infinite nature, it also alludes to desired fusion of ontological horizons. It is the reader's ontological embrace with the authorial construct that grants the text its playfully dialogical and therefore inexhaustible nature. Borges' direct reference to the notion of literature as 'un juego formal' is of particular analytical value, then, insofar as it points to the consideration of a playful interaction between reader and author that is carried out within the narrative space. It is with these concepts of exhaustion and the 'juego formal' in mind, together with emerging problematics of narrative closure and idealized reader constructs, that we now turn our attention to 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'.

1.4 The Super-sleuth and the Metaphysical Detective Story - 'La muerte y la brújula'

In Patricia Merivale's 'The Flaunting of Artifice', the critic observes how 'Borges has always admired and enjoyed detective stories, and indeed translated, anthologized and parodied them'. 'Justly', Merivale continues, 'the most famous of the detective stories is "La muerte y la brújula"'. [90] Of particular interest in this section is not only the story's playful subversion of typical detective story genre tropes, but its evocation of what Robert Wilson refers to as 'godgames'. Such a focus will not only help to further explicate the concept and implications of the ideal, knowledge-agile reader as a lusory 'super-sleuth', but will also seek to elaborate upon the inherently problematical pursuit of closure through an essentially linear movement through the text.

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[90] Patricia Merivale, 'The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8, 2 (1967), 294-309 (p. 296).

Specifically, Borges' forays into what Merivale and Holquist term 'the metaphysical detective story' are of particular analytical currency insofar as they actively thematize the increasingly complex relationship between the concepts of space, play, and the movement of idealized reader constructs.[91]   On the subject of the metaphysical (or anti-) detective story, a genre said to include the works of Borges, Nabokov and Robbe-Grillet, Merivale asserts:

> A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions - such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader - with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot.   Metaphysical detective stories often emphasize this transcendence, moreover, by becoming self-reflexive (that is, by representing allegorically the text's own processes of composition).[92]

Of particular interest here are the ways in which Borges subverts certain generic features inherent to the detective genre, such as the genre's staunch reliance upon rigid closural procedures, in order to disrupt the interpretive process (seen here as a manifestation of deductive reasoning). Such a focus allows us to see the means by which the author emphasises both the topographical and potentially hostile nature of the narrative space and the lusory attitude that such a space seems to encourage. As the above citation suggests, the question of closure, as it comes to represent not only a product of this interpretive process but a defining element in the reading experience, is already much-contested in the realm of the metaphysical detective story.[93] Merivale

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[91] While the idea here is not to weigh in on the potentially postmodern bent of the Borgesian text, such an avenue of analysis has, elsewhere, doubtless proven to be both fruitful and insightful. For more on this, see Carlos Rincón, 'The Peripheral Center of Postmodernism: On Borges, García Márquez, and Alterity', *Boundary 2*, 20, 3 (1993), 162-179.

[92] Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney (eds.) *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 103.

[93] On the importance of endings in the specific context of short fiction, Helmut W. Bonheim observes that 'we expect endings, much more than beginnings, to show what the story was about, what special effect was to be achieved'. Helmut W. Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), p. 118.

writes of how the concept of closure in the detective story, itself a product of logical

deduction and thus tantamount to 'the restoring, through the power of reasoning, of a

criminally disrupted but inherently viable Order' comes to represent an unattractive

and yet tempting scenario for the writer of metaphysical detective stories.[94] Thus,

narrative closure, as it represents the process by which 'the preceding narrative

comes, in hindsight, to "make sense," and thus, reciprocally, to make the conclusion

itself seem inevitable' is a staple of the detective genre but, oftentimes, a hindrance to

its postmodern or metaphysical counterparts. That Borges chooses to place 'La

muerte y la brújula, however ironically, within the generic boundaries of the detective

story - a genre very much dependent on such deductive closure - is highly significant

and, as such, merits further discussion. [95]

Borges' self-conscious meshing of subversive artifice with detective-esque generic

mainstays exemplifies a further instance of one of Juvan's textual explosions. As

Merivale suggests: 'the [metaphysical detective] genre exemplifies postmodernism's

concern with intertextuality [...], metafiction, and what John Barth famously called "the

literature of exhaustion"'.[96] Such concerns are evinced in 'La muerte y la brújula'

through Borges' evocation of Poe's prototypical rational detective, Auguste Dupin:

'Lönnrot se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin, pero algo de aventurero había

en él y hasta de tahúr'.[97] Thus, we bear witness to the deterritorializing effects of the

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[94] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 102.

[95] To reiterate, this is not to say that Borges should be labelled a postmodernist *per se*. As Merivale herself observes: 'Certainly, the writers who are most identified with postmodernism's formal characteristics (even if, like Borges and Nabokov, they began writing at the height of modernism) also helped to create the metaphysical detective story' (*Detecting Texts*, p. 7). For more on the debate surrounding Borges and the postmodern, see Cristina Piña, 'Borges: un posmoderno avant la lettre', in *Literatura y (pos)modernidad: teoría y lecturas críticas*, ed. by Ana María García *et al* (Buenos Aires, Biblos, 2008), pp. 55-121.

[96] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 7.

[97] Borges, *Ficciones*, pp. 153-154.

story's numerous textual explosions. Using Brian McHale's postmodern reasoning, Merivale and Sweeney point out that 'sophisticated and erudite fictional genres reciprocally invade and are invaded by more popular ones. Accordingly, elements of the metaphysical detective story may be seeping back into the popular mystery genre'.[98] Not only does this deterritorializing or seeping effect pertain to the generic status and intellectual rigour of the text (i.e. the merging of highbrow with popular cultural products), it also generates ontological links between otherwise distinct narrative and generic spaces. John T. Irwin suggests as much in his observations on the ostensible intertextual links between Borges' 'La muerte y la brújula' and Poe's 'The Purloined Letter':

> I take it that this elaborate revenge on 'a kind of Auguste Dupin' for the arrest of a brother is an allusion to the fact that in 'The Purloined Letter' the Minister D– has a brother with whom he is sometimes confused because they 'both have attained reputation in letters'. Since Dupin gets even with the Minister, are we to see Scharlach's revenge on Lönnrot as an attempt to even the score for that earlier revenge on a brother criminal?[99]

Further explication of the permeability of generic boundaries, in the particular context of the prose poem and the short fiction, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III. Of more immediate concern are the ways in which Irwin's analysis of the text not only effectively illustrates the implications of Juvan's textual explosions, but also provides a perfect demonstration of the way in which the empowered, trained or erudite reader, in this case, Irwin himself, is encouraged to jump, playfully, from one ontological territory to another and, in doing so, help shape the narrative space. That is, Irwin's lusory engagement with the text sees him playfully follow Borges along a suggested intertextual trajectory that explicitly links the narratives of Poe and Borges, generating

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[98] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 5.
[99] Ibid., p. 42.

one, ontologically-fused, narrative space. In his *Constructing Postmodernism*, McHale talks of the ontological weakness of the metaphysical text. According to McHale, by laying the fictional status of the work bare for all to see, the author weakens the ontological fixity of the text. While these observations are made in relation to Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, the concept of ontological fixity in the anti-detective novel is pertinent to the present analysis of 'La muerte y la brújula'. Specifically, McHale asserts:

> Thus, *The Name of the Rose* is [...] a metafictional text, laying bare its status *as* text and *as* fiction. In other words, to revert to the language of my definition of postmodernism, *The Name of the Rose* foregrounds its own ontological status, its mode of being, in this case its relative ontological weakness *vis á vis* its own author, whose presence is 'behind' it. What rushes in, then, when the anti-detective story empties the detective model of its epistemological structure and thematics? What else but ontological structure and thematics: postmodernist poetics.[100]

Again, this chapter does not seek to present the Borgesian text as postmodern *per se*. It argues, in fact, that Borges' detective fiction does not evoke this ontological weakness, but rather, seeks to conjure up a sense of ever diminishing ontological separateness or *otherness*. That is, the texts hitherto discussed foreground an ontological otherness in their respective elaborations of narrative space. This space represents - at first glance and to varying degrees - a separate ontological territory to that inhabited by the reader. Thus, while the focus turns invariably to a reduction or destabilization of the structural, theoretical and thematic thresholds that separate such territories, it is not at the cost of the ontological rigour of the story space. That is, the 'flaunting of artifice' favoured by Borges does not serve to weaken the ontological status of the text, but instead highlights its ludic nature. Artifice is, at its core,

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[100] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 151.

primordial to the agonistic conceptualization of play as it is manifest in the Borgesian

narrative and beyond, as will be explicated in the chapters to come. Self-conscious

reference to the text's own status as fiction merely serves to position or otherwise

coerce the reader into a less defensive interpretive position, or else to harness the

reader's intellectual and interpretive zeal and use it against them. Robert L. Chibka

highlights as much in his remarks on the aggressive impulses of the professional

reader or critic:

> Part of Borges's game consists in misleading and confounding readers; with reference to the sometimes atrocious enterprise of criticism, he seems to have played this game with remarkable success. Professional readers, in this regard, are ironically more vulnerable than amateurs; like martial artists who exploit opponents' weight and momentum, Borges's story lets our own aggressive impulses toward textual mastery throw us off balance.[101]

Thus, Irwin, in his lusory, performative role as both critic and reader, not only supports

the ludic potential of the ontological embrace alluded to in Borges' text, but also

perfectly encapsulates the concept of the empowered reader as 'super-sleuth', a

particularly fitting nomenclature for the empowered reader, given the investigative bent

of the detective stories presently up for analysis. Of pressing concern, then, is an

analysis of this the super-sleuth, the knowledge-agile reader whose role goes beyond

that of mere passive receptor of the text's extractible meaning.

I use the term 'super-sleuth' in reference to Mary Orr's observations in *Intertextuality:*

Debates and Contexts. While Orr's focus is more specifically on the reader of the

prose poem, her use of the term 'super-sleuth' to identify the Riffaterian concept of the

'widely-read', 'well-educated' or 'erudite' reader is of particular significance given the

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[101] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 60.

detective-esque generic features of the two stories currently under analysis. As Orr

elucidates:

> Clearly the reader of the prose poem rather than prose requires a high(er) degree of intertextual experience and micro-attention to indirections and ungrammaticalities. S/he cannot then be some 'ordinary' reader, but a super-sleuth. [...]. Riffaterre's reader is therefore no apprentice or youthful enthusiast, nor even someone highly informed in rhetoric or linguistics, but a well-equipped reader formed in the school of accumulated experience of reading. Although Riffaterre calls such reader formation simply 'competence', his version of intertextuality as syllepsis is not merely experience of the déjà lu, but quantified and qualified by terms such as 'widely read', 'well-educated', 'erudite'.[102]

Differentiation between the prose poem and the short story will form the basis of the

coming analysis the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua and the hybrid digital artefacts

of Belén Gache's *WordToys*, discussed in Chapters III and IV respectively. Of more

immediate concern here, however, are the emerging problematics of the super-sleuth

reader. There is, after all, a central frustration inherent to the seemingly democratised

and playful freedom of this idealized reader construct. As suggested above, these

frustrations are best explicated using the fictional analogue of just such a reader. It is

with this in mind that we turn our attention to the story's protagonist, detective Lönnrot.

There are significant grounds to suggest that Lönnrot, the staunchly rational gumshoe

of Borges' 'La muerte y la brújula', functions as a textually-embedded representation

of the ideal reader: 'Bruscamente bibliófilo o hebraísta, [Lönnrot] ordenó que le

hicieran un paquete con los libros del muerto y los llevó a su departamento. Indiferente

a la investigación policial, se dedicó a estudiarlos'.[103] Accordingly, the detective's

investigative troubles are, in turn, indicative of the problematics of the reader's

interpretive and exploratory tasks within the narrative space. As such, the reader finds

him/herself in a similar position to that of Lönnrot, whose analytical rigour and

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[102] Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 2003), p. 39.
[103] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.157.

unwavering belief in deductive reasoning sees him lost in his own attempts to straighten the narrative line of his investigation: 'He aquí un rabino muerto; yo preferiría una explicación puramente rabínica, no los imaginarios percances de un imaginario ladrón'.[104]   On the subject of the futility of such an endeavour, Adrian Gargett points out:

> Lönnrot is fated to enter Scharlach's infernal symmetrical design, to meet his destiny wandering forever through some infinite eternal landscape, trapped in the labyrinth of Borges' imagination. And yet Borges' conundrum is a liberating experience, even when we realise that Lönnrot *rather than being empowered by his intelligence is actually constructed by it*.[105]

On the creation of the reader of detective fiction, Borges' 'El cuento policial' observes that, since its relative infancy in Poe's short fictions, 'la novela policial ha creado un tipo especial de lector'.[106]   This is highly significant, for if Poe created the detective story, 'creó después el tipo de lector de ficciones policiales'.[107]   Such a position effectively complements the present analysis of the ideal reader construct as skilled, experienced super-sleuth. Borges observes:

> Por eso podemos pensar mal de Poe, podemos pensar que sus argumentos son tan tenues que parecen transparentes. Lo son para nosotros, pero no para los primeros lectores de ficciones policiales; no estaban educados como nosotros, no eran una invención de Poe como lo somos nosotros. Nosotros, al leer una novela policial, somos una invención de Edgar Allan Poe. Los que leyeron ese cuento se quedaron maravillados y luego vinieron los otros.[108]

Like the reader, Lönnrot's frustrations centre on his need to grasp or otherwise control the topological structures of the narrative. Thus, Lönnrot's attempts to draw up a

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[104] Ibid., p. 155.
[105] Adrian Gargett, 'Symmetry of Death', *Variaciones Borges*, 13 (2002), 79-97 (p. 95, my italics).
[106] Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges, oral* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1979), p. 67.
[107] Ibid., p. 126.
[108] Ibid., p. 75.

cognitive map of the investigation and thereby establish and maintain a narrative line are echoed in the reader's attempts to resolve the narrative complexities of the text. Ultimately, investigation - insofar as it represents an interpretation of past events, such as the murders presented in the story - and exploration become synonymous, as Lönnrot's investigation leads him to the labyrinthine architectural complexities - the 'inútiles simetrías' and 'repeticiones maniáticas' - of the Triste-le-Roy villa:

> Lönnrot exploró la casa. Por antecomedores y galerías salió a patios iguales y repetidas veces al mismo patio. Subió por escaleras polvorientas a antecámaras circulares; infinitamente se multiplicó en espejos opuestos; se cansó de abrir o entreabrir ventanas que le revelaban, afuera, el mismo desolado jardín desde varias alturas y varios ángulos; adentro, muebles con fundas amarillas y arañas embaladas en tarlatán.[109]

Ryan observes that 'when topography is of prime importance for the logic of the plot, as it may be in detective fiction, the limitations of language as a medium of spatial representation can be remediated by a graphic map of the narrative world'.[110] Such graphics are intended 'to spare the reader the effort of building a cognitive map, thereby facilitating the mental visualizations that produce immersion'.[111] Borges, on the other hand, revels in the vertiginous complexity of such structures; immersion comes from the reader's often futile efforts to formulate a reliable cognitive map of the narrative space. Thus, both Lönnrot and the reader are trapped by their very efforts to hold the narrative, investigative and exploratory line. Such vertigo brings us back the labyrinth once more; in Robert Wilson's words, 'a labyrinth perplexes straightness;

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[109] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.167.
[110] Jannidis et al., p. 428.
[111] Ibid.

it bends directions, in the inescapable fusion of illusion and impasse, and involutes the empty potential of space'.[112]

The super-sleuth-reader parallel grows stronger still when we consider the fact that, in his investigative endeavours, Lönnrot is being coerced by his arch nemesis, Red Scharlach. The reader, like Lönnrot, finds himself at the mercy of the various godgames constructed around him/her. On the concept of godgames, we recall Wilson's elucidations:

> A godgame occurs in literature when one or more characters creates an illusion, a mazelike sequence of false accounts, that entraps another character. The entrapped character finds himself entangled in the threads of (from his point of view) an incomprehensible strategy plotted by another character who (thus) takes on the roles both of a game-master, since he invents the rules for the other character to follow, and of a god as well.[113]

The ludic implications of terms such as 'player' and 'game-master' are particularly significant. According to Wilson, 'the master of the game is godlike in that he exercises power, holds an advantageous position, will probably be beyond detection (even understanding) and may even be, as far as the entrapped character is concerned, invisible'.[114] The relationship between what Wilson calls the entrapped character and the god-like games-master shares significant parallels with that of the reader-author dynamic as it is manifest in the Borgesian short story: 'Whether comic or deadly serious, the victim of a godgame finds himself caught in a trap, subjected to a web of unintelligible incidents which, from the god's side, are merely cunningly opaque strategies'.[115] Accordingly, 'the victim in a godgame is like a piece in a game who

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[112] Wilson, p. 19.
[113] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[114] Ibid., p. 7.
[115] Ibid., p. 8.

cannot grasp the rules according to which he is required to play'.[116] Not only is this indicative of Red Scharlach's manipulation of Lönnrot's intellectual and investigative zeal, 'supe que algunos Hasidim, en busca de ese Nombre secreto, habían llegado a cometer sacrificios humanos...Comprendí que usted conjeturaba que los Hasidim habían sacrificado al rabino; me dediqué a justificar esa conjetura', it also elucidates on Borges' manipulation of the erudite reader, who embarks upon a similarly futile interpretive endeavour.[117] Wilson notes the lusory appeal of such a construct: 'A strong labyrinth compels a player (the victim within) to experience a bending of apparently straight lines, a perplexing of space, even while he, in playing back, attempts to straighten them'.[118]

All of which comes to represent a most enlightening meditation on the reading process and the need for narrative. The active reader, in his/her interpretive endeavours, represents a Lönnrotesque super-sleuth, whose need to establish a coherent, consistent narrative sees him/her coerced along a particular narrative trajectory, temporarily blind to other narrative, and thus interpretive, possibilities. Not only does Borges weave a labyrinth around the super-sleuth reader, he thematizes this very process of weaving in the narrative itself. Indeed, 'La muerte y la brújula' represents a meditation on narrative entrapment that draws the reader into the same investigative disorientation as the text's protagonist. By implication, Red Scharlach essentially adopts the role of author, weaving a fatal, labyrinthine fiction around Lönnrot, his reader-victim: 'así lo entendió el público; yo, sin embargo, intercalé repetidos indicios para que usted, el razonador Erik Lönnrot, comprendiera que es *cuádruple*'.[119] Such

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.170.
[118] Wilson, p. 18.
[119] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.170.

is the ontologically disruptive nature of the Borgesian game; the reader is drawn into the narrative space in such a way that he/she could be said to occupy the same ontological territory of the text's protagonist. In his own additional commentary on 'La muerte y la brújula', Borges states that 'the killer and the slain, whose minds work in the same way, may be the same man'. As such, 'Lönnrot is not an unbelievable fool walking into his own death trap but, in a symbolic way, a man committing suicide'.[120] While the apparently fatal consequences of such an acquiescence to a rigid, interpretive line will be more fully developed in the context of Cortázar's short stories, it is interesting to note the double evocation of the ontological embrace between author and reader - made explicit in the suggestion that the killer and the slain may be the same man - and the reader-victim's knowing, almost voluntary journey towards an inescapable end.[121] Both, as should now be clear, suggest significant parallels with the act of reading. That is, the act of reading is inevitably accompanied by the reader's self-conscious recognition that s/he is, to some extent, being led along a pre-determined path with a fixed end-point.

To this end, the perils of the interpretive task, outlined in 'La muerte y la brújula', echo the observations made by Chibka, concerning Borges' ability to mislead and confound the erudite reader by co-opting his/her 'aggressive impulses toward textual mastery'.[122] The agonistic undertones of Chibka's martial artist metaphor - 'professional readers, in this regard, are ironically more vulnerable than amateurs; like

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[120] Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 269.

[121] The same concept is also evoked in a number of Shua's sudden fictions. See, for example, 'Pista falsa', to be discussed more fully in chapter III: 'Seguir el reguero de manchas, ¿no será peligroso? ¿Cómo saber que conducen hasta el cadáver, y no hasta el asesino? (Pero las manchas son de tinta y llevan hasta la palabra fin)' (*Casa de geishas,* p. 355).

[122] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 60.

martial artists who exploit opponents' weight and momentum' - are most apt.[123] For all of his analytical and deductive rigour, Lönnrot finds himself fatally lost in both a narrative and structural labyrinth of Scharlach's design. Likewise, the empowered, trained or ideal reader, for all of his/her interpretive self-assuredness, finds him/herself led along a predefined narrative path, as s/he attempts to not only deduce the nature of the crimes committed, but to reconstruct the vertiginous topography of the narrative. With this in mind, a correlation emerges between the reader and Borges' numerous detectives and pursuers who, in the quest for understanding 'are outwitted by the people they pursue, are trapped in a labyrinth fashioned from the pursuer's ability to follow a trail until he arrives in the chosen spot at the expected moment'.[124]

Thus, the labyrinth is not only indicative of the conceptual, structural and thematic complexities of the Borgesian narrative, but also symbolic of the narrative's ludic properties. That is, the above evocation of pursuit, coercion and eventual entrapment allude to the interpretational vertigo felt by the reader in the hands of the author-as-gamewright. According to Bernard Suits, this vertigo is often precipitated by what he considers to be the sole tactic in the detective story writer's repertoire: Misdirection. While this claim is made in reference to more traditional approaches to the detective genre - namely the Minute Mystery genre - the concept of misdirection is analytically significant insofar as it makes an important distinction between the author's construction of, and participation in, his/her particular narrative game. On the concept of misdirection, Suits observes:

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., p. 50.

It seems that the chief, if not the only, tactic that the detective author uses in contriving suitable difficulties is the use of misdirection, and in this respect the author uses a device widely employed in ordinary games by their *players*: in bridge, the finesse; in baseball, the curve; in boxing and fencing, the feint; in poker, the bluff. Now this fact must give us pause. For it suggests that the writer of detective fiction is not *constructing* a game for his reader, but that he is *playing* a game with him.[125]

While this chapter, as should now be abundantly clear, does not suggest that misdirection represents Borges' sole narrative stratagem, focus on such a tactic serves to emphasise the agonistic relationship between reader and author. As the above examples of the finesse, the curve, the feint and the bluff suggest, the use of misdirection reveals an adversarial element about the reading process not unlike that found in traditional manifestations of competitive play. As such, authorial misdirection not only reinforces the importance or desirability of a worthy opponent such as the knowledge-agile reader, but also points to an additional element of the reading process that further highlights its ludic nature: The idea of mastery.

In Wilson's 'In Palamedes' Shadow: Game and Play Concepts Today', the critic suggests that 'structure, self-absorption and *mastery* are among the recursive problems around which any discussion of game and play concepts must thread itself'.[126] Thus, not only is the concept of mastery central to the idea of play, it effectively resonates with the reading process as it pertains to the Borgesian narrative. That is, the concept of mastery suggests that the reader, following sufficient exposure to the author's technical, thematic and stylistic idiosyncrasies, will become more adept at anticipating certain authorial and narrative stratagems. Stark suggests as much in

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[125] Bernard Suits, 'The Detective Story: A Case Study of Games in Literature', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 12, 2 (1985), 200-219 (p. 202).
[126] Robert Rawden Wilson, 'In Palamedes' Shadow: Game and Play Concepts Today', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 12, 2 (1985), 177-199, (p. 179, my italics).

his analysis of the Borgesian short story as an example of a literature of exhaustion: 'Borges always plays fair; a reader can see clues to the ending if he goes back over the story. Also, as with detective stories, the more of Borges' work one reads the more likely he is to anticipate the ending'.[127] Similarly, and with direct reference to 'La muerte y la brújula', Richardson observes that:

> The mention of the smell of eucalyptus provides a foretaste of the atmosphere associated with the house and gardens where the killing of Lönnrot himself occurs. It is also a significant detail in terms of the development of this detective story, since it gives the *alert reader* a concrete clue to the outcome of the riddle at the heart of it, indicating clearly that the message Treviranus later receives, on 1 March, claiming that there will be a *not* be a fourth killing, must be false.[128]

Thus, despite Borges' numerous, vertigo-inducing and ontologically frustrating narrative stratagems, the ludic properties of the Borgesian narrative are such that we detect a certain fairness in Borges' prose; a desire perhaps to allow the reader to master the text and, in doing so, become a more worthy adversary. In light of this, it is opportune to reiterate the agonistic nature of play in Borges' short fiction. Roger Caillois' *Les jeux et les hommes* provides four basic rubrics of play: *Agôn* (competitive play), *alea* (games of luck or chance), *mimicry* (role-playing), and *Ilinx* (games of self-induced vertigo and disorientation). Borges' short stories, then, could be seen as agonistic games insofar as they encourage a competitive back-and-forth between reader and author in such a way that tests, and potentially improves, a reader's interpretive capacity. Samuel L. Chambers, in his analysis of 'agonistic discourse' within the US political system, sets agonism apart from antagonism by emphasising

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[127] Stark, p. 56.
[128] Bill Richardson, 'Spatial Concepts in Borges' Stories', *Variaciones Borges,* 30 (2010), 43 -58 (p. 47, my italics).

the former's concern for the mutual respect and admiration between opponents. According to Chambers:

> This agonistic element of discourse must be rigorously distinguished from *antagonism*. Agonism implies a deep respect and concern for the other; indeed, the Greek agon refers most directly to an athletic contest oriented not merely toward victory or defeat, but emphasizing the importance of the struggle itself - a struggle that cannot exist without the opponent. Victory through forfeit or default, or over an unworthy opponent, comes up short compared to a defeat at the hands of a worthy opponent - a defeat that still brings honor. An agonistic discourse will therefore be one marked not merely by conflict but just as importantly, by mutual admiration.[129]

Thus, to see the games at hand in Borges' fictions as agonistic as opposed to antagonistic is to reinforce the playful, though not entirely unserious, nature of the literary politics at work within Borgesian narrative. As Sturrock suggests, 'Borges likens the making of a fiction to a game of chess, and it is to a game of chess that his fictions, once made, invite their readers'.[130] The chess analogy is particularly apt; with its insistence on a back-and-forth method of participation, together with its simulation of hand-to-hand combat, the game of chess effectively encapsulates the performative and exploratory roles of the knowledge-agile reader all the while reminding us that, for all his apparent fairness, Borges is never without the strategic upper hand. Sturrock continues: 'It is a game in which we are always on the defensive; the most we can hope to do is rationalize the moves Borges makes after he has made them'.[131]

It is hardly surprising then, given the implicit value of the concepts of mastery and agonism, that the possibility of cheating the reader should further problematize the

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[129] Samuel A. Chambers, 'Language and Politics: Agonistic Discourse in *The West Wing*', *CTheory* (2001) <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=317> [accessed 10.02.2016].
[130] Sturrock, p. 3.
[131] Ibid.

game at hand. Cheating renders the reader's feats of interpretive agility futile; a most undesirable concept in the Borgesian narrative. Borges himself suggests - in direct reference to the detective genre, no less - that overstepping the mark between misdirection and outright cheating represents one of the genre's most glaring shortcomings. Accordingly, Borges' writings on Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series allude to a demand for fairness:

> Si la memoria no me engaña (o su falta) la variada infracción de esta segunda ley es el defecto preferido de Conan Doyle. Se trata, a veces, de unas leves partículas de ceniza, recogidas a espaldas del lector por el privilegiado Holmes, y sólo derivables de un cigarro procedente de Burma, que en una sola tienda se despacha, que sirve a un solo cliente. Otras, el escamoteo es más grave. Se trata del culpable, terriblemente desenmascarado a última hora para resultar un desconocido, una insípida y torpe interpolación. En los cuentos honestos, el criminal es una de las personas que figuran desde el principio. [132]

This sentiment is echoed, some years later, in Suits' observations on the detective genre. Specifically, Suits suggests that cheating is so glaring in its infraction upon the narrative game due to its frustration of what he calls 'retrospective probability':

> If the culprit turned out to be someone not included in the list of suspects at all, and not even suggested, directly or indirectly, in the course of the story, but someone introduced *ex nihilo* on the last page, this would be a rule infraction in very much the same way that a bridge player's producing a trump from his sleeve would be an infraction at bridge. [133]

According to Suits, 'it is the cheating aspect of such withholding that most offends' insofar as it renders the concept of 'retrospective probability' impossible and, as such, frustrates closure. Indeed, the act of cheating 'would defeat the puzzle-solver's purpose; it would defeat the curious reader's purpose; and it would defeat the surprise-

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[132] Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficcionario: una antología de sus textos*, ed. by Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), p. 96.
[133] Suits, p. 203.

seeker's purpose'. For such reader's, Suits argues, 'the probability must be evident

retrospectively; that is to say, all three, after having finished their reading, ought to be

ready to respond, "That is the way it *had* to be"'. [134]

This concept of the author as cheat will be further developed in the proceeding

chapters, where it is argued that more contemporary treatments of narrative play (such

as those seen in Shua and Gache) do, in fact, resort to cheating the reader. For the

time being, however, this chapter uses just such a concept to postulate that Borges,

despite his proclivity for misdirection and intellectual, topological and ontological

vertigo, remains relatively fair to the reader. To this end, the closing dialogue between

Lönnrot and Red Scharlach, wherein the former is given a second chance, be it

hypothetical or fantastically-inflected, to gain the upper hand, represents a textually-

embedded manifestation of the respect and admiration felt between two opponents

engaged in agonistic play:

> - En su laberinto sobran tres líneas - dijo por fin -. Yo sé de un laberinto griego
> que es una línea única, recta. En esa línea se han perdido tantos filósofos que
> bien puede perderse un mero *detective*. Scharlach, cuando en otro avatar
> usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un segundo crimen
> en B, en 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer crimen en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y
> de B, a mitad de camino entre los dos. Aguárdeme después en D, a 2
> kilómetros de A y de C, de nuevo a mitad de camino. Máteme en D, como ahora
> va a matarme en Triste-le-Roy.
>   - Para la otra vez que lo mate - replicó Scharlach -, le prometo ese
> laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es indivisible, incesante.[135]

Thus, the ludic though no less dangerous subversion of the interpretive line,

tantamount to the super-sleuth reader's journey through the text, represents one of

Borges' many methods of misdirection. There is a sense of fairness about Borges'

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[134] Ibid., p. 209.
[135] Borges, *Ficciones*, pp.171-172.

sleights of hand, however; we almost always detect a respectful understanding at the moment of our eventual defeat, and an implicit offer of a rematch.

Moreover, Suits distinction between the game and the imitation thereof raises a number of important questions concerning the nature of play in 'La muerte y la brújula'. Suits states that 'if the "game" at issue is one played by (or between) characters in the story, then it is not, of course, really a *game* that is being viewed by the reader, but, in Aristotle's sense of the word, an *imitation* of a game'.[136] As is by now to be expected, we see both manifestations of the game (that is, the game and its imitation) played out simultaneously in Borges. Such are the ontologically disturbing tendencies of the Borgesian metaphysical detective story. That is, in foregrounding imitation and flaunting narrative artifice, Borges confuses the distinction between game and imitation, and by implication, between readerly observation and participation. The reader is, knowingly or otherwise, drawn into the game at hand, as Adrian Gargett suggests:

> Borges's is a realm where fact and fiction, real and unreal, the whole and the part, the highest and the lowest, are complementary aspects of the same continuous being. The word is a text and the text is a world, and both are labyrinthine and enclosed enigmas designed to be *interpreted and participated in by humans*. The synthesized intellectual unity is achieved precisely by the confrontation of opposites.[137]

Thus, in 'La muerte y la brújula', holding, or otherwise attempting to reestablish, the line is seen as something of a ludic endeavour, a playful attempt to engage with the enclosed enigmas of the narrative space. As should now be clear, this deductive or reconstitutive game is not without its risks for the player, Richardson observes that 'we

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[136] Suits, p. 210.
[137] Gargett, p. 89.

must grant that the story is a game, but it is a game with a fatal outcome'.[138]   Such

games, the hostile spaces in which they are played out, and their potentially fatal

outcomes will be examined further Chapter II.   Presently, however, we turn our

attention to 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', and in doing so, move from the

idea of holding the interpretive line toward the possibility of exhausting it.

1.5 The Player as Victim – 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'

The sheer polyvalence of the narrative line in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'

is such that questions of movement through the narrative, and the typical closure that

ensues from such movements, become increasingly problematic.   Thus, not only does

this story resonate with the subversively detective-esque genre staples of 'La muerte

y la brújula', its proto-hypertextual nature - to be outlined shortly - helps to elucidate

further on the primary analytical thrust of the chapter. Namely, the narrative space of

'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', as it comes to represent a site of playful

engagement between author and reader, helps to further articulate this chapter's

concern for Borgesian topographical structures of play.

Returning to the concept of the godgame, Wilson observes that 'without the entrapped,

or otherwise caught-in, character, a labyrinth could not so readily be seen as a game

[...] since there would be no lusory attitude, nothing to pull attention inward toward the

steps of the disjunctive sequence'.[139]   Like the entrapped Lönnrot before them, both

Yu Tsun and Stephen Albert - the central characters of 'El jardín de senderos que se

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[138] Richardson, 'Spatial Concepts in Borges' Stories', p. 49.
[139] Wilson, p. 14.

bifurcan' - come to represent players caught in their own respective godgames. Just as Yu attempts to relay his secret message to the German forces whilst avoiding capture by Richard Madden, Albert attempts to navigate the labyrinthine intricacies and irresolvable paradoxes of Ts'ui Pên's book-labyrinth. Thus, topological and textual constructs merge as exploration and journey (Yu's search for Albert), and performance (Albert's attempted decoding of Ts'ui Pên's enigma) take centre stage. Ultimately, Yu is captured by Madden (though, we are told, his message is successfully delivered) and Albert is murdered by Yu before ever fully grasping the nature of Ts'ui Pên's work: 'esa publicación fue insensata. El libro es un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios. Lo he examinado alguna vez: en el tercer capítulo muere el héroe, en el cuarto está vivo'.[140] At every turn, it seems, performative, explorative and reconfiguratory endeavours are frustrated by what Wilson calls the 'artifex ludens': The gamesmaster or gamewright. Such frustrations suggest that, in the godgames inherent to the narrative space of 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', there is a fine line between player and victim, 'the player is actually played since he will not be the *artifex* himself, not the gamewright who designed the labyrinth. The player played is a victim of a godgame'.[141]

Thus, the notion of the labyrinth as a representation of narrative space obtains a renewed theoretical and interpretive relevance in its insistence on the subject's potential for dynamic, lusory engagement. To see the topographical structure of the labyrinth and the imaginative storyworld of the text as ideologically synonymous is to acknowledge, or further reinforce, the idea of the narrative space as a dynamic site of engagement rather than a static, linear receptacle of fixed, objective meaning. Thus,

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[140] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.110.
[141] Wilson, p. 14.

the games played out, both thematically and interpretively, come to represent a confrontation between gamewright (author) and player (reader): 'The reciprocity between godgames and strong labyrinths should be evident. The strong labyrinth is invariably a godgame'.[142] The result of such a confrontation is the breaking down of the ontological barriers that exist between reader, text and author. As Gargett suggests:

> Borges's fictions grow out of the intense confrontation between the text and an exterior narrative which is not only a central problem in literature but also in human experience - the problem of illusion and reality. We are concomitantly writers/readers/protagonists in a *continuous eternal narrative*. We construct personal illusions, attempt to interpret the symbols around us, but ultimately find all efforts frustrated - and yet in this mournful defeat there can come a glimpse of a higher understanding that prevails at our expense.[143]

Moreover, Chibka's observations on the ludic and ontological implications of the historic inaccuracies found in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' - evinced in Borges' apparent misuse of real life historian Liddell Hart's historical account of the First World War - help to further explicate this confrontation between text and exterior narrative. Specifically, Chibka notes that:

> Critics who notice such discrepancies usually dismiss them as simple irony [...] or typical Borgesian playfulness. But vigorous play can evoke serious vertigo, and those critics who attend to the Liddell Hart citation tend to show symptoms of the disorientation that labyrinths traditionally produce'.[144]

These instances of vertigo and disorientation are once again evocative of Brian McHale's analysis of Umberto Eco's *In the Name of the Rose*. Specifically, McHale - taking a cue from Linda Hutcheon - talks of 'historiographic metafiction': 'Where the

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Gargett, p. 95.
[144] Merivale and Sweeney, p. 59.

classic historical novel sought to ease the ontological tension between historical fact

and fictional invention, and to camouflage if possible the seam along which fact and

fiction meet, postmodernist historical fictions [...] aim to exacerbate this tension and

expose the seam'.[145]   Approaching the Borgesian text via McHale's postmodern

treatment of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is by no means an attempt to situate Borges

along a similarly postmodern line.   Rather, I merely wish to address the similarly

ontologically disruptive functions of 'contradicting familiar historical fact', 'mingling the

realist and the fantastic modes' and 'flaunting anachronism' that, while foregrounded

in Eco, are anticipated in Borges' 'El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan'.[146]

The frustrations inherent to this ontological disruption are further exacerbated by the

apparently proto-hypertextual nature of the short story. That is, the concepts of reader

performance and the idea of a potentially endless, bifurcating narrative - both

cornerstones of the thematic foundations of 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' -

point towards a dynamic, ever-changing narrative space not unlike those constructed

by hypertext narrative.[147]   Before moving onto the proto-hypertextual nature of the

Borgesian labyrinth, we must briefly recall Wilson's observations on what he calls the

'strong labyrinth':

> Strong labyrinths have no shape at all, at least no necessary shape. They are
> the   purely   conceptual   mind-mazes   of   literature,   corridors   of   doubt,

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[145] McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, p. 152.

[146] Ibid.

[147] I use the term hypertext to refer to digital, web-based, non-sequential writing that fuses multiple semiotic systems within a digital space. As I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter IV, one of the key features of hypertext is its perceived attack on the principles of narrative linearity and structural, ontological hierarchy. In rejecting the structural practicalities of the print-text form, the hypertext's digital nature allows for the generation of dispersed and fragmented texts that are loosely related through a rhizomatic interconnectedness. The result is a matrix of independent yet borderless (and thus, inter-relational) units of text or *lexia*.

passageways of perplexity, forking paths of decision, that underline godgames, giving structure but not receiving it.[148]

Not only does this concept of infinitely bifurcating narrative possibilities, manifest in Wilson's passageways of perplexity and forking paths of decision, tie in with the emerging themes of infinite play and readerly exploration, it is also an effective means of broaching this oft-cited proto-hypertextual element of Borges' work. Numerous critics often posit the hypertext as the potential solution to Borges' literary and philosophical preoccupations regarding narrative and temporal bifurcation. This narrative bifurcation is outlined most succinctly in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' as 'una red creciente y vertiginosa de tiempos divergentes, convergentes y paralelos'.[149] While hypertext theory will take centre stage in Chapter IV, the proto-hypertextual nature of the Borgesian text merits further discussion insofar as it helps to elucidate upon the dynamic and topographical nature of play hitherto discussed.

The hypertextual elements of Borges' short fiction form the subject and focus of a great wealth of the contemporary critical engagement with the author's work. As hypertext theorists such as Jay David Bolter, Jane Yellowlees Douglas and Stuart Moulthrop make clear in their respective analyses, this hypertextual inflection finds its apogee in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan.' Moulthrop, for instance, suggests that:

> Ts'ui Pên's Garden of Forking Paths is a remarkably prescient approximation of hypertextual narrative, which does indeed take the form of a matrix of inconsistent 'drafts' (or more accurately, narrative units). Depending upon reader response, these units may be assembled into any one of a large number of alternative linear discourses. In a hypertextual version of 'The Garden of

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[148] Wilson, p. 12.
[149] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.116.

Forking Paths', Yu Tsun's vision of alternate selves would be no illusion, at least from a readerly point of view.[150]

Likewise, Bolter observes that, while the Borgesian text is ultimately limited by its print form, its hypertextual potential is made clear in the author's explicit and enduring thematic concern for narrative polyvalence and potentially endless bifurcation:

> The *Ficciones* are themselves conventional pieces of prose, essays or stories meant to be read page by page. Yet the works he describes, the novels of Quain or the 'Garden of Forking Paths,' belong in another writing space altogether. Borges never had available to him an electronic writing space, in which the text can constitute a network of diverging, converging and parallel times. The literature of exhaustion in print by no means exhausts the electronic medium. In fact, a number of Borges' pieces suggest themselves for translation into the computer's writing space.[151]

Thus, the hypertext - a 'network of diverging, converging and parallel times' - and the strong labyrinth - itself constructed out of 'alternatives, choices' and 'symmetrically opposed sets of criteria' - find a mutual ground in the Borgesian text.[152] The hypertextually-inflected, labyrinthine potential of 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' is evidenced in its own textually-embedded ruminations on narrative polyvalence and multiplicity:

> En todas las ficciones, cada vez que un hombre se enfrenta con diversas alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; en la del casi inextricable Ts'ui Pên, opta —simultáneamente— por todas. Crea, así, diversos porvenires, diversos tiempos, que también, proliferan y se bifurcan. De ahí las contradicciones de la novela. Fang, digamos, tiene un secreto; un desconocido llama a su puerta; Fang resuelve matarlo. Naturalmente, hay varios desenlaces posibles: Fang puede matar al intruso, el intruso puede matar a Fang, ambos pueden salvarse, ambos pueden morir, etcétera. En la obra de Ts'ui Pên, todos los desenlaces ocurren; cada uno es el punto de partida de otras bifurcaciones.

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[150] Stuart Moulthrop, 'Reading from the Map: Metonymy and Metaphor in the Fiction of "Forking Paths"' in *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, ed. by Paul Delany and George P. Landow (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 119-132 (p. 123).
[151] See Jay David Bolter and Michael Joyce, 'Hypertext and Creative Writing' *Hypertext '87 Papers* (1987), 41-50 (p. 46).
[152] Wilson, p. 12.

> Alguna vez, los senderos de ese laberinto convergen; por ejemplo, usted llega a esta casa, pero en uno de los pasados posibles usted es mi enemigo, en otro mi amigo.[153]

On the subject of multiplicity, Jane Yellowlees Douglas places Borges' narratives firmly within a similarly hypertextually-inflected literary trend. Specifically, she observes that the Borgesian text uses print's 'linear and sequential nature to explore simultaneity and multiplicity in plotted events'.[154] As a result, 'multiple possibilities for developments in the plot and conclusions proliferate' and 'readers are given the opportunity to experience multiple endings'.[155] Conversely, however, Yellowlees Douglas also highlights a central frustration that emerges between readerly attempts to exercise the possibility of dynamic narrative reconfiguration and the explorative limitations of the text's inherent, authorially-contingent linearity. That is, while 'time and possibility are literally equated with a labyrinth where an infinite number of plot configurations are not only possible but can be realized', there is a constant, authorially-imposed narrative structure that undermines the potential for readerly freedom.[156] In Yellowlees Douglas' own words, Borges 'deliberately permits only a single outcome to conclude the story, and the gesture toward liberating the narrative from print boundaries simply reminds us how constricting a typographic framework really is'.[157] Thus, while Borges' self-conscious, interrelational and intertextual games ultimately position themselves at odds with the author-killing proclivities of the hypertext narrative, hypertext theory allows us to appreciate the kineticism,

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[153] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.113.
[154] Jane Yellowlees Douglas, 'Wandering Through the Labyrinth: Encountering Interactive Fiction', *Computers and Composition*, 6, 3 (1989), 93-101.
<http://computersandcomposition.candcblog.org/archives/v6/6_3_html/6_3_6_Douglas.html>
[accessed 25.01.2016].
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

polyvalence and multiplicity inherent to the Borgesian narrative space, and to see that the labyrinth - as it comes to represent a textual manifestation of such a space - is intended as a construct of infinite play and exploration.

Indeed, consideration of the Borgesian narrative space - seen in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' as both a textual and architectural labyrinth - as a proto-hypertextual or hypertextually-inflected site of interaction resists what Schehr calls the 'logical process of deconstruction' inherent in paradigmatic, linear interpretive movements through a text. According to Schehr:

> 'El jardín de senderos,' underscores another point about the physical labyrinths: they are not totally labyrinthine. One undoes them by 'doblando siempre a la izquierda' […]. The centre of the labyrinth is attained by a concerted, logical process of deconstruction, where every step undoes what is already there. This turning to the left is a process of un-reading - our reading being always to the right - that is followed in order to 'un-win.' For the goal, the centre of the maze, is finally just an empty (null) point; it is not the solution to the system but its dissolution, its death.[158]

Resisting such a linear process of deconstruction in favour of playful exploration not only demands a more performative interaction from the reader, it does so in such a way that - contrary to typical hypertext convictions - reasserts authorial presence. Moreover, while Schehr's comments presume a structural or topological fixity about the labyrinth, the Borgesian labyrinth - in both its narrative and topographical forms - represents a dynamic site of exploration rather than a static site of interpretation. Thus, it is not something to be overcome or deconstructed *per se*, but a complex, kinetic and ludically-charged arena to be explored continuously.

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[158] Lawrence R. Schehr, 'Unreading Borges's Labyrinths', *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, 10, 2 (1986), 177-89 (p. 180).

In a similar vein to Yellowlees Douglas, Moulthrop attests to the way in which the typographical restrictions of the print text ultimately serve to remind the reader, however empowered, that 'even under deconstruction, the last word of the primary narrative still belongs to Borges, and any overture to alternative outcomes are checked by the ironic tension of formal closure'.[159] The hypertextual frustration of closure helps to further illustrate the idea of the reader as trapped in the same, self-perpetuating games as Lönnrot and Yu. Accordingly, Moulthrop asserts that 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' 'is not simply a detective fiction, but a detective fiction whose conclusion initiates a critique of narrative closure'.[160] Thus, a brief, hypertextually-inflected analysis of 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' reveals hypertext's value as an expository device for, rather than a technocratic solution to, Borges' longstanding ontological and thematic concern for playful interaction, disruption of linearity and the constant forestalling of narrative or interpretive closure. On the nature of narrative closure, Peter Brooks observes that: '[W]e read the incidents of narration as 'promises and annunciations' of final coherence, that metaphor may be reached through the chain of metonymies: across the bulk of the as yet unread middle ages, the end calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it'.[161] Like the dichotomy paradox in which Lönnrot attempts to save his potentially alternate self - 'Máteme en D, como ahora va a matarme en Triste-le-Roy' - the reader does not find closure.[162] Instead, s/he finds her/himself trapped in an endless series of middle points and deferred endings.[163] And this is exactly the point; Borges' narrative play spaces are

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[159] Moulthrop, p. 123
[160] Ibid.
[161] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), pp. 93-94.
[162] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.172.
[163] As a number of critics have pointed out, the labyrinth that Lönnrot attempts to outline before his murder is evocative of Zeno's dichotomy paradox whereby 'that which is in locomotion must arrive at the half-way stage before it arrives at the goal'. 'Zeno's *Paradoxes, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/paradox-zeno/> [accessed 26.09.2016]. *Given* that such

not designed to be easily beaten, cracked, dissolved or deduced, they are to be embraced and explored and experienced as they seep - accidentally or by design - into and over other ontological territories *ad infinitum.*

Thus, the various spatial metaphors that pervade texts such as 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'Las ruinas circulares', 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'La casa de Asterión' reveal the Borgesian narrative space to be an ever-expanding, topologically-shifting, competitive arena that, like the chess board, demands the willful, agonistic and intellectually-charged engagement of two players. As we have hitherto discussed, the instances of ontological merging provoked by the fantastic, metaleptic transgressions of the above stories would suggest that the two players in question are, in fact, the reader and the author. That is, Borges' constant evocation of the strange loops and tangled hierarchies of his narrative structures point to a state of ontological flux in which reader and author often come to occupy the same ontological space. Such a game and its players approximates Iser's summary of Laurence Sterne's remarks on the reader-author relationship, namely, Iser's observation that 'Sterne's conception of a literary text is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination'.[164] However, the ludic nature of the Borgesian narrative space adopts a significantly more agonistic edge in light of the author's fantastically-inflected and self-referential narrative stratagems. The thematization of the cat-and-mouse relationship between author and reader, manifest in the detective-esque 'godgames' of 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'

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a paradox makes reaching the end-point impossible, it is easy to see how the paradox applies to the current discussion on Borges' intentional deferral of closure. For more on the relevance of such paradoxes in relation to Borges, see Sylvia Molloy, *Signs of Borges* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1994).

[164] Tompkins, p. 51.

reveals how Borges is apt to co-opt the reader's interpretive and intellectual momentum in such a way that mirrors the agonistic bent of the game of chess; a game marked not merely by conflict between two players, but by their mutual respect and admiration.

With the emerging concept of the contested space of the narrative effectively foregrounded in the present analysis of the Borges' short fictions, we may now turn our attention to the treatments of play, space and authorial presence as they are manifest in the short fictions of Julio Cortázar's short fictions. Specifically, we will discuss the ways in which the narrative space, representative in Borges of an arena for agonistic and respectful play, comes to represent, in Cortázar, a hostile space that operates as both play space and prison for the reader-player construct.

Chapter II
Houses, Homes and Hostile Spaces in the Short Fiction of Julio Cortázar

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the concepts of play, space and the problematics of authorial presence in the short fictions of Julio Cortázar. Drawing on key texts from *Bestiario* (1951), *Final del juego* (1956), *Las armas secretas* (1959) and *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966), this chapter not only analyses the spatial constructs that pervade Cortázar's *oeuvre*, but also the fantastically-inflected, metaleptic transgressions that render them hostile.[1] Doing so will allow for an in-depth analysis of the idealized reader construct as he/she is manifest in the ludically-inflected short fictions of Julio Cortázar.

What follows is a brief outline of the present chapter's four primary areas of focus, along with a preparatory consideration of the theoretical concepts and concerns that will be raised throughout the chapter. The first section of this chapter posits the narrative spaces of Cortázar's short fiction not simply as contested arenas of play, but as actively hostile spaces. Specifically, this section argues that Cortázar uses the 'monstrous' house as a metaphor for the text itself, in an attempt to problematize both the topographical and ontological fixity of the narrative space and, in turn, disrupt the

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[1] Unless stated otherwise, any direct quotation of Cortázar's short stories refers to *Cuentos completos/1* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998). Henceforth, any reference to the stories included in this collection will include the title of the story and the relevant page number.

reader's feelings of safety, protection and separation from the text. An in-depth analysis of the spatial metaphor of the house in 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' will serve to illustrate how both the inhabitants and hostile forces that occupy the Cortazarian houses become textual representations of readerly and authorial constructs. The neo-fantastic presence of the destructive, ever-multiplying rabbits of 'Carta a una señorita en París', the invasive yet invisible forces of 'Casa tomada' and the roaming tiger of 'Bestiario' not only problematize the concept of narrative space by foregrounding its kinetic, contested and hostile nature, but also actively thematize the often adversarial relationship between author and reader, as well as their mutual occupation of a contested space.[2] Owing to the phenomenological implications of such a relationship, Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* will provide a valuable hermeneutic tool insofar as it will enable us to conceive of the house as both a site for, and product of, oneiric or imaginative co-production and psychic mapping. That is, when used as a spatialized metaphor of the text itself, the house aids in the reader's mental construction and, in effect, the co-production of the narrative space. This phenomenological treatment of the Cortazarian house highlights its potential as a shared space, and thus, a site of ontological connectedness. By

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[2] The concept of the neo-fantastic is most useful insofar as it points to a very different application of the fantastic in contemporary fiction, one that further blurs the distinction between fiction and reality by attempting to make the fantastic commonplace. On the nature of the term neo-fantastic, Pablo Brescia's 'A "Superior Magic": Literary Politics and the Rise of the Fantastic in Latin American Fiction' notes that the term refers to 'the introduction of an incredible event into a believable fictional world' (p. 384) Jaime Alazraki elucidates further in his assertion that 'si para la literatura fantástica el horror y el miedo constituían la ruta de acceso a *lo otro*, y el relato se organizaba a partir de esa ruta, el relato neofantástico prescinde del miedo, porque *lo otro* emerge de una nueva postulación del mundo, que modifica la organización del relato, su funcionamiento, y cuyos propósitos difieren considerablemente de los perseguidos por lo fantástico' (p. 28). For more on the neo-fantastic tendencies of the Cortazarian narrative, see Jaime Alazraki, *En busca del unicornio: los cuentos de Julio Cortázar: elementos para una poética de lo neofantástico* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983).

implication, Cortázar's attacks upon these houses are indicative of an implicit or textualized interrogation of the reader's standing within narrative space itself.

In the second section of this chapter, the idealized reader constructs that emerge following the analysis of Cortázar's three house stories will be further developed in a close reading of 'Instrucciones para John Howell' (*Todos los fuegos el fuego*, 1966). Here, it will be argued that Cortázar's demand for an accomplice reader who, 'in the act of reading, will create, [...] a new work at each moment' is offset by the story's explicit treatment of the problematic and potentially illusory nature of reader agency.[3] That is, the subversive, self-referential nature of the story invites similarly subversive, resistive and potentially reconfiguratory readings of its own narrative substructures, all the while alluding to the impossibility, or relative futility, of such readings. An analysis of the story will allow for further investigation of the oft-cited 'lector-cómplice', broaching the often nebulous distinction between the reader as observer and as agent within the narrative space. Here, the link between the lusory attitude of the protagonist and the ludic edge of the idealized reader construct or 'lector-cómplice' will be explicated in order to further comment on the literary politics at work in Cortázar's *oeuvre.*

The third section will concern itself with non-verbal representations of space and play in 'Las babas del diablo' (*Las armas secretas*, 1959). Of particular interest in this section are the ways in which the Barthesian concepts of 'studium', 'punctum' and 'animation' - insofar as they represent affective phenomena inherent to the cultural artefact of the photograph - help to illustrate the dynamic and ludic interpretive

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[3] Barbara L. Hussey, '*Rayuela*: Chapter 55 as Take-(away)' in *Modern Latin American Fiction*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), pp. 149-158 (p. 152).

processes that occur between the reader and the Cortazarian narrative. Specifically, in 'Las babas del diablo' we see a fantastic literalization of the Barthesian notions of 'punctum' and 'animation' that serves to reinforce the (ideally and problematically) participatory nature of the reader's role within the distinctly spatial dimensions of the narrative. In light of this, this section further reinforces the notion that the narrative spaces of Cortázar's short fictions represent contested arenas of ontological convergence, wherein reader and author alike find themselves locked in a state of adversarial play.

The fourth and final section of the chapter considers the implications of metaleptic transgression in 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Continuidad de los parques' (*Final del juego*, 1956). Here, I argue that the agonistic bent of the Borgesian narrative, discussed in Chapter I, acquires a more sinister edge in the games outlined in Cortázar's short fictions. In both stories, the fatal destabilization of the otherwise ontologically rigorous thresholds between reality and fiction serve to undermine the typical notion that both the artist and the reader are located 'outside of the narrative system' and are therefore 'protected from metaleptic phenomena'.[4] While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the reader is at genuine, physical peril at the hands of the text, this section argues that the spatial frames of the Cortazarian short story - insofar as they come to represent spatial metaphors of the texts themselves - posit the narrative space as an inherently dangerous or hostile environment. This danger or hostility is further exacerbated by the constant and sudden metaleptic transgressions that pervade the Cortazarian narrative. This *weaponization* of the metaleptic process culminates in the insistent suggestion that the reader - in his/her engagement with the

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[4] Ryan, *Avatars*, p. 209.

Cortazarian game - is at the constant mercy of the adversarial stratagems employed by the author. Such a sentiment echoes Ryan's suggestion that 'metalepsis is far more than a trick of the trade of the postmodern novelist, and the boundaries that it threatens involve other territories than the (fictionally) real and the imaginary'.[5] The true analytical value of approaching the narrative space as an arena of adversarial play lies in the necessarily performative and explorative actions that such spaces demand, as well as the implicit hypothesis that such spaces can be shared.

Together, these four sections will illustrate that the significance of play in Cortázar's short fictions is twofold. Firstly, the idea of the narrative as play space points to the playful, performative and reconfiguratory potential of the idealized reader construct. Secondly, this ludic element reinforces or otherwise defends the concept of authorial presence in a time when modern literary scholarship 'would seem to have banished the historical author from any role whatsoever in the text'.[6] On this Barthesian-Foucauldian impulse to displace the reader, Howard Mancing observes:

> Today most literary scholars labor under the influence of New Critical formalism, where the text stands alone and the author is irrelevant; or structuralism, where the text embodies culture and the author is irrelevant; and/or some form of poststructuralist theory, where the reader creates, or deconstructs, the text and the author is irrelevant. The author is dead, proclaims Roland Barthes; not quite dead, responds Michel Foucault, but merely a function of the text, and an eighteenth-century invention, at that. It is often (condescendingly) assumed to be critically naïve to talk and write of authors in serious scholarly discourse.[7]

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[5] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2006), p. 211.
[6] Howard Mancing, 'Cervantes as Narrator of *Don Quijote*' *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 23.1 (2003): 117-140 (p. 118).
[7] Ibid.

This chapter argues, however, that the adversarial, antagonistic and potentially menacing nature of the author, insofar as he comes to represent a fellow player in the game, successfully resists the author-killing proclivities of contemporary reading and interpretive paradigms. Indeed, as will become clear over the course of this chapter, the *authoricidal* tendency of modern literary scholarship is co-opted in Cortázar in such a way that suggests that it is the reader construct that finds him/herself at the mercy of the murderous text.

2.1 The House as Hostile Space - 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario'

In Chapter I we discussed how the topographical structure of the labyrinth - with its dual significance as both house and prison - is not only a representation of the narrative space, but more specifically, of a narrative space that is home to a potentially adversarial presence. In Borges, we recall, the labyrinth represents a topographical structure of play, the essential inertness of which is remedied not only by the Minotaur's solitary games, but more importantly, by his mental projections of a second player. I suggested that the labyrinth, like the text, represents a clearly defined imaginative space with which the reader-player is encouraged to interact using his/her own mental, imaginative and cognitive horizons and competences. As such, the labyrinth is not only seen as the monstrous home of the Minotaur, but also represents a performative site of engagement where meaning is made through the reader-player's ludic interaction with - or meaningful exploration of - its internal, topographical structures. In the present section I continue along this same topologically-inflected

investigative line, albeit with a greater emphasis on the more aggressively contested and overtly hostile nature of the play spaces of the Cortazarian narrative.

Indeed, it is with this concept in mind - that of the house and by implication, the text as hostile play space - that we turn our attention to the lived spaces of 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario'. The house, when considered not only as a play space, but also as a textually-embedded (and thus, self-referential) representation of the text itself, adopts a vital, ontological significance in Cortázar. The inhabitants of Cortázar's fictional homes - in their attempts to deal with the fantastically-inflected and hostile domestic environments in which they find themselves - become ontologically consonant with the reader construct and his/her problematic interaction with the narrative space. In his 1974 study, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre underscores the dual, phenomenological significance of the house in his conceptualization of the 'lived' or 'representational' space. Lefebvre suggests that 'representational space refers not to the mere description of space, but to its daily inhabitation and its use in representation, especially in art'.[8] Lefebvre further attests to the importance of this representational space in the spatial - and spatialized - concerns of contemporary art. Specifically, Lefebvre looks to the internal and external representational spaces outlined by the surrealist movement. According to Lefebvre, 'the leading surrealists sought to decode inner space and illuminate the nature of the transition from this subjective space to the material realm of the body and the outside world, and thence to social life'.[9]

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[8] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1974).
[9] Ibid., p. 18

While this chapter does not seek to broach the apparent surrealist traits of Cortázar's *oeuvre*, Lefebvre's focus on the dichotomy between inward, personal or intimate space and outward societal structures - in so far as it echoes both surrealist and Cortazarian models of spatial construction - merits further discussion. In her seminal study, *¿Es Julio Cortázar un surrealista?*, Evelyn Picon Garfield outlines the surrealist movement's elaboration of 'una realidad dual'.[10] 'Por un lado,' Garfield explains, 'existe la realidad visible, la realidad razonable en el ámbito de la vigilia y la conciencia'.[11] This external, sociologically contingent reality is a representational space 'que se entiende y en la cual se siente cómodo porque no amenaza la tranquilidad de la vida'.[12] Concomitant to this safe, external reality, there exists an inner, subconscious or imaginative space: 'La realidad intuida, la realidad de la imaginación en el ámbito del deseo y de la subconsciencia'.[13] Unlike the relative safety of the external or outward space, this intuited or imaginative space 'se interna en la vida cotidiana para estorbarla, para trastornar el hábito, para destruir la tradición'.[14] This same internal-external dichotomy can often be seen in Cortázar, as Garfield suggests: 'A lo largo de toda la obra de Julio Cortázar se evidencia la misma dicotomía de la realidad'.[15] The representational or lived spaces of Cortázar's short stories, like the spatial constructs outlined in Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, serve to provoke, threaten and ultimately unearth 'las ondas subterráneas del verdadero ser humano escondidas bajo los tabúes de la sociedad'.[16] Thus, the relative hostility of the lived, representational or inner space runs consonant with what

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[10] Evelyn Picon Garfield *¿Es Julio Cortázar un surrealista?* (Madrid: Gredos, 1975), p, 13.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 14.
[16] Ibid.

this chapter posits as Cortázar's thematization of the monstrous house as a spatial metaphor for the narrative space.[17] That is, like Lefebvre's notion of the inner space, the narrative space is transitional in Cortázar. Such a space simultaneously represents a subjective, imaginary or intimate space that can be seen to open up, and actively threaten, other ontological territories, such as that of the reader.

The house, like the narrative space, comes to represent a hostile structure subject to constant change. As such, the house, insofar as it represents what Bachelard considers to be a 'world in itself', becomes a powerful hermeneutic tool in its elaboration of the Cortazarian treatment of the relationship between subject and fiction.[18] Specifically, the house as both hostile ground and play space reveals the narrative space to be a spatiotemporal construct that simultaneously invites and challenges active, readerly engagement through the ontological embrace of subject and fictionalised space.

On the subject of the inherent spatiotemporality of the Cortazarian narrative, Malva E. Filer observes that Cortázar's short fictions often represent 'a constantly renewed attempt at increasing the possibilities of the essential correlation of spatiotemporal relationships that occur in the imaginative process'.[19] Specifically, Filer asserts that the language of Cortázar's short fictions 'functions as a sketch, a painting and a transfiguration of the world described by it'.[20] As a result, 'narrative discourse condenses into spatialized images that attempt to neutralize the sequential character

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[17] For more on the purportedly surrealist undertones of Cortázar's *oeuvre*, see Sara Castro-Klarén's 'Cortázar, Surrealism, and 'Pataphysics', *Comparative Literature*, 27, 3 (1975), 218-236.
[18] Bachelard, p. 57.
[19] Malva E. Filer, 'Spatial and Temporal Representations in the Late Fiction of Julio Cortázar', *The Centennial Review*, 30, 2, (1986), 260-268 (p. 260).
[20] Ibid.

of words and produce, in the process, a semantic enrichment'.[21] The narrative, then, is not a sequentially linear construct that demands a similarly linear interpretive strategy. The Cortazarian narrative is not dictated by the tyranny of the line, 'that compulsory author-directed movement from the beginning of a sentence to its period, from the top of the page to the bottom, from the first page to the last'.[22] Rather, the narrative becomes a dynamic, non-linear space through the metaphor of the house.

This condensation of narrative discourse into spatialized image - through the use of the house metaphor - is particularly evident in 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario'; three of the eight stories that make up Cortázar's first collection of short stories, *Bestiario* (1951). Of particular interest here are the ways in which spatialized images of the three houses come to represent thematic or textually-embedded representations of the narrative space itself. Further still, the kinetic and monstrous nature of the Cortazarian house, as we will now discuss, reveals that the narrative space, for all of its ludic potential, is above all a hostile space of contestation.

In Cortázar, spatial imagery represents a narrative device instrumental to the elaboration and subsequent weaponization of the contested, narrative space. The topographical intricacies of the houses of 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' are revealed to the reader in the form of essentially narrativized descriptions and reports of events. According to Ryan, these notions of description and report are essential to the construction of a narrative space.[23] That is, narrativized

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[21] Ibid., p. 261.
[22] Robert Coover, 'The End of Books', *The New York Times*, June 21, 1992 <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/09/27/specials/coover-end.html?_r=1> [accessed 29.06.16]. This notion of the line will be considered in more detail in Chapter IV.
[23] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Space' in *The Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Fotis Jannidis, Matías Martínez, John Pier and Wolf Schmid (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 420-433 (p. 426). Here, Ryan elucidates on the importance of narrativized descriptions and reports:

accounts of the uncanny or fantastical events, as they occur in each of their respective narratives, enable the reader to draw up a cognitive map or mental model of the spatial frames of each house. These spatial frames refer to 'the immediate surroundings of the actual events' of the narrative; the 'shifting scenes of action' that often 'flow into each other' over the course of a story.[24] The spatial frame is, then, instrumental to the topographical nature of the narrative space insofar as such frames suggest a nonlinear dynamism of form and structure about the Cortazarian house narrative. Of immediate interest, then, is the analysis of such spatial frames.

In 'Carta a una señorita en París', it is the protagonist's discomfort at having found himself trapped in the closed order of another's intimate life - 'me es amargo entrar en un ámbito donde alguien que vive bellamente lo ha dispuesto todo como una reiteración visible de su alma' - that furnishes the reader with a mental layout of the apartment:

> Aquí los libros (de un lado en español, del otro en francés e inglés), allí los almohadones verdes, en este preciso sitio de la mesita el cenicero de cristal que parece el corte de una pompa de jabón, y siempre un perfume, un sonido, un crecer de plantas, una fotografía del amigo muerto, ritual de bandejas con té y tenacillas de azúcar.[25]

Likewise, in 'Casa tomada', the lengthy description of the house and its corridors serves not only to accentuate the unnecessary vastness of the house in relation to its

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In description, the report of the narrative action is temporarily suspended to afford the reader a more or less detailed glimpse at the current spatial frame. This interruption can, however, be minimized by more dynamic ways of constructing narrative space such as object or character movements ('he left his house, and turned right toward the harbor'); characters' perceptions ('from the balcony, a tree blocked her view'); narrativized descriptions (e.g. revealing the floor plan of a house by describing the building process); and implications from reports of events ('the bullet missed its target, crossed the town square and broke a window of the church').

[24] Jannidis et al., p. 421.
[25] Cortázar, 'Carta', p. 112.

two introverted and inactive inhabitants, it also allows the reader to appreciate the apparent topographical and communicative homogeneity of the house's internal structures: 'Solamente un pasillo con su maciza puerta de roble aislaba esa parte del ala delantera donde había un baño, la cocina, nuestros dormitorios y el living central, al cual comunicaban los dormitorios y el pasillo'.[26] This apparent topological harmony effectively foreshadows the ensuing discord of the house following its supernatural invasion: 'me tiré contra la pared antes de que fuera demasiado tarde, la cerré de golpe apoyando el cuerpo; felizmente la llave estaba puesta de nuestro lado y además corrí el gran cerrojo para más seguridad'.[27]

In the case of 'Bestiario', the shifting scenes of action are revealed to the reader as part of the narrator's account of the story's neo-fantastical element: The roaming tiger:

> Estaban tan bien que no era necesario preocuparse por lo de las piezas. Una casa grandísima, y en el peor de los casos había que no entrar en una habitación; nunca más de una, de modo que no importaba.[28]

When considered as spatial metaphors of the text itself, the besieged rooms of the Funes household not only attest to the kinetic nature of the narrative and its spatial frames, the numerous and often concurrent references to play imbue the text with a ludic charge. For instance, while the play spaces available to Isabel and her playmate Nino are constantly subject to change at the hands of the roaming tiger, these topographical shifts are never detrimental to the numerous games in play:

> Jugaban de la mañana a la noche en el bosque de sauces, y si no se podía en el bosque de sauces les quedaba el jardín de los tréboles, el parque de las

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26 Cortázar, 'Casa tomada', p. 108.
27 Ibid., p. 109.
28 Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 167.

> hamacas y la costa del arroyo. En la casa era lo mismo, tenían sus dormitorios, el corredor del medio, la biblioteca de abajo (salvo un jueves en que no se pudo ir a la biblioteca) y el comedor de cristales. Al estudio de Luis no iban porque Luis leía todo el tiempo, a veces llamaba a su hijo y le daba libros con figuras; pero Nino los sacaba de ahí, se iban a mirarlos al living o al jardín del frente. No entraban nunca en el estudio del Nene porque tenían miedo de sus rabias.[29]

Thus, narrativized descriptions of the houses' spatial frames allow the reader both to immerse and to orientate him/herself in the narrative space. As such, Ryan's suggestion[30] that spatial frames are given ultimate form by the reader's imagination 'on the basis of cultural knowledge and real-world experience' not only echo Bachelard's claims that 'our most personal recollections can come and live' in the fictional structure of the house, but also resonate with the spatial metaphor of the house in Cortázar.[31]

Indeed, the house adopts both a narratological and a phenomenological significance in its implicit evocation of the performative and creative role of the reader. The reader's dynamically constructed mental maps are tantamount to an emotional investment or immersion in the narrative space. In this sense, there are significant parallels to be drawn between Ryan's cognitive maps, dynamically constructed in the course of reading (and periodically consulted by the reader as a means of orientation within narrative world), and Bachelard's theorizations on the role of the house as a 'functional composite of imagination and memory'.[32] Ryan's observation that 'the narrative world is conceived by the imagination as a coherent, unified, ontologically full and materially existing geographical entity'[33] resonates with Bachelard's conviction - expressed over

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[29] Ibid., p. 167-68.
[30] Jannidis et al., p. 422.
[31] Bachelard, p. 60.
[32] Ibid., p. 37.
[33] Jannidis et al., p. 422.

half a century earlier - that 'the house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space'.[34] When applied to Cortázar's short fictions, the spatial theorizations put forth by Bachelard and Ryan help to further illustrate that both the narrative space and the fictionalized house are in effect synonymous, insofar as they both represent manifestations of a phenomenologically significant, inside space.

The phenomenological import of such a space is made clearer still in Bachelard's observations on the reader's recollective or imaginative conjuring of the house. The reader's act of cognitive mapping is, in essence, a mixture of memory and creation. This carries a certain ontological weight, as the reader's reconstruction of the narrative space reveals the reading process to be, by and large, an active and performative one. The narrative space is, at once, a product of the author's creative output and the reader's imaginative input: 'Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them'.[35]

The house adopts an ontological significance in the Cortazarian narrative, then, insofar as it allows readers to 'draw on their normal experience of space in some regions of the narrative world, despite its topological heterogeneity'.[36] The ability to draw up a cognitive map of the narrative space is, then, fundamental not only to the desired ontological embrace sought in much of Cortázar's fiction - a desire to 'tomar de la literatura eso que es puente de hombre a hombre' to be discussed in more detail shortly - but is also instrumental to the concept of rigorous play.[37] Cognitive mapping

[34] Bachelard, p. 25.
[35] Ibid., p. 21.
[36] Jannidis et al., p. 431.
[37] Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela* (Madrid: Punto de lectura, 2010), p. 518.

through narrativized description of the lived space allows for the reader's initial orientation in such a space, even if this space is subsequently subject to destabilization. In short, some degree of cognitive mapping is essential if the narrative space is to remain a means of 'mental representation' and thereby retain its 'spatial quality'.[38]

The spatial quality of the house has a significant hermeneutic value insofar as it allows for the mental construction of a narrative space that the reader is subsequently able to (or indeed invited to) explore as part of an interpretive process. By way of illustration, and with particular reference to Baudelaire's *Les paradis artificiels,* Bachelard comments on how the poet's description of a cottage in Wales 'furnishes' the reader with 'a centered picture that leads to the heart of a dream which we can then take over for ourselves'.[39] This idea of the reader taking over the dream is paramount to the process of ontological embrace as it pertains to Cortázar, for it alludes to the fusion of horizons between author and reader via the narrative space. In other words, the textually-embedded or fictionalized house acts as an ontological repository for the reader; s/he fills the house with personal imaginings, memories and experiences. Thus, the author's creative output - the narrative space of the text itself - is furnished by the imaginative input of the reader. The narrative space is therefore shared by both the reader and author construct. This is not only evocative of Bachelard's claims that 'well-determined centres of revery are means of communication between men who dream as surely as well-defined concepts are means of communication between men who think'[40], but is also somewhat reminiscent

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[38] Jannidis et al., p. 430.
[39] Bachelard, p. 60.
[40] Ibid, p. 61.

of Gadamerian hermeneutics, whereby the interpretation of a text is not defined by a 'passive openness' to a linear system, but by a 'dialectical interaction' with the narrative space resulting in a 'new creation, a new event in understanding'.[41]

Using the observations of Bachelard, Lefebvre and Ryan, the phenomenological and hermeneutic significance of the house in Cortázar becomes clear: Such a spatial metaphor provides the mental parameters that delimit, initially at least, the structural confines of the narrative space. That is not to say, however, that 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' present a wholesale application of the Bachelardian poetics of space. In fact, all three stories reveal instances of significant ideological discord between the Bachelardian and Cortazarian treatments of the house. The Bachelardian notions of the house as utopic, shared dream space, centre of communication or safe haven for the creative processes of revery and memory are more problematic in Cortázar. More often than not, Cortázar's stories, despite implicit and explicit textual and thematic concerns for ontological embrace, focus on the protagonists' failed attempts to share, or otherwise engage with, the environments in which they find themselves. Of present interest then, are the notable divergences from the Bachelardian treatment of the house.

The protagonist of 'Carta a una señorita en París', for instance, is a temporary lodger in his friend's apartment. As such, he is unnerved to find himself intruding on the intimate, lived space of another: 'Andrée, yo no quería venirme a vivir a su departamento de la calle Suipacha. No tanto por los conejitos, más bien porque me duele ingresar en un orden cerrado, construido ya hasta en las más finas mallas del

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[41] Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 212.

aire'.[42] This unease is offset by the relative comfort and safety of the routine of which his own home is symbolic:

> Mire usted, yo tenía perfectamente resuelto el problema de los conejitos. Sembraba trébol en el balcón de mi otra casa, vomitaba un conejito, lo ponía en el trébol y al cabo de un mes, cuando sospechaba que de un momento a otro... entonces regalaba el conejo ya crecido a la señora de Molina, que creía en un *hobby* y se callaba.[43]

The protagonist's unwillingness to incorporate himself into the 'orden cerrado' of the apartment is indicative of the impossibility of meaningful communication between subject and spatial construct. The fantastic intrusion of the rabbits further exacerbates this ontological incompatibility between subject and space, as the creatures begin to destroy the intricacies and intimacies of the fictional apartment: 'Rompieron las cortinas, las telas de los sillones, el borde del autorretrato de Augusto Torres, llenaron de pelos la alfombra y también gritaron'.[44]

Similarly, the siblings of 'Casa tomada' find comfort in the closed order and familial setting of their ancestral home: 'Nos gustaba la casa porque aparte de espaciosa y antigua [...] guardaba los recuerdos de nuestros bisabuelos, el abuelo paterno, nuestros padres y toda la infancia'.[45] However, contrary to Bachelard's concept of the 'house of dream-memory' - a place of retreat wherein dream and memory are sheltered and nurtured - the uncanny climax of 'Casa tomada' reveals a glaring discord between memory and imagination.[46] The sibling's home finds itself under invasion from an invisible, and potentially imaginary force: 'Tuve que cerrar la puerta del pasillo.

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[42] Cortázar, 'Carta', p. 112.
[43] Ibid., p. 113-4.
[44] Ibid., pp. 117-8.
[45] Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 107.
[46] Bachelard, p. 37.

Han tomado parte del fondo'.[47]   With the gradual advance of the hostile force's encroachment, the siblings find themselves cut off from the objects and artefacts of their past in a manner that resonates with, yet deviates from, Bachelard's claims that 'memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening'[48]:

> Los primeros días nos pareció penoso porque ambos habíamos dejado en la parte tomada muchas cosas que queríamos. Mis libros de literatura francesa, por ejemplo, estaban todos en la biblioteca. Irene extrañaba unas carpetas, un par de pantuflas que tanto la abrigaban en invierno. Yo sentía mi pipa de enebro y creo que Irene pensó en una botella de Hesperidina de muchos años.[49]

Here, then, the relationship between imagination and memory is not one of mutual deepening, but one of mutual destruction. The hostile, imaginary force stakes a claim on the objects of the protagonists' pasts in such a way that suggests a war of attrition on the concept of memory.

Elsewhere however, imagination, in the forms of revery and play, thrives in the lived space of the house.[50] In 'Bestiario' the whole of the Los Horneros household becomes

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[47] Cortázar, 'Casa Tomada', p. 109. In *Julio Cortázar* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1975)*, Evelyn Picon Garfield points to the imaginary, oneiric foundations of 'Casa tomada' in her retelling of the nightmare that inspired Cortázar's story. Despite the numerous socio-political (anti-peronist) and psychoanalytical interpretations that 'Casa tomada' invites, Garfield highlights Cortázar's assertion that, for him, the story 'has no other meaning than that of a nightmare' (p. 19).

[48] Bachelard, p. 27.

[49] Cortázar, 'Casa tomada', p. 109.

[50] Play and imagination are, or course, inextricably linked. For more on these links, see Robert Rawdon Wilson, 'Godgames and Labyrinths: The Logic of Entrapment', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 15, 4 (1982), 1-22 and 'In Palamedes' Shadow: Game and Play concepts today' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 12, 2, (1985), 177-199. In the latter work, Wilson suggests that 'games constitute a block of *conceptual space* within which skills, and hence mastery, are exercised and tested' (p. 179). In the former, Wilson draws on Bernard Suit's concept of the 'lusory attitude' in order to underline the cognitive and imaginative elements at work in the act of game-playing: 'The lusory attitude [...] formulates the playfulness of the game-playing and may be described as the inwardness, the reflexivity, of game-playing. It is the player's state of mind that makes the rules of a given game acceptable' (p. 6).

a site of imaginative conjuring.   Isabel's oneiric superimposition of the house's

corridors upon the antfarm's underground tunnels attests to the notion of the house as

dream space: 'El formicario valía más que todo Los Horneros, y a ella [Isabel] le

encantaba pensar que las hormigas iban y venían sin miedo a ningún tigre, a veces

le daba por imaginarse un tigrecito chico como una goma de borrar, rodando las

galerías del formicario'.[51]   Contrary to the antagonistic relationship between lived

space, imagination and memory evoked in 'Casa tomada', in 'Bestiario' there are

significant parallels to be drawn between Cortázar's account of the Funes household

as the ideal site for Isabel's playful reveries and Bachelard's assertion that 'the house

shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream

in peace'.[52]

Thus, Cortázar's house fictions reveal a similar concern to Bachelard's

phenomenological principles of the house as both a secure site of dreaming and as

bridge between two thinking minds.   The utopic, ontological embrace outlined in

Poetics of Space is, however, often made hostile and adversarial in Cortázar. This is

not to say that the possibility of meaningful experience through exploration is denied

in Cortázar, nor does it suggest that the ontological embrace outlined in Chapter I is

rejected here.   Rather, the notions of meaningful experience, exploration and

ontological embrace as interpretive typicalities or inevitabilities come under fierce

interrogation in Cortázar. To read is not necessarily to engage in any meaningful or

significant way with the text.   In fact, it is in this distinction between meaningful

engagement and passive reception, thematized in the above stories, that we detect

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[51] Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 169.
[52] Bachelard, p. 28.

implicit references to the Cortazarian idealized reader construct. We will return to the distinction between meaningful engagement and passive reception in our discussions of 'Instrucciones para John Howell' and 'Continuidad de los parques'. Of more immediate concern are the implicit allusions to the idealized reader construct as they are manifest in 'Bestiario'.

In 'Bestiario', Isabel's manipulation of the tiger, the very force that renders the spatial frames of the house so hostile, is fundamental to the elaboration of just such a reader. That is, Cortázar's thematization of the inherent dangers of the complicit mind-set, seen in both 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada', is offset by Isabel's murderous display of agency in 'Bestiario'. Owing to their mutual focus on performance, all three stories reveal a common desire to distort, problematize or otherwise interrogate traditional understandings and applications of certain referential codes and reading practices in order to elaborate upon an idealized reader subject. When approached as a textual elaboration of such a construct, the character of Isabel becomes both a symbol of transgression and an interrogation of the so-called 'lector cómplice'. To borrow from Borges' terminology, Isabel represents a textualized manifestation of the 'black swan' or 'cisne tenebroso'. In his introduction to *Historia universal de la infamia*, Borges states that 'los buenos lectores son cisnes aún más tenebrosos y singulares que los buenos autores' and that the act of reading 'por lo pronto, es una actividad posterior de la de escribir: más resignada, más civil, más intelectual'.[53] Something of a symbol of Hume's inductive reasoning, the concept of the black swan already has solid foundations in elementary philosophy. According to Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the black swan 'lies outside the realm of regular expectation'

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[53] Jorge Luis Borges, *Historia universal de la infamia* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1995), p. 4.

but 'carries an extreme impact'.[54] This combination of rarity and impact resonates with Borges' concept of the 'cisne tenebroso' insofar as the 'black swan, like the 'buen lector', represents an atypicality, whose rare appearance results in a paradigm shift.[55] Cortázar's depiction of Isabel as a transgressive force shares significant parallels with this Borgesian 'black swan' construct. That is to say that Isabel's subversion of the very system that keeps the Funes household safe makes her a nonconformist figure whose transgressive actions result in a paradigm shift. Specifically, her misdirection concerning the tiger's whereabouts results in the death of el Nene and thus, destabilizes the oppressive *status quo* of the household. As such, this transgression merits further discussion.

In 'Bestiario', there is a chess-like, strategic element to the way in which the Funes household deals with the roaming tiger. While the inhabitants are almost entirely passive in their constant observation and avoidance of the tiger, there is nevertheless a strict set of rules to which the inhabitants must adhere if they are to remain safe: 'casi siempre era el capataz el que avisaba de los movimientos del tigre.[56] This ludic edge is fundamental to the understanding of Isabel's actions. Isabel's final and murderous act of misdirection adopts a transgressive significance insofar as it is carried out in a conscious subversion of the house rules. In her act of fatally misleading el Nene into the path of the roaming tiger - '¡Pero sí estaba en el estudio

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[54] Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. XVII.
[55] In keeping with Borges' terminology, the 'buen lector' or the good reader will be used as an umbrella term for the idealized reader constructs as they are manifest in all four of the authors up for analysis in this thesis.
[56] Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 172.

de él! ¡Ella dijo que estaba en el estudio de él!' - Isabel is co-opting her fellow inhabitant's faithfulness to the rules of the game.[57] She is, in effect, cheating.

On the subject of the cheat and his/her infractions upon the rules of the game, Roger Caillois observes that:

> Le tricheur, s'il les viole, feint du moins de les respecter. Il ne les discute pas: il abuse de la loyauté des autres joueurs. A ce point de vue, on doit approuver les auteurs qui ont souligné que la malhonnêteté du tricheur ne détruit pas le jeu.[58]

In manipulating the hostile and contested spaces of the house, Isabel subverts the rigour of the very system upon which the adults have become entirely dependent. Ultimately, Isabel's' inclination towards play and spatial manipulation, alluded to throughout the story in numerous references to her games, toys and experiments, not only gives her an edge over Rema's tormentor, el Nene, but also offers an alternative to, or a fatal subversion of, the interpretive and epistemological strangleholds of method, routine and pragmatism. Thus, Isabel's ludic and transgressive inclinations offset '[el] orden de la casa' and 'la no difícil disciplina' of its occupants in such a way that provides an implicit, textualized consideration of the ideal reader as active, engaged, non-conformist.[59] This notion of the non-conformist runs parallel to the Morellian concept - to be developed more fully in the imminent analysis of 'Instrucciones para John Howell' - of the individual who finds fulfillment and contentedness in 'lo nimio, en lo pueril'.[60]

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[57] Ibid., p. 165.
[58] Caillois, p. 38.
[59] Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 168.
[60] *Rayuela*, p. 441.

Moreover, Isabel's manipulation of the hostile spaces, played out in practice on her ant farm project, provides further indication of this proclivity for mischievous play. Just as Isabel attempts to play one ant hill off against another - 'mejor hormigas negras que coloradas: más grandes, más feroces. Soltar después un montón de coloradas, seguir la guerra detrás del vidrio, bien seguros' - so too does she manipulate the spatial frames of the Funes household in order to play the tiger off against el Nene.[61] The ludic implications of Isabel's performative subversion of the household rules are particularly glaring when compared to the relative inaction of the protagonists of 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada'. In her manipulation of the rules, Isabel represents a transgressive player of the house's rigorous, chess-like game, but a player nonetheless. In his *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga postulates an important distinction between the concepts of the cheat and the spoilsport:

> The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a 'spoil-sport'. The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle. It is curious to note how much more lenient the society is to the cheat than to the spoil-sport. This is because the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and the fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its *illusion* - a pregnant word which means literally 'in-play' (from *inlusio, illudere* or *inludere*). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play community.[62]

Isabel's murderous actions still acknowledge the magic circle or illusion of the game. As such, Isabel remains in a state of play. Even if her actions drastically alter the game at hand, her status as a player in the game remains uncontested. In this way,

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[61] Cortázar, 'Bestiario', p. 169.
[62] Huizinga, p. 11.

Isabel's role in the story runs consonant to Richard E. Parent's postulations on the cheat. According to Parent, the act of cheating 'means ending the game as it had presumably been agreed upon by the players, and beginning another in which the rules have changed'.[63] Isabel's violation of the rules, and subsequent changing or ending of the game, is indicative of her role as the paradigm-shifting, black swan reader.

Conversely, the protagonists of 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada', in their rejection of, or ignorance towards, the terms of play, find themselves cast out of the play space that their respective living spaces come to represent. They are displaced from their respective play spaces as a direct result of their unwillingness to play the game, as evinced in their respective interpretive and exploratory inertias. They both deny, and in turn are denied, the possibility of meaningful experience with the play space. In Cortázar, textually-embedded instances of failure and displacement are tantamount to the author's conscious elaboration of an insufficient or unsatisfactory reading strategy employed by an equally insufficient or unsatisfactory reader construct. In this sense, the narrative strategy in place within 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada' is reminiscent of Stanley Fish's account of the process of progressive decertainizing as it appears in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> Milton's strategy in the poem is to make the reader self-conscious about his own performance, to force him to doubt the correctness of his responses, and to bring him to the realization that his inability to read the poem with any confidence in his own perception is its focus.[64]

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[63] Richard E. Parent, 'Interpretation, Navigation, Enactment: Fragmented Narratives and the Play of Reading' in *The Hand of the Interpreter: Essays on Meaning After Theory*, ed. by G. F. Mitrano and Eric Jarosinski (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 173-205 (p. 182).
[64] Fish, p. 21.

According to Fish, the consequence of this process of decertainizing is the transformation of the unit of meaning (the line, sentence, paragraph, story) from an object or a 'thing-in-itself' to an *event*, 'something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader'.[65] As we have seen in the case of 'Bestiario', not only is this participatory event ludic in nature, it also serves to suggest that certain characters in Cortázar's short stories, in their conscious manipulation of their spatial environment, come to represent particularly able players in such games. As we have seen, the relative performative and agential capabilities of such characters offer an implicit, textually-embedded consideration of the idealized reader construct. Of equal interest, then, are those characters that make such performative and agential capabilities relative: The disengaged and reticent reader-inhabitants of 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada'.

In 'Carta a una señorita en París', there is a perceptible reticence on behalf of the protagonist to engage or interact with the intricacies of the apartment in which he finds himself: 'ah, querida Andrée, qué difícil oponerse, aun aceptándolo con entera sumisión del propio ser, al orden minucioso que una mujer instaura en su liviana residencia. Cuán culpable tomar una tacita de metal y ponerla al otro extremo de la mesa'.[66] Cortázar's treatment of the protagonist's reluctance to engage with the lived space of the apartment runs parallel to the author's censure of the complicit reading paradigms of the passive reader or 'lector-hembra'.[67] Of interest here are the

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[65] Ibid., p. 25.
[66] Cortázar, 'Carta', p. 112.
[67] To be noted here is Cortázar's use of the term 'lector hembra' to describe the passive reader. Quite beyond the purview of this chapter, Cortázar's use of the heavily gendered term has been the source of considerable controversy over the years. For more information, see Philip Swanson, *Latin American Fiction: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) and Jean Franco, *Critical Passions: Selected Essays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). While Swanson suggests that the term should be considered in a 'pre-feminist sense' (p. 63), Franco laments the fact that, although Cortázar may regret the term, she doubts that 'his perceptions of gender differences underwent any radical changes' (p.

protagonist's unwavering acceptance of the fantastic nature of his situation - 'de cuando en cuando me ocurre vomitar un conejito. No es razón para no vivir en cualquier casa' - and the reader's concomitant acceptance of such absurd scenarios.[68] On the interpretive inertia of the passive reader, Daniel R. Reedy suggests that:

> Cortázar has adroitly accustomed his reader to accept rather bizarre happenings with incidents such as the man who vomits rabbits in 'Carta a una señorita en París,' the invisible tiger in 'Bestiario,' the unseen invaders who take possession of the house in 'Casa tomada,' and the strange beings who populate 'Cefalea.'[69]

Presently, I argue that acceptance is tantamount to disengagement. This disengagement is made explicit in 'Carta a una señorita en París', wherein the house, like the narrative space, is left relatively unexplored: 'Y yo no puedo acercar los dedos a un libro, ceñir apenas el cono de luz de una lámpara, destapar la caja de música, sin que un sentimiento de ultraje y desafío me pase por los ojos como un bando de gorriones'.[70] The protagonist, like the passive reader, is bound by the customs he so readily hides behind. Custom, complicity and routine are seen, momentarily at least, to predominate over exploration, engagement and play: 'las costumbres, Andrée, son formas concretas del ritmo, son la cuota del ritmo que nos ayuda a vivir. No era tan terrible vomitar conejitos una vez que se había entrado en el ciclo invariable, en el método'.[71]

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422). On the other hand, in her *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), Debra Castillo does not argue against the inherent sexism of the term, but shows instead that this term is actually applicable to superficial readers of both sexes. The analytical currency of the passive reader or 'lector hembra' will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

[68] Cortázar, 'Carta', p. 113.

[69] Daniel R. Reedy, 'The Symbolic Reality of Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo"', *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, 36, 4 (1971), 224 - 237 (p. 224-5).

[70] Cortázar, 'Carta', p. 112.

[71] Ibid., p. 114.

While many critics consider the rabbits to be the physical manifestation, or literary metaphor, of a latent psychosis or obsessive compulsive disorder, this chapter argues that the main import of the rabbits lies in their destabilization of the concepts of order, method and mental/interpretive inertia. Put succinctly, the rabbits render the notions of method and routine ineffective. To embrace the existence of the rabbits, then, is to embrace the chaos and kineticism inherent to Cortázar's literary game. Moreover, the rabbits of 'Carta a una señorita en París' are not only detrimental to the concepts of order, method and routine, they actively corrode, and thus problematize, the very structural integrity of the narrative space: 'Hago lo que puedo para que no destrocen sus cosas. Han roído un poco los libros del anaquel más bajo, usted los encontrará disimulados para que Sara no se dé cuenta'.[72] In very literal terms, the rabbits eat away at the apartment's intricate features.

If we see the apartment as a spatially-inflected metaphor of the text itself, then the destructive rabbits effectively foreground the kinetic and ever-changing nature of the narrative space. The protagonist's unwillingness or inability to embrace the dynamism that the house under siege comes to represent ultimately leads to his fatal displacement, an act of suicide: 'No creo que les sea difícil juntar once conejitos salpicados sobre los adoquines, tal vez ni se fijen en ellos, atareados con el otro cuerpo que conviene llevarse pronto, antes de que pasen los primeros colegiales'.[73] There is a thematic corollary to be drawn here between the protagonist and the reader construct. That is, the protagonist's failure to accept the sudden shifts and changes of which the rabbits are symbolic - 'en cuanto a mí, del diez al once hay como un hueco insuperable' - is evocative of the reader's reliance upon outdated or ineffective

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[72] Ibid., p. 116.
[73] Ibid., p. 118.

reading and interpretive paradigms. The death or displacement of the protagonist suggests that new methods of interpretation, spatial or otherwise, are needed if the reader is to remain in play within the narrative space.

In 'Casa tomada' we are given a similar sense of the currency of the 'orden cerrado' found in 'Carta a una señorita en París': 'Entramos en los cuarenta años con la inexpresada idea de que el nuestro, simple y silencioso matrimonio de hermanos, *era necesaria clausura* de la genealogía asentada por nuestros bisabuelos en nuestra casa'.[74] Not unlike 'Carta a una señorita en París', structure, method and routine represent passive failsafes that eventually come under attack by the oppressive, invisible and potentially imaginary forces that gradually invade the house: 'Nos habituamos Irene y yo a persistir solos en [la casa]', 'hacíamos la limpieza por la mañana, levantándonos a las siete, y a eso de las once yo le dejaba a Irene las últimas habitaciones por repasar y me iba a la cocina'.[75] These concepts of enclosed order ('necesaria clausura') and isolation ('persistir solos') are paramount. Any upset that the mysterious force comes to represent is merely quarantined. As a result, there is no sense of engagement with the house's inherent kineticism, there is merely a failed attempt at containment and self-preservation: 'Tuve que cerrar la puerta del pasillo. Han tomado parte del fondo', 'tendremos que vivir en este lado'.[76] Here, we have the same implicit suggestion of Cortazar's damning censure of a shared, passive complicity or disengagement: 'Estábamos bien, y poco a poco empezábamos a no pensar. Se puede vivir sin pensar'.[77] Indeed, the invasive forces co-opt the siblings' compulsive need to stay in one particular section of the house. Ultimately, the

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[74] Cortázar, 'Casa tomada', p. 107.
[75] Ibid., p. 107.
[76] Ibid., p. 109.
[77] Ibid., p. 110.

protagonists' failure to engage with the force sees them displaced from the lived space entirely:

> Rodeé con mi brazo la cintura de Irene (yo creo que ella estaba llorando) y salimos así a la calle. Antes de alejarnos tuve lástima, cerré bien la puerta de entrada y tiré la llave a la alcantarilla. No fuese que a algún pobre diablo se le ocurriera robar y se metiera en la casa, a esa hora y con la casa tomada.[78]

Thus, the failures and victories of the protagonist-inhabitants become implicit, textualized interrogations of both good and bad reader constructs and their respective reading paradigms. Bachelard's assertion that we can 'read a house' or 'read a room' since 'both room and house are psychological diagrams' further reinforces the link between reading, performance and exploration.[79] What we see in 'Carta a una señorita en París' and 'Casa tomada', then, is a failure, or unwillingness, to effectively read such spaces. This, in turn, is tantamount to a refusal to play the game; a spoilsport mentality that sees the characters ejected from the play space. The protagonist of 'Bestiario', on the other hand, is able to use the hostile element of the lived space, the neo-fantastical tiger, to her advantage. She is able to play one hostile force (that of the tiger) off against another (el Nene). Unlike her fellow inhabitants, Isabel reveals herself to be capable of 'reading', and subsequently reconfiguring, the house. Her reading and manipulation of the contested spaces of the house are not only instrumental to the gruesome climax of the story, they also serve as effective thematizations of the ludically-inflected, idealized reader-player construct. In 'Bestiario', the displacement (through death or injury) of el Nene at the hands of the tiger - as a direct result of active spatial manipulation - helps to further illustrate the nature of the narrative space in Cortázar. The narrative space is both hostile and

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[78] Ibid., p. 111
[79] Bachelard, p. 59.

contested, but open to ludic manipulation and engagement at the hands of the lusory reader-player. As such, the narrative space takes on a ludic edge, as the game-like search for tactical or interpretive advantages offsets an implicit, textually embedded disdain for passivity and inertia.

Indeed, the house, as it appears in 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' comes to represent a monstrous, inhabited space that favours (if not demands) an exploration of, and active engagement with, its substructures. As Herman suggests, 'a house is an object in a larger (superordinate, framing) environment, but for its inhabitants it is part of their living space'.[80] While this idea of the house and, by implication the text, as a kinetic site of engagement runs concomitant to Bachelard's assertions that 'a house that has been experienced is not an inert box' and that 'inhabited space transcends geometrical space', we have seen how anything less than an active engagement with this kineticism - that is, a passive acceptance of the text or an agential or interpretive inertia - is both ideologically and thematically anathema to the dynamic, ludic conceptualization of the reading process as it is thematized in Cortázar's short fiction.[81] The hostile spaces of Cortázar's monstrous houses openly condemn the complicitous or passive attitudes of their inhabitants or visitors in such a way that parallels the author's own, personal scorn for the acquiescence inherent to the passive reader construct.

The notion of the monstrous house merits a brief return to Borges' *Book of Imaginary Beings*, in which the author, we recall, comments on the symbolic compatibility of the

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[80] Herman, Jahn and Ryan, p. 553.
[81] Bachelard, p. vii.

house (the labyrinth) and the hostile force (the Minotaur). Specifically, Borges believes that 'la imagen del laberinto conviene a la imagen del Minotauro. Queda bien que en el centro de una casa monstruosa haya un habitante monstruoso'.[82] Borges' notion of the house as a labyrinthine space designed for disorientation and inhabited by a monstrous presence finds a significant thematic corollary in the three houses of Cortázar's *Bestiario.* The diminutive but destructive rabbits of 'Carta a una señorita en París', the invisible, invasive presence of 'Casa tomada' and the roaming tiger of 'Bestiario' all represent, to some degree, monstrous or hostile forces that actively problematize the spatial frames of their respective narratives. Such forces posit the house and by implication, the narrative space, as a contested, dynamic site of active engagement. As such, all three short stories represent an interrogation of the reader-author-text dynamic as it exists in Cortázar as an agonistic, antagonistic and even 'cruel' or abusive relationship made possible through the spatial constructions of the texts themselves.[83] It is through the textualized elaboration of such monstrous spaces that Cortázar is not only able to outline the boundaries and rules of his literary games, but is also able to outline their ideal players. Indeed, the narrative play space, as represented in these three texts as monstrous and hostile *lived spaces,* becomes the ideal site for the elaboration, both implicit and explicit, of Cortazarian concept of the ideal reader as player.

As we have now seen, it is a failure to engage with the text's structures, topological or otherwise, that generates the main thematic thrust of many of Cortázar's fictions. To read is not, in itself, to breach the ontological thresholds of the narrative space entirely.

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[82] Borges, *El Aleph*, p. 140.
[83] Sara Castro-Klarén, 'Ontological Fabulation: Toward Cortázar's Theory of Literature' in *The Final Island: The Fiction of Julio Cortázar*, ed. by Jaime Alazraki and Ivar Ivask (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 140-50 (p. 140).

Instead, one must actively engage with such a space, one must be prepared to play. Consequently, Cortázar's texts are replete with fatal failures to play the games outlined, explicitly or otherwise, in his fictions. This focus on the failure to connect resonates with Sara Castro-Klarén's observations on Cortázar's attempts to make reading 'an inescapable ontological act'. Specifically, Castro-Klarén observes that:

> [Cortázar] wants his texts to awaken the need for reverie in the reader. He writes so as to probe into the passivity of the reader's consciousness in order to bring about in him the same sense of sudden strangeness (*extrañamiento*) of incompleteness (*falencia*) that moves him to write, that is, to seek his being in the fabulation of the Other.[84]

Owing to her focus on Cortázar's thematization of displacement from the narrative space, Nataly Tcherepashenets' theories on place and displacement in Cortázar effectively serve to round off the current discussion on the ontological divergences and convergences of Bachelardian phenomenological poetics and the Cortazarian short story. In her *Place and Displacement in the Narrative Worlds of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar*, Tcherepashenets makes a convincing and perspicacious link between Bachelard's phenomenological poetics of space and Cortázar's problematization of the subject/space dynamic, whereby subjectivity and spatiality come to represent 'interrelated and unfixed realms'.[85] While Tcherepashenets makes no significant observation on the importance of the house/home motif *per se* - least of all with regards to the specific stories presently under analysis - the critic's postulations on the notion of displacement and divided identity, themselves informed by Freudian psychoanalysis and Bachelardian phenomenology, offer invaluable insight into the

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[84] Castro-Klarén, pp. 147-48.
[85] Nataly Tcherepashenets, *Place and Displacement in the Narrative Worlds of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 126.

literary politics at work in much of Cortázar's short fiction. Specifically, Tcherepashenets observes:

> The implicit dialogue between Cortázar's stories and Bachelard's phenomenology allows one to suggest that texts by the Argentine author both use and deviate from conceptions proposed by the French philosopher and his followers. Though symbolic functions of the door and the bridge reappear in Cortázar's stories, his texts subvert any idea of fixed subjectivity and therefore any stable relationship between a place and an individual.[86]

With a particular focus on the '*topos* of divided identity' in 'La puerta condenada' (*Final del juego*, 1956), Tcherepashenets addresses the ways in which displacement comes to represent a divisive element in the purported harmony between subject and space: 'The presence of the locked door and its location evokes the protagonist's imagination, which exercises displacement, illustrates the lack of self-integrity and points to an epistemological gap in knowledge about the human self'.[87] Likewise, Tcherepashenets' claims that, in Cortázar's 'Lejana', 'the literal, metaphorical and metapoetical functions' of the bridge suggest a parallel between place, self and writing, all of which 'possess a spatial dimension interrelated with a subjective one'.[88]

These notions of the divided self, the unstable relationship between place and individual and the resulting displacement that often ensues all resonate profoundly with the ideas hitherto put forward in this chapter. That is, Tcherepashenets' analyses of the unstable categories of self and space run parallel to my own observations on both the narrative space as a kinetic and potentially hostile play space and on the reader as an active, reconfiguratory and nonconformist player. Thus, the concept of

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[86] Tcherepashenets, p. 126.
[87] Ibid., p. 117.
[88] Ibid., p. 114.

displacement helps to further elaborate on the hostile nature of the narrative space. With particular reference to Cortázar's house stories, the process of displacement is often a consequence of a failure, on behalf of the houses' respective inhabitants, to either act or adapt. So far, this chapter has argued that action and adaptation suggest engagement with the space itself. What we have seen in all three stories, therefore, is a problematization of this failure to engage. This failure, and the displacement that ensues, could be said to represent a thematization of the reader/author/text dynamic, whereby a failure to act (accordingly) sees the reader-player ejected from the play space of the narrative. It is with these notions of action, reaction and displacement in mind that we turn our attention to the double-edged nature of reader agency in 'Instrucciones para John Howell'.

2.2 The Player and the Prisoner - 'Instrucciones para John Howell'

In the present analysis of 'Instrucciones para John Howell' (*Todos los fuegos el fuego*, 1966), we discuss the ways in which Rice, the nonconformist reader-player or 'figura morelliana', is both empowered and imprisoned by the often illusory sense of interpretive, creative and agential freedom evoked in the Cortazarian game.[89] Such a focus will allow for a brief comparison between the ludically-charged narrative spaces of Borges and Cortázar which, in turn, will allow us to highlight an adversarial drift from the agonistic games of the Borgesian narrative to the hostile, antagonistic games that populate Cortázar's short fictions. The concepts of game and play represent a

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[89] Santiago Juan-Navarro, 'El lector se rebela: "Instrucciones para John Howell" de Julio Cortázar o la estética de la subversión', *Journal of the Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference*, 1 (1991), 149–58 (p. 149).

recurring critical and thematic concern in Cortázar. On the nature of the play element

in the author's opus, Aida Gambetta observes:

> El juego acompaña toda la literatura escrita por Julio Cortázar, desde sus primeros relatos, como un hilo luminoso y definitorio que toca mágicamente los elementos de una realidad privilegiada: niños, animales y espacios consagrados por la fantasía y la exorbitancia.[90]

Likewise, with particular reference to the complex erotics of Cortázar's *Rayuela*,

Michael Hardin observes that 'one of the two points upon which [critics] generally

agree is that the novel is a game'.[91] Accordingly, Hardin underlines a perceptible and

ludically-inflected critical interest in Cortázar's novel in his observation that 'critics

differ greatly on how to win, if winning is even possible; on what constitutes victory or

the end of the game; and on why the other strategies result in failure'.[92] In his analysis

of the potential means of victory over the author construct in *Rayuela*, Hardin suggests

that the reading strategies of the 'lector hembra' - the passive or 'female' reader to be

more fully explicated over the course this section - represent 'a potential winning move'

in Cortázar's game:

> If one takes the novel seriously *as a game* [...] then the female-reading is the only one which provides a possible winning move; it allows the actual reader to exit, which in this novel constitutes victory at the simplest level of playing. The

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[90] Aida Gambetta, 'Julio Cortázar, *homo ludens*' *Relaciones*, 13, 52, (1992), 67-88 (p. 73).
For more on the early theorizations surrounding the ludic in Cortázar, see Ana María Barrenechea, 'La estructura de *Rayuela* de Julio Cortázar' in *Textos hispanoamericanos: De Sarmiento a Sarduy* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1978), pp. 195-220 and Enrique Giordano, 'Algunas aproximaciones a *Rayuela* de Julio Cortázar, a través de la dinámica del juego' in *Homenaje a Julio Cortázar* ed. by Halmy F. Giacoman (Madrid: Anaya, 1972), pp. 95-129.
[91] Michael Hardin, 'Seducing the Male-Reader: Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* and the Pleasure of Losing', *The International Fiction Review*, 25, 1&2 (1998)
 <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7595/8652> [accessed 30.06.2016]. For more on the 'lector-hembra' as potential winning strategy in Cortázar's literary games, see Hardin's earlier article, 'Non-Cooperative Game Theory and Female-Readers: How to Win the Game of *Hopscotch*,' *Hispanófila* 37.3 (1994): 57-72.
[92] Ibid.

extent to which gaming plays a part in *Hopscotch* [Rayuela] suggests an intense relationship between narrator and constructed reader.[93]

More recently, Richard E. Parent focuses on the potentially *agonistic* bent of the *Rayuela*, suggesting that 'puzzling out the winning strategy for beating Cortázar at his own game' represents 'a recurring thread' in critical approaches to the novel.[94] Of particular interest in Parent's analysis of *agon* is the critic's evocation of the cheat. We have already outlined the relevance of the cheat in our analysis of 'Bestiario', wherein Isabel, as cheat, comes to represent a textually-embedded, idealized reader concept. On the subject of the cheat, Parent observes that:

> If we are to approach the novel as *agon*, then we must also consider the possibility of cheating, for all games have rules with can be bent or broken by unscrupulous players. Strictly speaking, cheating ends the game, as games are predicated upon and bound by their constitutive rules. Violating the rules means ending the game as it had presumably been agreed upon by the players, and beginning another in which the rules have changed.[95]

Thus, *Rayuela*, in its consideration of the text's function as a bridge between author and reader, together with its elaboration of the nonconformist figure, provides valuable theoretical insight into not only the player as cheat, but also into the juxtaposing reader constructs of the 'lector cómplice' and the 'lector pasivo' or 'lector hembra'. While the passive, indifferent reader represents '[el] tipo que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falsos problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo'[96], the accomplice reader's active engagement with the text reveals what Cortázar calls '[una]

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Parent, p. 182.
[95] Ibid., p. 182.
[96] *Rayuela*, p. 574.

alianza misteriosa y compleja' with the author. [97]

This call for, and interrogation of, heightened reader engagement finds a further thematic outlet in 'Instrucciones para John Howell'.[98] Building on the earlier concerns of both *Rayuela* and *Bestiario*, 'Instrucciones para John Howell' further problematizes the ontological standing of both the 'lector pasivo' and the 'lector cómplice' in relation to the text, through the thematization of reader agency and ludic engagement. This is evidenced in the story's focus on the oscillating role of the protagonist as both the passive observer of the John Howell stage drama and the active, subversive, agent within it:

> Usted es Howell, el marido de Eva. Ya ha visto que Eva engaña a Howell con Michael, y que probablemente Howell se ha dado cuenta aunque prefiere callar por razones que no están todavía claras. No se mueva, por favor, es simplemente una peluca.[99]

The protagonist's acts of slipping in and out of the drama's narrative space reveal instances of metaleptic transgression that will be further developed in the analysis of 'Las babas del diablo'. In the case of the story presently under analysis, Santiago Juan-Navarro suggests that the presence of such slippages 'provoca una nueva transgresión, en este caso, la de los marcos estructurales que separan la realidad de la ficción'.[100] As such, the story not only provides a strong illustration of Cortázar's personal conceptualization of the good reader as an active agent within the narrative,

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[97] Julio Cortázar, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' in *Obra crítica/ 2* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994), pp. 365-385 (p. 378) (hereafter cited as *Obra 2*).

[98] To be noted here is the choice to approach the stage drama, as it appears in this story, as a further extension of the print text. It is argued here that the stage drama can still be discussed in terms of its narrative space. In his essay 'El conformista y el rebelde', reprinted in *Obra crítica/ 1* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994), pp. 44-8, Cortázar himself suggests that 'incluso el teatro resulta un modo de libro oral' (p. 45).

[99] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', p. 571.

[100] Juan-Navarro, p. 154.

it also presents the acts of reader participation and interpretation as performative, reconfiguratory and transgressive processes capable of reducing the ontological distance between text and reader. It does so, however, with a distinctly antagonistic bent that distinguishes it not only from the agonistic nature of play in *Rayuela* (according to Parent), but also from the agonistic games discussed in Chapter I. To elucidate, the protagonist is initially coerced into a submissive participation in the drama's narrative following the hostile demands of his mysterious interlocutors: 'no era exactamente una amenaza, aunque los tres hombres lo rodeaban de una manera que exigía la obediencia o la lucha abierta'.[101] Torn between 'obediencia' (a passive reading of the text) and 'lucha abierta' (outright rejection of the text), the protagonist compromises with a subversive stance *within* the narrative space:

> Sin vacilar Rice siguió marchando contra la corriente, violando poco a poco las instrucciones en una esgrima feroz y absurda contra actores habilísimos que se esforzaban por hacerlo volver a su papel.[102]

In this sense, Rice shares Isabel's status as the Morellian nonconformist. In Morelli's own terms, the attitude of the nonconformist 'se traduce por su rechazo de todo lo que huele a idea recibida, a tradición, a estructura gregaria basada en el miedo y en las ventajas falsamente recíprocas'.[103] Despite the nonconformist's awareness of being trapped within the 'superestructura social' - in this case, that of the objective text - Morelli highlights the fact that this awareness is, above all, active and subversive: '[el inconformista] tiene medio cuerpo metido en el molde y lo sabe, pero ese saber es activo y no la resignación del que marca el paso'.[104] While the thematic significance

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[101] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', p. 571.
[102] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', p. 575.
[103] *Rayuela*, p. 443.
[104] Ibid.

of the nonconformist figures of Isabel and Rice are more or less consonant, Rice, in his dual status as 'espectador-personaje' more immediately problematizes the line between fiction and reality and thus, offers a more explicit manifestation of the antagonistic literary politics at work in Cortázar.[105]

That is, Rice's refusal to play the game by his captors' rules sees him ejected from the narrative space (and the theatre itself). As a result of this displacement, Rice is only able to watch the rest of the John Howell drama unfold 'desde la seguridad de la platea', lost in the same 'agradable indiferencia' as his fellow spectators: 'ya no se sabe con estos autores jóvenes, [...] todo es símbolo, supongo'.[106] In short, the protagonist finds himself in an open struggle with the John Howell narrative, as the line between fiction and reality, between observer and agent, becomes increasingly vague. As such, the 'esgrima feroz y absurda' that characterizes Rice's initial, transgressive impulses to act 'contra la corriente' is ultimately offset by the 'seguridad' and 'indiferencia' of the passive, observational stance he is later forced to adopt following his displacement from the play space of the theatre stage. As such, while Juan-Navarro suggests that 'Instrucciones para John Howell' represents 'una metáfora del acto de la recepción literaria' wherein 'la audiencia pasa de ser un mero receptáculo pasivo a convertirse en agente "copartícipe/copadeciente" en la actualización del objeto estético', I suggest that this status as 'agente "copartícipe/copadeciente"' is somewhat overstated.[107] After all, in becomming an active agent in the drama, Rice puts himself at antagonistic odds, or 'lucha abierta' with the author.

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[105] Juan-Navarro, p. 149.
[106] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', p. 577.
[107] Juan-Navarro, p. 149.

Thus, through an apparent invitation for resistive readings of its own narrative substructures, 'Instrucciones para John Howell' hints at the reconfiguratory potential of the reader's ludic engagement with the text. As a result, Rice represents, initially at least, Cortázar's accomplice reader, his nonconformist; that reader capable of active engagement with, and playful subversion of, the narrative space. However, his capacity for playful subversion, evinced in his mischievous transgressions upon the boundaries of the drama, is short-lived. Ultimately, Rice is denied the chance to see things through 'hasta el final', and it is this rescission of the protagonist's freedom to 'comprometerse en el drama' – to return to Morellian terms – that ultimately prevents him from altering the stage drama's fatal climax: '*Quédate conmigo hasta el final*, le había suplicado Eva, pero lo habían echado del teatro, lo habían apartado de eso que tenía que suceder'.[108] 'Instrucciones para John Howell', then, comes to represent something of a narrative trap in which the reader is encouraged to subvert the text or otherwise explore his or her own narrative trajectories and possibilities, but is either denied the means to do so, or is cut down in the act.

The supposed reconfiguratory potential of 'Instrucciones para John Howell' not only problematizes the concept of reader agency, but also underlines a central tension between the concepts of the self and the text. In Cortázar, the text is both the playground and the prison, and the reader - by implication - is both the playmate and the prisoner. As evinced on the John Howell drama, the Cortazarian narrative seemingly invites playful co-production of the narrative, all the while attempting to ensnare the reader-player in the same strange loops and tangled hierarchies seen in

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[108] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', pp. 577-78.

the Borgesian metaleptic inversions discussed in Chapter I.

This notion of the reader as potential co-producer of the text inevitably evokes certain Barthesian parallels.[109] That is, the double-edged nature of Cortázar's short fiction is simultaneously representative of both the *readerly* and *writerly* text. The *writerly* text is characterized by the reader's active role in the production of meaning and, as such, reinforces the reader's ontological proximity to the text. In Barthes's own terms, 'the writerly text is *ourselves writing*'.[110] Thus, for the accomplice reader, the Cortazarian narrative is representative of the *writerly* text: an invitation for ludic engagement with – and by implication, a level of control over – the production of the narrative. For the passive reader, however, the narrative is *readerly* in nature, it is a literary product (and not a production) containing a fixed, extractable meaning. The relationship between this passive reader and the text is characterized, above all, by 'the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader'.[111] Consequently, the passive reader is 'plunged into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive, he is, in short, *serious*'.[112] There are significant parallels to be drawn between Barthes' idle reader and Cortázar's passive reader. For both, ludic engagement with the text is impossible, and their ontological distance or 'pitiless divorce' from the text is such that they are left 'with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text'.[113] 'Instrucciones para John Howell', then, perfectly encapsulates this dualism of both the

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[109] The origins of this line of enquiry can be found in my forthcoming article 'The Good, the Bad and the Author: Idealized Reader Constructs in the Short Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Ana María Shua', *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* advanced access June 24, 2016.
[110] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5.
[111] Ibid, p. 4.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

self and the text, as the narrative's unstable nature sees Rice's role oscillate between that of reconfiguratory agent (engaged producer of the text/drama) and intransitive, idle bystander (divorced from the text and trapped by his own passive idleness).

Ultimately, Barthes's concept of the reader as producer of the text affords a greater understanding of the good reader as he or she appears in both Borges and Cortázar. In Borges' 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', the role of the reader as producer is made clear in narrator-Borges' function as the 'unwitting messenger' of Tlönic ideals, and thus as conduit for the transgressive processes of the Tlönic invasion.[114] That is, this fictionally real Borges' interpretation of (and thus, engagement with) the Tlönic encyclopaedia produces the fantastic convergence of two conflicting ontological worlds, Tlön and Earth: 'Entonces desaparecerán del planeta el inglés y el francés y el mero español. El mundo será Tlön'.[115] The consequence of these convergences lies in their suggestion that the thresholds that separate the ontological territories of the author, the text and the reader are not absolute. Indeed, they are augmented, permeable and open to manipulation.[116] In Cortázar, this same concern is echoed in the author's

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[114] Sturrock, p. 137.
[115] Borges, *Ficciones*, p.40.
[116] On the subject of augmented reality, Mark Graham, Matthew Zook and Andrew Boulton observe:

> The recent rapid growth in both virtual representations of place and the expanding availability of technologies to access those representations calls upon scholars to examine the ways in which virtual representations of place, in conjunction with myriad other layerings and discourses, are implicated in the production and experiences of places as augmented realities. We use the term *augmented reality* in reference to the indeterminate, unstable, context dependent and multiple realities brought into being through the subjective coming-togethers in time and space of material and virtual experience [...]. In other words: augmented reality is the material/virtual nexus mediated through technology, information and code, and enacted in specific and individualised space/time configurations.

'Augmented Reality in Urban Places: Contested Content and the Duplicity of Code', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38, 3 (2013), 464 - 479 (pp. 464-65) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00539.x/full> [accessed 06.09.2016]. This will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

suggestion that the reader, in his or her lusory engagement with the text's seemingly reconfiguratory potential, has entered into a game with the author that s/he cannot possibly win. In the case of 'Instrucciones para John Howell', we are told that Rice is not the first to fail in his attempts to alter the outcome of the John Howell stage drama: 'yo también traté de salvarla... pero no me dejaron seguir. [...] Siempre ocurre lo mismo', 'es típico de los aficionados, creen que pueden hacerlo mejor que los otros, y al final no sirve de nada'.[117] Reading, interpretation and co-production of the narrative are propelled by a distictly ludic force in Cortázar, as Mario Vargas Llosa suggests in his introduction to *Cuentos completos*: 'en los libros de Cortázar juega el autor, juega el narrador, juegan las personajes y juega el lector'.[118] Yet, as we have seen so far the stakes in these Cortazarian games are often fatally high; the players of such games, protagonists and readers alike, are at the mercy of 'las endiabladas trampas que lo acechan a la vuelta de la página menos pensada'.[119]

In Chapter I, we discussed the agonistic nature of the literary games that populate Borges' *Ficciones*. We spoke of how such a rubric not only implies a deep mutual respect and admiration between players of the game, but also of how the agonistic model of play suggests a certain rigour or fairness. Indeed, Chapter I argued that to see Borges' literary games as agonistic as opposed to antagonistic was to reinforce the ludic, chess-like, nature of the literary politics at work in the Borgesian narrative. The chess analogy proved particularly fitting in light of its evocation of a reciprocal mode of participation. Indeed, the chapter argued that the game of chess effectively encapsulates the performative and exploratory roles of Borges' knowledge-agile

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[117] Cortázar, 'Instrucciones', p. 579.
[118] Cortázar, *Cuentos*, p. 16.
[119] Cortázar, *Cuentos*, p. 16.

reader, all the while serving as a reminder that Borges himself, as gamesmaster, always maintained the strategic upper hand.

In Cortázar, the ludic and sportsperson-like rigour inherent to the game of chess is replaced by the dynamic, free-form and highly combative nature of the boxing bout.[120] In his essay, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' Cortázar states that, in the conflict that breaks out between text and reader, 'la novela gana siempre por puntos, mientras que el cuento debe ganar por knock-out'.[121] Subsequently, he likens the short story writer to the prizefighter, observing that 'el buen cuentista es un boxeador muy astuto, y muchos de sus golpes iniciales pueden parecer poco eficaces cuando, en realidad, están minando ya las resistencias más sólidas del adversario'.[122] The currency of the boxing analogy, then, is twofold. Firstly, it implicitly posits the reader as the author's adversary. With its synthesis of intensity, impact and deception, the Cortazarian short story strikes up a dynamic relationship between author and reader not unlike the adversity of two prize-fighters in the ring. Secondly, and by logical implication, it suggests that the arena in which author and reader meet, the narrative space, is synonymous in form and function with the boxing ring. That is, the contested nature of the boxing ring becomes a conceptual analogue of the narrative space, thereby emphasising the inherent hostility and potential violence that such a space comes to represent. In Cortázar then, the narrative space of the text often comes to represent the boxing ring, a space of contact wherein the fierce conflict between author and

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[120] The significance of the boxing match to the consideration of Cortázar's *oeuvre* is such that Peter Standish, in his *Understanding Julio Cortázar* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) opts to structure his monograph around the boxing bout. Standish explains, 'one of Cortázar's most puzzling passions was for boxing; he wrote about boxing, set some stories in boxing environments, and title one of his most important books *Último round* (The final round). That passion, combined with another, his love of games with words, explains why I have also played with boxing terminology' (prelude, p. xii).
[121] *Obra/ 2*, p. 372.
[122] Ibid.

reader, rather than their measured cooperation or mutual admiration (as in Borges), defines the game at hand.

The 'endiabladas trampas' of which Vargas Llosa speaks suggest, however, that the narrative space, unlike the boxing ring, is far from a neutral arena. Its hostile and kinetic nature is often such that the reader is coerced into a particular interpretive stance which is then exploited by the author. I have outlined just such a process of coercion and exploitation in 'Instrucciones para John Howell'. In this sense, the Borgesian game's concern for the fine line between fairness and misdirection is replaced by a proclivity for outright, and often violent, disorientation, and the reader is expected to retain a certain interpretive agility if he or she is to avoid Cortázar's *rope-a-dope* strategies.[123] The narrative space, then, is not only hostile in Cortázar, it is actively weaponized. In 'Bestiario' and 'Instrucciones para John Howell', we have seen how the narrative space confounds the reader through both the illusion of agency and an apparent invitation to manipulate or reconfigure the structures of the narrative space. Such playful (though potentially dangerous) authorial manipulations serve to foreground the importance and desirability of an active, engaged reader, without compromising the intellectual and creative authority, or indeed the very *presence*, of the author figure.

Naturally, the concept of authorial presence evokes certain parallels with the Barthesian-Foucauldian impulse to displace or destroy the author as a means of empowering the reader and defending the autonomy of the text. Indeed, Barthes'

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[123] I use the term *rope-a-dope* in reference to the boxing stratagem of confusing one's opponent by goading them into adopting a particular (usually offensive) stance that results in them throwing tiring and ultimately ineffective punches.

suggestion that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'[124] is echoed in Foucault's assertion that the literary work 'now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author'. In Chapters III and IV, we will discuss the digital manifestations of this defence of the author's presence within the narrative space. Of present interest, however, are the ways in which binary opposition of absence and presence comes under fire in the ontologically and spatiotemporally unstable narrative space of 'Las babas del diablo'.

2.3 An Ontology of Mutual Performance - 'Las babas del diablo'

As we have discussed in Section 2.1, behaviour and geometry are intrinsically linked in Cortázar. The rabbits of 'Carta a una señorita en París' attest to the protagonist's neurotic need to break free of the unfamiliar, closed order of the friend's apartment. The ancestral house of 'Casa tomada' provides refuge for the siblings and their 'simple y silencioso matrimonio de hermanos'.[125] The implicit, unspoken attempts to avoid the sinister advances of el Nene in 'Bestiario' are mirrored in the whole household's constant movement about the house in avoidance of the roaming tiger. In 'Instrucciones para John Howell', the performative edge of the theatre encourages Rice's overwrought and mischievous actions upon the stage.

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[124] See Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 148 and Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 117, respectively.
[125] Cortázar, 'Casa tomada', p. 107. A number of critics point to the possibility of an implicitly incestuous relationship between the siblings. Standish points to the possibility of just such an interpretation: 'When Irene's brother puts his arm around her waist, is he simply comforting her or symbolizing the "outing" of their (monstrous) feelings for one another?' (p. 23). Earlier still, Ilan Stavens' *Julio Cortázar: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996) observes that 'in "House Taken Over" and "Bestiary," incest is indeed a crucial issue'. Stavens continues: 'Brother and sister inhabit the place as a functional loving couple, convinced it is their duty to carry on the genealogical legacy of safeguarding the place' (p. 8).

This concern for the mental or psychological impact of spatial constructs is evocative of the concept of psychogeography. Guy Debord defines psychogeography as 'the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.[126] Celebrating the 'pleasing vagueness' of the term, Merlin Coverley further suggests that 'psychogeography is [...] the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place'.[127] Not unlike the acts of reading and interpretation - as we have previously defined them as a journey through, an exploration of, or even an attempt to reconfigure, a given narrative space - psychogeography concerns itself with the processes of exploration and navigation of a partially mental space. Coverley asserts that 'the successful navigation of [...] a city is dependent upon the composition of a mental map, which can be transposed upon its physical layout'.[128] The concept of psychogeography is useful, then, insofar as it concerns itself with 'the act of urban wandering, the spirit of political radicalism, allied to a playful sense of subversion and governed by an inquiry into the methods by which we can transform our relationship to the urban environment'.[129] The ideas of wandering, radicalism, playful subversion and the interrogation of the subject's relationship with a given space are immediately consonant with the acts of reading and interpretation as we have hitherto discussed them in Cortázar. Much like Coverley, who chooses to 'place psychogeography within a predominantly literary tradition', Vaughn Anderson considers the possible psychogeographical import of *Rayuela*.[130] Specifically, Anderson suggests that 'when *Rayuela's* Horacio Oliveira famously asks, "Encontraría la Maga?" Cortázar

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[126] Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography' in *Situationist International Anthology* ed. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), pp. 8-12 (p. 8).
[127] Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006), p. 10.
[128] Coverley, p. 15.
[129] Ibid., p. 14.
[130] Ibid.

immediately evokes the surrealist novels that also inspired Ivain and the psychogeographers.'[131] The concept of psychogeography is illuminating, then, insofar as it suggests a concern for topologically-inflected thought structures, mindscapes and/or imaginative and cognitively generated spaces.

What we have discussed over the course this chapter so far is, in effect, the psychogeographical import of the more intimate and domestic spatial settings of Cortázar's short fiction, as opposed to the sprawling and labyrinthine cityscapes of his novels. While *Rayuela* focuses on the ontological value of the urban spaces of Paris and Buenos Aires, Cortázar's short stories often centre on the more intimate topography of the domestic setting. As such, the psychogeographic elements of *Rayuela* find an ontological inwardness in the lived spaces of Cortázar's short fiction. Marcy Schwartz asserts that the cities of Paris and Buenos Aires, as they appear in *Rayuela*, provide 'the architectural framework' for Cortázar's 'ontological experimentation and revolutionary esthetics'.[132] Thus far, we have made a similar claim in relation to the domestic space of the home as it is manifest in 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Casa tomada' and 'Bestiario' as well as the inner, performative space of the theatre in 'Instrucciones para John Howell'.

Of particular concern here is the affective or emotional foci of the psychogeographical model. That is, the clear ontological and topographical concerns inherent to the model effectively compliment the present discussion of the subject's relationship to a given

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[131] Vaughn Anderson, 'Unfrozen Music: Disrupted Synaesthesia in Julio Cortázar's Paris', *Hispanic Journal*, 35, 1 (2013), 115-129 (p. 6).

[132] Marcy Schwartz, 'Cortázar Under Exposure: Photography and Fiction in the City' in *Latin American Literature and Mass Media,* ed. by Edmundo Paz-Soldán and Debra A. Castillo (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 117-138 (p. 118).

space, be it geographical, literary or psychological. Of present interest, then, is the fantastic distortion of both internal and external spaces in 'Las babas del diablo'. Specifically, the ways in which the story fantastically merges the intimate, inner space of the photographer-translator Roberto's apartment with the vaster cityscape of contemporary Paris, finds itself at odds with the protagonist-narrator's initial stress on their obvious separation. Indeed, from the outset of the story, the interior and exterior spatial frames of the narrative, by way of description, are considered to be entirely separate:

> Y ya que vamos a contarlo pongamos un poco de orden, bajemos por la escalera de esta casa hasta el domingo 7 de noviembre, justo un mes atrás. Uno baja cinco pisos y ya está en el domingo, con un sol insospechado para noviembre en París, con muchísimas ganas de andar por ahí, de ver cosas, de sacar fotos.[133]

We are informed that Roberto's story, if it can be told at all, must be told in two parts. The first part of the story takes place during Roberto's exploration of the Île Saint-Louis: 'Después seguí por el Quai de Bourbon hasta llegar a la punta de la isla, donde la íntima placita [...] me gusta y me regusta', 'de un salto me instalé en el parapeto y me dejé envolver y atar por el sol, dándole la cara, las orejas, las dos manos'.[134] The second part of the story takes place in Roberto's fifth-floor apartment: 'Lo que sigue ocurrió aquí, casi ahora mismo, en una habitación de un quinto piso'.[135] This emphasis on the juxtaposition between two distinct spatial frames, exterior and interior, serves to foreshadow the topologically, ontologically and indeed diegetically disruptive force that the fantastic element comes to represent later in the story. Thus, the distinctly psychogeographical focus of the story, as evinced in the story's implicit

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[133] Cortázar, 'Las babas', p. 215.
[134] Ibid., p. 216.
[135] Ibid., p. 221.

interrogation of the affective relationship between subject and space, helps us to observe how spatial and metaleptic transgressions ultimately destabilize the hierarchical and heterogeneous nature of the narrative's diegetic substructures. Indeed, as the spatial confines and ontological thresholds of Roberto's perceived reality become increasingly nebulous, so too does his situational certainty. Location and identity are problematized, as spatial markers, temporal boundaries and ontological thresholds become increasingly unclear:

> Nunca se sabrá cómo hay que contar esto, si en primera persona o en segunda, usando la tercera del plural o inventando continuamente formas que no servirán de nada. Si se pudiera decir: yo vieron subir la luna, o: nos me duele el fondo de los ojos, y sobre todo así: tú la mujer rubia eran las nubes que siguen corriendo delante de mis tus sus nuestros vuestros sus rostros. Qué diablos.[136]

Consequently, the protagonist's initial attempts to reconstruct and subsequently reconfigure the narrative (the event in the park) are marked, first and foremost, by an explicit ontological separation. That is, the ontological territory of the present-day apartment and that of the event photographed in Île Saint-Louis some days prior, are described in terms of their clear ontological, temporal and geographical separation:

> La foto había sido tomada, el tiempo había corrido; estábamos tan lejos unos de otros, la corrupción seguramente consumada, las lágrimas vertidas, y el resto conjetura y tristeza. De pronto el orden se invertía, ellos estaban vivos, moviéndose, decidían y eran decididos, iban a su futuro; y yo desde este lado, prisionero de otro tiempo, de una habitación en un quinto piso, de no saber quiénes eran esa mujer, y ese hombre y ese niño, de ser nada más que la lente de mi cámara, algo rígido, incapaz de intervención.[137]

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[136] Cortázar, 'Las babas', p. 214.
[137] Ibid., p. 223.

However, further attempts to interpret the scene distort the spatial markers that separate not only the interior and exterior spatial frames of the narrative, but also disturb the diegetic levels of the narrative itself. Such transgressions are tantamount to the transformation of the narrative space, as the diegetic level of the protagonist's story and that of the event captured in the photograph become fantastically entwined:

> Por segunda vez se les iba, por segunda vez yo lo ayudaba a escaparse, lo devolvía a su paraíso precario. Jadeando me quedé frente a ellos; no había necesidad de avanzar más, el juego estaba jugado. De la mujer se veía apenas un hombro y algo de pelo, brutalmente cortado por el cuadro de la imagen; pero de frente estaba el hombre, entreabierta la boca donde veía temblar una lengua negra, y levantaba lentamente las manos, acercándolas al primer plano, un instante aún en perfecto foco, y después todo él un bulto que borraba la isla, el árbol, y yo cerré los ojos y no quise mirar más, y me tapé la cara y rompí a llorar como un idiota.[138]

As with Borges' stories, then, the process of metaleptic transgression bears a topological consequence, as the tangled hierarchies and fantastic apertures to which such a process gives rise actively alter the topographical structuring of the narrative space. As a result, the spatial frames of the narrative bleed, fantastically, into one another; the photographic blow-ups present apertures through which the Île Saint-Louis becomes ontologically and diegetically (and perhaps temporally) indistinguishable from Roberto's apartment.

In 'Las babas del diablo', the photograph provides a nonverbal representation of the narrative space as it comes to represent, in Cortázar at least, a porous and topographically unstable environment. In his observations on the importance and frustrations of nonverbal expression in Cortázar's fictions, Filer comments that:

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[138] Ibid., p. 224.

> The incessant flow of images that create and transform the narrative space, that mobilize the presumably immobile, destroying all attempts at system, order or equilibrium is, without a doubt, a cherished aspect of Cortazarian language, that which shapes his universe of texts considered fantastic.[139]

While Filer's comments are made with particular reference to nonverbal expressive means such as drawing and dance, the present analysis of 'Las babas del diablo' would suggest that photography lies amongst those expressive means considered, fleetingly at least, to be 'superior to verbal expression'.[140] Of particular importance is Filer's claim that the Cortazarian text, owing to the 'liberating impulse' of its 'kaleidoscopic vision', comes to represent a 'space of infinite transformations'.[141] The visually dynamic and above all ludic connotations of the kaleidoscope make it a most fitting visual metaphor for the Cortazarian narrative space. Owing to the kinetic, ever-changing or indeed kaleidoscopic nature of its narrative space, the very act of interpretation becomes a dangerous game in 'Las babas del diablo'. Roberto's frenzied attempts to make sense of the sinister event he has witnessed – the coercion of a child at the hands of an older couple – see him trapped in his own interpretive reconstructions:

> Va a ser difícil porque nadie sabe bien quién es el que verdaderamente está contando. Si soy yo o eso que ha ocurrido, o lo que estoy viendo (nubes y a veces una paloma) o si sencillamente cuento una verdad que es solo mi verdad, y entonces no es la verdad salvo para mi estómago, para estas ganas de salir corriendo y acabar de alguna manera con esto, sea lo que fuere.[142]

The instability of the narrative space and the problematics of interpretation not only form the primary dramatic thrust of 'Las babas del diablo', they also serve as further

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[139] Filer, p. 262.
[140] Ibid., p. 261.
[141] Ibid., p. 262.
[142] Cortázar, 'Las babas', p. 215.

elaborations upon the idealized reader construct. That the fantastic event - the transformation of the photograph into an interactive aperture between two distinct spatiotemporal zones - affords Roberto a level of agency within an ontological territory that, previously, had allowed for nothing more than his passive observation is highly significant. Roberto's role as both witness and agent reveals an inextricable link between the acts of interpretation and narrative production: 'no describo nada, trato más bien de entender'.[143] As witness-agent, he becomes a further example of the reader at odds with a dualistic and deceptively open narrative space. As such, his attempts to reconstruct the events he has witnessed are rife with parenthetical concessions – '(pero Michel se bifurca fácilmente, no hay que dejarlo que declame a gusto)'; 'formando parte (o deformando esa parte) de la isla'[144] – and self-contradictions: 'Michel es culpable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales. Nada le gusta más que imaginar excepciones'.[145] The very title of the story alludes to the dangerously deceptive nature of the text, suggesting that the story is a spider's web in which the less attentive reader might quickly find themselves trapped: 'pero los hilos de la Virgen se llaman también babas del diablo'.[146]

Ultimately, 'Las babas del diablo' not only suggests that the role of the reader is often necessarily performative, the story also effectively problematizes the acts of interpretation, reinterpretation and the actualization and reconfiguration of meaning within an ever-changing narrative space. Cortázar's emphasis on the photograph as a space of infinite transformation and kaleidoscopic, and thereby ludic, dynamism is evocative of Barthes' analysis of the photograph in his seminal essay, *Camera*

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[143] Ibid., p. 217.
[144] Ibid., p. 217.
[145] Ibid., p. 220.
[146] Ibid.

Lucida.[147] Specifically, the photographic reproduction of a narrative space, as seen in 'Las babas del diablo' merits a brief discussion in relation to Barthes' notion of 'animation'. In Barthes' own words:

> In this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it. So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an *animation*. The photograph itself is in no way animated [...], but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure.[148]

This idea of animation is most illuminating in light of the inherent kineticism of the narrative space hitherto discussed in this chapter. Just as engagement and participation rid the narrative space of its inertia or stasis, so too, argues Barthes, does this concept of 'animation' rid the photograph of its motionless artifice and static objectivity. That is, the concept of 'animation' points to the photograph's affective potential, not in light of its objective significance - presupposed by the author-photographer - but owing to its almost aleatory stirring of, or resonance with, the reader-observer's personal, cultural and ideological prejudices.[149]

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[147] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Cape, 1982), p. 20.
[148] Ibid.
[149] The term 'prejudice' is used here in reference to Gadamer's postulations on the subjective and prejudicial nature of understanding. To be noted here is Gadamer's account of the positive function of such prejudices. As Pat F. Rossi suggests:

> Considering previous understandings of prejudice and bias as indicative of a certain 'overhastiness' or 'partiality' in judgement, or perhaps even as a given limitation in understanding on the part of the individual, Gadamer ascribes a positive function to these aspects of seemingly subjective judgement. Gadamer asserts that 'our prejudices do not cut us off from the past, but initially open it up to us…prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world' (p. 79).

For more on Gadamerian subjective prejudice, see Pat F. Rossi, *Discourse in Dialogue: Reflections in Fundamental Philosophical Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012).

In the narrative devices and stratagems of 'Las babas del diablo' we see a fantastic literalization of this concept of 'animation': 'Pero las manos ya eran demasiado. Acababa de escribir: *Donc, la seconde clé réside dans la nature intrinsèque des difficultés que les sociétés*—y vi la mano de la mujer que empezaba a cerrarse despacio, dedo por dedo'.[150] Cortázar's influence on Barthes is clear, here. Not only do Cortázar's fantastic dramatizations of 'animation' resonate with the subjective turn of the Barthesian poetics of affect to which the concept of 'animation' alludes, Cortázar's frustrations regarding the fundamental constraints of language are also echoed in *Camera Lucida*:

> It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself. The *noeme* of language is perhaps this impotence, or, to put it positively: language is, by nature, fictional; the attempt to render language unfictional requires an enormous apparatus of measurements.[151]

It is of little surprise, then, that *Blow-Up* - both the English translation of 'Las babas del diablo' and the title given to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 cinematic adaptation of the story - should find mention in Barthes' study.[152] Of more pressing concern here, however, are the ways in which Barthes' elaboration of the concepts of the *studium* and the *punctum* ultimately serve to reinforce this sense of 'animation' and, in doing so, further elaborates on the (ideally) participatory nature of the reader's role within the distinctly spatial dimensions of the narrative. While the *studium* refers to the culturally, linguistically, and politically-contingent interpretations of a particular photographic image, the *punctum* refers the 'wounding', affective and thus subjective element which necessarily resonates with the reader-observer on an intimate,

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[150] Cortázar, 'Las babas', p. 222.
[151] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 87.
[152] Ibid., p. 85.

personal level. In his rereading of *Camera Lucida*, Brian Dillon refers to the *punctum* as 'that aspect (often a detail) of a photograph that holds our gaze without condescending to mere meaning or beauty'.[153] Accordingly, the *punctum* could be said to establish a deeply personal, ontological connection with those who 'read' the photograph. On the distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum*, Barthes' theorizes that:

> The virtuous gesture which seizes upon 'docile' photographs (those invested by a simple *studium*) is an idle gesture (to leaf through, to glance quickly and desultorily, to linger, then to hurry on); on the contrary, the reading of the *punctum* (of the pricked photograph, so to speak) is at once brief and active.[154]

Of notable relevance here is Barthes' use of the term 'read' to denote the action by which an observer internalises the photographical image. These *readings* of both the *studium* and the *punctum* allow us to further elaborate upon the juxtaposition between passive and active reading paradigms. Not only is this in keeping with the reading paradigms hitherto discussed, it also effectively serves to foreground the discussion of both idle and agile reader models to be developed more thoroughly in Chapter III. The reading of the *punctum* is not only a more active process than the reading of the *studium*, but its affective impact also runs much deeper. As Barthes postulates:

> Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision orientated its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description with will always miss its point of effect, the *punctum*. [...] [H]owever immediate and incisive it was, the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any scrutiny).[155]

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[153] Brian Dillon, 'Rereading: *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes', *The Guardian* (26 March 2011) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/mar/26/roland-barthes-camera-lucida-rereading> [accessed 06.07.2016].
[154] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 49.
[155] Ibid., p. 53.

Barthes' observations evoke not only a poetics of affect, but also a fusion of horizons. The irreducible nature of the *punctum*, the fact that it often 'wounds' or works away at the reader *after the fact*, points to exactly the same level of affective engagement and ontological embrace hitherto discussed in 'Las babas del diablo'. Roberto, like the reader of the *punctum*, is repeatedly drawn back to the photograph: 'No me pregunté siquiera por qué interrumpía a cada rato la traducción del tratado de José Norberto Allende para reencontrar la cara de la mujer, las manchas oscuras en el pretil'.[156] Thus, the ontological significance of the *punctum* becomes clear: Its affective potential, its ability to move, unnerve or otherwise 'wound' the reader is a testament to its ability to fuse, in a deeply personal way, the reader to the work.

Despite Barthes' talk of 'animation', he ultimately concedes that the photograph is not only static, but violent. Indeed, Barthes suggests that the photograph is violent 'not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed'.[157] If we consider this alongside Barthes' earlier observations that the photograph, unlike the film, breaks the 'constitutive style,' lacks 'protensity,' or is simply '*without future*', then we begin to see how the photograph, perhaps more than the book, is restricted by its illusion of stasis.[158] In Cortázar, however, the photograph is, in essence, delivered from its essentially non-dialectical nature through the fantastic event. As evinced in 'Las babas del diablo', the photograph becomes subject to both denial and transformation through the transformational thrust of the fantastic. Like the text, the narrative space of the

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[156] Cortázar, 'Las babas', p. 221.
[157] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 91.
[158] Ibid., p. 90.

image or photograph is open to ontological embrace, and thus, subject to manipulation and transformation at the hands of the reader-observer. This sentiment is, to some extent, echoed in Lois Parkinson Zamora's 'Quetzalcóatl's Mirror: Reflections on the Photographic Image in Latin America'.[159] In her account of the distinction to be made between the image-as-*re*presentation and the image-as-presentation (or presence), Zamora makes a number of valuable observations on the ontological significance of the photograph, drawing particular attention to the importance of an active engagement with the image or text. On the image-as-*re*presentation, Zamora observes that Western culture invests such an image with the 'capacity to *re*present (copy or resemble or simulate) its object in the world'.[160] As such, 'the image-as-*re*presentation conveys a likeness of its object, but remains distinct from it'.[161] According to Zamora, 'the separation thus maintained between image and object - via perspective or degree of stylization or abstraction - contains part of the meaning of the representation'.[162]

In a manner quite evocative of Barthes' concept of the *studium*, Zamora clearly outlines the ontological detachment inherent to this image-as-*re*presentation. We are told of how the ontological participation of the observer is made impossible through the perceived static objectivity of the image. Observation, separation and distance reign supreme in what Zamora considers to be a predominantly Western conceptualization of the image:

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[159] Zamora, Lois Parkinson, 'Quetzalcóatl's Mirror: Reflections on the Photographic Image in Latin America' in *Image and Memory: Photography from Latin America 1866-1994,* ed. by Wendy Watriss and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 300-84.
[160] Zamora, p. 315.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

[I]t is the separation itself that is culturally significant, for it encodes a modern understanding of the observer's detachment from phenomena, of empirical observation, and of individual expression. It attests to the (relatively recent) possibility of objectivity.[163]

Zamora's account of the image-as-presence, however, underlines the way in which certain non-western cultures and traditions 'do not conceive of the visual image as once removed from the object or figure it resembles'.[164] Instead, such cultures - owing perhaps to significant archaic or mythic sensibilities - privilege the capacity of the image to '*be*, or *become*', the object or figure it captures. Zamora continues:

The image contains its referent, embodies it, makes it present physically and experientially to the beholder. The image-as-presence may involve a ritual transfer of spirit or identity or function: it is not separated from its referent but made integral to it according to culturally determined systems of analogy.[165]

This concept of physical and experiential presence, evoked in the image-as-presence, is highly significant in the context of 'Las babas del diablo'. Indeed, the process of being made 'integral' to the image is heavily thematized in Cortázar's story; fantastic metalepsis upsets the Western concept of *re*presentation and, in doing so, blurs the ontological boundary between subject and object. 'Las babas del diablo', then, serves as an interrogation of the various Western belief systems that 'hold the world to be separate from, and controlled by, the observing I/eye' in favour of an ontology of 'communal participation and ritual performance'.[166] The concepts of communal participation and performance are, in turn, evocative of the concept of play as it has been discussed throughout this chapter. The concept of play, as it pertains to 'Las babas del diablo' serves to undermine the binary division between presence and

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[163] Ibid., pp. 313-315.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

absence in the work of art. That is, the protagonist's willful manipulation of the narrative space, seen here as a fantastically-induced and reconfiguratory engagement with the photograph, evokes a sense of ontological embrace that ultimately destabilizes the very concept of representation as it is typically conceived in Western thought systems. Alice A. Jardine outlines the significance of the process of representation in the propagation of the presence-absence dichotomy:

> Representation is the condition that confirms the possibility of an imitation (mimesis) based on the dichotomy of presence and absence and, more generally, on the dichotomies of dialectical thinking (negativity). Representation, mimesis, and the dialectic are inseparable; they designate together a way of thinking as old as the West, a way of thinking which French thought, through German philosophy, has been attempting to rethink since the turn of the century.[167]

In Cortázar, however, the crises that emerge from such willful manipulations suggest that the narrative space, despite - or perhaps owing to - its proclivity for kaleidoscopic convergence and transformation, remains hostile. In the case of 'Las babas del diablo', Roberto's fate is left uncertain following the metaleptic transgressions that allow the predatory stranger from the park in Île Saint-Louis to invade his apartment through the fantastic aperture of the photograph. Presently, we carry forward the concepts of communal participation and ritual performance within the narrative space, and their destabilization of the absence-presence dichotomy, into an analysis of 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Continuidad de los parques'. Here, the shared space of the narrative comes to represent that of the dream and that of the story space, respectively.

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[167] Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 119.

2.4 The Death of the Reader – The Metaleptic Transgressions of 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Continuidad de los parques'

In the last section, we discussed how Cortázar consciously threatens the reader-observer construct through the sudden destabilization of two spatiotemporally distinct, ontological territories: That of the photographic image and that of the protagonist's sense of reality. Doing so not only served to reinforce the potentially dynamic and reconfiguratory role of the reader construct, initially elaborated upon in the likes of 'Bestiario' and 'Instrucciones para John Howell', but also successfully emphasized the Cortazarian concern for the inversions and transgressions that draw such a construct into the narrative space.

As we will now discuss, instances of oneiric inversion and metaleptic transgression represent altogether more sinister narrative strategies in 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Continuidad de los parques', as the positions occupied by author and reader are further problematized by the outright weaponization of such transgressive stratagems. The term 'weaponization' is used in further reference to the Cortazarian demand - made through the fictional proxy of *Rayuela's* Morelli - that we use literature 'cómo se usa un revólver'.[168] Specifically, in the cases of 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Continuidad de los parques' the term weaponization refers to narrative instances wherein the contact between two ontological territories presents a direct threat to the protagonist and, by implication, to the reader construct. As such, the weaponization of specific narrative devices or stratagems, such as that of metalepsis, provides further evocation of the antagonistic knock-out effect often sought by Cortázar. In 'La noche

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[168] *Rayuela*, p. 518.

boca arriba' (*Final del juego*, 1956*)*, the victim of a motorcycle accident suffers fevered

dreams of pursuit at the hands of Aztec hunters: 'y todo era tan natural, tenía que huir

de los aztecas que andaban a caza de hombre'.[169]   Before long, however, the

divergent positions of the dreamer and the dream collide and invert in such a way that

places the protagonist in imminent danger:

> Alcanzó a cerrar otra vez los párpados, aunque ahora sabía que no iba a despertarse, que estaba despierto, que el sueño maravilloso había sido el otro, absurdo como todos los sueños.[170]

The protagonist's motorcycle becomes a nightmarish 'insecto de metal' as dream

displaces reality in an instance of sudden, fantastic inversion that culminates in the

protagonist's sacrifice at the hands of his pursuers.[171] This fascination with the sudden

collision of ontological territories forms the theoretical backbone of the Morellian

chapters of *Rayuela*.   Indeed,   *Rayuela*'s 'capítulos prescindibles' are not only

essential to the understanding of the dangerous metaleptic processes at work in

Cortázar's short fiction, their experimental nature also foregrounds the concept of

generic instability to be discussed shortly in the context of the sudden fictions of Ana

María Shua.[172]   In Chapter 79, *Rayuela*'s Morelli ruminates on the epistemic value of

'una narrativa que actúe como coagulante de vivencias, como catalizador de nociones

confusas y mal entendidas'.[173] This concept of the coagulating narrative echoes earlier

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[169] Cortázar, 'La noche' p. 387.
[170] Ibid., p. 392.
[171] Ibid.
[172] For more on the experimental nature of *Rayuela* and its use as a critical and theoretical codex for the author's short fictions, see Santiago Juan-Navarro, *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas (Self-Reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia)* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000). Here, Juan-Navarro notes that 'in *Rayuela*, Cortázar takes his metafictional experiments to their utmost limits. Through the so-called "capitulos prescindibles" (expendable chapters) the novel provides its own metatext, which comments and theorizes about itself, about the author's short fiction, as well as about literary creation in general' (p. 198).
[173] *Rayuela*, p. 518.

concerns, thematized in stories like 'La noche boca arriba', for the narrative's role in the reduction of ontological distances between the world of the reader and the world of the fiction. Such convergences as those seen in 'La noche boca arriba', then, represent textually-embedded instances of Cortázar's desire to 'tomar de la literatura eso que es puente de hombre a hombre'.[174]

In this sense, Cortázar's use of a fantastically-charged, oneiric inversion of ontological territories - in the case of 'La noche boca arriba', the world of the dreamer and the world of the dream - is consonant with similar inversions previously discussed in the context of Borges' *Ficciones.* In Chapter I, we discussed how Borges' constant inversions of reality and fiction ultimately blur the line between dreamer and dream and between creator and creation. Cortázar's shared desire to place the reader within the spatial dimensions of the text, through recurring textual allusions to the porous nature of the fiction and the performative role of the reader, reveals a similar concern for the Borgesian merging of disparate ontological territories into one, textualized play space. As such, 'La noche boca arriba' follows the same interrogative line as Borgesian stories such as the oneirically-inflected 'Las ruinas circulares' which, in turn, represents a textual examination of Borges' long-standing conviction - discussed in Chapter I - that 'si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios'.[175]

In the spatial terms hitherto discussed, we have seen how the strange loops and tangled hierarchies of Borges' 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Las ruinas circulares' point not only to the labyrinthine qualities of the narrative

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[174] Ibid.
[175] Borges, *Otras inquisiciones,* p. 111.

space, but also consider the problematics of the reader's movement through it. In Cortázar, the reader's movement within, or general engagement with the narrative space is seen as a necessary but potentially lethal endeavour and, as such, requires a specialized, accomplice reader. While, in Borges, a simple linear motion through the text is rendered almost impossible by the ontological vertigo provoked by the paradoxical architectures of the Borgesian fantastic, in Cortázar, such movements are problematized not only by the inherently hostile nature of the author's narrative spaces, but also by the possibility of outright, metaleptic collapse. Such is the weaponized nature of metaleptic transgression in Cortázar's short fiction.

The hostility of the narrative space as a result of this weaponized metaleptic process, is effectively evinced in 'Continuidad de los parques'. Here, the ontological distance between the fictional reader and text is quickly reduced to an absolute – and fatal – zero. In one, sudden act of metaleptic transgression, the protagonist-reader becomes the victim of the very murder recounted in the novel he is reading: 'Nadie en la primera habitación, nadie en la segunda. La puerta del salón, y entonces el puñal en la mano, la luz de los ventanales, el alto respaldo de un sillón de terciopelo verde, la cabeza del hombre en el sillón leyendo una novela'.[176] As such, 'Continuidad de los parques' perfectly evinces the most unsettling aspect of Gérard Genette's initial formulation of the concept of metalepsis: Its 'unacceptable and insistent hypothesis' that author and reader alike belong to the same narrative space.[177]

In light of this, the spatial implications of the metaleptic process in 'Continuidad de los parques' merit further analysis. Fanfan Chen's 'From Hypotyposis to Metalepsis:

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[176] Cortázar, 'Continuidad', p. 292.
[177] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 236.

Narrative Devices in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction' - with its emphasis on post-Todorovian theorizations on the fantastic - not only echoes the postulations hitherto put forth in this chapter regarding the problematization of readerly participation and agency, but also betrays an implicit concern for the spatial implications of the metaleptic process. As Chen observes:

> [The] anxiety regarding metalepsis is given shape in many contemporary fantastic narratives. It involves subject, object and creation. In fantastic fiction, the narrative device of metalepsis brings to light the significance of imaginative storytelling, which calls for a reflection on the author's creation, the reader's participation, and the narrative voice's animation of the text. The 'labyrinth of words' has its own reality, woven with the threads of poetic creation. The type of metalepsis encountered in the fantastic surpasses ontological metalepsis and metaphorical metalepsis, for the diegesis seeks a genuine story, the ideal rhetorical medium with the unique feature of the invented story straddling both real history and the imaginary, as is emphasised by Aristotle.[178]

Chen's assertion that the fantastic narrative gives shape to the anxieties native to metaleptic transgression - such as the problematization of both authorial and readerly roles - are of particular significance in light of the stories discussed so far. Likewise, the critic's suggestion that the metaleptic process has a spatial significance - that the text comes to represent a 'labyrinth of words' - runs parallel to the ideas put forward in this chapter regarding the topographical implications of such transgressive processes. However, Chen's subsequent hypothesis that, in Cortázar, 'the autonomy of the diegetic and hypodiegetic worlds', itself achieved through the process of metaleptic transgression, 'renders the author, or even the narrator, invisible' is problematic.[179] Such a claim finds itself at odds with the ludic qualities of the stories currently under analysis. Indeed, the idealized reader constructs elaborated upon in this chapter

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[178] Fanfan Chen, 'From Hypotyposis to Metalepsis: Narrative devices in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 44, 4 (2008), 394 - 411 (p. 408).
[179] Ibid., p. 408

suggest that the 'buen lector' or Cortázar's 'lector cómplice', is defined above all by his/her lusory approach to the act of reading. Furthermore, as is by now clear, this ludic element extends to the narrative space which, despite its often contested nature, primarily represents a space of play. Both the lusory attitude of the reader-player and the ludic edge of the narrative space come together to suggest that the ontological embrace sought in Cortázar's fantastic narratives is often depicted, both explicitly and implicitly, as a series of games played out between both the author and reader via the text. Thus, the theoretical import of the ludic in relation to the literary politics of the Cortazarian text becomes clearer still. The concept of play, be it agonistic, antagonistic or openly hostile, necessarily reasserts authorial presence. Contrary to Chen's claims on the author's invisibility or relative absence, this chapter has, thus far, mounted a defence against the idea that the author is dead or invisible, and instead suggests that s/he represents a key player in the game at hand.[180]

In 'Continuidad de los parques' the impact of the sudden breakdown of the boundary between fiction and reality is predicated on the initial separation of such territories. This initial separation - reinforced by the protagonist's gradual immersion into the hyperdiegetic (or metadiegetic) world - foregrounds the intercalated story's initial status as artifice or fiction: 'Su memoria retenía sin esfuerzo los nombres y las imágenes de los protagonistas; la ilusión novelesca lo ganó casi en seguida'.[181] This

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[180] For more on Crotázar's ambivalent treatment of the author figure, see Lucille Kerr, 'In the Name of the Author: Reading Around Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*' in *Reclaiming the Author: Figures and Fictions from Spanish America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992). The critic suggests that for Cortázar 'the figure of the author appears to be a figure against which *Rayuela* launches a deadly attack' (p. 26-27). Kerr continues: 'As one rereads *Rayuela*, then, one finds significant evidence of how contemporary Spanish American fiction begins to pose questions about the figure of the author and about the attributions of authorship. But one also finds evidence of how Cortázar's apparent ruminations about the author's authority leads as much to the affirmation as to the denegation of authorial privilege and position' (p. 27).
[181] Cortázar, 'Continuidad', p. 291. Hypodiegesis is here evoked in reference to Mieke Bal's, 'Notes on Narrative Embedding', *Poetics Today*, 2.2 (1981), 41–59. Owing to her conviction that 'an embedded

initial emphasis on the text's artificiality necessarily reinforces authorial presence as opposed to rendering such a figure invisible. As such, the text not only points to the same dangerous ontological tethering depicted in both 'Las babas del diablo' and 'La noche boca arriba', it also implicitly refers to the author's manipulation, and subsequent murder of the passive reader construct. As such, the Foucauldian-Barthesian *authoricidal* impulse, echoed in Chen's account of the author's invisibility, is turned on its head in Cortázar. For Cortázar, the birth of the 'lector cómplice' must often be at the cost of the death of the 'lector hembra'.

Consequently, for all of its metaleptic pyrotechnics, 'Continuidad de los parques' offers the same conceptualization of the reader constructs that we later see in *Rayuela*. Specifically, in their mutual consideration of the text's function as a bridge between author and reader, both 'Continuidad de los parques' and *Rayuela* share further theoretical insight into the two juxtaposing reader constructs of the 'lector cómplice' and the 'lector pasivo'. In the protagonist-reader of 'Continuidad de los parques' we see the same reluctance or inability to 'comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo' as we have seen in the Morellian-Cortazarian concept of the 'lector hembra'.[182] In 'Continuidad de los parques', however, passivity is not synonymous with disengagement. The death or displacement of the protagonist-reader is not simply the result of a failure to immerse himself in the world of the text. Chen observes how

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unit is by definition subordinate to the unit which embeds it' (p. 48), Bal chooses to replace Genette's 'metadiegesis' with the concept of 'hypodiegesis'. Doing so inverts the hierarchical structure outlined in Genette, thus suggesting that it is the narrative act that is above or higher than the narrative event. The choice to include both narratological concepts is merely intended to provide some illustration of the perceived structuring of narrative levels, hierarchical or otherwise, that make up the text without attempting to weigh in on a complex narratological debate quite beyond the purview of this study. For more insight into just such a debate, see John Pier, 'Narrative levels', *the living handbook of narratology* (April 2014) <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrative-levels-revised-version-uploaded-23-april-2014> [accessed 07.07.2016].
[182] *Rayuela*, p. 547.

the protagonist-reader, or 'hero', is defined, above all, by his/her enthusiasm for the act of reading. The critic suggests that 'the reader in Cortázar's story is depicted as being an avid one', and infers an intense 'fascination' from the ease with which the hero re-immerses himself in the narrative.[183] The text itself supports such a claim; we are told of how the story's protagonist:

> Gozaba del placer casi perverso de irse desgajando línea a línea de lo que lo rodeaba, y sentir a la vez que su cabeza descansaba cómodamente en el terciopelo del alto respaldo, que los cigarrillos seguían al alcance de la mano, que más allá de los ventanales danzaba el aire del atardecer bajo los robles.[184]

Nevertheless, a sense of separation remains. The reader's awareness of his surroundings betrays a certain ontological anchor that, initially at least, emphasizes a divide between reality and fiction: 'Arrellanado en su sillón favorito, de espaldas a la puerta que lo hubiera molestado como una irritante posibilidad de intrusiones, dejó que su mano izquierda acariciara una y otra vez el terciopelo verde y se puso a leer los últimos capítulos'.[185]

Much like the destabilization of the absence-presence dichotomy seen in 'Las babas del diablo', the fatal climax of 'Continuidad de los parques' reveals a sudden subversion of the reader-protagonist's sense of safety through separation. Indeed, there is a sense that the reader, in his death at the hands of the fiction itself (at the hands of a fictional love rival, no less), is being punished for taking such an ontological separateness for granted. We are told of how the protagonist 'había empezado a leer la novela unos días antes' but 'la abandonó por negocios urgentes, volvió a abrirla

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[183] Chen, p. 398.
[184] Cortázar, 'Continuidad', p. 291.
[185] Ibid.

cuando regresaba en tren a la finca; se dejaba interesar lentamente por la trama, por el dibujo de los personajes'.[186] Despite the reader's enthusiasm and willingness to get lost in the text, in a proverbial sense at least, his inability to use the text in any meaningful way, beyond an ontologically static or passive reception of the text's objective meaning, sees him fall victim to the sudden and violent hostility of the Cortazarian narrative space.

Here lies a fundamental distinction between the reading paradigms of the 'lector cómplice' and the 'lector pasivo'. The fatal climax of 'Continuidad de los parques' suggests that a reader's sense of immersion in the text is not tantamount to an ontological embrace or active, agential engagement with the narrative space. Likewise, the avid or enthusiastic reader is not synonymous with the active or idealized reader. Without the necessary ontological *rapprochement*, the act of reading, as it is manifest in 'Continuidad de los parques' as a momentary retreat from reality, embodies the same 'dialéctica[s] de bolsillo', 'tormentas en piyama', and 'cataclismos de living room' held in such low regard in *Rayuela's* Morellian chapters.[187] That is to say that the act of reading, despite its potentially subversive nature, traditionally and by its very nature, functions in isolation. Like traditional conceptualizations of play - whereby the game is seen as something that is essentially 'free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, controlled and fictive' - reading is typically perceived as an isolated and unproductive activity.[188] As we have seen throughout this chapter, traditional reading precepts are deficient insofar as they perpetuate this (ontological) separation and lack of meaningful productivity. It is this separation that leads to Cortázar's notion of

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[186] Ibid.
[187] *Rayuela,* p. 438
[188] Ehrmann, p. 34.

suffering comfortably, and it is this sense of comfort that Cortázar's texts ultimately seek to destroy.

What Cortázar calls for, then, is the nonconformist, subversive or playful reader that both animates and, in turn, is animated by the text. That reader capable of willful manipulation of the contested, hostile space of the narrative, rather than the reader that merely seeks to contain or quarantine such subspaces from everyday life. That reader who is prepared to be 'wounded' by the text - in Barthesian terms - rather than merely suffering comfortably in the relative safety of his/her ontological distance. In his essay, 'Morelliana, siempre', Cortázar makes this distinction between readerly zeal and active engagement clear:

> Detesto al lector que ha pagado por su libro, al espectador que ha comprado su butaca, y que a partir de allí aprovecha el blando almohadón del goce hedónico o la admiración por el genio. ¿Qué le importaba a Van Gogh tu admiración? Lo que quería era tu complicidad.[189]

This 'complicidad', as it has been outlined throughout the present chapter as a subversively playful engagement with a hostile and contested narrative space, serves to challenge traditional reading paradigms. Cortázar attacks paradigmatic reading practices as they are typically conceived as passive activities that propagate, or actively capitalize on, the divide between the world of the reader and the world of that which is read. Cortázar's disdain for the passive reader stems from his/her perpetuation - conscious or otherwise - of just such a paradigm or practice.

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[189] Julio Cortázar, *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 1967), p. 208.

In challenging the apparently escapist nature of fiction, by turning the act of reading into an inescapable ontological act, Cortázar destabilizes the perceived, socio-culturally contingent divide between play and productive activity. That is, the Cortazarian depiction of reading is that of a ludic, subversive and reconfiguratory activity played out within a hostile and topologically unstable narrative space. In its foregrounding of activity, intensity and subversive reconfiguration, the Cortazarian concept of the idealized reader construct is ideologically consonant with the player figure. The concept of the reader as player - or more specifically, the reader as subversive player - not only destabilizes traditional attempts to maintain a sacred frontier between play and seriousness, between fiction and reality, it also runs counter to critical attempts to displace the author figure in contemporary literature. That the reader-player effectively engages in a game with the author figure undermines critical attempts to displace the author. To reassert authorial presence is not to defend his/her absolute authority, however; the lusory attitude of the ideal reader both reasserts and problematizes authorial presence by converting the author construct into an opponent figure. Such a narrative strategy serves to destabilize the supposed frontier between both fiction and reality and play and seriousness while also attempting to democratize the reading and interpretive process in such a way that turns interpretation into playful co-production. Doing so elevates the act of lusory reading beyond its possible status as a mere escapist, or ontologically-quarantined indulgence by emphasizing its potential as process of communal participation or ritual performance that favours protensity over fleeting distraction.[190]

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[190] Such attempts to quarantine play from everyday life, both traditional and contemporary, will be discussed in Chapters III and IV.

In light of this, we return one final time to Bachelard's *Poetics of Space,* this time to the theorist's observations on 'reading pride', insofar as it echoes this concern for mastery through participation. Bachelard observes:

> But what does the phenomenological attitude advise? It asks us to produce within ourselves a reading pride that will give us the illusion of participating in the work of the author of the book. Such an attitude could hardly be achieved on first reading, which remains too passive. For here the reader is still something of a child who is entertained by reading. But every good book should be reread as soon as it is finished. After the sketchiness of the first reading comes the creative work of reading.[191]

The act of reading, then, is seen as a participatory endeavour that favours multiple readings: 'The second, then the third reading...give us, little by little, the solution of this problem'.[192] This is not only ideologically and functionally consonant with the rematch or replay, effectuated by the player in the hopes of a better outcome, but is also evocative of Cortázar's thoughts on the *take*. In his essay, 'Melancolía de las maletas', Cortázar outlines the literary implications of the *jazz take*:

> En el *take* la creación incluye su propia crítica y por eso se interrumpe muchas veces para recomenzar; la insuficiencia o el fracaso de un *take* vale como un ensayo para el siguiente, pero el siguiente no es nunca el anterior en mejor, sino que es siempre otra cosa si realmente es bueno. Lo mejor de la literatura es siempre *take*, riesgo implícito en la ejecución, margen de peligro que hace el placer del volante, del amor, con lo que entraña de pérdida sensible pero a la vez con ese compromiso total que en otro plano da al teatro su inconquistable imperfección frente al perfecto cine. Yo no quisiera escribir más que *takes.*[193]

Thus, the *take* reinforces the idea of the work as a unique creative event that is *redone* with each new *reading*, as Hussey suggests, 'Cortázar denies permanence and

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[191] Bachelard, p. 42.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Cortázar, *Vuelta*, p. 201

perfection here to emphasize performance and the necessary transience of the literary vision'.[194] Here, the *take* reveals a performative edge; just as Hussey applies the concept of the *take* to the author's creative role, we might also venture to posit certain performative parallels in the interpretive processes of the reader. In the specific context of *Rayuela*, Hussey asserts, 'with this chapter [55], he offers the reader a sense of participating in the immediate creative process of the author, encouraging him to experience the novel as a performance and, as such, temporary rather than timeless'.[195] The same sentiment is echoed in Marcy Schwartz's assertion that 'what interests Cortázar most in music is not an arrival at some revelatory state but rather the pursuit of it. Cortázar values the process of jazz over the music as product'.[196]

Over the course of this chapter we have discussed the ways in which this performative edge, as it appears in *Rayuela*, is explored with equal - if not greater - success in Cortázar's short fiction. Thus, the idealized reader constructs analysed over the course of this chapter reveal that it is a willingness to perform, and not the performance itself that concerns Cortázar. As we have seen in the stories hitherto discussed, what counts above all else is the game itself, and not the result. By implication, the value of the narrative space lies primarily in its function as a continuously contested arena of playful engagement. Such a hostile space elevates play above its typical status as an isolated, escapist distraction, and instead serves as a constant reminder of the ontological and epistemic stakes of the seemingly eternal 'batalla amorosa' between author and reader.[197] Of interest in the coming chapter, however, is the perceptible

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[194] Hussey, p. 153.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Schwartz, p. 9.
[197] Cortázar, *Vuelta*, p. 142.

drift away from the antagonistic and adversarial Cortazarian model of play towards the

more subversively casual models posited in the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua.

Chapter III
Mocking the Idle Reader: Casual Play in the Sudden Fictions of Ana María Shua

3.0 Introduction

Having already established the ludic properties of the contemporary Argentine short story as they are manifest in the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, the present chapter turns its attention to the sudden fictions of Ana María Shua. Following on from previous chapters, a key focus here will be the reader's movement through and interaction with the narrative space, and how such movements and interactions are problematized by both the formal structures inherent to the sudden fiction format and those native to Shua's own treatment of the format. Drawing on key texts from *La sueñera* (1984), *Casa de geishas* (1992), *Botánica del caos* (2000), *Temporada de fantasmas* (2004) and *Fenómenos de circo* (2011), this chapter will address the ways in which Shua's persistent thematization of the text's kineticism points to the necessarily performative and cooperative role of the reader, thereby foregrounding the concepts of reader movement and agency and further elaborating upon certain idealized reader constructs.[1]

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[1] Owing to the nature of sudden fiction, any close readings will be accompanied by the full text under analysis. Furthermore, unless stated otherwise, any sudden fictions cited from *La sueñera* (1984), *Casa de geishas* (1992), *Botánica del caos* (2000) or *Temporada de fantasmas* (2004) will come from Shua's *Cazadores de letras: minificción reunida* (Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2009). While page reference will refer to *Cazadores de letras*, I will indicate the original collection in which each text can be found. However, all citations from Shua's most recent collection of sudden fictions, *Fenómenos de circo*, will not come from the incomplete compilation found in *Cazadores de letras*, but from *Fenómenos de circo* (Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2011). Furthermore, all stories will be indented as a means of emphasizing their nature as full stories rather than excerpts.

As in previous chapters, this emphasis on the reader's journey, movement or progress through the text evokes significant parallels with the interpretational paradigms of reader-response theory. While the invaluable observations made by reader-response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, Jonathan Culler and Stanley Fish will once again provide a significant hermeneutical foundation for an analysis of the reader's role in Shua's *oeuvre*, this chapter ultimately seeks to emphasise the ways in which the play element not only reconfigures reader-response constructs such as the ideal reader, the informed reader and the super reader, but also alters the nature of his/her engagement with the text. To some extent, reader-response paradigms (the kinetic nature of the text, the empowered reader and the nature of interpretation as an event) will be explored in light of their capacity to illustrate the inherent dynamism of the text and the reader's purported movement through it. Ultimately, however, the concept of the narrative play space, as is comes to represent both the spatial form of the narrative and an illustration of the relationship between author, text and reader, will be used to qualify what this chapter considers to be two significant reader-response prejudices. Namely, it will be argued that the distinctly poststructuralist subordination or displacement of authorial control and presence in favour of a reader/text authority is problematized by Shua's conscious re-assertion of authorial presence within the narrative space. Secondly, this chapter argues that the concept of play becomes a means of reconfiguring the reader's interaction with the narrative space in such a way that reveals readerly interaction to be more than the simple, linear movement through the text.[2] In light of this, the discussion of Shua's sudden fictions will be divided into

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[2] For more on the idea of the interpretive task of the reader as a journey or passage through the text, see 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics' in Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 21-67. Although Fish's foreword warns that he 'would not now subscribe to the tenets' put forward in this particular article, his articulation of the

six main sections.

The first section will analyse the impact of sudden fiction's propensity for extreme brevity and concision, its 'lightness' of form and its generically protean nature on the reader's interaction with - or navigation of - the narrative space.[3] It will be argued that Shua's manipulation of these formal elements, together with the author's self-conscious positioning of her own work within a distinctly Argentine literary heritage of short fiction, become the methods by which the author attempts to shape the narrative play space and, in turn, condition the reader's navigation of it.

Leading on from this, I will then engage with sudden fiction's proclivity for what Lauro Zavala calls 'hibridación genérica' or generic hybridization, together with its tendency toward intertextuality and transtextuality. [4] Over the course of two closely-linked sections, both intertextuality and transtextuality will be discussed in light of their function as consciously-employed narrative strategies that serve to condition the reader's perception of a text prior to the act of reading, thereby manipulating the reader's perception and subsequent interpretation of the text.

The fourth section will discuss Shua's contribution to the *authoricidal* literary politics discussed in the previous chapters. Here, it will be argued that Shua does not rely upon the same agonistic and adversarial stratagems employed by Borges and Cortázar. Instead, Shua's co-opting of the perceived casualization of certain reading

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'informed reader' and his/her 'reading competences' are most illuminating concepts that still resonate with this chapter's focus on the reader/author relationship (p. 22).

[3] Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[4] Lauro Zavala, 'El cuento ultracorto bajo el microscopio', *Revista de literatura*, 64, 128 (2002), 539-553 (p. 539).

paradigms will be discussed in light of its potential for coercing the contemporary reader into a more cooperative and productive stance. In other words, the passive tendencies of the Cortazarian armchair reader - suffering comfortably in the relative safety of his/her ontological distance from the text - are subverted in Shua's fictions. This subversion will be illustrated using the cultural analogue of the video game, wherein the proliferation of the 'casual' model over the traditionally 'hardcore' paradigm will serve to underline a similar casualization of contemporary reading practices.

Subsequently, Shua's recurring concern for the reader's response to the text's inherent kineticism - thematized in her sudden fictions - will help to elaborate upon a number of idealized reader constructs.[5] As will be discussed, the concepts of hybridization, intertextuality and kineticism serve to problematize the limits and thresholds of the narrative space, creating sites of dynamic, ludic engagement that call for similarly dynamic reader constructs. This section will identify a number of these idealized reader constructs and the multiple roles that they fulfil within Shua's narrative spaces.

In light of the apparent opening up of the generic and ontological thresholds of the text, this chapter will close on a brief analysis of the hypertextual features of Shua's sudden

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[5] In Shua's own words:

> Las minificciones son criaturas pequeñas y feroces, como las pirañas. Y todavía más, porque no necesitan actuar en cardumen. Son narrativas, tienen menos de veinticinco líneas y muerden. Son trocitos de caos transformados en pequeños universos. Si se ha conseguido atraparlas, es que no son buenas. Una buena minificción resulta tan inasible y resbaladiza como cualquier pez, como cualquier buen texto literario.

Saturnino Rodríguez, 'Criaturas pequeñas y feroces, como las pirañas: conversación con Ana María Shua,' *El cuento en red*, 18 (2008), 25-31 (p. 25).

fictions. Specifically, the fragmentary, reconfigurative and reiterative features of sudden fiction, together with the genre's emphasis on the reader as co-creator or co-participant in the narrative event, will be discussed as a means of highlighting the proto-hypertextual potentialities of Shua's work. Such a focus will not only engage critically with Lauro Zavala's claims that the sudden fiction format 'prefigures the birth of hypertextual writing', but will also serve to foreground the forthcoming analysis of Belén Gache's *WordToys*.[6]

3.1 Shaping the Playground - The Impact of Nomenclature, Generic Hybridization and Intertextuality on the Narrative Space

To this day, problems of nomenclature remain a point of contention amongst critics and writers of hyper short fiction. Distinctions between terms such as minicuento, microrrelato and minificción, the more popular choices amongst critics, are numerous and often unnecessarily convoluted. Dolores M. Koch, for instance, attempts to make a distinction between the 'minicuento' and the 'microrrelato' on the grounds of theme and content:

> En el minicuento los hechos narrados, más o menos realistas, llegan a una situación que se resuelve por medio de un acontecimiento o acción concreta. Por el contrario, el verdadero desenlace del micro-relato no se basa en una acción sino en una idea, un pensamiento. Esto es, el desenlace de un minicuento depende de *algo que ocurre* en el mundo narrativo, mientras que en el micro-relato el desenlace depende de *algo que se le ocurre* al autor. Esta distinción no siempre es fácil.[7]

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[6] Lauro Zavala 'The Boundaries of Serial Narrative' in *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective*, ed. by Viorica Patea (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 281-297 (283).
[7] Dolores M. Koch 'Diez recursos para lograr la brevedad en el micro-relato', *Ciudad Seva* <http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/teoria/tecni/10recur.htm> [accessed 11.09.2015].

David Lagmanovich, on the other hand, maintains that 'minicuento y microrrelato son dos formas de mentar la misma cosa' and warns against what he believes to be 'un corte taxonómico innecesario'. [8] The critic argues further that to see both terms as ultimately synonymous 'permite al crítico concentrarse en las verdaderas características de estas construcciones para avanzar en su conocimiento'.[9]

On the more general debate surrounding the classification and denomination of short fiction, Lauro Zavala observes that 'han recibido casi medio centenar de nombres, entre ellos: micro-relatos, ficción súbita, instántaneas [*sic*], retazos, viñetas, minicuentos, fragmentos y relámpagos'.[10] Likewise, in an interview with Shua herself, Rodríguez outlines the difficulty scholars face in their attempts to classify the author's fictions, stating that 'en este último género advenedizo, subgénero, género híbrido, transgénero (los teóricos no se llegan a poner de acuerdo con la clasificación) es precisamente donde Ana María Shua ha sentado cátedra'.[11] Violeta Rojo adds fuel to the critical fire in her observation that the rampant proliferation of terminology is a result of a lack of adequate critical attention: 'Tan poca atención se le ha prestado a este tipo de narrativa que no cuenta ni siquiera con un nombre definido para llamarla, y a la hora de hablar de ella hay que debatirse entre una multitud de expresiones, muchas de las cuales pecan de ambiguas y caprichosas'.[12]

While this chapter recognizes the analytical value of such vast and varied attempts at nomenclature in providing a nuanced and thorough account of the genre's internal

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[8] David Lagmanovich, *El microrrelato: teoría y historia* (Palencia: Menoscuarto, 2006), pp. 27-28.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Lauro Zavala, *Relatos vertiginosos: Antología de cuentos mínimos* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2000), p. 13.
[11] Saturnino Rodríguez, 'Criaturas pequeñas y feroces, como las pirañas: conversación con Ana María Shua,' *El cuento en red*, 18 (2008), 25-31 (p. 25).
[12] Violeta Rojo, *Breve manual (ampliado) para reconocer minicuentos* (Caracas: Editorial Equinoccio, 2009), p. 26.

structures and processes, it does so without wishing to further the debate on terminology. As such, the distinctions made between the 'minicuento' and the 'microrrelato', for instance, are secondary to the more pressing issues, debates and themes at work (or in play) in the text themselves. Thus, while attempts to provide accurate denomination for what Shua herself calls 'una tendencia a la síntesis' fuel an ongoing and dizzying debate quite beyond the purview of this chapter, a brief account of the problems of nomenclature are revealing insofar as they point towards a preoccupation for the manner in which a given text might be received by its audience. Indeed, nomenclature is, in itself, a means of conditioning reader expectations, a means of engaging a particular set of reading competences, before the very act of reading has commenced. On this preparatory nature of genre and nomenclature, Françoise Camion muses:

> Is this a question of reading strategy or writing strategy? Do I label this a short-short ahead of time, so that I have a different set of criteria in mind when I sit down and write? Or do I label it a short-short afterward so that the reader will know how he should read it? Naming as a sort of instruction to the reader seems more interesting, somehow.[13]

Just as Viorica Patea suggests that 'endings condition our reading of the entire text as well as the endings themselves', so too do the very terms we call upon to describe such texts. [14] Terminology engages a set of interpretive prejudices that ultimately guide the reader in his/her exploration of the text.

As is by now clear, this chapter opts for the term 'sudden fiction' to address the works

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[13] Robert Shapard and James Thomas, *Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories* (Salt Lake City: Smith, 1986), p. 256.
[14] Viorica Patea (ed.), *Short Story Theories*: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), p. 4.

presently up for analysis. The choice to do so has been made in conscious reference to Rhonda Dahl Buchanan's *Quick Fix: Sudden Fiction*, a bilingual compilation of Shua's short fictions.[15] Not only does the term avoid the unnecessary confusions of the somewhat inconsistent use of terms such as 'microrrelato', 'micro-relato', 'microcuento', 'minicuento' and 'minificción', it also makes apparent the existence of what Ana María Shua calls 'una tradición muy consolidada en la Argentina'.[16] Indeed, the term is apt insofar as it evokes the same spontaneity and intensity found in the Borgesian and Cortazarian critical analyses of the contemporary *cuento* and thus, builds upon extant literary concerns to be discussed throughout the chapter. According to Borges and Bioy Casares, we recall, the short story represents 'lo esencial de lo narrativo,' unencumbered by 'episodio ilustrativo, análisis psicológico' and 'feliz o inoportuno adorno verbal'.[17] Likewise, Cortázar observes that 'los cuentos plenamente logrados' are defined by 'la eliminación de todas las ideas o situaciones intermedias, de todos los rellenos o fases de transición que la novela permite e incluso exige'.[18] This function of the *cuento breve* as 'una máquina infalible destinada a cumplir su misión narrativa con la máxima economía de medios'[19] finds its logical and structural extremes in sudden fiction, as Robert Shapard illustrates in his introduction to *Sudden Fiction*: 'Sudden. Without warning, from the Latin *subire*, to steal upon. Unforeseen, swift. *Sudden*'.[20] Use of the term 'sudden fiction', then, is both a stylistic consideration and a theoretical conviction insofar as it comes to represent a literature fascinated by the far-reaching, ontological possibilities of extreme brevity and

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[15] Ana María Shua and Rhonda Dahl Buchanan, *Quick Fix: Sudden Fiction* (New York: White Pine Press, 2008).
[16] Rodríguez, *Cuento en red*, p. 27.
[17] Borges and Bioy Casares, *Cuentos breves,* p. 11.
[18] *Obra 2,* p. 379.
[19] *Último round*, p. 35.
[20] Shapard and Thomas, p. xvi.

concision.

Of greater interest in the context of this chapter, however, is not so much the contentious issue of nomenclature but the factors that give rise to such contention. That is, there are considerable grounds to argue that the issue of nomenclature is symptomatic of sudden fiction's inherent liminality. Zavala observes that sudden fiction 'situates itself in uncertainty, in the liminal, paradoxical, indeterminate and productive spaces of possibility where all limiting interpretations become irrelevant'.[21] Zavala further attests to the generically protean nature of the medium and its import not only with regard to the creative process, but also in the context of its critical and commercial reception:

> The critical reading of these texts poses fundamental questions to literary theory and to the practice of composition, because they are at once fragmentary novels, short story cycles and minifiction series. They tacitly make us raise questions concerning their original generic definitions: are they novels? Are they short stories? Are they literature? The answers to these and other questions depend on the angle from which we frame each enquiry, and it is this protean ambiguity that defines the generic, structural and semantic nature of serial minifictions.[22]

This evocation of liminality and its effects on what Zavala refers to as the 'productive spaces of possibility' of the text help to further elaborate upon the concept of narrative space as it is manifest in preceding chapters. Questions of the liminal, as they arise in Shua's strategic use of generic hybridization and intertextuality, serve to reconfigure the narrative play space by opening up or otherwise distorting its generic and by implication its ontological borders. In other words, if the narrative space represents a play space, as I argue that it does, then the narrative stratagems of generic

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[21] Patea, *Short Story Theories*, p. 298.
[22] Ibid., p. 289.

hybridization and intertextuality call attention to, and actively distort, the topographical structures of such a ludically-charged, imaginative space. Specifically, the concepts of generic hybridization and intertextuality ultimately dictate the interpretive strategies employed by the reader, thus conditioning or otherwise manipulating his/her reading of, or journey through, the text. By logical implication, Shua's attempts to frustrate the reader's often generically-contingent interpretive expectations actively problematize the boundaries of the play sphere, and with them, the rules by which the game ought to be played.

Thus, the generically unstable nature of sudden fiction further problematizes topographical considerations of the narrative space by opening up - or otherwise distorting - generic and referential boundaries. As such, the Borgesian notions of the chess board and the labyrinth and the Cortazarian conceptualization of the boxing ring and the monstrous house - insofar as they represent topographical structures of play - find themselves under a process of reconfiguration in Shua's sudden fictions. The formal structures of sudden fiction elaborate upon more dynamic spheres of play that necessitate a renewed conceptualization of both the ideal reader construct and his/her reading strategies and interpretational and creative responsibilities. Thus, generic hybridization not only acts as typical identificatory staple of the sudden fiction genre, but also as a narrative strategy consciously employed by Shua to frustrate, and thereby potentially renew, the reader's typical interpretational and creative procedures.

Unsurprisingly, then, questions of genre form the thematic basis of a number of Shua's sudden fictions. 'Respeto por los generos', for example shows how a given text's identification with a particular genre not only affects the reader's perception of the text,

but also the interpretive strategies used to deal with it:

> Un hombre despierta junto a una mujer a la que no reconoce. En una historia policial esta situación podría ser efecto del alcohol, de la droga o de un golpe en la cabeza. En un cuento de ciencia ficción el hombre comprendería eventualmente que se encuentra en un universo paralelo. En una novela existencialista el no reconocimiento podría deberse, simplemente, a una sensación de extrañamiento, de absurdo. En un texto experimental el misterio quedaría sin desentrañar y la situación sería resuelta por una pirueta del lenguaje. Los editores son cada vez más exigentes y el hombre sabe, con cierta desesperación, que si no logra ubicarse rápidamente en un género corre el riesgo de permanecer dolorosa, perpetuamente inédito.[23]

On a textual level, 'Respeto por los géneros' illustrates the generic liminality of the sudden fiction format through something of a textualized Schrödinger's Cat scenario. In the work's liminal state, it simultaneously represents the crime novel, the science fiction tale, the existential novel and the experimental, postmodern text. The text connects with, but never wholly embodies any of these genres, suggesting that Shua's sudden fictions defy any categorization beyond their own, inherent hybridization. Likewise, in 'La mujer que vuela', the woman's ability to fly is not understood in terms of the act itself, but through the genre tropes that the act implicitly evokes:

> -Puedo volar -dice la mujer.
> Se la ve grande y cansada. Fue bella.
> -Trapecista. Una genial trapecista- entiende el director del circo.
> -No. Yo vuelo. De verdad.
> -¿Con cables invisibles? ¿Con un sistema de imanes, como el mago David Copperfield?
> -Usted no entiende. Como Súperman.
> La mujer alza el vuelo y da una vuelta completa alrededor de la carpa.
> - Una gran artista. Pero no es este su lugar, señora - el director es sincero y odia tener que rechazar a una gran artista. - Este es un modesto circo de minicuento. Estoy seguro de que tendrá más suerte en una novela de realismo mágico.[24]

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[23] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 411.
[24] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 62.

Oblique, self-referential allusions to the commercial and creative pressures of writing aside for the time being, both 'Respeto por los géneros' and 'La mujer que vuela' explicitly subvert the notion of genre as a stable category. In doing so, both texts not only suggest that expectations of genre shape our perception of a given narrative event, they also attest to the ways in which the concept of liminality opens up the generic and thematic boundaries of the text, and in doing so, multiplies the interpretive possibilities to which such texts give rise. By focussing on their ability to weave themselves into a seemingly endless number of literary modes, genres and heritages, Shua consciously portrays the narrative spaces of her sudden fictions as dynamic, ever-changing sites of ludic engagement between reader and author. Zavala attests to the ways in which this dynamism in turn points to the performative role of the reader:

> En muchos casos de escritura ultracorta es difícil distinguir un cuento tradicional de otros géneros. Un mismo texto puede aparecer en antologías de poema en prosa, ensayo o crónica. Esto lleva a pensar que la naturaleza genérica de cada texto depende en muchos casos de la manera como es leído por cada lector, lo cual depende a su vez de sus estrategias de lectura y de su experiencia literaria y extraliteraria.[25]

Thus, the generically unstable nature of sudden fiction, evinced in its playful transgenericism and meta-literary proclivities, dramatically alters the narrative space as it comes to represent a play space that enables the confrontation between author and reader. This idea of interweaving immediately evokes certain intertextual and transtextual parallels. For Julia Kristeva: 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; and text is the absorption and transformation of another'.[26] Shua's

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[25] Zavala, 'El cuento ultracorto bajo el microscopio', p. 13.
[26] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, Novel' in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 64-91 (66). It is also important to note, as Mary Orr (p. 26) stresses and Kristeva herself implies, that this definition of intertextuality is, in itself, 'a *gloss* and transposition of Bakhtin's thought'. See Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 2003).

conscious subversion of intertextual and transtextual processes will now be analysed in light of its two-fold relevance. Firstly, the intertextual processes of Shua's sudden fictions will be discussed in relation to their foregrounding of the spatial dimensions of the text as a mediating environment or transformational space. Secondly, Shua's subversion of the purportedly anonymous, anti-humanist and impersonal impetus of intertextual paradigms will be discussed in light of its explicit problematization of authorial presence within the narrative space.[27]

3.2.1 Intertextuality and Transtextuality - The Narrative Space as Mediating Environment

As we will now see, the Kristevan model of intertextuality can be used to further illustrate the spatial implications of the narrative as a mediating environment. Presently, the aim here is not to reduce the concept of intertextuality, already a much

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[27] The significance of the term 'anti-humanist' lies in its insistence that it is the subject alone that is responsible for the elaboration of the work's structures of meaning. As such, this anti-humanist inflection serves to problematize the reader-author dynamic insofar as it attempts to remove the Author from the production of meaning. Megan Becker-Leckrone's J*ulia Kristeva and Literary Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), further elaborates on Kristeva's 'anti-identificatory' anti-humanism:

> Both outside and within the normative structures of meaning, the 'excesses' Kristeva identifies shape the contours of a human identity that is rational only if our critical gaze is trained on the tip of the iceberg and not its great 'hidden' base. According to this 'new conception', the subject both produces and is produced by structures of meaning that are multiple, illogical, and often at odds, matters of the body and culture as well as the mind. (p. 22)

With a particular emphasis on the sexual politics at work in Kristeva's theory of language, Toril Moi's *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003) further attests to the model's anti-humanist, anti-essentialist power reconfigurations. Owing to the nature of this chapter, the focus here is not on Moi's account of the sexual politics of Kristeva's theories, but on their apparent rejection of a once authorially-contingent and hierarchically-constructed power configuration:

> Kristeva's perspective is not exclusively or essentially feminist, but it is one in which the hierarchical closure imposed on meaning and language has been opened up to the free-play of the signifier. Applied to the field of sexual identity and difference, this becomes a feminist vision of a society in which the sexual signifier would be free to move; where the fact of being born male or female no longer would determine the subject's position in relation to power, and where, therefore, *the very nature of power would be transformed*. (p. 171)

debated term in regards to both its meaning and function, to the mere study of one author's use of another author's work. That is, there is no attempt to deal with intertextuality from within the simple, verbal confines of allusion, quotation and plagiarism, as Genette suggests.[28] Rather, the central concerns here are the ways in which intertextuality, insofar as it comes to represent a consciously-employed narrative stratagem as opposed to a mere textual, verbal inevitability, evokes a sense of intertextual spatiality. Such a focus will allow us to envision the text as both a theatre of production and a transformational surface or space.

Moreover, an analysis of the intertextual elements of Shua's sudden fictions will reveal how the anonymous, anti-humanist and impersonal impetus of Kristevan intertextuality finds itself at odds with Shua's conscious subversion of intertextual reference as a means of opening up the ontological territories of the text and problematizing authorial presence within the narrative space. That is, conscious intertextual spatiality, constituted in large part by the author's conscious problematization of generic borders, represent a narrative stratagem that not only responds to sudden fiction's demand for brevity and concision, but also reconfigures the reader-author relationship by attempting to both foreground the narrative space and reassert authorial presence.

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[28] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997):

> For my part I define [intertextuality], no doubt in a more restrictive sense, as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, with or without specific references). In another less explicit and canonical form, it is the practice of *plagiarism* (in Lautreamont, for instance), which is an undeclared but still literal borrowing. Again, in still less explicit and less literal guise, it is the practice of *allusion*: that is, an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible. (pp. 1-2)

Thus, further to the concept of generic hybridization, the spatial, topographical features of the text can be further illustrated by engaging with the consciously intertextual nature of Shua's sudden fiction. The intertextual models put forward by Kristeva and her fellow poststructuralists are insightful, then, insofar as their various, and often conflicting, attempts to account for the text as a mosaic or tissue of quotations drawn from myriad literary and cultural sources serve to reinforce the spatial dimensions of the narrative. According to Barthes, for instance:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[29]

Of particular interest here, then, are the various theoretical accounts of this intertextual spatiality. Such a focus allows us to harness the theoretical import of intertextuality as a mediation of literary form as opposed to verbal content. Indeed, while Kristevan theory refers primarily to the specialized nature of the word, we may also use such models to stress the function of the text as a *mediating environment* and thus, a spatialized construct. As Kristeva herself suggests:

> The word as minimal textual unit thus turns out to occupy the status of *mediator*, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment, as well as that of *regulator*, controlling mutations from diachrony to synchrony, i.e., to literary structure. The word is spatialized; through the very notion of status, it functions in three dimensions (subject-addressee-context) as a set of *dialogical*, semic elements.[30]

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[29] Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, p. 146.
[30] Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text' in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 36-63 (66).

References to mediating environments, mutations in literary structure and the dialogical space of the text are paramount insofar as they provide the text with a distinctly spatial dimension and thus, reinforce the concept of the text as a contested space of play. Specifically, Kristeva suggests that - owing to the transpositional processes inherent to intertextuality - the text comes to represent a site of continuous reconfiguration, the forms and boundaries of which are myriad and nebulous. In 'The Bounded Text', for instance, Kristeva outlines just such a process of reconfiguration and destructive-constructive redistribution:

> The text is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a *productivity*, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that is it a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.[31]

For Kristeva, then, the permutational nature of intertextuality robs the text of its authoritative fixity and, in doing so, generates an interactive, productive site of engagement within a dynamic narrative space.[32] Barthes further attests to this spatial dimension of the narrative in his account of the text as a productive theatre of meaning:

> The text is a productivity. Not in the sense that it is a product of being worked (as narrative technique or the mastery or style would demand), but as the very theatre of the production where the producer of the text and the reader come together: the text works whenever and however it is taken up; even in written fixed form, the text does not stop working, or undertaking a process of production.[33]

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[31] Ibid., p. 36.
[32] As Orr observes, 'there can be no authoritative fixity for interactive, permutational (inter)text' (p. 28).
[33] Cited in Orr's *Intertextuality*, p. 33.

The fact that Tilottama Rajan, through the lense of Kristevan intertextuality, sees the text as a 'transformational surface' that brings about a new articulation of enunciative and denotative positionality further attests to the text's nature as a dynamic space in a constant state of flux.[34] This idea of the text as a transformational surface shares significant parallels with the nature Shua's sudden fictions, insofar as they come to represent, through generic hybridization and self-reflective intertextuality, a constantly shifting, dynamic space. To borrow from Rajan's terminology, it could be said that Shua's texts 'construct themselves intertextually,' or that they 'thematize intertextuality so as to make it their operative mode'.[35] Moreover, Rajan's assertion that 'writing and reading exist on a transformational continuum' is of particular relevance insofar as it suggests a necessary interpretive agility about the reader.[36] That is, the notion that the reader 'will himself be subject to rereading, to further articulations of the thetic generated by his inscription in the text' shares significant parallels with the ways in which Shua actively problematizes the reader's position in relation to, and by implication, function within, the narrative space.[37]

Thus, intertextuality allows us to envision the text as a mediating environment, a theatre of production, and a transformational surface. Through these various intertextual models and their mediation of spatialized, literary form, we are ultimately able to see the text primarily as 'a performative site of engagement'.[38] More than a

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[34] Tilottama Rajan, 'Intertextuality and the Subject of Reading/Writing' in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 61-74 (65).
[35] Ibid., p. 68.
[36] Ibid., p. 69.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author' in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 146-180 (149).

simple mediation of verbal content, intertextuality renders the borders of Shua's various narrative spaces nebulous and, in doing so, emphasises the reader's performative role within them. It is with these notions of the text as a multi-dimensional, performative site of engagement in mind that we move towards an analysis of the narrative space as it is manifest in Shua's sudden fictions. As we will now see, Shua's consciously intertextual construction of the text not only attests to the poststructural denial of the text as a pure, originary entity, it also problematizes the topographical structure of the play space insofar as it renders its (generic) borders nebulous and uncertain.

While for Kristeva and her fellow poststructuralists, this process of transposition forms an inevitable and natural element of the arts, sudden fiction sheds new light on the process insofar as it constitutes an essential, formal element of the genre. That is, sudden fiction not only utilizes intertextual transposition as a means of achieving its characteristic brevity and concision, but actively thematizes instances of intertextual transposition as a means of destabilizing the narrative space. Indeed, a number of Shua's sudden fictions offer both a literalization and playful subversion of the Kristevan notion that a literary structure 'does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure' in such a way that alludes to the rapid expansion of the narrative space through a destabilization of generic boundaries.[39] Shua's 'Máquina del tiempo' provides an effective illustration of just such a process of playful subversion:

> A través de este instrumento rudimentario, descubierto casi por azar, es posible entrever ciertas escenas del futuro, como quien espía por una cerradura. La simplicidad del equipo y ciertos indicios históricos nos permiten suponer que no hemos sido los primeros en hacer este hallazgo. Así podría haber conocido

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[39] Rajan, 'The Subject of Reading/Writing', p. 65.

Cervantes, antes de componer su Quijote, la obra completa de nuestro contemporáneo Pierre Menard.[40]

Koricancic's evocation of Genette's 'transtextuality' further alludes to the opening up of the topographical structure of the narrative space through an intensification of textual referents.[41] In the particular case of 'Máquina del tiempo', however, the inversion of creative origin, from Cervantes as originary creator to the fictional, Borgesian invention of Pierre Menard, not only disrupts the interpretive strategies typically employed by the reader, but multiplies the sites of ludic engagement. That is, by playfully introducing both Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha* and Borges' 'Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*' as further sites of engagement, Shua consciously elevates the intertextual import of the text above the mere acts of allusion, quotation or plagiarism and instead points to an expansion of the narrative space that seemingly undermines the ontological disconnect between fiction and reality in her work. As Koricancic suggests:

De esta manera, Shua homenajea a dos grandes escritores de la lengua española. Además, al situar a un personaje textual y a un escritor de la vida real dentro del mismo plano enunciativo, descubre la inestabilidad de las categorías 'realidad' y 'ficción' en su literatura.[42]

Shua's conscious, playful evocation of Borges and Cervantes harnesses the spatial potential of intertextuality by insisting that the text, and by implication, the narrative space, cannot be considered in light of its singularity, but rather, in terms of its architextuality. According to Genette, this architextuality refers to 'the entire set of

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[40] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 322.
[41] Velebita Koricancic, 'Las estrategias lúdicas en los micro-relatos de Ana María Shua', *El cuento en Red*, 17 (2007), 1-19
<http://cuentoenred.xoc.uam.mx/tabla_contenido.php?id_fasciculo=227>[accessed 11.10.2015].
[42] Ibid., p. 7.

general or transcendent categories - types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres - from which emerges each singular text'.[43] As such, sudden fiction could be said to destabilize typical generic boundaries though the ludic co-opting of the textual transcendence of the text. That is, through the explicit thematization of 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts'.[44]

A further example of this textual transcendence, or transtextuality, can be found in 'El tamaño importa':

> En 1832 llegó a México, con un circo, el primer elefante que pisó tierras aztecas. Se llamaba Mogul. Después de su muerte, su carne fue vendida a elaboradores de antojitos y su esqueleto fue exhibido como si hubiera pertenecido a un animal prehistórico. El circo tenía también un pequeño dinosaurio, no más grande que una iguana, pero no llamaba la atención más que por su habilidad para bailar habaneras. Murió en uno de los penosos viajes de pueblo en pueblo, fue enterrado al costado del camino, sin una piedra que señalara su tumba, y nada sabríamos de él si no lo hubiera soñado Monterroso.[45]

Here, the closing allusion to Augusto Monterroso's 'El dinosaurio' not only suggests a conscious evocation of literary heritage, but opens up the narrative space by weaving itself into the thematic fabric of Monterosso's most famous, one-line, short story: 'Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí'.[46] In doing so, Shua not only further reinforces the transtextual potentiality of the sudden fiction format, but also frustrates the closural elements of the narrative by opening the text up to further, literary allusions and paths of exploration. As such, the concepts of intertextuality and transtextuality replace the line with the Kristevan-Barthesian tissue, web or matrix;

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[43] Genette, *Palimpsest*, p. 1.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 121.
[46] Augusto Monterroso, *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2012), p. 77.

words imbued with a greater topographical significance than the monodirectional, theologically - and thereby authoritatively - inflected line of meaning.

While the potentially *authoricidal* elements of both models are largely incompatible with the theorizations but forth in this chapter, it is through the lense of Kristevan intertextuality and Genettian transtextuality that we are more clearly able to see the 'mediating environment', the 'theatre of productivity' and the 'transformational surface' as metaphors of the text. Indeed, all three concepts denote a particularly topographical element with regards to the narrative space. Sudden fiction is no stranger to spatially-inflected considerations of its literary form, according to Patea, the short fiction format naturally lends itself to the conceptualization of its narrative structure in terms of its perceived spatial dimensions:

> Because of its compressed structure, the short form lends itself to pictorial perceptions and can be perceived in spatial terms by the reader. The form's brevity invites an analogy between the short story and the spatial dimension of visual arts - such as painting and photography - which differentiates the short form from the temporality of the novel, which more clearly unfolds in time.[47]

There are significant links to be made here between Patea's comments on the spatial dimension of the short form and the idea that Malva E. Filer puts forward in relation to Cortázar, discussed in Chapter II. Namely, Patea's comments echo Filer's claims that (Cortazarian) short fiction often represents a textualized consideration of the 'spatiotemporal relationships that occur in the imaginative process'.[48] The claims made by both Filer and Patea attest to the nature of the fantastic short story narrative as a 'space of infinite transformations'.[49] It is with this idea of the narrative space as

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[47] Patea, *Short Story Theories*, p. 10.
[48] Filer, 'Spatial and Temporal Representations', p. 260.
[49] Ibid., p. 262.

a kinetic, ever-changing topographical structure of play in mind that we turn our attention to the concepts of reader movement and the frustration of closural features.

As we have now discussed, Shua's conscious eschewing of typical intertextual and transtextual paradigms not only problematizes the perceived spatial dimension of the text, but also seeks to reconfigure the reader's engagement with the text as it is traditionally conceived as an authorially-ordained or dictated journey. This interpretive journey, as it comes to represent a movement along or through the units of meaning that make up the text itself, has been effectively illustrated in Chapter I using the reader-response manifesto of Stanley Fish's 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics'. Fish's description of the reader's linear movement through the text is further reinforced by Robert Coover's account of the 'compulsory, author-directed movement from the beginning of a sentence to its period'[50] and Susan Lohafer's 'experience of *entering, moving through, and getting out of the story*'.[51]

As with Borges, such linear interpretive paradigms are subverted in Shua's sudden fictions through a frustration of cultural features. Intertextuality, as it is consciously employed by Shua, often seeks to subvert this idea of simply getting out of the story through a distortion, or expansion of the boundaries of the narrative space. In effect, Shua's intertextually-inflected sudden fictions move away from the conditioning effects of closural elements, and instead seek to open up the ending by alluding to a network or matrix of subsequent texts and themes. Thus, the reader's conditioning is upset, and the act of reading becomes less an act of travelling from beginning to end, and

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[50] Coover, web.
[51] Susan Lohafer, 'A Cognitive Approach to Storyness' in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 301 - 311 (301).

more an exploration of the narrative space and its protean thresholds. Consequently, Shua problematizes typical perceptions of the narrative space as a linear construct not only through the spatialization of an otherwise linear form, but also through a frustration of the reader's sense of closure.

On the importance of closural elements, John Gerlach suggests that 'endings condition our readings of the entire text as well as the endings themselves'.[52] Readerly anticipation of an ending not only conditions the reader, but allows him/her to orientate him/herself within the narrative space. Used as an interpretational device, the expectation of closure represents a tacit understanding between reader and author that allows the reader to draw up a definitive cognitive map of the text from beginning to end. Such a map can then be further furnished depending on the reader's identification of the generic markers and intertextual references that allow him/her to adequately discern the nature of the text. Shua's manipulation of the sudden fiction format's generically protean nature, and subsequent frustration of closural elements, disrupts the reader's ability to locate him/herself within both the generic and formal structures of the text by rendering those very structures unreliable and open to change. This rhizomatic edge will be further elaborated upon in a discussion of the proto-hypertextual nature of Shua's sudden fictions. Presently, however, the reader frustration evoked through generic and structural misdirection is of more pressing concern. The possibility of frustration and misdirection forms the thematic crux of stories such as 'Pista falsa':

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[52] John Gerlach, *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), p. 4.

> Seguir el reguero de manchas, ¿no será peligroso? ¿Cómo saber que conducen hasta el cadáver, y no hasta el asesino? (Pero las manchas son de tinta y llevan hasta la palabra *fin*).[53]

Not only does the text evoke the concepts of the Cortazarian reader-victim, falling prey to the very murder recounted in the novel he is reading in 'Continuidad de los parques' and the Borgesian super-sleuth reader seen in the likes of 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', it also reveals a similar concern for the reader's movement through the text. Specifically, there is an explicit, albeit playful, warning against any acquiescence with 'the line'. That is, the readerly desire to merely enter, move through, and get out of the narrative space is seen as a potentially dangerous endeavour in 'Pista falsa' in much the same way as in Borges and Cortázar. Similarly, the frantic, disoriented and potentially disastrous attempt to follow the narrative line is effectively thematized in Shua's 'Naufragio'/'Sueño #117':

> ¡Arriad el foque!, ordena el capitán. ¡Arriad el foque!, repite el segundo. ¡Orzad a estribor!, grita el capitán. ¡Orzad a estribor!, repite el segundo. ¡Cuidado con el bauprés!, grita el capitán. ¡El bauprés!, repite el segundo. ¡Abatid el palo de mesana!, grita el capitán. ¡El palo de mesana!, repite el segundo. Entretanto la tormenta arrecia y los marineros corremos de un lado a otro de la cubierta, desconcertados. Si no encontramos pronto un diccionario, nos vamos a pique sin remedio.[54]

The story's depiction of the sailor's dutiful attempts to decode and act upon the captain's orders draws significant parallels with the interpretive responsibilities of the reader and his/her attempts to move through the text. Accordingly, the crew's fear of drowning is tantamount to the reader's concern for being overwhelmed, outmatched or otherwise lost in the text. Thus, the text not only reminds us of Fish's account of the authorial strategy of making the reader doubt both his/her own performance and

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[53] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 355.
[54] Shua, *La sueñera*, p. 127.

the correctness of his responses (discussed in Chapter II), but also thematizes an implicit concern for the reader's navigation of the narrative space in light of its kinetic and unstable nature. That is, there is a ludic subversion of the ways in which implicit communication of a text's internal structures conditions the reader's perception of the narrative, and with it, the interpretive strategies used to deal with it. The implicit suggestion in both stories that the author figure, insofar as he/she comes to represent the final authority on the reader's movement through the text, brings us to the issue of authorial presence as it forms part of the literary politics of Shua's sudden fictions.

3.2.2 Intertextuality and Transtextuality - The Narrative Space as Authorial Hiding Place

While Kristevan intertextuality largely fails to account for the reader as a 'pivot of interpretability within or outside the text'[55], Barthes' take on the intertextual model, as it is manifest in his essay 'Death of the Author', explicitly reconfigures the centre of power and authority in favour of the reader construct. In doing so, Barthes addresses, and 'overwrites' what Mary Orr considers to be one of the 'blind spots' of the Kristevan intertextual model as 'theory of text as productivity'.[56] Specifically, Barthes states that:

> A text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader and not, as was hitherto said, the author.[57]

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[55] Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 26.
[56] Ibid., p. 32.
[57] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 148.

As has been discussed in Chapter II, Barthes' essay is clear in its murderous intent towards the authorial subject, an intent echoed to varying degrees not only in other seminal works such as Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' but also throughout the theoretical and methodological paradigms posited by New Criticism and reader-response theory. As Paul Kameen stresses, however, 'Barthes does not make the concept of *an* author irrelevant to the activity of reading. Nor does Foucault shortly after him'.[58] Instead, what Barthes and Foucault are concerned about is '*the* Author, with a capital A, that antecedent force of imaginative creation, invented figuratively by processes of commodification and canonization, and then rendered literally through successive acts of autobiography, biography and explanation'.[59] Indeed, according to Barthes, to give a text such an Author 'is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing'.[60]

This concept of the Author as antecedent force comes under fierce, if not humorous, interrogation in Shua's sudden fictions. For Shua, authorial presence is not tantamount to the fixing of objective meaning or the closing of the text *per se*. Rather, authorial presence serves as a constant reminder of the contested nature of the narrative space, a space that, as Barthes suggests, must be traversed or 'ranged over' and not merely penetrated or 'pierced'.[61] Indeed, it is thanks to Barthes' concept of the narrative space or 'writing space', and not in spite of it, that we are able to appreciate the ontological significance of authorial presence in Shua. Owing to the ludic nature of the reading act as it has hitherto been discussed, such a presence still

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[58] Paul Kameen, *Re-reading Poets: The Life of the Author* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), p. 5.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, p. 147.
[61] Ibid.

points to 'the multiplicity of writing' whereby 'everything is to be *disentangled*' and 'nothing *deciphered*'.[62] Thus, by refusing to assign a 'secret', ultimate, objective meaning to the text, Barthes argues that we might liberate 'what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, law'.[63]

Shua inserts herself into this distinctly Barthesian, anti-theological line of reasoning, albeit with a typically subversive sense of humour. This is not to say that Shua entirely undermines the act of interpretation as it comes to represent, in Barthes, a 'truly revolutionary' act. Rather, Shua often co-opts just such a poststructural proclivity - the killing of the author as a means of empowering the reader - in order to ironically posit the author figure as something of a fugitive that, owing to the author-killing proclivities of contemporary criticism, must hide from the reader/critic. 'Sueno #48' thematizes just such an instance of *authoricidal* literary politics turned game of hide-and-seek:

> Los calamares no me atemorizan. En señal de mi amistad, trenzo y destrenzo sus tentáculos. Después de todo, soy casi una de ellos: yo también sé jugar a esconderme con nubes de tinta.[64]

Shua's account of the author figure hiding behind his/her words, or 'nubes de tinta', points not to a disappearance of the author, but to something of a vanishing act. As such, in 'Sueno #48', Shua not only subverts the poststructural displacement of the author, but actively thematizes the deceptive vanishing act performed by such a figure. This concept of the vanishing act will be explicated further in the coming analysis of the magic act as a metaphor of literary creation. Of more immediate interest, however,

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Shua, *La sueñera*, p. 58.

is the ideological and functional juxtaposition that emerges between the act of hiding or vanishing, seen here as a conscious, author-employed, narrative stratagem and the concept of the 'vanishing author' as it is manifest in Italo Calvino's 'Cybernetics and Ghosts'. Here, Calvino suggests that the work or text 'will continue to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or constantly renewed on contact with the eye of the reader. What will vanish is the figure of the author, that personage to whom we persist in attributing functions that do not belong to him'.[65] Calvino offers a less abstract notion of the author figure than that of the Barthesian model. That is, the author as a product of the processes of literary commodification and canonization gives way to:

> [T]he author as an exhibitor of his own soul in the permanent Exhibition of Souls, the author as the exploiter of sensory and interpretive organs more receptive than the average...The author: that anachronistic personage, the bearer of messages, the director of consciences, the giver of lectures to cultural bodies.[66]

For Calvino, the vanishing act is imposed upon the author by the author-killing bent of contemporary reading, critical and interpretive paradigms. Owing to a general rejection of the closed text, the author figure, as he/she has come to represent an ultimate authority over the text, is forced to disappear from the text entirely, making way for the reconfigurative potential of the empowered reader. Like Barthes' Author with a capital A, Calvino's notion of the vanishing author is ironized in stories like 'La ardilla verosímil', where the emphasis is firmly placed on the author's sudden and comical reappearance:

> Un hombre es amigo de una ardilla que vive en el jardín de un conocido financista. Trepando de un salto al alféizar de la ventana, la ardilla escucha conversaciones claves acerca de las oscilaciones de la Bolsa de Valores.

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[65] Calvino, 'Cybernetics and Ghosts', p. 16.
[66] Ibid.

> Usted no se sorprenderá en absoluto si le cuento que el amigo de la ardilla se enriquece rápidamente con sus inversiones.
> Pero yo sí estoy sorprendida. No dejo de preguntarme por qué usted está tan dispuesto a creer, sin un instante de duda, que una ardilla pueda entender conversaciones claves acerca de las oscilaciones de la Bolsa.[67]

The story reveals a further instance of sudden authorial intervention as they have hitherto been discussed over the last three chapters. Of particular significance here, however, is the way in which such an act of intervention is set apart from the typical severity seen in the works of Borges and Cortázar. Here, the author's sudden reappearance comes not in the form of a sudden, fantastic *denouement* or a potentially fatal metaleptic transgression, but in the form of a pithy punchline ostensibly employed to mock the reader for a particular interpretive stance. Specifically, Shua manipulates the reader's understanding of, and subsequent compliance with, a particular set of generic expectations and boundaries through the use of ironic humour. In the case of 'la ardilla verosímil', the reader accepts the conventions of fantasy, manifest in the depiction of a talking, economically savvy squirrel, but is ultimately ridiculed for doing so. In Shua's own words, 'Me gusta mucho desacomodar al lector. Es un juego que me divierte mucho. La literatura se trata de eso'.[68]

The further examples of 'Cuatro Paredes,' 'Espíritu,' and 'Houdini, el escapista' not only define the text through a series of spatial metaphors, but also attest to the author's continued presence within each narrative space and, as such, offer further ironic takes on the poststructural notion of the 'closed text'. Specifically, these stories seek to reconfigure the Barthesian refusal to fix meaning, to close the text, by problematizing

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[67] Shua, *Temporada de fantasmas*, p. 631.
[68] 'El oficio de lo breve y extraordinario', *Télam* (29 September 2015) <http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201509/121731-el-oficio-de-lo-breve-y-extraordinario.html?iframe=true&width=100%&height=100%> [accessed 15.07.2016].

just such a process of closure. Indeed, Shua often jokes that the text is closed with the author still trapped inside. Such is the case in 'Cuatro Paredes':

> Siempre encerrada entre estas cuatro paredes, inventándome mundos para no pensar en la rutina, en esta vida plana, unidimensional, limitada por el fatal rectángulo de la hoja.[69]

Likewise, 'Espíritu' alludes to a similar idea of the author finding herself trapped within the text is such a way that ironically reconfigures or otherwise destabilizes the authoritative centeredness of the Author figure:

> En estas humildes palabras está encerrado todo el espíritu de su autora: 'Socorro, socorro, sáquenme de aquí'.[70]

Ultimately, both 'Cuatro Paredes' and 'Espíritu' problematize authorial presence by presenting the author figure not as the Barthesian, theologically-inflected Author-God, but as a fellow inhabitant of, or player within, the narrative space. The ontological import of such a subversion is clear: Sudden fiction blurs the line between fiction and reality through the constant destabilization of its borders. We have seen similar instances of destabilization in the likes of Borges' 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and Cortázar's 'Las babas del diablo'. In such instances, the fantastic merging of the fictional with the real represents an immediate threat to the stories' respective reader-protagonists, and by implication their non-fictionalized readers. In Shua's sudden fictions, however, such instances of merging represent more playful, almost whimsical affairs. 'Houdini, el escapista', for instance, not only alludes to the inherent artifice of fiction though the reference to the great escape artist and illusionist, Harold Houdini,

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[69] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 404.
[70] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 370.

the text also features the playful thematization of the ontological merging of reality and fiction:

> Fue ilusionista, atleta, contorsionista y cerrajero. Se hizo llamar Houdini, creó el número del escapismo y fue el mejor escapista de todos los tiempos. En pueblos y ciudades promocionaba su acto desafiando al jefe de policía o de la prisión local a mantenerlo encerrado. Escapó de cuerdas, cadenas, camisas de fuerza, todo tipo de esposas, barriles, cajas, baúles, bidones, bolsas, sacos, ataúdes, jaulas y habitaciones cerradas. Y sin embargo, yo conseguí atraparlo aquí, para siempre: para ustedes.[71]

As such, the story attests to the ways in which the ludic serves to level the ontological playing field. All three stories come together to reveal how the text becomes a neutral ground for multiple ontological territories. In Shua, the narrative space of the sudden fiction represents something of an augmented reality. That is, the narrative space opens up in such a way that allows for the co-occupation or superimposition of author, fictional creation and historical figure.

However, Shua's conscious use of intertextual references plays on the impersonal nature of its transpositional, origin-erasing processes. In Shua, intertextuality is not the 'anonymous', 'impersonal' process of 'blending, clashing and intersecting'.[72] Instead, the conscious use of intertextual transposition becomes the means by which the author is able to both define and/or problematize the boundaries of the narrative space, not through the intertextual model's typical insistence on the authority of quotations and citations, but through its implicit subversion of genre thresholds and expectations. As a result, the author figure is not erased by the intertextual process, s/he is given renewed form as a player within the ever-changing, topographical play

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[71] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 142.
[72] Friedman, p. 149.

arena that is the narrative space. The author acquires a ludic function similar to that of the reader, and while this particular author is often mischievous and misleading, s/he remains far detached from the Barthesian notion of a collectively-conceived, tyrannical author-with-a-capital-A.

Consequently, the agential, exploratory role of the (ideal) reader is manifest in his or her tracing of, and reaction to, these intertextual references. Often, these responses or reactions are anticipated by the author, leading to further misdirection and problems of orientation. This is how the game is played: The ideal reader is expected, or otherwise encouraged to navigate deceptively small narrative spaces that open up into often vertiginous, protean landscapes. Thus, Shua's conscious and insistent destabilization of the narrative space through both the use of intertextuality and, by implication, the rejection of textual linearity helps to elaborate on the performative role of the reader and his/her task at hand, namely, the overcoming of linguistic disorientation and the decoding of an ever-shifting meaning.

This disorientation is further compounded by the intensity of the sudden fiction's characteristic brevity and concision. It is with these factors in mind that we begin to grasp the ways in which the narrative space - and with it, the reader's navigation of or movement through it - become problematic in Shua. Thus, while Rojo's account of intertextuality as a basic, stylistic necessity falls in line with a general critical consensus, there are significant grounds to argue that its typical function as interpretive anchor is subverted in Shua's sudden fictions. Intertextuality, like generic hybridization, becomes the means by which Shua problematizes or frustrates the reader's navigation of the text's internal structures by opening up the narrative space

and distorting its generic boundaries. The frenetic transgenericism of Shua's sudden fiction challenges - and often subverts - the tacit understanding between the text and its reader, often intentionally leading the reader astray. In short, the reader is unsure how to read the text. The propensity for generic hybridization and subversive intertextuality presents new challenges in the elaboration of idealized reader constructs, for the opening up of the narrative space coerces the reader into numerous and often conflicting roles. The concern for reception, possible (mis)communication and problematic navigation as a result of sudden fiction's generically kaleidoscopic nature is further elaborated upon in Shua's 'Poetas':

> Náufrago en este mundo lejano por donde no pasan ni pasarán nuestras naves, perdido en este grano de polvo apartado de todas las rutas comerciales del universo, estoy condenado a la soledad esencial de sus habitantes, incapaces de comunicarse con una herramienta menos torpe, menos opaca que el lenguaje. Yo lo utilizo para lanzar mensajes en clave que solo los demás náufragos pueden comprender. La gente nos llama poetas.[73]

Not only does the story's allusion to the poem testify to the generic confusion inherent to Shua's sudden fictions, it also elaborates upon one of the numerous idealized reader constructs to be found in Shua's work.[74] That is, 'Poetas' presents the ideal reader as a fellow castaway or poet. As such, intertextuality and generic hybridization represent methods of codification that demand an active, interpretive and decodifying response from the reader. 'Poetas', then, reveals a significant reconfiguration of the author-reader relationship as it is manifest in 'Naufragio'/'Sueño #117' and 'Pista falsa'. In 'Poetas', the author-reader relationship is not defined by the demanding

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[73] Shua, *Temporada de fantasmas*, p. 798.
[74] For more on the formal, ideological and thematic convergences between poetry and microfiction, see Santiago Fortuño Llorens, 'La poeticidad del microrrelato (a propósito de tres antologías)', *Atas do Simpósio Internacional 'Microcontos e outras microformas'* (Universidade do Minho, 6-7 October, 2011) <http://ceh.ilch.uminho.pt/publicacoes/cehum_simpomicro_santiagollorens.pdf>. Here, Llorens not only observes that 'se ha comparado el cuento a la poesía por su brevedad y depuración expresivas' (p. 1), but also provides an effective, bibliographic overview of similar critical reactions to the genre.

captain toying with the bemused and soon-to-be-shipwrecked crewmen, nor is it defined by the bloody footprints that potentially lead the super-sleuth-reader to his/her doom. Rather, in 'Poetas', the author-reader relationship is defined by an implicit co-dependency; meaningful experience is achieved through cooperation and communication, a merging of the ontological categories of two fellow poet-castaways. The logical implication of such an interpretation is that, in the face of the text's dizzying, generically unstable and bifurcating or rhizomatic nature, the reader must be willing to lose him/herself in the text's labyrinthine and ever-shifting internal structures if s/he is to make meaningful contact with the author.

Thus, the reader's role becomes performative insofar as s/he is expected to navigate or explore the text's internal structures and decode instances of flux (generic or otherwise) within the narrative space. To be misled and disoriented, therefore, is to participate in the game as it is conceptualized by Shua as a possible answer to what the 'Poetas' text refers to as author figure's 'soledad esencial'. The games played by Shua - as they appear in 'Naufragio'/'Sueño #117' and 'Poetas' - are not merely stylistic pranks or linguistic pedantry. Rather, they are borne of a need to co-opt the reader's interpretational strategies to achieve some level of ontological connection. Despite the interpretive frustrations inherent to Shua's games, there is an underlying sentiment of co-dependency or cooperation within the liminal, productive space of possibility that sudden fiction comes to represent. It is these notions of the performative reader and the emerging possibility of ontological connection between authorial and readerly identifications that will form the basis of the proceeding analysis on the apparent casualization of reading paradigms.

3.3 Merging of Ontological Territories - 'Hardcore' and 'Casual' Models of Readerly Engagement

As is now clear, Shua's concern is not simply the reader's movement through the narrative space (i.e. from beginning to end), but rather, for his/her dynamic performance within, and creative co-production of, such a space. With this performative role in mind, and with the topography of Shua's narrative spaces now clearly defined, the chapter turns to Shua's conscious problematization of meaningful connection with such spaces or territories. That is, in a time when 'el imperio de la brevedad' has given rise to less paradigmatic and more truncated, fragmented reading practises, Shua's sudden fictions suggest that the text must ensnare the disengaged reader by more immediate, asymmetrical means than the traditional text.[75]

On the subject of such socio-cultural pressures and their effects on contemporary reading practices, Lagmanovich observes:

> La vida moderna, con su paso inflexiblemente apresurado, exige formas artísticas capaces de concordar con el estilo, o con las exigencias, de la época actual. Si la velocidad y la falta de tiempo son características de la sociedad contemporánea, tendrán mayor éxito aquellos textos literarios que exijan menor tiempo para su lectura; de ahí la preferencia por las formas breves, en novelas, cuentos, obras teatrales, realizaciones cinematográficas, composiciones musicales [...]. En este panorama de general achicamiento de extensiones que antes no constituían un problema a resolver parecen insertarse los microrrelatos.[76]

As such, sudden fiction's characteristic brevity and concision are often considered to

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[75] Clara Obligado, *Por favor, sea breve II: Antología de microrrelatos* (Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2009), p. 12.
[76] David Lagmanovich, 'El microrrelato hispánico: algunas reiteraciones', *Iberoamericana*, 9, 36 (2009), 85-95 (p. 92).

be a practical necessity in an age when opportunities to read, that is, when routes of access into the narrative space, are limited. As Steven J. Stewart suggests, 'microfictions and the concision they embody are an increasingly apt literary form for our fast-paced, fragmented, and rapidly changing world'. [77] Similarly, and in specific reference to Shua's work, Rhonda Dahl Buchanan observes that the increased rhythm of daily life and the evolution of social media have brought the concepts of quickness and immediacy to the forefront of contemporary reading paradigms:

> In this age of speed and technology, when people are distracted by email, Blackberries and iPods, the short story has definite appeal for those addicted to reading who can barely find the time to open a book.[78]

Thus, in Shua, there is a growing sense that, in a frenetic society increasingly resistant to traditional, paradigmatic reading practices, the text must display and demand a certain agility if it is to make an affective and enduring connection with the reader. In this sense, the ontological function of Shua's sudden fictions shares significant parallels with the Cortazarian notion of the text's function as both an 'implacable carrera contra el reloj'[79] and a 'puente de hombre a hombre,' or 'coagulante de vivencias'.[80] That is, there is a common concern for, and recurrent problematization of, the reader's ability to access the ontological territories presented by the text in a successful and meaningful way. In the case of Shua's sudden fictions, however, this concern for the brief yet affective seizure of the reader's attention is frustrated by the fact that the typical metaphors of textual exploration and readerly immersion are seen to undergo a perceptible and radical transformation. That is, the readerly processes of 'penetrating, dwelling within, inhabiting and becoming lost (absorbed, swallowed,

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[77] Ana María Shua, *Without a Net*, trans. by Steven J. Stewart (New York: Hanging Loose Press, 2012), p. 5.
[78] *Quick Fix*, p. 13.
[79] *Último round*, p. 35.
[80] *Rayuela,* p. 518.

overwhelmed) in the text' are being modified by much less demanding, less invasive metaphors of exploration and immersion.[81] For instance, Dahl Buchanan describes Shua's *Quick Fix* as 'the perfect book to carry with you for those moments when you must wait for an appointment, a flight, your turn at the check-out line, or if you find yourself stuck in traffic'.[82] Thus, immersion in, and exploration of, the narrative space is seemingly compromised by the truncated, sporadic nature of contemporary reading practices. Meaningful experience becomes mere diversionary stopgap. Shua situates herself within, and subsequently co-opts, this drift towards the diversionary. In Shua, ontological territories are seen to come crashing together in such a way that not only speaks back to the narrative strategies employed by both Borges and Cortázar (discussed in Chapters I and II), but also suggests an intensification of these strategies in light of the perceived emergence of what Francisco Noguerol describes as '[una] estética zapping'.[83] Shua's 'Sueño #69' is a particularly strong example of this intensification:

> Despiértese, que es tarde, me grita desde la puerta un hombre extraño. Despiértese usted, que buena falta le hace, le contesto yo. Pero el muy obstinado me sigue soñando.[84]

'Sueño #69', with its oneiric quality and its insistence on similar strange loops and tangled hierarchies to those found in a number of Borgesian narratives, could be said to represent a stripped-down, intensified version of Borges' 'Las ruinas circulares'. That is, in 'Sueño #69', the ontological distance between creator and creation, between dreamer and dream, is reduced through the same metaleptic processes as

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[81] Wilson, 'Narrative Boundaries', p. 241.
[82] *Quick Fix,* pp. 15-16.
[83] Clara Obligado, *Por favor, sea breve II*, 12.
[84] Shua, *La sueñera*, p. 79.

those seen in Borges' 'Las ruinas circulares', where the dreamer who devotes himself to the oneiric conjuring of another human being is revealed, in turn, to be a dream. Shua's sudden yet humorous – and distinctly Borgesian - inversion of dreamer and dream blurs the line between the ontological territories of the text and, in doing so, thematizes the possibility of a sudden but significant immersion in the fiction despite an extreme concision of form. For Shua, this connection or immersion is often a question of coercion. In her own words, 'se trata de apretar fuerte y ser dulce a la vez. Pero no de estrangular al lector, no. Queremos que nos siga comprando los libros'.[85] The apparent style-over-substance approach of the short fiction genre often invites allegations of whimsical superficiality, in that the stories belonging to the genre apparently present less immersive fictional worlds, as Wilson suggests, almost in passing:

> To say that a text creates a 'world' is an ordinary, and yet profoundly strange idea. It accords with the experience of common readers who often claim that they become lost in the world of the text or who reject certain forms of fiction (the short story, say) because their worlds, in being less fully developed, are either uninteresting or frustrating.[86]

The frustrations of a 'less fully developed world' can only intensify in the face of the hyper-stylised, super-concise nature of sudden fiction. Moreover, it is hard to ignore the explicit commercial focus - ironic or otherwise - of Shua's desire to squeeze and not strangle the contemporary reader for fear of a decline in readership.

These charges of superficially and an overtly commercial concern come together to

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[85] Emma Rodríguez, 'Ana María Shua: "Me gusta apretar al lector y ser dulce a la vez"' *Lecturassumergidas.com* (2013) <http://lecturassumergidas.com/2013/05/15/ana-maria- shua-me-gusta-apretar- al-lector- y-ser-dulce-a- la-vez/> [accessed 19.07.2016].
[86] Wilson, 'Narrative Boundaries', p. 240.

suggest a process of casualization inherent to the sudden fiction format. At first glance, such a literature, so concerned as it is with pandering to the reader's sense of comfort and ease of access, seems problematic insofar as it seemingly casts doubt over the enduring demand for the performative, engaged and erudite reader as he or she is called upon in Borges and Cortázar. Indeed, there is an apparent, initial contradiction between the casual nonchalance of the contemporary reader of this 'age of speed and technology' who can barely find the time to open a book and the accomplice readers forged and thematized in the likes of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'Instrucciones para John Howell'.[87] If anything, this concept of the modern reader - ensnared, as Zavala suggests, 'por el ritmo vertiginoso de la vida cotidiana' - more immediately evokes the image of the passive reader of Cortázar's *Rayuela*.[88] That is, we recall:

> El tipo que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falsos problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser suyo.[89]

It is not hard to find a cultural corollary between the much-scorned passive reader, suffering comfortably in his armchair, and the casual readers that populate the subways, bus routes and shop queues that pervade, and perhaps define, contemporary life. It is also interesting to consider Shua's concern for the continued financial support of the reader, evinced in her (perhaps ironic) fear of suffocating her audience, alongside Cortázar's apparent scorn for just such a focus, discussed in Chapter II:

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[87] *Quick Fix*, p. 13.
[88] Zavala, *Relatos*, p. 15.
[89] *Rayuela*, p. 547.

> Detesto al lector que ha pagado por su libro, al espectador que ha comprado su butaca, y que a partir de allí aprovecha el blando almohadón del goce hedónico o la admiración por el genio. ¿Qué le importa a Van Gogh tu admiración? Lo que él quería era tu complicidad.[90]

Of interest here is the evocation of hedonistic pleasure as it comes to represent a casual, almost diversionary iteration of intellectual engagement. The apparent casualization of sudden fiction would seem to suggest that the author can no longer make demands on the reader beyond that of a semi-engaged, hedonistic and ultimately superficial acknowledgment of the text. This hedonistically-inclined, ludically-inflected casualization of sudden fiction can be more effectively illustrated using the cultural analogue of what video games theorist Jesper Juul calls the 'casual revolution' in contemporary video games, to be discussed presently.[91]

On the subject of games in a generally pre-digital sense, Robert R. Wilson observes that certain manifestations of play fulfil 'the need to occupy oneself in time when all activities are subject to instant truncation'.[92] Such instances of truncation are arguably more prevalent in what Buchanan calls 'this age of speed and technology'.[93] Presently, this chapter outlines a similar concern for the possibility, or threat, of interruption in the design principles of the contemporary video game, where the proliferation of mobile, app-based games has given rise to a perceptible divide between the 'hardcore gamer' and the 'casual gamer' audiences. As Jesper Juul outlines in his 2009 study, *A Casual Revolution*, casual games answer to, or contend with, an apparent disengagement with electronic media in light of societal pressures

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[90] Cortázar, *Vuelta*, p. 208.
[91] Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and their Players* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).
[92] Robert Rawden Wilson, 'In Palamedes' Shadow: Game and Play Concepts Today', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 12, 2 (1985), 177-199, (p. 177).
[93] *Quick Fix*, p. 13.

on leisure time and a seemingly prevalent need for instant, no-strings gratification. Seen as something of a cultural reconfiguration of the gaming *status quo*, Juul observes how casual gaming has given rise to two divergent player constructs: The 'hardcore' and the 'casual' gamer:

> There is an identifiable *stereotype of a hardcore player* who has [...] played a large number of video games, will invest large amounts of time and resources towards playing video games, and enjoys difficult games. The *stereotype of a casual player* is the inverted image of the hardcore player: this player has a preference for positive and pleasant fictions [...], is willing to commit little time and few resources toward playing games, and dislikes difficult games.[94]

It is not hard to see the behavioural parallels that run between the stereotypes of the 'hardcore' and the 'casual' player and the reader constructs discussed throughout this thesis. The casual gamer's dislike of difficult games echoes the passive or idle reader's divorce from the challenges of the text. Likewise, the hardcore gamer's dedication of significant time and recourses is reminiscent of the engaged, accomplice readers so heavily thematized in Borges and Cortázar. As is often the case with short fiction and its readers, there is a prevailing critical prejudice against the casual game, and by implication, the casual gamer, on the grounds of their apparent superficiality or lack of profundity.[95] Or rather, there is something of a critical fear that casual, mobile games make questions of play and space flexible and approachable at the apparent cost of what Juul perspicaciously describes 'meaningful experience'.[96] Of particular

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[94] Juul, *A Casual Revolution*, p. 5.

[95] Kevin Veale elaborates on the popular and critical prejudice against the casual game:

> Whenever forum discussion online deals with the subject of indie games, particularly those which qualify as part of the 'casual' games movement, it's very common for someone to argue that 'They're not games'. Most often, this happens as an example of the oppositional framing between 'hardcore' and 'casual' games within player communities.

Kevin Veale, '"Interactive Cinema" Is an Oxymoron, but May Not Always Be', *Gamestudies.org* <http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/veale> [accessed 20.10.87].

[96] Juul, *A Casual Revolution*, p. 9.

interest here, however, are Juul's observations on the casual games subversion of such a dichotomy. Specifically, Juul asserts that the casual paradigm often co-opts the casual, detached mindset, coercing otherwise passive gamers into 'hardcore' levels of engagement:

> Do casual players even exist? Looking at the games commonly described as casual yields a clue in that these games allow us to have a meaningful play experience within a short time frame, but do not prevent us from spending more time on a game. More traditional hardcore design, on the other hand, requires a large time commitment in order to have a meaningful experience, but does not allow a meaningful experience with a shorter commitment. It then follows that the distinction between hardcore and casual should not be treated as an either/or question or even as a sliding scale, but rather as a number of parameters that can change over time because players change over time. The stereotypical casual player gradually acquires a larger amount of knowledge of video game conventions, effectively making the player more like a stereotypical hardcore player in terms of game knowledge.[97]

A brief consideration of sudden fiction through the lens of the cultural analogue of the video game (an analogue that will become increasingly significant in Chapter IV), not only reinforces the ludic quality of Shua's sudden fiction, but also helps to illustrate a conscious, coercive process of casualization at work in sudden fiction. Moreover, such a focus allows us to foreground the proto-hypertextual edge of Shua's sudden fiction. In Shua, this apparent casualization serves as a narrative strategy directly aimed at eliciting a more meaningful response from an otherwise disengaged reader. Shua uses play to coerce certain readers into a meaningful connection with the text through the apparent casualization of both its form and content. The semi-distracted, half-engaged attitude of the reader, together with the nebulous, almost phantasmagoric, nature of sudden fiction, forms the thematic basis of stories like 'Temporada de fantasmas':

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[97] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

No vienen a buscar pareja, ni para desovar. No necesitan reproducirse. Tampoco es posible cazarlos. No tienen entidad suficiente para caer en las redes de la lógica, los atraviesan las balas de la razón. Breves, esenciales, despojados de su carne, vienen aquí a mostrarse, vienen para agitar ante los observadores sus húmedos sudarios. Y sin embargo no se exhiben ante los ojos de cualquiera. El experto observador de fantasmas sabe que debe optar por una mirada indiferente, nunca directa, aceptar esa percepción imprecisa, de costado, sin tratar de apropiarse de un significado evanescente que se deshace entre los dedos: textos translúcidos, medusas del sentido.[98]

The story draws an essential parallel between the 'Leggerezza' or 'lightness' of the text - to borrow from Calvino's terminology - and the intangible essence of the phantom. As a metaphor of the text, Shua's depiction of the ghosts as 'breves', 'esenciales' and 'despojados de su carne' suggests an overall lightness of form and function, a textual agility built, perhaps, on the Cortazarian notion of intensity. Conversely, the reader - the 'experto observador de fantasmas' - is expected to engage with these instances of flux and openness with 'una mirada indiferente' instead of any particular interpretive agenda. Furthermore, that the tools of logic and reason will merely result in the brief capture of 'un significado evanescente que se deshace entre los dedos' further attests to Shua's implicit suggestion of a more casual, free-form method of interpretive engagement that mirrors the playful agility of the text. That such texts 'no se exhiben ante los ojos de cualquiera' suggests that the expert ghostwatcher represents something of an ideal reader construct in Shua. Like Cortázar's 'lector cómplice', Shua's ghostwatcher - represents an active, if not casual, participant in the production of narrative meaning rather than an idle - or serious -

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[98] Shua, *Cazadores de letras*, p. 709. In testament to its agility, this particular text serves as the titleless epigraph to the collection, and also features in Shua's critical discourse on the function of sudden fiction. It therefore operates outside of the clusters of texts that make up *Temporada de fantasmas*. It is, in fact, Rhonda Dahl Buchanan's *Quick Fix* that provides the text with its eponymous status. See also Eduardo Becerra (ed.), *El arquero inmóvil: nuevas poéticas sobre el cuento* (Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2006), p. 48, where the story also serves as a theoretical consideration of sudden fiction.

consumer of it.

Thus, the performative and explorative roles of Shua's ideal reader, together with the conscious problematization of the truncated 'routes of access' into the narrative space, are effectively illustrated using the cultural analogue of the contemporary video game.[99] Both Shua's sudden fictions and the 'casual' video game reveal a concern for the immediate merging of the ontological territories of reader-player and fiction, of seriousness and play, despite increasingly sporadic opportunities for meaningful experience with the work. As such, Juul's account of the 'casual revolution' and the distinction he makes between the 'hardcore' and the 'casual' player can be used to posit the interactive processes that occur between contemporary video game and its players as analogous to those that occur between sudden fiction and its readers. Engagement with both art forms' shared ability to elicit surprising levels of engagement *on the fly* ultimately allow for a radical reconsideration of not only the false dichotomy between accessibility and superficiality, but also of the stigma surrounding the casual, generally less-engaged modern reader-player. This 'casual revolution' further illustrates the formal and thematic trajectories of the short fiction format and its emphasis on the reader as a central, performative agent within the narrative space, despite a perceived loss of 'hardcore' engagement due to various socio-culturally-contingent shifts in reading paradigms.

The emerging concepts of instant gratification, formal lightness and the casualization of interpretive engagement, together with the explicit (if not slightly ironic) concern for

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[99] Robert Rawdon Wilson, 'Narrative Boundaries in Shakespeare's Plays', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 18, 2&3, September (1991), 233-261 (p. 251).

the commodification of the textual product, come together to suggest something of a pornography of literature in Shua. Here, we must resist the urge to equate a pornography of literature to pornographic literature. Indeed, of interest here is not the pornographic as it represents 'a minor but interesting modality or convention within the arts'.[100] Rather, the analytical currency of the term pornography lies in its provocation of an immediate, and often meaningless or superficial emotional or sensory response. A pornography of literature, then, becomes a most efficacious means of highlighting the affective stratagems of Shua's sudden fictions as they seemingly come to represent a series of casual, *no-strings*, encounters aimed at satisfying the contemporary reader's apparent need for instant gratification. True to their name, Shua's sudden fictions provide the reader with a *quick fix*. Shua's 'El reclutamiento' further reinforces this conceptual merging of literary practice and sexual gratification and commodification:

> Las primeras mujeres se recluían aparentemente al azar. Sin embargo, una vez reunidas, se observa cierta configuración en el conjunto, una organización que, enfatizada, podría convertirse en un estilo. Ahora la madama busca a las mujeres que faltan y que ya no son cualquiera sino únicamente las que encajan en los espacios que las otras delimitan, y a esta altura ya es posible distinguir qué tipo de burdel se está gestando y hasta qué tipo de clientela podría atraer. Como un libro de cuentos o de poemas, a veces incluso una novela.[101]

The text's account of the author-procurer's awareness of the reader-client's desire for gratification forges an allegorical link between sex and literature through their mutual commodification. As Dahl Buchanan observes:

> Podríamos decir que la clientela que atraen las geishas abarca los diversos tipos de lectores que disfrutarán de los textos ofrecidos por la tentadora

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[100] Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination' in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), pp. 35 -74 (p. 35).
[101] Shua, *Casa de geishas*, p. 263.

Madame Shua. Antes de que entren en esta casa de placer y perversiones, a los clientes se les deben advertir que hay que asumir ciertos riesgos, y naturalmente, hay que pagar los servicios rendidos.[102]

As such, 'El reclutamiento' could also be said to point to a less abstract notion of pornography as it is traditionally defined as 'the explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films [...] in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings'.[103] Of more immediate interest, however, is not the text's thematization of sex *per se*, but its evocation of the casualized, instantly gratifying poetics of affect at work in most of Shua's sudden fictions. That is, in its thematic focus on the concern for satisfying the needs of a particular audience or clientele, 'El reclutamiento' further reinforces the idea that the sudden fiction is, above all, tailor made to elicit an immediate emotional or sensory response from the reader. It is these concepts of satisfaction and gratification that most effectively illustrate the pornography of literature as it pertains to Shua's sudden fictions. In this sense, the pornography of literature shares certain parallels with the interpretive concerns of Susan Sontag's 'Against Interpretation', wherein Sontag suggests that 'in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art'.[104]

Again, this is not to take Sontag's 'erotics of art' as literally tantamount to eroticism or pornographic titilation. Rather, an erotics of art, as it is employed in Sontag's essay as a countermeasure to interpretive overzealousness, is useful insofar as it points to a need for a less encumbered, more intuitive or sensory engagement with the work of

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[102] Rhonda Dahl Buchanan, 'El género rebelde de la literatura: El cuento brevísimo en La casa de geishas de Ana María Shua', *El Cuento en Red*, 2 (2000)
<http://cuentoenred.xoc.uam.mx/busqueda.php> [accessed 22.10.15].
[103] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148012?redirectedFrom=pornography#eid> [accessed 20.07.2016].
[104] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), pp. 3 - 14 (p. 14).

art. According to Sontag, the act of interpretation is largely 'reactionary, impertinent, cowardly [and] stifling', it is borne of an insecure compulsion to weigh the work down in our own historically and socioculturally-contingent baggage as a means of controlling it.[105] As a result, we are incapable of any meaningful connection with the work beyond our efforts to slow down its essential impetus. As Sontag laments:

> Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life - its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness - conjoin to dull our sensory faculties.[106]

As such, Sontag's closing declaration that in the place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art seeks to embrace this essential intensity and, as a result, rejoice in a more sensory (or even sensual) and less cerebral, connection with the work of art. As Sontag suggests: 'in a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art'.[107]

Shua's sudden fictions, then, in their flaunting of the primacy of intensity and seemingly instant gratification, in their championing of the *quick fix*, become the ideal conduit for Sontag's erotics of literature. The lightness, intensity and inherent poeticism of sudden fiction answer to Sontag's call for more elusive works of art 'whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be...just what it is'.[108] While Sontag does not mention short fiction directly, she does assert that poetry has reinstated 'the magic of the word and thus, to some extent, has

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[105] Ibid., p. 7.
[106] Ibid., p. 13.
[107] Ibid., p. 7.
[108] Ibid., p. 11.

eluded the "rough grip of interpretation"'.[109] The concept of instant gratification, as this chapter perceives it to be linked to Sontag's 'erotics' of literature, allows the reader to regain this sharpness of sensory experience through the *quick fixes* offered by sudden fiction. Ludic exploration of the text does not necessarily bog the text down in superfluous or overzealous interpretation. The casualization of the reading process paradoxically prevents what Sontag considers to be a dulling of our sensory faculties by allowing the reader to experience the narrative space for what it is: A site of engagement, not of excess.

Thus, sudden fiction, as it is manifest in Shua, comes to represent an accessible, instantly gratifying yet deceptively vertiginous and demanding play space that coerces the reader - casual and hardcore alike - into the narrative game. As Lagmanovich suggests:

> El microrrelato contemporáneo es uno de los mejores ejemplos de una bien entendida concepción hedonista de la literatura: una visión que adopta y justifica el deseo de placer, la búsqueda del placer, a través de la palabra. Y bien que merecemos tenerla, como contrapeso para tanta desdicha como nos ofrece diariamente el mundo de hoy.[110]

This hedonistic conception of literature and its function as a means of escape, or rather, as escapist outlet, generates new methods of engagement with the text. True to Shua's claim that 'un escritor argentino de mi generación es hijo réprobo de Borges y hermano menor de Cortázar' Shua offers a means of connection with the text that does not necessarily require the same, idealized readerly dedication of her literary predecessors, but instead seeks to entice the reader through the promises of cheap

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[109] Ibid., p. 10.
[110] Lagmanovich, *Algunas reiteraciones*, p. 91.

thrills and no-strings fun.[111] Thus, Shua playfully coerces the casual reader into a meaningful engagement with the narrative space through a process of apparent casualization. The casual reader, however, is not be confused with the idle reader. As should now be clear, the term casual adopts a ludic quality that - despite the pervasive instances of instant truncation that define modern life - still denotes, and even demands, engagement with the narrative space. The idle reader, on the other hand, is incapable of connecting with the text on this same playful, and thereby productive, basis. As discussed in Chapter II, the idle reader, as Barthes suggests, 'is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: [...] he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum'.[112] This is not the last time we will discuss the parallels that run through the ludic possibilities of the narrative and its cultural analogue, the videogame. For now, however, the distinctions drawn between the concepts of the hardcore and the casual player, as well as those made between the idle and casual reader, raise the more pressing issue of the various idealized reader constructs that emerge in Shua's sudden fictions.

3.4 Fellow Clowns and Acrobats: From the Boxing Ring to the Circus Tent

Thus far, we have established two considerations of narrative space: That of the shifting, architectural dimensions of the narrative space and that of the narrative space as ontological territory (and the subsequent problems of ontological connection to which such a conceptualization inevitably gives rise). With these considerations in

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[111] Saturnino Rodrıguez, 'Criaturas pequeñas y feroces', p. 27.
[112] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

place, we now turn our attention to the relationship between reader and author cultivated within such spaces. Such a focus allows us not only to identify certain idealized reader constructs in Shua's work, but also to observe the literary politics at work between such a reader and the author construct.

In direct reference to Shua's sudden fictions, Rosa María Navarro Romero observes that '[e]n la microficción es fundamental el truco, el juego que nos hace dudar de las redes de la realidad. En el espectáculo de la microficción hasta las reglas tienen trampa'.[113] Romero's evocation of the concepts of the trick, the trap and the game further attest to the interpretive politics at work in Shua. The critic's reminder that even the rules governing genre are apt to be part of the trick not only echo the concept of generic hybridization, discussed earlier in this chapter, it also serves to problematize interpretation by foregrounding the structurally and thematically elusive nature of sudden fiction, and thus, provides valuable insight into the author-reader relationship as it is manifest in Shua's sudden fictions.

We can draw further insight into this relationship from a number of texts found in Shua's most recent collection of sudden fictions, *Fenómenos de circo* (2011). For instance, the relative futility of interpretation, insofar as it refers to the search for a fixed, objective meaning or, as Sontag suggests, a weighing down of the work in an attempt to 'find the maximum amount of content'[114] forms the basis of texts such as '¿Quién fue?':

> ¿Quién ha reemplazado el sistema hidráulico que impulsa al hombre-bala por verdadera pólvora? ¿Quién ha mezclado ese veneno que penetra a través de

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[113] Rosa María Navarro Romero, 'El espectáculo invisible: las claves del microrrelato a través de los textos de Ana María Shua,' *Castilla. Estudios de Literatura*, 4 (2013), 249-269 (p. 265).
[114] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, p. 14.

la piel en el maquillaje del payaso? ¿Quién ha limado los trapecios, quién ha cortado y vuelto a pegar la cuerda floja, quién ha desmontado el mecanismo de los cables de seguridad? Es inútil buscar al asesino, le informa al dueño del circo y al lector el atribulado detective, muy incómodo de tener que trabajar en un cuento fantástico: el género policial al que está tan habituado tampoco es realista, pero tiene reglas más precisas.[115]

'¿Quién fue?' warns of its own generic instability, and in doing so, playfully deters the reader from any investigative or interpretive endeavours beyond a vague recognition of genre. As such, the textually-embedded reader is portrayed as ill-equipped for the ludically-inflected reading task at hand.

This manipulation of the reader's interpretive zeal, seen here as an attempt to shake the reader's confidence in their own interpretive abilities, is a recurrent narrative stratagem in Shua. Elsewhere, for instance, Shua reveals that the author's trick, or trap, often relies on convincing the reader of just such an interpretive incompetence. In 'Robert Houdin y la caja de acero', Shua offers a subversive look at the passive, or less-knowledge agile reader by suggesting that such a reader is, above all, a product of the author's illusions and sleights of hand rather than a victim of them:

> Si su discípulo Houdini fue sobre todo un atleta, la clave de los trucos de Robert Houdin fue su profesión de relojero. Sin embargo, lo más importante para los dos, como para todos los ilusionistas, fue la comprensión psicológica de la ilusión, su aguda percepción de los huecos por donde atravesar el engaño.
> Uno de los trucos de Houdin consistía en mostrar una liviana caja de acero, que hasta un niño podía levantar, y pedirle después a los hombres más fuertes del público que intentaran moverla, mientras la mantenía adosada al suelo con un enorme imán.
> El truco fue muy exitoso mientras Houdin afirmó que su poder mágico consistía en aumentar el peso de la caja. Pero pronto descubrió que la gente se impresionaba mucho más si afirmaba ser capaz de extraer la fuerza de un hombre, debilitándolo de tal modo que ya no pudiera mover el artilugio. Como ciertos autores que, en lugar de reconocer el peso específico de su novela,

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[115] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 35.

> culpan a la debilidad del lector. Este truco se puede realizar sin utilizar imanes, pero es necesario contar con el férreo sostén de la crítica.[116]

Here, additional allusion to the concern for the favourable critical and commercial reception of the text provides further evidence of Shua's candid attitude towards readership. That is, in the text's ironic account of the author's subversion of the reader's interpretive insecurity, manifest in the evocation of the immovable steel box trick, suggests that the ideas of 'high cultural mastery' and 'master-reading', as they point to potentially idealized reader constructs, are nothing more than marketing schemes aimed at pandering to the audience's sense of intellectual superiority, or else manipulating their sense of intellectual inferiority.[117] Such instances of manipulation are subject to further irony in 'El deseo secreto':

> En el fondo del corazón de cada niño, de cada madre, de todo espectador, anida el deseo secreto de ver caer al trapecista, de verlo destrozarse los huesos contra el suelo, derramada su sangre oscura sobre la arena, el deseo esencial de ver a los leones disputándose los restos del domador, el deseo de que el caballo arrastre a la ecuyere con el pie enganchado en el estribo, golpeando la cabeza rítmicamente contra el límite de la pista y para ellos hemos inaugurado este circo, el mejor, el absoluto, el circo donde falla la base de las pirámides humanas, el tirador de cuchillos clava los puñales (por error, siempre por error) en los pechos de su partenaire, el oso destroza con su zarpa la cara del gitano y por eso, como las peores expectativas se cumplen y sólo se desea lo que no se tiene, los anhelos de los espectadores viran hacia las buenas intenciones: asqueados de calamidades y fracasos empiezan a desear que el trapecista tienda los brazos a tiempo, que el domador consiga controlar a los leones, que la ecuyere logre izarse otra vez hacia la montura, y en lugar de rebosar muerte y horrores, el lugar más secreto de su corazón se llena de horrorizada bondad, de ansias de felicidad ajena, y así se van de nuestro espectáculo felices consigo mismos, orgullosos de su calidad humana, sintiéndose mejores, gente decente, personas sensibles y bien intencionadas, público generoso del más perfecto de los circos.[118]

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[116] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 156.
[117] Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 38.
[118] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 11.

With its emphasis on the conscious subversion of giving the audience what they want, together with the evocation of the magic and illusion inherent to the circus as metaphors of literary production and reception, it is of little surprise that 'El deseo secreto' should serve as the introduction to *Fenómenos de circo*. After all, the text foregrounds the thematic, formal and ideological underpinnings that shape the entire collection.

Magic, illusion, and spectacle, in addition to representing the essential tenets of the circus performance and the magic show, also come to represent the principal narrative stratagems employed Shua's sudden fictions. This symbiosis of magic and art resonates with the theoretical convictions of graphic novelist Alan Moore, who states that:

> Magic in its earliest form is often referred to as 'the art'. I believe this is completely literal. I believe that magic is art and that art, whether it be writing, music, sculpture, or any other form is literally magic. Art is, like magic, the science of manipulating symbols, words, or images, to achieve changes in consciousness.[119]

The analytical currency of Moore's comments is twofold. Firstly, in his positing of art as magic and magic as art, Moore necessarily points to the role of the artist or author as magician or shaman. Secondly, and as a direct implication of such a claim, Moore's comments effectively illustrate the ways in which the fabulations of the shaman have been co-opted in the contemporary arts as a means of controlling, or otherwise manipulating, audiences. Moore elaborates:

> Originally, all of the facets of our culture, whether they be in the arts or sciences were the province of the shaman. The fact that in present times, this magical

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[119] *The Mindscape of Alan Moore*, dir. By Dez Vylanz (Shadowsnake Films, 2005) [DVD].

power has degenerated to the level of cheap entertainment and manipulation, is, I think a tragedy. At the moment the people who are using shamanism and magic to shape our culture are advertisers. Rather than try to wake people up, their shamanism is used as an opiate to tranquilize people, to make people more manipulable.[120]

Shua's recurring focus on the manipulation of readerly expectations, together with her oft-thematized consciousness of literature's status as both work of art and cultural commodity, reveals a certain ideological consonance with Moore's observations on the shaman as the great manipulator. This consonance is further reinforced when we consider the cultural status of the sudden fiction in relation to Moore's most prominent medium: The comic book. Like the graphic novel or the comic book, sudden fiction, despite its ostensible ties to canonical authors such as Borges and Cortázar, remains anchored to the realm of popular culture. Shua's constant allusions to the commodification of literature, together with her playful manipulation of contemporary, casualized reading paradigms, attest to such a tie.

Paradoxically, while Shua's sudden fictions subscribe to such a casualized, commercialized and accessible model of literary production, her work constantly, though playfully, belittles the - markedly Barthesian - reader as s/he represents a consumer of literature as cultural product (as opposed to production). Shua undermines this 'serious' reader as he or she is conceived by Barthes as an intransitive entity 'plunged into a kind of idleness' through the playful subversion of this very idleness.[121] In short, Shua mocks the idle reader as s/he comes to represent the tranquilized and thereby manipulable victim of the shaman-turned-charlatan that is the writer. In terms of the reader-author relationships discussed throughout Chapters I

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

and II, this mocking of the reader stands in relative juxtaposition to Borges' demands and Cortázar's threats. As such, the gradual destabilization of ontological thresholds and the inherently menacing inversions of perception found in the narrative traps of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' or 'Continuidad de los parques', for instance, give way to playful, pithy punchlines in Shua; the threat of imminent danger is instead replaced by an incisive humour. In this sense, Shua's conceptualization of sudden fiction, as it comes to represent a subspace of the fantastic narrative, shares significant parallels with that of compatriot Enrique Anderson-Imbert:

> Los escritores presumen de que con la fantasía se liberan de la coerción de las leyes físicas de la naturaleza y de la coerción de las leyes lógicas de la mente. ¡Si ellos lo dicen! Pero el placer de esa libertad es en el fondo el placer de desconcertar al prójimo con disparates. La literatura fantástica para mí es siempre literatura humorística.[122]

The use of humour and misdirection as a means of disarming or otherwise disconcerting the otherwise casual reader certainly resonates in Shua. Both the ridicule and disorientation felt by the reader come from his/her being coerced into a particular interpretive stance only to have that stance undermined through narrative sleight of hand. For Shua, transgression is, as Irving Howe suggests, a question of 'one sweeping blow of perception'.[123] Shua's agile reader, then, is expected to retain a certain playful agility if he or she is to engage with Shua's narrative strategies.

In Chapter II, we discussed how short fiction is representative of the boxing ring; a contested space of contact wherein the conflict between author and reader defines the

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[122] Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. 76.
[123] Irving Howe, *Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories* (London: Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1999), p. xi.

game. Indeed, in Cortázar, each fiction becomes a small, self-contained bout whereby author and reader fight to gain the upper hand. Acts of interpretation, seen through either the agonistic lens of the Borgesian text or the antagonistic lens of Cortázar's stories, go beyond the mere concern for the reader's movement through a particular unit of meaning. Movement through the text is insufficient; exploration, manipulation and agile engagement become key. The text becomes a negotiable, navigable and above all contested space. With its synthesis of intensity, impact and deception, there is a temptation to make a similar claim in relation to sudden fiction. After all, sudden fiction strikes up a dynamic relationship between author and reader not unlike the adversity of two prize-fighters in the ring. While both Cortázar and Shua allude to a readerly function quite beyond the simple Iserian filling-in of the gaps of the text, instead working towards an interpretational game in which expectations and reading strategies are constantly subverted and frustrated, to compare Shua's sudden fictions to the boxing bout would only serve to undermine the element of play as it exists in her works.

Indeed, Shua's intertextual, generic weavings and ontological inversions open up the play space beyond the spatial metaphor of the boxing ring. The shifting topographical structures of the play space, as it is manifest in Shua's sudden fictions, point not only to the destabilization of power centres within the text, but also implicitly demand a more diversely performative engagement from the reader. A more effective spatial metaphor is to be found, then, in Shua's *Fenómenos de circo.* The circus ring, as it comes to represent a dynamic, contested site of ludic engagement, respects the inherent kineticism of the text, as seen in Borges and Cortázar, whilst also alluding to the ever-changing, dynamic spaces of contact that encourage the reader to assume a

number of different performative roles that nevertheless maintain or respect the sharpness of sensory experience demanded by the text.

As a matter of fact, *Fenómenos de circo* and, by implication, the spatial metaphor of the circus ring, represent a point of convergence for the numerous postulations put forth in this chapter. That is to say, the concepts intertextual, transgeneric weaving, the playful reassertion and reconfiguration of authorial presence, the dynamic topographical manifestations of the narrative space and the subversive casualization of reader engagement all find a thematic outlet in the circus ring as it is manifest in *Fenómenos de circo*. While the Cortazarian boxing ring provides a navigable, spatial, architectural manifestation of the narrative space that ultimately necessitates, the adversarial clashing of readerly and authorial constructs, the circus ring forefronts playful performance, casual navigation and brief exploration through the thematization of the circus ring's dynamic, ever-changing structure. Indeed, the circus ring consists of numerous performative spaces that actively problematize notions of boundary or threshold. In doing so, Shua both renders explicit and intensifies what is already considered by many to be one of sudden fiction's most significant generic staples:

> The notion of boundaries helps define concepts, establish limits, legislate exclusions, regulate identities, implant beginnings and establish properties. Short text series demand a reformulation not only of the borders between the whole and its parts and the limits between diverse canonical genres, but also of the most important border in the literary space: the one between the act of creation and the act of reading.[124]

The difference in Shua, then, lies in the varied nature of the interplay between author and reader. Shua's conscious use of the narrative strategies discussed so far

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[124] Patea, *Short Story Theories,* p. 297.

drastically and continuously alters the state of play in her sudden fictions, taking the

hermeneutic and ontological function of the narrative space away from that of the

boxing ring and towards a more dynamic sphere of engagement. Such a sphere

maintains a focus on the power struggle between author and reader whist diversifying

their roles. Such a diversification is evinced in '¿Quién es la víctima?':

> Los payasos actúan en parejas. Por lo general uno de ellos es la víctima de las bromas, trucos y tramoyas del otro: el que recibe las bofetadas. Las parejas pueden ser Augusto y Carablanca, Pierrot y Arlequín, Penasar y Kartala, el tonto y el inteligente, el gordo y el flaco, el torpe y el ágil, el autor y el lector.[125]

At times, this interplay is combative, as in Cortázar's boxing analogy. More often,

however, the relationship between reader and author is cooperative, co-productive

and defined by mutual trust. What matters above all else, in Shua, is a sense of agility.

The playful diversification of the reader's role points to the agile reader as something

of an idealized reader construct in Shua.

In these concepts of the reader's agility and the text's dynamism we are reminded of

Fish's claim that 'kinetic art does not lend itself to static interpretation because it

refuses to stay still and does not let you stay still either'.[126] The agile reader must

reject the text's static illusion and, instead, maintain a constant awareness of its kinetic

nature. Such a reader must refrain from succumbing to the diversionary illusion of the

text's fixed, extractable meaning 'que se deshace entre los dedos,'[127] and instead

adopt the 'actualizing role of the observer'.[128] The ability to do so belongs to the agile

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[125] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 82.
[126] Fish, p. 43.
[127] Shua, *Cazadores*, p. 159.
[128] Fish, p. 43.

reader's own, personal repertoire of 'estrategias de lectura'.[129] As we have previously discussed, however, the primary significance of the play element lies in its continued insistence on authorial presence as a fellow player within the narrative space. As such, while Fish's illustration of the text as a kinetic structure resonates with the topographically dynamic, playful nature of the narrative space, the ludic element ultimately undermines authorial displacement as it represents one of reader-response theories most glaring prejudices. Shua's agile reader, then, opens up a performative interplay that reinforces the ontological connection between author, text and reader in such a way that speaks back to Cortázar's account of 'el conflicto que se entabla' between text and reader, all the while favouring a more playful and performative approach to the ontological tethering between the three elements.[130]

In 'Ágiles y portores', for example, the boxing ring, a space of combat, is given a significant overhaul in the cooperative arena of the circus highline. Here, there are significant parallels to be drawn between the physical agility of the trapeze artist and the interpretive agility of the good reader. That is, the trapeze act becomes a metaphor of the act of reading, and as such, provides a fitting illustration of the author-reader dynamic as it is conceptualized by Shua:

> En todo número de acrobacia hay ágiles y portores. Los portores se llaman también bases, los ágiles se llaman también volteadores. Los portores sostienen y sujetan, los ágiles dan volteretas. Los portores ejercen fuerza de propulsión, los ágiles emprenden fases aéreas. Los portores son las bases de las pirámides, los ágiles realizan en lo alto figuras de equilibrio. En la recepción, el portor captura, el ágil es capturado. En este momento, yo soy el portor, usted es el ágil. Este es el único circo en el que se nos permite intercambiar papeles.[131]

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[129] Zavala, *Relatos*, p. 13.
[130] *Obra/ 2*, p. 372.
[131] Shua, *Fenómenos*, p. 42.

Shua's allusion to the reciprocal relationship or cooperative interplay between catcher and flyer, that is, between author and reader, suggests a level of co-dependency. The success of the sudden fiction, like the trapeze act, depends on the effective dynamic of its two performers. Thus, while the idle reader is often mocked for his or her interpretive or performative inertia, the agile reader attains the status of co-performer. Evidently, the concern for ontological proximity prevails in Shua. Her assertion that the short story 'es el único circo en el que se nos permite intercambiar papeles' suggests a reduction of the ontological distance between fiction and reality, between text and reader, in such a way that speaks back to the earlier concerns of Borges and Cortázar albeit with a renewed sense of immediate and dynamic playfulness.

The impact of Shua's sudden fictions, then, lies in their constant, ludic inversion of roles and their ironic subversion of expectations, both of which are delivered with a prodigious narrative immediacy. Sudden fiction - in its thematization of the relationships established between spectator and spectacle - deals in the constant, conscious subversion of the collective expectations of contemporary reading communities. This is indicative of Shua's overall approach to the reader; with collective reading habits veering more frequently towards Twitter's 140 character limit, the sudden fiction format allows for a stylistic and intellectual impetus more in line with the frenetic, and often sporadic or truncated, nature of contemporary reading paradigms. While Shua's sudden fictions are lighter in form and function, the reader is constantly made aware of their affective and intellectual clout. Ultimately, Shua's is a literature that does not take its games so seriously.

3.5 Digital Playgrounds - Sudden Fiction as Precursor to the Hypertext

Throughout this chapter there have been numerous allusions to the interrelational and decentering values of Shua's sudden fiction *oeuvre*. As such, this closing section offers a brief discussion of the proto-hypertextual elements of Shua's sudden fictions. These elements will be discussed in light of the general observations made by Lauro Zavala in both 'The Boundaries of Serial Narrative' and 'De la teoría literaria a la minificción posmoderna'. Such a discussion will not only serve to round-off our current focus on the generically hybrid, structurally protean and fragmented nature of sudden fiction as we have come to understand it through Shua's works, it will also serve to foreground the imminent analysis of Belén Gache's *WordToys* and *Góngora WordToys*, to be dealt with in Chapter IV.

Of interest here is the purportedly fractal or multifractal nature of contemporary sudden fiction. In a very general sense, fractals refer to 'self-similar mathematical objects' that contain recurring patterns such as those found in the formations of snowflakes and galaxies.[132] Vicente Talanquer provides a most illuminating description of the fractal form:

> En 1975 Benoit Mandelbrot denominó *fractales* (del latín *fractus,* irregular) al conjunto de formas que, generadas normalmente por un proceso de repetición, se caracterizan por poseer detalle a toda escala, por tener longitud infinita, por no ser diferenciables y por exhibir dimensión fraccional. Adicionalmente, construyó con ellas un conjunto de nuevas *reglas* para explorar la geometría

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[132] The Henryk Niewodniczanski Institute of Nuclear Physics Polish Academy of Sciences, 'The world's greatest literature reveals multifractals and cascades of consciousness', *ScienceDaily*. (21 January 2016) <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/01/160121110913.htm> [accessed 05.09.16].

de la naturaleza, y las reconoció como herramientas potencialmente útiles para analizar un gran número de fenómenos físicos.[133]

Of interest here are the mentions of repetition and geometric structure alongside an almost *Aleph-esque* sense of infinite expanse. Multifractals in particular are more highly advanced mathematical structures in that they represent 'fractals of fractals' and as such, further compound a Borgesian sense of infinitely vast geometric space:

> [Multifractals] arise from fractals 'interwoven' with each other in an appropriate manner and in appropriate proportions. Multifractals are not simply the sum of fractals and cannot be divided to return back to their original components, because the way they weave is fractal in nature. The result is that in order to see a structure similar to the original, different portions of a multifractal need to expand at different rates. A multifractal is therefore non-linear in nature.[134]

As Gilberto Antonio Nava Rosales claims, in direct reference to Zavala's own observations, there is a strong parallel that runs between the mathematical structure of the fractal and the interrelational yet irreducible nature of the sudden fiction:

> Zavala también hace uso del término 'fractal'; menciona que es una característica de la minificción, así como un texto perteneciente a una serie, el cual puede ser analizado como un texto independiente o junto con la totalidad, pues mantiene una relación por su temática o estilo.[135]

Thus, the image of the fractal aids in the illustration of the sudden fiction's status as both a stand-alone, independent structure and as interrelational, intertextual or networked node. Moreover, the fractal, in its seemingly chaotic and prodigious geometric expanse, helps to further elucidate on the geometric and topological complexities of the narrative space as it is manifest in the Borgesian short story,

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[133] Vicente Talanquer, *Fractus, Fracta, Fractal: Fractales, de Laberintos y Espejos* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1996), p. 25.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Gilberto Antonio Nava Rosales, 'Literatura fractal', *Decires, Revista del Centro de Enseñanza para Extranjeros*, 12, 15 (2010), 39-52 (p. 41).

discussed in Chapter I. In both cases, the fractal points to a distinctly spatial concern that underscores the common thematic and structural threads running through all four of the authors discussed in this thesis.

In 'The Boundaries of Serial Narrative', Zavala attaches a postmodern - and by implication, a hypertextual - significance to the term 'minificción', stressing not only the fragmentary, fractal and hybrid nature of the sudden fiction, but also highlighting the reader's creative, agential role in the production of the text. In Zavala's own words, 'the possibilities of textual interpretation demand a reformulation of traditional literary norms and a redefinition of the genre in terms of interpretive contexts within which readers are willing to invest their reading experience (memory), their ideological competencies (worldview) and their literary appetite'.[136] As such, Zavala's account of reading and interpretation as a reconfiguratory and productive act can be used to bridge the gap between sudden fiction and hypertext fiction. It could be argued that sudden fiction's proclivity for multi-sequentiality, hybridization and intertextuality, all of which have been discussed throughout this chapter, make it a strong precursor to hypertext. In fact, Zavala's use of the terms 'minifiction cycles' and 'sequential minifiction' are essentially synonymous with the borderless yet inter-relational nature of the hypertext. Indeed, such sequences or cycles refer to a 'series of stories united by theme, genre, or style' and defined, above all by their liminal or 'borderline' quality:

> Thus, the mandatory generic references are no longer the novel (in its most traditional form, subject to rules of realism and verisimilitude), nor the short story (in its classic and epiphanic variety, characterized by its surprise ending), but rather the minifiction, a literary genre practiced throughout the twentieth century that in turn prefigures the birth of hypertextual writing.[137]

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[136] Zavala, 'The Boundaries of Serial Narrative', p. 284.
[137] Ibid., p. 281-82.

Zavala's focus on minifiction's prefiguration of the hypertextual form not only attests to the generic hybridity of sudden fiction, but also seeks to draw a line in the sand between it and its perceived predecessor, short fiction. This line in the proverbial sand reveals a temptation to consider the hypertext as a utopian, emancipatory platform from which one might further stoke the flames upon which the author precariously sits. That is, the above accounts of hypertext, and indeed the proto-hypertextual nature of sudden fiction, reveal further critical attempts to dethrone the author as ultimate authority over the text. To this end, Zavala observes how the hypertext is often considered to achieve that which could only be theorized or indirectly problematized by the traditional, print-based, poststructural model:

> La creación del hipertexto en la cultura virtual contemporánea abre posibilidades anteriormente inexistentes en la práctica de la lectura y la escritura, posibilidades éstas que habían sido meramente postuladas como hipótesis de trabajo (y como parte de un proyecto utópico) por la teoría literaria post-estructuralista a principios de los años sesenta.[138]

Specifically, Zavala observes that the hypertextual model can be seen to represent something of poststructural and reader-response utopia, one that seemingly succeeds in driving the final nail into the author's proverbial coffin: 'El hipertexto hace posible la concreción de una metáfora como la que sostiene que el lector es el autor último del sentido del texto, o la metáfora que sostiene que el texto sobre la página es sólo un *pre-texto* para los paseos inferenciales de cada lector cada vez que se asoma a ese abismo que llamamos texto'.[139]

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[138] Lauro Zavala, 'De la teoría literaria a la minificción posmoderna', *Ciencias Sociais Unisinos*, 43, 1 (2007), 86-96 (p. 91).
[139] Ibid.

While Zavala's observations on the proto-hypertextual nature of 'minifiction cycles' or 'sequential minification' prove most illuminating in underlining the fractal and potentially borderless nature of the sudden fiction, some critical distance from an emerging hypertextual bias must be noted. That is, Zavala's attempts to completely delineate both sudden fiction and hypertext fiction from the rich literary trajectory of the novel and the short story are, in the context of this study, somewhat overstated.

The last three chapters have sought to discuss the ways in which Borges, Cortázar and Shua, through converging and indeed diverging approaches to the concepts of play and spatiality, attempt to mediate a compromise between complete authorial control and readerly empowerment. They have done so, it must be stressed, under the continued belief that the novel, the short fiction and the sudden fiction formats continue to dialogue with each other in rich and rewarding ways and with a mutual concern for the implications of play, space and idealized reader constructs in contemporary literary politics of Argentine fiction. That Borges' metafictions have been discussed alongside both Cortázar's short fiction and novelistic endeavours is a testament to the ideological and thematic ties that bind the novel to the short fiction. That we may then go on to explore the same concerns in Shua's sudden fictions and, as we will now do in Chapter IV, in Gache's hypertext fictions, further reinforces the structural, thematic and ideological heritages celebrated throughout this study. To include Zavala's views is to harness his perspicacious treatment of the vast theoretical landscape of the short story and its emerging dialogue with new media technologies. It is not, however, to contribute to his attempts at generic demarcation, nor is it to suggest that hypertext represents the ultimate solution to the inquiries discussed over the last three chapters. Of particular interest in the coming chapter, then, are they

ways in which the tension between complete authorial control and readerly empowerment, as it pertains to the landscape of Argentine literary heritage, is not eased through the intervention of new media technologies, but further problematized in the wake of the digitized, decentering and potentially author-displacing literary politics of hypertext fiction.

Chapter IV
Gameplay Literature and the Literary Politics of Belén Gache's *WordToys*

4.0 Introduction

Of particular interest in this chapter are the ways in which Belén Gache's *WordToys*, through an ironic subversion of hypertext's fundamental features, thematizes the concept of the narrative as a contested space that challenges questions of authorial presence and reader agency. Specifically, it aims to illustrate, using the performative and visual analogue of the video game, how the concept of play can be used to counteract the author-killing proclivities that seemingly pervade hypertext theory. Indeed, this chapter calls on a number of Gache's 'word toys' to show how both the print text and the digital text, despite their structural and technological differences, not only share significant ideological and ontological concerns, but are also troubled by the same agential and performative frustrations.

To date, Belén Gache has produced 19 'word toys' spanning two online anthologies: *WordToys* (1996-2006) and *Góngora WordToys (Soledades)* (2011). According to Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, Gache's hypertext fictions engage not only with 'a rich Hispanic tradition of the reconfiguring and questionings of the author-reader relationship', but also with the ongoing discourses of the contemporary hypertext narrative.[1] Owing to their hypertextual framework, it is not hard to see how Gache's

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[1] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 87.

WordToys might dialogue with, and thus further problematize, certain concepts elaborated upon in previous chapters. Indeed, the idealized reader constructs, hermeneutical tasks and ludically-inflected ontological convergences hitherto discussed in the works of Borges, Cortázar and Shua, are given new investigative possibilities in light of Gache's digital, web-based *opus*. This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of these hypertextually-informed, investigative possibilities. Of particular interest here are the ways in which Gache anticipates the use of 'wreaderly' interpretive strategies to position herself deliberately and deftly in a subversive stance against a perceived utopian overreaching on behalf of the hypertextual system. Commenting on this potential utopian overreaching, Astrid Ensslin offers a most perspicacious and succinct summary of George P. Landow's empowered 'wreader':

> Due to hypertext's distinctly 'poststructuralist' characteristics, such as textual openness, intertextuality, multivocality, decentering and rhizomatic, nonlinear structures, one significant effect of its linking structure is a 'reconfigured', 'empowered' reader. Such a 'wreader' [...] takes full responsibility not only for the sequence of events but also, as a result, for the text itself in its structural and semantic totality.[2]

Thus, the hypertextual format of Gache's *WordToys* is predicated on the notion that this active, empowered and reconfigured wreader is not an idealized reader construct *per se*, but the operational standard, the minimum specification in a newly-democratised narrative system. What follows in this chapter, then, is an analysis of *WordToys*' subversion of the 'wreader' from *within* this hypertextual prejudice.

The choice to approach Gache's digital artefacts as examples of narrative, specifically short fiction, is not to deny the validity of other critical approaches which conceptualize

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[2] Astrid Ensslin, *Canonizing Hypertext: Explorations and Constructions* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group (2007), p. 31.

the 'word toy' as a form of digital poetry. There is no attempt here to downplay the poetic origins or remediated nature of Gache's artistic output. 'Word toys' are, by their very nature, hybrid digital artefacts. While this chapter chooses to focus on those 'word toys' that display a greater degree of narrativity (owing in part to the inherent narrativity of their respective hypotexts), it does not wish to assume that the narrative element is a generic trait of the 'word toy'. There are grounds to suggest, for instance, that 'word toys' like 'El lenguaje de los pájaros' and 'Poemas de agua', are remediations of modernist and avant-garde poetry. Similarly, the unique, abstract formalism of 'Delicias del parnaso' and 'Southern Heavens' puts the 'word toys' more in line with the contemporary video game than the short story. The multitude of possible critical approaches to Gache's *WordToys* are, then, a testament to its generic hybridity. This chapter celebrates that hybridity, and sees a strong cultural analogue in the generically protean nature of short fiction. Short fiction, and by implication, sudden fiction, represent increasingly hybrid genres that, as we have discussed in Chapter III, traverse and transgress any number of generic boundaries, configurations and traditions. Using the remediating, decentring and performative qualities of hypertext media as a valuable hermeneutic, this chapter approaches a selection of hybrid digital artefacts from Gache's *WordToys* within a long-standing literary concern for, and multi-faceted subversion of, the concepts of genre, space and readerly participation seen in canonical Argentine authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, as well as the more contemporary, genre-defying, sudden fictions of Ana María Shua. Again, this is not to downplay Gache's standing in the wider context of what Luis Correa-Díaz labels 'el ámbito poético latinoamericano propiamente digital-posthumanista' alongside other prominent Latin American digital artists such as

Gustavo Romano, Santiago Ortiz and Eugenio Tisselli.[3] Nor is it an attempt to reduce Gache's *WordToys* to a digital rehash or '*Rayuela* 2.0'.[4]   Rather, this chapter emphasizes the spatial concerns of Gache's digital artefacts in order to highlight the artist's own conceptualizations of authorship and ludic, readerly participation. To this end, the term 'narrative space' does not argue for the primacy of one genre over another in relation to the categorization of Gache's hybrid digital artefacts. Instead, it is helpful to approach such spatial considerations in terms of what Christine Henseler and Debra A. Castillo refer to as 'hybrid storyspaces' or, as this chapter also suggests, digital play spaces.[5]

This chapter argues that, by using the hypertext system (if we can allow for such an oxymoron), Gache attempts to reconfigure traditional concepts of interactivity and spatiality in such a way that speaks back to the ideological, aesthetic and thematic concerns of pre-hypertext, Argentine authors like Borges and Cortázar.   The experimental capacity of the hypertext framework is such that authors such as Borges and Cortázar, for whom the concepts of labyrinthine, nonlinear structures and potentially endless literary and epistemological bifurcations represent long-standing, central concerns, are considered to be the forerunners of hypertext theory, proto-hypertextual writers.   As Thea Pitman and Claire Taylor suggest, hypertext fiction belongs to 'a Latin American-specific heritage of literary experimentation'.[6] Similarly, Jay David Bolter underlines something of an ideological corollary between the literary

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[3] Luis Correa-Díaz, 'La poesía cibernética latinoamericana (todavía) in print: un recorrido desde los años 50 y 60 hasta finales de la primera década del 2000', *New Readings*, 13, (2013), 57-73 (p. 57).

[4] Carolina Gaínza, 'Campos literarios emergentes: literatura digital en América Latina', *Estudios Avanzados*, 22, (2014) 29-43.

[5] Christine Henseler and Debra A. Castillo 'Hybrid Storyspaces: Redefining the Critical Enterprise in Twenty-First Century Hispanic Literature', *Hispanic Issues On Line,* 9 (2012) <http://cla.umn.edu/hispanic-issues/online> [accessed 21.04. 2016].

[6] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 84.

pursuits of authors such as Borges and those of the hypertextual system. Specifically, Bolter asserts that:

> [The] history of the novel itself will have to be rewritten, so that we understand works by authors from Laurence Sterne to Jorge Luis Borges not only as explorations of the limits of the printed page but also as models for electronic writing. It is as if these authors had been waiting for the computer to free them from print. And in fact, many of their works could be transferred to the electronic writing space and playfully reconstructed there. From this perspective interactive fiction is the next step, like the takeoff of an airplane that has been gaining speed on the runway.[7]

However, while Gache's *WordToys* doubtless echo the literary politics posited in Borges and Cortázar, and indeed run consonant with the theoretical convictions of Shua's sudden fictions, this chapter underlines a tension between the apparently proto-hypertextual status of the Borgesian and Cortazarian narratives and their implicit, textualized defence of authorial presence. That is, while this chapter concedes that the influence of Borgesian and Cortazarian thematics doubtless informs the literary foundations of the hypertext, it remains unconvinced that hypertext works constitute an ultimate solution to, or logical next step for, the literary concerns of either author. Furthermore, this chapter argues that Gache ultimately inscribes herself into this same defence of the author through the use of play. As with Borges, Cortázar and Shua, the ludic inclinations of Gache's *WordToys* ultimately serve to reassert authorial presence by turning such a figure into something of a co-presence within the narrative space whose adversarial or cooperative function varies depending on the nature of the game. Owing to the hypertextual nature of Gache's *WordToys*, we see a more literalized account of these constructs in the form of digital avatars. As this chapter will discuss, Gache's *WordToys* allow for, and even encourage, playful

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[7] Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext and the History of Writing* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991), p. 132.

reconstruction of the reader-author relationship as it is manifest in Borges, Cortázar and Shua, but do not necessarily submit to the foundational, but now widely contested 'narrative myths' of the hypertext to be discussed over the course of this chapter.[8]

In terms of literary theory, the radicality of the hypertext system stems from the purported liberatory potential of its structural decenteredness. For early proponents of the system such as Landow, hypertext is synonymous with the reader's freedom from the authoritative structures inherent to the cultural artefact that is the printed text, namely the linearity of its narrative sub-structures and the apparent omnipotence of the author figure.[9] The present chapter will concern itself primarily with the literary consequences of this apparent radicality. Doing so will allow for critical engagement with a number of key areas of inquiry. Namely, this chapter will consider the implications of the hypertextual system for the idealized reader construct, and with it the reader-author axis. Additionally, this chapter will concern itself with the ways in which the permeable, kinetic and ontological boundaries of the play space, as they have been considered in previous chapters, speak to the ephemeral and volatile structures of the hypertext. Finally, this chapter will explore the extent to which hypertext's apparent rejection of authorial control relates to the instances of fantastic authorial inscription previously discussed Borges, Cortázar and Shua.

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[8] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Beyond Myth and Metaphor: The Case of Narrative in Digital Media' in *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research,* 1, 1, (2001) <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/ryan/> [accessed 30:06.2015].

[9] George P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1997). While this chapter diverges from, and indeed takes issue with, a number of Professor Landow's early theorizations, it does so with a continued respect for the critic's work as it represents a seminal and foundational contribution to hypertext theory.

4.1 The Literary Politics of Hypertext - Freedom, Agency and Destruction of 'the Line'

To appreciate fully the subversive processes at work in Gache, it is important to establish the theoretical framework within which Gache's *WordToys* seemingly operate: the hypertext. Hypertext refers to web-based, non-sequential writing that fuses multiple semiotic systems within a digital space.[10] George P. Landow considers hypertext theory to be the next step in the 'revolution of human thought', inspired by the deconstructive and poststructural concerns of theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. In its espousal of the necessary drift from the concepts of hierarchy, linearity and centeredness towards those of multiplicity, indeterminacy and fervent anti-linearity, hypertext represents, for some, at least, a radically new form of information technology.[11] Hypertext's foregrounding of a challenged or besieged narrative hierarchy certainly suggests significant parallels with the structural, thematic and even ontological concerns discussed in previous chapters.

Like the theoretical convictions of the print texts previously discussed in Chapters I, II and III, one of the key features of hypertext is its perceived attack on the principles of narrative linearity and structural, ontological hierarchy. In rejecting the structural practicalities of the print text, hypertext's digitized form allows for the generation of dispersed and fragmented texts that are loosely related through a rhizomatic interconnectedness. The result is a matrix of independent yet borderless (and thus, inter-relational) units of text or *lexia*. Through the concepts of interconnectedness,

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[10] Marta Sierra, *Gendered Spaces in Argentine Women's Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 140.
[11] Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 3.

borderlessness and multi-sequentiality, hypertext presents itself as a direct threat to what Robert Coover (taking a cue from Derrida) calls 'the line'. Discussed previously in Chapters II and III, 'the line' represents 'that compulsory author-directed movement from the beginning of a sentence to its period, from the top of the page to the bottom, from the first page to the last'.[12] Coover goes on the suggest that, 'much of the novel's alleged power is embedded in the line' and that despite the experimental efforts of authors like Cortázar and Calvino, 'true freedom from the tyranny of the line is perceived as only really possible [...] with the advent of hypertext'.[13]

In the hypertext narrative, however, the line becomes a choice rather than a practical (and technological) necessity. Hypertext jeopardizes 'the line' through the production of potentially endless matrices of fragmented, semi-autonomous *lexia*. The fragmentary nature of these units of text are such that the reader is granted the freedom to take the work on from a multitude of investigative angles using an array of interpretive strategies. Thus, the loss (or destruction) of the line is seen by many hypertext theorists as an emancipatory process that frees the reader from any structurally-dictated, authorially contingent hierarchy. As Landow himself puts it, 'hypertext systems permit the individual reader to choose his or her own centre of investigation and experience'.[14] Thus, the most relevant consequence of the apparent hypertextual destruction of this line, in the present discussion, at least, is two-fold. Firstly, it undermines the narrative structures of the print text as it is traditionally conceived as a linear construct that perpetuates similarly linear modes of interpretation and reader engagement. As such, talk of hypertext's destructive capabilities and its

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[12] Coover, web.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 38.

rejection of a centered axis of organization is typically qualified with the Derridean sentiment that 'the end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book'.[15] Secondly, and by implication, hypertext potentially displaces, decentres or even destroys the author as ultimate creative authority. As Landow suggests, 'the basic hypertext experience [...] moves the boundary of power away from the author in the direction of the reader'.[16]

Hypertext's apparent reader-oriented redistribution of power suggests a notable shift in the literary politics of the narrative. A heightened sense of agency imbues the reader with a creative impetus comparable to, if not greater than, that of the author figure. By way of example, Stuart Moulthrop observes that hypertext enables us to 'reconceive writing not as a private activity eventuating in a public product, but as a process of revision or construction that is itself shared between writers and readers, or among reader/writers'.[17] Similarly, Ilana Snyder talks of 'reader-authors' who transcend typical reader paradigms 'either by choosing individual paths through linked information, or by adding text and links to the network'.[18] Likewise, in dealing with hypertext's apparent displacement of the author figure, Jane Yellowlees Douglas evokes Umberto Eco's concept of the 'opera aperta' and its inherent 'devolution of intellectual authority to personal decision, choice and social context'.[19] Gache's

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[15] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 86. This sentiment has subsequently been appropriated by a number of scholars dealing, to lesser and greater degrees, with hypertext theory. See, for example, Landow, Kolb and Coover.

[16] Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 89.

[17] Stuart Moulthrop, 'The Politics of Hypertext' in *Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition studies: Questions for the 1990s,* ed. by Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1991), pp. 253-271 (267).

[18] Ilana Snyder, 'Beyond the Hype: Reassessing Hypertext' in *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*, ed. by Ilana Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 125-143 (135).

[19] Jane Yellowlees Douglas, 'How Do I Stop This Thing?: Closure and Indeterminacy in Interactive Narratives' in *Hyper/Text/Theory,* ed. by George P. Landow (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 159-188 (183).

WordToys, then, are intriguing insofar as they are informed by, and operate within, a well-established, hypertextually-inflected framework of *authoricidal* literary politics. That is, the hypertext is predicated on the Barthesian-Foucauldian impulse to displace or destroy the author as a means of empowering the reader. On the destruction of the author, Barthes proclaims:

> Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant, antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.[20]

Foucault responds in a similar vein: 'Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author'.[21] He goes on: 'If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing'.[22] In emulating the principles posited in Barthes and Foucault, hypertext presents itself as a newer, shinier nail in the author's proverbial coffin; a digital solution to the attempts made by modern literary scholarship to banish 'the historical author from any role whatsoever in the text'.[23] It is with this *authoricidal* framework in mind that we turn our attention to Gache's hypertext fictions.

As is by now clear, hypertext is predicated primarily on the author's gradual loss of control at the hands of an increasingly more empowered reader. Hypertext, it seems,

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[20] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, p. 148.
[21] Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory*, p. 117.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Howard Mancing, 'Cervantes as Narrator of *Don Quijote*' *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 23.1 (2003): 117-140 (p. 118).

demands either the outright disappearance or gradual displacement of the author in favour of a more democratised, user-oriented narrative experience. The prevalent use of the terms 'reader-author' or 'wreader' to describe those interactors who freely navigate the hypertextual system reveals the degree to which the author as authoritative figure has been supplanted by the newly empowered, active or intrusive reader. Of particular interest here, then, are the ways in which the cultural analogue of the video game illustrates a further shift in such *authoricidal* literary politics. Specifically, Gache subverts the notion of the hypertextually-empowered 'wreader' construct as s/he comes to represent something of a creative authority over the digital artefact. Indeed, using the video game as a cultural, performative and visual analogue of the hypertext fiction, Gache attempts to mediate a creative and agential compromise between the figures of the author and the reader. In Chapter III we discussed the illustrative significance of the video game in relation to Shua's sudden fictions and their perceived casualization of the reading paradigm as a coercive narrative strategy. In the following discussion, however, the interactive and immersive features of the contemporary video game will be used to further explicate Gache's reconfiguration of both the narrative space and the act of reading. In short, it will be argued that the digital, video game-esque nature of the 'word toy' allows for the taking literally of the concept of the text as play space and, by implication, of the concept of the reader as player.

4.2 Hypertext as Cultural and Theoretical Analogue to the Video Game – 'Escribe tu propio Quijote'

Gache's hypertexts run parallel to the video game in their shared concern for the concepts of interactivity and immersion. As Jesus Martín-Barbero suggests in his foreword to *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature*, the potential of hypertext lies in its value as 'a new type of cultural experience'. Its greatest originality 'lies in the capacity for interaction between writer and reader, between creator and spectator'.[24] Likewise, Jay David Bolter makes the ideological link between the hypertext and the video game abundantly clear:

> Electronic literature will remain a game, just as all computer programming is a game. We have seen that such literature grows out of the computer games that are popular today. In video games, the kind depicting spacecraft and deadly robots, the player competes against the programmer, who has defined goals and puts obstacles in the player's path.[25]

Unlike the video game, the hypertextually-inflected nature of play acquires a more subversive significance in Gache insofar as it runs counter to traditional hypertextual impulses to destroy or displace the author, and instead seeks to reassert authorial presence. 'Escribe tu propio Quijote' (*WordToys*) for instance, seemingly espouses the hypertextual ideals of augmented reader agency and technocratic authorial displacement whilst simultaneously undermining the hypertext illusion of the reader-turned-author. The 'word toy' presents the reader with an empty word-processing document, a blank, white page and a blinking caret that seemingly invite interaction. Creative control is seemingly relinquished to the reader, as the introductory lexia

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[24] Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p xiii.
[25] Bolter, *Writing Space*, p. 130.

suggests: 'todos somos Rembrandt, todos somos Cervantes'.[26]   Such an epithet

encapsulates hypertext's apparent significance as the great democratizer of authorial

functions in all of its emancipatory fervour; the 'word toy' is a digital *tabula rasa* whose

form, owing to the author's apparent displacement, depends entirely on the reader's

creative input.

The illusion of reader agency is short-lived, however, for no matter what the reader

enters into the word processor, the result is always the same. That is, each keystroke

produces the same opening passage of Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Taylor

and Pitman perspicaciously observe that Gache's *WordToys* do not propose total

reader agency as 'ever fully achievable'. Rather, they are 'more concerned with the

process towards, and self-reflection on, the potential of a revised role for the reader,

rather than its actualisation'.[27]   One is compelled to suggest here, however, that

Gache's concern lies not in the revised role of the reader *per se*, but in his/her renewed

sense of presence within the narrative space. Looking at the means by which Gache

literalizes reader presence within, and seemingly emphasizes authorial absence from,

the narrative space helps foreground the immanent analysis of the concepts of the

avatar and the play space.

The performative role of Gache's reader-turned-player, together with the conscious

problematization of readerly presence within the narrative space turned play arena,

share significant parallels with the contemporary video game. Both the hypertext and

the video game reveal a concern for ontological embrace through the evocation of a

tangible presence within the play space.   As such, video game theorist Jane

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[26] Gache, WordToys, web.
[27] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 87.

McGonigal's account of 'interactive loops' and 'feedback' systems are of interest here insofar as they can be used to posit the contemporary video game and its players as performative analogues of the hypertext and its interactors (who are, as this thesis continually argues, players themselves).[28] According to McGonigal, the feedback system tells players 'how close they are to achieving the goal'. In its most basic form, 'the feedback system can be as simple as the player's knowledge of an objective outcome'.[29] Thus, at their core, feedback systems provide visual representation of a player's interaction with the digital space. Moreover, the interactive loops produced by these feedback systems offer an unparalleled sense of being within such a space: 'in computer and video games, the interactive loop is satisfyingly tight. There seems to be no gap between your actions and the game's responses. You can literally see the animations and count on the scoreboard your impact on the game world'.[30] The feedback systems and interactive loops produced by 'Escribe tu propio Quijote' are not unlike those outlined in McGonigal. In the case of Gache's 'word toy', however, the value of the feedback system lies not in its indication of a goal or end-game scenario, but in its visualization of action and response. Interaction with the 'word toy''s preamble opens a word processor; further interaction with the word processor reproduces the introductory paragraph of the *Quixote*. In short, 'Escribe tu propio Quijote' literalizes reader interaction with the text through the visualization of a tangible impact on the play space. While reader agency is ultimately stifled by the preordained, or rather, pre-programmed or 'scripted' nature of the word processor's Cervantine output, the visual feedback systems and interactive loops triggered by the reader's exploration of the digital space provide a most convincing illusion of both presence

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[28] McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, p. 21.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., p. 24.

and agential freedom. As King and Krzywinska suggest: 'Qualities of vision and sound are usually the most potent sources of impressions of presence in games'.[31] Thus, it is through the application of McGonigal's analysis of game design fundamentals of action and response that we are best able to illustrate Gache's concern for the reader's perceived freedom within the play space.

In 'Escribe tu propio Quijote', this sense of freedom is further compounded by the apparent disappearance of the author, alluded to in the 'word toy''s recursive chain of displaced authors. For instance, Gache calls upon Borges' short story 'Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*' to seemingly infer an ideological and thematic drift away from fixed, authorial and textual identities in favour of the radical democratization of creative control: 'el cuento de Borges reflexiona sobre temáticas como la identidad fija de un texto o la autoría original. Para él, el significado del texto se construye con cada lectura y cada escritura no es sino una reescritura'.[32] Likewise, Gache's account of the *Quixote's* nebulous authorship subordinates the concept of sole, authorial control to collective creative enterprise:

> En su *Quijote*, Cervantes narrador nos cuenta que él no es el autor de la obra, sino que ha encontrado un manuscrito escrito en árabe, firmado por un tal Cide Hamete Benengeli en un mercado de Toledo y que, incluso, debió procurarse para su desciframiento la asistencia de un traductor que, para colmo de males, posiblemente fuera un mentiroso.[33]

'Escribe tu propio Quijote', then, ironically presents itself as the hypertextual realization of the reader displacing the authoritative centeredness of the author figure. In doing

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[31] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 109.
[32] Gache, WordToys, web.
[33] Ibid.

so, Gache both anticipates and encourages the agential zeal of the hypertext reader, only to then reassert authorial presence and undermine the illusion of reader agency. As Taylor and Pitman suggest: 'It is thus the imaginary - and hence potentially illusory - role of the wreader that comes under scrutiny in these new hypertext fictions'.[34]

Along a similar investigative line, this chapter argues that the illusory nature of such a role ultimately serves to carve out a more dynamic, playful relationship between reader-player and author-creator that, far from shifting the balance of power in favour of the newly empowered 'wreader', insists on the continued presence of the authorial figure as potential, and necessary, opponent within the digital story space. As such, replacing the concept of the reader with that of the player helps to identify more clearly a tension central to the concept of play within the hypertext narrative; that the reader-player is indeed an active agent in the co-production of the narrative, but the extent of this agency and its productive function is ultimately dictated by the author's construction of, and perceptible presence within, the narrative play space. The currency of the term 'player' is further compounded by the simple fact that Gache's hypertexts are, by their very nature, games. They are word *toys*; digital games designed to be played. More specifically still, they are fully-formed, pre-constructed digital spaces that invite playful engagement and exploration, but do not necessarily allow for meaningful reconstitution. In the case of the hypertext, much like the contemporary video game, this engagement with the narrative space is a visual process, an observable back-and-forth between player and digital environment. Thus, the term 'player' becomes a most fitting epithet for the active reader insofar as it alludes to his or her interactive, exploratory function within the distinctly videogame-

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[34] Taylor and Pitman, *Cyberculture and Cyberliterature*, p. 87.

esque narrative space without evoking the author-killing connotations inherent to the term 'wreader'.

By shifting the focus from *reader* agency to *player* movement within, and exploration of, the digital play space, we begin to see *WordToys* as a series of subversive illustrations of the concomitant presence of author and reader within various hybrid story spaces. As a result of this concomitance, the player's role is not necessarily creative, as the term 'wreader' would have us believe, but exploratory. To reiterate, in 'Escribe tu propio Quijote', Gache has constructed a play space in which the author seems to have vanished. In this apparent vanishing act, Gache anticipates that the reader, in a fit of hypertextual zeal, will adopt the authorial role. It is in the player's exploration of the 'word toy', however, that he/she discovers the boundaries of the narrative space and, with them, the limits of his/her agency. It is in the player's subsequent testing of these limits that they come face to face with the authorial presence.

In Gache, then, the concept of play as it pertains to literature is given new expressive outlets in light of its newly digitized framework. The reconceptualization of the narrative space as a digital playground encourages exploration and, by implication, a deeper reflection on the concepts of being and presence. Gache's play spaces, then, highlight a divergence from, or subversion of, both the hypertextual displacement of the author figure and the unfettered freedom of the so-called 'wreader'. By challenging the hypertext system's typical subordination of authorial presence in favour of total reader agency, Gache's treatment of play and play space serve to re-establish authorial presence and reconfigure the relationship between reader and author as an

ongoing, agonistic game. This agonistic notion of play demands, by its very nature, the presence of (at least) two opponents. In Gache's use of the digital text as a play space, it becomes clear that these two opponents are readerly and authorial in nature. With this in mind, it is possible to engage with Gache's use of the play space as a means of reuniting both author and reader through lusory exploration of the text. It is with the notion of exploration in mind that we turn our attention to the concept of the avatar.

4.3 Suture and Scission - Outlining the Avatar in 'El llanto del peregrino' and 'Los sueños'

As we have now discussed, it is through the application of McGonigal's analysis of game design fundamentals that we are best able to illustrate Gache's subversion of a seemingly collective 'blind acceptance' of the 'easy metaphors of cyberspace'[35] by reminding the reader that activity alone is not synonymous with agency.[36] In *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet H. Murray elucidates on just such a myth: 'Because of the vague and pervasive use of the term *interactivity*, the pleasure of agency in electronic environments is often confused with the mere ability to move a joystick or click on a mouse. But activity alone is not agency'.[37] Another easy metaphor that comes under fire in Gache is the apparent displacement of the author figure. In 'Escribe tu propio

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[35] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 103.
[36] The main arguments of this section are developments of the ideas put forward in my article, 'Gameplay Literature: The Digital Play Spaces of Belén Gache's *WordToys*' published in *Journal of Romance Studies: Reading Practices in Experimental Narratives* (special issue), 16.1 (2016). It is with their permission that I retrace and elaborate on the salient points of said article.
[37] Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: Free Press, 1997), p. 128.

Quijote', the apparent disappearance of the author is alluded to in the word toy's recursive chain of displaced authors. Namely, Borgesian ontological convergence and Cervantine authorial vagaries are evoked to mask reader manipulation under the pretence of literary self-reflection.

Gache's hypertexts, then, work best as a meditation on the potential of a revised role for the reader, rather than an actual means of revision. Where Taylor and Pitman suggest - using Murray's reasoning - that the hypertext allows for the reader to merely imagine themselves 'in the place of the creator', there are significant grounds to argue that this is a temporary misdirection that ultimately serves to carve out a more dynamic relationship between reader-player and author-creator.[38] That is to say, Gache's manipulation of reader agency suggests an oscillatory motion from cooperative to combative that, far from shifting the balance of power in favour of the empowered reader, insists on the continued presence of the authorial figure as potential, and necessary, opponent within the digital story space. In previous chapters it has been suggested that the idealized reader construct should be considered as something of a chess opponent (Chapter I) or even a sparring partner (Chapter II). Presently, this section outlines a digital manifestation of a similarly adversarial construct situated along the same agonistic or combative line: the avatar.

Exploration of *WordToys'* various play spaces is often made possible through the player's control over an on-screen avatar. Far from being a mere visual aid, the avatar proves central to the exploration of the reader-author relationship insofar as it represents a site of continuous identification with(in) the diegesis, and therefore acts

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[38] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 87.

as a tether between two separate ontological territories (that of the reader and that of the text, that of the player and that of the game). As Bob Rehak suggests, avatars are 'figures that appear on screen in place of, indeed as direct extensions of, the spectator'.[39] For Rehak, the avatar attests to the 'suturing effect of interactive technologies', for it highlights the double presence of the reader both within and without the narrative space.[40] As such, the avatar not only merges spectatorship and participation 'in ways that fundamentally transform both activities', its literalization of readerly presence within the digital space also attests to the digital narrative's interrogation of 'unstable categories of identity, presence and subjectivity'.[41] In this respect, Rehak's account of the avatar echoes the analyses found in Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*. Here, the avatar's potential to provide the player with a sense of being or presence within the narrative space is manifest in its ability to grant vision. Indeed, for Hayles, the value of the avatar or 'cyberspace body' lies in its digital reconstitution of the subject's POV (point of view): 'cyberspace represents a quantum leap forward into the technological construction of vision. Instead of an embodied consciousness looking through the window at a scene, consciousness moves through the screen to become the pov'.[42]

Hayles' account of the technological construction of vision anticipates both an ideological and ontological drift from the reader's observation of the fictional, digital space to his/her exploration of it. While such a drift complements the exploratory role of the player elaborated upon in 'Escribe tu propio Quijote', we must not ignore the

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[39] Bob Rehak, 'Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar' in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 103-127 (103).
[40] Ibid., p. 105.
[41] Ibid, pp. 103-107.
[42] Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 38.

potential for ontological scission suggested in the posthuman edge of Hayles' avatar. According to Hayles, the avatar facilitates the consciousness' exodus from the fetters of the fragile, physical form to the digitized safe-haven of the computerized self:

> In a world bespoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons, it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as informational patterns in a multidimensional computer space. A cyberspace body, like a cyberspace landscape, is immune to blight and corruption.[43]

In Hayles and Rehak, then, two distinct conceptualizations of the avatar emerge. While both accounts attest to the avatar's ability to grant vision and presence to the player, tensions arise in light of the posthuman dimensions of Hayles' construction. Hayles inquires, 'if flesh is data incarnate, why not go back to the source and leave the perils of physicality behind?'[44] The suggestion that, through the avatar, consciousness leaves the physical body behind betrays a distinctly escapist rationale that challenges the avatarial function as it is manifest in Rehak as ontological tether. That is, while Hayles attests to the emancipatory potential of the avatar and its value as a means of escape from one ontological territory (decaying physicality) to another (virtual immortality), Rehak's emphasis on the suturing effect of the avatar suggests a digital *rapprochement* between the ontological territories of player and playground. While Rehak's depiction of the avatar as an extension of these ontological categories resonates more immediately with the current discussions on the ontological convergence of author, reader and text, Hayles' posthuman construction highlights a potential scission between the concepts of the self and the other, between reality and fiction. Indeed, her assertion that the avatar allows the player to leave the body behind

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[43] Ibid., p. 36.
[44] Ibid., p. 37.

'as an unoccupied shell' points to one of the numerous ways in which the avatar problematizes questions of identity in a digital era.[45] The overtly escapist connotations of such a claim run counter to the ontological tethering that the avatar comes to represent in Gache. As such, Rehak's depiction of the avatar as a digital extension of the subject's ontological categories resonates more profoundly with the present focus on the ontological convergence of author, reader and narrative space. Regardless, the tension outlined in Rehak and Hayles is a most interesting one, and perfectly encapsulates one of the numerous ways in which the avatar comes to problematize the relationship between self and other in a digital age.

In Gache, then, the avatar is more than a visual manifestation of the reader's interactions with the digital play space. It is an extension of being that not only problematizes the coexistence of two ontological territories, but also dialogues with the escapist undertones of new media technologies as they are discussed in Hayles' posthuman considerations. Such charges of escapism are unsurprising. Traditional analyses of play have always concerned themselves with attempts to quarantine the play space from everyday reality, to provide play with its own, sacred or hallowed space 'outside of everyday life'.[46] According to Huizinga, we recall, 'play is distinct from "ordinary life" both as to locality and duration, it is "played out" within certain limits of time and space'.[47] In Gache, however, play is not used to uphold and preserve a sacred frontier between fiction and reality. Instead, it serves to problematize these very frontiers. Indeed, the avatar ultimately serves as a digitized tether between the ontological territories of play and reality. Despite the posthuman tensions inherent to

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[45] Ibid., p. 38.
[46] Caillois, *Game, Play, Literature*, p. 34.
[47] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 9.

the avatar, play, as it is manifest in Gache's *WordToys* is not defined by its potential

as a 'passive retreat from reality'.[48] Rather, the concepts of play and the avatar

represent 'purposeful', 'thoughtful' and more importantly, 'active' methods of

'reorganisation'.[49] In the context of the current discussion, it becomes clear that this

reorganization refers to the reader-author axis. Thus, while there is a constant

awareness of the avatar's potential for rupture in Gache, the avatar ultimately serves

as an ontological tether between the subject and the text. With this tethering effect in

place, we can turn our focus towards textually-embedded manifestations of the avatar

in 'El llanto del peregrino' and 'Los sueños'.

'El llanto del peregrino' presents the player with an anthropomorphic representation of

his/her interaction with the text. That is, the player navigates a small, pixelated pilgrim

across a digital landscape whose borders and contours are defined by the words on

the screen. Gache's introduction to the 'word toy' explains how 'el peregrino recorre

el complejo camino de sus circunstancias así como el lector transita por los versos

escritos por Góngora a partir de ramificaciones y meandros del lenguaje'.[50] Gache's

emphasis on the player's movement through - or journey across - the text (as a means

of interpretation or understanding) not only attests to his/her exploratory function, but

does so in a way that underlines the symbiotic relationship between player and avatar.

It is, after all, only through the reader-player's manipulation of the digitized pilgrim that

he or she is able to traverse the digital text labyrinth in search of understanding. Thus,

exploration and interpretation become inextricably linked in a hypertextually-inflected

(video) game, traversal of the labyrinth becomes the only method of reading the very

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[48] McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, p. 6.
[49] ibid, p. 10.
[50] Gache, WordToys, web.

text that makes up its walls. Indeed, in 'El llanto del peregrino', the lines of text and the intermittent spaces that separate them become labyrinthine corridors; maze-like avenues of exploration that the player is only able to navigate using the digital pilgrim as agential ambassador or ontological proxy. Without the avatar, the player's view of the text is limited. Thus, the avatar's function as agential ambassador echoes the ontological suturing outlined in Rehak's synthesis of player and avatar identities.

Here, the link between narrative space and digital space is particularly evident. 'El llanto del peregrino' provides visual representation of the narrative space. The text is - in a most literal sense - a labyrinth; a play space or arena that both invites and demands exploration. Despite the ostensibly open, exploratory nature of the 'word toy', however, the integrity of the Cooverian-Derridean line is more or less maintained. That is, owing to the limitations of the avatar's range of motion (it can only move in straight lines either up or down, left or right), the fixed orientation of the page and the uncompromisingly impenetrable nature of the labyrinth's text-based corridors, navigation of the page can only be carried out in such a way that mirrors the eye's traditional scanning of the printed page. Thus, by its very design, 'El llanto del peregrino' invites exploration of the narrative space while exhausting and thereby frustrating the player's exploratory freedom.   The author-creator/author-architect dictates the avatar's range of motion, and by implication, the reader's interrogative capacity. Just as the avatar is locked in a *Pacmanesque* navigational axis (up, down, left, right), the reader is bound to Coover's 'compulsory author-directed movement from the beginning of a sentence to its period'.[51] As with 'Escribe tu propio Quijote', 'El llanto del peregrino' undermines the hypertextual illusion of true freedom from the

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[51] Coover, web.

perceived tyranny of the line, and it is through the exploration of the narrative space and the subsequent discovery of its agential and architectural boundaries that we confront authorial presence. In these exploratory frustrations we find perceptible links to Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of internal-exploratory interactivity:

> Through its emphasis on travel, internal-exploratory participation lends itself particularly well to narratives that invest in the imaginative appeal of their spatial setting. This could be an electronic version of *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice, the player's character, would explore Wonderland, stumble into the lives of its inhabitants, overhear conversations, gather gossips, and watch the unfolding of the story of Wonderland like a live spectacle.[52]

Despite the fact that this particular mode of participation is rooted in the concepts of travel and exploration, internal-exploratory interaction is considered by Ryan to impose 'severe restrictions on the agency of the interactor'.[53] Specifically, Ryan explains that 'the role of the user is limited to actions that have no bearing on the evolution of the virtual world, nor on the personal destiny of the avatar: actions such as traveling around the virtual world, looking into its nooks and crannies'.[54] The frustrations inherent to this internal-exploratory player function are particularly evident in 'Los sueños'.

Unlike 'El llanto del peregrino', 'Los sueños' has no prologue, no navigational instructions and no anthropomorphized avatar. Using the cursor alone, the player must explore the topographical scene of a row of houses at night. Moving the cursor around the screen allows the player to identify five separate sites of interpretation, monologues recounting dreams (through both audio and text segments), in such a

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[52] Ryan, *Avatars*, p. 113.
[53] Ibid., p. 112.
[54] Ibid.

way that evokes Ryan's internal-exploratory process of stumbling into the lives of others, overhearing conversations and gathering gossips. It is through the exploration of the topographical structure of the 'word toy' that the reader stumbles across these audio monologues (in a very literal sense - it is even possible to happen upon the retellings *in medias res*) and their corresponding (though disjointed or desynchronized) transcriptions. Just as the player relies on the anthropomorphized pilgrim of 'El llanto del peregrino' to explore the text-based labyrinth, the cursor of 'Los sueños' allows the player to uncover and subsequently eavesdrop on the dreams retold by the 'word toy''s anonymous characters. Though markedly more primitive than the embodied avatar of 'El llanto del peregrino', the avatarial currency of the cursor in 'Los sueños' lies in its potential for what Calleja refers to as a 'meaningful exertion of agency'.[55] The cursor, as Carr suggests, 'umbilically links the off-screen participant to the on-screen world and enables their agency within that world'.[56] Paradoxically, then, the cursor represents a consciously obsolete and delimiting avatarial form that fulfils the role of ontological tether or agential ambassador while also upholding a sense of internal-exploratory frustration.

Agency, exploration and interpretation are intrinsically linked by the avatar. In enabling exploration of the digital space, the avatar acts as a conduit for the player's interpretive strategies. The avatar is not just a visual representation of the player, but a conduit for the ontological baggage that the reader brings to the act of reading, that the player brings to the act of playing. The avatar not only grants the player presence in the

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[55] Gordon Calleja, *In-Game: from Immersion to Incorporation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), p. 55.
[56] Diane Carr, 'Playing with Lara' in *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), pp. 171-180 (p. 177).

digital play space, it is an ambassador for the player's various, *a priori* referential and interpretive idiosyncrasies. As Rehak suggests:

> Appearing on screen in place of the player, the avatar does double duty as self and other, symbol and index. As *self*, its behaviour is tied to the player's through an interface (keyboard, mouse, joystick): its literal motion, as well as its figurative triumphs and defeats, result from the player's actions. At the same time, avatars are unequivocally *other*. Both limited and freed by difference from the player, they can accomplish more than the player alone; they are supernatural ambassadors of agency.[57]

That the player is thrust into the narrative space of 'Los sueños' without the customary guidance, instruction or coercion of the tyrannical line seemingly suggests a notable absence on the part of the author. Once again, however, it is the player's frustrated exploration of the narrative space, as it constitutes here a search for interpretive waypoints through the use of the cursor, that reconstitutes the line and reasserts authorial presence.

Thus, by positioning *WordToys* firmly within the framework of the hypertext and its author-destroying proclivities, Gache manipulates the reader-player into assuming creative control - as is the apparent triumph of the hypertext - only to dispel this illusion of agency through the frustration of the very exploratory capacities that 'word toys' like 'Los sueños' purport to encourage. In this game of hide-and-seek, Gache frustrates the player with constant, oscillatory motions between illusion and disenchantment. In reference to hypertext, Michael Joyce warns that 'what we are used to we too often become used by'.[58] In *WordToys*, then, the player's hypertextually-informed

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[57] Rehak, *Playing at Being*, p. 106.
[58] Michael Joyce, 'New Stories for New Readers: Contour, Coherence and Constructive Hypertext' in *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*, ed. by Ilana Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 163-182 (167).

interpretive strategies, as they are projected onto the 'word toy' through the avatar, are co-opted by the author figure to reinstate some iteration of 'the line' and, by implication, some iteration of authorial control. Joyce goes on to lament the fact that 'the web, like most technologies, encourages a constant hunger for newness without a taste for detail'.[59] Such a claim is effectively evidenced in Gache's *WordToys*, where the hypertext systems in place do not displace the author. Rather the *authoricidal* features of hypertext (as they are outlined in Landow *et al.*) are assimilated in order to make the reader temporarily blind to authorial presence, to cheat the player into accepting the illusion of agency. As players in the digital narrative, we find ourselves cheated by Gache's subversive stratagems.

The cheat, as we discussed in Chapter II, manipulates his/her fellow player's commitment to the game and its rules. To return to Caillois' assertions:

> Le lois confuses et embrouillés de la vie ordinaire sont replacées, dans cet espace défini et pour ce temps donné, par des règles précises, arbitraires, irrécusables, qu'il faut accepter comme telles et qui président au déroulement correct de la partie. Le tricheur, s'il les viole, feint du moins de les respecter. Il ne les discute pas: il abuse de la loyauté des autres joueurs.[60]

This notion of 'autre joueurs' or 'fellow players' is interesting insofar as it suggests a compromise between the purported tyranny of the author and his/her total displacement. As we discussed in Chapter III, in hiding, the author figure - while still present - takes on a distinctly more phantasmagorical, ghost-like presence that nevertheless occupies the same ontological space as the player's avatar. The logical

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[59] Ibid., p. 167.
[60] Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes,* p. 38.

implication here is that the player's avatar is not alone in the digital play spaces of any given 'word toy'.

Presently, then, we are able to outline a more digitally apt concept of the author function that responds to the ludic element of *WordToys*: That of the authorial avatar. In Gache, authorial presence itself is avatarial in nature. Often, the topographical structure of the play space becomes an extension of the author precisely because the lines that make up the boundaries of the narrative space, however well-hidden, represent authorial strategies or instances of anticipation. The interpretive sites of 'Los sueños', the text-based labyrinth of 'El llanto del peregrino' and the mirage of creativity that is the word processor of 'Escribe tu propio Quijote' all represent confrontations (in the form of interpretive or agonistic challenges) with the authorial avatar. Such examples represent perceptible, topographical manifestations of subject matter that must be navigated, successfully or otherwise, by the player's avatar. As King and Krzywinska suggest, in particular reference to the video game, 'more than simply a background setting, the world of the game is often as much a protagonist, or even antagonist, as its inhabitants'.[61] Similarly, Espen Aarseth argues that 'the defining element in computer games is spatiality. Computer games are essentially concerned with spatial representation and negotiation'.[62]

Like the video game, Gache's *WordToys* often share a similar concern for spatial representation and negotiation. The oppositional or antagonistic edge of a number

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[61] King and Krzywinska, *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders*, p. 76.
[62] Espen Aarseth, 'Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Videogames', *ResearchGate* (2001)
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238485005_Allegories_of_Space>
[accessed 27 April 2016].

Gache's spatial configurations (such as those discussed above) betray an initial, authorially-dictated spatial construct that is intended to be navigated by the reader-player. It is in the oppositional or antagonistic nature of such spaces that we detect the presence of the author. Both the avatar and the play space, then, allow for the playful engagement between reader and author via the text. This agonistic relationship is not entirely dictated by the tyranny of the line, nor is it defined by the absolute freedom of the reader. Instead, it points to a co-dependent interplay, a playful back-and-forth within - or even facilitated by - the narrative space. In short, the concept of play defends the primacy of the text as a point of contact, but acknowledges the interpretive dynamic made possible exclusively through the interplay between readerly and authorial avatars within the digital play spaces that *WordToys* provide. This interplay is vital not only to the understanding of Gache's subversion of the hypertext narrative, but also to the understanding of the short fictions that make up the previous chapters of this study, as they form part of an evolving use of narrative strategy in fantastic Argentine short fiction.

As such, the interplay between the reader-player avatar and the authorial avatar is not unlike the dialectical, back-and-forth nature of interpretation found in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. As Jean Grondin observes: 'L'hermémeutique philosophique ne connaît donc pas de principe plus élevé que celui du dialogue'.[63] However, whereas Gadamer's view of interpretation is that of a dialectical experience that subordinates authorial presence to direct engagement with the text, Gache's *WordToys* reassert authorial presence through avatarial manifestations within the play space. In doing so, Gache subverts the hermeneutic task as it is traditionally

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[63] Jean Grondin, *L'universalité de l'herméneutique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 194.

conceived in Gadamerian theory as an attempt to understand the text rather than the author. Richard E. Palmer outlines the Gadamerian project:

> The task of hermeneutics is essentially to understand the text, not the author. Both the concept of temporal distance and the emphasis on meaning in historical understanding should make this self-evident. The text is understood not because a relation between persons is involved but because of the participation in the subject matter that the text communicates.[64]

In *WordToys*, this 'subject matter that the text communicates' is spatial in nature, and thus, an extension of the author. While the Gadamerian subordination of the author figure in favour of the text is ultimately undermined in *WordToys*, the confrontation between reader and author avatars represents a hypertextually-inflected manifestation of the Gadamerian 'Horizontverschmelzung'; a 'fusion of horizons' or a merging of self and other. In this sense, the avatar adopts a hermeneutical significance insofar as it provides a visual representation of the dialectical nature of interpretation, albeit with a reconfigured focus on reader, text and author. Thus, the game-like quality of Gache's *WordToys* imbues the interpretive process with a ludic dynamism. The confrontation between author and reader avatars is wrought with victories and losses on both sides as the two figures assert their presence in the digital play space. The play space, by virtue of the tension it reveals between readerly and authorial avatars, becomes a competitive arena; a contested space in which the author's creative control over the digital landscape is offset by the player's exploration of it. Thus, if interpretation refers to a dialogical confrontation with the 'other', as Francisco J. Gonzalez suggests, there are grounds to suggest that this otherness is, in Gache, the authorial avatar.[65] It is

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[64] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 185.
[65] Francisco J. Gonzalez, 'Dialectic and Dialogue in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and H.G. Gadamer', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 39 (2006), 313-345 (p. 330).

with this concept of the avatarial author in mind that we move towards the contested space of Gache's 'Dedicatoria espiral'.

4.4 The Narrative Space as Contested Arena of Play – 'Dedicatoria espiral'

Over the course of Chapters I, II and III we have discussed how the spatial implications of the narratives of Borges, Cortázar and Shua point to the nature of the narrative space as a contested arena. In Borges, the spatial metaphor of the Minotaur's labyrinth, as it comes to represent a monstrous fortress-turned-prison, points to the duplicitous and contested nature of the narrative space as both 'construcción defensiva' and 'cárcel de imposible salida'.[66] Likewise, the neofantastically-inflected hostile spaces of the Cortazarian house not only problematize the concept of narrative space by foregrounding its kinetic, contested and hostile nature, but also actively thematize the adversarial nature of the reader-author relationship and their mutual occupation of such space. In the context of Shua's sudden fictions, our emphasis on the theoretical import of intertextuality as a spatializing concept pointed to the function of the text as a *mediating environment* that foregrounds the dynamic and co-performative relationship between author and reader. We now return to this concept of the contested space in relation to the ludically-inflected, hybrid digital artefacts of Gache's *WordToys*.

On the subject of the text as competitive, contested arena, the structural and theoretical insight provided by video games theorists Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire

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[66] Grau, *Borges y la arquitectura*, p. 159.

is of particular illustrative significance. Jenkins and Squire observe that play is, first and foremost, an art of contested spaces. The video game in particular is a spatial art 'with its roots in architecture, landscape painting, sculpture, gardening or amusement-park design'.[67] This emphasis on the game space as a competitive arena occupied by two opposing forces 'encourages performance, playfulness, competition and collaboration' and in doing so, raises significant questions regarding the nature of narrative in a digital age. Jenkins and Squire continue:

> If games tell stories, they do so by organising spatial features. If games stage combat, then players learn to scan their environments for competitive advantages. Game designers create immersive worlds and relationships among objects that enable dynamic experiences.[68]

Applied to Gache's *WordToys*, this notion of the digital play space as a dynamic, competitive experience evokes the concept of anticipation insofar as it represents both a readerly and authorial strategic device. This anticipatory concern further articulates the hypertextually-inflected relationship between author and reader in Gache. Namely, while the author 'use[s] spatial elements to set the initial terms for the player's experiences'[69] the player must 'learn to read tactical possibilities from the spaces themselves'.[70] Once again, video game theory helps to further elaborate upon the agonistic nature of the reader-author relationship in *WordToys*. The tension between the 'initial terms' dictated by the author and the 'tactical possibilities' uncovered by the player suggests that interpretation is played out within the 'word toy' as a series of pre-emptive and retaliatory moves. That is, the author is able to pre-empt the reader's

[67] Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire, 'The Art of Contested Spaces' in *Game On: The History and Culture of Videogames,* ed. by Lucien King (New York: Laurence King Publishing. 2002), pp. 64-75 (p. 65).
[68] Ibid., p. 65.
[69] Ibid., p. 69.
[70] Ibid., p. 65.

initial movements within the narrative during her construction of the play space.[71] The

reader, through the exploration of said play space, must respond to these anticipatory

constructions if he/she is to successfully engage with the games presented before

him/her.

This tension between authorial anticipation and readerly retaliation through spatial

manipulation is, in many ways, evocative of Umberto Eco's postulations on the 'opera

aperta' or 'open work'. Specifically, Eco's talk of the interpretive dialogue between

creator and interactor helps elucidate on the back-and-forth or give-and-take

kineticism of the contested space of the narrative:

> The author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work *to be completed*. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded, but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own. It will not be a different work, and, at the end of the interpretive dialogue, a form which is *his* form, will have been organised, even though it may have been assembled by an outside party in a particular way that he could not have foreseen. The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organised, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development.[72]

In the context of *WordToys*, I argue that play and the contested nature of its

topographical structures are used to co-opt or subvert hypertext's potential as an

'expository device', thereby literalizing the narrative space and providing a visual,

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[71] While beyond the immediate purview of this particular thesis, authorial construction of the play space necessarily evokes the practice of coding. For a perspicacious analysis of the role of coding (or Codework) in digital poetry, with a particular focus on Latin American electronic literature, see Eduardo Ledesma 'The Poetics and Politics of Computer Code in Latin America: Codework, Code Art, and Live Coding', *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 49, 1 (2015). For a more general overview, see Rita Raley, 'Interferences: [Net.Writing] and the Practice of Codework', *Electronic Book Review* (2002) <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/net.writing> and 'Code.surface || Code.depth', *Dichtung Digital,* 36 (2006) <http://www.dichtung-digital.de/2006/01/Raley/index.htm>.
[72] Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 63.

digitized representation of the literary politics at work within it.[73] The concept of the

digital text as a contested play space problematizes the apparent decentering potential

of the hypertextual system by reconstituting the line and reasserting authorial

presence. In effect, *WordToys'* subversion of key hypertext devices renders the

reader-player complicit in the reconstitution of 'the line' in such a way that suggests a

compromise between agential freedom and rational order. The various interpretive

sites hidden in 'Los sueños', the textual labyrinth of 'El llanto del peregrino' and the

semi-interactive word processor of 'Escribe tu propio Quijote' are all effective

representations of this compromise. That is, the tactical and interpretive possibilities

found in *WordToys* double up as set-pieces that operate within a complex structure of

scripted, rationally-organized possibilities that are ultimately prescribed by the

author.[74] Such set-pieces allow the reader to engage with the text in an exploratory

capacity without succumbing to the hypertextual threats of structural chaos and

devolution of artistic vision to noisy, but ultimately vapid, rhetoric or 'passive

titillation'.[75] In short, *WordToys* uses the contested play space to re-negotiate a

compromise between reader agency and freedom of exploration on the one hand and

authorial presence as a means of rational organization on the other.

Like Murray's concept of the 'unsolvable maze', then, the contested spaces of Gache's

digital playgrounds function as expressive structures that offer the thrill of exploratory

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[73] David Kolb, 'Socrates in the Labyrinth' in *Hyper/Text/Theory,* ed. George P. Landow (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 323-44 (p. 339).
[74] In the context of the contemporary video game, the set-piece represents a scripted event aimed at maximum affective impact whilst allowing for little to no interaction with the event itself. The event is played out before the player, who, while still able to explore the intricacies and details of the event as it unfolds, actually has zero agential input. A set-piece will playout out in the same way, time and time again, despite any efforts to change it.
[75] Kolb, 'Socrates in the Labyrinth', p. 339.

freedom whilst upholding the safety inherent to an implicit code of order. In Murray's own words:

> Walking through a rhizome one enacts a story of wandering, of being enticed in conflicting directions, or remaining always open to surprise, of feeling helpless to orient oneself or to find an exit, but the story is also oddly reassuring. In the rhizome, one is constantly threatened but also continuously enclosed. The fact that the plot will not resolve means that no irreparable loss will be suffered.[76]

The notions of constant threat and continuous enclosure resonate with the formal structures of the playground. Namely, the protective qualities of the contested space address some of the concerns levelled at the hypertext narrative's potential for indeterminacy. For instance, the contested nature of Gache's digital play spaces speak to Coover's concerns over getting lost in the potentially infinite hypertextual maze: 'How do you move around in infinity without getting lost? The structuring of the space can be so compelling and confusing as to utterly absorb and neutralize the narrator and to exhaust the reader'.[77] Similarly, Coover also raises concerns over the unstable nature of the hypertext and its potential to compromise certain literary values:

> With an unstable text that can be intruded upon by other author-readers, how do you, caught in the maze, avoid the trivial? How do you duck the garbage? Venerable novelistic values like unity, integrity, coherence, vision, voice seem to be in danger. Eloquence is being redefined. 'Text' has lost its canonical certainty. How does one judge, analyze, write about a work that never reads the same way twice?[78]

The contested spaces of Gache's hypertext fictions champion the kineticism inherent in the hypertext narrative whilst also calling attention to the values of integrity and

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[76] Murray, *Hamlet*, p. 133.
[77] Coover, web.
[78] Ibid.

coherence. In doing so, Gache not only defends the kinetic dynamism of the printed text but also points to a more grounded treatment of the digital narrative, one that avoids the technocratic utopianism so often evoked in hypertext theory. In Gache, hypertext is not a game-changer *per se*, it is but one more level in the infinite game of literary politics.

The contested space of word toys like 'Dedicatoria espiral' thematize this concern for the complete neutralization of creative authority on the one hand, and the utter exhaustion of the reader-player on the other. In 'Dedicatoria espiral', Gache continues to problematize ontological boundaries and narrative hierarchies, but does so in such a way that does not invalidate the authoritative centre of the author, nor totally undermine the interpretive, agential rigour of the reader. Like Borges and Cortázar before her, Gache seeks to make the reader a fellow player in an interpretive and exploratory game. The author is not tyrannical, but playful. The narrative structure is complex, but not so utterly chaotic as to hopelessly lose the player. What follows, then, is an analysis of the contested nature of the play space as it appears in 'Dedicatoria espiral', with a particular focus on the ways in which it protects narrative coherency and thus prevents interpretational chaos.

Gache's concern for the spatialized value of the narrative structure is made clear in the perceptibly baroque sensibilities of her *Góngora WordToys* anthology. In the preface to the collection, Gache writes:

> Mucho se ha hablado sobre la mentalidad barroca, caracterizada por una relación de conflicto entre el ser humano y el cosmos. El hombre del siglo XVII ya no habitaba el universo clásico del hombre renacentista, ordenado, cerrado, en equilibrio, sino uno inestable, abierto, descentrado a partir de los drásticos 'descentramientos' que habían tenido lugar en el siglo precedente: del Sol

(revolución copernicana), de Europa (descubrimiento de América), de la iglesia católica (reforma luterana) pero, principalmente, de la cosa respecto al signo y consiguiente crisis de la representación.[79]

Thus, the unstable, open and decentered nature of the hypertext echoes the baroque concern for humankind's confrontation with, and interrogation of, the concept of order. Accordingly, the five pieces that make up Gache's *Góngora WordToys (Soledades)* present, according the author herself, 'un universo plagado de espirales, pliegues y laberintos del lenguaje'. A very literal manifestation of these 'laberintos del lenguaje' has already been discussed in the context of 'El llanto del peregrino'. Of interest here is Gache's hypertextual treatment of the play space as a contested arena 'donde seres y objetos perdían su centro en la representación y permanecían perdidos tras el abigarramiento de los signos'.[80] Specifically, the means by which Gache problematises control over the narrative space so as to render the reader-player complicit in the reconstitution of order (from within an apparent instance of absolute chaos) merits further analysis.

In 'Dedicatoria espiral', the significance of the play space is architectural as well as thematic. Narrative is not conveyed through the written word alone. It is embedded in the digital architecture of its hypertextual form. In her hypertextual response to Luis de Góngora's *Soledades*, Gache blurs the line between the baroque in its written and architectural forms in such a way that form itself becomes a vessel for narrative meaning. Jay David Bolter defends a similar line of reasoning in his assertion that electronic writing is both a visual and verbal description. Bolter suggests that electronic writing is not simply the writing of a place, but rather a writing *with* places as

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[79] Gache, *Góngora WordToys*, web.
[80] Ibid.

they come to represent spatially realized topics. Specifically, Bolter asserts that 'Whenever we divide our text into unitary topics and organise those units into a connected structure and whenever we conceive of this textual structure spatially as well as verbally, we are writing topographically'.[81] Thus, 'Although the computer is not necessary for topographic writing, it is only in the computer that the mode becomes a natural, and therefore also conventional, way to write'.[82]

We have discussed the implications of topographical writing in the context of the print text labyrinths and hostile spaces of Borges and Cortázar. Of interest here, however, is the way in which Gache's transmedia treatment of topological writing, as it is manifest in 'Dedicatoria espiral' ultimately serves to emphasize the ludic, almost video game-esque potential of the 'word toy'. On the subject of transmedia storytelling, Jenkins - in his study 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture' - observes that the narrative, like the video game, now operates within a cultural politics 'that depends less on each individual work being self-sufficient than on each work contributing to a larger narrative economy'.[83] In the larger narrative economy of the transmedia setting outlined above, Jenkins argues that 'what games will do best will almost certainly centre around their ability to give concrete shapes to our memories and imaginings of the storyworld, creating an immersive environment we can wander through and interact with'.[84] While Jenkins' attempts to mediate a middle ground between an ongoing and fervent ludological-narratological debate have come under significant criticism, the analytical currency of the concept of 'narrative architecture' not only resonates with the Baroque underpinnings of the *Góngora WordToys* collection, but

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[81] Bolter, *Writing* Space, p. 25.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, *First Person*, p. 124.
[84] Ibid.

also allows for further elucidation on the spatial concerns hitherto put forth in this chapter and, indeed, throughout this thesis. Before moving on to such concerns, however, a brief look at the debate that fuels such criticism is in order.

As Henry Jenkins outlines, the majority of ludologists typically reject the 'various attempts to map traditional narrative structures ('Hypertext,' 'Interactive Cinema,' 'nonlinear narrative') onto games at the expense of an attention to their specificity as an emerging mode of entertainment'.[85] While the relevance of the ludology vs. narratology debate is relatively tangential to the primary focus of the current discussion, it could be argued that the present application of video game theory to the topographical, spatial and affective implications of narrative spaces, as they are manifest in the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache, inadvertently places this chapter along a tentatively narratological theoretical spectrum. As such, the main tenets of both the ludological and narratological stances, as they participate in the wider context of genre and media theory, merit a brief discussion.

Accordingly, Janet Murray's 'The Last Word on Ludology v Narratology' offers a perspicacious overview of both the ludological and narratological viewpoints.[86] Murray observes that, according to ludologists such as Jesper Juul, Espen Aarseth and Markku Eskelinen, 'games in general and computer games in particular display a unique formalism which defines them as a discreet experience, a different genre from narrative, drama, poetry and also different from other "ergotic" or "configurational"

[85] Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, *First Person*, p. 118.
[86] Janet Murray, 'The Last Word on Ludology v Narratology', *inventingthemedium.com* <https://inventingthemedium.com/2013/06/28/the-last-word-on-ludology-v-narratology-2005/> [accessed 16.08.2016].

forms like Oulipo texts'.[87] According to Murray, such theorists argue that the focus of video game theory 'should be on the rules of the game, not on the representational or mimetic elements which are only incidental'. Owing to this desire to privilege a formalistic approach above all else, such theorists are apt to dismiss what Murray considers to be the 'many salient aspects of the game experience, such as the feeling of immersion, the enactment of violent or sexual events, the performative dimension of game play, and even the personal experience of winning and losing'. While Murray's concern that to subscribe to such a viewpoint 'you must have what American poet Wallace Stevens called "a mind of winter"; you must be able to look at highly emotive, narrative, semiotically-charged objects and see only their abstract game function', betrays a distinctly narratological prejudice, fellow (video) game theorists such as Eskelinen are steadfast in their defence of the primacy of function and form. Indeed, in his article 'The Gaming Situation', Eskelinen is resolute in his complete (and caustic) rejection of the perceived narratological colonization of the digital artefact at the hands of narrative theorists. Specifically, Eskelinen observes that:

> If and when games and especially computer games are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonised from the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies. Games are seen as interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema. On top of everything else, such definitions, despite being successful in terms of influence or funding, are conceptually weak and ill-grounded, as they are usually derived from a very limited knowledge of mere mainstream drama or outdated literary theory, or both.[88]

Thus, while the present chapter commits to neither the narratological nor the ludological stance *per se*, it recognizes that the theoretical lens of game studies effectively illustrates the spatial concerns of Gache's hybrid digital artefacts. As such,

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Markku Eskelinen, 'The Gaming Situation', *Game Studies*, 1, 1, (2001) <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/> [accessed 16.08.2016].

this chapter betrays a slight inclination towards the narratological viewpoint insofar as it takes the narratological import of the video game for granted. While such an inclination potentially invites the scrutiny of essentialist taunts along the lines of Eskelinen's 'if I throw a ball at you I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories', it nevertheless proves instrumental in illustrating the spatialized, affective and above all ludic implications of Gache's digital artefacts.[89]

With this now clear, we return to the spatial implications of the 'word toy' as it comes to represent a digitized, ludically-charged, play space. To return to the postulations put forth by Jenkins, we must consider the possibility that 'games may more fully realize the spatiality' of the text based narrative, 'giving a much more immersive and compelling representation of their narrative worlds'.[90] On the immersive potentiality of the video game's inherent spatiality, Jenkins elucidates:

> Anyone who doubts that Tolstoy might have achieved his true calling as a game designer should reread the final segment of *War and Peace* where he works through how a series of alternative choices might have reversed the outcome of Napoleon's Russian campaign.[91]

It is with these kinetic, immersive and spatial considerations in mind that we return to the contested space of Gache's 'Dedicatoria espiral'. In this 'word toy''s preamble, Gache highlights Heinrich Wölfflin's observation that 'el arte barroco rechaza las formas que remitían a lo inerte y lo permanente, siendo su estética multiforme y plural: en el barroco, las formas abiertas reemplazan a las cerradas, propias del clasicismo, y la elipsis y la espiral desplazan al círculo'.[92] For Gache, then, the Baroque's

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, *First Person*, p. 124.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Gache, *Góngora WordToys*, web.

rejection of closed, static forms is analogous to the way in which Góngora 'trabaja el lenguaje de las *Soledades* a partir del descentramiento y el ornamento, amenazando la autoridad de la gramática normativa de corte clásico, propia de la "corriente lingüística imperial"'.[93] By implication, 'Dedicatoria espiral' becomes a visual metaphor of the ways in which Góngora's written poetry 'se presenta, como en una espiral, tangencial, centrífugo y centrípeto, pleno de movimiento, inconcluso y abierto'.[94] Consequently, and somewhat ironically, the 'word toy' comes to represent a hypertextual defence of the kineticism inherent to the print text, rather than a denouncement of the print text's apparently static nature. In doing so, Gache not only defends the kinetic dynamism of the print text, but also points to a more grounded treatment of the hypertext narrative, one that does not ransom off the print text in favour of the digital, but instead acknowledges both mediums as the obverse and reverse of the same ideological coin. Peter Whalley outlines the same defence in his treatment of linearity:

> It is a mistake to think of conventional texts [...] as being purely linear. In conventional materials [...] cycles of ideas are repeated and overlaid upon each other. For example, a central idea may be repeated within progressively more complex contexts. The skillful author may use the linear text form to weave an entirely non-linear pattern of associations in the reader's mind.[95]

'Dedicatoria espiral' presents the reader with the image of an animated, spiralling text; Góngora's 'Dedicatoria al duque de Béjar' lost in a seemingly frenzied, chaotic whirlwind. Gache invites the player to face off against the momentum of the rampaging text, to take the reins and subdue the frantic, oscillatory explosions and implosions

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Peter Whalley, 'Models of Hypertext Structures and Learning' in *Designing Hypermedia for Learning*, ed. by David Jonassen and Heinz Mandl (Berlin: Springer, 1990), pp. 63-64.

that the author has set in motion. The oscillating centrifugal and centripetal movements of 'Dedicatoria espiral' provide a clear example of contested space, as the 'word toy' presents a navigable space that renders visible the presence of both readerly and authorial avatars. The authorial avatar is manifest in the rampaging, runaway text and the reader's avatar, once again manifest in the crude, almost obsolete computer cursor, represents the force used to bring the text under control. That is, despite the initially vertiginous nature of the word toy, the player is able to engage with the complex kineticism of the lexia (via the avatarial cursor) and navigate the contested space in such a way that ultimately reinforces the 'the line' by making the text readable. It is this reconfiguration of 'the line' - as it comes to represent an interpretive strategy - that ultimately leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the text.

As such, in 'Dedicatoria espiral' we see a clear subversion of the perceived dichotomy between interactivity and narrativity. Ernest Adams elucidates on such a dichotomy in his assertion that: 'Interactivity is almost the opposite of narrative; narrative flows under the direction of the author, while interactivity depends on the player for motive power'.[96] The ideas of flow, direction and motive power are as fiercely indicative of the literary politics at work in 'Dedicatoria espiral' as they are fundamental to the understanding of play as it pertains to the works of all four authors in this study. That is, the idea of motive power shares significant parallels with this thesis's postulations on the kinetic nature of the narrative spaces that come to define the fictions, short fiction and sudden fictions of Borges, Cortázar and Shua.

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[96] Ernest Adams, 'The Designer's Notebook: Three Problems for Interactive Storytellers' in *Gamasutra*, December 29, 1999
<http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131821/the_designers_notebook_three_.php>
[accessed 27.07.2016].

At this juncture we would do well to reiterate our initial postulations on the concept of the narrative space. Specifically, we must underline once again that the emphasis here lies in the term's spatial implications, and not on its perceived imposition of narrativity upon the work of art. To be clear, this chapter acknowledges the fact that 'Dedicatoria espiral', like 'El llanto del peregrino' and the other 'word toys' that make up Gache's *Góngora* collection, represent remediations of the avant-garde poetry of Luis de Góngora. The term 'narrative space' does not refer to the degree of narrativity of a given text. Instead, the term is used to account for, or otherwise illustrate, the spatial constructs evoked, or else mentally conceived, during the reader's experience of the text. As such, to address the narrative space of a remediated poem, as we have done in the cases of 'El llanto del peregrino' and 'Dedicatoria espiral' is not to stake a claim on their primacy as narratives, or even to suggest the existence of a narrative trajectory over a poetic one. Rather, the use of such a term is in keeping with this thesis's attempts to approximate the cognitive maps and schematics drawn up not only in the act of interpretation, but as a direct result of the emotional and affective impacts of the work of art upon the observer, of the text upon the reader or, by implication, of the game upon the player.

While, in the cases of Gache's 'El llanto del peregrino' and 'Dedicatoria espiral' it might be less misleading to call upon (as this chapter often has) alternative terms such as 'play space' or 'story space', this chapter wishes to defend the pertinence of the term 'narrative space' in relation to Gache's hybrid digital artefacts on the grounds that the inherently nebulous connotations and definitions that surround the term are, in turn, reflections on the kinetic, hybrid and protean nature of the ontological territories that

these spaces come to represent not only in Gache's 'word toys', but throughout the works analysed in this thesis. In my appropriation of the term, 'narrative' comes to represent a broad spectrum of experiences brought on by the ontological *rapprochement* between artist, work and audience. As such, the term effectively evokes and responds to a narrative of experience accumulated or built over the course of the reader-player's contact with the work of art.

As we have previously discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it is in the term's evocation of the reader's production of a mental image or a cognitive construct - and not in the term's relation to the measuring of a given work's inherent 'storiness' - that the analytical currency of the term narrative space becomes clear. Narrative space points, above all, to the spatial quality of the affective, imaginative and emotional potentialities of the work of art, as they become apparent following the reader's engagement with the work. Moreover, in light of the hybrid nature of the 'word toys' discussed throughout this chapter, and indeed the hybrid qualities of the short fictions and sudden fictions hitherto discussed in this thesis, the protean, nebulous or 'fuzzy' nature of the term narrative does not represent a critical or analytical shortcoming, but a necessarily loose and flexible account of the topographical uncertainty of the text's play spaces.

Thus, such topographical considerations aid in the elaboration of the narrative space as it comes to represent, in the context of this thesis, a spatially-inflected manifestation of the cognitive, imaginative and emotional experiences of the reader upon contact with the ontological territory of the text. As Fludernik suggests, we recall, 'experiencing, just like telling, viewing or thinking, are holistic schemata known from

real life and therefore can be used as building stones for the mimetic evocation of a fictional world'.[97] With this reiteration of the narrative space as a cognitive, mental representation of both the ludically-charged storyworld and the reader-player's contact and subsequent interaction with such a world, we return one last time to the kinetic play space of 'Dedicatoria espiral'. Specifically, we return to the concepts of flow, direction and motive power as they appear in 'Dedicatoria espiral' as a confirmation of the kinetic nature of the play spaces elaborated upon throughout Gache's *WordToys and Góngora WordToys.*

Despite the vertiginous chaos of the rampaging text-spirals of 'Dedicatoria espiral', the simulation of centrifugal and centripetal movements within the narrative space, by their very nature, suggests the presence of a central point. Depending on the player's avatarially-facilitated movements, the words that make up the poem can either flee from the centre mass, or else implode upon it. Furthermore, approaching the central axis of the text with the avatarial cursor makes it possible to slow the text's momentum completely, to stop the text dead in its tracks. Thus, Gache's hypertextual engagement with Góngora's *Soledades* further reinforces the value of the hypertext as a literalizing device that, far from providing the solution to, or even next step in, a particular artistic or philosophical quandary, aids in the renewed visualization of the thematic, structural and indeed ontological concerns that have always driven the literary arts. As Bolter puts it:

> All novels embody a struggle between the linear flow of the narrative and the associative trains of thought touched off by the narrative, and the electronic medium provides a *new perspective* on that struggle.[98]

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[97] Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, p. 20.
[98] Bolter, *Writing Spaces*, p. 132.

Jane Yellowlees Douglas outlines a similar reasoning in her observation that: 'it can be argued that since the advent of the modern novel readers have been challenged with the task or reading something that approximates the virtual, three-dimensional space of hypertext narratives'.[99] But as we can see in Gache's 'Dedicatoria espiral', a new perspective is not necessarily synonymous with a solution. In many ways, the player's attempts to curtail the constant explosive and implosive impulses of 'Dedicatoria espiral' mirror Gache's typically subversive treatment of the hypertextual system. Specifically, through the contested space of the 'word toy', Gache warns that, for all its free-form potential, the hypertext descends into chaos if left unchecked. Coover issues a similar warning in his concerns over the hypertext's potential jeopardizing of narrative flow and closural elements:

> And what of narrative flow? There is still movement, but in hyperspace's dimensionless infinity, it is more like endless expansion; it runs the risk of being so distended and slackly driven as to lose its centripetal force, to give way to a kind of static low-charged lyricism - that dreamy gravityless lost-in-space feeling of the early sci-fi films. How does one resolve the conflict between the reader's desire for coherence and closure and the text's desire for continuance, its fear of death? Indeed, what is closure in such an environment? If everything is middle, how do you know when you are done, either as reader or writer? If the author is free to take a story anywhere at any time and in as many directions as she or he wishes, does that not become the obligation to do so?[100]

Likewise, Ryan considers the inherent dangers of hypertext's authorial decenteredness in her claims that 'narrative coherence is impossible to maintain in a truly complex system of links'.[101] As such, Ryan ruminates on the need for some level of authority or control to counteract the potential chaos of the hypertext:

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[99] Landow, *Hyper/Text/Theory*, p. 176.
[100] Coover, web.
[101] Ryan, 'Beyond Myth and Metaphor', web.

We need therefore simpler structures, structures with fewer branches and fewer decision points, so that every path can be individually designed by the author. Once the user has made a choice, the narrative should be able to roll by itself for an extended period of time; otherwise, the system would lead to a combinatory explosion - or fall back into randomness, the deathbed of narrative coherence.[102]

Similarly, Murray asserts that 'the postmodern hypertext tradition celebrates the indeterminate text as a liberation from the tyranny of the author and an affirmation of the reader's freedom of interpretation', but warns of the implications of such freedom:

In trying to create texts that do not 'privilege' any one order of reading or interpretive framework, the postmodernists are privileging confusion itself. The indeterminate structure of these hypertexts frustrates our desire for narrational agency, for using the act of navigation to unfold a story that flows from our own meaningful choices.[103]

Using Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, we are able to map this potential for chaos onto the topographical concerns discussed throughout this thesis. Specifically, Lynch's comments on the inherent mystification of the labyrinthine structure, as it pertains to large-scale, urban design theory, serves to illustrate the impact of disorientation and directional frustration on the subject's sense of place. Much like the psychogeographical considerations put forth in Chapter II, these concepts of disorientation, directionality, frustration and place further reinforce both the topographical and affective significance of the narrative space in contemporary literature. Lynch asserts:

It must be granted that there is some value in mystification, labyrinth or surprise in the environment. Many of us enjoy the House of Mirrors, and there is a certain charm in the crooked streets of Boston. This is so, however, only under

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[102] Ibid.
[103] Murray, *Hamlet*, p. 133.

two conditions. First, there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out. The surprise must occur in an over-all framework; the confusions must be small regions in a visible whole. Furthermore, the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have some form that can be explored and in time apprehended. Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.[104]

Thus, through the concept of the narrative space as a contested arena of play, Gache positions her hypertexts along a distinct analytical line of inquiry, one that serves to thematize Coover's conflict between closure and continuance, Murray's hypertextual privileging of confusion over clarity and Ryan's fear of randomness as the harbinger of doom for narrative coherence. Resolving the conflict between the reader's desire for coherence and closure and the text's desire for continuance, its fear of death, are all key concerns that feed into the concept of infinite play. Gache uses the contested nature of the play space as an ironic subversion of the reconfiguratory potential of her own hypertext fictions. In the competitive, avatarial dynamic of author and reader, Gache reasserts authorial presence and thereby defends the concept of narrative coherence, all the while revealing a desire to keep the game in play. It is with these ideas of keeping the game going and the possibility of infinite play in mind that we turn our attention to further 'word toys': 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?'

4.5 *Respawn* and Infinite Play - 'Mariposas-libro' & '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?'

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[104] Kevin Lynch, 'The Image of the Environment' in *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 1-14 (pp. 5-6).

In his *Writing Space*, Bolter suggests that 'no matter how competitive, the experience of reading in the electronic medium remains a game, rather than a combat, in the sense that it has no finality. The reader may win one day and lose the next'.[105] Bolter's evocation of play's avoidance of finality is of particular analytical significance insofar as it not only ties into to concepts of closure, mastery and the strange loops discussed over the last three chapters, but also further evokes the emerging concepts of the avatar, the topographical inconsistency of the digital contested space, and the potentially infinite nature of play to be discussed presently. On the subject of infinite play, we would do well to return to Gadamer's postulations on the ontology of play as they are outlined in *Truth and Method*. In the introduction to this thesis, it was made clear that the theoretical import of Gadamer's ontology of play lay not only in its consideration of a mutually-inhibited realm of the imaginary, but also in its account of the eternal and reciprocal nature of the engagement encouraged within just such a realm. As Gadamer suggests:

> If we examine how the word 'play' is used and concentrate on its so-called metaphorical senses, we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words. In each case, what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. [...]. It renews itself in constant repetition.[106]

Over the course of the present chapter we have discussed how Gache's concern for the back-and-forth dynamism of the ludic interaction between authorial and readerly avatarial forms, together with a clear desire to maintain a permanent state of play, speaks back to these Gadamerian concepts of renewal and repetition. Indeed, both

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[105] Bolter, *Writing Space*, p. 130.
[106] Gadamer, p. 104.

concepts, when applied to the theoretical concerns of the avatarial form and the play space, help further elucidate upon the nature of the game and the construction of the narrative play space in a digital era. That is, Bolter's idea that 'the computer erases the program and offers the reader a fresh start - all wounds healed' resonates with this concern for renewal and repetition, and suggests a need to reconsider the concepts of victory and loss as they pertain to the ludically-inflected reading process elaborated upon throughout this thesis.[107] With this in mind, we return to the concept of the avatar as it is manifest in the contemporary video game as a site of constant reconfiguration or, to borrow from common gaming vernacular, of constant *respawning*. Doing so will allow us to further elaborate upon the reading process as it comes to represent, in the authors hitherto discussed, a potentially endless, ludically-charged, back-and forth process of renewal and repetition that occurs between readerly and authorial constructs. Of equal interest at this juncture, however, are the ways in which the potentially overstated and distinctly posthuman notions of impermanence and indeterminacy are brought to task through Gache's subversive stratagems.

On the subject of the digital drift toward the ephemeral, Bolter observes that in the hypertext work, 'the impermanence of electronic literature cuts both ways: as there is no lasting success, there is also no failure that needs to last'.[108] The avatar is predicated on this very notion of impermanence. In addition to its capacity for granting situational representation within the digital play space, the avatar is also potentially capable of near endless reconfigurations. In the contemporary video game for instance, the avatar is able to *respawn* for further attempts at success in times of defeat. Indeed, according to Rehak, the 'frequent breakdown and reestablishment of

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[107] Bolter, *Writing Space*, p. 130.
[108] Ibid.

avatarial identification through destruction of [the] avatar' represents one of the five primary operations of the avatarial construct as it relates to the contemporary video game.[109]

Gache's use of certain avatarial constructs, as we have discussed in relation to 'word toys' such as 'El llanto del peregrino', 'Los sueños' and 'Dedicatoria espiral', reveals additional ideological corollaries with the neighbouring medium of the video game. Specifically, Gache's avatars, crude though they are, inevitably serve to position a number of her 'word toys' alongside similar theoretical and technical pursuits to those undertaken by the video game. The avatar not only provides an ontological tether to the contested arena of the game at hand, such a construct implicitly suggests the possibility of constant destruction and subsequent renewal or self-reconfiguration within such contested arenas.

However, Gache's avatars and the play spaces they occupy are, as we have already stated, comparatively crude. Moreover, unlike the video game, whose most common visual and agential metaphor is often, though not always, that of destruction, there is no real justification for the violent dissolution of the avatar in Gache's *WordToys*. Unlike the hostile play spaces of Cortázar's short fiction, Gache's concept of the nature

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[109] Rehak outlines these avatarial functions as they appear in the video game *Spacewar!*:

> 1. Player identification with an onscreen avatar.
> 2. Player control of avatar through a physical interface.
> 3. Player-avatar's engagement with narrative-strategic constraints organising the onscreen diegesis in terms of its (simulated) physical laws and semiotic content - the 'meaning' of the game's sound and imagery - that constitute rules or conditions of possibility governing play.
> 4. Imposition of extradiegetic constraints further shaping play (for example, timer, music, scorekeeping and other elements perceptible to the player but presumably not by the entity represented by the avatar; an instance of this in the relatively austere Spacewar! would be the software function that ended a game when one player 'died').
> 5. Frequent breakdown and reestablishment of avatarial identification through destruction of avatar, starting or ending of individual games and tournaments, and ultimately the act of leaving or returning to the physical apparatus of the computer. (*Playing at Being*, p. 110)

of play is strictly exploratory as opposed to combative. Nevertheless, use of the avatarial construct is enough to subscribe to, or else evoke, its primary functions as both ultimate ambassador of agency and key component in the potentially infinite perpetuation of the game. Thus, Gache's treatment of the avatar as a digital, non-physical and thus potentially posthuman representation of the individual subject further compounds the notion of infinite play through an implicit consideration of the avatar's capacity for constant destruction and subsequent renewal.

In this sense, the concept of infinite play, as it is evoked in the avatarial form's seemingly endless capacity for reconfiguration is evocative of Fredric Jameson's postulations of the existential potentialities of what he calls the 'postmodern hyperspace'.[110] According to Jameson, this 'latest mutation in space' succeeds in 'transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world'.[111] Accordingly, both the contested arena of the play space and the reader-player's avatarial presence within it could be said to enable what Jameson refers to as the situational representation of the individual subject. That is, exploration of the contested space represents a metaphor of the individual subject's continual struggle to establish him/herself within 'that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole'.[112] Thus, not only does the avatar have existential dimensions insofar as it challenges a monadic point of view 'to which we are necessarily, as biological subjects, restricted', it also speaks to the concept of infinite play in its potential for endless

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[110] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 44.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., p. 51.

reconfiguration.[113] This proclivity for reconfiguration becomes a means by which the reader and to an extent, the author, are able to reimagine themselves and their position within the contested space as a means of pursuing alternate interpretive and creative possibilities within the narrative.

Naturally, the primacy of play over combat, as suggested in Bolter's postulations on the experience of reading in the electronic medium, raises valuable questions regarding both the respectful, agonistic games of Borges' *Ficciones* and the dangerously adversarial games of Cortázar's short fictions. As we have previously discussed, Borges, despite the intellectual, topological and ontological vertigo that characterize his narrative play spaces, remains relatively fair to the reader. Indeed, as we have already established in our discussions on 'La muerte y la brújula', Borges' fictions often thematize the possibility of a rematch between protagonist and antagonist, and by implication, between author and reader constructs. Likewise, in our analysis of Cortázar, we considered how the concepts of the boxing bout and the jazz *take* come to represent metaphors of the ludically-charged reading process as it is manifest in Cortázar as a process of seemingly infinite reconfigurations. That is, both the intensity and potential violence of the boxing bout, together with the improvisational, fleeting and impermanent nature of the *take*, come together in Cortázar to suggest that the act of reading is both a performative and a participatory endeavour that favours multiple readings. Thus, the ludically-charged acts of reading, elaborated upon in Borges and Cortázar, are ideologically and functionally consonant with the rematch or replay. In Gache's hybrid digital artefacts, the concept of the avatar reinforces this desire for re-exploration and re-engagement on behalf of the

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[113] Ibid., p. 53.

reader in the hopes of either a better outcome, or else a greater mastery of the game at hand. Just as, in the context of Cortázar, the *take* reinforces the author's rejection of permanence and perfection in favour of performance and playful improvisation, so too does the avatarial construct point to a desire to present the work of art as a unique, creative event that is playfully recast with each new engagement. As such, the digitized avatars of Gache's 'word toys', in their championing of the same impermanence and reconfiguratory potentialities of the sporting match and the jazz *take* through the *respawning* potential of the avatar, echo a common primacy of process over product, of the temporary over the timeless.

Not unlike Rorty's edifying philosophy, and indeed Gadamer's dialogical conceptualization of interpretation, the goal of Gache's *WordToys* is not to posit an absolute truth, meaning, or authority, but to keep the conversation going, to keep the game in play. In light of this, the kinetic nature or motive power of Gache's *WordToys* depends heavily on the concepts of the avatar and the contested space, for both concepts not only require a constant interplay between players, they also encourage what Jameson refers to as 'the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble' which the individual subject 'can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories'.[114] On the subject of Rorty's edifying philosophy and the hypertextual desire to keep the conversation going, Landow states:

> [The] hypertextual dissolution of centrality, which makes the medium such a potentially democratic one, also makes it a model of a society of conversations in which no one conversation, no one discipline or ideology, dominates or founds the others. It is this the instantiation of what Richard Rorty terms

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[114] Jameson, p. 51.

'edifying philosophy', the point of which 'is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth.[115]

Landow's comments point to a similar concern for constant interplay between reader and text hitherto discussed in the chapter. However, the 'society of conversations' in which 'no one conversation, no one discipline or ideology, dominates or founds the others' is problematic in its implications for Gache's *WordToys*. Specifically, Landow's application of Rorty's philosophical framework to espouse a chaotic indeterminacy risks robbing the text of its ability to grant coherence and closure. As we have discussed in Chapters I and II, the experimental nature of short fiction is often predicated on the problematics of a frustrated sense of closure. In the likes of Borges and Cortázar, we see the concept of closure problematized in such a way that breeds multiple interpretive possibilities (the fantastic narrative is often reliant upon hesitation, a flirtation with indeterminacy and the postponement of the final effect).[116] Hypertext, on the other hand - for reasons we have hitherto discussed such as the displacement of the authorial figure - threatens to open up the work to *any and all* interpretive strategies, turning this 'society of conversations' into a cacophony of white noise. David Kolb highlights a similar concern in his essay 'Socrates in the Labyrinth':

> A building made of fragments still has to be carefully designed; random assemblages soon lose their ability to hold our interest. So, too, hypertext needs some form and figure more than simple addition. Flipping the channels on cable television can produce exciting juxtapositions, but only for a while. Active reading becomes passive titillation. Later it becomes noise. We need forms of hypertext writing that are neither standard linear hierarchical unities nor the cloying shocks of simple juxtaposition.[117]

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[115] Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 89.

[116] On the Todorovian concept of hesitation in the fantastic narrative, Greg Bechtel's '"There and Back Again": Progress in the Discourse of Todorovian, Tolkienian and Mystic Fantasy Theory', *English Studies in Canada*, 30, 4 (2004), 139-166 observes that 'an evanescent genre, fantasy exists only so long as the narrative remains ambiguous as to the "true" explanation of the portrayed events' (p. 143). See also, Tzvetan Todorov, *The fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

[117] Kolb, 'Socrates in the Labyrinth', p. 339.

With a particular focus on philosophical enquiry, Kolb writes of his concern that 'a philosophy hypertext web would be the functional equivalent of writing without self-discipline, publishing one's drafts and jottings, or self-indulgently exfoliating ideas without taking a position'.[118] Faced with this, he warns that 'we have to learn from Hegel and Derrida that the choice is not between rigid boundaries and total flux' .[119] The play space allows for this middle ground, it provides this much-needed form and figure. The contested play space points to a desire to keep the game going, but not at the cost of coherence and closure. The function of the play space in Gache is to establish a state of perpetual play, an infinite, interpretive dynamic that 'keeps the conversation going' within a deceptively strict set of interpretive boundaries. Thus, while Landow's evocation of Rorty's edifying philosophy is both apt and perspicacious with regards to the potential of the hypertext for greater interpretive dynamism, it overlooks the ways in which the ensuing 'society of conversations' risks devolving into rhetorical white noise and complete narrative indeterminacy devoid of any sense of form or closure.

On the subject of closure, Frank Kermode suggests that 'the telling is always in terms of the impending end'.[120]   Ultimately, the concept of the play space makes interpretation a question of victory and loss on both sides of the contested space. In Gache, interpretation is played out through exploration of the narrative space in such a way that allows for, and in many ways demands, the investigation of alternative interpretive trajectories without descending into critical or interpretational

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[118] Ibid, p. 328.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Narrative Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 52.

overindulgence. In this sense, there are multiple and often contradictory instances of closure. In light of this, Gache's *WordToys* respond to Jane Yellowlees Douglas' analysis of closure as it pertains to both the print narrative and digital, interactive fiction: 'What triggers the ending of a reading? Where print readers encounter texts already supplied with closure and endings, readers of interactive fiction generally must supply their own sense of an ending'.[121] Specifically, Yellowlees Douglas questions the reader's ability to seek out a sense of closure in the face of the hypertext's potentially infinite, rhizomatic bifurcations:

> What prompts readers to decide they are 'finished' with a particular interactive narrative and to discontinue their readings of it? And can readings, cumulatively, approximate a sense of closure for readers, a sense that they have experienced the full range of the narrative's possibilities [...] even though their readings may not have explored every narrative space and link?[122]

Hypertext's desire for impermanence, indeterminacy and anti-closural measures, as such a desire comes to suggest an implicit 'fear of death', is brought to task in Gache's digital artefacts.[123] Indeed, a constant subversion of closural and anti-closural elements forms the thematic crux of both 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' Both 'word toys', in their ludic thematization of taxidermy and suicide representatively, offer a literalization of the fear of death, as it comes to represent an endgame scenario for the digital text. In doing so, Gache reveals how an overstating of the rhizomatic potential of the play space and the infinitely reconstructive capacity of the avatarial form betray a notably hypertextual insecurity. As such, reconfiguration and indeterminacy - as they are manifest in 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó

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[121] Yellowlees Douglas, How do I Stop this Thing?', p. 164.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Coover, web.

la Señorita Chao?' - come to represent subversive measures employed to emphasise the hypertext's apparent fear of death through a cessation of readerly engagement. Indeed, by way of elucidation, both 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' foreground the emerging tension between Kermode's anticipation of the impending end and Yellowlees Douglas' multiple narrative possibilities through the former 'word toy''s infinite, procedurally generated, intertextual references and the latter's similarly random, through ultimately stifled, narrative combinations. In doing so, Gache targets the 'cloying shocks of simple juxtaposition' outlined in Kolb and seeks to provide visual representation of the frustrations evoked by such instances indeterminacy.[124] By implication, both stories offer considerations of an apparent fear of death, all the while subverting the potentially chaotic indeterminacy and openness of the hypertext system. In the paratext accompanying 'Mariposas-libro', for instance, Gache comments on the taxidermical effect of writing upon the word:

> La escritura detiene, cristaliza, de alguna manera mata a la palabra conservando su cadáver. Un cadáver etéreo como el de una mariposa disecada. Parto aquí de la idea de colección. Al igual que Linneo clasificaba sus insectos en diferentes clases, colores, tamaños; al igual que un entomólogo caza mariposas y las ordena luego clavando sus cuerpos con alfileres, aquí coleccionaré citas-mariposa.[125]

Here, the crystallizing process imposed upon the word by the act of writing is thematized in the 'word toy''s collection of taxidermied citations. Each of the butterflies is accompanied by an intertextual reference to not only canonical, Latin American authors such as Borges and Cortázar (in such a way that suggests a certain proto-hypertextual element in both authors' works) but to a host of philosophical, scientific and psychoanalytic sources. As Taylor and Pitman suggest: 'This work is an

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[124] Kolb, 'Socrates in the Labyrinth', p. 339.
[125] Gache, *WordToys.*

intertextual and a self-referential one, in which quotations from eminent authors are brought together in new and revealing ways as the reader clicks at random on the images on the page'.[126]

Not only do the butterflies, in their simultaneous evocation of taxidermy and intertextuality, attest to the text's apparent fear of death, the 'word toy' threatens to strip the work of its ability to grant closure and satisfaction through the endless generation and regeneration of intertextual references. In Chapter III, we discussed the serious topographical implications of the intertextual model in relation to Shua's sudden fictions. We recall how Shua's use of intertextual and transtextual reference represents a consciously-employed, spatially-inflected narrative stratagem as opposed to a mere textual, verbal inevitability. In Gache, on the other hand, intertextual and self-referential citation betray a potential for topological chaos. That is, in the randomly generated textual-digital taxidermies of 'Mariposas-libro' we are reminded of Ryan's warnings that randomness constitutes the deathbed of coherence.[127] Thus, 'Mariposas-libro' not only responds to the print text's apparent fear of death in the clutches of the digital age, but also to the reader's constant concern for closure, coherence and gratification. These fears and concerns are most effectively and succinctly outlined in Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*:

> Now you can never achieve satiation, never reach the point of satisfied completion that comes with finishing a book. Your anxiety about *reading interruptus* is intensified by what might be called *print interruptus*, a print book's fear that once it has been digitized, the computer will garble its body, breaking it apart and reassembling it into the nonstory of a data matrix rather than entangled and entangling narrative.[128]

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[126] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, p. 108.
[127] Ryan, 'Beyond Myth and Metaphor', web.
[128] Hayles, *Posthuman*, p. 41.

It is exactly this process of digital garbling, together with the reader's subsequent interpretive and closural anxieties, that form the thematic basis of 'Mariposas-libro'. Gache's 'colección infinita de citas' frustrates the need for closure through a potentially endless generation of combinations.[129] In this 'word toy' the very concept of canon becomes displaced, as works by authors such as Borges and Cortázar lose their traditional forms and become lost in an endless digital chaos. Narrative coherence is compromised as entire works find their bodies garbled, broken up and turned into hypertextual non-stories. From Borges, to Cortázar to Dario, each reconfiguration calls upon a new authorial or avatarial form to take its place in the contested space. Interpretation of the eponymous butterfly's significance changes with each new intertextual reference in such a way that encourages infinite play whilst underlining the possible frustrations of indeterminacy and impermanence. In essence, the posthuman condition evoked by the avatar and its capacity for infinite *respawn*, renewal and repetition finds a textual parallel in 'Mariposas-libro'. The constant destruction and reconfiguration of the digital butterflies and their accompanying intertextual references reflect a foregrounding of the hypertext's fear of death. Hayles' notion of *reading interruptus*, the fear of an interruption of denial of interpretive closure or satisfaction, becomes synonymous with the hypertextual fear of ending the game, the fear of *ludus interruptus*. In 'Mariposas-libro', this fear of *ludus interruptus* is subverted. The digital rehashing of intertextual references serves to ironically overcompensate for the relatively finite nature of the printed text by enclosing the player in an endless, aleatory process of literary *respawing*.

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[129] Gache, WordToys, web.

Likewise, in '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' hypertext's potential for merely supplying the 'cloying shocks of simple juxtaposition' is brought to task in the 'word toy''s subversive, combinatorial game. Despite the 'word toy''s paratextual reference to the 'paradigmáticas historias de amor' of Chinese literature, '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' offers a subversive take on the concept of cause and effect. That is, in his/her engagement with the 'word toy', the reader-player is free to activate any number of possible, randomly generated, explanations for the death of the eponymous Miss Chao: 'Si los familiares de la señorita Ch'ieh, no se hubieran matado, la sociedad china hubiera comprendido el punto de vista de sus padres' and 'Si los padres del señor Wu, no se hubieran matado, la señorita Li no se hubiera matado' are but two examples of the procedurally-generated explanations made possible in the 'word toys' aleatory game.

By way of brief elucidation, the term 'procedural generation' refers to a method of algorithmic creation commonly used in video game production as a means of randomly generating textures, 3D models and playing environments. Owing to the model's inherent randomness, procedural generation typically allows for less predictable gameplay and the illusion of a greater topographical expanse about the play space. In a recent article in *Rolling Stone* magazine, '"No Man's Sky": How Games Are Building Themselves', journalist Chris Baker outlines such a process in layman's terms:

> Procedural generation is essentially a way for game developers to introduce carefully controlled elements of randomness into their work - an inexhaustible variety of levels in *Spelunky*, an endless array of bizarre weapons in *Borderlands*, hordes of zombies appearing out of nowhere in *Left4Dead*. Instead of molding and shaping each tiny nuance manually, the game makers

program certain parameters into an algorithm that can generate the content itself.[130]

The analytical significance of Baker's comments lies in his description of *No Man's Sky's* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2016) inclusion of 'carefully controlled elements of randomness'. Such a concept clearly resonates with the ludic stratagems at work in '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?', where the carefully controlled elements of randomness that the 'word toy''s ever-shifting explanations come to represent create the illusion of an infinitely vast, constantly reconfiguratory and, above all, seemingly authorless play space. The imposition of a fixed, non-negotiable conclusion to each randomly-generated explanation, however, undermines both the possibility of indeterminacy and the fear of *reading interruptus*. Indeed, In '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?', the conclusion becomes the only certainty: 'Dado que la sociedad se ha tornado en extremo peligrosa, debemos estar alertas para evitar que nos infrinja a nosotros mismos su golpe fatal'.[131]

Thus, the tension that arises between the procedurally-generated and the authorially-imposed elements that make up 'word toys' such as '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' and 'Mariposas-libro' dialogues with the concerns expressed by critics and theorists who war with hypertext's potential for over-indulgent or undisciplined narrative white-noise. Gache's self-conscious foregrounding of just such a tension suggests that, for all of hypertext's potential for indeterminacy and endless reconfiguration, not to mention its oft-cited penchant for authorial displacement, *WordToys* and *Góngora WordToys* do not submit to such *authoricidal* literary politics.

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[130] Chris Baker, ''No Man's Sky': How Games Are Building Themselves', *Rolling Stone*, August 9, 2016 <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/no-mans-sky-how-games-are-building-themselves-w433492> [accessed 19.08.2016].
[131] Gache, WordToys, web.

In Gache, there is an implicit suggestion that there must be some semblance of an authorially-contingent ending in sight, even if just such an ending gives rise to certain Derridean *supplements* that demand subsequent readings or play-throughs.[132] In this way, Gache is able to negotiate a compromise between hypertext's digitally-inflected fear of death and the player's concomitant desire for closure and continuance.

As such, both 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' come to represent the obverse and reverse of the same theoretical coin. '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' is a procedurally-generated, combinatorial game with a fixed conclusion, while 'Mariposas-libro' is representative of a similarly combinatorial game, albeit with a greater emphasis on the frustrations of indeterminacy due to the absence of such a conclusion. While the reader-player's apparent freedom to reconfigure the narrative's constituent elements *ad infinitum* is indicative of hypertext as it comes to represent a site of potentially infinite reconfiguration and exploration, in Gache, the reader-player is made constantly aware of the illusory nature of this apparent freedom in light of the author construct's continued presence within the play space of the 'word toy'. Indeed, 'word toys' such as 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' wear their limits on their digital sleeves despite their obvious kineticism and their apparent reconfiguratory potential. 'Mariposas-libro', despite encouraging the reader's participation in the digital conjuring of intertextual references through a direct interaction with the play space's digital butterflies, generates the same literary references *ad infinitum*. Likewise, in '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?', the

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[132] On such *supplements*, Kolb asserts: 'Philosophy's line finds itself constantly surrounded by supplements which it both desires and rejects: marginalia (as in medieval manuscripts), parallel columns of text (as in Kant's antinomies), parenthetical (and footnote) remarks that provide self-critical comments, ampliative material, methodological reflections, objections and replies, ironic juxtapositions, historical precedents and deviations, references to other texts, quotations and so on' ('Socrates in the Labyrinth', p. 329).

reader is able to produce endless reconfigurations of the 'word toy''s initial narrative trajectory at the push of a button, but is ultimately denied the chance to alter its conclusion.

Such limitations upon the agency of the reader-player help to further elaborate upon the spatial and topographical implications of play in Gache's *WordToys* and *Góngora WordToys*. While the procedurally-generated nature of 'Mariposas-libro' and '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?' tease at the vast, reconfiguratory potential of hypertext fiction, and by implication, the reader-player's unfettered, agential and exploratory capacity, both 'word toys' ultimately reveal themselves to be, to return once more to common video game vernacular, *on rails*.

On the implications of such a system for the possibility of spatial exploration, games theorist Carl Therrien explains that the term 'on rails' acts as a generic designation for video games in which 'spatial exploration is heavily directed by the system'.[133] Specifically, the action in such games 'unfolds through space as if it was set up on the rails of a roller coaster'.[134] Such games stand in juxtaposition to the 'sandbox' gaming paradigm, which implements 'free roaming spatial exploration' within a fully-realised, three-dimensional landscape'.[135] Both the *sandbox* and *on the rails* paradigms are useful insofar as they help to illustrate the authorial misdirection at work in Gache's digital artefacts. Despite the initial promise of a sandbox-esque, open play space (as is implicitly suggested by a self-conscious alignment with the hypertext framework),

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[133] Carl Therrien, 'Inspecting Video Game Historiography Through Critical Lens: Etymology of the First-Person Shooter Genre', *Game Studies*, 15, 2 (December 2015) <http://gamestudies.org/1502/articles/therrien> [accessed 18.08.2016].
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Gache's 'word toys' often quickly reveal themselves to be 'on rails'. That is, the player's movement in, or interaction with, the play space is ultimately dictated by the author's construction, or imposition, of specific parameters and thresholds. Such instances of subversive delimitation remind us of our earlier discussion, in the context of 'Dedicatoria espiral', of the author's pre-emptive considerations of reader-player's initial movements within the play space.

Richard Schechner, in his response to Jane Yellowlees Douglas and Andrew Hargadon's 'The Pleasures of Immersion and Interaction: Schemas, Scripts and the Fifth Business' is more scathing in his reaction to the hypertext's cheating of the reader-player's sense of freedom. Schechner suggests that, like the video game, hypertext narrative remains comparatively hollow: 'As for "hypertext" , how much really do the participants contribute? They participate for the most part in games that are fixed, making choices that are extremely limited: they agree, that is, to be manipulated'.[136] Schechner elucidates further on this idea of consensual manipulation:

> The game, like the menu, gives choice within a strictly defined and tightly limited field. The job of the restauranteur and the programmer is to make it appear as if the client or player is free. The better the data management, the more convincing the illusion.[137]

This is why the concept of the play space is so important in Gache, it demands a constant state of immersion, all the while negotiating a compromise between complete authorial control and wreaderly, agential and creative zeal. This desire for infinite play, together with the avatarial dynamics projected by both reader and author figures, turns

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[136] Jane Yellowlees Douglas and Andrew Hargadon's 'The Pleasures of Immersion and Interaction: Schemas, Scripts and the Fifth Business' in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game,* ed. by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 192 - 206 (pp. 193-4).
[137] Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, *First Person*, p. 194.

the play space into an infinitely contested arena of agonistic encounters. The very boundaries of this space, as they are ultimately dictated by the author and subsequently tested and explored by the reader-player avatar, prevent the hybrid digital artefact from descending into overindulgent white noise or empty, indeterminate rhetoric. In Gache, then, the hypertextual form does not privilege confusion, but complexity and kineticism (as in 'Dedicatoria espiral'). Randomness is not employed to undermine 'the tyranny of the line', but to reassert authorial presence by flaunting its myriad avatarial forms (as in 'Mariposas-libro').[138] The fear of death or cessation is offset by a yearning for infinite, but relatively structured play, (as in '¿Por qué se suicidó la Señorita Chao?').

Thus, in this thesis's ongoing discussion of the concepts of play, space and idealized reader constructs, the hypertext model is of particular analytical significance insofar as it presents us with a clear visual representation of the literary, structural and thematic concerns that not only inform the hybrid digital artefacts hitherto discussed, but also speak back to a long heritage of literary experimentation that finds its ideological roots in Borges and Cortázar. As Kolb suggests, however, hypertext works best as an 'expository device' or 'informational convenience'.[139] Indeed, more than any previous text technology, argues Johnson-Eilola, hypertext 'encourages both writers and readers [...] to confront and work consciously and concretely with deconstruction, intertextuality, the decentring of the author, and the reader's complicity with the construction of the text'.[140] Or, as Yellowlees Douglas puts it, hypertext simplifies certain postmodernist concerns by providing visual cognitive maps:

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[138] Coover, web.

[139] Kolb, 'Socrates in the Labyrinth', p. 325.

[140] Cited by Ilana Snyder, 'Beyond the Hype: Reassessing Hypertext' in *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*, ed. by Ilana Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 125-143 (134).

> The act of perceiving reference, layers in time, multiple perspectives, and many of the devices used by modern and postmodern writers is infinitely simplified in reading interactive narratives, particularly where a narrative provides its readers with access to cognitive maps of the hypertext structure.[141]

Through an in-depth analysis of Gache's hypertexts, this chapter has argued that claims that hypertext theory represents the solution to, or the next logical step for, the various poststructural and deconstructionist quandaries found, for instance, in the fictions of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache are overstated. While Gache does indeed provide a new tool set with which to approach the concerns put forth throughout this thesis, namely the concepts of play, space and the reader-author dynamic, the author constantly reminds us of the dangers of succumbing to the utopian, technocratic rhetoric of the more enthusiastic tenets of hypertext theory. In doing so, Gache elaborates upon, and provides a visualized exploration of, the topographical structures of play posited in Borges, Cortázar and Shua. Despite the digital nature of such explorations, however, Gache is quite unprepared to succumb to the complete hypertextual displacement of the authorial figure. Consequently, Gache's *WordToys* and *Góngora WordToys*, through a playful subversion of their own hypertextual substructures, echo Ilana Snyder's warnings against a blind acceptance of the 'silicon snake oil' that the digital narrative often comes to represent. Snyder asserts that 'to hail [hypertext's] advent as the beginning of a [...] revolution is politically naive. It is similarly naive to connect the invention of hypertext directly and causally with the demise of print culture, if, indeed, we are witnessing such a phenomenon'.[142] Such a stance suggests that we ought not to be overwhelmed by the 'technocratic belief' in

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[141] Landow, *Hyper/Text/Theory*, p. 176.
[142] Snyder, *Page to Screen*, p. 133.

the revolutionary clout of the hypertext system.[143]   Likewise, Marie-Laure Ryan

considers the hypertext narrative's infinite nature (and with it, its apparent links to the

Borgesian *Aleph*) to be one of many 'narrative myths':

> Media theorists invoke what I will call 'narrative myths' to promote literary or entertainment forms of digital textuality. *These myths, which present an idealized representation of the genre they describe, serve the useful purpose of energizing the imagination of the public, but they may also stand for impossible or ill-conceived goals that raise false expectations*.[144]

As we have seen, Gache's *WordToys* not only allow for a visual literalization of the

spatial concerns of Borges, Cortázar and Shua, but also facilitate a theoretical and

ideological approximation with the prevalent discourses of more contemporary media

such as those of hypertext and the video game. That the spatial and ludic concerns

of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache might run consonant with more contemporary,

digital manifestations of space - such as the augmented realities of the hypertext and

the video game - serves to solidify the continued theoretical import of Borges and

Cortázar in the debates surrounding the relationship between the work of art and its

audience.

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Ryan, 'Beyond Myth and Metaphor', web.

Conclusion

Over the course of the last four chapters, we have discussed the ways in which the concepts of play and space serve to renegotiate the dynamic relationship between author, reader and text in Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Ana María Shua and Belén Gache. To this end, the use of spatial metaphors such as the labyrinth, the monstrous house and the boxing ring has not only helped to outline the topographical structure and ludic significance of the narrative space, but has also aided in negotiating a compromise in the processes of literary and textual politics that occur between author and reader. Indeed, our spatially-inflected considerations of specific intertextual and narratological elements have been of use in the elaboration of a kinetic and contested narrative space. This, in turn, has helped to illustrate the interpretive process - as it is thematized by the authors discussed over the last four chapters - as a playful exploration of a mutually-inhabited, or else ontologically-tethered space of contestation.

An in-depth analysis of these concepts of play and play space has enabled us to comment on the ways in which the narrative spaces of the short fictions, sudden fictions and hypertext fictions of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache negotiate a compromise between the total displacement of the author figure and the unchecked interpretive zeal of the empowered reader construct, thereby rejecting the poststructural murder of the author as well as bringing to task the reader-response enabling of solipsistic overindulgence through the reader's undisciplined or un-checked interpretive endeavours. We have seen, in equal measure, how the concepts of play and play space resist certain emancipatory metaphors of hypertext theory, such

as the destruction of 'the line' and the subsequent agential anarchy of the empowered, or indeed over-powered, *wreader.* In doing so, we have underscored the ways in which the short fictions of Borges and Cortázar not only prefigure certain hypertextual tenets, but continue to dialogue in fresh and meaningful ways with new media technologies. The focus on play, then, has served to reinforce an already strong literary heritage of playful experimentation in Argentine short fiction that has, at its heart, a continued concern for the reader's engagement with the cognitive or imaginative spaces of the text. This primacy of engagement and exploration over a monodirectional *journey* through the text has helped in the elaboration of specific idealized reader constructs.

In Borges, the ideal, black swan or 'super-sleuth' reader comes to represent a Theseus-like redeemer whose exploration of the topographical structures of the narrative rid the author of his essential solitude. As we have seen, however, this merging of ontological territories is often offset by the author-gamesmaster's leveraging of the reader's intellectual and interpretive prowess in order to trap such a reader in the strange loops and tangled hierarchies of his narrative structures.

In Cortázar, the ideal reader is indicative of the nonconformist, subversive or playful agitator. Such a reader is capable of willful manipulation of the contested, hostile spaces of the narrative. As a result, such a reader both animates and is animated by the narrative structures of the text in such a way that suggests a level of disdain for those passive readers that seek safety in routine and thereby perpetuate a sense of ontological disconnect between reader and fiction.

Likewise, Shua's conscious and insistent destabilization of the narrative space through a spatialized intertextuality elaborates on the performative role of the ideal, or agile, reader. Such a reader is expected to navigate deceptively small narrative spaces that open up into often vertiginous and protean landscapes. Ultimately, the agile reader alludes to a performative interplay that further serves to reinforce the ontological connection between author, text and reader, albeit with a renewed sense of nonchalant, whimsical or casual play.

Along a similar vein, the hypertextual format of Gache's *WordToys* points to the necessarily active and avatarial nature of the idealized reader-player construct, all the while rejecting the overzealousness of the technocratic, author-killing *wreader*. While the avatarial reader-player comes to represent an active agent in the co-production of the digital work, the explorative, agential and productive function of such a reader is persistently limited by the author's construction of, and perceptible presence within, the digital play space.

Not only has this thesis elaborated upon specific, idealized reader constructs, it has also offered a detailed account of the various spaces within which such constructs operate. Indeed, over the last four chapters, we have relied upon a number of spatial metaphors as a means of illustrating the interpretive, exploratory and agential functions of the reader construct, as well as the ludically-charged challenges they face.

In Borges, both the labyrinth and the chess board come to represent sites of ontological and topographical *wrongness* or paradoxicality. Such metaphors reveal the Borgesian narrative space to be an ever-expanding, topologically-shifting, competitive arena that demands the willful, agonistic and intellectually-charged

engagement of the expert or super-sleuth reader. This conception of the literary text as a mutually-inhabited, mentally-constructed, competitive arena is thematized in the author's fantastically-inflected, self-referential and metafictional narratives. The agonistic bent of Borges' narratives, as they are marked by a sportsmanlike mutual admiration for the reader-player as worthy opponent, reveals the author's proclivity for harnessing, and at times, co-opting, the reader's own interpretive and intellectual momentum as a means of victory over the games presented by the text.

The agonism of the Borgesian game gives way to outright antagonism and hostility in Cortázar's short fictions. This antagonism and hostility is most effectively illustrated using the spatial metaphors of the monstrous house and the boxing ring. The monstrous house invites active, subversive engagement with the protean environment of the play space, while simultaneously alluding to the dangers of the passive reader's complicit reading strategies. Likewise, the metaphorical significance of the boxing ring lies in its function as a contested arena of active, antagonistic engagement. Ultimately, hostile spaces such as the monstrous house and the boxing ring serve to reconfigure traditional concepts of play as they typically represent ontologically-isolated and escapist distractions, by emphasising the ontological and epistemic stakes of a potentially infinite back-and-forth between author and reader. These stakes are further compounded by the instances of metaleptic transgression that effectively serve to merge the *safe* ontological territory of the reader with the hostile ontological territory of that which is read.

The competitive and intellectually rigorous edge of the Borgesian and Cortazarian games are subsequently offset by Shua's perceptible drift towards more casual

reader-player paradigms. The subversive casualization of reader engagement finds a thematic outlet in the spatial metaphor of the circus ring. Such a space not only foregrounds playful performance, casual navigation and brief exploration through a flaunting of its dynamic and ever-changing structure, it also champions co-dependency and cooperation within a liminal, productive space of possibility. Shua's conscious process of casualization serves to elicit a more meaningful response from an otherwise disengaged reader. Shua coerces certain readers into a meaningful connection with the narrative space through a deceptive casualization of its form and content. The emerging concepts of instant gratification, formal lightness and the casualization of interpretive engagement evoke a pornography of literature, whereby the text's initial value lies in its production of an immediate and superficial emotional or sensory response. The act of reading becomes a series of casual, *no-strings*, encounters aimed at satisfying the contemporary reader's need for instant gratification. Paradoxically, this casual or *quick fix* approach defends the sharpness of sensory experience, for it does not encumber the text with superfluous interpretive baggage. The text, therefore, becomes a site of engagement and not of excess. As such, Shua's sudden fictions represent instantly gratifying yet deceptively demanding play spaces that demonstrate a stylistic and intellectual impetus more in line with the frenetic and often truncated opportunities for meaningful engagement of contemporary reading paradigms.

In a distinctly Cortazarian tactic, Gache's digital play spaces come to represent competitive arenas or contested spaces in which the author's creative control over the digital landscape is offset by the player's seemingly unfettered engagement with it. The spatial and agential corollaries of the contemporary video game serve to highlight

the literary or textual politics at work in Gache's hypertext. By positioning her work within the author-destroying framework of the hypertext system, Gache manipulates the reader-player into assuming creative control over the work. The *authoricidal* proclivities of hypertext are appropriated so as to make the reader-player blind to authorial presence, thereby coercing him/her into accepting an illusion of agency. The player's hypertextually-informed interpretive strategies are, however, ultimately co-opted by the author figure to reinstate a more nuanced degree of authorial control. The contested digital arena allows for the playful confrontation between reader and author, a confrontation that is neither dictated by the tyranny of the line nor defined by the absolute freedom of the reader, but is instead predicated on a co-dependent interplay, a playful back-and-forth within the digital play space.

Through these concepts of play, space, and idealized reader constructs, all four authors can be seen to reject the prevalent paradigms of their times. Borges' topographically-inflected and self-referential short fictions reject the dominant literary structures of the 1940s, such as the psychological novel and social realism, and indeed serve to challenge the notion of the novelistic form as cultural, creative and intellectual authority. Similarly, the works of Cortázar and Gache can be seen to reject the easy metaphors of postmodernity, and by implication, the hypertext, by instead seeking to reassert - with significant modification - certain cognitive lines and authorially-contingent reading and interpretive paradigms. Likewise, Shua's sudden fictions reject the overall seriousness of both the reading task and the writing tradition, opting for a deceptively casual drift that offers a more light-hearted take on Borges' fierce irreverence. In doing so, the works of all four authors come to represent instances of 'cultural mutation' insofar as they reveal notable theoretical and

ideological divergences from both traditional and postmodern conceptualizations of narrative space and form.[1] The concepts of play and play space, as they have been elaborated upon throughout this thesis, defend the primacy of the text as a point of ontological contact, all the while respecting an interpretive interplay that necessarily occurs between readerly and authorial constructs. This interplay serves as a unifying concern through the works of all four authors. It is vital not only to the understanding of Gache's subversive treatment of the hypertext form, but equally essential to an appreciation of the short fictions and sudden fictions of Borges, Cortázar and Shua, as they form part of the ever-evolving literary and textual politics of contemporary Argentine fiction.

This concept of interplay further reinforces the analytical significance of ontological merging that has been elaborated upon throughout this thesis. In Chapters II and III of this study, we touched briefly on the possible dialogues between the ludically-charged and porous ontological territories of both Borges' and Cortázar's short fictions and those of Shua's sudden fictions. Specifically, in Chapter II we discussed how the metaleptic transgressions at work in Borges and Cortázar suggest that the thresholds that separate the ontological territories of the author, the text and the reader are not absolute but permeable. Likewise, in Chapter III, we considered the implications of Shua's implicit suggestion that the ontological territory of the play space allows for the mutual occupation of author construct, fictional creation and even historical figure. The ludic superimposition of distinct, ontological territories, as thematized in Borges, Cortázar and Shua, point to a shared concern for the elaboration of one, augmented ontological territory. As has become clear over the last four chapters, this augmented

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[1] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Cyberculture*, p. xii.

reality clearly resonates with the hypertextual, almost video game-esque properties of Gache's *WordToys*, wherein the ontological tethering of player and play space through an avatarial ambassador provides a strong visual analogue to the earlier concerns of Borges, Cortázar and the concurrent pursuits of Shua's sudden fictions.

On the nature of augmented reality, we recall the insights of Graham, Zook and Bouton in their 'Augmented Reality in Urban Places'. Specifically, their suggestion that augmented reality refers to the 'indeterminate, unstable, context dependent and multiple realities brought into being through the subjective coming-togethers [...] of material and virtual experience' clearly resonates with the instances of ontological merging as they have been discussed throughout this thesis.[2] Indeed, the metaleptic transgressions and ontological mergings that give rise to the co-occupied territories of the Borgesian and Cortazarian narratives effectively dialogue with the 'material-virtual nexus' foregrounded by the concept of augmented reality. This merging of material and virtual experience through technology, information and code is further literalized in Gache's *WordToys*.

This concern for the overlapping, merging, or superimposition of distinct ontological territories reveals how the short fictions of Borges and Cortázar continue to dialogue in rich and rewarding ways with contemporary cultural and artistic outputs such as hypertext and the video game. Just as, in Borges and Cortázar, the text, the image and the game come to represent apertures or conduits through which one ontological territory merges with another, the augmented realities of digital entertainment reveal similar, albeit digitally-inflected, ontological handshakes. As such, the analytical

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[2] Graham, Zook and Bouton, 'Augmented Reality in Urban Places', p. 464.

import of the works of Borges and Cortázar are made more salient still by the fact that both authors prefigure, predict, and subsequently continue to dialogue with contemporary cyber-cultural fascinations and engagements such as augmented and virtual reality. To much the same effect, the works of Shua and Gache consciously place themselves within this ongoing, technologically-charged shift in reading paradigms. While Gache's digital artefacts provide a more immediate technological analogue insofar as they, by their very nature, already operate within a virtual domain, Shua's sudden fictions respond to a similar paradigm shift in the subversive, casualized drift that they come to embody and embrace.

A comparative analysis of the works of Borges, Cortázar, Shua and Gache has served to reinforce the representation of both the text and the digital artefact as a kinetic system that attempts to destabilize the boundaries between play and seriousness, between fiction and reality, between author and reader through the elaboration of augmented or ontologically-superimposed points of contact. Such a desire for meaningful contact not only speaks back to a notable literary heritage of experimentation in contemporary Argentine fiction, but looks forward to the far-reaching implications and applications of a literature in dialogue with new media technologies. While neither the sudden fiction nor the hypertext fiction formats represent radical departures from the traditionally experimental tenets of short fiction, beyond a material shift in the cultural artefact that is the text itself, they do offer fresh vantage points from which we may articulate new conversations around the literary and textual politics of contemporary Argentine fiction. To this end, the aim throughout this thesis has been to harness the reconfiguratory potential of play as a means of renegotiating the author-text-reader dynamic. Doing so represents an attempt to move

away from both the constraints of paradigmatic literary structures and the easy metaphors of new media technologies so that, if nothing else, new questions can be heard and new games can be played.

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