Spaces and Places in the Fantastic

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Exploring Fantastic Geographies

Edited by

Kristin Aubel, Sarah Edwards and Christian Lenz

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In 2022, the editors of this volume organised a conference at TU Dortmund University, Germany, dedicated to the multiplicity that is fantastic geographies. Speakers from countries all over the world were invited to illuminate their audiences and show their takes on geographies in the many genres the fantastic is comprised of. The following essays originate from this conference.

The editors would like to express their deepest gratitude to Zoran Calic for his immeasurable help in creating this volume—his contribution is fantastic indeed: thank you.

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CHRISTIAN LENZ

Introduction

"There is a theory that says if anyone ever figures out exactly what the universe is for and why it is there, it will disappear on the spot and be replaced by something even more bizarre and incomprehensible. There is another theory according to which this has already happened." This epigraph from Douglas Adams' famous *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980) draws attention to the spatial volatility that is predominant in fantastic texts. Adams' idea of the alterity of spaces is probably the most obvious form of what Derek Gregory has termed "imaginative geographies" (2009). Taking his cues from Edward Said's ideas about the Orient in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Gregory (2009) defines these imaginative geographies as "[representations] of other places—of people and landscapes, cultures and 'natures'—that articulate the desires, fantasies and fears of their authors and the grids of power between them and their 'Others'" (369-370). Therefore, any depiction of a geographical location always reveals something about its producer as well as the time and place of production just as much as it speaks of an imaginative and creative mind. With fantastic texts, the suspension of disbelief and entering into different worlds seems to be much easier, since readers and viewers understand the texts to be fundamentally imaginative from the start. However, as the essays in this volume will show, fantastic geographies are decisively more complex.

Much has been written about the general constructions of worlds in what is considered to be fantasy, chiefly among them Farah Mendlesohn (*Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 2008), John Clute ("Notes on the Geography of Bad Art in Fantasy", 2011), and Stefan Ekman (*Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings*, 2013). Already implied in the various titles, there needs to be something 'fantastic', something that is not just of this world and more than the reality we are living in. David Roas (2018) writes that the "fantastic tale replaces familiarity with strangeness, […] it destroys our conception of

the real and places us in a state of instability" (4-5). In that, readers and viewers behold a heterotopic vision: they recognise the world—for example due to its rules or general set-up—but at the same time they do not know it. It is this notion of the 'impossible' which is a vital element of the narrative and part of an internally consistent system (Ekman, 2013, 6).[1] Of course, this can be attributed to characters (trolls, alien life forms, or talking animals), the laws of physics (brooms can fly, magic is a possibility or given)—and also the environment. Yet, the setting for many fantastic narratives is somewhat trickier to define. While the fantastic can be defined in many different ways, the most rewarding definition is the most simple and basic one: the aforementioned strangeness, instability, and (im)possibility as elements of the fantastic can be summarised, in Kathryn Hume's (1984) words, as a "departure from consensus reality" (31). While she is only referring to fantasy here, her words can also be applied to the other big subcategories of the fantastic: science fiction and horror texts. What these three have in common is exactly this departure from consensus reality into a space of strangeness. Although they have distinct markers, they have overlapping similarities as well—especially when it comes to the usage of spatial distinctions.

It is prudent to quote Michel Foucault (1986) at length here:

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (24)

Foucault speaks of spaces that are closely linked to our places, yet they attain a utopian, namely other-worldly, quality. His counter-sites are prisons or asylums, thus actual, existing locations, but his notion of the connection of a real place and its "represented, contested, and inverted" version can be equally applied to the fantastic. After all, is *Harry Potter* not set in a school, recognisably modelled on the British (boarding) school system and the school novel genre? Do apocalyptic end-of-the-world scenarios not merely (try to) read the signs of the times and fast forward, warning of future dystopias? And has New Zealand not embraced the shooting locations of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* movie adaptation and incorporated them into the spatial fabric offered for tourists and national identification alike? Yet, whilst the setting of most fantastic texts is recognisable, Ekman (2013)

[1] In their chapter, Voigts and Heinze argue against the idea of the "impossible" as presented by Ekman.

suggests that "the setting should not be made central to a definition of the fantastic" (2).

This leads to a conundrum: whilst the setting is imperative to the fantastic narrative, it is both fantastic by association, yet at the same time rather recognisable. Take the example of Lewis Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* (1865): Alice falls through the rabbit hole into the titular Wonderland. Here, she comes across many wondrous elements, such as talking animals and plants, characters are transforming from babies into pigs, and Alice herself is constantly changing her size. But Wonderland itself does not change: it almost appears to be the only decipherable constant of the possible in an otherworldly space of impossibilities and mayhem. Yet, Wonderland is undeniably a staple of fantastic spaces. Carroll's Wonderland appears to be a container for all the impossibilities and it becomes fantastic seemingly through that alone. In that, it is not just the stage on which the Queen of Hearts, the Mad Hatter, and the Cheshire Cat interact with Alice: the environment enables Alice to experience these impossibilities in the first place, as it neither enables nor endorses restraint. Wonderland is a twisted version of actual Victorian England with its rules about afternoon tea, croquet, and court proceedings satirised and ridiculed. This goes to show that the relationship between geography and the fantastic is indeed a curious one.

Science Fiction

In 1979, the original *Alien* movie—directed by Ridley Scott—featured the famous tagline "In space no one can hear you scream." The tagline works with and from the assumption that (outer) space is a form of vacuum in which nothing can be heard and thus nothing *is*—at least when it comes to (human) help.[2] Outer space is used synonymously with the undiscovered and thus potentially dangerous. Ever since the beginning of motion pictures, the realm beyond the borders of our planet Earth has been considered a dark and somewhat threatening space. Thus, filmic outer space corresponds to Nigel Thrift's (2003) definition of the concept of "space [which] is no longer viewed as a fixed and absolute container within which the world proceeds" (86). Instead, 'space' is a conception of multiple dimensions as he demonstrates (Thrift, 2003): firstly, it can be considered from an empirical

[2] In *Alien: Romulus* (2024), the titular spaceship is static in outer space and whenever the film cuts to the exterior of the ship, the soundtrack emphasises the silence that appears to emanate from the infinite blackness. Outer space in the *Alien* franchise is a void of a soundscape.

perspective that allows us to measure space and transform it into information, such as GPS data. Returning to the example of Scott's movie, humanity has branched out into (outer) space and thus engages in what can be termed neo-colonialism. At the same time, the existence of the alien species demonstrates that the humans have not yet fully mapped (outer) space. Secondly, there are flow spaces that are focusing on (series of) worked-up connections that comprise the world we know via its interactions—something we only realise when they do no longer work: the space ship Nostromo is sent to a planet from which a distress signal has been received, yet when the titular alien decimates the crew, they are on their own, help is no longer easily available. In fact, most of the films within the *Alien* franchise deal with a breakdown of these flow spaces, highlighting the isolation of space travel between planets and representing a criticism of (space) colonialisation.[3] Thirdly, there are image spaces that (re)present space via images, "which allow us to see some things and not others and so construct some spaces and not others" (Thrift, 2003, 91). Movies such as *Alien* have shaped humans' perception of outer space as a dark and empty 'nothing', themselves being influenced by images received from telescopes. But as with every image, it is never complete as the one taking or creating it will have to select what is in the focus and what is not, effectively creating the representation.

Yet, the notion of 'space' is never fully complete without acknowledging the idea of 'place'. Yi-Fu Tuan (1979a) defines 'place" as "a 'special ensemble' […], but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspective of the people who have given it meaning" (387). In another article, he writes that "[p]laces are centres of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest and procreation, are satisfied" (Tuan 1979b, 4). In contrast to the rather abstract notion of space, place is the more personal(ised) idea of the same. Here, not only humans but all beings tend to turn a particular location into an environment that they deem habitable. Therefore, to the alien, the Nostromo becomes a new feeding ground and source of possible procreation.

Many fantastic texts work with the 'undiscovered' as part of their (geographical) set-up, but science fiction texts tend to employ this idea predominantly, particularly those texts in which space travel is a common experience. Science in its many varieties is exhibited as the means to discover something hitherto unheard or unthought of such as foreign landscapes and their (alien) inhabitants. In his essay "Geography and Other Explorers"

[3] For more information on colonialisation in science fiction narratives, see Bridle in this volume.

(1926), Joseph Conrad organises world history into three phases: geography fabulous, geography militant, and geography triumphant. While the first stage is about 'discovering' the various lands on Earth (according to Conrad, the height was the 'discovery' of the American continents), the second stage is about the domination of the same which results in all the 'white spots' on the world's map being coloured in and 'taken' by the early 20th century. The fact that this was (and is) not a peaceful, nor undisputed process must be considered a given—hence the many phrases in inverted commas in the previous sentence. But what to do, at that point in time (and space) at which there are few blank spaces left—because "the romance of exploration led inexorably to disenchantment" (Driver, 2001, 4)? Naturally, people looked for places that were hitherto unreachable and the 20th and 21st century have experienced a surge in interest—both real and in fiction—in the most inaccessible realms such as "the poles, outer space and the ocean depths" (Laing and Frost, 2012, 120). It must be here, writers and explorers reasoned, that the new age geography fabulous must lead them. Therefore, fantastical journeys such as Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), the many voyages of the Star Trek fleet, or the aforementioned *Alien* caught and inspired people's interest.

The notion of science is thus used to justify the exploration—because if humans *can* do it, they *will* do it. That this also works the other way around, with extraterrestrial life forms coming to planet Earth, is a logical consequence. Here, the notion of territorialisation is to be considered. Just like human explorers and conquerors took over land they deemed 'empty'—such as terra australis incognita, the African continent, or what Columbus thought to be India—foreign life forms also tend to consider Earth to be for the taking as its inhabitants are less 'advanced' than they are; after all, they managed to come to Earth while humanity has only made it as far as the moon (yet): the aliens in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1897) and *Mars Attacks!* (Burton, 1996)[4] or many antagonists of multiple comic book heroes and heroines, chiefly Marvel's Galactus,[5] have come to take Earth as theirs. Theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004), territorialisation works with the binary of striated and smooth territory. While smooth space is "a space of contact, […] nonmetric, acentered" (409), which means open and free to anyone and everybody, striated space is homogeneous in construction, it has been explored, counted, and dominated (408). While the

[4] The tagline for Burton's movie reads "Nice planet. We'll take it!"—which echoes the brash and irreverent behaviour of many colonialising nations during the phase of geography militant (17th century-20th century).

[5] Galactus is one of the major antagonists of the superhero group *The Fantastic Four* and was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1966.

humans in the *Alien* franchise striate other planets and fight the Xenomorphs for dominance and territorialisation, the examples of Galactus and the various Martians show that extraterrestrials consider Earth equally smooth and therefore unclaimed.

Horror

As a genre, horror seems to chiefly employ two different spaces: the 'out there' and the 'in here'. While the former is concerned with folk horror tales, scary woods, or even outer space—*Alien* is effectively a genre crossover between science fiction and horror—the latter category is referring to the haunted house with its domestic horrors. In both cases, the horror genre makes use of its protagonists and readers or viewers coming across this one point at which they have to 'hesitate' and deliberate whether the experience or text, respectively, could be uncanny or marvellous. Tzvetan Todorov, in his seminal book *The Fantastic*, distinguishes between two modes of the fantastic and their *raison d'etre*: the marvellous constructs a wonderfully fantastic atmosphere in which supernatural causes have to be accepted; the uncanny, on the contrary, can be traced back to natural causes, however strange or frightening they may seem (Todorov, 1975, 26). Of course, both notions can be found in fantastic texts, but when it comes to horror, Fred Botting (1998) attests that the genre is "[constituting] the limit of reason, sense [and] consciousness" (131), establishing the moment of Todorov's hesitation as a crucial marker for horror texts. Examples for the uncanny 'out there' would be *The Wicker Man* (1973) that is set on an island off the Scottish coast or *Deep Blue Sea* (1999), in which a group of scientists create and subsequently get killed by super intelligent sharks at a submerged laboratory. In both texts, the reason for the unfolding terror and horror, however, is explicable—even if, as in the case of *The Wicker Man*, the realisation comes too late. The marvellous 'out there' can also be found in mythological and folk horror: mythological beings such as wendigos, evil leprechauns, and werewolves haunt and striate spaces into which unsuspecting outsiders venture. But films like *The Descent* (2005) also create a subterranean 'out there' in which creatures have established a domain in caves that are off the well-known path. The 'out there' is characterised by its striated design which the antagonists, be they human or anything-but, have created to lay claim to the spaces. At the same time, however, the unknowing protagonists fail to see the striated space for what it is and deem themselves better, either in (physical) force, intelligence or other, rather urban markers, and (wrongly) consider the space smooth and up for the taking. Since these spaces are connected to the non-urban in horror texts, they often establish a

binary in which the protagonists tend to think they have the upper hand but realise their mistake soon enough.

Regarding the other category, namely the 'in here' version of horror, the uncanny variety of texts encompass horrific tales such as the slasher movies *Halloween* (1978) and *Scream* (1996) as well as *The Babadook* (2014). In all of these texts, a reasonable explanation can be found and, disastrous as the outcomes of the films might be, even the titular Babadook is merely a personified trauma of protagonist Amelia and not a supernatural threat. Just like the doomed characters mistakenly think themselves superior in the 'out there' category, the urban structures of 'in here' horror texts have also become striated by another power. Largely set in (sub)urban homes, the killer challenges the protagonists' sense of belonging and therefore power. Indeed, slashers work with a large cast of characters that think themselves safe and impervious as they have lived in a certain space long enough for example, only to fall prey to the killer(s).[6] The marvellous 'in here' is the terrain of the actual haunted house with spectres and supernatural monsters invading the safe space of humans. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the titular count moves from foreign Transylvania to (local) London and wreaks havoc in the midst of the British Empire. This idea can be seen as the continuation—or even reverse—of the marvellous 'out there', as it shows the fragility of the protagonists' claim to power in both spaces. What many of the horror texts of the 'in here' variety have in common is that the antagonistic force stems from within, either the community or the protagonists affected: the opponents can be killers returning to their previous haunts (*Halloween*) or torturing their peers (*Scream*), they can manifest from one character's mind (*The Babadook*) or even represent the repressed feelings of the community (*Dracula*).[7]

Additionally, a haunted house must be considered a container of past events which have come to infiltrate the present. In that, this space becomes a heterotopia as the architecture of the house draws a different time to the fore of the present and thus creates a multitemporal structure which at times

[6] These antagonists police the (urban) space and kill off deviants to a certain moral the horror texts criticise (Cohen 1996, 12-16): when in the original *Scream* one of the characters enumerates the rules how to survive a horror movie—whilst watching Carpenter's *Halloween*—he does not think himself a victim; in fact, he even admonishes his friends to abstain from alcohol and sex in order to survive. The majority of these friends will indeed die, and the patronising character barely survives—only to be killed in the sequel.

[7] Dracula represents a sexual freedom many adults in Victorian Britain could not enjoy (Botting, 1998, 128).

also becomes a multispatial one. Michel Foucault's (1986) idea of heterotopia creates the idea of a space being a place of both reality and utopia, literally a non-place (24). Texts like Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020)[8] charts protagonist Noemí's experience at a stately manor of the British Doyle family in 1950s rural Mexico. The house, strikingly named High Place, has become a mausoleum to the Doyle's former wealth and power, clashing constantly with very modern Noemí. High Place is a signifier of another form of a heterotopia as it presents a secluded outpost to society in which the non-Spanish speaking Doyles can exist: they are part of Mexico without being part. Furthermore, just like the cemetery it is adjacent to, High Place is a place of death and secrets and Noemí's presence upsets this status of being dead and alive at the same time. The novel employs the idea of the 'out there' and fuses it with the 'in here' as Noemí arrives from Mexico City to a small village in which time has seemingly come to a standstill, just like Howard Doyle, the head of the family, seems to live forever. The house in which the majority of the story is set becomes a personification of Howard Doyle and Noemí is caught in his network of secrets, eugenics, and mycelia. She deems herself educated enough to find logical reasons for the weird events she witnesses, but ultimately has to acknowledge that, although there is a logical explanation, the circumstances are marvellous indeed. Finally, it should be noted that the Gothic tends to treat its heroines poorly and sacrifices many a woman by taking her life or sanity. Noemí, however, does not give in to these traditions and wrestles the control over the haunted house from the Doyles in order to save her cousin, the reason why she actually came to High Place. In that, the horror genre is also a constant struggle as to the power over spaces—yet, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) cautions: the monster always returns (4-6) and the fight for the power to striate is only ever temporarily won.

Fantasy

As already mentioned above, Todorov's distinction between the uncanny and the marvellous is often winningly employed to distinguish horror texts (the uncanny) from fantasy texts (the marvellous). Due to the fact that a lot of terror—the essence of the horror genre—results from the unknown and yet uncannily familiar, fantasy texts can lean heavily into the marvellous

[8] The novel draws many connections to the long tradition of Gothic novels, which has started with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. By using the literary tropes from these texts, Moreno-Garcia has created a postmodern horror tale that plays with readers' expectations and presents a modern take on it.

and present their readers and viewers with worlds that are familiar but framed in such a way as to stress the unfamiliar. While Samuel Taylor Coleridge's suspension of disbelief is usually a given with regard to fantastic texts, science fiction works hard to make their science as believable as possible, and horror tends to start from a point of recognition before it can move into realms of (im)possibility. Therefore, readers are keen to accept hobbits, elves, and wizards and although Tolkien has his peoples sometimes converse in entirely different languages, the accounts of their adventures were originally written in reader-friendly English.[9] One of the most important texts with regard to the fantasy genre is Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) in which she distinguishes between four different types of engaging with fantasy worlds, of which there are the primary world (of the readers and viewers) and secondary worlds (the fantastic ones). Both immersive and portal fantasies draw a clear line between the two: immersive fantasy texts create a world in which the outsider (reader or viewer) has to find their own footing, learn the customs the characters adhere to and acknowledge the general rules. Again, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is an excellent example, as readers have to accept the nutritional habits of hobbits—for example their second breakfast—and not think them unrealistic. Portal fantasies operate with two worlds and with a traveller who uses any form of portal to traverse from one world into another. Famous portals are the enchanted wardrobe leading to Narnia (C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1950) or Alice's rabbit hole (Lewis Carroll). The other two types of fantasy, namely the intrusive and the liminal fantasy, put more emphasis on the primary world than the secondary world. In the former type, the marvellous arrives at the world which is distinctly un-marvellous, and the plot can structure this from being minor nuisances (Edith Nesbit's Psammead from *Five Children and It*, 1902) to downright battles for dominion (J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in which Lord Voldemort's followers want to take over the muggles' territories). The last type, the liminal fantasy, is explained further below. Naturally, these types can overlap and bleed into another, particularly with postmodern fantasy texts. Concerning geographies, they become an important element of the narrative, supporting or hindering the marvellous protagonists. Many a time-traveller text uses the anachronistic traveller in a setting they are not used to in order to poke fun at that particular time and the traveller at the same time. The environment is thus not merely one to traverse, but rather it becomes an active agent in shaping the narrative and the 'feel' of the marvellous plot.

[9] For a more detailed analysis of Tolkien's usage of language, see Joyce in this volume.

When it comes to (video) games, though, players are usually treated to an immersive fantasy. Of course, there are rules, but these are usually located on the level of the action (playing the game), not on the level of the actual worldbuilding. As the narrative unfolds, so will the player be drawn deeper into the mythology of the game and experiences it along the avatar. In the video game *Immortals: Fenyx Rising* by Ubisoft Quebec (2020), the player customises and controls Fenyx who can be of either male or female gender and any ethnicity. However, the game is set on an island created for the Greek gods by master builder Daedalos, locating it in a version of ancient Greece. The so-called Golden Isle consists of six parts, each dedicated to either a Greek deity or the main antagonist, titan Typhon. As Stefan Ekman (2013) has observed, a fantastical map—and games such as *Immortals* and popular series such as *Prince of Persia* or *The Legend of Zelda* operate with the same system—"is often primary[:] to create the map means, largely, to create the world of the map" (20). As players use Fenyx to explore the island, the geographical space is created: the part of the map that was hitherto obscured under a cloud is revealed. The map thus becomes a means of tracking the player's progress (up to a certain point of course). Particularly in *Immortals*, the player can get up to high monuments or statues and survey the land and thus finds elements of the map which are not part of the main quest, such as treasure chests or crystals. Maps of fantastic worlds must thus be understood as a threshold "between the actual world of the [player] and the fictional […] world of the fantasy story" (Ekman, 2013, 21). As a recognisable item, these maps function like their real-world equivalents yet allow for the incorporation of fantasy elements and can be considered a bridge between the extradiegetic (and primary) world of the player and the intradiegetic (and secondary) world of Fenyx.

Along the way, the player encounters vaults that lead to Tartarus, a subterranean level which doubles as a particular version of the underworld as well as mythical creatures such as minotaurs, griffins, or gorgons. Concerning the former, the vaults are portals to a sub-secondary world off the principal secondary world and just like in any hero's quest, Fenyx goes down these vaults, finishes the streamlined side quest in that portion of Tartarus, and returns to the Golden Isle to continue with the main quest. These vaults of Tartarus add a multispatial dimension to the Golden Isle since the entrance to these levels are located at a geographical 'below'—Fenyx falls into and rises out of them—yet at the same time, the actual levels seem to exist as labyrinths hovering in an infinite space. Moreover, the various vaults that should technically lead to the same 'below' are not connected and attest to a distinct fantastic geography. In addition to that, the existence of the mythical creatures constructs the Golden Isle as a place of cryptozoology. As

these animals do not exist in real life—Fenyx tends to initially operate from the point of not believing that they are real until she or he is attacked by them—fantasy texts can offer cryptids a territory. The openness of fantastic geographies is not endangered by cryptids but testifies to its elasticity. Hence, there can also be a plurality of minotaurs when Greek mythology mentions only one. Fantastic texts present as palimpsestic heterotopias of spatial possibilities. In *Immortals*, Fenyx chances upon these cryptids and they are explained as henchcreatures of Typhon—and their presence accounts for an intrusive fantasy as they intend to striate the Golden Isle in their master's stead. However, the case is slightly more complicated as cryptids are creatures living in hidden pockets within the primary world (Miller, 2015, 153) but due to their biological makeup, they have strong ties to the fantastic. Famous examples are Scotland's Nessie, North American Bigfoot, or the mighty Kraken. They are elements of a liminal fantasy that do not disturb the general construction of the primary world but bring a certain marvellous quality to it. In that, liminal fantasy is the least marvellous, as these fantastical occurrences or creatures do not disturb the otherwise rather explicable status quo. Moreover, the moment these creatures are found—and Fenyx has to look for some of them—they "[stop] being a cryptid; the fascination of its secrecy is ruined by its discovery" (Miller, 2015, 154). They become part of an ever-growing gallery of antagonists and when encountered, they pose merely a threat and no longer a marvel as to their inclusion in both the game and the in-game world. The Golden Isle in *Immortals: Fenyx Rising* is a geographical entity which encompasses multispatial possibilities due to its opaque status: Fenyx's movement creates the island and shapes it whilst it has its own fantastic identity.

Fantastic Contributions

In the following articles, the authors have devoted themselves to investigate texts from many different cultural contexts and to further the study of and research in fantastic geographies. It should be noted that this book does not differentiate between and thus rank or classify the various subgenres on the fantastic spectrum. Rather, the essays represent scholarship on texts as wide-ranging as popular international TV shows and national books which have not yet been translated into other languages, pieces of art or (linguistic) soundscapes. What unites these essays are their sharp observations on the intricate workings of fantastic geographies and their ability to challenge and contribute to preconceived notions and existing research. It is particularly the contributions' interdisciplinary and multimedia nature which attests to the importance of this volume.

The first section is dedicated to **Theorising Fantastic Geographies** and introduces its readers to locations that are considered from new and interdisciplinary points of view. The four contributions look at concrete fantastic geographies and theorise these places so as to find more universal understandings.

This volume is started off by Eckart Voigts and Rüdiger Heinze's essay on the **Neverwhere, Somewhere, Everywhere: A Possible Worlds Approach to the Topography of China Miéville's *The City & The City***. In their study, they investigate the usefulness of possible worlds theory derived from modal logic for analyses of fantastic geographies. Arguing against the predominant notion of considering the fantastic as a form of the impossible, Voigts and Heinze evaluate the idea of the actual world as a counterpoint to possible worlds. These, the authors claim, are possible because they adhere to laws that do not seem possible but actually form intradiegetic systems of logics. In a second step, the essay applies this theoretical framework to China Miéville's *The City & The City* as a compelling case study, emphasising the important feature of transitory movements between worlds.

In his study of **The Sociolinguistics of Fantasy Worlds**, Stephen Joyce looks at the function of accents for the construction of fantasy worlds. Building on the study of conlangs (constructed languages), Joyce points to the importance of real-world-accents and sociolects to establish fantastic geographies in audiovisual media. He uses the employment of regional English accents in the TV series *Game of Thrones* and the video game *The Witcher 3* as examples to investigate their influence on worldbuilding from a sociolinguistic perspective.

In **The Fantastic Geographies of *Ikhtayyi*: On Space and Place in Emile Habibi's Novel,** Zef Segal demonstrates the creation of maps as a form of literary analysis. Talking about the experience, history, and collective memory of Haifa's people, Segal first theorises maps before delving deeper into Habibi's text. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, he proposes that *Ikhtayyi* does not present a 'real' Haifa but a dream, as it collapses past, present, and future and (re-)presents imagined spaces as well as dynamics in geographical places. Segal's relational and geographical maps offer unique interpretations of the novel and its fantastic geographies.

René Schallegger's essay **Queering the Quest: Kai Ashante Wilson's Poetic Questioning of the Traditional Quest Narrative** studies the oeuvre of fantastic author Wilson. Starting off with a discussion about the notion of fantasy in general, Schallegger continues to show how the fantastic is a genre characterised by hybridity—just like the characters and narratives of Wilson's texts. Particularly the notion of sexuality, gender, and ethnicity is

of interest to the author, as he classifies his chosen subjects of investigation as Black Queer Dark Science Fantasy. He employs concepts such as psychogeography and Afrofuturism to analyse and interpret the fantastic spaces of Wilson's world.

In the second section, the multitude of **Inhospitable Spaces** is considered, whether they are located in an arctic climate or even in a seemingly safe home. Each of the five essays in this section proposes a new way of looking at seemingly familiar spaces and how the authors' re-calibrations help arriving at new understandings.

Kristin Aubel investigates **Home as Deterritorialized Fantasy in Helen Oyeyemi's 2010s Works**. Oyeyemi's oeuvre is hard to classify when it comes to genres, but she always includes fantastic elements in her fiction—particularly in her depictions and constructions of 'home'. From haunted houses to liminal homelands, her works reveal the limitations of spatial and realist understandings of home in order to introduce new and fantastic ways of home-making. Through her analysis of *Boy, Snow, Bird*, *Gingerbread*, "drownings", and *Mr Fox*, Aubel shows how Oyeyemi creates (and sometimes only hints at) community, fantastic realms, and literature itself as homes beyond inhospitable geographies.

The focus of Can Çakır's essay, entitled **Renegotiating the Utopian "No-Place" in Cory Doctorow's *Walkaway***, lies on the notion of utopia. He suggests that utopian societies as well as spaces must be considered critically because they are located between the non-place and the good place. As Çakır shows, utopias are problematic in their actual existence as they usually depict dire consequences for everyone and everything, lest because of their political potentiality as an 'ideal state'. Cory Doctorow's novel presents a society that is divided along class lines. Çakır shows, however, that the dystopian status quo holds the potential for emancipation and change—particularly in the practice of 'walking away' from the novel's toxic hypercapitalist society: it presents solidarity and collaboration by accessing a virtual utopian space.

The title of Nils Jablonski's contribution is **Terribly Beautiful: Body Fantasies in Idyll and Horror**. Here, the author looks at spatial constructions of the idyll as a *locus amoenus* and how it can be transformed into a space of horror as *locus horribilis*/*locus terribilis*. Horror as genre is thus capable of subversive transformation. Introducing readers to the theory of the idyll, Jablonski dedicates himself to analysing the US-American TV series *True Blood* and the Slovenian movie *Idila*: he portrays the horror as body genre of (bodily) excess and ecstasies. In that, body fantasies which are represented through locales express structures of desire, either as dream worlds and spatial constructions of bodily demise and desire or as places of

excess as the picturesque countryside morphs into a pace of mutilation and destruction of the body.

Through Mónika Rusvai's essay, readers enter an **Unmappable Vegetation: Re-Imagining Woodlands in Robert Holdstock's Mythago Novels**. Analysing Holdstock's famous Mythago cycle, the author investigates the hidden potential of arboreal spaces in fantastic texts. As there are no more blank spaces left on maps these days, it appears that the homogenization of the world has become devoid of mystery and imagination. The wood in Holdstock's novels and short stories, however, presents such a space of the fantastic. Here, trees are no mere background to human actions, they are fully intertwined with them and signify the wood as a place of vitality in which multiple spaces interact. Introducing the fantastic as an element of plant studies, Rusvai's essay proves that the wood as unmappable space for humans are not able to fully grasp the trees' interaction with the place and with the mind of humans who wander into the forest.

For the last essay in this section, it is off to the Antarctic: Svenja Engelmann-Kewitz discusses **Ice, Minds, Bodies: The Fantastic Ecocriticism of Marie Darrieussecq's *White***. In this contribution, the author considers the icescape in terms of ecocritical world-making and particularly the space's spectres as manipulative narrative voices. Together with the white space of the environment, these spectres contribute to the protagonists' feelings of disorientation: Antarctica becomes a white space of 'nothingness' as Darrieussecq herself calls it. The ice in particular eliminates humanness and human actions, time and space become white blanks. Engelmann-Kewitz examines ideas of the Anthropocene, hauntology, and how the novel and the icescape blur boundaries as well as dichotomies in order to establish a fantastic space.

The third section is devoted to **Mapping Identity and the Body**. Often neglected, the body is paramount to the construction of space and the following four essays show the potential of body geographies, particularly when married to the idea of identity and how it is influenced by spaces and places.

The essay which starts off this section is by Anne Laura Penning. In ***Sense8*—Transgressing Minds and Borders**, she considers queer kinship across geopolitical and transmedial borders by focussing on Netflix's series *Sense8*. The author explores and distinguishes between kinship and the chosen family and provides both history and context to these concepts. Penning establishes that, within the series, family becomes a *leitmotif* which throws into question the idea of a single identity and instead favours the multiplicity

of selves. Naturally, this also includes the analysis of stereotypes and clichés. Moreover, she looks at online fandom and community-building beyond the medium of the series as a form of transmedia storytelling.

The next chapter is dedicated to **Praga Mater Urbium—Genius Loci in Pavel Renčín's Trilogy *Městské války***. Tereza Zelinová introduces her readers to one of the most important and influential authors of the relatively young genre of Czech fantasy, Pavel Renčín. Explaining first the history of the genius loci as well as its properties and connections, she maps out the concepts of power and place attachment in the *genius loci*. Zelinová follows this theoretical part with a close reading of one of the trilogy's central characters: Prague, who is both a person and a city. Combining the history of the 'Golden City' with the notion of fantasy, the author offers a double(d) reading of both character and city as a means of social critique, particularly in connection with the novels' other *genii locorum*.

Sarah Edwards discusses **De-/Re-familiarisation: Layered Space and Identities in China Miéville's *King Rat***. Focussing on verticality and the hybrid identity of the main protagonist, she looks into the changed perception of London after said character realises he is half human and half rat. His ability to traverse the metropolis differently from mere humans allows for a layered experience of the urban structure: he is able to perceive the space as a palimpsest as well as a heterotopia, which also has repercussions for the reader in their notion of the fantastic and the mundane. Finally, Edwards shows that the protagonist's observations de-familiarise the readers' understanding of London, leading them to critically reflect on contemporary urban identities, spatial practices, and discourses.

Anna Lüscher investigates **Mechanisms of Exclusion and Belonging at the Magical World's Borders in *Harry Potter***. Taking all of Rowling's novels about 'the boy who lived' into consideration, Lüscher analyses the many different versions of borders and how characters transgress them or are barred from doing so. She sets down three types of borders: first, there is the border between the magical and the non-magical or Muggle world. These two worlds should be conceived as overlapping or folded in spaces, particularly when it comes to travelling between the two worlds. Second, due to his hybrid body, the character of Hagrid occupies a liminal position in society as well as geographically. He is thus able to facilitate border crossings for other characters. The final point is made regarding social acceptance as a metaphysical border: names and concepts—such as the term 'Muggle'—create borders and are a means of in- and exclusion.

The final section focuses on authors and artists who are **Challenging Spaces**. Here, the act of exploration by the various protagonists or beholders

shows the construction of fantastic geographies and how they can be challenged.

The first essay in this section is Deborah Bridle's **The Immer, the Manchmal, and the Planet at the Other End of the Universe—Understanding the Science-fictional Space of China Miéville's *Embassytown***. Bridle offers a close reading of Miéville's novel and studies its postcolonial science-fiction geographies. She stresses the importance of disruption as a form of renewal and regeneration of the city named Embassytown and of space itself, for the latter is not just a built environment but architecture presents as live organisms. The author suggests that cooperation, coexistence, and synergies of spaces and languages are essential and central to Miéville's idea. Following the structure of the text, Bridle maps out the crisis that befalls the inhabitants of Embassytown and how the repercussions play out on the level of both characters and space.

Ghosts, Skins, and Souvenirs: Four Artists' Fantastic Geographies serves as the title of Ruth Watson's contribution. Being an artist herself, she analyses the materiality of four different artists and their construction of pieces of art. It is particularly the idea of mapping that informs Watson's take on materiality. The artists employ both haptic elements as well as virtual means to craft their artworks. The author reads these pieces as expressions of their view of the world and how they establish new fantastic spaces for beholders to experience. The pieces of art are informed by their creators' personal stories as well as social-cultural backgrounds and therefore prove a unique point of entry into fantastic geographies.

In his essay, Satvik Gupta is **Pondering Infinity and Irrationality in the Fantastic Architecture and Geography in Jorge Luis Borges' Fiction**. He argues that Borges' mimesis of the infinite—made palatable for human cognition in spatial and architectural terms—is almost always accompanied by a latent sense of irrationality and/or futility. Across the analysed narratives, the article investigates the relationship between the Borgesian representations of the infinite and the inherent threat they pose to human rationality. Gupta accentuates Borges' mimesis of the infinite, thereby suggesting that the finite desire to imitate space, time, and geography at the infinite scale is at once innate and absurd. In the process, the article ruminates on the nature of Borgesian infinity—its subsequent conflict with the finite human *cogito* and the inevitability of its transcendence.

The final article, written by Rachel Dowse, is entitled: **Fantasy Soundscapes on Virtual Islands: The Virtual Geographies of *Proteus* and *Dear Esther***. Choosing video games as the objects of her study, Dowse investigates the importance and influence of sound and how it constructs fantastic

places, which might even be modelled on existing locales. The author highlights the connections of the two video games to myths and fairy tales and how these inform the place-making. With a psychogeographical reading, Dowse demonstrates how players are drawn into the fantastic worlds of the video games and are influenced by them.

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PART 1:

THEORISING FANTASTIC GEOGRAPHIES

NEVERWHERE, SOMEWHERE, EVERYWHERE: A POSSIBLE WORLDS APPROACH TO THE TOPOGRAPHY OF CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *THE CITY & THE CITY*

ECKART VOIGTS AND RÜDIGER HEINZE

Introduction

In an essay from 2019 in a collection on possible worlds theory and contemporary narratology, Thomas Martin notes—and laments—that there is very little work done in fantasy studies that employs possible worlds theory (201). To Martin, this is surprising because, as he argues, a framework with possibilism at its center should be inherently appealing to scholars interested in literature often playing with what is possible and what is not. As he acknowledges, some work exists, for example by Nancy Traill, but it remains the exception. This is also surprising in light of the fact that (at least literary) possible worlds theorists quite often use fantastic texts as examples for discussing notions of (im)possibility (e.g. Doležel, Ryan). An MLA Bibliography search in 2023 using "fantasy literature" and "possible worlds theory" as search terms shows that Martin's claim is still valid: less than six hits appear for the years 2019 and after, among them Martin's own contribution.

It is a moot, though certainly interesting point to speculate why exactly this is the case; modal logic, which gave rise to current versions of possible worlds theory, is not among the most accessible theories and frameworks. Another reason might lie in a misunderstanding of the very concept of possibility itself, which is why it will be given more attention in the next section. Whatever the reasons, the point of this essay is not to develop a theoretical framework that combines concepts of traditional fantasy studies and possible worlds theory. Nancy Traill (1996) and Farah Mendlesohn (2008), among others, have done that, and Martin's own work goes a long way towards that goal. Our aim is rather to show how possible worlds theory can be productively used to analyze the topographies of fantastic texts, using China Miéville's 2009 novel *The City & The City* as a test case. The working