Durham E-Theses

The Spatial Dimension of Narrative Understanding. Exploring Plot Types in the Narratives of Alessandro Baricco, Andrea Camilleri and Italo Calvino

MARZIA BELTRAMI

The Spatial Dimension of Narrative Understanding

Exploring Plot Types in the Narratives of Alessandro Baricco, Andrea Camilleri
and Italo Calvino

Marzia Beltrami

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
PhD
University of Durham
School of Modern Languages and Cultures

March 2017

Contents

Abstract

The Spatial Dimension of Narrative Understanding.
Exploring Plot Types in the Narratives of Alessandro Baricco, Andrea Camilleri and Italo Calvino

Marzia Beltrami

The thesis explores the hypothesis that some plots might rely on spatiality as an organising principle that impacts on the narrative structure and, consequently, on the strategies adopted by readers to understand them. In order to lay the grounding for a spatially-oriented approach to narrative understanding, this study pursues both a theoretical line of inquiry and an applied line of inquiry in literary criticism. A cognitive stance on the nature of thought as non-propositional (Johnson-Laird 1983) and of the mind as embodied (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Varela et al. 1993) provides the theoretical point of departure for the subsequent identification of a range of principles and frameworks that can be implemented to support a spatially-oriented interpretation according to the specificities of narratives. The three case studies provided by Alessandro Baricco's *City*, Andrea Camilleri's *Montalbano* crime series, and Italo Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* illustrate how a spatially-oriented perspective can add new interpretive angles and an unprecedented insight into the ways narratives achieve a coherent structure. At the same time, the case studies serve to extrapolate a set of features that constitute the preliminary criteria for assessing whether it would be fruitful to apply a spatially-oriented approach to a specific narrative. Baricco's, Camilleri's and Calvino's works represent three plot types in which spatiality impinges in three different ways on the narrative, which, as I will show, can be epitomised by the image schemata of map, trajectory, and fractal. Far from simply referring to objects which plot is compared to, these images indicate procedural techniques and strategies of sense-making that a certain type of narrative is designed to prompt in the reader through textual cues. The study, in fact, builds on and advances a notion of plot to be analysed as a process rather than a given structure, something that readers understand as they read, and not retrospectively only.

Acknowledgements

My warmest and sincerest gratitude goes first of all to my supervisors, Federico M. Federici, Katrin Wehling-Giorgi and David Herman: in their own way, each of them showed me that research can be both a passion and a profession, and taught me to keep my balance between the two. I will always be grateful to Federico for his steady support which began even before I officially started to work with him at Durham; to Katrin for her commitment, attention, and advice; to David for the model of calm rigour and intellectual energy he represented for me. I hope that my relationship with them will continue well after the end of this doctoral project. I am indebted to Dr Richard Walsh, who kindly gave me some productive feedback on my reflections on fractality while he was a IAS fellow at Durham. I am very grateful to the Department of Italian at Durham University, who funded my research and gave me the opportunity to focus on my studies and fully benefit from this experience.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of a number of people, who have been close to me in many ways throughout these years. Many thanks to Giulia Crespi and Barbara Tanzi-Imbri for the countless conversations – academic and non-academic – and for their generous and solid friendship; to Teresa Filizzola for the constant flow of positive vibes; to Claudia Dellacasa, for her intellectual passion and with whom I look forward to collaborating on some future Calvinian project. Thanks also to Alexandre Burin, Giacomo Giannini, and Jack Coopey, whose timely arrival in Durham greatly contributed to improve this final year and to make a most enjoyable experience out of it. A special acknowledgment goes to Emanuele, who has been at my side throughout the journeys of these past few years, across England and beyond, and who has never stopped encouraging and stimulating me. Finally, my wholehearted gratitude goes to my family and especially to my parents, Gabriella and Claudio, who loved me and raised me to think that I could take my life in my own hands: there is no greater gift parents could give to a daughter.

Abbreviations

Works by Andrea Camilleri, from the *Montalbano* series:

CT	*Il cane di terracotta*
FA	*La forma dell'acqua*
GT	*La gita a Tindari*
LL	*Una lama di luce*
LM, *Il ladro*	*Il ladro di merendine*
PS	*La pista di sabbia*
VV	*La voce del violino*

Abbreviations from Marie-Laure Ryan's (1991) possible-worlds theory:

APW	Alternative possible world in a modal system of reality
AW	Actual world
TAPW	Textual alternative possible world
TAW	Textual actual world
TRW	Textual reference world
K-world	Knowledge-world
O-world	Obligation-world
W-world	Wish-world

Works by Italo Calvino:

Se una notte	*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*
RRI, RRII, RRIII	*Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, 2, 3
SI, SII	*Saggi*, vol. 1, 2

Introduction

Focused on the element of plot, this study presents the results of an investigation into the spatial dimension of narrative understanding. Plot understanding should be intended as the high-level cognitive practice performed by readers as they understand a story as a whole (Fauconnier 1997: 1). In this light, plot understanding amounts to narrative understanding, and I shall use the two expressions interchangeably. The theoretical hypothesis explored in the thesis is that, in some narratives, spatiality should be privileged over causality as main principle of plot organisation. The study identifies a set of critical features that arguably endorse a spatial narrative understanding in readers: (a) engagement of virtuality; (b) semantic references to spatiality; (c) embodiment of comprehension strategies; (d) self-reflexivity; (e) fictionalisation of readers' virtual body. These features are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for a plot to be deemed as spatial. Yet they function as signals for the critic of whether the application of a spatially-oriented approach could be beneficial from a literary-critical perspective. The productiveness of a spatially-oriented approach is illustrated by the new interpretive paths it opens up to in relation to three case studies: Alessandro Baricco's (b. 1958) *City* (1999); Andrea Camilleri's (b. 1925) *Montalbano* series (1994 to present), within a broader re-description offered of crime fiction as a genre; Italo Calvino's (1923–1985) *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979). These three case studies variously combine and implement the aforementioned features hence resulting in three different plot types, three different ways in which spatiality can operate as organising principle of the narrative. These plot types are represented by three images that seek to epitomise their individual distinctiveness: the map, the trajectory, and the fractal.

Research rationale

Plot is one of the most elusive concepts in narrative theory (Dannenberg 2005a), largely used also among non-experts and the hardest to define. Despite the halo of restive ambiguities surrounding the notion of plot, hardly any definition attempted to move away from rooting it in principles such as causality and chronology. By plot I intend not merely the sequence of events and states of which the narrative is made, but the principle by which these elements are coherently interlinked. Plot, in other words, is the concept that should

somehow designate the point of a narrative, that is 'the way [in which] the story indicates its aim, purpose, meaning' and turns sequences of events and states into a 'structured, closed, and complete whole' (Ronen 1990: 819, 828). Plot understanding is a hermeneutic process (Bruner 1991: 7-11) that depends on the cognitive activity performed by the reader to make sense of a story, both step by step during reading and of the narrative as a whole. The inability of conventional action-based definitions to grasp the distinctive nature of Baricco's novels or of some of Calvino's mature works prompted me to search for different organising principles that might be potentially operating in these like in many other narratives. The thesis claims that a viable principle could be found in spatiality, especially in the light of recent findings in cognitive sciences and psychology. These results suggest that abstract thought is likely to be rooted in a deeper type of knowledge that human beings develop through their sensorimotor skills as they learn to make sense of the environment in which they are situated, body and mind (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Varela et al. 1993).

The rationale for this study rests on the assumption that narratives are structured into meaningful wholes in a variety of ways, and spatiality constitutes a promising principle. This research seeks to lay the groundwork for the elaboration of a more structured spatially-oriented model of narrative comprehension in the future. With this purpose in mind, it aims to identify a preliminary set of recurring features that may work as criteria for the applicability of such focus. For this reason it is crucial that this work maintains a double viewpoint, advancing theoretical reflections on the process of narrative understanding alongside with critical analyses of the narratives that could illustrate how this innovative perspective is likely to add inputs to the interpretation of concrete texts.

The three plot types individuated in my research are epitomised by the three image schemata of the map, the trajectory, and the fractal. In its broader cognitive sense, an image schema is 'a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience' (Johnson 1987: xiv). Indeed, these images have been chosen less because of the object they identify and rather because of the process, the procedural strategies they entail. They are meant not to pinpoint normative categories but to represent the distinctive character of three spatially-oriented and yet diversified ways of plot understanding, thus making the case for the potentialities of a theoretical and critical approach that promises to be flexible and productive.

Research questions and original contribution

The research questions pursued in the present thesis have a double directionality and could be formulated in two ways. From a theoretical perspective, this study aims to investigate the hypothesis that plot understanding may be deemed as spatial in nature. With this

objective in mind, the study sets out to ask: what features do usually mark a plot as organised according to a spatial principle, and what criteria do reveal that a narrative might be encouraging spatially-oriented strategies of co-construction on the readers' part? Along with these critical features, the thesis aims to establish the underlying theoretical groundings for a spatial conceptualisation of plot (and, consequently, for plot co-construction and understanding): what frameworks or approaches may result useful for turning this theoretical awareness into an interpretive model to apply to textual analysis? How systematic such an approach would be and/or to what extent would it depend on the features implemented in a specific narrative? In other words, would it be possible to identify spatially-oriented plot types? By answering these questions, the study elaborates on the results gathered from textual analyses with the ultimate objective of ascertaining how productive, flexible, and diversified a spatially-oriented narrative approach could potentially be.

This exploration aims to be productive not only as far as narrative theory is concerned but also in the applied field of literary criticism. The identification of critical features that indicate whether a narrative is likely to benefit from a spatially-oriented approach goes in this direction. The study contextualises the analysis of each case study in order to illustrate how a spatially-oriented focus is beneficial to specific narratives and how it adds new inputs on the scholarship of each author or genre.

In the case of Baricco's *City*, the thesis questions previous interpretations of the novel as a portrayal of the postmodern metropolis. It offers an unprecedented reading by suggesting that the image of the city works instead as a cognitive metaphor that refers to the structure of the narrative, not to its themes. As to the second case study, two contributions are advanced. The first consists in a theoretical re-description of the genre of crime fiction as typified by competing counterfactual scenarios, whose negotiation and management on the detective's and on readers' part constitute a major phase of the process of narrative understanding; moreover, spatiality is proposed as metamorphic *fil rouge* that runs throughout the genre and connects its early elaborations, emphasising order and pre-eminently geometrical plots (nineteenth and early-twentieth century), to more recent developments characterised by a significant sociological interest. The second contribution regards specifically Camilleri's *Montalbano* series. The spatially-oriented approach provides an overarching and coherent framework for arguing that the distinctiveness of the *Montalbano* stories resides in that fact that plots are organised to function as systems of interacting narrative inputs – ranging from extra-textual literary works to theatre-like put-ons organised by Montalbano, from dreams to secondary cases – that impact on the main investigation and on the understanding of the novel as a whole.

Finally, the last chapter opens up a fresh perspective on Calvino studies as it illustrates how his cognitive style is strongly rooted in spatiality (as is Baricco's style, although the latter does not problematise it as much) and how several features of his fictional and nonfictional work exhibit an ongoing reflection on this inherently spatial nature. The thesis also offers unprecedented theoretical tools including the focus on virtuality and the concept of the reader's virtual body, which emphasise a set of features of Calvino's oeuvre that may have been acknowledged but not yet recognised a unified meaning. The exploration of virtuality leads to recognise the centrality of the patterns of repetition and variation in Calvino's works and in particular in *Se una notte*, of which I offer a new interpretation. The notion of the virtual body, borrowed from Caracciolo's theory, enables me to foreground the importance of bodily engagement in the reading process designed by Calvino and, consequently, to offer an innovative view of the author as a strongly mind-centred writer (Hume 1992) who is yet also crucially concerned with the role of corporeality. I chose these three case studies with the intention of providing three instances of narrative which can be deemed as spatial in nature yet in three slightly different ways. This difference entails, first, that the narratives operate on analogous spatially-oriented principles that, however, are implemented by means of different features; secondly, that they impact differently on the reader.

One of the most original dimensions of the present thesis as a whole consists in the drafting of the criteria of applicability of a certain critical and theoretical focus. It outlines the premises of a spatially-informed approach to the study of plot and explores various perspectives that could be adopted, on the basis of the specific features displayed by different narratives. Against the backdrop of this exploration, a specific original contribution of the present work consists in the narratological concept which I define as space of narrative experience. The space of narrative experience is a virtual space that partly depends on story-level entities belonging to the storyworld – i.e. characters, fictional events and situations – but which also critically includes the perspective of the reader, an entity that straddles the narrative fictional storyworld and the realm of actuality. For readers, indeed, understanding plots is the result of an interaction of what actually happens in the narrative with what is expected to happen. Expectations, in turn, depend on events and states internal to the fictional storyworld but also crucially on readers' awareness that narratives are artefacts designed to prompt certain responses; inasmuch as they are literary artefacts, narratives situate themselves within traditions, genres or authorial oeuvres, whose general features impact on the type of expectations readers develop on a specific story. My definition of space of narrative experience is irreducibly connected to the theoretical and methodological framework adopted: it relies on concepts such as

storyworld and mental model, on a focus on plot, and on a critical position that takes into account the reader's perspective and narrative reception.[1] I will preliminarily introduce these concepts in the next chapter (1.2) and then thoroughly discuss them in the course of the thesis.

It should be observed that, if the space of narrative experience could be identified theoretically in relation to any narrative, it only becomes a meaningful element to isolate when the narrative is designed to engage it: this seems particularly likely to happen in narratives where virtuality plays a preeminent role. Indeed this study offers an unprecedented exploration of virtuality because, among the criteria pinpointed in the thesis as foregrounding plot as guided by spatially-oriented principles, it resulted to be the feature that recurs, with significant variations, in all of three case studies. As I shall explain in greater detail later, virtuality is juxtaposed to actuality, not to reality, which is instead juxtaposed to fiction.[2] Hence, as actuality comprises what actually and certainly happens, the realm of virtuality includes anything other than actual, meaning the scope of possible (or potential) and of impossible (or counterfactual).

The three images used in the titles of the thesis' chapters should be regarded as explanatory labels, not as normative categories; originality lies less in the images themselves and rather in the conditions determining the underlying framework. Map and trajectory are used in a deliberately general yet by no means casual fashion, as they aim to stand for groups of narratives characterised by the same plot type. The image of the plot as map epitomises the narratives in which the cognitive activity of spatially mapping out storylines and their reciprocal connections is more relevant to their overall understanding than the chronological apprehension of fictional events; arguably, stories that are meant to portray situations of dynamic equilibrium would be included in this plot type. By contrast, the image of plot as trajectory typifies narratives that are strongly teleological in nature (e.g. crime fiction stories) and embodies the goal-oriented attitude of readers as they make sense of the plot as it unfolds. The trajectory represents a virtual structure that guides readers in their navigation through counterfactual scenarios inasmuch as they expect it to exist, on account of the conventions of the genre. In fact, the most original image schema is the geometric figure of the fractal, because it is tailored specifically onto Calvino's *Se una notte* (see 1.1): typified by self-reflexivity and by a pattern of variation within continuation, the fractal productively describes the strategies of comprehension designed in this novel, which

---

[1] For an overview of reader-oriented approaches, see Rabinowitz (2008).

[2] Referring to 'fictionality' implies the definition of a domain on its own, which usually overlaps but has to be theoretically distinguished from that of narrative. Along with Cohn (1990), Doležel (1998), Hrushovski (1984), and Ronen (1988; 1990; 1994), speaking of fictionality means to assume that the approach to an artefact as fictional is regulated by a set of conventions and attitudes that stem specifically from the its fictional (rather than narrative, or literary) nature. In my thesis, I defend Ronen's notion of fictionality as culturally-based against Cohn's textually-based view.

are based on the same principles of fractality. That the concept of the fractal was privileged over that of labyrinth, dear to Calvino studies, is indicative of the difference between a metaphoric use and the implementation of an image schema: this latter does not simply suggest an overall quality, but primarily captures the dynamic nature of the process of plot understanding and the peculiar relationship in *Se una notte* between its parts and the narrative as a whole.

The present research is addressed to readers interested in exploring theoretical aspects as well as specific Italian authors: the structure of the thesis should aid its consultation according to the different focuses. Moreover, since the application of a cognitive-oriented framework is not common in Italian studies, this work breaks new ground in this specific study area, encouraging researchers to open up to a methodological approach so far adopted mainly in Anglo-American critical contexts.

Thesis overview

The thesis is subdivided into four chapters. Chapter 1 offers a brief theoretical premise to the investigation of my case studies. It illustrates the methodology of my analysis and the rationale for the selection of the narratives examined in the following chapters. It outlines the composite theoretical framework needed to provide a suitable grounding for both the narratological and critical investigation. Combining cognitive literary criticism and cognitive narratology, the work situates itself in the broader field of postclassical narrative studies and rests on two main assumptions: a non-propositional view of thought and the notion of mind as embodied. The chapter also introduces the core notion of 'storyworld', key to the whole thesis, which will be further refined later through possible-worlds theory and modality (see Chapter 3). Although the chapter does not necessarily aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current debate around plot, it contextualises the main issues concerning classic definitions and posits the premises for a re-formulation of the concept according to more flexible and reception-oriented criteria, in the light of the hypothesis that spatiality may be the principle at the basis of an alternative model of narrative understanding.

Chapter 2 presents the first case study, Alessandro Baricco's *City* (1999). The chapter starts by proposing a re-interpretation of the novel: rather than aiming to represent the postmodern metropolis, the reference to the city is arguably meant to function as a metaphor of the narrative structure and hence as an indication of the best strategy for readers to understand it. Contextual frame theory (Emmott 1997) and phenomenology of reading (Caracciolo 2014a) are introduced to illustrate how Baricco draws on strategies rooted in our sensorimotor knowledge to ensure the reader's

comprehension throughout the swift changes of scene and the numerous shifts between the storylines that compose the novel. A close reading of *City*'s prologue, which well anticipates the storytelling devices adopted throughout the novel, is offered as sample analysis. In the second part of the chapter, the notion of script is introduced and its peculiar implementations in *City* examined. Then, scenario-mapping and focus account (Garrod and Sanford 1999) and the framework of enactivism (Noë 2004) – which includes Caracciolo's theories – are employed to explain how virtuality, in the form of world knowledge that is only referred to by the text rather than properly instantiated, can still impinge on readers' understanding of the narrative. The chapter concludes by further enriching the array of spatial conceptualisations exhibited by Baricco, and by summarising the features that arguably endorse a spatially-oriented reading of the novel (see criteria listed above).

Chapter 3 opens with an initial diachronic overview of the protean relationship between the genre of crime fiction and spatiality, which shows how the second criterion endorsing a spatially-oriented approach – semantic reference to space – is fulfilled by this case study. The core discussion of the chapter, however, builds on the significant role of virtuality with particular attention to its counterfactual dimension. I enrich my framework through possible-worlds theory (Ronen 1994; Ryan 1991, 1985) and research on counterfactuality in plot (Dannenberg 2008), which provide the ideal theoretical background for a re-formulation of crime fiction as an epistemological genre that capitalises on a modally-elaborated and ontologically complex notion of storyworld. Building on the critical premise that the investigative practice is the indispensable component for narratives to be labelled as crime fiction, the chapter argues how the investigation consists, in fact, in a navigation through the private worlds of characters and through counterfactual scenarios. This hypothesis is explored through the case study of Andrea Camilleri's *Montalbano* series, and most of the textual examples are extracted from *Il ladro di merendine* (1996). Section 3.4.2 entirely focuses on how a spatially-oriented approach adds an innovative perspective on the features typical of Camilleri's crime series specifically. Following the modal re-structuring of the storyworld, in the final part of the chapter three spaces are individuated: mimetic space, the virtual space of private worlds of characters, and the space of narrative experience to which plot pertains. The notion of trajectory is then applied to the second and third space to express the way readers navigate through counterfactuals to understand the overall plot.

Chapter 4 discusses the third and last case study, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* by Italo Calvino. Among the features endorsing a spatially-oriented approach, this chapter further explores two additional articulations of virtuality (potentiality and absence) and considers under a new light two strategies already pinpointed in Chapter 1: the

fictionalisation of readers' virtual body and the embodiment of comprehension mechanisms. Although briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, self-reflexivity is the distinctive criterion explored here. The chapter first considers the general impact of spatiality on Calvino's cognitive style. Then, the virtual dimensions of potentiality and void are analysed and the label of 'hypernovel' debated in relation to *Se una notte*. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 constitute the heart of the chapter, where the specific type of plot as fractal is discussed: along with the notion of fractal, the analogy between metanarrative text and complex system is introduced and a close-reading of the novel according to this organising principle is provided; finally, variable degrees of fictionalisation of the reader's virtual body are examined and their impact on the reader's engagement and plot comprehension assessed. The thesis concludes with some final considerations and reflections on the outcomes of the study and on the possible directions in which further research could be carried out.

Chapter One
Research Design

1.1. Methodological approach

1.1.1. A combined method for a framework in the making

The methodology for this study combines a close reading of the primary texts with a composite theoretical framework stemming from the broad field of cognitive literary criticism and cognitive narratology. Both theoretical fields fall within the scope of postclassical theories of narrative (Alber and Fludernik 2010). Far from thoroughly rejecting the structuralist poetics of classical narratology, postclassical theories rather foster its reinterpretation and supplementation through a range of concepts and methods. These pertain to disciplines that were either neglected or unavailable to structuralist scholars, including gender theory, philosophy of language, cognitive sciences, and sociolinguistics (Herman 2009a). The passage from classical to postclassical narratology brought about not only a substantial innovation in terms of available frameworks but also a change in method: while structuralist analysis used to carry out theoretical discussions in the abstract and in isolation from critical interpretive practice on texts (Todorov 1969), this thesis seeks to combine these two perspectives. The elaboration of a model of plot understanding, or better the identification of its conditions of applicability, proceeds therefore alongside with an illustration of the critical productiveness of a spatially-oriented approach. The identification of a different focus, indeed, leads to an alternative way of parsing the narrative or even to new theoretical tools and concepts that can illuminate previously unnoticed aspects of a specific novel or reveal patterns connecting different works. The research exhibits an alternate focus on the two strands, theoretical and critical, as they substantiate and feed on each other. Instead of spanning through a wider selection of examples, the thesis is structured into case studies because the purpose of offering a fresh perspective on each work in its own right requires a more in-depth argumentation.

As anticipated in the rationale, the research was initially sparked by the lack of a concept that could effectively render the particularity of those narratives where the form of

their content significantly impacts on their meaning (Herman 2002: 104; Perry 1979). Or better, although plot is the narratological element that should express a narrative's organisational principle, its definitions seemed inadequate whenever the logic responsible for turning the narrative elements into a coherent and integrated whole was not chronology or direct causality.[3] Baricco's *City* was the point of departure for my analysis because traditional definitions of plot appeared to be hardly applicable to the novel and the case therefore demanded further attention. The turn of perspective on the meaning of the city from thematic pointer to cognitive metaphor prompted a theoretical shift toward a cognitive-oriented framework. From here, the study followed a necessarily speculative course of action in the search for models that would enable the investigation of those issues that the new approach contributed to emphasise. In the case of *City*, the presence of multiple storylines, the swiftness of passages from one to the other, and the systematic tapping into readers' world knowledge prompted me to look into contextual frame theory (Emmott 1997), script theory (Herman 1997, 2002; Schank and Abelson 1977), scenario-mapping and focus approach (Garrod and Sanford 1999) and enactivism (Noë 2004). These interpretive options provide on the one hand a reasonable account of how the text's design prompts readers to understand the narrative in a certain way, and on the other illuminate some previously neglected aspects of Baricco's narrative style and of *City*'s structure and meaning. For instance, the unprecedented focus on the comprehension strategies designed in *City*, also supported by reference to Baricco's nonfictional works, enabled me to pinpoint and productively scrutinise some of the distinctive features of the novel.

My irreducible methodological constraint, in this case study as well as in the other two, has been to make sure that all models and frameworks are coherent and compatible with each other and would comply with a few core principles, which I explain in section 1.2. Since this is a pilot study aiming at identifying the premises for an unprecedented model of narrative understanding and plot structuring, there is no ready-made theoretical framework to apply. Questions to be explored arise from the analysed narratives and the attempted answers emerge from the interrelations among the case studies. The second case study is designed as a further test of and a variation on the features pinpointed in the first one, and the third as a response to and a step further from the previous two cases. The outcome is a set of viable criteria for the identification of narratives whose plot can be deemed as spatial in nature and which could therefore benefit from a spatially-oriented approach. The frameworks adopted can be potentially employed for the analysis of similar issues in relation to other narratives, either individually or combined.

---

[3] For works privileging and exploring causality see Bal (1997), Bordwell (1985), Kafalenos (2006), Rabinowitz (1987), Richardson (1997), and White (1981).

1.1.2. A genre as case study

Some further elucidations are needed in relation to the second case study, in particular as to the decision to select a genre to fulfil the task. This case study, indeed, holds a twofold value because it accounts for both an author – Camilleri – and a wider category of narratives – crime fiction stories. Camilleri's *Montalbano* stories were initially taken into consideration because they seemed to present analogous strategies to *City*, inasmuch as meaning is distinctively conveyed by means of a composite narrative structure whose interrelated parts contribute to give a spatial structure to the plot (3.4.2). In other words, as much as *City* the novels of the *Montalbano* series interestingly endorse Ryan's observation that '[f]or the semiotician, a plot is a type of semantic structure' that may be regarded as a 'spatial configuration of elements' (1991: 175). Yet, by looking at these novels through the provisional framework sketched following the analysis of my first case study, it emerged that the criteria pinpointed not only foreground some specificities of Camilleri's work but also to some extent they are connected to its affiliation to the crime fiction genre. This finding is important as it situates the case study within a wider category (a genre) and takes a step in the direction of demonstrating that a spatially-oriented approach could identify plot types not only on the basis of the specific cognitive style of an author but also on the basis of sets of conventions, provided that they are sufficiently culturally defined to reliably impact on readers' expectations. Adopting a whole genre as case study is not out of place especially when it comes to crime fiction, which is a genre characterised by a remarkable rigidity of its conventions and therefore enables to infer a general model of narrative comprehension (Cawelti 1976; Hühn 1987). Conventions generate expectations, and a good management of readers' expectations, irrespective of whether they are ultimately met or disrupted, is a fundamental quality for a narrative to be successfully understood. If expectations generated by a certain authorship are generally to be avoided – as they would arguably determine an excessive predictability that could undermine curiosity –, expectations stemming from the affiliation to a certain genre, instead, play a crucial role in plot understanding. Spolsky (2004) even argues that the decision of the author to present content through a specific literary genre is the 'foundational step in the making of literary meaning' (2004: 52). This is because, as Herman observes, 'narrative genres are distinguished by different preference-rule systems prescribing different ratios of stereotypic to nonstereotypic actions and events' (2002: 91), which means that narratives belonging to different genres will be understood by readers in different ways on the account of different operating expectations of how textual cues should be anchored to stored world knowledge (1997). It goes without saying, expectations and preference-rule systems are not absolute and can be negotiated: crime fiction is indeed what Spolsky describes as a functional genre,

that is '[t]he culturally produced and learned template that re-represents fragmentary sense data, connecting them in a way that makes them usable as knowledge' (2004: 52).

1.1.3. Who is the reader?

One last thorny methodological problem concerns the nature of the reader (Dorfman 1996). In my research, I embrace the perspective of reception, aiming to outline a model of plot understanding, and I put forward hypotheses about the ways readers make sense of certain stories. However, as Calvino's character Silas Flannery muses, 'la lettura è un atto necessariamente individuale, molto più dello scrivere' (*Se una notte*, 176). The bridge between any empirical reader and the reader I refer to in this work is unavoidably provided, to some extent, by the personal experience of the author of the thesis, thus adopting a less reliable, introspective method (see also Caracciolo 2014a: 61). Nonetheless, the spatially-oriented approach to plot comprehension outlined in this study is not a predictive model of the empirical reactions of the actual reader: it formulates some hypotheses concerning the ways in which certain stories arguably cue and guide readers' engagement and narrative understanding by means of textually encoded strategies (Herman 2002). To elaborate my claims, therefore, I will build on established narrative theories that link certain psychological or cognitive responses to specific textual patterns – which can emerge at syntactic, rhetorical or discourse level. In turn, I will substantiate my hypotheses by drawing on textual analysis of my case studies and on the extant scholarship in literary criticism.

1.2. Cognitive narratology and cognitive literary criticism: a diversified theoretical framework

As relatively new fields of research, cognitive literary criticism and cognitive narratology constitute at present 'more a set of loosely confederated heuristic schemes rather than a systematic framework for inquiry' (Herman 2009a: 31).[4] Yet, far from undermining their speculative and explorative power, this flexibility highly enhances it. As stated in the methodological section, in each chapter I will capitalise on different models of discourse comprehension and narrative theory to emphasise specific textual features. Although it will not always be possible to fully report the underlying theoretical issues, all these diversified theoretical inputs – from Herman's narratology to Ryan's possible worlds theory to Caracciolo's enactivist hypotheses of readers' engagement – achieve a coherent integration

---

[4] For an overview of the relationships between cognitive sciences and literary criticism and theory, see Adler and Gross (2002), Bernaerts et al. (2013), Eder (2003), Hart (2001, 2004), Herman (2009b), Jaén and Simon (eds. 2012), Nünning (2003), Olson (ed. 2011), Richardson A. (2004), Richardson and Steen (2002), Ryan (2010), Spolsky (2003), Stockwell (2009), Turner (1994).

within a cognitive-oriented framework that relies on few fundamental principles and concepts, which I will briefly introduce in this section. The essential transformation distinctive of a cognitive approach to narrative is that mind replaces language as its pilot-notion, and cognitive sciences replace linguistics as main discipline of reference (cf. Barthes 1966). Irrespective of the field on which it impinges – be it literary criticism or narratology – the cognitive stance embraced in this study entails two main theoretical consequences: first, a non-propositional view of thought; secondly, an awareness of the mind as embodied, and therefore the role of the sensorimotor system in developing high-level concepts.

1.2.1. A non-propositional view of thought: mental models and storyworlds

Albeit it is not the aim of this work to fully account for the extensive debate on a non-propositional view of thought, this claim constitutes a point critical to my exploration. It opens up to forms of thinking other than verbal, admitting that language is the main but not the only vessel for narrative understanding. This view aligns itself with the hypothesis that what is mentally constructed and manipulated by readers is surely prompted by the text but is also affected by types of knowledge conveyed or stored not only propositionally.[5] For general reference in this regard, the study mainly draws on the works by French linguist and cognitive scientist Fauconnier and psychologist of reasoning Johnson-Laird, though more precise references are made in the course of my discussion to other linguists and philosophers, including Emmott, Lakoff, and Johnson.

A propositional approach to meaning, rejected by this thesis, holds that meaning is created and apprehended first and primarily in a verbal form. Johnson-Laird (1980, 1983, 1993) conversely argues that meaning is not lodged exclusively in words and prepositions, and that readers do not generally reason using the rules of formal logic. It goes without saying that language is closely related to and dramatically impinges on our cognitive activity. Yet it is not a direct proof of mental processes, great part of which happens invisibly, either to propositional knowledge or to consciousness itself (Fauconnier 1997: 1). In particular, Fauconnier convincingly claims that 'language […] does not autonomously specify meanings that later undergo pragmatic processing. Rather, it guides meaning construction directly in context' (1997: 17) through various devices, regulated by grammar and pragmatics. Context constitutes a crucial point because, as Emmott remarks, 'narrative sentences need to be viewed in relation to mentally represented context created from the texts themselves' (1997: 58). It follows that context usually impacts on the understanding of individual propositions as the overall mental space against which the meaning of a certain proposition

---

[5] For instance, Ryan praises a non-propositional view of thought as it 'opened up to many possible forms of thinking in addition to verbal, including visual or musical, and admits the possibility to favour either spatial or temporal dimension' (2003: 334).

is projected, but it can be present to the interpreter's mind in conceptual rather than textual form (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

A non-propositional approach does not deny the importance of language. It posits mental spaces and mental relations as alternative carriers of meaning – as opposed to propositions – on which our cognition primarily relies. As I am specifically concerned with non-propositional views of cognition in relation to narrative understanding, the most productive insight in this respect consists in the elaboration of mental models instead of textual models (Fauconnier 1997; Ferstl and Kintsch 1999; Schank and Abelson 1977). 'When approached in this way,' Fauconnier (1997: 38) explains, 'the unfolding of discourse is a succession of cognitive configurations', conceptualised in terms of mental spaces, which can be locally manipulated and derive from a progressive re-arrangement of the mental space initially conjured up at the beginning of a text.

When the debate around the production of non-propositional mental spaces is projected from discourse comprehension to narrative studies, the crucial concept of storyworld emerges: it retains the basic features of mental models, the non-propositional stance, and the unavoidable relationship with language. My thesis adheres to a view of narrative as a discourse genre that aims at the production and co-construction of storyworlds, that is to say mental models, by means of textual cues (Herman 2002: 6). It rests on the assumption that, given the interactive nature of narrative, elaborating a spatially-oriented approach to plot comprehension concerns textual elements as much as reception strategies, because the two aspects are irreducibly interdependent. Readers' cognitive processes are triggered by strategies textually encoded, which means that a narrative can be designed to encourage a certain way to co-construct a storyworld. It is therefore possible to justify specific reactions through specific narrative techniques (Herman 2002). The concept of storyworld adopted in this study is philosophically elaborated by Ronen, refined by literary theorist Ryan and narratologically employed by Herman. Ronen's and Ryan's contributions shall be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3. As preliminary introduction to the concept I shall refer to Herman's claim that *storyworld*, rather than *story*, 'better captures what might be called the ecology of narrative interpretation. […] More generally, *storyworld* points to the way interpreters of narrative reconstruct a sequence of states, events, and actions not just additively or incrementally but integratively or "ecologically"' (2002: 13-14). In this formulation, Herman stresses that if stories are conveyed linguistically, what is retained and manipulated in the readers' minds is not necessarily propositional anymore; the reading activity, therefore, results in the shaping of a non-propositional mental representation of the narrative storyworld. At the same time, the scholar does not dismiss the propositional source and remarks that narratological

models should be concerned with the 'interrelations between linguistic form, world knowledge, and narrative structure' (2002: 90). Introducing the concept of storyworld, therefore, has a significant methodological impact on the analysis of my case studies because it enables me to integrate different approaches, from cognitive to linguistic ones, and to aim for a holistic and multi-layered understanding of the process of narrative comprehension.

The fact itself of positing the notion of storyworld as a co-product of the narrative – produced by the author and re-produced by the reader by means of the text – foregrounds the dimension of space, as this process of mental co-construction draws on cognitive strategies that we develop by learning to make sense of real environments through everyday experience (Emmott 1997; Fludernik 1996; Herman 2002). Bakhtin's (1937/1981) notion of chronotope already preliminarily reassessed the position of space in relation to time, and during the last decades a growing number of theoretical arguments have converged on the assumption, aptly enunciated by Herman, that 'narratives encode emergent spatial relationships among participants, objects and places', thus making of spatiality a core property for the construction of narrative domains (2002: 269, 296). Scholars like Gerrig (1993) and Ryan (1991) describe the reading experience as of the reader 'being transported' or 'fictionally recentered' in the storyworld, while Caracciolo leaves the domain of metaphor behind and argues for a process of 'actualization within the fictional world' of the readers' virtual body (2011: 118; 2014a).

1.2.2. The embodied mind

This re-appraisal of the spatial dimension in narrative understanding is further corroborated by the second principle entailed by a cognitive approach, which posits the nature of the mind as embodied (Johnson 1987, 2008). Introducing the idea of the embodied mind brought about a paradigmatic shift, marking the passage to a second-wave of cognitive sciences. This second-generation stands out in opposition to a first generation of studies heavily influenced by artificial intelligence, which initially fostered a computational notion of mind as a software running on a 'brain-hardware' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 75-6). In the 1970s, cognitive sciences turned from a notion of reason as disembodied and literal, to a view of mind as embodied. Above all, this meant acknowledging that the mind is deeply informed by being situated in the body, which affects both its structure and the way its content is elaborated (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Varela et al. 1993; Wilson and Foglia 2011). Gallese and Lakoff (2005) argue that our conceptual knowledge – that is, our capability to elaborate abstract concepts – stems from perceptual knowledge, and perception is deeply rooted in our sensorimotor system. Language too, as a high-level cognitive activity, must therefore make use of the same structures used in perception and action (2005: 473).

Gallese and Lakoff remark on the plausibility, from an evolutionary perspective, that our abstraction skills developed from pre-existing, more basic forms of knowledge – that is from sensorimotor knowledge – rather than depending on the creation of a separate neuronal system.

The notion of the mind as embodied and the subsequent claim that mental processes are rooted in sensorimotor perception critically impacts on my hypothesis. For one thing, it is compatible and endorses a view of thought as non-propositional. Noë claims that sensorimotor knowledge is non propositional (2004: 118), and Calabrese argues that 'i processi di comprensione dipendono molto meno dalle parole utilizzate che non dagli scenari situazionali presentati dalle narrazioni (il ricorso a sinonimi non muta i dati interpretativi); […] come se la competenza senso-motoria dei neuroni specchio creasse un'equivalenza tra *comprendere* un'azione e *farla*' (2013: 107)[6]. Even more importantly, the assumption of the mind as embodied strongly endorses a privileged role played by spatiality. Drawing on cognitive research on embodiment, Bjornson argues that 'it seems plausible to assume that the same mental operations which allow people to make sense of their physical environments are also called upon when they seek to understand the verbal universes [i.e. storyworlds] they encounter in literary texts' (1981: 51). Experiments in neuroscience seem to confirm that processes of identification happening in the reader's mind are embodied simulations of actions and emotions represented in the narrative (Gallese 2013: 106). More specifically, Gallese and Lakoff suggest that our visual and motor imagery are embodied inasmuch as some parts of the brain that activate when one sees or performs an action, activate also when one imagines doing so (2005: 463-4).

Our sensorimotor knowledge has developed by becoming acquainted with the space in which our body moves through. However, I am less concerned with readers' comprehension of fictional mimetic spaces conjured up by narrative than with the impact that spatiality has on a more abstract level. Particularly interesting to my exploration is the claim that human thought itself is built up metaphorically from the basic kinesthetic experiences of living in a body (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Metaphorically because the link between sensorimotor knowledge and conceptual (abstract) knowledge relies on a process of 'mapping across conceptual domains, from a (typically) sensory-motor source domain to a (typically) non-sensory-motor target domain', which is the basic relation typifying metaphors (Gallese and Lakoff 2005: 469-70). In other words, individuals derive from their sensorimotor knowledge and experience general inference patterns of comprehension called image schemata, which can be applied to 'a wide range of […] forms of causal, spatial, and event-based reasoning' (2005: 471). Reverting to narrative studies and to the issue of

---

[6] In his study, Calabrese draws on experiments carried out on pre-scholar children (Rall and Harris 2000).

plot understanding, it could be argued that also an abstract and high-level cognitive activity such as that required to make sense of a story as a whole ultimately relies on image schemata that are rooted in our sensorimotor system. As Bjornson aptly puts it, 'people seek coherence and consistency in textual images in the same way as they do in their cognitive maps of actual spatio-temporal environments' (1981: 58). In a 2003 essay (then refined in 2014), Ryan pinpoints a number of forms that the spatial dimension of a text can take, which is worth quoting in full:

- The actual space, or geographical context in which the text is produced, or to which the text refers. The mapping of this space is a matter of literary historiography.
- The space signified by the text. By this I mean the geographical, or topographic organization of the textual world, whether this world is real or fictional.
- The "spatial form" of the text, a term coined in the forties by the critic Joseph Frank to describe the metaphorical space constituted by the network of internal correspondences that links the themes, images, or sounds of the text.
- The virtual space navigated by readers, as they move through the text. This space is implied by the reading protocol inherent to the text. In branching texts and textual databases the virtual space is a two-dimensional network of possible routes; in non-branching texts, such as traditional novels, it collapses into a line.
- If we follow the usage of the word map in cognitive science, we can extend the concept to the graphic representation of only partly spatial phenomena, such as narrative plots. As suggested above, a plot is indeed a series of events that take place in a space-time continuum.
- The space physically occupied by the text, such as the codex format and the graphic design of the pages for texts materialized as books. [2003: 336]

The first two forms of space fall under the general rubric of mimetic fictional spaces, as they describe spaces that are regarded as actual within the fictional storyworld, irrespective of their relation to extra-textual reality. The following three types of spaces, instead, are those more closely explored and elaborated on in this thesis. The last type of space, the space physically occupied by the text, is explicitly addressed in Chapter 4, with regard to Calvino's metanarrative practices.

1.2.3. The enactivist framework

To complete the account of the sources for my theoretical framework, enactivism should be mentioned as the theoretical background for Caracciolo's work, which is often referred to in the study. Launched by the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993), the enactivist position stands for a new trend in cognitive sciences and it is grounded on the principle that perception is something we do, rather than something that happens to us

(Noë 2004: 2). It is centred on a view of the mind as embodied and stresses how meaning should emerge from the interaction between text and readers. Illustrated in greater detail in Chapter 2, the enactivist framework will be considered through the work of philosopher of perception Noë (2004) to introduce some basic concepts and to contextualise Caracciolo's theories on the readers' virtual body, which elaborate enactivist principles in the narrative context.

The main asset provided by enactivism to the present research is the bridge between a cognitive framework and reception theories. It maintains a strong stance about the necessary active engagement of readers in the process of co-construction of the storyworld, like individuals are actively involved in the activity of sense-making of reality around them. Active engagement is prompted by textual cues in the same way perceptual affordances work in the actual environment individuals perceive: Noë offers a view of environment – as Caracciolo of storyworlds – as made not only of objects and surfaces but also crucially of affordances, that is things or properties of the environment which enable perceivers to do things. The philosopher suggests that:

> To perceive is (among other things) to learn how the environment structures one's possibilities for movement and so it is, thereby, to experience possibilities of movement and action afforded by the environment. [2004: 105]

The enactivist-based view of a storyworld (originally, an environment) as a system of possibilities productively matches with an approach to narrative understanding that foregrounds virtuality on the one hand and readers' expectations on the other.[7] All of my case studies critically rely on virtuality in a variety of ways; this fact positively emphasises the value of a framework that acknowledges and explains how virtuality can be textually encoded and thus enter narrative comprehension to this study.

Caracciolo (2014a) explores in particular how readers' cognitive engagement potentially depends also on the engagement of readers' virtual body: indeed, some narratives encourage the reader to recentre herself in the fictional mental space, and to do so she has to draw to some extent on practices of self-location in actual environments (cf. Bjornson 1981: 52). Furthermore, I owe to Caracciolo the sense in which the concept of 'experience' is used in my notion of space of narrative experience. Caracciolo intends 'experientiality' as 'the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience' (2014a: 12) to indicate the way texts tap into readers' familiarity with real experience by activating the

---

[7] As Noë argues that 'You enact your perceptual content, through the activity of skillfully looking' (2004: 73), we could say that readers enact narrative content through the activity of skillfully reading. This view thus admits a varied phenomenology of reading, since it acknowledges that readers with different background knowledge, some more skillful than others, might get different experiences from the same text.

same cognitive parameters.[8] Overall, the enactivist approach lends theoretical support to the claim that when readers understand storyworlds they instantiate strategies and mechanisms that are not far from those instantiated in their everyday life to make sense of the reality. It follows that a cognitive perspective and bringing the mind and its workings to the forefront may help illuminate the ways narratives prompt readers' imaginative engagement.

1.3. Plot as structuring design

The focus on plot constitutes the main lens through which case studies are considered in the thesis. Plot should be intended as the narratological element that conveys the overall understanding of the narrative, the macrodesign supposed to guide readers in making sense of its parts and of the whole and 'determining not so much the individual constituents or localized features as the overall contours, the dominant "feel", of the storyworld being mentally modeled' (2002: 7).[9] How profoundly the concept of plot is embedded in our conception of narrative itself clearly emerges from reflections such as Herman's, who convincingly argues that storytelling is a 'basic technology for modelling events in ways that facilitate their arrangement, or *emplotment*, into large patterns' (Herman et al. 2012: 74). Similarly, Bruner suggests that narrative understanding is the perfect implementation of the hermeneutic circle: in order to understand the whole it is necessary to understand the single parts, but in turn each and every part makes sense only in relation to others and therefore, ultimately, in relation to the whole itself. It follows that 'parts and wholes in narrative rely on each other for their viability' (1991: 8).

One of the reasons behind the ambiguities surrounding plot, is that it is an emergent property of the narrative: on the one hand, it is conveyed through the text and as such it can be attached to textual strategies and elements (microdesigns, in Herman's terminology), most of which have been pinpointed by structuralist narratological studies; on the other hand, however, plot is primarily mentally construed by readers. Once again, textual elements and the reception strategies they prompt are irreducibly intertwined, two sides of the same coin. Ryan (1991) argues that plot is not an inherent property of a narrative, but a mental representation, 'an interpretive model built by the mind as it tries to

---

[8] As an aside it should be noted that, although Caracciolo firstly takes the term from Fludernik (1996), my allegiance goes with the former rather than the latter. Fludernik's natural narratology, indeed, goes in a quite different direction from that of the present research, as she explores narrativity as based on the subjectivity of experience. Epigones of the notion of experientiality have explored the concept further, but unlike Caracciolo, they intended it as focusing on the representation of characters' experience (Margolin 1990, 2003, 2007; Palmer 2003, 2004, 2011) rather than on recipients' experience.

[9] In his 2002 study on the processes of re-construction of the storyworld, Herman distinguishes between narrative microdesigns operating at a local level (states, events, actions, and characters) and macrodesigns that concern the principles determining the overall contours of the storyworld (temporalities, spatialisation, perspective, and contextual anchoring).

understand events' (264).[10] As such, it seems reasonable to approach it through a cognitive lens, as the way the mind works may impact on the interpretive strategies on which plot relies. A theoretical notion of plot should therefore be flexible enough to potentially include any principle originating the patterns of coherence designed in a certain narrative, not only the two more common principles of chronology and causality. Although I do not share Brooks' interpretation of plot structure via Freud's psychoanalysis, I believe his reflections are not far from truth when he describes plot as a 'mode of human understanding' (1984: 7), where understanding refers to the activity of 'making-sense of' something.[11] The core reason of my resistance to Brook's approach, albeit fascinating, is that his view of the text as a 'system of internal energies and tensions, compulsions, resistances, and desires' (1984: xiv) is taken as an interpretive grid to be indiscriminately applied to any narrative, irrespective of its proximity to a psychoanalytical perspective. This is opposed to what this study attempts to do when it posits that each text is designed to provide its readers with the tools and cues to implement certain comprehension strategies. In fact, the research aim is to pinpoint the criteria of applicability of a spatially-oriented approach, without assuming that it must always be the most productive. Also, when attempts of reshaping general definitions of plot are advanced, it is always with the objective of extending the extant definitions to accommodate alternative views, rather than replacing other more conventional organising principles.

In this section, I clarify the theoretical premises underlying the concept of plot employed throughout the thesis. I will briefly trace the critical steps that lead from a linearly- and retrospectively-formulated structuralist concept of plot to modally-developed plot models, which integrate developments in narrative studies as explored by postclassical narratology. Then, I advocate the introduction of a dynamic element in plot theory and the need to theorise plot understanding as a process that takes place during reading, through constant re-assessment and involving both textual and extra-textual cues, such as expectations stemming from genre affiliation.

1.3.1. A fundamental ambiguity: minimal versus maximal definitions of plot

Ryan (1991: 124) states that '[t]he most widely accepted claim about the nature of narrative is that it represents a chronologically ordered sequence of states and events'. Although I do not deny that this might be true for a large number of narratives, I believe that there is an equally large number of other stories whose organising principle may not be pre-eminently

---

[10] Ricoeur states something similar when he talks of *emplotment* as a 'configuring act' and a key manifestation of narrativity (1982: 102).
[11] This twofold way of understanding narrative, as artefact target of interpretation on the one hand and tool for making sense of reality on the other, constitutes the core of Herman's theorisations (for its last and more developed elaboration, see Herman 2013).

temporal. It would be desirable that a general notion of plot would not exclude them a priori, and this thesis seeks to take some steps in this direction.

In fact, almost all classical definitions variably identify narrative with sequences of events causally and functionally connected into action-structures (e.g. Bremond 1966/1980; Chatman 1978; Dannenberg 2005b; Greimas 1977; Prince 1982; Propp 1928/1958). Action and change, linked by the principle of causality, thus constitute the common elements on which most of the perspectives on plot converge. In other words, a plot is given by a series of events presented in such a way that they acquire a point.[12] The major problem with classical structuralist definitions of plot stems from an irreducible ambiguity, given by the fact that structuralist scholars resort to the concept of plot to describe both the minimal and necessary conditions for a narrative to be deemed such, and its maximal conditions, that is to account for the complexity and richness of a story (Herman et al. 2012: 57). Almost paradoxically, when Prince compiles the entry in his *Dictionary*, he reports that the term 'plot' is used to define both 'the main incidents of a narrative' and 'the arrangement of [the] incidents' themselves (1987/2003: 73). An example of minimal definition is again offered by Prince's notion of plot as 'the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other' (1982: 4). Maximal definitions, instead, stem from an Aristotelian orientation in narrative theory that tends to give precedence to action over characters and thoughts, and therefore to recognise plot as an overall organising principle.

A productive alternative to this distinction between necessary conditions and degrees of narrativity is offered by Herman (1997: 1048), who introduces the conceptual pair of narrativity and narrativehood. The notion of narrativehood replaces what Ronen calls narrativity, that is the set of minimal conditions necessary for a sequence to be qualified as narrative. 'Narrativity', in turn, is employed to indicate a scalar predicate of narrative sequences that expresses 'the formal and contextual features making a (narrative) text more or less narrative' (Prince 1987/2003: 65), or, to use Ronen's words, the features in terms of which the *quality* of the narrative is judged (1990: 820; Abbott 2011; Davis 2012; Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 18). Attached to the tag of quality, in this case, there is no aesthetic judgment but rather an assessment concerning functionality (Spolsky 2004: 67): variations within the scalar predicate of narrativity express the degree or ways in which various narrative elements, at the story level and discourse level, are integrated and coherently designed to convey a certain (arguable) message.

However, in both minimal and maximal definitions, plot structures are defined in terms of actions and events. As Ronen aptly puts it, '[w]hen plot is tantamount to an

---

[12] Ronen compares the function of 'point' to Labov's (1972) similar evaluative function, and understands it as referring to 'the way the story indicates its aim, purpose, meaning' (cf. Prince 1982; Shen 1985).

action-structure, it points not only to action's centrality in the definition of narrativity, but to the role of the action-domain in organizing the narrative text as a whole' (1990: 819). This implies that all non-narrative parts (e.g. descriptions) and any element or event that either does not push the action-structure forward or is not functional to the ending is systematically excluded from any sort of plot structure, or at best demoted to a secondary category. Distinctions performed relying on this principle – from Tomashevsky's (1965: 67-78) *free* and *bound motifs* to Barthes' (1966/1975: 248 ff) *nuclei* and *catalyses* to Chatman's (1978: 53-6) *kernels* and *satellites* – may be useful insofar one wants to point out the essential features of a narrative but, when it comes to account for narrative complexity, it can hardly be explained through action-structure only. Indirectly addressing the issue, Eco (1979) – whose plot model is pointed at by Ronen as one of the first semantic models – observes that 'narrative structure cannot be accounted for unless the totality of knowledge a narrative text activates is taken into consideration'. With such an assertion, Eco puts the emphasis on the necessity to elaborate plot models that are inclusive of everything that composes the narrative text, irrespective of their action-based nature.

1.3.2. Modal re-structuring and plot as process

Ronen (1990, 1994) explains the shift between classical to postclassical plot models in terms of a shift between syntactic to semantic plot models. Rather than rejecting structuralism, postclassical models progressively disengage from its most strict principles and increasingly integrate syntactic and semantic traits alike. A major aporia inherent to structuralism lies in the fact that semantic integration is officially rejected and yet it actually permeates the very basis of structuralist models, which are highly functionally-oriented. In an attempt to neglect its crucial role, the isolation and naming of narrative units, as well as the definition of their function within the whole action-structure, are explained by Barthes by referring to some unspecified '"language" of narrative' fashioned in us 'through all the narrative acts' (1966/1975: 254). The issue is then simply ignored in the case of Tomashevsky's *motifs* or when it comes to identify roles in actantial models such as Greimas' – where, before being reduced to logical properties functionally described, tags such as 'hero', 'villain', 'helper', 'object' do require a preliminary semantic integration in order to be ascribed.

In fact, Ronen argues that, to some extent, postclassical models result almost naturally from the acknowledgment of discrepancies inherent to the structuralist paradigm, which undergo an overall consistent readjustment. Ronen illustrates how, over the last decades, plot models had their theoretical layout revised around few main points, in dialogue with structuralist models: (a) narrative semantics replaced syntactic

functionalism;[13] (b) more complex and eclectic plot models are elaborated, not necessarily based on one single principle or on action-structures, which directly affects the question of (c) the definition of narrative units, which is no longer merely functionally-based but is the result of an intersection of syntactic and semantic rules; (d) the renewed interest in semantics and content brings along a new interest in the referent, leaving the structuralist anti-referential conception behind.

The assumption that plot should designate not merely the events but the ordering-principle underpinning these events situates my ideal definition toward the side of the spectrum closer to maximal definitions; my research is focused on the exploration of narrativity, rather than narrativehood.[14] Moreover, if it is reasonable to reject the structuralist pursuit of an abstract narrative logic based on syntactic relations irrespective of semantic content, it seems plausible to attempt to isolate the logic behind the design of individual narratives. This is what I aim to do for the three case studies examined in the thesis: to identify and illustrate the underlying logic that structures them and therefore requires to be re-constructed and re-activated by readers to make sense of the narrative.[15] More specifically, it is my contention that the organising principles scaffolding these narratives constitute different articulations variably related to spatiality.

Arguably, the only feature to be thoroughly disputed as a full bias of structuralism is the retrospectively-operating perspective and the consequent static grasp of narrative and plot as given – at least if this is the only perspective to build on. The introduction of a dynamic dimension and the consequent foregrounding of the process of reading represent seminal transformations into the study of narrative. Structuralist narratological accounts mostly fail to consider what happens during the reading process. Conversely, the description of plot as an emergent property that has to be co-construed by readers acknowledges the fact that its comprehension requires constant revision and adjustments (Johnson and Seifert 1999). In doing so, it significantly opens up to virtuality and to possible-worlds theory. This latter framework provides narrative theorists with the conceptual tools to 'assign concrete ontological content to modal concepts' (Ronen 1990: 837) and will be explored in Chapter 3. Introducing a dynamic dimension leads to an understanding of plot no longer as a fixed given, but as the process of co-construction of a flexible structure of diverging alternative courses, resulting from the reader's active participation to the actualisation of narrative through reading. A modally-complex view of plot structure represents a first step toward the disengagement from an action-oriented definition of plot,

---

[13] Ryan defines a narrative semantics 'a description of the cognitive categories in which readers classify the information provided by the text in their effort to make sense of the represented events' (1991: 110).

[14] This position arguably aligns with Herman's, who entitles one of his major works *Story Logic* (2002).

[15] The concept of a logic underlying narrative has one of its early forerunner in Bremond (1973) and is endorsed by Cohen (1979), Herman (2002), and Sturgess (1992).

as it can no longer be defined in terms of (fictional) actual or factual states of affairs only, because, for instance, it has to consider also counterfactual or non-actual states as they are prompted during reading and the ways in which they relate to fictional actuality.[16] In *Lector in fabula* (1979) Eco posits the idea of plot structure as a process of activating some semantic possibilities while narcotising others. In the same year, Perry claims that 'any reading of a text is a process of constructing a system of hypotheses or frames which can create maximal relevancy among the various data of the text' (1979: 43).[17]

Bringing forward concepts such as primacy and recency effects, both Perry and Herman argue that the way fictional events or states of affairs are presented deeply affects the way the reader processes and therefore understands them. 'Primacy effect' is an expression borrowed from psychology by literary theorists to describe the influence exerted by trajectory on the understanding of the narrative as a whole, and in particular that what comes first directly affects the way the reader interprets what comes next. The 'recency effect', conversely, represents the opposite tension, that is the fact that the later information processed strongly casts its influence on the information already in possession (Perry 1979: 54, 57). Moreover, it is not only the order with which information is presented that contributes to the actualisation of the narrative: hypotheses that are aroused and then modified or totally discarded, along with unfulfilled expectations, exert a fundamental influence too.

One last critical point to be emphasised in relation to plot understanding as discussed in this thesis concerns the nature of fictional narratives as artefacts. The point I want to make is adequately expressed by a principle identified by Bruner as hermeneutic composability. It advocates that whatever the elements in the narrative box, as long as the reader 'has' the rules – which are partly cognitive and partly culturally-based – she will make sense of the whole by using the elements at her disposal. Since the reader knows that *she is expected to* find a meaning in the whole, she will arrange the interpretive grids at her disposal in order to *make them* fit for endowing with sense the elements they are applied to. Let me clarify by resorting to a well-known example put forward by E. M. Forster. The writer and critic offers two examples, allegedly juxtaposed, 'The king died and then the queen died' and 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' (1927/2005: 87), and he argues that the former represents a story (sequence of events), whereas the latter is a plot (action-structure). While I see that his purpose is to theoretically distinguish the two cases,

---

[16] Again, Ronen (1990) notes that modal categories had already entered structuralist theories but remained on the fringes: i.e. Bremond's description of plot as a mechanism of *choices among alternative* narrative sequences (1966/1980: 405); Greimas' *modal* utterance as sub-typology of narrative utterances (1977: 30 ff); Todorov's grammar's *mood* (1971/1977).

[17] For early suggestions in favour of integrating modally-oriented plot models in narrative semantics, see Pavel (1980).

my point is that from an interpretive perspective the two examples are exactly the same. In other words, if the two sentences were to be found *in a fictional narrative text* – that is, context being the same – the reader would interpret them equally. Unlike argumentative discourse, narrative is not required to make all the connections explicit: it is the interpreting mind that shall make sense of it, starting from the incomplete pattern it is offered. In fact, the human mind is characterised by such a strong representational hunger (Clark 2001: 167) that it tends to individuate intentions and plans – to find a pattern – even when there is no actual mind behind, for instance in historical nonfictional narratives. Herman (2013: 25-37) recounts the case of Runamo rock, where naturally produced markings on a rock where interpreted at first as runic writings.

Plot understanding and attribution of an overall meaning to a narrative, both during reading and retrospectively once reading is over, are high-level cognitive activities that draw on the interaction between textual cues and background knowledge provided by readers themselves. Background knowledge includes basic cognitive sense-making strategies but also conventions and rules, which are determined by the medium or the genre and do affect readers' understanding of a narrative because they directly operate on their expectations and inference-making. As Herman aptly observes:

> What makes a story a story cannot be ascribed to narrative form alone, but rather arises from the interplay between the *semantic content* of the narrative; the *formal features* of the discourse through which such narrated content manifests itself; and the kinds of *inferences* promoted via this interplay of form and content in particular discourse contexts. [1990: 229 – my emphases]

* * *

This introductory chapter should provide the reader with fundamental grounding to approach the case studies in the next chapters. The brief overview of the theoretical frameworks adopted and the general outline of the conception of plot underpinning the study represent a point of departure that will be enriched and expanded in the course of the thesis. The case studies are not applications or demonstration of an established theory but rather illustrations of its potential, and each of them marks a step further in the elaboration of a fascinating hypothesis – namely, that spatiality can function as narrative organising principle and that plot understanding can be therefore spatially-oriented.

The three case studies share a research perspective (focus on plot and on reception), a set of theoretical premises (non-propositional view of thought and mental processes as grounded in sensorimotor knowledge) and a few recurring concepts (i.e. storyworld and virtuality), with a view to isolating in each narrative the specific logic that

turns their elements into a coherent and integrated whole. It is the purpose of the study not only to explore a theoretical hypothesis but also to show how a spatially-oriented approach may shed new light on specific works. Map, trajectory and fractal are concepts that exhibit deep and diversified connections with spatiality. Rather than describing normative categories, they aim to capture the distinctive nature of the three plot types suggested in the research by pointing at the specificities of the processes of plot understanding designed by each (type of) narrative. Far from offering isolated instances of criticism, however, the study promisingly opens up to the possibility to outline a spatially-oriented approach to narrative understanding. The features pinpointed across the case studies constitute a first productive sketch of the criteria of applicability of such approach, and the frameworks hereby adopted a first exploration in the direction of a theoretical model rooted in spatiality. The next chapter provides a first implementation of the framework outlined so far and the isolation of a preliminary set of features that could be distinctive of a narrative organised according to a spatially-oriented principle.

Chapter Two

Plot as Map: Alessandro Baricco's *City* (or, Nothing to Do with the Metropolis)

Published in 1999, *City* is the third novel by Turinese writer Alessandro Baricco (b. 1958). Successfully welcomed by the public,[18] it has been generally understood by scholarship as a critique of the postmodern metropolis. However, I suggest that the application of a theoretical framework like the one presented in the first chapter is beneficial to Baricco's novel in several respects. This framework foregrounds a cognitive perspective, explores spatiality, and assumes a stance on narrative as textually mediated co-construction of storyworlds; as such, it provides the suitable analytical tools and concepts to emphasise those features of *City* that are arguably most remarkable; it explains how its 'narrative machinery' works (Eco 1979: 24); it opens up to a more coherent interpretation of the novel as a whole.

Drawing critical attention to the element of plot already sets a profitable premise to the investigation of *City*, as the novel is indeed typified by the fact that its tellability almost entirely coincides with its narrativity. Firstly developed in conversational storytelling analysis (Fludernik 2003; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Ochs and Capps 2001), tellability is an intrinsic property used to express why and to whom a story is worth telling, while narrativity is rather associated with narrative artefacts and is concerned with the interconnectedness between story and discourse (Baroni 2011; Herman 2002; Sternberg 2011). In other words, the story of *City* is worth telling in large part because of the way it is narrated. It is thus the strategies that connect together its parts into a whole, its organising principle, that are worth further examination. In turn, narratives like *City* call for a rethinking of the theoretical and literary-critical notion of plot because they expose how

---

[18] Five weeks after its publication, the newspaper *La Stampa* releases a sales ranking chart reporting Baricco's novel at the second position, following Camilleri's *La mossa del cavallo* (Rizzoli). Another novel by Camilleri, belonging to the Montalbano series (*Un mese con Montalbano*, Mondadori), holds the sixth position, URL: http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,avanzata/action,viewer/Itemid, 3/page,8/articleid,0496_04_1999_1165_0008_11630175/. See also Di Bari (2008).

traditional action-based synopses might fail to account for the point of a narrative, that is the story's narrativity.[19]

Recounting what *City* is about is not as straightforward a process as it might seem. It is the story of a child prodigy, Gould, who after graduating in theoretical physics at the age of eleven, at thirteen years old is attending college, receiving an education that is expected to gently lead him in a few years to his destiny: the award of the Nobel prize. Being a genius, however, has its major side-effects: his father living away at the military base where he works, Gould is an extremely lonely and isolated boy, who spends his free time wandering around with his two imaginary friends, the giant Diesel and the mute Poomerang. The narrative focuses on a span of roughly two years, between 1987 and 1989, which corresponds to the period when he makes friends with and employs the randomly met young woman Shatzy Shell as his governess. Over the final pages, the narrative stretches to six years into the future, accounting for Shatzy's death and for Gould's whereabouts. The boy, after deciding to flee his own destiny, has abandoned the academic career and now works as a cleaner in a shopping mall, presumably happier than he would have been had he pursued the life originally set out for him. As to the narrative format, the novel is subdivided into 35 numbered chapters of variable length spanning from a couple of lines to twenty-some pages, preceded by a Prologue and closed by an Epilogue.

This is a fairly reliable summary of *City*: yet, at the same time it does not grasp what typifies this narrative the most, nor does it account for the majority of events actually recounted throughout the narrative, which mostly consists of episodes and digressions that do not directly concern the plot as I just summarised it. In order to summarise *City* with a coherent account as the one formulated above, we would have to read through the actual matter of the narration including the assemblage of excerpts of the Western authored by Shatzy, the imaginary conversations between Diesel and Poomerang, the story of Larry the boxer that Gould invents while he is sitting on the toilet, the lectures delivered by his college professors.

My investigation into the spatial dimension of plot breaks new ground in the scholarship on Baricco because it lays stress on features that have thus far been neglected by extant criticism (2.1.1). The results presented in the chapter demonstrate that *City* is designed according to narrative strategies that aim at keeping the reader's engagement alive, and work to ensure its readability at various levels. Starting from how readers are

---

[19] The notion of point was introduced by AI researcher Wilensky (1983) and subsequently borrowed in sociolinguistics and in discourse and narrative theory. While according to Wilensky points pertain to the content of a story, '[t]hey characterize those contents that constitute reasonable stories and account for the existence of that story as an item to be communicated' (583), Ryan convincingly observes that points do not necessarily coincide with action-structures as they can belong to the story as well as to discourse (1991: 153; cf. also Prince 1983).

guided through the numerous shifts of context and perspective staged in the novel to the way the text engages readers' background knowledge (that is, knowledge that is not conveyed directly by the narrative), my discussion illustrates how *City* consistently provides readers with the affordances to successfully co-construct the narrative storyworld. Caracciolo's enactivist framework, Emmott's cognitive theory of discourse comprehension, and script theory as elaborated in post-classical narratology provide the discussion with the suitable analytical tools and concepts to foreground these strategies and explain how they impact on the reader's understanding of the narrative. It is my contention that the 'narrative machinery' of *City* works precisely because its textually encoded strategies operate synergistically to convey the view of the narrative as something to be explored as a space. The considerations emerging from the application of these frameworks will be supplemented and confirmed through the close-reading of narrative and paratextual elements of *City*, but also by drawing on Baricco's own critical – if targeting a popular audience – production, collected in *I barbari* (2006/2008).

In turn, Baricco's novel offers interesting insights for theoretical reflection. It provides the terrain to productively test the hypothesis that not all plots exhibit chronology or causality as main organising principles, and that some narrative prompt a spatially-oriented understanding of plot instead. Building on a re-interpretation of the novel as a narrative about urban reality, my reading argues instead that the image of the city works as a cognitive metaphor. As such, the title does not address a theme but a set of comprehension strategies that should be used to understand the narrative as a whole. *City* offers a productive starting point for attempting to isolate the textual strategies through which a plot could be deemed as spatial. My analysis suggests ways in which the text could encourage readers to tap into their sensorimotor knowledge and into the cognitive processes involved with making sense of spatial relations.

If any, Baricco's affiliation to 'middle-culture' (Macdonald 1963; cf. Coccia 2014) stems from a certain deliberate combination of naivety, a sensationalism rich in pathos and a pleasurable lightness in his approach to fundamental existential questions, and from a perhaps excessively self-satisfied compliance with the alleged desires of the reader.[20] On the other hand, precisely as a result of his cultivated attention to readers' response, Baricco's mastery of the narrative medium and its strategies is hard to deny: irrespective of an evaluation of the content of his oeuvre, it is on his implementation of certain narrative techniques in *City* that this discussion focuses. More specifically, I will look into how textual information is managed and how extra-textual information is integrated – both crucial

---

[20] Among the scholars who acknowledge Baricco's narrative skills, see Casadei (2007) and La Porta (1999). Nicewicz (2011) offers an overview of the broader debate referring, among others, to Berardinelli et al. (2006), Berselli (2006), Ferroni (2005, 2006a, 2006b), Jansen (2002).

phases of narrative understanding. My examination builds on the finer-grained analysis of the Prologue of *City*, which displays a number of mechanisms and prompts strategies that are then reproduced on a larger scale throughout the whole narration.

2.1. A productive shift of perspective

2.1.1. The city as theme: the postmodern metropolis

Faced with the controversial nature of Baricco's work, scholars have mainly focused on linguistic and discursive features (Bellavia 2001; Scarsella 2003), on social and thematic aspects (Bonsaver 2001; Tarantino 2006), or on traits which have been variously linked to the postmodern, from kitsch to intertextuality (Casadei 2002; Giannetto 2002; La Porta 1999; Scarsella 2003). Within a scholarship that is not extensive, there are very few works that have attempted to look at the macrodesigns governing the narrative of *City* and to account for what I referred to in Chapter 1 as the *logic* underlying the narrative. In other words, to look for that potential set of features – be they mimetic, or thematic, or metanarrative – that may work as general principle(s) giving coherence to the narrative.

Attempts in this direction have been proposed by Nicewicz (2009), Rorato (2001), Rorato and Storchi (2004), and Piazza (2007),[21] whose readings of *City* stress the centrality of the postmodern metropolis. Rorato argues that *City* is entirely devoted to the representation of the postmodern metropolis through the bodies that inhabit it (2001: 245). Similarly, in her follow-up article co-authored with Storchi, they suggest that *City* aims to represent a new 'globalised habitat', juxtaposed to the 'traditional concept of *città*, where space and time form a harmonious and meaningful entity, [which] is no longer suitable to express the globalized, metropolitan reality of many Italian cities' (2004: 251 – de-italicised). According to Piazza, *City* portrays the metropolis as 'teatro di un'umanità di passaggio' (2007: 121). Scarsella recognises in the adoption of a metropolitan frame a programmatic choice (2003: 94). Nicewicz suggests that *City* is a metropolitan work par excellence, whose true protagonist is indeed the city (2009: 161). However, if we look at the summary of the novel, it would appear that the story recounted in *City* is hardly about urban life or dimension at all. In fact, in the whole novel there is only one scene set in a typically urban context (23-28). It is my contention that the alleged identity between the title of the novel and its thematic core stems from a hermeneutic *faux pas*. This is not just a matter of personal interpretation, as it seems to be endorsed by a series of problematic ambiguities that result from pursuing a reading of *City* as a novel about the contemporary metropolis.

---

[21] Pezzin (2001) offers an intentionally general and descriptive introduction to Baricco's oeuvre; Giannetto's (2002) and Zangirolami's (2008) monographs take into account the whole production of the author with a particular focus on the fascination for storytelling and the theme of destiny, respectively.

Critics defended their point by stressing the polarisation between *città* and *city*, and with it the features that allegedly typify the postmodern metropolis. In order to highlight the sense of loss and displacement assumed to be prototypical of the postmodern metropolis, scholars overemphasised the indeterminacy of time and space to the extent that some critical observations even seem to stand in contradiction to the text. Rorato and Storchi observe that Baricco's representation of the city corresponds to a process of 'etherealisation', and that 'no indications of space or time are provided' (2004: 252). However, even though the narrative is not set in a real city, it is undeniably a verisimilar one, reminiscent perhaps of a North-American town: the protagonist Gould goes to college and is supposed to go to Couverney University; his father works at the Arpaka military base (33); most of the names would not look out of place in an American context. The fact that the location is fictional does not imply per se any geography of 'loss and displacement' – as instead it has been argued. Also temporal signposts are clearly offered: the novel opens by specifying in the very first page that the narrative begins in October 1987, while halfway through the story the narrator points out that it is now September 1988 and Gould is celebrating his fourteenth birthday (135); a few pages later, the narrative recounts of an important academic achievement of Gould, dating it February 1989. It follows that, although interspersed with many conversations that may indeed make the reader lose track of time, time is definitely not annihilated.

Along similar lines, Nicewicz and Rorato and Storchi refer to the notion of 'non-place', elaborated by the anthropologist Augé to identify 'il contrario del luogo, uno spazio in cui colui che lo attraversa non può leggere nulla né della sua identità (del suo rapporto con se stesso), né dei suoi rapporti con gli altri' (2000: 75). They argue that

> In *City* the urban imagery is constructed through an accumulation of 'non-places', or places whose identities (and consequently the identities of the human beings transiting those places) are blurred, distorted, artificial: motorway restaurants, shopping malls, the 'Ideal Home Exhibition', fast-food restaurants. [Rorato and Storchi 2004: 253]

According to Augé, the non-place is the typical product of contemporary age, which he calls 'supermodernity'. As a matter of fact, examples of non-places include several settings that also feature in Baricco's novel and, as this concept complies with the sense of displacement advocated by many scholars, it is not surprising that they should draw on it in their critical readings. It could also be well argued that, on some occasions, Baricco employs certain places (i.e. the diner) to express a criticism toward the isolation of the individual in

contemporary Western society.[22] Yet, Rorato and Storchi themselves admit that the attitude toward these non-places in the novel appears, at best, ambiguous (2004: 253). My suggestion is that this is because they are not non-places at all: rather than being characterised by a lack of identity, places such the diner, the shopping mall or the museum are typified by a strong and recognisable identity, and this is what makes them useful to Baricco's narrative machinery.[23] In the remainder of the chapter, I shall build on the notions of script and contextual frame to demonstrate how Baricco capitalises on the recognisability of these fully-fledged, if fictional, places in order to enhance the narrativity of the story.

Finally, the novel is surely characterised by a fragmentary structure. Different discourse types and styles are juxtaposed according to modalities and with designed effects that I shall thoroughly explore in this chapter. Yet, the majority of the extant scholarship has drawn on the multilinearity of the narrative to further endorse the comparison with the postmodern metropolis which, described as a 'collage' made of fragments and juxtapositions among different cultures, arguably embodies a reality 'dove tempo e spazio sono compressi e privati di significato: nella città nuova tutto è presente e contemporaneo in quanto non esiste più il passato e non esiste più la distanza' (Amendola 1997: 50). Again with a view to endorsing the claim of a collapsing temporal and spatial dimension, Nicewicz observes that in *City* 'le immagini si accavallano l'una sull'altra, come fluire dei pensieri, senza nessuna logica. Anzi, a volte troviamo pezzi di storie, là, dove meno ce li aspettiamo' (2009: 163). If we look at these 'pieces of stories', though, we see that they belong to a limited number of intertwined narrative strands, linked to one another in a way that can be hardly described as devoid of logic.

Arguably, one of the main elements that might confuse the reader is the fact that *City* is made of several storylines, some of which do not even directly interact with the others. To further complicate the situation, not all the characters belong to the same ontological storyworld, and this information is ingeniously retained from the reader, who is

---

[22] For the ambiguity of *City*'s criticism, however, consider Shatzy's attitude toward the same scene at the diner (or toward the Ideal Home Exhibition), which seems to prompt a negative interpretation first and then instead is surprisingly praised by the character: 'io guardai tutto quello ed è chiaro che c'era solamente da pensare *che vomito, ragazzi*, una cosa da vomitare tanto era triste, e invece quello che mi successe fu che […] io pensai *Dio che bello*, con addosso perfino un po' di voglia di ridere, accidenti com'è bello tutto questo, proprio tutto, fino all'ultima briciola di roba schiacciata per terra, fino all'ultimo tovagliolino unto, senza sapere perché, ma sapendo che era vero, era tutto dannatamente bello. Assurdo, no?' (14 – emphases in the original).

[23] In an article in preparation ('Urban space as cognitive metaphor? Suggestions from Alessandro Baricco's *City*', recently submitted for peer review as contribute to Giovannoni and Ross (eds.) *Crossdisciplinary Approaches to Urban Space*, Firenze, DIDA press), I argue that Foucault's (1984/1986) notion of heterotopia would be better suited to describe the type of places conjured up in *City*. In fact, Nicewicz does refer to heterotopias in her article, but she does not offer any further indication as to how to understand the similarities and dissimilarities with Augé's non-places and appears to use the two concepts interchangeably. By contrast, I suggest that Augé's and Foucault's notions capture different features of places, and that privileging their interpretation as heterotopias also illuminates the broader interpretive shift I argue for, from city as a theme to city as cognitive metaphor.

given only increasing clues of the truth throughout the narration. As soon as the narrative proceeds, the reader realises that some characters surely belong to the actual (fictional) storyworld, including the protagonist Gould, his parents, his professors (Dr Martens, Mondrian Kilroy, professor Taltomar), and his governess and friend Shatzy Shell. Most of these entities originate, in turn, other departing narrative strands. Shatzy records on tape passages of a Western story centred on the fictional deserted city of Closingtown, while the professors recount lectures and anecdotes. The main source of virtual storyworlds, however, is Gould himself: he has two imaginary friends constantly interacting with him, the giant Diesel and the mute Poomerang, and is used to entertain himself when he sits on the toilet by imagining the adventures of boxer Larry Gorman and his coach Mondini. These narratives or imaginative acts instantiate embedded storyworlds which are virtual inasmuch as they are not actual, in the sense that they and their entities do not belong to the same ontological level – or degree of existence – of the main characters. Unlike traditional framed narratives, the ontological boundaries between the various storyworlds in *City* are sometimes blurred: Gould interacts with Diesel and Poomerang in a way that tricks readers into believing that they are (fictionally) actual characters; the boxing matches are narrated via a running commentary that is produced by Gould himself, although this is not immediately clear to the reader. As she proceeds in her reading, the reader is given more and more clues to make clear what stories and characters are imagined by Gould or Shatzy and what events and conversations are real instead ('Lei non trova spaventoso che un bambino giri tutto il tempo con due amici che non esistono?', 250). All doubts are ultimately swept away, so that the reader is not left dealing with an ontologically subverted narrative world. If the quick shifts from one narrative strand to the other may seem initially confusing, they are definitely not without logic. More interestingly, I shall argue that the logic underpinning the connections among narrative excerpts resides precisely in the strong recognisability of narrative places and contexts that scholars tend to deny.

In conclusion, building on the assumption that *City* is meant to thematically convey a critique of the modern metropolis, scholars are formulating not fully-convincing interpretations of the alleged indeterminate nature of its settings: a significant game-changer could be the hypothesis that *City* may *not* be primarily meant to represent a metropolis in the first place.

2.1.2. The city as cognitive metaphor: a map for the reader

Let us take a closer look at the paratextual passage on the back cover of the novel as it appears in the 1999 first edition for Rizzoli. In addition to the seemingly obvious hint of the

title, many critics rely on this excerpt to support the position previously outlined, that *City* is meant to represent our lived urban environment:

> Questo libro è costruito come una città, come l'idea di una città. Mi piaceva che il titolo lo dicesse. Adesso lo dice.
> Le storie sono quartieri, i personaggi sono strade. Il resto è tempo che passa, voglia di vagabondare e bisogno di guardare. Ci ho viaggiato per tre anni, in *City*. Il lettore, se vorrà, potrà rifare la mia strada.

The first line is crucial to my argument: the narrative is *constructed like* a city. It does not *represent* a city. The connection stressed here concerns the macrodesign, not the object, of narrative representation. My suggestion is that the reference to the city is not to be intended as a thematic pointer but rather as a cognitive metaphor. In other words, the idea of the city is offered to the reader to provide her with the best way to make sense of the narrative as a whole, as a mental image to guide the process of connecting the parts of the narrative together. The city works as metaphor because comprehension is enabled by a 'conceptual cross-domain mapping' that is proper of this technique (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 70); the metaphor is cognitive because it concerns the way the narrative is cognized, that is to say it is made sense of. The metaphor, in this case, does not express a similarity between entities – e.g. 'John is a lion' means that the features of the lion are cross-mapped onto the features of John – but rather a similarity between modes of sense-making. To put the same concept another way, the reader should make sense of the narrative in the same way the traveller/walker makes sense of a city. Hence, it is no longer a matter of words, words that would belong to a domain but can be used to describe another, but of forms of reasoning, which are normally used to reason about the city (that is, about a space) and whose use is now prompted to reason about a narrative.

In advancing the notion of cognitive metaphor, I refer to the theoretical framework of phenomenological embodiment, firstly posited by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993) and hereby adopted in the further elaboration by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). By introducing the notion of conceptual metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson intend to challenge the idea, substantially ingrained in most of Western thought (epitomised by the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*), that our reason exists independently from our body.[24] By contrast, they argue for a notion of reason as embodied (or mind as embodied), a view that aims to account for the fact that the human cognitive ability to elaborate abstract concepts – as, for example, understanding a narrative as a whole, which is quite a high-level cognitive operation – ultimately builds on our sensorimotor experience, which in turn shapes the way we

---

[24] See also Fauconnier and Turner (2008) and Gallese and Lakoff (2005: 469-70).

elaborate these abstract concepts and our subjective experience.[25] Conceptual metaphor is the general expression that Lakoff and Johnson use to indicate the fundamental link that enables our cognition to move from sensorimotor knowledge to any superior kind of abstract knowledge; in this chapter, I adopt the term cognitive metaphor to describe a metaphoric connection between narrative sense-making strategies.[26]

The image of the city fits the specific use Baricco makes of it, firstly because he arguably aims to tap into the readers' knowledge not only of a generic space but of a familiar environment – as an urban environment is likely to be; secondly, because the city describes an inherently composite and multifarious environment, which evokes a closer analogy with a composite novel made of multiple storylines; thirdly, although I advocated that this is not his main point, Baricco does take up some occasions to portray aspects of contemporary society, and this, at least in the Western world, is characterised by a typically urban setting.

Yet, in using the description of 'plot as map' as the overarching image for this chapter, my purpose is to draw on the particular case of the city – and of this novel – to build a more general case. On the one hand, Baricco's reference to the city is specific enough to prompt me to seek for an image that could be the carrier of a more generalised value, in order to indicate with this label a broader category of narratives. On the other hand, the considerations I shall advance throughout the chapter in relation to an understanding of plot as city can still be applied to an understanding of plot as map, because my arguments depend more on the spatial nature of the city and less on its specifically urban character.

More precisely, if the city is the cognitive metaphor offered to the reader to make sense of the narrative as a whole, the process of plot understanding amounts to the process of exploration of the city-narrative; in other words, to the elaboration of a mental map. Plot, intended as the constantly re-assessed outcome of narrative understanding, is the product, while the mapping process conceptualises the reader's narrative experience in spatial terms. The term 'cognitive map' was first employed in 1948 by psychologist Tolman and refers to 'an individual's knowledge of spatial and environmental relations, and the cognitive processes associated with the encoding and retrieval of the information from which it is composed' (Kitchin and Blades 2002: 1). What makes the concept of map

---

[25] A quick but effective example from Lakoff and Johnson (1999): at the first step of the process that connects our sensorimotor experience with our capability to elaborate abstract thought, there are primary metaphors, such as *Affection is Warmth*. Affection is a subjective experience that we make sense of by drawing on our sensorimotor experience of warmth, which is something understood by and through the body. However, Lakoff and Johnson themselves remark that the affiliation of an individual to a specific culture is crucial and its impact on the way certain concepts are elaborated should not be underestimated.

[26] The expression has some affinities with the concept of epistemological metaphor, advanced by Eco in relation to his concept of open work (1962: 23).

particularly useful to my research is that maps capture the way individuals cognize the relation between the whole and its constituents, what Moore and Golledge define 'structural inter-relatedness' (1976: xii). In this sense, maps and plots share a fundamental property: far from duplicating reality (as this would make it pointless), a map provides an orienting mechanism and an interpretive grid (Bjornson 1981; Muehrcke and Muehrcke 1974) as much as plot, although it emerges from the story as a whole, should convey its organising principle, on the basis of which readers understand the narrative.

In this light, it might be argued that the process of narrative understanding could be always described as a mapping process, irrespective of the type of narrative analysed. In their work on cognitive mapping, Downs and Stea (1977) – a geographer and a psychologist, respectively – point out that the cognitive and mental abilities that enable us to understand and navigate a spatial environment are the same ones we use, more generally, to 'collect, organize, store, recall, and manipulate [any kind of] information' (6): individuals, for instance, employ cognitive mapping abilities in order to make sense of personal experience. The comparison between plot understanding and cognitive mapping surely points toward a fascinating direction for research; however, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate its full impact and I shall limit the use of the concept of map in relation to plot only to indicate a specific – if negotiable – category of plot types, epitomised by the novel analysed in this chapter.

By advancing the analogy of plot as map, my purpose is less to focus on the process of plot understanding as cognitive mapping of a narrative than to outline a category of narratives which aim to portray a state of affairs or a situation that could be broadly deemed as static. This category expects to include narratives, such as *City*, that are designed to guide their readers through an exploration of their conditions of narrativity, rather than their evolution. The plot is described as a map because to understand the plot means for readers to map out the states of affairs and the issues that typify a certain storyworld in its dynamic equilibrium. As Ryan points out, '[t]he association of the concepts of map and narrative presupposes that we expand the widely accepted definition of narrative as the expression of the *temporal* nature of human experience into a type of meaning that involves the four dimensions of a space-time continuum' (2003: 335).

2.2. Contextual frame theory

2.2.1. Introducing contextual frames

As anticipated in Chapter 1, recent work in narrative theory draws on a cognitive perspective and a non-propositional view of thought to advance the hypothesis that

'grasping the *when*, *what*, *who*, and *where* of events being recounted is a matter of actively building and updating the mental representations', or storyworlds (Herman 2002: 270). Such an approach entails an understanding of events not in terms of transient entities running along a chain of facts temporally conceived, but rather in terms of progressive modifications of a storyworld and of the interrelationships connecting its entities, namely objects or characters.[27] I already pointed out that embracing a non-propositional view of thought does not deny the impact of the text: in fact, as one reads, any additional linguistic specification modifies the discourse model and, by doing so, also modifies the mental model of the storyworld, either by actively changing its fictional configuration or by changing the perspective from which it is mentally represented.[28]

The reason why *City* represents a case study worth further investigation is that in this novel the overall storyworld does not go through major changes, or at least not significant enough to cause Gould to break free from his existential impasse until the very end of the narrative. Rather, the narrative is designed as an exploration for the reader to undertake, an encouragement for interpreters to map out the fictional state of affairs: things do happen, but the point of the narrative is less in their chronological unfolding and more, if any, in their accumulation. By analysing *City* as my case study, I am evaluating whether the tellability of a story may stem from the exploration of a static state of affairs.

In this sense, the cognitive aspects usually relied on to make sense of a space may play a more relevant role than the one they would have had chronology occupied a pre-eminent function. Yet, if the state of affairs portrayed in *City* is relatively static, its narration is, on the contrary, quite lively. I argue that this dynamism may be ensured by the swift changes of perspective (and storyline) and I suggest that the cognitive mechanisms underpinning the maintenance of coherence in plot understanding are productively described by Emmott's (1997) contextual frame theory. Contextual frame theory productively fits within my project not only because its theoretical premises are compatible with the other theories I build on, but because it provides suitable tools to parse those cognitive operations prompted by the narrative understanding designed in *City*. The concept of contextual frame is not usually counted among the traditional narratological components, and its visibility is granted precisely by theories that adopt a cognitive lens and foreground processes taking place in the mind as response to the narrative.

---

[27] 'A central assumption of this model [situation model] is that the main purpose of constructing a situation model is to monitor what characters are involved in a story, what is happening to them, what their goals are, and how they are achieving those goals, all within narrative time and space. As each story event and action is comprehended, readers monitor changes in continuity in characters and objects, time, space, causality, and intentionality. Changes along these dimensions cue the reader that the mental representation for a story must be updated' (Magliano et al. 1999: 220).

[28] Remarking the importance of change in narrative – and, thus, the fact that narrative requires a progression of some sort and therefore a movement through time – reasserts once again the undiminished significance of time.

Plot emerges as the reader understands the mechanisms that regulate these configurational changes affecting the storyworld. As Dannenberg (2008: 12) observes in her endorsement of a cognitive approach to narrative studies,

> [p]recisely because the cognitive research explores the overall sense-making patterns that the human mind within the human body uses to negotiate its way through the spatial and temporal environments of life, it can be used to study plot by investigating how narrative fiction simulates both the experience and the conceptualization of time and space.

While not laying any claim to sorting out the inherent theoretical instability of the notion of plot – in fact, embracing it – Dannenberg argues that coming to terms with the plot actually represents the 'attempt to make sense of a larger, unorganized entity' (2008: 13), and that therefore plot understanding as a process that unfolds throughout reading becomes an active cognitive operation that capitalises on a range of cognitive connecting patterns.

Emmott's theory of contextual-frame shifts aims to explain how narrative comprehension takes place and specifically, to put it in Herman's words, 'how readers of written narratives supplement text-based or propositional information with situation-based information' (Herman 2002: 270). She individuates its key processes in the interrelations between text and reader's knowledge, inference-making, and referencing. Building on an approach hinging on mental representations as formulated by Johnson-Laird (1983) rather than on a propositional approach,[29] Emmott posits the notion of contextual frame as 'a mental store of information about a particular context' (1997: 132), which includes '"episodic" information about a configuration of characters, location, and time at any point in a narrative' (1997: 104). She defines, then, contextual monitoring as an active form of memory which expresses the reader's awareness of the narrative configurations – namely, groupings of characters, objects and relations among them – 'located at specific space-time coordinates in the storyworld' (Herman 2002: 270), in terms of continuity and change (1997: 106, 115). Emmott points out two main types of contextual monitoring: *binding*, which defines processes related to the establishment of episodic connections among narrative entities, and *priming*, which describes changes in the attentional focus of the reader (Chilton 2014).[30]

Also relevant for an investigation of Baricco's novel are ideas advanced by Goffman (1974) concerning frame analysis. Although his discussion was developed with regard to

---

[29] In her discussion of linguistic theories of reference, Emmott (1997) distinguishes between 'referent in the text' models and 'referent in the mind' models, opting for the latter type. Such distinction and the predilection for the 'referent in the mind' model was firstly posited and explicitly argued for by Brown and Yule (1983).

[30] Although contextual monitoring – including both binding and priming – concerns episodic relationships, Emmott stresses that when readers process a text they have to remain aware of non-episodic relationships too, which remain true beyond specific contexts.

conversational narratives, I believe it may still productively employed for my case study due to the fact that Baricco's narratives are strongly characterised by an attempt to reproduce the rhythms and features of orality. Unlike Emmott and Herman who conceive frames in terms of mental representations, Goffman deploys the notion of frame with the meaning of 'boundary', to indicate the 'brackets' that delimit parts of discourse characterised by different reality statuses. He pinpoints eight types of frames:

Conversation[Preface[Opening[Orientation[Beginning
[Story]End]Closing]Evaluation]Coda]Conversation

As Young (2005) aptly summarises in her entry on 'Frame Theory' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, beginnings and ends frame events for stories and therefore belong to the storyworld; openings and closings frame stories for conversations and therefore belong to storyrealm (Young 1986)[31]; prefaces and codas are part of the realm of conversation and are indeed responsible for soliciting permission to suspend and reinstitute turn taking, respectively. The orientation section preceding stories usually provides readers with information useful to follow it and at the same time directs the hearers' attention toward the storyworld, while the evaluation section comprises the hearers' expression of their emotional response and frames storyworld and storyrealms as potential aesthetic objects. In order to avoid terminological confusion, whenever I use the term 'frame' I do so in Emmott's sense; when I use it to refer to Goffman eight types of frames, I will adopt from now on the disclaimer expression 'B-frame' (boundary-frame). Moreover, as the object of my analysis is a written narrative and not a conversation, I shall adapt Goffman's model to fit within the storyworld created by the act of narration. The level of 'conversation' will thus correspond to the narrator's narration; to operate such a shift does not seem inappropriate, given that the narrator indeed adopts techniques and types of B-frames that remind of those typical of a conversation. By providing a close reading of the Prologue through the occurring frame shifts, my purpose is to demonstrate how consistently and extensively the narrative capitalises on them. To ensure readability, I devote 2.2.2 to the description of the contextual-frame shifts, while I postpone the ensuing considerations and comments to 2.2.3.

In his monograph, Scarsella identifies the alternation of different discourse styles – short story, anecdote, lecture, stream of consciousness – as the principle and driving force of the narration ('il principio e il motore della narrazione', 2003: 92). My suggestion is that this isolated insight should be taken seriously, and that by framing it within a cognitive

---

[31] Young's notion of 'taleworld' corresponds to what, along with Herman, I define here 'storyworld', whereas 'storyrealm' is 'the narrative discourse that reports the story' (2005: 186).

approach it gains full theoretical potential. The alternation acknowledged by Scarsella is not simply a matter of style; it rather mirrors a process that affects the narration at a more structural level and could be better described in terms of alternation of contextual frames. Emmott's theorisation allows for a reformulation of the issue in terms not of how a certain content is expressed, but of how the various parts are connected, how the narrative proceeds and how it keeps engaging the reader – namely, a set of processes that fall within the scope of the notion of plot.

2.2.2. The Prologue: a description of the contextual-frame shifts

> – Allora, signor Klauser, deve morire Mami Jane?
> – Che vadano tutti a cagare.
> – È un sì o un no?
> – Lei che ne dice? [9]

The narrative opens with four lines of direct speech (initially not recognised as a phone call) that already set up a first contextual frame to which at least two fictional interlocutors are bound in, so far unidentified. After the four lines, the narrator takes on the narration, performing a frame switch from the direct-speech frame. In a retrospective way the narrator outlines the Orientation B-frame, informing the reader of the identity of Mami Jane and of the context of the telephonic poll among the readers, in the course of which the direct speech – now understood to be a sample phone call – had taken place. The narrator also isolates an expectedly relevant character by introducing, and thus priming, the figure of Shatzy Shell among the eight secretaries in charge of performing the poll. If the Orientation for the first call is offered retrospectively, the next contextual frame is instead introduced by means of a proper Opening:

> Shatzy Shell sentì suonare il telefono per la ventunesima volta, scrisse sul modulo che aveva davanti la cifra 21 e sollevò il ricevitore. Ne seguì la seguente conversazione. [10]

Within the broader contextual frame that binds in the CRB office as the location where Shatzy Shell is working together with other seven secretaries, the more specific contextual frame of a phone call is now primed, binding in the character of Shatzy and the other interlocutor, a 13-year-old kid named Gould. During the conversation, Shatzy herself performs a narrating task, thus triggering another frame switch from the phone call frame to that of the diner, a different contextual frame that binds in a different setting and an array of other fictional entities; Shatzy's story is introduced by a Preface and signalled by a proper Beginning ('Una volta ero'):

<pre>
[Gould] – È tutto sempre così splendido per lei? […]
[Shatzy] – Sì… credo di sì.
           – Splendido.
           – Cioè… mi succede spesso, ecco.
           – È una fortuna.
           – Mi succede anche nei momenti più strani.
           – Credo che sia una fortuna, davvero.
           – Una volta ero in una tavola calda, sulla Statale 16, appena fuori città
[…] [13]
</pre>

Later on, the reinstitution of turn-taking is properly signalled by means of a Coda ('Assurdo, no?', 14), which ends Shatzy's story, unprimes the diner contextual frame, and recalls the telephone conversation frame, bringing back the reader's attentional focus onto it. The following shifts from the telephone conversation between Shatzy and Gould and the verbal interaction between Shatzy and her boss in the office, are easily understood thanks to diacritic markers. Once the call is finished (B-framed by phatic expressions that amount to a Closing in Goffman's model), the narrator describes Shatzy as she leaves the office after being fired and mentions a few details: that Shatzy changes her tennis shoes into high heeled shoes, and that she collects in her bag two framed pictures, portraying Eva Braun and Walt Disney respectively.

Here the reader experiences an unexpected shift: the contextual frame of the office is suddenly unprimed and a new unidentified contextual frame is instated, marked by an Opening in the form of a direct speech ("'Capito?'" / "'Più o meno.'", 20) that leads straight to a Beginning of a new story: "'Faceva il pianista in un enorme centro commerciale'" (20). Since the story tells the reason why someone should carry around the portrait of Eva Braun, the reader is prompted to identify the narrator of the story as Shatzy. The frame switch is signalled by a change in the use of diacritic signs – inverted commas rather than the dash, previously used for reporting the phone call – and by a clear change of topic. Once again, a Coda signals the reinstitution of turn-taking and the End of the 'Eva Braun's picture' story. The two following lines of direct speech bind the character of Shatzy to the likely setting of a diner or a fast-food ("'Buono l'hamburger?'", 23) and thus trigger the preliminary hypothesis that the interlocutor may be Gould, since during the phone call he had invited Shatzy to celebrate his birthday, the following day, at the diner she has been talking about in her first story. However, the reader's wondering is interrupted soon enough by another contextual-frame shift, performed by the narrator overtly taking the storytelling floor: the narrator unprimes the contextual frame of Shatzy and (possibly) Gould, and primes instead the contextual frame binding Diesel and Poomerang on their way to the CRB office, as anticipated by Gould's warning phone call:

> Finì, comunque, che Diesel e Poomerang non arrivarono mai alla CRB perché all'incrocio tra la Settima Strada e il Boulevard Bourdon si trovarono davanti agli occhi, in mezzo al marciapiede, il tacco a spillo di una scarpa nera […]. [23]

The following five pages display a complex interaction of overlapping and shifting frames. The contextual frame introduced by the narrator – binding in the street setting, Diesel, Poomerang, and the stiletto heel – remains primed, but the attentional focus of the reader zooms in onto the detail of the heel. In turn, this detail prompts the priming of a new contextual frame that nonetheless seems characterised by a weaker ontological status: by looking at the stiletto heel, Diesel and Poomerang are described in the process of *seeing* the scene that had led the woman to break and lose the heel. This happens in a continuous switching from the hypothetical contextual frame binding the woman to the contextual frame binding Diesel and Poomerang. The impression of a weaker status of the former frame is enhanced by the fact that, even though it looks like a flashback, it is actually a *present* imaginary reconstruction:

> Fissavano quel tacco nero, a spillo, e fu un niente vedere – un attimo dopo l'inevitabile flash di una caviglia in nylon scuro – vedere il passo che l'aveva perso, esattamente il passo […]. [i] capelli – corti neri, pensò Diesel – corti biondi, pensò Poomerang – lisci e sottili […]. [24]

What follows poses an even more unexpected challenge to the reader's activity of contextual monitoring. While the frame binding in the woman is primed, the other one binding in Diesel and Poomerang is never fully unprimed, and, despite being on the background, it remains active as it contains the focalisers to which the foreground frame is attached. Once again, the zoom on a detail of the reader's (along with Diesel's and Poomerang's) attentional focus works as a bridge to trigger another frame shift: the glimpse of the woman's thigh while she takes seat into a taxi is randomly spotted also by an unknown man, and the moment of joint attention with the main frame's focalisers causes the bystander to get bound in to the frame. The woman is bound out, determining a rearrangement of the central directory, that is the set of characters bound in to a frame;[32] the bystander becomes the object of the attentional focus of a newly primed contextual frame:

---

[32] Here the difference between *priming* and *binding* emerges quite clearly: when the woman is *bound out* of the frame, it means that she fictionally leaves the frame, disengaging her whereabouts from the topological coordinates of the frame under consideration. If, instead, she were *unprimed*, it would have meant that she is not into focus anymore but she is still bound in to the frame, that is fictionally still present on the scene, unless otherwise indicated.

> Quel che successe fu che Diesel e Poomerang rimasero impastoiati nell'uomo in scuro, in verità, risucchiati dalla composta scia del suo turbamento, che li commuoveva, per così dire, e che li spinse lontano, fino a vedere il colore del suo scendiletto – marrone – e sentire il puzzo della sua cucina. [25]

The reader follows Diesel's and Poomerang's attentional focus, until:

> Stavano rovistando tra la biancheria intima della signora Mortensen quando, per banale e volgare associazione di idee, gli risalì nel sangue il ricordo del compasso femmina smaltato nylon scuro – scossa feroce che li costrinse a precipitarsi indietro fino al taxi giallo, e a farli rimanere lì, sul bordo della strada, un po' inebetiti dalla rovinosa scoperta – rovinosa scomparsa del taxi giallo nelle viscere della città – tutto il viale pieno di macchine, ma vuoto di taxi gialli e leggende accomodate sul sedile posteriore.
>   – Cristo –, disse Diesel.
>   – Sparita –, nondisse Poomerang. [26]

Let me continue with the description of the few remaining frame shifts, before advancing a few considerations. The primed frame is now, again, the frame that binds in Diesel, Poomerang, the stiletto heel, and the street setting, from which the woman has just been bound out. Displaying an unnatural – but no longer surprising – ability to navigate within and among contextual frames, Diesel and Poomerang deduce where a woman who has just broken her shoe could be, and find her in a shoe shop, binding her back to the frame:

> Allora non la persero più. Per un numero imprecisabile di ore catalogarono i suoi gesti e gli oggetti intorno a lei, come se testassero dei profumi. [27]

The focalisers remain bound in to the contextual frame to which the woman is bound in, until she leaves the house of the man she spent the night with: 'L'ultima cosa che videro di lei, fu una porta chiusa, dolcemente' (27). As soon as the woman is bound out, the frame revolving around her dissolves: the attentional focus returns on the initial frame containing Diesel, Poomerang, and the stiletto heel. A change of focalisation, from Diesel's and Poomerang's to the narrator's perspective, subtly modifies the contextual frame, enlarging it to contain the two characters, who are no longer the focalisers. The reader's attention is drawn to the act of storytelling of the narrator by the presence of a nominal sentence that works as Closing by pulling the reader away from Diesel, Poomerang, the stiletto heel, and the setting of the street pavement:

> L'uno e l'altro, vicini, e poi pezzi marci di città sulla strada di casa, luci liquide di semafori, auto in terza a far rumore di sciacquone, un tacco per terra, sempre più lontano, occhio bagnato, senza più palpebre, senza ciglia, occhio finito. [28]

Graphically stressing the frame switch with a new paragraph, the narrator mentions the second portrait owned by Shatzy, that of Walt Disney. The re-priming of the picture recalls the contextual frame to which both pictures are bound; it is a particular contextual frame, conceptually rather than physically instantiated, since its priming does not determine the priming of any specific topological setting bound to it. The connection between the pictures of Eva Braun and Walt Disney is established in the office scene but, since both pictures are Shatzy's belongings, this connection is stored by the reader as a non-episodic relation (Emmott 1997: 128), namely a relation that remains true beyond specific contexts (unless otherwise specified). The return to a previous moment of the narrative is further emphasised by the fact that Disney's picture is introduced by means of a variation modelled on the previous description of Eva Braun's picture:

> La foto di Eva Braun aveva una cornice di plastica rossa, e un piedino dietro, foderato di stoffa, e pieghevole: per tenerla su, all'occorrenza. [20]

> La foto di Walt Disney era un po' più grande di quella di Eva Braun. Aveva una cornice di legno chiaro, e un piedino dietro, pieghevole: per tenerla su, all'occorrenza. [28]

Immediately after this passage, the contextual frame binding in Shatzy and Gould in (presumably) the diner is recalled by the reappearance of the inverted commas as diacritic signs marking the direct speech, and by an actual repetition of the first two phatic lines ("'Capito?'" / "'Più o meno.'", 28): after having opened to the story of why Shatzy is keeping a portrait of Eva Braun in her bag, now the same lines open to the explanation of why she has Disney's. The final shift is triggered by the very last line of the Prologue, where the narrator's speaking reassesses the framed status of the dialogue, circularly closing the narration and the Prologue:

> [Shatzy] "Andiamo?"
> [Gould] "Andiamo."
>   Andiamo? Andiamo. [29]

2.2.3. Moving through the plot

The description carried out in 2.2.2 suggests that a deliberate design informs the structural and cognitive configuration of *City*'s narrative. Over the nineteen pages of the Prologue, Baricco prompts the reader to keep track of at least twenty frame shifts: given their frequency and prolonged employment throughout the narrative, it does not seem out of place to argue that these rapid shifts in focalisation constitute a critical strategy for the

novel.[33] This strategy aims at keeping the reader's attention alive by maintaining the narration lively but, at the same time, it takes care to provide enough affordances to ensure orientation. From typographic devices (e.g. differentiation of diacritic marks) to rhetoric and discourse comprehension strategies (i.e. repetitions and parallelisms, the use of B-frames), Baricco makes sure that the surface impression of quickness does not actually hinder the narrative comprehension and the way its various parts are linked to each other.

The fact that the linking strategies employed in the Prologue do not pre-eminently include chronology is already a preliminary proof in favour of my underlying claim that plot understanding does not necessarily have to be rooted in the temporal dimension. Chronology is not annihilated and should be reconstructed, but the reader cannot make sense of the story by relying on the re-composition of the events as ordered in the *fabula* starting from their order in the discourse. It is thanks to strategies of contextual monitoring that readers are encouraged to understand the Prologue and the whole narrative.

Baricco's novel, however, allows me to take my hypothesis concerning the significance of spatiality a step further and suggest that the storyworlds instantiated by the various storylines are sometimes more than 'windows' opened on represented state of affairs.[34] In fact, they are increasingly conceived as proper spaces, simulating the reader's spatial experience not only in terms of conceptualisation of mimetic spaces but also in terms of potential for manipulation of and interaction with the surrounding (fictional) space. My suggestion is that the enhanced spatial interaction with the storyworld is triggered by the occasional but crucial embodiment of the readers' cognitive operations of contextual monitoring.

An exemplary case is given by the peculiar way contextual-frame shifts are handled in the second part of the Prologue, starting from the moment when Diesel and Poomerang find the stiletto heel. Let us take a closer look at the types of verbs used to bind entities in and out to the frame: 'rimasero impastoiati', 'risucchiati', 'li spinse lontano', 'arrivarono a sedersi a tavola con lui' (25), 'scossa feroce che li costrinse a precipitarsi indietro' (26). These are all expressions that refer to actual movements of the body in space. The cognitive operations of priming and unpriming are fictionalised in terms of characters following and leaving the primed and unprimed frames, displaying a power and a freedom of movement within the storyworld that is strikingly anomalous. Or better, if this is

---

[33] Despite the competition of concepts such as that of embedded or framed narrative, contextual frame theory remains a productive framework. First, because it is more broadly applicable and accounts for other types of relations in addition to embeddedness; secondly, because it does not simply describe a relation between narrative levels, but rather explains how readers elaborate and manage such relation.

[34] The term 'window' was employed by Just and Carpenter (1985), who 'noted that it is difficult to imagine a whole map in detail, and the way we cope with this is to create a 'window' on the area in which we are interested. They suggested that the cognitive map contains embedded systems, and that processing involves moving up and down through this hierarchical system depending on situational demands (Kitchin and Blades 2002: 71).

theoretically not much different from the ubiquity traditionally displayed by an omniscient narrator, its fictionalisation represents a far more interesting implementation that casts some fascinating consequences concerning the cognitive elaboration of the narrative. At this moment of the narrative, Diesel and Poomerang are still supposed to be actual fictional characters and the reader is prompted to provide them with fictional bodies, which occupy space within the fictional world; indeed, Baricco makes sure to stress the remarkable physical features of the pair, endowing them with distinctive bodily concreteness.

In a broader sense, the employment of spatial metaphors to describe the narrative experience is not unprecedented. Gerrig (1993) refers to the reading experience as 'being transported' into a fictional world; in a work that is seminal for the development of my own understanding of plot as spatially-oriented, Dannenberg (2008) speaks of 'dynamics of immersion and expulsion' (22) and of plot as expressing 'the dynamic interaction of competing possible worlds' (46). Ryan (1991) properly theorises this phenomenon under the label of 'fictional recentering', although she mainly posits it with a view to exploring the modal nature of possible-worlds:

> [f]or the duration of our immersion in a work of fiction, the realm of possibilities is thus recentered around the sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world. This recentering pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility. [22]

In other words, she uses the new re-centred position virtually occupied by the reader to articulate the surrounding storyworld from an ontological perspective. Adopting quite a strong stance, Herman even observes that the core of storytelling may lie precisely in the act(s) of deictic relocation of the reader's perspective 'from the HERE and NOW of the act of narration to other space-time coordinates – namely, those defining the perspective from which the events of the story are recounted' (2002: 271).

Caracciolo (2014a), however, takes issues with Ryan's notion of recentring, as he argues that it is not the reader's consciousness to virtually relocate itself in the storyworld (1991: 104) but her virtual body, following that '[some] narrative texts draw on the readers' memories of bodily movements (experiential traces) as part of the process of co-constructing fictional worlds' (160). The notion of readers' virtual body is developed by Caracciolo within the framework of enactivism and it is built on the principle that the structural resemblance between imagination and perception is such that they partly share the same neural resources (Kosslyn et al. 2001). It follows that '[i]f perception is embodied […], then mental imagery must be embodied too; it must be deeply rooted in our real body and in memories of our past sensorimotor interactions with the environment' (2014a: 160-1). Caracciolo outlines a scalar schematisation of four degrees of fictionalisation of the

virtual body, from a lower end of the scale – a so called 'degree zero' – where readers are barely prompted to project their bodily-perceptual experience into the storyworld, to the highest degree of fictionalisation of readers' virtual body, in which it is aligned with an actual character in the narrative (2014a: 173-80).

This process of alignment taps into the readers' sensorimotor experience and can be triggered automatically, but it does not mean that a critical framework that foregrounds these strategies is necessarily the most effective one for every narrative. As far as *City* is concerned, though, it could be argued that the embodiment of the reader's activity of contextual monitoring significantly cues the fictionalisation of her virtual body. These instances are particularly relevant because the embodied nature of the focalisers is stressed in a way that I will further examine. It should not be overlooked, though, that this narrative mechanism does not fall into a void, and that Baricco systematically encourages the alignment (or recentring) of the readers' perspective with the perspective (if not with the fictional body) of the characters within the storyworld, thus promoting narrative engagement. The pervasive use of spatial and temporal deixis is perhaps the most effective strategy to prompt such relocation.

In the case analysed in the Prologue, the readers' virtual body is aligned with the fictional bodies of Diesel and Poomerang. Arguably, Baricco's decision to select precisely these fictional characters to cue the alignment of the readers' virtual body is not accidental and has interesting consequences on the readers' experience of the narrative space. It has been already noted that the way Diesel and Poomerang move through different frames and fictional scenarios is entirely anomalous: they appear to be able to follow other characters with their fictional bodies but in awkwardly disembodied ways, seemingly free from the laws of physics expected to be in place in a realistic storyworld.[35] The ambiguity will be later solved when it will become progressively clear that Diesel and Poomerang, in fact, do not have fictional actual bodies because they are Gould's imaginary friends. The reader might distance herself from these characters as they assume less realistic features, but her imagination is already involved. On this occasion, Baricco makes skilful use of the possibilities of narrative: on the one hand, he exploits the engaging power of the fictionalisation of readers' virtual body and uses it to endow the spatial dimension of the narrative structure with visibility; on the other, he does not jeopardise his credibility with the readers by unduly subverting the ontology of the storyworld given that he provides a retroactive explanation of why those characters were able to move so freely and

---

[35] This according to Ryan's (1991) principle of minimal departure, which posits that a fictional storyworld tends to correspond to the actual world unless otherwise stated. As to the fact that Diesel and Poomerang can seemingly escape the laws of physics in *City*'s storyworld, I will show later that they are subject to the irreversibility of time.

unnoticed. Furthermore, a possible risk stemming from arranging so many frame shifts is an overemphasis of the metanarrative dimension of narrative experience: if there is the chance that some readers might get more intellectually engaged by a metanarrative operation, it is also true that this might also undermine the immersion into the fictional storyworld. Encouraging the reader to bring her virtual body into the narrative may, by contrast, enhance the immersion experience (Zwaan 2004), thus leaving in this case a larger margin for metanarrative operations.

Another productive point following from Caracciolo's enactivist theory is his identification of two levels of experientiality: one that concerns the (fictional) life experience of characters, and one that concerns the reader's real narrative experience. It is at this second level that the concept of space of narrative experience emerges. The space of narrative experience is a virtual space that is moulded onto story-level entities such as characters or fictional events. This space is however typified by the inclusion of the reader's perspective. Plot understanding pertains to this virtual space, as it is an emergent property of the narrative that depends on the entities belonging and modifications occurring to the fictional storyworld but is also influenced by readers' extra-storyworld knowledge. Ryan (2016) observes that 'we relate to objects in our environment not by building static mental pictures of them, but by apprehending their "affordances", that is, by mentally exploring what a virtual body can do with them' (381): through the episode of Diesel and Poomerang, Baricco stages in the narrative itself the process of manipulation of the storyworld's configurations as it is mentally performed by readers themselves during reading. Plot and the structure of the narrative are portrayed as a space, something that can be browsed from various perspectives and at a variable degree of detail, accessible to (some) fictional entities, potentially explorable. As an aside, it might be suggested that this specific spatially-based way to conceptualise stories seems to open up to a view on the power of narrative resulting from the exhaustion of narrative cues and possibilities, rather than from the grasping and recounting of events in time. Let us think, for instance, of the stiletto heel that, once the contextual frames potentially stemming from it have been explored, turns into a trigger now useless: an 'occhio finito', 'senza più palpebre, senza ciglia' (28).[36]

While I am not claiming that cases of fictionalisation of readers' virtual body always occur in narratives which are productively compatible with a spatial-oriented critical approach, in the case of Baricco there are multiple hints that converge in this interpretive direction. Reverting to the image of city as cognitive metaphor offered by the primary paratextual element of the novel – the title itself –, Caracciolo hypothesises that authors can tap into 'readers' familiarity with bodily and perceptual experience […] to bring into

---

[36] I further explore this idea in 4.2.2, with regard to Calvino's interest in combinatorics.

play higher-order, socio-cultural meanings and values', thus producing a so-called 'feedback effect' (2014a: 158). More than stimulating a socio-cultural meaning, in *City* the urban landscape is called upon in a pre-eminent position to exert its feedback effect onto the higher-order cognitive practice of plot understanding. A city is something inherently spatial rather than temporal in nature; Baricco's equation of stories to neighbourhoods and characters to roads seems to imply that potentially no narrative route is more relevant than any other, nor that they necessarily have to be recounted in a specific temporal order.

It is worth stressing that this does not mean that time is annihilated. Mimetically, as I pointed out at the outset of the chapter, the narrative is explicitly framed in time, and temporal hallmarks are provided throughout the novel. Secondly, the way the temporal dimension is managed during the second part of the Prologue suggests its problematisation rather than its annihilation. By taking off from the detail of the heel as if it established a direct bridge with its own past, Diesel and Poomerang are able not only to reconstruct a contextual frame temporally placed in the past, but also to enter it with their actual (fictional) bodies and, from there, to freely move throughout other areas of the storyworld. On the other hand, however, they are not totally free from the constraints of time: while they are in the frame to which the bystander Mortensen is bound, rummaging through his drawers, the woman of the taxi has disappeared; when they finally find her again and follow her for a number of hours, in the meantime it started raining, the crowd surrounding Diesel and Poomerang has scattered, the light is different. It may be argued that characters – and fictional entities in general – are roads in the sense that all their punctual configurations in time can be potentially compressed into one single three-dimensional configuration that contains all its past and future unfoldings. It follows that, within each series of temporally sequenced configurations concerning a specific character, the reader-traveller could move potentially freely, thus turning the time attached to a fictional entity into a linearly extended space. Nevertheless, for the reader-traveller the process of exploring takes place in time, or better, the reader's experience of the storyworld exploration takes place in time: therefore, as soon as she leaves the exploration of a specific character or story, time has passed and more configurations have added to all the fictional entities belonging to the storyworld. The city has expanded.

2.3. Enhancing the spatiality of plot through scripts

In the last section, I introduced the hypothesis that Baricco intentionally prompts a spatial understanding of the narrative. I argued that he does so through the embodiment of contextual-frame shifts, which encourages interpreters to move through the storylines as if they are spaces, and by offering readers the image of the city as cognitive metaphor for the

comprehension of the narrative as a whole. In this section I will continue this argument, suggesting that Baricco also capitalises on the activation of scripts and that this, in turn, further enhances the visibility of the spatial nature of the narrative experience by increasing the number of spaces potentially suggested to the reader.

While in the previous section I considered strategies for contextual monitoring, that is how readers manage the information provided by the text and orient themselves through shifts of perspective and setting during reading, in this section I focus on script theory, which examines how readers supplement narrative information with their own background knowledge. Or better, script theory illustrates how the text prompts readers to tap into their background knowledge in order to be fully comprehended. Although in principle the connection between textual information and world knowledge happens automatically because no text (nor any other form of communication) could be understandable without drawing on some kind of prior knowledge, narratives can nonetheless variously – and purposely – exploit some of the cognitive processes at the basis of this connection, and foreground their presence to a variable extent.

The expression *world* or *background knowledge* should be understood in its broader sense, referring to any kind of information not explicitly provided by the text, derived both by other texts (intertextual knowledge) or by general everyday (extra-textual) experience. It corresponds to what Iser (1976/1978) calls 'repertoire' and Caracciolo (2014a) 'experiential background' of the reader. As part of an interrelationship between storytelling and real-life experience, background knowledge can be both tapped into, but also modified by narrative.

One of the core mechanisms normally implemented to regulate the interpretation of narrative texts is the script: it is my contention that Baricco relies on this notion in a systematic way and its peculiar uses shape the design of *City* (Herman 1997).

2.3.1. How the barbarians think

Baricco's propensity to think and conceptualise in spatial terms constitutes a preferred mode that not only can be detected at both a micro- and a macro-level in his works but also is indirectly confirmed by his nonfictional writings. In a series of weekly articles firstly appeared on the newspaper *La Repubblica* between 12th May and 21st October 2006 and subsequently collected in the volume *I barbari* (2006/2008), Baricco expressed his views on storytelling and on the ongoing changes in the contemporary readership. Building on the features he pinpoints, it is possible to reveal interesting patterns within his own oeuvre and to provide further support to my broader argument concerning the role of spatiality in processing narratives.

The barbarians identified by the title of his essay are those readers who are born as readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Baricco, through the injection of these new readers in the literary system, readership is undergoing a collective mutation that involves expectations, values, and reasons of interest in approaching literature. The intellectual and academic milieu tends to look at this mutation with a sense of reproach and fear: the same attitude, Baricco suggests, with which established societies in the past must have looked at the arrival to their borders of hordes of barbarians. The author's core thesis is that this new generation of barbarian readers distinguishes itself in two main respects: a different idea of what experience is, and a different view as to where meaning lies and how it is distributed in experience. From these two tenets, Baricco derives the set of features that characterise the new readership and explores them through a number of accessible examples, spanning from popularisation of wine culture to the cognitive changes brought about by internet and digital technologies.

My intention here is not much to assess the merits of Baricco's examination. In fact, similar suggestions can be found almost forty years earlier in Foucault's (1967/1984) lecture on heterotopias – and it is no accident that this notion has already been mentioned in relation to *City* (Nicewicz 2009: 165; Rorato and Storchi 2004: 257).[37] In 1967, Foucault argues that

> the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. [22]

Baricco's reflections remain interesting, partly because they represent a digestible folk version of ideas that were already circulating in philosophy and culture theory with regard to the postmodern (it should not be forgotten that the articles were meant to have a popular, non-specialist distribution and reception),[38] and mostly in relation to his own narrative practice.

One of the main shifts identified by Baricco is the privileged position accorded to horizontality rather than verticality, or to surface instead of depth. A barbarian, he remarks, would value experience inasmuch as it links together the largest number of experiences, not by focusing on a single aspect in a deeper way: 'La sua idea di esperienza è una

---

[37] Interestingly, Foucault actually mentions Structuralism as a trend that epitomises this penchant for space as it relies on 'an ensemble of relations that makes them [elements] appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another' (1967/1984: 22).

[38] In addition to Foucault and already cited Augé, see Hutcheon (1988) and Jameson (1991) among others.

traiettoria che tiene insieme tessere differenti del reale' (2006/2008: 103). In other words, the more inclusive and multifarious the experience, the more powerful and engaging that experience will be. Closely related to this notion of experience is the conception of meaning, about which Baricco observes that to the barbarian readers '*un sistema è vivo quando il senso è presente ovunque e in maniera dinamica: se il senso è localizzato, e immobile, il sistema muore*' (56 – emphases in the original). Transferring this concept to the system-book, it follows that:

> La qualità di un libro, per i barbari, sta nella quantità di energia che quel libro è in grado di ricevere da altre narrazioni, e poi di riversare in altre narrazioni […] Il libro, di per sé, non è un valore: il valore è la *sequenza*. [74]

Horizontality versus verticality, experience as trajectory, narrative as a system whose successful functioning depends also on the network of connections it establishes with other extra-textual sources of knowledge: spatial metaphors are used widely throughout the essay, and this should not be underestimated. Published fifteen years after the publication of Baricco's first novel, *Castelli di rabbia* (1991), and seven after *City*, *I barbari* is a useful subtext for Baricco's narrative production as it confirms that the reliance on mechanisms of narrative understanding that are ultimately rooted in sensorimotor knowledge is not casual; in fact, it reveals a consistent pattern in the cognitive strategies implemented in his narrative corpus.

This point leads my discussion to a necessary caveat. The interrelations between spatiality and contemporary culture and ideology have been a matter of extensive debate. Since the 1990s, however, – that is since computers and new media have spread massively, becoming of common use – a specific strand of discussion has developed, concerned with the implications of media upheaval within the humanities and the impact of digital technology on the way we think. Baricco himself muses on how the brains of barbarian readers seem to have started working in a different way, thinking in a different way. That digital technologies might have impacted in an evolutionarily unprecedented way on our cognitive capabilities is undoubtedly an interesting hypothesis, entertained by many researchers including Hayles (2012) and Ryan (2001) and pursued by new disciplines such as Digital Humanities. It lies beyond the scope of my thesis to investigate this possibility. As a matter of fact, not even Baricco's potential allegiance to this hypothesis is the specific focus of my discussion, because his own storytelling practices do not directly engage with such newly developed cognitive strategies anyway, for instance by employing hyper-narratives (cf. 4.2.4).

The most relevant aspect in my study is that, irrespective of how he may frame it within broader dynamics, Baricco conceptualises this paradigmatic shift in spatial terms, by tapping into recipients' (readers of his fictional and nonfictional writing alike) sensorimotor knowledge in order to make sense of this mutation. Indeed, both the 'old' way of thinking and the new barbarian way are explained by means of spatial metaphors: the shift is not from a time-based to a space-based way of making sense, but from a predominance of verticality to a predominance of horizontality. It is true that, according to Baricco, the barbarian notions of meaning and experience emphasise spatiality over temporality because they are non-hierarchically distributed, and, as a consequence, he programmatically designs his narratives to work synergistically with what he considers the preferred cognitive strategies employed by his readership. Nonetheless, this does not change that the embodied nature of abstract thought is not something developed over the past decades due to the passage from the Age of Print to the Age of Digital Media (Hayles 2012), but rather something inherent to our cognition, whose visibility might be variably foregrounded by an author's cognitive style or by his (or her) cultural agenda.

2.3.2. Scripts as means to create energy

Paraphrasing some of his observations reported above, it could be suggested that, for Baricco, the narrativity of a written story critically depends on the 'quantity of energy' it creates or makes circulate, from and to other stories. What does it mean, though, in narratological terms, to 'create energy' or to 'receive energy from other stories'? And how does this relate to the spatialisation of narrative understanding? In the remainder of this chapter I explore the hypothesis that both issues are linked to how a narrative draws on background knowledge in order to be actualised. My working assumption is that, even if Baricco might not thoroughly share the barbarians' point of view on literature, it is likely that he followed some of these principles in order to appeal what he describes as a significant part of contemporary readership.

Since for the new readers the value of experience resides in its amount and variety, most appreciated are those books that provide the reader with multiple stimuli rather than analysing fewer in more depth (2006/2008: 136). It is my suggestion that the energy praised by Baricco should be understood in terms of stimuli, and stimuli should be ultimately understood as pieces of information, not provided by the text, that the narrative cues the reader to retrieve. The second posited feature is represented by the variety of sources of such stimuli: with this regard, Baricco observes that 'i barbari tendono a leggere solo i libri le cui istruzioni per l'uso sono date in posti che NON sono libri' (2006/2008: 69, de-italicised). I will reiterate throughout the chapter the principle that no text or narrative can

be understood without relying to some extent on world knowledge, that is on information that is not contained in the text itself and has to be supplemented by the reader, who has acquired and elaborated it through everyday experience. Before considering how this information is diversified and provided in large amount, let us turn to the bridge between text knowledge and world knowledge in the first place, which is built by the mechanism known as script. Below, I firstly sketch a preliminary theoretical description of the concept, which I then explore in greater detail through its practical applications in the novel.

In its most essential definition, a script is a 'standardized generalized episode' (Schank and Abelson 1977: 19). The notion is inherited from schema theory, a branch of cognitive sciences initiated in Gestalt psychology during the 1920s and 1930s, and then revived and further expanded in the 1970s within AI research (Gavins 2005). Indeed, it is within this framework that Schank and Abelson carry out their studies, and in his *Dictionary of narratology* (1987/2003) Prince dates back to them the first systematic use of this notion:[39]

> A script is made up of slots and requirements about what can fill those slots. The structure is an interconnected whole, and what is in one slot affects what can be in another. [...] Thus, a script is a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation. Scripts allow for new references to objects within them just as if these objects had been previously mentioned. [Schank and Abelson 1977: 41]

Drawing on their research on episodic memory, Schank and Abelson posit the starting assumption that memory relies on situations (personally) experienced rather than on abstract semantic categories. It follows, the two scholars argue, that there must be 'a procedure for recognizing repeated or similar sequences' (1977: 18): the elaboration of scripts is precisely the economical measure thanks to which we are able to identify these patterns, store them in our memory, and retrieve them whenever we need to draw on them again. If we had every time to process everything we experience as if it were the first time, most likely we would not survive.

Schank and Abelson clearly state that relying on the concept of script already sets an implicit premise: world knowledge does not simply enrich or flavour the text, it enables understanding itself. Understanding – a pragmatic situation as well as a written or oral communication – does not depend only on the elements at stake, but on the recipient's background knowledge. Hence Schank and Abelson's definition of understanding as 'a

---

[39] Prince also further distinguishes script ('stereotypical plan') from schema and plan, defining the former a generic 'serially ordered, temporally bound frame' and the latter a 'goal-directed schema' (1987: 86). Schank (1986) later introduces the notion of explanation pattern to describe adaptable scripts. See also Mercadal (1990), Minsky (1975) for frame, Rumelhart (1976) for schemata. In linguistics, Gutt (1991) and relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986) examine this type of inferences as part of 'linguistic predictability'.

process by which people match what they see and hear to pre-stored groupings of actions that they have already experienced' (1977: 67).[40] Understanding, in other words, is knowledge-based, and scripts are 'knowledge structures' that serve understanding.

Debates in literary criticism during the 1990s mark a migration of these concepts from research in artificial intelligence to the investigation of narrative (Fludernik 1996; Gerrig and Egidi 2003; Jahn 1997; Ryan 1991).[41] Although he borrows the term *frame* rather than *script* from psycholinguistics, in one of the first studies applying a cognitive framework to literary texts van Dijk (1979) recognises the importance of this notion in discourse comprehension, particularly in the pursuit of semantic coherence. In the present discussion I mainly draw on Herman's (1997, 2002) theorisation, which effectively integrates scripts within narratology and acknowledges their role as crucial strategies implemented by readers to negotiate narrative texts,[42] as they enable to 'build up complex (semantic) representations of stories on the basis of very few textual or linguistic cues' (2002: 97). In turn, these cues variably work as 'headers', that is words or concepts that, being closely involved with the action sequence of a certain script, prompt the reader to retrieve it from memory and activate it, or instantiate it (Schank and Abelson 1977: 48).

Even if all narratives ultimately rely on readers' background knowledge and on the instantiation of scripts in order to be understood, a writer's narrative style can still be typified by the use of scripts. First of all, because relying on these mechanisms is a matter of degree and extent rather than the exclusive province of a certain narrative or genre, and I will show that Baricco extensively employs scripts. Secondly, because by arguing that Baricco capitalises on the cognitive mechanisms connected to scripts, I contend that he does so in a peculiar way and to pursue effects that are worth further examination. In particular, my analysis illuminates the elements within the scripts' structure on which Baricco intervenes and how these practices match with an overall foregrounding of the spatial dimension of narrative apprehension.

Earlier in 2.2.1, I mentioned Scarsella's comment on the narrative in *City* as built on the alternation of styles. In fact, I pointed out that not only are changes in style indices of contextual-frame shifts, but in some cases styles also become associated with specific recurring contexts. Rather than a choice concerning rhetoric, this is due precisely to Baricco's reliance on scripts in constructing his narrative situations. Some of the scripts

---

[40] Along the same lines, memory can be understood in terms of 'organization of prior experience into patterns of expectations for current experiences' (Herman 2002: 97; cf. Bartlett 1932: 201-14).

[41] Cf. Hogan (2004) for a discussion of exempla versus schemas and prototypes. See Herman (2002: 85-113) for a broader review of classical and structuralist accounts of narrative sequences, and their relations with the script-based approach.

[42] Herman actually distinguishes between scripts and frames, as characterised by a dynamic and a static nature respectively. In the present work, however, I will refer to scripts only in order not to create confusion with the notion of frame in Emmott's sense, discussed in 2.2.1.

more evidently exploited in *City* include the fast food or restaurant, the football match, the lecture, the phone call, the boxing match, the running commentary, the interview, the chase. Another set of scripts derives from Shatzy's adoption of the western genre for her story, which conventionally implies some codified situations and roles: this is why the reference to '*the* saloon' does not find us lost, even though it had not been mentioned before.[43]

Indeed, a script is not simply made of sequences of actions. It also includes objects, which either belong to the stereotypical setting (in the case of situational scripts) or are involved in the action, and roles played by participants. This relation between details and domain knowledge – that is, between headers and scripts – has been object of specific research. Ferstl and Kintsch (1999) carried out experiments where participants were prompted to provide lists of words associated with a script. Their results confirmed that large parts of these lists overlapped, thus leading to the elaboration of the concept of domain knowledge as a set of concepts – objects, roles, settings – stereotypically associated with a standard script. Naturally, also the reverse relationship holds, and any word or concept belonging to a certain domain of knowledge could function as a header instantiating the script. As Garrod and Sanford (1982) put it, there is 'no processing penalty in reading a sentence that referred to the role, as opposed to reading a sentence that referred to an explicitly introduced antecedent referent' (cited in Sanford and Garrod 2009: 164): this means that a role conventionally attached to a script – e.g. a waiter in a restaurant – can be mentioned without this causing any problem to the recipient. All these elements – codified actions, objects, and roles – can potentially be headers and they can all potentially invoke a script.[44]

Let us consider, for instance, the first of the boxing episodes in *City* (66-68). This narrative strand focuses on Larry 'Lawyer' Gorman, a rising star of boxing, and his coach Mondini: the two characters are imaginary figures created by Gould in his struggle against loneliness, originated from the memory of the only activity he shared with his father when they still lived together and used to listen to boxing matches on the radio. At the time the

---

[43] Following Schank and Abelson (1977: 61-5), one could distinguish between situational and instrumental scripts: despite being similar in structure and both prescribing standard sequences of actions, the former type is usually associated to a situation or a setting and involves multiple players and roles (e.g. the restaurant script); the latter type, instead, displays very little variability, a very rigid ordering and usually involves only one person (e.g. the phone call or the interview, but also tasks such as lighting a cigarette or preparing a specific dish).

[44] By this point, it should be clear that the non-propositional view of thought I advocated for in Chapter 1 is critical to my approach. It is only by relying on mental models that are not necessarily stored in verbal form that one can ensure an adequate flexibility and automaticity in recognising the semantic connection between a known context and an element traditionally attached to it, which however has not yet been referred to in a certain text. The underlying hypothesis elaborated by Sanford and Garrod is that writers do assist readers in finding the appropriate scenarios in long-term memory to which attach the things mentioned in the text by exploiting the cognitive principle that readers relate what they read to some world knowledge as soon as possible, and that this the background knowledge is expectedly shared with that of the writer him/herself (2009: 161).

narrative is set, Gould has developed the habit of re-enacting scenes with Larry and Mondini as direct protagonists or of mimicking the running commentary of Larry's matches to entertain himself when he sits on the toilet ('E quel che si sentiva da fuori era la […] sua voce che faceva delle voci', 66). The first time the reader is presented with this embedded story, the narrative voice simply introduces Shatzy eavesdropping Gould in the bathroom, after which a dialogue ensues:

> – Non siamo al tuo college del cazzo, lo sai Larry?... Guardami, e respira… andiamo, respira… E VACCI PIANO CON QUELLA ROBA, CRISTO!
> – Ha il sopracciglio a pezzi, Maestro. [66]

As it proceeds, an increasing number of headers (i.e. script-related cues) are offered to the reader: the vaseline on Larry's face, the bruised eyebrow and hand, the physical strain, the need to go towards someone's punches, the onomatopoeia of the boxing bell, the jargon ('sinistro al fegato e montante'; 'guardia', 67). All these elements concur to fully instantiate the boxing-match script, they progressively lead the reader to deduce that the dialogue is between a boxer named Larry and his coach, and that the conversation is taking place during a break in between two rounds. Once recognised, the script also retrospectively gives meaning to the details that may have remained obscure at a first reading. Whenever references to this sport appear again over the narrative, the reader will quickly realise that the narrative strand of Larry and Mondini has been taken up again and will be prompted to instantiate a compatible situational script.

However, even taking into account their frequency, such uses are quite normal – if not unavoidable – and would not yet justify the hypothesis that Baricco's narratives are characterised by a distinctive implementation of scripts. To support my argument, two main points should be advanced: the first one is that the systematic and peculiar way in which Baricco capitalises on standardised knowledge structures matches with the theoretical principle expounded in *I barbari* according to which surpluses of narrative energy are valuable and increase the story's narrativity; secondly, I will show that scripts play a critical role in encouraging the spatial conceptualisation of *City*'s plot structure, thus fruitfully integrating with other strategies implemented at other levels.

2.3.3. Uses of scripts in *City*

In this section, my purpose is to illustrate the extensive and nuanced use that Baricco makes of scripts and, in doing so, stress their essential role to the working of *City* and their sophisticated employment. Drawing on Schank and Abelson's (1977) definition quoted above, one can pinpoint two main functions of scripts: since a script is a 'predetermined,

stereotyped sequence' that allows for 'new *references*' to objects (41 – my emphases), stereotypicality and referentiality are the properties at stake.

[A] The latter property, referentiality, provides the basis for the broadest and more canonical type of scripts. When the main function of a script is referentiality – which is the quality of containing references, or affordances to references – it means that its main purpose is to provide the necessary background for the narrative to unfold, as it happens with the example of the boxing match. The instantiation of a script enables the narrator to refer to certain objects or roles as if they had been previously mentioned, as the saloon in the western story (63) or the grown-ups that sit shouting on the sidelines of the soccer pitch ('I grandi stavano in panchina a urlare', 35). Once the right script is activated, no reader would fail to correctly integrate these details into the narrative.

This canonical use of script, however, gains particular visibility in *City* because of its fragmented structure into multiple storylines and its abrupt shifts and relocations from one to the other, which require the reader to continuously re-establish new connections with different contexts with very little explicit Orientation. Baricco's systematic use of stereotypical and commonly known settings or channels (such as with instrumental scripts, i.e. the phone call, or the lecture) is not accidental, because recognisability and immediacy of connections are among its target values. The series of anecdotes recounted in the Prologue, for instance, achieve coherence once they are understood as parts of a dialogue between Shatzy and Gould. However, the only way for the reader to make this inference depends on two isolated references to a hamburger ('Buono l'hamburger?', 23; '"Finito." "Finito?" "Sì." "Com'era?" "Insomma"', 29). These two brief exchanges have a twofold purpose: first, they encourage one to identify Shatzy and Gould as the participants of the dialogue, by priming the setting of the diner where Gould invites Shatzy during their initial telephonic conversation; secondly, by referring to two subsequent moments of the meal, the two references situate the conversation in time, giving the reader the sense of chronological unfolding. Even though the overall effect might be that of a blurry succession of disconnected stories, the various scenes are in fact anchored into a reasonable narrative structure that is recognisable only thanks to a systematic and extensive use of scripts. The immediate recognition and semantic connections ensured by scripts afford an agile and swift narration that perfectly matches with the rationale attached to the new readership illustrated in *I barbari*.

[B] It is by playing with the stereotypicality of scripts, however, that Baricco achieves the most interesting narrative effects.[45] I identified two juxtaposed ways in which

---

[45] It goes without saying that scripts are always invoked in the light of both their referentiality and stereotypicality. By distinguishing uses of scripts according to their function, I am relying on a scalar differentiation that points at what function is pre-eminent in each case.

Baricco relies on stereotypicality: either he prompts it only to utterly undermine it, with a defamiliarising reversal of perspective; or he fully embraces it, thus re-establishing a bonding with the reader but also triggering interesting consequences as far as the spatial perception of the narrative is concerned.

Let us focus on the former type, that is on those cases where Baricco leverages the stereotypicality of a script in the first place, only to immediately challenge the ensuing standard horizon of expectations. Gerrig and Egidi (2003) note that scripts present the additional advantage of prompting the reader to focus on what departs from the norm, because their activation allows the writer to give for granted what is stereotypically included in a script and to report only what it unusual. Baricco, instead, forces the unusual to emerge precisely from disruptions of the stereotypical features of scripts. Rather than letting the reader down, however, I suggest that these disruptions achieve the opposite effect of renewing the reader's engagement praised in *I barbari*, because they break the expected linearity of a message:

> Guardava una televisione. […] Shatzy lo guardò.
>   – Non aspettarti un granché, ma comunque se l'accendi migliora. [123]

Here, the infraction is performed on the level of rhetoric by suddenly shifting the focus from one element to the other of the metonymic pair programme–television. If brief, the surprise effect is catchy.

Within the broader upsurge over the past thirty years in research on the cognitive processes underpinning discourse comprehension, from linguistics to psychological perspectives, an increasing number of works has focused on the management of unexpected or inconsistent information. Tapiero and Otero (1999) report that experiments carried out by different research teams converge on registering an improvement of memory for inconsistent items. Indeed, 'lexical items are recognized more quickly when they are unexpected, that is, preceded by a nonpredictive context, compared to a predictive context (Cairns, Cowart, and Jablon 1981; O'Brien and Myers 1985)' (1999: 344). The impact that these empirical findings could have on script theory is suggested by Tapiero and Otero themselves, who observe that 'information that did not fit an instantiated schema [i.e. script] received more extensive processing than conventional prototypical information' (344). In other words, on the one hand scripts enable basic discourse comprehension; on the other, when they are instantiated in unconventional ways, they are likely to further enhance the interpreter's engagement.

The hypothesis that Baricco purposely capitalises on challenged stereotypicality gathers momentum when one considers the variety of its instantiations. The passage on the

television quoted above relies on a reversal of perspective based on rhetoric, but there are cases in which the disruption of expectations affects stereotypicality at a deeper semantic level and over a prolonged narrative sequence. Chapter 14, for instance, opens with a three-page direct speech involving Shatzy, a fast-food clerk and Gould (106-9), and the script is immediately instantiated by a highly recognisable exchange of lines that start the procedure of placing an order. What follows, however, is an escalation in absurdity, where the food-order script gets distorted by the stolid pertinacity displayed by the clerk in luring an unwilling Shatzy into a loop of bargains and special offers that would result in her having much more food than she wants, based on the fact that it is free. The action-sequence prescribed by the script is not itself undermined, but, thanks to its potential for protracting the negotiation indefinitely, rather becomes the instrumental vessel for conveying the sense of utter alienation that capitalism is bringing into a supposedly straightforward procedure such as ordering the sufficient amount of food one needs. In this case, the disruption of stereotypicality is determined by the fact that the two participants playing interlocking roles regulated by the order script actually draw on two different systems of values and priorities:

> – Questa settimana per ogni dessert ordinato ce n'è un altro in regalo.
> – Splendido.
> – Cosa prendi?
> – Niente, grazie.
> – Ma *devi* prenderlo, è in regalo.
> – Non mi piacciono i dessert, non li voglio.
> – Ma io *devo* dartelo. [107][46]

The experimental evidence in linguistics concerning the engaging potential of unexpected information comes in support of similar hypotheses also advanced by scholars commonly referenced in narrative studies. Cognitive psychologist Bruner, for instance, lists 'breach of canonicity' among his ten features of narrative, and refers specifically to Schank and Abelson's notion of script when he states that it is only when the script is 'breached, violated or deviated' (1991: 11) that one can properly speak of narrativity, that is to say that a situation becomes worth telling (cf. also Polanyi 1979).

Let us consider a second episode, when Gould is interviewed by a television troupe meant to shoot a video on child prodigies (114-21). In a chapter mostly made of dialogue, the disrupting element is given by the fact that Poomerang and Diesel take part in the conversation between Gould and the interviewer. At this point of the narrative, although it

---

[46] The episode of the Chinese restaurant (136-8) displays a similar purpose, pursued through an analogous technique: the breaking down of the standard sequence of the script, focused here on the use of chopsticks, allows the author to point out the absurdity or negativity of some common interactions, thus advancing a criticism of everyday social and human dynamics.

has not been explicitly stated, it is increasingly clear to the reader that the two friends of Gould are actually imaginary projections of Gould himself. As the interviewer proceeds to ask questions, Gould delegates his answers to Diesel and Poomerang, who offer long and articulated replies; however, from the reactions and comments of the interviewer it soon emerges that all she witnesses is a boy staring silently at her, limiting himself to awkwardly reassuring her that he feels fine and does not seem to understand her uneasiness. The result is a narrative that, after invoking the interview script, is deconstructed into a double thread: the actual one, which is a failed interview, and the virtual one, experienced from Gould's perspective and inclusive of Diesel's and Poomerang's comments, which respects the action sequences and roles prescribed by the interview script.

> – [...] Senti Gould, quando ti sei accorto che non eri un bambino qualunque, voglio dire, che eri un genio?
> POOMERANG (nondicendo) – Dipende. Lei, ad esempio, quando si è accorta di essere cretina?, è successo tutto d'un colpo o l'ha scoperto poco a poco [...]?
> – Gould?
> – Sì?
> – Volevo sapere... se ti ricordi, quando eri piccolo, di un aneddoto, qualcosa, per cui d'improvviso ti sentisti diverso dagli altri, diverso dagli altri bambini...
> DIESEL – Sì, mi ricordo benissimo. Vede, si andava ai giardini [...]. [115]

In addition to its subversion of the stereotypical features of the interview-script, this episode is particularly interesting because it overtly foregrounds virtuality. The disruption of the script creates two overlapping mental images, one of the scene as experienced by the interviewer and one of the scene as experienced by Gould; this latter, however, is virtual inasmuch as it is a product of Gould's imagination, artfully interacting with his perception of actuality. The reader's experience embraces them both and is enriched by the added value provided by their comparison: the narrativity of the story does not come from either of the two perspectives taken separately, but only from their joined juxtaposition. I shall consider later further reasons why virtuality plays a relevant role in the narrative experience of this novel.

In the examples just examined, scripts are evoked because of their stereotypicality which, however, is promptly subverted, thus creating the opportunity to boost the reader's attention and/or unexpectedly enhancing the narrativity of the situation. A second and opposite way to exploit a script's stereotypicality stems, conversely, by embracing it overtly and unambiguously. Since stereotypicality is exploited for its immediate recognisability, it might look like this type of use is similar to the first one, characterised by pre-eminence of a referential function. Unlike in the first type, though, here the elements invoked are less

meant to provide a utilitarian background knowledge (cf. Prince 2008: 124), and more intended to play an engaging role.

When Diesel and Poomerang rummage through Dr Mortensen's room, they spot a selection of objects each of which is meant to convey a clear message about its owner (25-6): the bed mat signifies a comfortable life, arguably economically solid enough (as the bed mat is not a necessary item) without being glamorous (the implicit impression that the colour is dull); the incomplete novel is a reminder of failed aspirations to art and originality; the business card marked with lipstick alludes to a love affair, probably in the work environment; the radio-alarm set on Radio Nostalgia almost too overtly refers to a state of constant feeling of dissatisfaction and regret; on the bed-table lies a religious-oriented leaflet that, far from revealing a troubled interior quest for spirituality, rather focuses on a relatively petty issue like the morality of fishing and hunting. Far from aiming at realism, objects almost become symbols. In fact, each object is mentioned to work as header and to create a direct link with a whole context, a whole situation codified by narrative clichés or folk psychology. Technically speaking, these potential digressions should be gathered under the rubric of 'fleeting-scripts', coined by Schank and Abelson (1977: 47): namely, scripts whose headers are called up but which are not properly instantiated, as the narrative does not provide any inputs connecting with events prescribed by the standard episode.

Another instance of this type of scripts used to emphasise their stereotypicality can be identified in the narrator's description of Gould's house, which ends with the following summarising sentence:

> L'impressione generale era quella di una casa signorile dove l'FBI era passata a cercare un microfilm con le scopate del Presidente in un bordello del Nevada. [32]

Clearly, the referents are not to be taken literally, as Gould surely has nothing to do with FBI or any presidential affair. The only plausible reason for such a choice, I suggest, is the vivid stereotypicality of the image: thanks to its topic and its visual effectiveness, the image establishes a link in the first place with the cinematic medium. By using it, Baricco cues the reader to activate a pointer to a script – unnecessary to the unfolding of the current narrative – which immediately multiplies the narrative experience by creating connections not only with another medium, but also with another whole genre, that of the crime or political scandal scenario. The specificity of the references (a microfilm rather than some photos; the determinate article in referring to *the* President; the geographical location of the brothel where he supposedly went) stimulates the outlining of a digression in the form of a basic story, despite being obviously unrelated to the narration the reader is currently

engaged with. The effect is quite close to that achieved in the previous example, where the selected objects almost create a tacit parallel story of Dr. Mortensen. In both cases, the non-instantiated reference to highly stereotyped scenarios enriches the narrative by means of its virtual presence within the cognitive horizon of the reader.

Taking a step back and looking at the taxonomy of scripts' uses outlined so far, I suggested that scripts can be instantiated by foregrounding their referential function or their stereotypical function. The first case encompasses more canonical uses of scripts, which are invoked in order to provide an immediate and recognisable referential background to the narrative; their use represents a distinctive strategy of Baricco's because he systematically relies on them to maintain the intelligibility of a fragmented and multilinear narrative.

The second case is focused on stereotypicality, which, in turn, can be invoked either to be challenged or to be complied with. The two strategies prompt two different types of narrative experience as they trigger different modifications of the narrative structure as it is understood by readers. A reversal of perspective like that operated on the metonymic pair programme/television – that is, in cases of subverted stereotypicality – amounts to a paradigmatic branching of the narrative into two counterfactual unfoldings, the one originally expected and the one actually instantiated.[47] As I remarked in relation also to the episode of the interview, the reader holds both forking paths activated in mind and the additional information, which demands to be processed, stems precisely from contrasting and comparing the two options (Riddle Harding 2007, 2011); hence the enhanced engagement. On the contrary, when stereotypicality is complied with, the result is that the narrative hints at diverging, unexplored narrations, rather than at counterfactual scenarios. If the previous use aims at foregrounding the discrepancy between counterfactual expectations and fictional actuality, here we have a syntagmatic extension of the narrative structure and the partial activation of a completely new and seemingly 'unnecessary' surplus of narrative inputs which remain liminal to the actual narrative.

Before continuing my discussion, I shall briefly comment on the close relation between *City* and Baricco's nonfictional work *I barbari*, as indeed many of the strategies implemented in this novel aim to endorse narrativity according to ways aligned with the ideas that will be later elaborated in terms of 'creation of new energy'. The values of swiftness and connectivity are pursued through a narration that shifts from contextual frame to contextual frame as smoothly as possible. The choice of frequently moving among storylines does not follow from the need to keep track of quickly changing scenarios, but

---

[47] Counterfactuality will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 3, in relation to the crime fiction genre. For the moment, suffice it to say that counterfactuals are events or situations that are impossible because they missed their chance to be actualised in the fictional storyworld.

rather from a specific storytelling style that privileges short and dense scenes juxtaposed over prolonged narrative passages. In *I barbari*, Baricco seeks to identify the principle that keeps a narrative machinery going for a barbarian reader; to say it with the terminology employed in this thesis, he seeks for a generalised principle of narrativity that might fit a contemporary readership. He writes:

> da cosa è generato quel movimento, cosa lo mantiene vivo? La vostra curiosità, certo, la vostra voglia di fare esperienza: ma non basterebbero, credetemi. Il propellente di quel movimento è fornito, anche, dai punti in cui passa: che non consumano energia, […] ma la forniscono. In pratica il barbaro ha delle chances di costruire vere sequenze di esperienza solo se a ogni stazione del suo viaggio riceve una spinta ulteriore: non sono stazioni, sono sistemi passanti che generano accelerazione. [2006/2008: 136]

A fragmented narrative divides the reading experience into several smaller chunks that better suit the barbarian notion of maximised experience. Subversions of the stereotypicality of scripts – be they rhetorical, semantic or discursive – succeeds in transmitting that 'acceleration' through the swift reversal of expectations. Straightforward exploitations of stereotypicality, finally, inject additional stimuli into the narrative, building the impression of a network expanding beyond the boundaries of one specific story. Baricco systematically employs scripts to purposely surround *City*'s storylines of a halo of potential narrative material, virtually present and yet left unexplored.

2.4. Do you have it in mind?

> Un'altra bella scena era quella del menu. Dentro il saloon. […]
> Dove ballava tutto un gran putiferio di cose, voci, rumori, colori, ma non dimenticare – diceva Shatzy – la puzza. Quella è importante. Devi tenere bene in mente la puzza. Sudore, alcool, cavallo, denti cariati, piscio e dopobarba. Hai in mente? Finché non giuravi di avere in mente non continuava. [63]

It should be clear by this point that virtuality is entering our critical discourse from many directions. I talked about the virtual body of the reader, aligned with the fictional body of characters to foster narrative engagement, and of the ensuing virtual space of narrative experience, modelled on the story-level but inclusive of the reader's perspective. While discussing the role of background knowledge and Baricco's peculiar use of scripts, I pointed at how they invoke – more or less strongly – broader contexts and certain horizons of expectations, which, despite not being fully actualised, do impact on the way the narrative is understood or experienced.

In order to understand how virtuality might impact on the actual content of a narrative, I seek to demonstrate how broad and diverse the cognitive activity surrounding

discourse comprehension is. The final interpretation one assigns to a text is not unaffected by prior cognitive processes, as all the hypotheses and digressions that are absent from the interpretive output still contribute to enrich it. To say it with Ryan, the story 'proclaims the virtual to be territory worth visiting for its own sake' (1991: 164).

In this last section of the chapter, I lay the cognitive grounding for my theoretical discussion of the influence of virtuality on narrative understanding, which will be carried out also in the next two chapters. In the first subsection, I focus on two main theoretical contributions: I draw on some insights of the scenario-mapping and focus account, which is elaborated within cognitive and discourse psychology, to show that the connection between local meaning and world knowledge takes place at a very early stage of understanding; then, I focus on Noë's enactivist approach to perception in order to explore the issue of presence in narrative. In the second subsection, I revert to *City* and I build on the arguments developed throughout the chapter to claim that the employment of the city as cognitive metaphor is the most representative but by no means the sole instance of Baricco tapping into readers' spatial skills. On other occasions Baricco resorts to spatial conceptualisations that contribute to orient readers towards bringing spatiality to the forefront.

2.4.1. Scenario-mapping and focus account and modes of presence

The first theoretical contribution illustrated in this subsection aims to explain how quickly, automatically and partially connections with prior knowledge are made. The second contribution, instead, explores how our consciousness and cognition build around detail.

The scenario-mapping and focus account (SMF) is a theoretical model of text comprehension elaborated by Garrod and Sanford (1999; Sanford and Garrod 2009) and concerned with how discourse understanding takes place. Their approach straddles syntactic processing and discourse interpretation precisely because their underlying hypothesis is that language comprehension – written and oral – is to some extent incremental, which implies that the sentence is not its minimal nor its maximal limit. This view fruitfully overcomes long-standing problems of integration between different semantic levels that date back to the earliest attempts to elaborate a cognitive approach to semantic understanding (Van Dijk 1979). SMF's core assumption is that:

> as receivers of language, the principal task is to relate whatever is said or written to the background assumptions and knowledge of the producer at the earliest opportunity. Only once this relation has been made can more complete interpretation take place. This process is facilitated by the use of knowledge that reflects stereotyped, or baseline, information. [Sanford and Garrod 2009: 160-1]

The main contribution of the SMF approach to a theorisation of plot is that it pushes in the background the thorny and long-lasting structuralist problem of narrative units (Barthes 1966/1975; Culler 1975; Ronen 1994). This issue lies at the basis of the contradictory coexistence of minimal and maximal definitions of plot outlined in 1.3.1, and raises from the impossibility to define a definite way to identify and isolate the basic elements on which functionalist narrative grammars – from Propp's to Bremond's to Greimas' – are grounded. By arguing for an incremental and shallow mode of discourse understanding, Sanford and Garrod provide a progressive way to see comprehension that better suits a view of plot understanding as an ongoing process subject to re-assessments like the one endorsed in this thesis.[48]

By their own acknowledgement, Sanford and Garrod's model is compatible with a script-based approach to the interpretation of action sequences. The notions of scenario and script are synonymic, as they both define situation-specific knowledge structures, on which readers rely for the organisation of world knowledge (for a matter of consistency, I will continue speaking of scripts). The 'mapping' process refers to the activity of setting up links between fragments of textual meaning and background knowledge, which happens by 'identifying sites of reference in LTM [long-term memory] (recovery) where interpretation (integration) may take place' (Garrod and Sanford 1999: 25); these sites represent anchor-points for background information. This distinction between recovery and integration as two separate moments of the understanding process should not be overlooked, as it has fundamental consequences on the activation of scripts, the duration of their instantiation, and the role of inference.

The phenomena we are going to look at pertain to the scope of working memory, which is structurally characterised by limitations that result in a genuine difficulty in (a) retaining uninterpreted information and (b) keeping track of multiple incompatible interpretations. On these grounds, Sanford and Garrod lend support to the 'immediate partial interpretation' hypothesis, formulated by Frazier and Rayner (1982). According to this hypothesis, when recipients read a text they first proceed with individuating potential sites where the relevant information may be found, but delay commitment to a specific interpretation to a later stage. However, until such referential or semantic commitment is accomplished, overall interpretation remains uncomfortably underdetermined. It follows that recipients are constantly prompted to look for evidence that may enable them to make such commitment, which means that they are strongly encouraged to identify a script as soon as possible, in order to isolate a situation-specific knowledge liable to override local

---

[48] For an overview of this issue, see Ronen (1994).

semantic interpretations (1999: 24). On this basis, Garrod and Sanford argue that evidence is for 'immediate or early shallow analysis, with very selective and often delayed elaborated interpretations' (1999: 22).

The theoretical outline drawn by Garrod and Sanford may have some interesting consequences for the present discussion and for narrative understanding. The SMF account holds the hypothesis that discourse comprehension proceeds along with the intake of information, establishing immediate links between textual information and background knowledge, in a constant negotiation with two opposing dynamics: a conservative drive that resists changes of scripts and reassessments of commitment, and another mechanism that stays on the lookout for eventual accumulation of evidence that would make re-elaboration unavoidable. An admittedly shallow processing, in other words, amounts to positing the existence of a sort of threshold in the cognitive system, below which alternative interpretations, referential and semantic commitments keep on being monitored. Distinguishing proper propositional inferences from identifications of potential sites of reference enables a finer-grained understanding of the dynamics of narrative comprehension, and opens up to the claim that incomplete and fleeting inputs – even though they do not result into an instantiated script – may still affect the process as a whole.

Understanding is not an input-output process, and it is richer and more complex than its own final product. In this light, I argue that some narratives can be designed in a way such that these intermediate, liminal phases of discourse understanding are foregrounded and capitalised on. But in what sense are these hints for potential interpretive change part of the overall process of narrative understanding? My suggestion is that the question could be better understood by looking at how the issue of perceptual presence is examined by the philosopher Noë (2004).

Noë's work on perception is carried out within an enactivist framework – the same providing the background for Caracciolo's theories –, which is built on the core assumption that perception is not something that happens to us, but something we *do*. Perception is a 'skilful bodily activity' (2004: 2) that is performed not by the brain and sensory organs only, but by the animal as a whole. This theoretical position has crucial implications for my discussion because it endorses the hypothesis that our abstract thought evolved – both phylogenetically and ontogenetically – from prior forms of knowledge, elaborated through the sensorimotor system and from the experience of our body in space.

Let us revert to the problem of perceptual presence. In his examination, Noë (2004) takes issue with the new-sceptic assumption (Blackmore et al. 1995, Dennett 1991, O'Regan 1992) that we are all victims of the so-called snapshot ideology: namely, the idea

that visual experience is picture-like, that is 'sharply focused, uniformly detailed, and high-resolution' (2004: 35). Noë contests such assumption and rather argues that detail is present to our perception only virtually. He reformulates the issue of presence in terms of possibility to access the detail by focusing our attention on it, rather than it being constantly and simultaneously present to our consciousness.[49] Noë distinguishes between perceptual awareness of and attended-to features in the world surrounding us: while attending to a specific feature means to move our attentional focus onto it, Noë makes a point that, even though the objects that fall outside our attentional focus cannot be distinguished in a detailed way (e.g. we cannot really see the colour or exact features of objects outside our foveal region), we are still aware of their presence. Positing a continuum rather than two dichotomous categories, Noë suggests therefore that objects are not either fully present and highly-detailed or absent: perceptual presence is actually a much more nuanced activity.

A second modality of virtual presence pointed out by Noë is the amodal perception or presence in absence. This modality includes those cases when an object cannot be perceived because it is physically blocked from one's view. Consider, for instance, a cat beyond a fence: even though one cannot really see it, one is aware that the cat 'continues' behind the bars. As Noë points out, one does not *believe* nor *think* the cat as a consistent whole: one *perceives* it as such. The example of Kanizsa's triangle (1955) is even more striking, as it demonstrates that viewers 'perceive the illusory contours of a triangle that is *not* there because the geometrical shapes arranged around it appear occluded' (Caracciolo 2014a: 169). Noë's purpose, therefore, is to lay full emphasis on how this process takes place below the threshold of our conscious re-elaboration of perceptual inputs, and is thus deeply embedded in our cognitive functioning. To be amodally present, Noë argues, means to be 'present to perception as accessible' (2004: 63).

Although Noë's discussion concerns the phenomenology of perception, his examination bears some interesting similarities with narrative understanding. It could be suggested, for instance, that his investigation of amodal presence actually explores the cognitive groundings of Ryan's principle of minimal departure, by virtue of which 'readers are able to form reasonably comprehensive representations of the foreign worlds created through discourse, even though the verbal representation of these worlds is always incomplete' (1991: 52). Indeed, if incompleteness has always represented an undeniable feature of fictional storyworlds (e.g. Ronen 1994), some hypotheses licensed by Noë's enactivist approach seem to suggest that, to a certain extent, this condition is not far from the way we experience the actual world. The similarities, therefore, would be situated on the phenomenological level, leaving the ontological difference between fictional and actual

---

[49] Also Dannenberg (2008: 62) speaks in terms of accessibility of background knowledge of real history in order to understand counterfactuals, and Ryan (1991) discusses accessibility relations (see 3.2).

world unchallenged. Embracing such view prompts a re-conceptualisation in terms of accessibility of the issue of detail presence, and, more crucially, the issue of how this presence impinges on the understanding of the broader narrative sequence – which is the aspect I seek to shed some light on with regard to Baricco's narrative technique.

A fundamental reason why a discussion concerning phenomenology of perception may lead to insights into narrative understanding is that perception, according to the enactivist view, is also an activity irreducibly involved with sense-making and the elaboration of expectations.[50] Presence is to be understood as a matter of availability, rather than of actual representation: 'the world is within reach and is present only insofar as we know (or feel) that it is' (2004: 67). Similarly, it could be suggested that also in narrative this availability, the potential accessibility of knowledge activated through scripts, is not lost on the reader's cognizance: '*virtual* presence is a kind of presence, not a kind of non-presence or illusory presence', as Noë significantly clarifies (2004: 67).

The topics discussed in this subsection primarily aimed at illustrating the basis for the relevance of virtuality in the co-construction of storyworld and, thus, in narrative understanding. Nonetheless, it does not mean that spatiality has faded into oblivion. Spatiality, indeed, maintains a pre-eminent position both in relation to the enactivist framework and in relation to the issue of virtuality in plot comprehension.

To assert the compatibility between enactivism and the present approach to narrative understanding means to stress a view of plot understanding as a dynamic activity of co-construction, prompted by the text and carried out throughout the reading via continuous re-assessments. Enactivism, moreover, posits understanding itself as an activity that cannot be performed but by tapping into our sensorimotor skills as our primal and irreducible means to get to know anything. It is worth noticing that the very concept of accessibility, discussed in this subsection, denotes the possibility of moving from one space to another (cf. Johnson's (1987: 21) container-schema). As Dannenberg notes as she proposes the additional image schema of the window or portal, 'breaks or gaps in containers through which people can look or pass through, respectively, therefore have a key function in our experience of the three-dimensionality of space' (2008: 76): every time Baricco (half)instantiates a script opening up to other potential narrative digressions, I suggest he creates a portal of the kind hypothesised by Dannenberg.

As to virtuality, it is my contention that the greater its impact on plot understanding, the more markedly spatial is the narrative structure and its process of comprehension. The cognitive structure of plot gains in complexity when its understanding depends both on the paradigmatic interaction of narrative information with other non-

---

[50] For a discussion of the relation between understanding and elaboration of expectations, see Noë (2004: 63), Schank and Abelson (1977: 146 ff.)

actualised options and on the syntagmatic connections created by the chronological ordering of events. My hypothesis is that the management of this enhanced complexity requires navigation strategies that, in some narratives, are strongly biased in favour of specific processes. These strategies and processes could depend on the particular cognitive style of an author or on the features of the narrative, which might converge synergistically toward a particular image or cognitive domain. Bearing this in mind, let us revert to our case study and to the hypothesis of plot understanding in *City* as mapping.

2.4.2. Further spatial conceptualisations in *City*

Making sense of a narrative according to a spatial-oriented paradigm, therefore, is not an all-or-nothing affair. Although I would call for a general rethinking of the definition of plot according to more flexible criteria that do not unavoidably assume chronology as main organising principle, I do not argue that this paradigm has to always be confined to spatiality. Throughout this chapter, however, I sought to introduce the theoretical groundings for a spatial-oriented understanding of plot comprehension and, at the same time, to show how *City* represents a productive example of narrative that prompts readers to adopt spatial-oriented strategies for plot understanding. The reasons pinpointed so far that endorse such hypothesis include the suggestion of the image of the city, of the urban space, as cognitive metaphor to make sense of the fragmented narrative; the embodiment of the process of contextual monitoring and the engagement of readers' virtual body; the impression, enhanced by means of a skilful use of scripts, of the narrative structure as a space to be explored, a space potentially larger than the one defined by the storyworld actually co-constructed by the text of *City*.

The spatial metaphor of urban space proposed in the blurb of the novel, where Baricco writes that his novel is built like a city (2.1.2.), is further elaborated in the narrative itself through the words of Shatzy. The alignment between paratextual and thematic cues corroborates the hypothesis that the text is indeed designed to prompt a certain spatial-oriented mode of understanding in its readers:

> Sarebbe tutto più semplice se non ti avessero inculcato questa storia del finire da qualche parte, se solo ti avessero insegnato, piuttosto, a essere felice rimanendo immobile. Tutte quelle storie sulla tua strada. Trovare la tua strada. Andare per la tua strada. Magari invece […] sono gli altri le strade, io sono una piazza, non porto in nessun posto, io *sono* un posto. [186]

Operating once again a reversal of perspective and deconstructing the common saying of 'finding one's way', Baricco advocates for his characters the possibility of being places themselves, rather than entities that have to go to places. It is worth remarking that this

shift does not exclude that characters undergo existential development: the juxtaposition of being a place vs. going somewhere does not amount to static vs. dynamic, nor to flat vs. round characters. What is undermined, instead, is the established cognitive metaphor equating 'change' with 'movement forward'. If characters can be places, then they may appeal to readers inasmuch as they can be explored.

On the other hand, the metaphor of 'life as a journey' (Dannenberg 2008: 67-85; Turner 1996: 88-90), after being apparently rejected, returns in the description of Gould's life as a river to be navigated (219-21); these oscillations in the use of this metaphor suggests that what interests the author is not the search for a metaphor that uniquely captures a truthful view of life, but rather to dismantle conventional metaphors and, building on the ensuing estrangement, to explore multiple ways of cognizing experience and reality. In fact, the image of life as a river is used to contest, not the direction forward, but the linearity of movement as desirable condition: like meanders, apparently meaningless digressions and diversions might be regarded not as unwanted distractions but as the better or the only way to proceed. Baricco casts doubt on linearity as an absolutely positive value, subverting the assumption that everything should be assessed on the basis of its distance from unshaken straightforwardness. Projecting this idea onto narrative, we could interpret it as the endorsement of a notion of plot that is not inherently linear and whose organising principle cannot be chronology or causality only but has to admit for more complex dynamics.

Although they prompt interesting observations, 'characters as places' and 'stories as roads' are fairly linear metaphors, as they both involve analogical relationships between basic-level concepts.[51] The following example is more complex as it describes the spatial configuration of a thought:

> Sto vedendo un pensiero, pensò Gould.
> I pensieri quando pensano nella forma dell'interrogazione. Rimbalzano deambulando per raccogliere intorno tutti i cocci della domanda, secondo un percorso che sembra casuale e fine a se stesso. Quando hanno ricomposto la domanda si fermano. Occhi al canestro. Silenzio. Stacco da terra, l'intuizione carica tutta la forza necessaria a ricucire la lontananza da una possibile risposta. Tiro. Fantasia e ragione. Nell'aria sfila la parabola logico-deduttiva di un pensiero che ruota su se stesso sotto l'effetto di una frustata di polso impressagli dall'immaginazione. Canestro. La pronuncia della risposta: come una specie di respiro. Pronunciarla è perderla. Scivola via ed è già cocci rimbalzanti della prossima domanda. Da capo. [189-90]

---

[51] Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 26-30) distinguish a basic-level from higher- and lower-level categories (e.g. 'car' vs. 'vehicle' vs. 'sport car'). Regarded as the cornerstone of embodied realism, basic-level concepts are characterised by four conditions: (1) they are the highest-level concepts whose mental images can stand for the entire category and (2) have similarly perceived overall shapes; (3) a person would use similar motor activities for interacting with category members; (4) they are fundamentally body-based, which means that they are mediated by the body and they represent the level at which most of our human-scaled knowledge is organised.

In this case, an action-pattern is mapped onto the cognitive activity that underpins the elaboration of a thought, which Gould identifies in terms of starting point, trajectory, and target. This action-pattern, integrating space and time, stands out as strongly embodied. Its organising principle is deeply rooted in sensorimotor knowledge because narrativity is conveyed through the shared experience of a pattern of sequenced movements of the body in space. Another passage confirms this typifying trend of Baricco's cognitive style:

> il tiepido lampo, che gli arroventa la coscienza e si abbatte sulla recinzione della sua narcosi da uomo stancamente sposato, con gran rumore di lamiere e lamenti. [25]

The adjective 'married' indexes a state of affairs – being married – that entails a history, a sequence of previous necessary actions defined by a script – meeting, engagement, marriage –, but conceptualises them in terms of a space around which a boundary has been built, and connotes it negatively by describing it as a narcotic state. The glimpse of the beautiful woman in the taxi is described in terms of something immaterial – a flash – that hits something material – the boundary – and nonetheless exerts a very material effect on it, provoking a loud metallic noise that is associated, in our world knowledge, with something allegedly solid, like iron, crashing.

All these examples display the same cognitive strategy at the basis of their narrativity: Baricco starts from a nucleus, a state of affairs or an event, and then unfolds it, turning it into a space to explore and conceptualising the transformations it undergoes in terms of steps to retrace or parts to describe. My further suggestion is that the same strategy is applied to the novel as a whole: *City* portrays the existential impasse of the main character, Gould, and explores it as if it were an urban space. By offering the image of the city in the title, I advocate that Baricco is designing a text that encourages readers to assume that the spatial relations holding between the various narrative strands composing *City* are more important, in order to achieve an understanding of the narrative as a whole, than the temporal relations of cause-and-effect. As a city can be known only piecemeal by means of individual practice and exploration, so this narrative is to be understood by comparing and contrasting its characters and their stories. As I sought to illustrate in the chapter, this cognitive metaphor does not stand alone. It is backed by additional strategies that emphasise the embodiment of narrative understanding as an exploration practice and therefore work synergistically with the image of the city to be walked through.

Although some narrative strands do not even interact with each other, they are all variously related to the same centre, the protagonist Gould. Particularly significant are the

embedded storylines created by Gould's own imagination. They capture and dramatise his reactions to the world around him, at a stage where he is not ready yet to let them impact on reality. Larry's training before the final boxing match with Poreda, which would mark his definitive entrance to the world of professional boxing, is recounted exactly when Gould is uncertain about whether to accept the place offered by the prestigious university of Couverney, which would mean to embrace his destiny as child prodigy (180-3): in a three-page stream of consciousness, Larry's thoughts exhibit a mix of pride, ambition, childlike desire for approval, and fear of failure, which corresponds exactly to Gould's feelings about his own future. Along the same lines, Larry seems to finally win when Gould is on a train running toward an unknown destination, away from Couverney (240). The fact that Gould is consciously modeling Larry's story dampens the metanarrative effect of *mise en abyme* and rather looks like a psychological strategy implemented by the boy to cope with reality.[52]

To some extent, a similar analysis could be applied to Shatzy and her story. Motives and stylistic details of the Western stem directly from small triggers and events in her everyday life: the syntactic rhythm characterising the beginning of the chapter on the prostitute of Closingtown comes from an old song she once learnt (85, 93); the story of Fanny and Pat Cobhan issues from the mere desire to design a story that could be suitably concluded with a verse of a poem Shatzy liked: 'Muoiono nello stesso respiro, gli amanti' (92); the twin sisters Dolphin copycat the twin sisters at the Ideal House Exhibition of her childhood (44).

Yet, a careful look reveals that *City*'s design is made more complex by the fact that the relationship between storylines is not always straightforward. The stories imagined by Gould do not serve to understand Gould only, just as the Western invented by Shatzy serves less to illuminate the character of Shatzy and more to shed new light on Gould and on his mother Ruth. The embedded Western narrative tells the story of Closingtown, a windswept town on the edge of the desert, none of whose inhabitants can die because their destinies are stuck and Time has stopped. The city's destiny is closely associated with that of a not-working giant clock – the Old Man – which was built by the city's founders; however, as the watchmaker Phil Wittacher discovers, the clock is not broken but rather stopped (275). In the final part of the novel, the reader finds out that the narrative voice of Shatzy's Western is actually Gould's mother, Ruth, hospitalised in a mental healthcare institution where Shatzy has worked for a few years as a nurse after Gould's disappearance.

---

[52] According to Prince's definition, a *mise en abyme* is 'a textual part reduplicating, reflecting, or mirroring (one or more than one aspect of) the textual whole' (1987/2003: 53). I shall further consider this narrative device in 4.3.2.

During one of the breaks from storytelling, Ruth admits a certain parallelism between Closingtown and her own mental situation:

> Lo stesso prof. Parmentier, una volta, mi disse che, se questo mi aiutava, potevo immaginare quello che mi succedeva in testa come qualcosa di non molto diverso da Closingtown. Succede che qualcosa strappa il Tempo, mi disse, e non si è più puntuali con niente. […] Diceva che questa era la mia malattia, volendo. Julie Dolphin la chiamava: smarrire il proprio destino. Ma quello era il West: si potevano ancora dire, certe cose. [260]

Embedded narratives and parallel storylines are used to provide alternative contexts that allow to frame in a clearer way issues that are too complex or painful to be directly looked at in the (fictional) actual storyworld – or, simply, to frame them from a different perspective: in a world governed by science, a doctor could never describe a disease in terms of 'losing one's destiny', as instead is possible in a Western story.

Closingtown, as the epitome of a state of existential impasse, can be related to both Ruth and to her son Gould. Baricco stresses the difference between being broken and stopped, and his emphasis encourages extending the validity of the consideration beyond its local reference to the clock. Gould's existential struggle is rephrased also in the narrative strand involving him and prof. Taltomar, where it is summed up by the formula: 'O guardi o giochi' (120). And indeed, the moment that marks Gould's resolution to embrace life and its uncertainties instead of remaining on the path traced for him as child prodigy, is depicted as a mechanism getting suddenly unjammed (225): for the first time, looking at a ball bouncing towards him, he abandons the usual stillness, takes the ball, and kicks it back into the park. In other words, he ceases to be unresponsive and responds to the external world's inputs.

As soon as Gould's impasse is overcome, the narrative ends: the storyworld develops into an uncharted territory. The map traced by the plot so far would be no longer the same, as it was revolving around the mapping process of Gould's state of mind and his emotional state prior to his decision to break with his destiny as child prodigy.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

In this chapter I built on an examination of Baricco's novel *City* to outline a first type of plot whose organising principle is rooted in spatiality. This type is epitomised by the image of the map because it potentially includes narratives that aim at portraying a dynamic equilibrium, whose point is less to follow the narrative development of the states of affairs characterising a storyworld than to explore its premises or conditions. Understanding this

type of plots involves strategies that can be associated to spatiality because comprehension critically depends on the mutual interrelations between parts rather than on their causal or chronological unfolding. As a provisional generalisation, it could be hypothesised that fragmented narratives are more likely to rely on spatially-oriented strategies than those which are not, because their disjointed structure already disrupts linearity. However, this is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a plot to be deeded as spatial: in fact, in the next chapter I shall consider how the understanding of crime fiction plots may be regarded as spatially-based even though fragmentation does not enter the picture.

By contrast, a factor that stands out as potentially recurring is virtuality – that is, anything not-(fictionally)actual that yet impacts on narrative understanding. In *City*, virtuality is called for by an over-instantiation of scripts which augments the domain of referents that are present to the reader's consciousness despite not being fully actualised in the storyworld, and by the embodiment of processes of narrative comprehension, i.e. contextual monitoring. In the next chapter I will continue the exploration of the potential conditions for plot understanding to be deemed as spatial. It will be contended that virtuality plays indeed a fundamental role but it can be emphasised also by other means than through the instantiation of scripts. Similarly, it will be confirmed that the fictionalisation of the reader's body and/or cognitive activities – although it can be emphasised to a variable extent – also impacts on a spatially-oriented understanding of narrative.

Chapter Three

Plot as Trajectory: Andrea Camilleri and the

Crime Fiction Genre

At the end of Chapter 2, I suggested that some of the features emerged from the examination of Baricco's *City* could be formulated into general criteria for the provisional definition of a plot type, characterised by strategies of narrative understanding such that plots would be assimilated to a mapping process. I pinpointed: a) the tendency to portray narrative situations of dynamic equilibrium rather than development; b) an emphasis on virtuality; c) the embodiment of comprehension processes; d) the fictionalisation of readers' virtual body; e) the semantic references to space (e.g. the city). In this chapter, I work on variations of these criteria in order to elaborate a second type of plot understanding, encompassing narratives that draw on different processes of narrative comprehension from those prompted in *City* and yet still significantly spatially-oriented.

While for the first plot type I studied a specific novel and I later deduced the features typifying a hypothetical set of narratives, the second plot type will be investigated through a case study – Camilleri's *Montalbano* series – that is already explicitly associated with a set of narratives, grouped under their affiliation to the genre of crime fiction. The criterion that arguably contributes to a spatial understanding of plot and on which I expand in this chapter is a pre-eminence of virtuality. I claim that the role of virtuality becomes critical in narratives that capitalise on a modal structure of the fictional universe. Indeed, introducing modality primarily means to account for the various ways of existence of the entities belonging to the storyworld, including virtual modes such as possibility and impossibility.

Crime fiction narratives represent the perfect case study to examine the systematic exploitation of modally structured storyworlds and, consequently, virtuality. I suggest that the investigation process, central to crime narratives, consists precisely in the assessment of characters' intentions (conceptualised, as I will explain, in terms of their private mental worlds – Ryan 1991) and in the evaluation of counterfactual sequences of events leading to the crime, with the purpose of identifying the actual one. Private worlds of characters and

counterfactual speculations are not static and, as plot itself, are rather subjected to constant re-assessments and revision. In this chapter, I argue that crime narratives, due to their strongly teleological nature, are conventionally read by readers in the constant attempt to guess and anticipate the outcome of the competition among the various virtual worlds. The resulting pattern stemming from these negotiations is the plot. Crime fiction plots are productively conceptualised in terms of trajectory because the image schema well captures the forward-oriented tension that guides readers through this process of navigation through alternative scenarios – rather than merely following its linear unfolding. By building my argument on the conventional features of crime fiction I do not intend to impose any norm on the genre: rather, I suggest that those narratives which do exhibit the conventional features of the crime genre – i.e. a teleological character and the centrality of the investigation process – can be regarded as a relatively homogeneous set inasmuch as their plots are likely to be structured in a way that invites a spatially-oriented interpretive approach. More importantly, my point is that, as far as the reading of a specific narrative continues to comply with certain conventional traits, the reader will continue to apply certain conventional expectations to understand the story. If the reader approaches Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957) – just to mention one example of an atypical, non-teleologically oriented crime story – she soon realises that the novel systematically disobeys the conventions of the genre, and she probably re-assesses her understanding strategies accordingly.[53] Moreover, it could be argued that the effectiveness of narratives that deviate from these conventional features reveals precisely how these conventions are deeply rooted in the first place, to the point that breaking them is likely to impact strongly on the reader. This thesis' overall aim is to identify plot types that are likely to benefit from a spatially-oriented approach, not to impose a grid of rules that have to be respected in order to rightfully belong to a genre. Furthermore, to rely on a certain conventionality does not seem out of place with regard to a genre that traditionally reveals a penchant for self-regulations, epitomised by Van Dine's 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories' (1928/1992) and Knox's 'Decalogue' (1929/1992).

In turn, the spatial-oriented approach to plot understanding adds an unprecedented perspective to the study of crime fiction genre. By foregrounding the modal structure of the storyworld and re-describing the investigation as the process of negotiation between alternate possible worlds, this chapter provides a new principle on the basis of which the peculiarity of crime stories is examined. Moreover, my hypothesis illustrates that spatiality in its broader sense could be regarded as a *fil rouge* diachronically connecting phases and trends across the crime fiction genre. In this light, the development from classic

---

[53] On the unconventional nature of Gadda's masterpiece as a detective story, see Guglielmi (2002-2017).

instantiations to more recent subgenres of crime narratives could be rather interpreted as a scalar shift of focus from spatiality as operating at the level of the abstract and geometric principles of order behind the orchestration of the crime and its resolution (Todorov 1966/1977: 45), to spatiality as impacting on the crime story in terms of socio-historical concerns related to its mimetic setting.

Camilleri's (b. 1925) crime series featuring Inspector Salvo Montalbano represents a highly interesting case study because it simultaneously manages to fully adhere to the traditional constraints imposed by the genre and to use these very features to build up its own specificity (3.1.2, 3.4.2). With the first novel published in 1994, the series (twenty-four novels to date) revolves around the character of Salvo Montalbano, chief inspector at the police station of Vigàta, fictional counterpart of the real town of Porto Empedocle (Agrigento). Although his first poetic efforts date back to the late 1940s, it is not until 1978 that Camilleri manages to publish his first novel, already completed ten years earlier. *Il corso delle cose* is a historical novel, a narrative genre dear to Camilleri, which he will continue to explore in other four novels before 1994 and, then, in parallel with the *Montalbano* stories. Often set in a more or less imaginary Sicily, these novels are characterised by sharp irony and a strong civic criticism. However, it is Camilleri's fortunate crime series that elevates him and his oeuvre to a 'caso letterario' and consequently attracts growing critical attention (Capecchi 2000: 9). Extant scholarship has mostly focused on the peculiar linguistic *pastiche* employed by Camilleri (La Fauci 2001; Novelli 2002; Santulli 2010; Vizmuller-Zocco 2001, 2010) and on thematic elements including the figure of the Inspector, the Sicilian setting, and the affiliation to the detective genre (Bonina 2007; Borsellino 2002; Buttita ed. 2004; Demontis 2001; Eckert 2008; Ferlita and Nifosi 2004; Marrone 2003; Rinaldi 2012; Pistelli 2003; Vitale 2001).[54] Fewer contributions (see Bertoni 1998, 3.1.2) consider the *Montalbano* series from the perspective of narrative studies, which is instead the approach adopted by this thesis: I argue that the narrative structures of the *Montalbano* stories are worth exploration because they exhibit an interesting synthesis. On the one hand, they fully embrace the centripetal drive that traditionally characterises the genre of crime fiction, ensuring a final closure which, if it does not fully restores justice, at least satisfies the reader's curiosity and resolves the suspense. On the other, Camilleri proves not to be oblivious of the developments brought about by the twentieth century, in terms of both the crisis of the crime genre and more general experimentations in narrative: the increased structural complexity displayed by his stories (3.4.2) demonstrates an attempt to reconcile the new possibilities pushed to the extreme by unconventional crime stories (e.g. the

---

[54] A significant part of the secondary bibliography on Camilleri is characterised by a rather descriptive approach and, interestingly, by a keen attention to the relationship with the extra-textual domain.

centrifugal force of digression) and the traditional readerly pleasures expected from the genre (Di Grado 2001; Farrell 2011).

In the light of its prototypical quality within the *Montalbano* series, I explore how *Il ladro di merendine* (1996) benefits from this innovative perspective. Acknowledging the importance of the domain of virtuality draws attention to a holistic approach to narrative comprehension as opposed to a rigidly teleological one, and leads to recognise the crucial role played in Montalbano's investigations by secondary narrative instances including literary references, theatre-like *mises en abyme*, dreams, and minor cases. The presence of this multifarious corollary strongly typifies Camilleri's crime novels, as it resonates as much and perhaps more than the main detection line, often contributing to the resolution of the crime on Montalbano's part and to the global meaning of the narrative in the reader's eyes.

In 3.1, I will outline the main articulations of the scholarship focusing on space and crime fiction. While I do not intend to provide an exhaustive discussion of the latter, I will sketch its main lines in order to prepare the ground for the topic I intend to explore in the main part of the chapter: here my focus will move from space as an object of representation to spatiality as an organising principle – or logic – operating behind the process of narrative understanding. This overview draws on scholarship on the crime fiction genre and its subgenres precisely with the objective of making a case for the existence of a set of expected and typical features. My subsequent discussion relies on these conventional features to select the apt theoretical frameworks and tools to work on them (i.e. possible-worlds theory), and to advance the hypothesis that actually spatiality has always played a more or less evident role in crime fiction plots.

In 3.2, I shall refer to examples taken from Camilleri's novels – in particular to *Il ladro* – to show why possible-worlds theory is a particularly profitable framework for analysing how readers make sense of plots in crime fiction and how it consequently endows the storyworld with a vigorously spatial dimension. In 3.3 and 3.4, I shall focus more closely on the dynamic dimension of plot understanding and on how it takes place during reading, thus foregrounding the role of the reader. Here I will also consider the strategies that typify the plot understanding of the *Montalbano* series and how they further enhance the spatially-oriented features of crime fiction narratives (3.4.2). The attention on spatiality will allow me to make a point of how way-finding techniques may intervene in the active management of the modal changes implemented in the storyworld throughout the narrative. The image schema of trajectory will be used to capture the way in which readers make sense of their negotiation through multiple epistemological possibilities, which makes of virtuality a three-dimensional space where readers orient themselves. I will suggest that, within the storyworld, characters are read as trajectories in the first place, inasmuch as the detective

seeks to understand their intentions and goals in order to shed light on their potential involvement in the crime and foresee their future actions. Understanding the plot as a trajectory emerges from the reader's perception of the multiple characters' actions as trajectories and from the integration of his understanding of the storyworld with the awareness of the narrative as an artefact expectedly complying with certain conventions.

Despite the fact that it epitomises the second plot type, the concept of trajectory will necessarily be further complemented at the end of the chapter, after all the elements have been examined. In fact, this confirms how these image schemata – map, trajectory and fractal – are meant to epitomise the distinctiveness of each type, as distinguished from other modes of spatially-oriented narrative experiences. These selected images are the result of my examinations rather than their starting points.

3.1. Spatiality cornered

3.1.1. At the convergence of geography and literature: the privileged position of crime fiction

During the last few decades, the relation between crime fiction genre and space has attracted an upsurge of attention and produced an increasing number of critical works. The ground for such convergence of interests has been prepared by a larger synergy between literature and geography, with the latter usually looking at the former along the lines of Frémont's (1976) encouragement to see literature as one of the new instruments of geographical inquiry.[55] While I refer to Lando (1996) for a reasoned overview of the interdisciplinary branches straddling geography and literature from a geographer's perspective, the fortunes of literature in this field started in the 1970s with the rise of cultural geography, as narrative was deemed particularly well-positioned to explore and convey the pivotal concept of 'sense of a place',[56] that is 'the result of the amalgamation between reality and culture and between visual and symbolic reality' (Pezzotti 2012: 3, n. 1). In the majority of cases, crime fiction was individuated as a privileged literary genre for looking at representations of environments and of social dynamics in space, for it consistently integrated the objectivity of geographical reality with the subjectivity of individual and collective perspectives. Even a scholar like Lutwack (1984), who evaluates the role of space in literature from the quite different lens of ecology, identifies the Gothic genre as a forerunner of crime fiction on the grounds that it was the first literary tradition

---

[55] Lando (1996) individuates five major directions of research: a) 'the geographical fact in literary works'; b) 'sense of place'; c) 'cultural rooting', d) the 'inscape'; e) 'culture and ethno-territorial consciousness'.
[56] For a discussion of the implications of the complex term 'place', see Entrikin (1991), Frémont (1976), Relph (1976), and in particular Tuan (1975, 1977).

to establish 'a peculiarly intense relationship between the characters and their immediate environments' (Allen 1954: 100), soon followed by Balzac and the realistic novel of the late eighteenth century.[57] Works such as Howell (1998) and Kadonaga (1998) focus on crime fiction and display an excellent acquaintance with the bibliography on literature and on this genre specifically, yet they still belong to a research strand that privileges the geographer's interest.

The opposite perspective – namely, literature drawing on geography to approach traditional issues with fresh eyes – is closer to the scope of the present discussion and has been embraced by a number of works flourishing mainly since the 2000s. Starting from the publishing context, these studies reveal a shift of emphasis onto literature and aim to investigate the ways in which crime fiction problematises issues related to space, place and identity. Due to the nature of these matters, the research focus is usually narrowed down to specific cultures, languages or regions; for the present discussion, I will therefore concentrate on the Italian case.

In literary studies, there was a certain delay in critical attention with respect to the Italian *giallo*, unlike what happened in the United States, United Kingdom and France in the post-war period.[58] This is mostly due to the difficulties affecting the genre on its way to being accepted as a fully-fledged and worthy literary production, a stigma that remained attached to it until the 1980s. Still today, the fact that some critics feel the need to object that it is 'reductive' to regard Camilleri's works as *gialli* reveals the long-term effects of this derogatory view (Dorfles 2004). It is not accidental that when credited authors such as Gadda, Leonardo Sciascia or Antonio Tabucchi approached the crime genre, scholars tended to underscore how they subvert and deconstruct the genre's traditional structure, in particular its teleological nature. Pieri (2011) reports that Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (1980) marked a significant critical turning point toward the final collapsing of the barrier between "high" and "low" literature, confirmed by the translation and publication the same year of a collection of theoretical essays on crime fiction by Cremante and Rambelli (1980).

Notwithstanding the initial dismissal, Italian crime fiction has since followed the international trend of the genre in proving to be a highly effective ground for questioning social reality and exploring its interrelation with geographical and cultural context. Especially from the 1990s, the presence of Italian and foreign crime stories on the literary scene was so vast that critical interest ultimately had to ensue, even though earliest works

---

[57] Lutwack argues that place may get into literature in two ways: as idea – that is 'as attitudes about places and classes of places that the writer picks up from his social and intellectual milieu and from his personal experiences' – and as form – that is as 'materials for the forms he uses to render events, characters, and themes' (1984: 12).

[58] The term *giallo* to indicate the genre in Italian stems from the colour of the cover of a series of crime fiction books launched in 1929 by Mondadori; the label is now recognised and widely accepted by scholars.

were much stronger in historical approaches rather than analysis (Pieri 2011). Studies that took the analysis of specific authors as their standpoint progressively attempted to reach out toward wider considerations on the genre as a whole, drawing on international scholarship elaborated by, to name but a few, Knight (1980, 2004), Most (2006), Priestman (1988, 2003), Scaggs (2005), and Thoms (1998). In line with what was registered by English, North American and French researchers, also Italian critics did not fail to stress space-related features: Somigli (2005) claims that crime fiction genre has become increasingly popular in Italy because of its attempt to grasp the contradictions of reality, while Marras (2005) advances the enticing proposal of Sciascia as initiator of the tradition of the 'giallo nazional-regionale'.

Until the turn of the century, however, with the exception of the pioneering work by Carloni (1994) which for the first time examines the crime fiction genre through the lens of geography, this connection so rich in potential has been explored mostly in articles and essays, necessarily limited in their scope. It is only in 2011 that Pieri edited the first collected work in English on Italian crime fiction, where attention is proportionately distributed between representations of space, gender and *impegno* (that is, social and political commitment).[59] The following year, Pezzotti (2012) publishes a study unprecedented in slant and scope that programmatically foregrounds the representation of place in contemporary Italian crime fiction and offers an overview of the genre on the basis of its geographical setting.[60] The innovative contribution added by Pezzotti's monograph resides in that she does not simply acknowledge the geographical setting, but rather aims to build on it to analyse the perception of ongoing changes in the social and physical landscape and thus draw critical connections between a certain setting and the specific features of Italian crime series.

3.1.2. Spatiality: a metamorphic interest

Cultural geography has undoubtedly triggered a new attention for the issue of space in crime fiction and yet, looking back at previous historical phases and subgenres of crime fiction, my discussion aims to make the case that spatiality has always loomed large in the genre, variously disguised and operating at different levels. When in classic detection stories plot was 'elevated above all considerations (often including credibility), and […] realistic character development takes a back seat to the construction of the puzzle' (Scaggs 2005: 35), spatiality stands out through the crucial role of the topological setting and the geometries of the deduction process. If it is true that the most successful detection stories

---

[59] See Rinaldi's 'Annotated bibliography' in Pieri (2011) for a complete bibliography on Italian crime fiction.
[60] See this work for a vast bibliography on Italian crime fiction and the importance of place in literature and in this genre specifically.

owe their popularity to distinctive characters such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot (or Montalbano himself, although he is more of a rounded character than the classic ones), these characters are often praised and typified by the way they think and manage virtuality throughout the investigation, rather than for their existential or emotional background. Then, when with the hardboiled genre the impeccability of plots starts swaying and characters assume more detailed and human traits, spatiality still finds its way through the socio-historical impact of the environment.

Although Scaggs (2005) accounts for a number of influences and forerunners that contributed to the protean richness of the genre – from the Old Testament stories[61] to Elizabethan revenge tragedies, from cautionary tales to the Gothic novel (Bell 2003) – the official birth of crime fiction is traditionally set by scholarship with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders of Rue Morgue' (1841). Poe's tales of ratiocination epitomise the classic phase of crime fiction, usually addressed as detective or mystery fiction, whose main features remain fundamentally unchanged across the subsequent moment of the so-called Golden Age, the period in-between the two world wars, characterised by the achievement of a wide popularity of the genre among readers. Belonging to the period are authors such as Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie, who select their favoured settings mainly aiming for stylistic effects (e.g. incongruity of murder in a pastoral setting) or for the possibilities they offer to the formal operation of the mystery. In this sense, the concept of setting is used in a specialised meaning that stresses its 'being formed by a set of fictional spaces which are the *topological focus* of the story' (Ronen 1986: 423). This latter function even produced sub-genres, such as the locked-room mystery, the country-house or snowbound mystery, or the murder afloat (Scaggs 2005).

The interest in the sociological complexity of the setting can be traced back to the hardboiled tradition started in the United States in the late 1920s, with the narratives of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. The hardboiled genre programmatically moves its crimes from the circumscribed middle-bourgeois and aristocratic settings of classic detective and mystery fiction to a typically hostile urban environment, whose toughness forges a new type of detective, usually a private eye, as rough as the context he lives in. The type of crimes changes, too: from the cleverly planned designs of classic fiction to the illegal activities of organised crime or the misdeeds of serial killers. In both these latter instances, elucidating the social background is pivotal to the resolution of the case. It could almost be suggested that the metropolis itself is the ultimate source of criminality, which makes the struggle of the solitary hero a never-ending battle. This shift does not originate in a vacuum: from a literary perspective, this trend develops from pulp magazines and dime novels based

---

[61] Interestingly enough, both Camilleri (VV 48) and Scaggs (2005) identify the story of Edipo as precursory detective story.

on sensational stories that were common in the United States since the civil war (Pykett 2003; Porter 2003), whose English counterparts are to be found in the 'penny dreadful' and 'shilling shockers' (Scaggs 2005); culturally, the genre is intrinsically linked to the phenomenon of urbanisation, whose exponential growth since the eighteenth century raised problematic issues related to social order. Pezzotti's enticing integration of the two perspectives fostered by classic detection and hardboiled fiction stands out as an example of the never-ending process of retrieval and renovation of techniques and *topoi* within a genre: in her analysis of Sicilian and Sardinian crime fiction, Pezzotti projects the fascination with the circumscribed location onto the confined space of the island, suggesting that this 'amplified version of the locked room of classic detective fiction' is used here to 'magnify the issue of a still-elusive common identity' (2012: 163).

To the new problems posed by a changing social environment brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the stories by Poe – followed by the British tradition of Wilkie Collins, G. K. Chesterton and Doyle, and by Emile Gaboriau, Maurice Leblanc and, later, Georges Simenon in France – replied by giving voice to an exquisitely Victorian faith in rationality and scientific methods of thinking, which are mirrored in and impose their logic on the narrative structure. As Knight aptly puts it, order 'is the overt method and the covert purpose' (1988: 110) of these narratives, which always revolve around its disruption and restoration, and therefore around one main question: who did it? And *whodunit*, indeed, becomes the label that defines the whole genre between the first and second world war. The need to answer this initial and ultimate question works as overarching thematic and plot constraint (Porter 1981). Praised in the classic and Golden Age fiction, order irremediably loses its purity in the hardboiled and following subgenres, which in turn abdicate their reassuring function. Here, even the brightest scenario, one in which justice partly succeeds and the murderer is punished, always retains some degree of disorder that tacitly reasserts the intrinsic criminal nature of society and of the individual. Reverting our attention to topographical space, it is no accident that it is Christie, the queen of the Golden Age, who most frequently used to attach proper maps of their closed settings to her novels: as Padrón (2007: 256) remarks, maps need 'visibility, stasis, hierarchy, and control', and as such they bear witness of the authorial stern belief in an objectified sense of place and time (Scaggs 2005: 51; cf. Knight 1980: 120) that reasserts the very possibility for order and control.

Another way to rephrase the transition from classic detective and mystery stories to the following forms of crime fiction has been proposed by Symons (1972), who sees a viable interpretive key in the passage from the main questions of *who* and *how* to the question *why*. In other words, while in the earlier phases the point was the formal design of

the crime, later it became the investigation of the reasons and causes behind it, thus justifying the increasing importance and problematisation of the social background. To be sure, a crime 'always occurs and it is solved […] in a specific location and in certain milieus and social strata' (Porter 1981: 73), and it is the mounting foregrounding of this latter aspect that has prompted the convergence between geography and crime fiction in the first place. From an initial concern over urban space, subsequently extended to its articulations – city, postmodern metropolis, sprawl –, interest has spread to society as a whole.

What I have sought to demonstrate so far is that spatiality has been a continuous presence in crime fiction, cross-cutting its various sub-genres. By way of explanatory simplification, it could be suggested that spatial practices undergird crime narratives in three main ways: in terms of setting, order, and social background. By referring to setting I am thinking about classic detective and Golden Age mystery fiction, where a self-contained, enclosed and manageable space includes all the elements that have led to the crime and all those that are necessary to its solution. This kind of space easily lends itself to visual mapping, is regarded as objective and knowable, and it is mirrored in the structuring formal features of the investigation. Detection is often conceived of as a puzzle: order is the main concern of and at the same time dominates these narratives, where each piece has (or will be returned) its rightful place. In the hardboiled subgenre the highly formalised unfolding of vicissitudes engages with the complexity of the social background, thus becoming increasingly blurred. No longer individuated by neat deductive practices, spatiality transforms and re-adjusts its own role, emerging as a wider, subject based environment to be questioned and critically explored.

Camilleri has an in-depth knowledge of crime fiction. Not only does he have due to his personal history as passionate reader of the novels of Simenon and Manuel Vàzquez Montalbàn, but also as a result of his career as a production manager in RAI following his studies in directing at the Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica. Here, during the 1960s Camilleri sponsored and was involved in the production of three crime series: *Le avventure di Laura Storm*, the series of detective Sheridan, and *Le inchieste del commissario Maigret*, based on Simenon's novels. Camilleri not only put himself to the test with crime fiction as a writer but also transferred his own reading passions to the character of Salvo Montalbano, who is portrayed as a keen reader of Sciascia, Simenon, and Vàzquez Montalbàn (FA 158, CT 41-2, GT 70).

During an interview with Sorgi in 2000, asked why he chose the crime fiction formula for his writing, Camilleri explained that he needed this genre as a cage that could impose an order onto his imagination. He said that it was Leonardo Sciascia, Sicilian novelist, sharp critic of the twentieth-century socio-political milieu and personal friend of

Camilleri, who encouraged him to approach the detective genre in this way. To be sure, these are not the only voices to relate crime genre to some kind of operating constraints, to be either complied with or challenged. Bruno Ventavoli observes that 'the *giallo* is a genre with both strict rules and the freedom to represent reality'. Carlo Lucarelli avers that the goals of tension and surprise prevent the genre from having rules, but at the same time he admits that it nonetheless has a *grammar*. Similarly, by arguing that a *giallo* is such only when it completely betrays the rules of the genre, Marcello Fois is actually confirming their silent (i.e. virtual) role (Pezzotti 2012: 173, 186). In her article on Camilleri and the revived pleasure of 'reading for the plot', Bertoni (1998) reports that, according to the author, 'lo schema del giallo in un certo modo imbriglia il recupero dell'intreccio, garantisce al racconto la tensione salda, avvincente del *suspence*'. These words suggest that by 'reading for the plot' Bertoni primarily means the pleasure of a final closure, a teleological structure satisfactorily centripetal. They also show that, despite the number of narratives that variously challenge this trend, Bertoni feels that the teleological aspect is a conventional and typifying element of the *giallo*.

Following the same tendency toward abstract and ordering simplification, in one of the first critical works that sought to assess the detection genre without dismissing it, Todorov (1966/1977) marks the presence of two stories as its dominant feature: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.[62] It should be noted that although this conceptualisation shall result productive in some respects (i.e. elaboration of expectations), it also immediately cues the adoption of a structuralist framework based on the distinction of fabula and sjuzet. To reduce each storyline to a single-world version would strongly limit the critic's analytic possibilities. The double-story structure is the premise of a crime narrative, not what it capitalises on.

I do not reject Todorov's description as I do not contest Brooks' (1984) claim that the structure of detective fiction mirrors the structure of all stories as it is a construction made by the detective and the reader. Rather, this chapter has a different focus. It does not concern how crime fiction genre captures structural aspects that belong to all narratives, but rather seeks to identify some feature or strategy that is distinctive of crime fiction. More specifically, distinctive of the way readers understand crime fiction stories as they read them. Arguably, one of these typifying processes is the investigation. Since the investigation requires a negotiation of potential alternate scenarios, it follows that crime fiction as a genre capitalises on the exploration of virtuality. This does not exclude that

---

[62] Todorov's (1966/1977, 1990) work represented a positive turning point toward a theory of genres, after Romanticism had determined their overall rejection in favour of a focus on 'literature' as a whole or on the critique of specific works. In addressing detective fiction, he attempts to isolate co-existing types interacting synchronically within the genre, rather than subsequent historical forms.

there can easily be crime narratives that disrupt this principle: however, I suggest that it is on this generalised model that readers' expectations are commonly modelled and it is against this blueprint that their understanding strategies are triggered. In fact, conventions or expectations can only be disrupted when they are part of the readers' world knowledge in the first place.

3.2. Possible worlds: a modally articulated narrative structure

3.2.1. Crime fiction as epistemological genre

Due to the historical genesis of the genre and its long-standing engagement with the representation of social dynamics, spatiality is deeply ingrained in crime fiction. It is beyond the scope of this research to further analyse the close interconnections of crime fiction – or even just of Camilleri's novels – with spatiality as mimetic space, of which the previous section gives a preliminary overview. Yet, I intended to make a point of the meaningful position occupied by the setting in this genre. Semantic reference to spaces, indeed, represents one of the parameters pinpointed at the beginning of the chapter that contribute to make it more likely and easy for readers to tap into their sensorimotor and spatial knowledge. According to the 'spill-over effect' posited by Caracciolo (2014b: 61), elements at the story-level can influence the way readers interact with discursive structures – such as plot itself. It follows that thematising spatiality might modulate readers' response and possibly make them more prone to engage in spatially-oriented comprehension strategies.

Let us revert to the order-imposing schema typical of the *giallo* that attracted Camilleri, and let us try to reformulate it in different terms. McHale (1987: 9), for instance, describes the detective fiction genre not in terms of structures of constraints operating on the narrative, as Todorov suggested, but as the epistemological genre par excellence. All crime stories, in other words, revolve around knowledge issues, fundamentally summarised by a few chief questions: *Who committed the crime? How? Why? How does the detective get to know it?* As Scaggs muses, this means that narratives belonging to this genre are programmatically 'organised "in terms of an epistemological dominant" whose structure and devices raise issues concerning the accessibility, transmission, and reliability and unreliability of "knowledge about the world"' (2005: 124). Most importantly, these epistemological issues involve both the reader and the system of characters internal to the narrative world. McHale highlights that in crime fiction narrativity is ensured not just by the story of the crime (i.e. its inherent tellability), but above all by the way it becomes known: who knows what and, ultimately, what the reader knows and how. In the case of Camilleri's

novels the perspective of the narrative voice is linked to Montalbano's focalisation, hence the general dependence of the reader's knowledge on the Inspector's knowledge. This dependence is admittedly arbitrary, and indeed there is a certain variability across the spectrum of crime fiction stories (e.g. in Sherlock Holmes stories the perspective is Dr Watson's): however, irrespective of whether the focalisation is or is not the detective's, it has to be aligned with that of a (set of) character(s) belonging to the storyworld; it has to reach the reader through textually encoded entities.

3.2.2. Possible-worlds theory: reality vs. fiction

Building on the assumption that, conventionally, narrativity of crime fiction resides precisely in the ways in which contradictory and conflicting knowledge(s) interact with each other, and in how the privileged figure of the detective manages to make sense of their reciprocal relationships, we should bear in mind that knowledge is not a matter of all-or-nothing. In order to conceptualise the modifications and updates of the epistemological statuses undergone by the various characters throughout the narrative, a more complex system of reference is needed. This is provided by Ryan's possible worlds theory, supplemented by Dannenberg's work on counterfactuality (3.3.1).

When Ryan (1991) introduces possible-worlds theory, she acknowledges that the notion of "world" was already in use in a loosely metaphoric way among literary critics, but also observes that it enters the field of textual semiotics significantly enriched and analytically sharpened by logicians:[63]

> The theory of possible worlds is a formal model developed by logicians for the purpose of defining the semantics of modal operators [...]. The theory has two concepts to propose to textual semiotics: the metaphor of "world" to describe the semantic domain projected by the text; and the concept of modality to describe and classify the various ways of existing of the objects, states, and events that make up the semantic domain. [1991: 3]

I already considered the profitability of the concept of storyworld at the outset of this work (1.2.1). As soon as modality enters the picture, however, the situation becomes more complex, with interesting consequences for crime fiction. The concept of modality, indeed, enables us to formalise the variations within the multifarious epistemological landscape sketched above, which represents the major source of narrativity of this specific narrative genre.

Theory of possible-worlds entertains the hypothesis that there is not just one world. Even if we disregard the doubling of actual and fictional world, the point is that they

---

[63] For an in-depth discussion of the transition of the concept of possible world from philosophy to literary theory, see Ronen (1994).

are both systems of reality. Each system is endowed with a modal structure that comprises a central world, where the subject can potentially recentre (2.2.3), and a set of alternate modal possibilities surrounding it, each defining a world on its own (alternative possible worlds – APW). Due to the multiplicity of worlds it comprises, a system of reality is usually referred to as 'universe'. Absolutely speaking, there is only one actual world (AW) and that is the reality we live in. However, the concepts of modal logic can be applied recursively, which means that a fictional world conjured up by a narrative can be in turn designated as the actual centre of a universe of its own. A 'textual universe' thus ensues, 'the image of a system of reality projected by a text' at whose centre there is a textual actual world (TAW) surrounded by the other modally diversified worlds of the system (Ryan 1991: 109-23).

Projecting these observations onto Camilleri's novels, it may be posited that the fictional world of Montalbano is the actual world of the textual universe projected by the fictional text. Incidentally, Ryan's framework can also aid in clarifying the potentially problematic issue of seriality. In my analysis, I freely move from one novel to another and refer to Montalbano's Sicily as if it were always the same sociological and geographical background. These intuitive critical moves gain theoretical validity if one suggests that the *Montalbano* series as a whole should be understood as one single textual universe, progressively expanding. Indeed, it may be argued that when it comes to narrative series – irrespective of the medium – a conventional agreement between an author and his readership is in place. According to this tacit pact, textual worlds conjured up by subsequent instalments (i.e. novels) maintain the same textual referential world, that is the world that (fictionally) exists independently of the textual actual world (Ryan 1991: 25). The textual worlds construed by different novels are linked to each other through accessibility relations that hold unvarying, with the exception of chronological compatibility. In other words, perfect accessibility is ensured only if we posit that any TAW, starting from that conjured in the second novel (*Il cane di terracotta*, 1996), is accessed by a subject relocated in a TAW displaying the properties set at the end of the novel published immediately before. The *Montalbano* series respects a chronological linearity, and its textual referential world (TRW) registers any change affecting its properties: a character that is introduced in one novel may reappear in a subsequent one, and it will be approached as if the characters (and the reader) already know it. Ingrid Sjostrom, for instance, firstly appears in Montalbano's world in *La forma dell'acqua* (1994), and the relationship between her and the inspector linearly develops in time; the same holds for Montalbano's girlfriend, Livia, even though she already belongs to the initial TRW of the first novel. Similarly, when

Montalbano's father dies in *Il ladro*, he remains dead in the following novels, leaving Montalbano to deal with the ensuing emotional trauma.

Ryan's modal structuring of the narrative universe may also aid in formalising the relationship between the fictional Sicily, emerging from the TAW of the *Montalbano* novels, and the real Sicily, belonging to the actual world.[64] Camilleri, in fact, changes the names of the main settings, turning Agrigento in Montelusa and Porto Empedocle into Vigàta.[65] However, this is done less to disguise than to transfer episodes and settings of Camilleri's biographical experience onto a level of imagination such that human and social dynamics are still reliably in place and yet they lose their specific real referent, thus operating a conflation of particularised localism and generalised universalism (Calabrò 2004). I suggest that the incompatibility between the "two Sicilies" is produced by transgressions of analytical accessibility relations, which assess the degree of resemblance between the analytical properties of the same objects in different worlds (1991: 32-38). In his texts, Camilleri transfers the properties that in AW are attached to 'Porto Empedocle' to the fictional 'Vigàta', and those attached to 'Agrigento' to 'Montelusa'. Nevertheless, the social and geographical background remains ultimately semantically accessible, because the reader can easily infer that names are the only property that changes against a whole set of untouched essential properties that define specific places in the actual world.

3.2.3. Articulating virtuality: the private worlds of characters

Until now, the notion of possible world has served to define the ontological status of Montalbano's fictional storyworld as opposed to the actual – i.e. nonfictional – world of reality, and to clarify the reciprocal relations between the textual universes described by different novels belonging to the same series. Within their own systems of reality, however,

---

[64] I only marginally touch this issue here as it would require a much larger discussion and a whole set of different questions and theoretical frameworks. In fact, an exhaustive analysis would require not only an investigation of the relationship between fictional and real Sicily but also an examination of the film adaptation and the complex semiotic transformations undergone by the fictional characters in this process (cf. Clausi et al. 2007; Marrone 2006). The television series, directed by Alberto Sironi and produced by Palomar for RAI, was first aired in 1999, starring Luca Zingaretti in the role of Inspector Montalbano; it counts ten seasons to date, each composed of four movies which, although mostly based on one novel, usually integrate the main plot with other short stories featuring Montalbano. In 2008, BBC Four purchased the transmission rights and broadcasted the series, subtitled, in the United Kingdom. The large success led to the production of a prequel series in 2012, *Il giovane Montalbano*. The influence not only on the audience/readership but also on the author himself has been so deep that Camilleri admits that 'Ora mi succede che quando scrivo un nuovo *Montalbano* rischi di influenzarmi non tanto il personaggio televisivo di Montalbano, quanto piuttosto il paesaggio' (Scarpetti and Strano 2004: 129). In fact, the scenographer Luciano Ricceri shot most of the scenes in the Eastern part of Sicily instead of the Western part, where Agrigento and Porto Empedocle – fictional counterparts of Montelusa and Vigàta – are situated.

[65] Already in *Un filo di fumo* (1980), a peculiar historical novel that precedes the *Montalbano* series, Vigàta appears as the fictional counterpart of the real town of Porto Empedocle, birthplace of Camilleri himself and of Luigi Pirandello. And probably as a homage to Pirandello should be intended the other fictitious name, invented by the Sicilian playwright to indicate Agrigento in the short story 'Le tonache di Montelusa' (now in *Novelle per un anno*, 2015).

all the worlds outlined so far pertain to the factual domain, which means that they encompass 'what exists absolutely in the semantic universe of the text' (1991: 112). In fact, Ryan also advances the notion of 'actualisable domain', which comprises all possible future events of the storyworld and is 'technically a possible world, linked to the present state of TAW through the relation of temporal accessibility; but it differs from the other APWs of the narrative system in that it exists absolutely, rather than being created by the mental act of a character' (1991: 114).

Outside of the factual domain, therefore, the domain of the virtual – i.e. nonfactual – spreads out, encompassing 'what exists in the mind of characters' (112) and which may or may not be actualised eventually.

> These constructs include not only the dreams, fictions, and fantasies conceived or told by characters, but any kind of representation concerning past or future states and events: plans, passive projections, desires, beliefs concerning the history of TAW, and beliefs concerning the private representations of other characters. [1991: 156]

'Insofar as they owe their existence to an act of the mind, the entities found exclusively in possible worlds differ in ontological status from the objects of the actual world', argues Ryan while she weighs up various approaches within possible-worlds theory, seeking the most adequate one to the formulation of a theory of fiction (1991: 20). In its original context, this consideration is meant to corroborate the ontological difference between fictional constructions (i.e. literary characters) and actual entities. However, playing on the principle of recursivity of modal logic, the whole system could be recentred onto the fictional world to distinguish also here factual from virtual, so that one could draw on it to explore how it is made sense of by fictional characters.

Sensing their importance, although classic narratology rejected a systematic employment of modal logic, some structuralists attempted not to let virtuality go unnoticed. Maybe it is no accident that the name occurring once again is that of Todorov (1969). In his attempt to formalise the plots of *The Decameron*, he realised that 'events considered possible by characters, but never enacted, had as much impact on the development of the plot as events presented as facts' (Ryan 1991: 3-4).[66] Overtly acknowledging the significance of the virtual, Ryan includes all these types of mental constructions elaborated by characters under the label of 'embedded narratives': she builds on a concept already in use among narratologists to refer to explicitly framed narratives (cf.

---

[66] Todorov proposes four modal operators to provide a classification of nonfactual propositions: *obligatory* mode, *optative* mode, *conditional* mode, and *predictive* mode. A few years later, Bremond (1973) suggests a distinction between descriptive (actual) and modalised statements, which 'anticipate the hypothesis of a future event, or a virtual action' (86 – English translation from Ryan 1991: 110).

Bal 1981; Chambers 1984; Rimmon-Kenan 1983), but extends its scope to 'any story-like representation produced in the mind of a character and reproduced in the mind of the reader' (1986: 320). Modal logics allows Ryan to refine her view of the narrative structure even further, not only distinguishing between factual and virtual but also formalising the various modes of existence within virtuality, according to different systems of modality. Drawing on Doležel (1976) and Pavel (1975), Ryan proposes three main systems that relate the private worlds of characters (APW) to the textual actual universe by means of sets of operators: permission, prohibition, and obligation for the *deontic* system; goodness, badness, and indifference for the *axiological* system; knowledge, ignorance, and belief for the *epistemic* system.[67] These operators function as common denominators of sets of propositions that describe similarly modalised mental constructions of a character, each of which constitutes a specific possible world. Ryan's reference to propositions acts as a reminder of the fact that readers' understanding of the private mental worlds of characters are always textually encoded, if they are to be included in the designed co-construction of the narrative storyworld. It is the text that may or may not be designed to tap into a certain world knowledge – which is not necessarily propositional.

It will be possible, therefore, to speak of Montalbano as a character endowed with an obligation-world, which describes the system of commitments and prohibitions that depend on rules established by society or values privately held by the individual; a wish-world, modelled according to what Montalbano perceives as good or bad – and anything within the continuum in-between; and a knowledge-world, which can be correct/incorrect, complete/incomplete, total/partial, depending on the extent to which what Montalbano knows is objectively true in the fictional actual world (1991: 114 ff.).

It is in particular the K-world that is going to play a crucial role in the understanding of crime fiction plots. To rephrase McHale's description in the terms of Ryan's modally articulated narrative structure, it may be argued that crime fiction programmatically capitalises on the richness and variety of epistemological worlds. Their virtuality enables these possible worlds to be fluid, in their content and reciprocal relations: produced by the mental constructions of characters, they can change as easily and quickly as people change their mind. A K-world is said to be in agreement with TAW when what the character holds to be true, is true also in TAW; contrariwise, it is in disagreement or conflict when the character holds to be true something that is irrevocably false in TAW. More blurred is the intermediate condition of indeterminacy. According to Ryan, indeterminacy may stem from either nonconsideration or noncommitment to a truth value:

---

[67] Ryan also mentions the alethic system, which relates AW to TAW, relying on the operators of possibility, impossibility, and necessity. Since I am not concerned with the relationship between real and fictional, here, I shall leave this categorisation aside.

> An incomplete K-world fits on its reference world like a cover with some holes in the middle; the location of the holes is determined, and the character knows where his or her knowledge is defective. A partial K-world is like a cover that is too small, the regions beyond the cover remaining unsurveyed. [1991: 115]

Interestingly, the issue of characters' private worlds meets counterfactuality when it comes to false beliefs (Goldman 2006). False beliefs occur when the K-world of a character is in disagreement with fictional reality. However, they can be crucially exploited by either the detective or criminal subjects to deceive the opposite faction: until they are held as true, false beliefs can provoke the same effects of real beliefs. In *Il ladro* Montalbano attempts to secretly record his meeting with a shady secret services officer in order to blackmail him; his technological inaptitude makes him fail but he still manages to convince the officer that a video has been recorded:

> [Montalbano] ragionò che in fondo non era tanto grave non aver registrato niente, l'importante era che il colonnello l'avesse creduto e continuasse a crederlo. [LM 226]

As anticipated, Todorov's view of crime stories as characterised by the double story of the crime and its reconstruction represents a prerequisite for the understanding of crime fiction narratives because it significantly affects the reader's expectations. Confirming my underlying thesis that sees the epistemological world as crucial to the design of detection, Ryan posits the situation of the enigma as a form of conflict stemming from 'an incomplete K-world with well-defined areas of indeterminacy' (1991: 121). In this respect, the figures of the detective and of the reader are truly alike (Hühn 1987) as, in order to proceed, they both have to circumscribe those areas of the storyworld about which their knowledge is indeterminate. For the detective, this process is triggered by being assigned a case. For the reader, it is prompted by the conventions of the genre: these conventions design a specific system of expectations such that the reader knows that a crime is going to be committed and that epistemologically grey areas are going to be cued by the text as favourite sites to be unveiled to identify the solution.

Incidentally, it is worth remarking how this case serves to stress the crucial pragmatic value of genre conventions that, far from being normative, rather scaffold the process of understanding. For the same reason, I tend to resist an uncontrolled application of the parallelism between detection and reading process, pre-eminently suggested by Barthes (1966/1975; Hühn 1987; Marcus 2003; Pyrhönen 1999; Scaggs 2005; Thoms

1998).[68] However appealing the metaphor might be, I claim that it is crucial not to dismiss the role of expectations attached to the genre affiliation, as it would be done if one assumes that comprehension strategies associated to detection are arguably adopted even when the narrative does not prompt them in any way, textually or paratextually encoded. Finally, Barthes' analysis is based on a prior and more fundamental metaphor, that of reality or world as text, which is deeply connected to a propositional view of thought, an approach from which I preliminarily distanced my research.

3.3. The dynamics of the investigation

Some may object that conflicting K-worlds are actually common to any kind of narrative. All stories concern human actions, which are understood as the mirror of complex systems of intentions underlying them and projecting one onto the other; these blends of wishes, plans, knowledge, and obligations are indeed conveyed by private possible worlds.

Nonetheless, crime fiction poses quite a particular scenario. Interpreting the detection frame in terms of conflicts stemming from incomplete epistemological worlds is an appealing cognitive reformulation, but it would be ultimately pointless if it would stop at being simply this, a rephrasing. Drawing on the third novel of the *Montalbano* series, *Il ladro*, I intend to explore some of the consequences of this rephrasing, underscoring how crime fiction capitalises on a more or less complex orchestration of virtuality.

In *Il ladro*, Montalbano's investigation begins with the finding of the lifeless body of Aurelio Lapecora in the lift of the building where he lived together with his wife. The indeterminate epistemic area – what events and intentions led to the murder of Mr Lapecora – is quite clearly defined. If this were not a crime novel and an equivalent gap in knowledge was pinpointed, the reader could reasonably guess that the gap is going to be eventually filled but she would have no specific expectations about how this will happen. Conversely, in a crime narrative the reader's expectations are fairly clear, a clarity that is mirrored in the customary investigation procedure. In the first phase, the detective has to gather as many clues as possible, in order to reduce the width of the areas of indeterminacy. On this basis, the second phase consists in winnowing down all the hypothetical accounts of events, until the actual one is outlined. These two phases, often intertwined, represent the main part of the narrative, both quantitatively and qualitatively: not only the investigation itself covers the highest number of pages, but it is in its convolutions that the reader takes the utmost pleasure. In other words, the expectations

---

[68] Nicolson (1946) and Porter (1981) argue instead for an analogy between the detective and the professor or the scientist.

stemming from the affiliation to the crime fiction genre concern the subject of the narration as much as they impact on the operative cognitive strategies expectedly cued in the reader.

Reverting to Todorov's insight, one can see that a far more complex situation is envisaged: a crime story is made not only of the story of the criminal and that of the chaser, but also of the more or less thick forest of hypodiegetic virtual stories. From this initial situation, alternate possibilities are progressively pruned, as they result progressively incompatible with what emerges as the fictional true story behind the crime. Understanding the plot of a crime narrative, indeed, does not simply mean to reconstruct the account which is ultimately true, but to be able to follow this process of negotiation among virtual narrative private worlds and action-sequences.

3.3.1. Counterfactuality

Once clues are gathered, Montalbano can start examining various options, sifting through the possible explanatory scenarios. Clues are the posts delimiting the space wherein virtuality can start unfolding. It has been said that the virtual, or nonfactual, comprises all that is not an objective fact in TAW. K-worlds, O-worlds and W-worlds represent sets of beliefs, values and desires of characters that basically exist in the present, even though they usually stem from past causes or states of affairs and they cast their potential effects onto the future. In addition to these possible worlds, Ryan argues that the virtual can be articulated in a twofold way according to temporal accessibility: the virtual in the future, which comprises still actualisable plans and expectations, modelled on the private worlds of a character; and the virtual in the past, which consists in counterfactual events that are 'impossible, since they missed the chance to be actualized' (1991: 114).[69]

Although crime fiction presents the reader also with alternative hypotheses concerning the future – for instance, plans on how to catch the murderer or prevent one from committing another –, the investigation process proper falls under the latter category of counterfactuality.[70] Through the figure of the detective, an array of different potential stories is overtly offered to the reader for assessment. Montalbano is strategically positioned at the centre of a network of relationships with colleagues, friends, and people involved in the case that are designed to prompt the enunciation of multiple conjectures. These may be spelled out to another character, or remain solitary speculations reported by the narrator; sometimes they are merely hinted at, and remain unknown to the reader until

---

[69] Substantial work has been done recently on counterfactuality, in the field of cognitive science (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002; Turner 1996) and psychology (Kahneman and Miller 1986; Roese and Olsen (ed.) 1995).

[70] Calabrese (2013) refers to counterfactuals in the future as prefactuals. Interestingly, he also notes that evidence seems to suggest that 'reminiscenza e proiezioni future sono espressioni di una medesima mappatura neurocognitiva' (99), meaning that they at least partially share the same neurological mechanisms; on the other hand, a certain difference in neural activation is registered between projections regarding a proximal vs. a distant future.

they are implemented and determine actual effects in the fictional universe. Unlike Dannenberg's liminal plotting, which individuates the reader's 'semiconscious mental images' (2008: 38 – cf. 2.3.2, 2.3.3), these conjectures are mental constructions of Montalbano's extended mind (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Menary 2010) but they are also explicitly proposed by the text. In Ryan's terminology, they constitute textual alternative possible worlds (TAPW), in the sense that they are not simply inferred by readers, but are textually encoded. Here resides one of the major distinctive features of crime fiction, for it appears blatant that possible-worlds created by characters do not simply enrich the narrative matter but constitute its substantial core. Montalbano's hypotheses can be regarded as constituting counterfactual possible-worlds in the light of Vaina's (1977) conceptualisation of possible world – or sub-world – as 'course of events' (this in addition to the alternative conceptualisation as 'complete set of events').[71]

And yet these hypotheses are endowed with an ambiguous epistemological status, which I explore by integrating Ryan's account with further observations advanced by Dannenberg (2008). Both scholars, indeed, have profitably integrated possible-worlds theory with narrative semantics; being equally interested in formal features of narrative structures, both scholars preferred to supplement structuralist stances by reinterpreting them from new perspectives rather than rejecting them. However, possibly because of her strong proximity to the field of artificial intelligence – with which I claim no allegiance – Ryan adopts a propositional-based approach that is, instead, conveniently overcome by Dannenberg. Furthermore, although their basic understandings of counterfactuals are not conflicting with each other, I find it useful to opt for a more flexible view than Ryan's strictly logical application. As one can infer from her proposal of a loose classification of plots into two macro-categories defined by either convergence (i.e. coincidence) or divergence (i.e. counterfactuality), Dannenberg broadens the applicability of the concept of counterfactuality, describing it as opposed to the actuality of AW but introducing the possibility that it may in fact be actual in TAW. This path has been thoroughly explored by Singles (2012), who takes the relation between counterfactuality and history as a starting point and offers an extremely articulated discussion, integrating it with references to numerous sub-genres and narrative experimentations. Drawing on Spedo (2009), Singles (2012: 93) reinstates a distinction between 'counterfactual histories', which are told in the conditional mode, and 'alternate histories', which are told in the indicative mode: 'counterfactual histories', Singles goes on explaining, 'consist of counterfactual statements,

---

[71] The reading of crime fiction narratives as characterised by a negotiation of possible worlds and counterfactual hypotheses arguably holds even in those uncommon instances where the perspective is that of the criminal instead of the detective's: there is simply a reversal, with the criminal seeking to figure out the detection process on the police's part (Hühn 1987: 462-3).

whereas alternate histories create counterfactual worlds' (95). This distinction on the one hand is overlooked by Dannenberg, who encompasses both options under the category of counterfactuals, and on the other is ignored by Ryan, since she bounds counterfactuals to the conditional mode of impossibility only.

To look in greater detail into Singles' examination would fall outside of the remit of the present discussion. By briefly referring to her work, I intended to put Dannenberg in perspective to Ryan, and to point out how Ryan adopts a strict definition of counterfactuality which still bears traces of its connection with its proposition-based character and its beginnings in logic and as rhetorical device mostly. Ryan highlights that early philosophical uses of counterfactuals were meant to be employed for the assessment of the truth value of statements, and that even when discussion shifts on to textual semantics, '[t]he pragmatic purpose of counterfactuals is not to create alternate possible worlds for their own sake, but to make a point about AW' (1991: 48). Dannenberg fundamentally agrees with all the above and indeed posits counterfactuals as '*consciously virtual* alternate version[s] of the past world constructed in a thought experiment' triggered by a what-if scenario (2008: 53). At the same time, though, she expands the category and points at its potential for blurring the ontological boundaries between actuality and counterfactuality through the multiplication of the alternate worlds – e.g. as attempted in postmodernist fiction. To put the same concept another way, Dannenberg accounts for counterfactuals not only as feedback devices on the actual, but, more generally, as means able to problematise the issue of truth itself.[72] In the present discussion I shall emphasise counterfactuality as not merely an isolated device seldom employed, but as a fundamental thought pattern that we employ in our everyday life. Scientific evidence indeed suggests that the capability to consider alternate outcomes is pivotal in developing an understanding of causality in children (Calabrese 2013). Concerned with the issues of plausibility and possibility, counterfactual thinking is a basic mechanism to test the significance of events that happen around us.

I claim that this thought pattern should be regarded as a distinctive feature of crime fiction because it practically constitutes the investigation process, which is the quantitative and qualitative core of any crime story (irrespective of its success). When Montalbano calculates, weighs and considers alternative possibilities, he is employing counterfactual thinking. I revert now to my previous warning about the ambiguous epistemological status

---

[72] Cf. Dannenberg (2008: 137-38). I believe that Dannenberg represents a reasonable middle ground between Ryan's strict definition – which admittedly provides the most flawless examination and application of the concept – and implementations such as that of Fauconnier and Turner (2003: 203), who sketch a much broader definition of counterfactuals, arguing that it is not an absolute property but rather a space that may also depend on the point of view one takes. This latter elaboration, although fascinating and thought-provoking, may be indeed too loose.

of Montalbano's speculations to point out that, if counterfactual thinking relies on a clear contrastive relationship between various hypotheses, such comparison is carried out – fairly enough – against no actual course of events. The actual course of events, the true story of the crime, is what should be mentally reconstructed through counterfactual thinking. The status of Montalbano's conjectures is ambiguous because necessarily suspended: in order to get to the solution, Montalbano must keep the possible scenarios simultaneously activated and indeterminate; realistic and detailed enough to be able to speculate on their features, flaws and points of strength, but uncommitted enough not to overshadow other potential, less immediate hypotheses. Technically speaking, all of these narratives but one will ultimately result to be counterfactuals. Yet it is important to the success of the detection that they are all processed as if they were actual accounts of events, in order to test their coherence with the factual elements (i.e. clues) at the Inspector's fingertips.

> «Escluso che l'intento di Ahmed fosse quello di farsi ammazzare mitragliato al largo del suo paese natale, non riesco a pensare che due ipotesi. La prima è quella di farsi sbarcare nottetempo in un posto isolato della costa per rientrare clandestinamente nella sua terra. La seconda è quella di un incontro in alto mare, un abboccamento, che doveva assolutamente essere fatto di persona».
> «Mi persuade di più quest'ultima».
> «Macari a mia. E poi è capitato qualcosa di imprevisto».
> «L'intercettazione».
> «Giusto. E qui c'è un bel travaglio d'ipotesi. […]» [LM 137]

To shed light on the difference between the use of counterfactuals in crime fiction and the use of virtuality as explained in relation to *City* and the half-instantiation of scripts, I shall refer to the concept of semantic domain discussed by Ryan (1991: 112) in association with the concept of narrative universe:

> While the narrative universe consists of a collection of facts established for the various worlds of the system, the semantic domain accepts any kind of meanings: statements of fact, generalizations, symbolic interpretations, subjective judgments expressed by the narrator, or formed by the reader.

The narrative universe, therefore, is described as opposed to the larger totality of the semantic domain, of which it represents a sub-domain. Virtuality as evoked in *City* of course relies on textual cues, but it encourages the reader to engage with the semantic domain and to expand it, including also vague impressions that are loosely prompted by the text. Montalbano's manipulation of counterfactuals, instead, involves virtual private worlds but strictly pertains to the narrative universe, as the whole investigation is a quest for knowledge about the TAW. K-worlds propose images of TAW (1991: 111), and they are assessed according to the degree of coherence and consistency they display against the

textual actual world. Counterfactuals hypotheses are used by Montalbano to make a point about TAW, while *City* prompts the proliferation of uninstantiated scripts, which are not actualised nor affect the fictional actual world, but only the reader's understanding of it.

3.3.2. The 'disnarrated'

In this light, one can hardly overestimate the extent to which crime fiction relies on the ongoing update and comparison of different (discordant and concordant) embedded narratives as maintained by various characters, the detective and the reader. Fully aware of this, in the *Montalbano* series Camilleri exploits the whole spectrum of virtuality. In the previous section I focused on counterfactuality as a narrative strategy employed to explore the past, that is the investigation process proper. However, crime narratives – and investigation practices broadly meant – often involve also the exploration of the future, still virtual inasmuch as it actualisable but not actualised yet, something which may or may not happen. Montalbano may need to look ahead either in order to interject the culprit, or to prevent them from operating again, or, as a mid-stage, for prompting determinate reactions in some characters in a way such that they favour Montalbano's goals (3.4.2). Before continuing, I would like to focus my attention onto a particular sub-type of counterfactual called disnarrated. In fact, the disnarrated constitutes the strictest version of counterfactual, but the fact that I shall consider it in its own right, endorses my claim that investigative speculations may have a different status.

Although attention to the issue is not unprecedented (Labov 1972; Shklovsky 1965), as far as literary studies are concerned the category of disnarrated was singled out by Prince (1988) as opposed to those of unnarratable and unnarrated. While these two categories comprise events that actually happen but cannot be narrated or are not worth narrating – because either they transgress some limit or fall below the threshold of narratability – the disnarrated, conversely, pertains to the virtual because it individuates events that *do not* happen and yet are recounted in the narrative. It is worth specifying that Prince counts as disnarrated only events that are referred to in a negative or hypothetical mode: this means that the set of cases designated by his disnarrated is smaller than that defined by Dannenberg's notion of counterfactual; Prince would include hypothetical counterfactuals but not alternate histories, which are recounted in the indicative mode and construct autonomous counterfactual worlds. It is my contention that it would be profitable to distinguish between counterfactuality as a concept apt to indicate the hypothetical conjectures that shape the investigative thinking, and disnarrated to refer, instead, to events that did not happen and still are somehow recounted in the story. As shown below, counterfactuals and disnarrated exhibit different narrative properties – i.e.

the disnarrated is attributed to the heterodiegetic narrator, not a character – and thus produce different effects. As a matter of fact, Prince mentions the detective genre and categorises the possible and false solutions the reader encounters in these narratives as disnarrated: however, I contest such conclusion and argue that the hypotheses considered by the detective emerge as definitively *nonactual* only retrospectively, as until the solution is unveiled they do not clearly pertain to the realm of the impossible.

To distinguish counterfactuals from the disnarrated may serve to make sense of another difference. According to Dannenberg's terminology, Montalbano's conjectures are *externally focused* counterfactuals, because they analyse events that are external to his own life (this goes irrespective of the first- or third-person narration):

> Era chiaro che Karima e il giovane possedevano la chiave dello scagno, sia che l'avessero avuta da Lapecora sia che ne avessero fatto fare un duplicato. Ed era pure chiaro, macari se non c'erano testimoni in preda all'insonnia, che Karima, la notte prima che Lapecora venisse ammazzato, aveva passato qualche ora in casa della vittima, il profumo di «Volupté» stava a dimostrarlo. *Possedeva anche le chiavi di casa o era stato lo stesso Lapecora a farla entrare*, approfittando del fatto che la moglie aveva pigliato una dose abbondante di sonnifero? Ad ogni modo, la cosa pareva non avere senso. Perché rischiare di farsi sorprendere dalla signora Antonietta quando potevano comodamente incontrarsi nello scagno? *Per un capriccio? Per condire col brivido del pericolo un rapporto altrimenti prevedibile?*
> E poi c'era la facenna delle tre lettere anonime, indubbiamente confezionate nello scagno. Perché Karima e il picciotto bruno l'avevano fatto? *Per mettere in una posizione critica Lapecora*? Non tornava. Niente avevano da guadagnarci. Anzi, rischiavano che il loro recapito telefonico, o quello che era diventata la ditta, non potesse più essere utilizzato. [LM 77 – my emphasis]

The emphases in italics mark the counterfactual hypotheses entertained by Montalbano. Even when the enunciation is ascribed to the narrative voice, these counterfactuals are still clearly depending on Montalbano's focalisation, they are his own mental constructions. The following example, instead, which I propose should be classified as disnarrated, displays a verbal status that is completely different from that of the counterfactual sampled above. Therefore, I suggest that the scope of the disnarrated should be limited to counterfactual statements or accounts that are to be understood as independent from the detective's perspective, and therefore have a stronger metanarrative character.[73] Although I propose to ascribe a less inclusive meaning to the disnarrated, I believe nonetheless that the concept exerts an interesting influence on the reader's sense-making process:

> Lo spettacolo si sarebbe diviso in due parti.

---

[73] Alternatively, the passage may be regarded as a mental construction of the community, which would function as focaliser.

> Parte prima: la signora Palmisano, scesa dalla corriera da Fiacca, quella delle sette e venticinque, sarebbe apparsa dall'inizio della strata cinque minuti dopo, offrendo alla vista di tutti la sua solita, scostante compostezza, senza che le passasse per la mente che da lì a poco una bomba le sarebbe scoppiata sulla testa. Questa prima parte era indispensabile per godersi meglio la seconda (con rapido spostamento degli spettatori da finestre e balconi a pianerottoli): al sentire dall'agente di guardia la ragione per la quale non poteva trasìre nel suo appartamento, l'ormai vedova Lapecora avrebbe principiato a fare come una maria, strappandosi i capelli, facendo le voci, dandosi manate sul petto, invano trattenuta da condolenti prontamente accorsi.
> Lo spettacolo non ebbe luogo. [LM 39]

At first, the use of future perfect induces the reader to assume she is being told something that is going to happen: it is only at the end of the passage that the sequence of events is retrospectively transferred into the realm of the unactualised. As I already noted before, though, what has been narrated cannot be unnarrated: irreversibly, every piece of narrative contributes to the way the matter is progressively and finally cognized. It is my belief that here Camilleri cleverly tricks the reader: by ascribing to the disnarrated category the expected reaction of a woman just informed about the death of the beloved husband, the author tacitly puts a doubtful alethic flag on it. The dramatic scene does not actually take place, and Camilleri dutifully provides a reasonable justification for the 'missed show' (the widow is soberly welcomed directly at the bus stop by a thoughtful neighbour, precisely in order to spare her the public humiliation).

However, the ambiguity remains: would the widow's reaction have matched the narrator's prevision? Through this narrative device, Camilleri diverts the reader's attention and postpones the moment when concrete suspicions will suddenly point toward the widow, the actual murderer of Aurelio Lapecora. The delay in detecting the strongly suspicious attitude of the widow comes out as crucial to the story's narrativity: the false belief that Mr Lapecora was assassinated by someone external to his family prompts Montalbano to broaden the focus of his investigations and to discover the illegal network controlled by two dangerous criminals, whose plans had been inadvertently crossed by the jealous wife's intentions. By deceitfully attaching the disnarrated scene to Antonietta Palmisano, Camilleri simultaneously attracts the reader's attention – by foregrounding the artificiality of the act of narration – and distracts it from the narrated matter, namely the awkward demeanour of the widow.

In line with Pyrhönen's (2005) emphasis on the metanarrative spin of detective fiction, the disnarrated draws the reader's attention to the possibility itself of manipulating

and handling hypothetical worlds, something that Montalbano constantly does.[74] It might be tentatively argued that because of its metanarrative function, in Camilleri's narrative the disnarrated includes counterfactuals that cast their effect on the reader only, and not, importantly enough, on Montalbano: in other words, this label could be adopted to pinpoint those counterfactuals that are employed as discourse strategies, rather than expressing a semantic dimension inherent to the plot (Ryan 1991: 169).

3.3.3. Detection as wayfinding

In the previous sections I sought to demonstrate why the investigation process can be said to crucially depend on counterfactual thinking. But how does its dynamic work? How can Montalbano extricate himself from the bundle of possible courses of events that his mind unravels in front of him to arrive at the solution?

I referred earlier (3.2.3) to the advanced analogy between the detective's investigation and the reading activity as sign-interpretation and meaning-formation. I specified that I would privilege an alternative way of cognizing the mystery – or the story of the crime, to say it with Todorov – as a space to be explored rather than as a text resisting interpretation, as it is in line with the overall re-assessment promoted by a postclassical cognitive approach that replaces the structuralist view of language as pilot-notion with that of mind as pilot-notion. That being said, I agree as well that the past course of events leading to the crime can be understood as something to be reconstructed, and Hühn's (1987) paper well captures two main aspects of this process. First of all, the role of reader's expectations, stemming from the genre affiliation: the assumption of a course of events to be reconstructed – Hühn's 'text' – has the effect of transforming TAW 'into a conglomeration of potential signs' to be made sense of in a coherent way (1987: 454). Clues function indeed as hallmarks to be born in mind when the plausibility of counterfactuals is assessed. Similarly, the emphasis on expectations allows to stress the fruitfulness also of Todorov's identification of the two stories as distinctive of the crime genre, which is no longer just a descriptive feature and rather actively operates as a pointer in the sense-making process. The second aspect underscored by Hühn that still holds even if we interpret the story to be reconstructed as a space rather than as a text, is the process of trial and error that regulates detection.

Conceiving the unknown past as a space to be explored calls for a powerful analogy between narrative understanding and way-finding. Following this argument, I retrieve the notion of cognitive mapping, briefly introduced in Chapter 2. It should be reminded that,

---

[74] By contrast, interpretations of the genre as governed by the parallelism between the detective and the reader (Hühn 1987) would argue that the main activity performed by the detective is the interpretation of signs, rather than the manipulation of hypothetical scenarios.

according to Downs and Stea (1977: 6), cognitive mapping is 'an abstraction covering those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organize, store, recall, and manipulate information about the spatial environment', irrespective of it being real or fictional. My claim is that, by extension, the same concepts could be applied to the sense-making of spatial relations concerning any kind of entity or information: when it comes to questions such as how the subject relates to the various parts of an entity – say, an unknown course of events – or how its parts relate to each other – i.e. the various counterfactual hypotheses –, we are always relying on some sort of cognitive mapping ability. Downs and Stea positively take into account this possibility themselves, remarking that:

> The ways in which cognitive mapping touches upon ongoing life are many and varied. We solve abstract problems using spatial representations that we can mentally rotate and manipulate. We use spatial mnemonics to recall a sequence of important ideas. We make use of spatial imagery and metaphors in verbal and written communication. [1977: 27]

My suggestion is that the concepts of cognitive mapping and way-finding as understanding could be applied both to the mimetic space and to virtuality. In other words, the detective is expected to navigate the setting of the crime to reconstruct the criminal's movements and potential alibis, as well as to navigate the virtual space of characters' private worlds and the virtual space emerging from the interaction of counterfactual hypothesis.[75] Consequently, as I shall illustrate in 3.4.3, the reader can be said to employ the same way-finding strategies to make sense of the plot through the space of narrative experience.

As to the space of the setting, Kadonaga observes that 'solving a mystery frequently involves reconstructing the complex movements of individuals through space and time, akin to problems faced by spatial scientists' (1998: 414). Similarly, in her entry on 'Detective fiction' for the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, Pyrhönen defines it a quest, with an image that accentuates the spatial nature of the cognitive process required of the reader: solved or not solved, the crime novel always stages a chase, of a criminal or of his/her motives. Ultimately, it is a quest for knowledge, as Antonio Tabucchi once described it.[76] It is indeed beyond doubt that a crucial part of the investigation consists in the reconstruction of the physical movements of the criminal.

Montalbano's visits to the crime scenes and to various places where victims, potential criminals and witnesses have been, are essential to the process of detection. Nonetheless, these movements would mean nothing were they not associated with some

---

[75] The disnarrated acts in this process as a virtual space that is created and subsequently removed; as such, it impacts on the cognitive map of the interpreter in the same way counterfactuals do, but with an additional tag that flags it as positively removed and poses an interrogation mark over the reasons of its design.

[76] '[Q]uel motivo di ricerca e interrogazione che è caratteristica della letteratura poliziesca', in Tabucchi et al. (1995).

underlying intentions (Palmer 2003, 2004; Zunshine 2006, 2008): hence the implication that movements in the setting and the space of private worlds of characters are irreducibly interconnected. Montalbano attempts to follow traces that are not only positions in the topographical space, but also intentional paths: the cognitive fruitfulness of retracing past trajectories is overtly displayed in *Il ladro*, where Montalbano asks Antonietta Palmisano to re-enact for him the exact movements she made on the morning of the murder (LM 85-87). When she starts recounting, he specifies: 'No, signora, forse non mi sono spiegato bene. Lei non me lo deve dire quello che fece, me lo deve far vedere. Andiamo di là' (LM 85). Perplexed, the widow physically retraces her steps through bedroom, bathroom and kitchen, followed by the Inspector. The renewed performance of her past actions confirms to Montalbano a crucial detail without him having to ask directly, thus retaining an advantage over the widow: she has not entered her husband's studio, where Montalbano believes Karima, the victim's lover, was hidden on the day of the murder.

Some other times, though, walking the crime scene is not enough to achieve a better understanding of the case, and Montalbano has to perform some purely mental work by going through various counterfactual hypotheses. But how does this examination, and consequent selection, work? In my analysis, I do not focus specifically on the content of each hypothesis, limiting myself to point out that simulation abilities together with a rich knowledge of human types are definitely useful qualities for a good detective. Each counterfactual outlines a possible course of events and, therefore, a different possible world: as he mentally co-constructs it, the detective should employ his cognitive mapping abilities in order to integrate the counterfactual parts with the factual data at his disposal; as already noted, traces and clues function as fixed signposts in an otherwise changeable chart.

3.3.4. Manipulation of counterfactuals: points of divergence

The reference to changeability marks a crucial issue: Montalbano must be able not only to outline different counterfactual scenarios, but also to mentally manipulate them, as posited by Downs and Stea (1977) in the quotation above, in order to test their plausibility or to supplement them with additional clues as the investigation proceeds. In particular, a successful problem-solving activity depends on the detective's capability to keep track of counterfactuals as points of divergence.

The notion of point of divergence is a key concept in Singles' (2012) theorisation of alternate history, and it indicates the event that sets the deviation from the actual past into a counterfactual course.[77] In this case, since I am not referring to the relationship between

---

[77] Relying in a somehow paradoxical way on the principles of contingency and necessity, the point of divergence is the feature on which Singles draws for distinguishing alternate histories from other types of future-narrative

history and its narrative specifically, with point of divergence I mean the point that sets the difference between one course of events and any other alternate one. It is also worth clarifying that, although Dannenberg uses the term 'counterfactual' also to indicate the whole course of events, she adds that it more properly defines 'a hypothetical alteration in a past sequence of events that changes the events in a *factual* sequence in order to create a different, *counter*factual outcome' (2008: 119; cf. McMullen et al. 1995).

It follows that in order to select among his hypotheses the one which is *not* a counterfactual and that coincides with the fictional truth, Montalbano has to remain aware of the various events that represent points of divergence, and from which divergent paths potentially branch out. In *Il ladro* Montalbano has to solve the unclear death of a Tunisian fisherman and sifts through a series of hypotheses with his colleague Valente: a turning point is reached when they suddenly realise that an element that they had so far given for granted – the fact that the boat from which the shooting had started was a Tunisian guard ship, as reported – may have actually been some private ship. 'Siamo sicuri che fosse una motovedetta militare tunisina?' (LM 138): a simple question turns the identity of the ship into a point of divergence, whose modification has profound consequences on the whole reconstructed narrative.

Reasoning about points of divergence draws the attention to another aspect, also remarked by Singles. If points of divergence are events or details that determine a divergence in the subsequent development of events, yet there are other events that despite being included in different counterfactual hypotheses, may not hold the same value in all the accounts. Indeed, Singles argues that 'shared' events, that is events that belong to both the real and the counterfactual string of events – in this case, to different counterfactual reconstructions – 'are not to be considered the same events' because 'each event gains meaning depending on its position in a given plot' (2012: 99).

Singles' observation endorses the principle that the counterfactual hypotheses outlined throughout an investigation constitute different possible worlds, each endowed with autonomous ontological status, and in search of their own internal coherence. Earlier in my discussion, I argued that a particularity of counterfactual accounts in crime fiction is that they do not have an actual account against which to assess their truth value; in fact, reconstructing the actual course of events is precisely the reason for their production. Nevertheless, counterfactuals do have at least one yardstick against which to attempt provisional assessments, which the detective can build on to start winnowing down his

---

(e.g. forking-paths narratives): firstly, it is permanent, that is there is no later point of convergence; secondly, the divergent history is actual *within* the fiction, which means that history as recounted in the narrative is perceived as counterfactual only by the reader in the context of reception, and not by any character belonging to the fictional alternate world (7).

options: this yardstick is coherence. For remaining a viable hypothesis, an account has to be internally coherent and, at the same time, to include all the factual elements Montalbano is aware of. Clues apparently unrelated have to be connected together in a non-contradictory way, while a psychological profile of the criminal has to be traced to provide a coherent set of intentions that matches with the physical actions.

In this light, one can fully appreciate how it is not accidental that the image of the puzzle has been often employed in relation to detection, since its early phases.[78] Puzzle games consist precisely in reconstructing the right spatial combination of pieces, such that it ultimately reveals the coherent picture it is supposed to. Moreover, marking another striking analogy with the investigation process, puzzles work on the basis of a process of trial and error, possibly preceded by a selection of the plausible pieces likely to fit in a specific area. In other words, when one makes a puzzle, one usually assembles small parts and then proceeds by trying out different pieces until the scattered, unrelated portions are finally put together, thus obtaining a complete, coherent picture. Analogously, when Montalbano starts investigating, he provisionally construes a counterfactual account, mentally runs it, identifies its weak or incoherent parts, and then proceeds to manipulate and substitute the incoherent parts with other hypotheses, sometimes testing out the consequences that potentially stem from different points of divergence.

In *Il ladro* Camilleri puts the image of the puzzle to a very good use. The excerpt below features Livia while she is recounting to Montalbano a conversation she had with François, the orphan kid whose mother has been murdered and whom Montalbano has temporarily taken under his wing:

> «François sostiene che i puzzle sono noiosi perché sono obbligati. Ogni pezzettino, dice, è tagliato in modo che s'incastri con un altro. E invece sarebbe bello un puzzle che contemplasse più soluzioni! […] Lui conosceva già la Statua della Libertà, quando ha composto la testa della statua sapeva perciò come proseguire ed era obbligato a farlo perché il costruttore del puzzle aveva tagliato i pezzi in un certo modo e quindi voleva che il giocatore seguisse il suo disegno. […] Sarebbe bello, disse, se il giocatore potesse essere messo in condizioni di creare un suo puzzle alternativo pur con gli stessi pezzi. Non ti pare un ragionamento straordinario per un bambino così piccolo?». [LM 153]

> […] Quando niscì dal bagno, già pronto per andare in ufficio, vide che François aveva smontato il puzzle e, con una forbice, rifilava diversamente i pezzi. Tentava, ingenuamente, di non seguire il disegno obbligato. E tutt'a un tratto Montalbano cimiò, come colpito da una scarica elettrica. [LM 156]

---

[78] Spatiality is pre-eminent also in another game dear to the classic detective tradition: chess. The game of chess is close to a classic view of detection as a system of moves and countermoves.

Camilleri flirts with the classic image of detection as puzzle only to play with it, defying the idea that this art of putting pieces together should be possibly complex but ultimately unproblematic and neatly objective. In fact, in the 'snack thief' case things are intentionally arranged by the criminals in a way that is meant less to muddle the waters and more to cue a completely coherent – but false – interpretation of the situation. In order to reconstruct the truth, Montalbano has to 'trim the pieces differently' like François does, namely to think of intentions and goals that are not the immediately expected ones.

Furthermore, the metaphor of the puzzle returns in the novel, once again with a destabilising effect:

> Il primo puzzle era risolto, perfettamente, dentro lo schema determinato. Fahrid, Ahmed, la stessa Aisha erano rimasti fuori. Con loro, usandoli bene, il disegno del puzzle sarebbe risultato ben diverso. [LM 193]

> Non parlò né di Fahrid né di Moussa, vale a dire del puzzle più grande. […] E fino a qui gli era andata bene, non aveva dovuto dire farfanterìe al Questore, aveva solo fatto delle omissioni, contato la mezza verità. [LM 199]

In the first passage, Montalbano has just released an interview to the local television where he outlined the case of the murder of Lapecora as crime of passion with ensuing blackmailing; this account corresponds to what the criminals want Montalbano to believe and, by publicly pretending to adhere to it, the Inspector is actually sending a clear message to the real responsible ones, affiliated to the Italian secret service. Referring to the different version of the story that he gave to the police commissioner, Montalbano demonstrates full awareness of the fact that the configuration of events can totally change depending on what pieces are included in the picture. The murder of Lapecora is indeed a crime based on financial interest disguised as a crime of passion, but by ignoring some crucial details Montalbano could have easily disregarded the broader picture, in which the petty interests of Antonietta Palmisano are reduced to just a risible portion of the whole and appear even more trivial as opposed to the deeply corrupted network and the criminal organisation that are involved in this bigger puzzle. Interestingly, Hühn (1987: 461) sketches a very similar situation as he seeks to pinpoint a typifying trait of hardboiled sub-genre. He observes that

> the *interaction* between the reading subject [i.e. the detective] and the object (the text) in which neither side remains a stable entity. […] One manifestation of this change is the instability of the mystery, the expansion of the story's confines. The initial problem is usually simple and unimportant […], but in the course of the detective's interpretive operations, the mystery shifts and expands so that a wide net of connected crimes […] is gradually brought to light. Moreover, the text of the first story not only changes in the extension of its meaning; it literally reacts to the reader's endeavours to read it.

By offering to different officers mismatching versions of the case – and especially by describing it by means of an iconic image of unquestionable order belonging to the classic crime fiction tradition – Montalbano strongly debases the reader's faith in justice and the idea that a breached order could be actually restored, thereby reasserting the topicality of a theme that has widely dominated the genre since hardboiled fiction.[79] Moreover, the very idea of truth is epistemologically (as opposed to ontologically) undermined inasmuch as in the private worlds of different characters the private actual world – that is, what really happened – will include different elements and different configurations of events. Actual accounts are multiplied, but this multiplication will remain at the level of the virtual, since the two principal minds, that of the detective and that of the reader, are aligned with one another and with the axis of the fictional actual.[80]

3.4. The multiple spaces of narrative understanding

3.4.1. Spatialising time

It may be argued that crime fiction is crucially dependent on the temporal succession of events. Nevertheless, it is my contention that, whenever Montalbano reconstructs the timing of a murder, what is at stake is a spatialisation of time. Dannenberg (2008: 65) claims that '[t]he bodily experience of negotiating and perceiving space underlies many sense-making operations, including the comprehension of time'. Not only am I inclined to agree with her statement in its broadest sense; it also serves to point to the aptness of this conceptualisation in relation to crime fiction in particular. If humans tend to make sense of time by drawing on their sensorimotor knowledge, from a literary critical perspective there are undoubtedly narratives which focus on the complexity of the experience of time. By contrast, conventional crime fiction is arguably one of the genres whose readers most readily assume the objectivity of the timeline. Crime narratives, in other words, rarely engage the subjective dimension of experienced time.

As the detection proceeds, milestones and points of reference in time are established as if time is a space to be acquired and processed: a space to be mapped. Chronology, in crime fiction, is conceived as a sequence of slots to be filled in coherently. Montalbano's investigation in the building where Lapecora is murdered (LM 20-31; GT 33-42) represents an almost archetypal crime situation, as it recalls classic detective fiction and

---

[79] Camilleri is not new to this type of conclusions: also in *La forma dell'acqua* and *Il cane di terracotta* we have the same multiplication of 'truths'.

[80] Cf. Ryan (1991: 166 ff.) for an example (John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 1969) where, by imagining several possible outcomes, the omniscient narrator 'refuses to select one path in the realm of the possible and call it the history of the one and only actual world'.

its circumscribed environments.[81] The building provides a closed setting, neatly structured in floors and apartments inhabited by families each of which entertains different relationships with the victim and moves between floors using the lift; the mobility of the lift, where the corpse has been found, contributes to multiply the possibilities for actions occurred in each time slot. It could be suggested that it works as a timepiece (Fauconnier and Turner 2008: 54), namely a device that by anchoring time to a space promotes a spatial conceptual mapping of time itself. Montalbano orderly proceeds floor by floor, gathering testimonies and accounts of everyone's movements between 7am and 8am, the time span individuated by the coroner Dr Pasquano as the possible time of death.

> A parte i viaggi in ascensore fatti in qualità di cadavere, a Montalbano parse chiaro che: uno, il defunto risultava essere stato una brava persona, ma decisamente antipatica; due, era stato ammazzato in ascensore, tra le sette e trentacinque e le otto. [LM 30]

Temporal gaps are assessed in relation to spatial movements performed by the characters. When Montalbano questions one of the residents on the movements of the lift and, therefore, of Lapecora and his murderer, the man answers: 'Per il tempo che ci mise ad arrivare, per me era fermo al quinto piano. Credo d'aver fatto il calcolo giusto' (LM 21). Clues work as signposts to be placed into a pattern, and in (temporal) relation with each other. The same function of the building in *Il ladro* is potentially performed by other devices, such diaries or journals (e.g. VV 53), which not only imply a series of spatial movements but also offer a spatially-based structure to conceptualised chronology – in the diary, for instance, each day is represented by a specific space on the page. The spatialising function of clues would remain predominant even if one was not to consider the physical movements implied by each appointment: it works as a mental grid to be filled in, in order to populate the past storyworld with a complete and reliable narrative of the characters' actions.

Johnson (1987) explores the ways in which the cognitive schemata of 'path' and 'link' scaffold our understanding of time, endowing it with a linear spatialisation. This constitutes the most common cognitive framework adopted to make sense of temporality. Yet, when Dr Pasquano sets the limits of the temporal territory to be mapped, in order to reconstruct the actual events Montalbano has not only to put the pieces in the right order, but also to compare incompatible sets of events, to weigh them and to sort out which ones are false. Time runs linearly, but at each moment along the timeline an entirely different

---

[81] 'Nei romanzi polizieschi – Simenon insegni – il condominio […] è un luogo deputato di esplorazione esistenziale oltre che indiziaria. Il giallo […] continua a svolgere una funzione sociologica che altri generi narrativi non possono vantare e perpetua con i suoi siparietti sollevati da interno a interno la grande tradizione del realismo' (Borsellino 2002: li – de-italicised).

storyworld is potentially attached, and such time mapping is made more complex by multiple interrelated variables.

It might be suggested therefore that one more schema should be added to those of 'path' and 'link' in Dannenberg's discussion of spatial mappings of time (2008: 65-73): the schema of the container as three-dimensional space, in which multiple narrative lines can potentially unfold. Indeed, a conceptualisation of time in three-dimensional rather than linear terms – namely, a full spatialisation of time – is called for by the more elaborated view of counterfactual storyworlds. In fact, during the detective's speculative activity, consisting in the cognitive elaboration of counterfactuals (examined in the next section), the timeline remains one. This is because the point is not the proliferation of equivalent alternate hypotheses as it might happen in some science fiction stories, but the individuation of potential ways to illuminate those delimited areas of indeterminacy that still affect the account of the crime. Or better, if hypotheses may proliferate, and if every clue potentially works as a 'fork' in the sense that it sets the event or detail that make potential reconstructions diverge, these hypotheses do not expand indefinitely, moving away from each other: the present time – i.e. the here-and-now where the detective is situated and from which he operates his reconstruction (Ronen 1994) – represents the resulting fork into which all counterfactual accounts must converge together. The known conditions of the here-and-now have to be met by all the hypothetical reconstructions in order for them to be deemed as plausible.

3.4.2. Dreams, literature, 'tiatro', and minor investigations

The large part of what has been noted so far is hypothetically applicable to a broad selection of crime fiction narratives. Building on features that are conventionally ascribed to the genre, I argued that spatiality programmatically scaffolds detective fiction understanding because of the crucial role played by virtuality. In particular, I suggested that navigation through counterfactuals and private worlds of characters is what constitutes the investigation process, which usually represents the most relevant part, quantitatively and qualitatively, of crime narratives. In this section, however, I focus my discussion upon some strategies that specifically characterise Camilleri's crime narrative in his *Montalbano* series, and which further endorse the spatiality of the process of plot understanding. I should like to momentarily divert my attention from counterfactuality, as it typifies crime fiction in general, and consider Camilleri's habit of interweaving Montalbano's main cases with a number of secondary narrative inputs of various kinds.

From generic denominations – link, parallelism, juxtaposition – to strategies recognisably established in the literary tradition – *mise en abyme*, intertextual reference,

dream –, these labels all entail modes of comprehension that do not primarily depend on causality nor chronology. The structure of sense-making prompted by these narrative devices is, instead, pre-eminently spatial (Dannenberg 2008: 66-7). This is because, for the reader, meaning stems from the configurations of events and their reciprocal relationships rather than from their temporal unfolding. As anticipated at the outset of the chapter, under discussion is not the causality underlying the unfolding of the crime, but the process of comprehension of a narrative that takes as its own focus the reconstruction of this crime, of this causality. That being said, it is meaningful that Montalbano rarely arrives to the solution of the case in a straightforward manner and following a neat application of rational logic only, as classic and Golden Age detectives could have done. According to Borsellino, in this respect Montalbano is similar to Gadda's detective Ciccio Ingravallo 'nel rifiuto della logica più lineare, di causa-effetto' (2002: xlii). The understanding of crucial nodes – both for Montalbano and, consequently, for the reader – often comes from analogical, and therefore inherently spatial, associations. To look at the strategies implemented in the *Montalbano* series through a spatial-oriented framework highlights how they are not isolated instances. It suggests that Camilleri is further exploiting some inherent possibilities of the genre to personalise his narratives and adapt them to his specific poetics and view of reality.

The articulation of the crime narrative into digressions or even dead-ends – articulation that sometimes threatens to turn into dissolution of the narrative – is not new to the genre. Scholars concur that, starting with the hardboiled and noir sub-genres in the 1920s, twentieth-century crime fiction is characterised by an increase in entropy that mirrors the fading trust in the possibility to re-establish the disrupted order (Pezzotti 2012). Alongside with Gadda, another illustrious example in the Italian tradition and in Camilleri's background is Sciascia, with his unresolved crime narratives denouncing the utter powerlessness of those who pursue justice and his challenge to the teleological nature of crime fiction (Borsellino 2004). Also in the *Montalbano* series, the Inspector's and the reader's attention are frequently diverted toward secondary or parallel lines of investigation. Sometimes, Montalbano finds these more interesting than the main case and ends up irrationally devoting most of his attention and investigative efforts to them.

> «Sa, m'è capitato di seguire una sua inchiesta, quella che venne detta del 'cane di terracotta'. In quell'occasione, lei abbandonò l'indagine su di un traffico d'armi per buttarsi a corpo morto appresso a un delitto avvenuto cinquant'anni prima e la cui soluzione non avrebbe avuto effetti pratici. Lo sa perché l'ha fatto?».
> «Per curiosità?» azzardò Montalbano.
> «No, carissimo. Il suo è stato un modo finissimo e intelligente di continuare a fare il suo non piacevole mestiere scappando però dalla realtà di tutti i giorni.

> Evidentemente questa realtà quotidiana a un certo momento le pesa troppo. E lei se ne scappa». [LM 233]

In *Il ladro*, too, Montalbano follows two cases which turn out to be irreducibly – if casually – intertwined. Camilleri arguably inherited from Sciascia, whom he personally knew and admired, the penchant for staging frequent interactions with contingent storylines, described by Bertoni (1998) as 'itinerari sghembi'.

However, I suggest that Camilleri uses them in a quite different way from how Sciascia or Gadda do so. It is not the purpose of my discussion to assess the impact of chance on Camilleri against the conventions of the genre. Yet I argue that (seemingly) contingent storylines do not much make the case for the determinant role of chance and chaos in life, either with disruptive or resolving effects (Polacco 1999). Unlike for Sciascia's and Gadda's works, where digressions and a proliferating model of causality hinder and hijack the investigation, in the *Montalbano* series they substantially contribute to convey the meaning of the narrative as a whole and often play a critical role in solving the main case. In other words, parallel narratives participate in the understanding of the story, rather than undercutting it. Both Camilleri's peculiar use of parallel investigation and the use of counterfactuality, which I suggest comes with the compliance with the genre conventions, endorse the view that meaning is likely to emerge from the negotiation among parallel options, rather than from the linear following of a sequence of events.

It is not only the interaction between multiple investigation strands that characterises the *Montalbano* series. Notably, Camilleri also shows a passion – almost an obsession, according to Pezzotti (2012: 127) – for weaving a network of intertextual references to his favourite authors into his stories. These links do not simply enrich the cultural background; they can play a more active cognitive role. For instance, the comparison with the configuration of elements and intentions as arranged in John Le Carrè's (1961) *Call for the Dead* helps Montalbano realise what happened in his own case (Capecchi 2000: 78):

> Seguendo la logica di Smiley [Le Carrè's detective], era dunque possibile che Lapecora avesse lui stesso scritto le lettere anonime contro di sé. Ma se ne era l'autore, perché, macari con qualche altro pretesto, non si era rivolto alla polizia o ai carabinieri?
> Aveva appena formulato la domanda, che gli venne da sorridere per la sua ingenuità. […] Grazie a Smiley, tutto quatrava. Tornò a dòrmiri. [LM 81, 82]

Literature indeed constitutes a repository of patterns and situations that Montalbano can paradigmatically access and employ to make sense of his fictional reality.

It should be noted that if literature works as privileged background knowledge for Montalbano, it tends to remain a passive one. An analogous role, similar to some extent to the *mise en abyme*, is also played by Montalbano's dreams which, often placed at the outset of the story (CT 129-30; PS 10-12; GT 205-6; LL 9-18), are usually pre-figurations of the investigation to come, or of some of its aspects.[82] By contrast, references to theatre and Montalbano's engagement in deceiving put-ons represent instances of a more active kind. Both Camilleri himself and Montalbano are aware of their nature as 'tragediaturi', as dramatists. In *Il gioco della mosca* (1995: 83), Camilleri writes that the 'tragediaturi' is 'chi organizza beffe e burle, spesso pesanti, a rischio di ritorsioni ancora più grevi': the role definitely entails deep connections with the issue of humour – which I am not going to explore here (Borsellino 2002: xvi) – but above all links to a strong dramaturgic talent and to a preference for staging scenarios to take in other characters and lure them into acting as the 'tragediaturi' wants them to, instead of violently coercing them.

The theatrical pretence is sometimes a way for Montalbano to bend the situation to his will, such as with the capture of Tano u' grecu (CT 27-33; here, see also the set-up arranged by Rizzitano with the corpses of the two murdered lovers in the cave, 232). Or, in *Il ladro*, Montalbano sends a fax to the Driver and Vehicles Licensing Agency in Rome and deliberately conveys a certain (false) impression in order to make the other characters react in a way that is advantageous to him (185). These put-ons could be regarded in some sense as forced instantiation of counterfactuals – counterfeited events, in fact: interpolations of reality orchestrated by Montalbano, who reveals to be such a deep connoisseur of the human mind to be able to play with others' expectations and intentions to unmask their criminal deeds. This strategy is employed at times when Montalbano outlines a fake scenario that lets the suspect indulge in the false belief that Montalbano has been mislead, and therefore make them fall in some contradiction (e.g. *Il ladro*, 'Il gatto e il cardellino' in *Gli arancini di Montalbano*, *La voce del violino*).

More commonly, the dramaturgic drive reveals itself in Montalbano's taste for whimsically putting on various fake attitudes, almost mask-like, when he liaises with the superiors he despises. Pointing at the recurrence of these narrative practices emphasises how consistently Camilleri refracts his narrative into a number of sub-narratives which variably mirror and interact with the main case. Far from suggesting digressions or a centrifugal dissolution, however, these patterns always get back to each other, reciprocally illuminating hidden aspects and perhaps offering alternative perspectives, but always retaining a strong network of internal connections that holds the narrative together as a whole. In fact, it is this ultimate centripetal drive that distinguishes Camilleri's novels from

---

[82] They become more frequent in the later novels of the series, perhaps to remark an increasing anxiety of Montalbano toward ageing and therefore toward his own capability to rely on rational thought in his profession.

more experimental works like Gadda's. Again, relying on this type of relations among the parts of the narrative distinctively endorses the spatial nature to the process of plot understanding.

The theatre framework, though, also stands out as a technique to put reality in perspective and at distance, in order to be able to look at it and assess it, paradoxically, in a more objective way. In *La forma dell'acqua*, Pino transcribes the conversation he had with his boss after finding the corpse of the boss' friend and political ally: when Montalbano finds the transcript, Pino admits that 'quella telefonata l'ho scritta perché me la volevo studiare, non mi suonava, parlandone da omu di teatro […] è tutta sbagliata come commedia, il pubblico si metterebbe a ridere, non funziona' (70). If this effect could also be interpreted as a consequence of the distancing, it is perhaps not out of place to ascribe it to Camilleri's own decennial experience as theatre director, which arguably made him more instinctively sensitive to the effectiveness of the theatrical representation rather than to cold, reasoned assessment of a state of affairs.[83]

Finally, to this theatrically-informed view of reality also belongs the taste for reversals. This is primarily epitomised by the trope of the 'scangiu', meaning 'swap' but also 'misunderstanding' (Borsellino 2002: xviii). Already a central motif in Pirandello, whose Mattia Pascal swaps his identity with that of Adriano Meis and back, the 'scangiu' is extensively adopted by Camilleri in his narrative.[84] In *La voce del violino*, an inestimable violin is swapped with a cheap one and a shoe is swapped with a grenade; the whole novel *La giostra degli scambi* (2015) revolves around subsequent swaps. The similar theme of the mirror recurs throughout the stories of the collected volume *La paura di Montalbano* (2002) and in *Il gioco degli specchi* (2010a). The mode of the 'scangiu' is also intimately related to that of falsification, which assumes quite an ambiguous connotation; in fact, as emerges also in *Il ladro*, falsifications are constantly staged both by criminals to protect their traces and by Montalbano himself, either to trick his suspects or even to deliberately circumvent aspects of the law whenever they collide with his personal view of justice. Looking at these elements, a prevalence of binary oppositions might be noticed. Juxtaposed or simply placed parallel to each other, twofold options often structure the narrative, contributing to convey the impression of meaning as always stemming from the negotiation of at least two possibilities. Particularly telling is the episode of the olive tree (the 'ulivo saraceno', inheritance of Pirandello's *I giganti della montagna*) in *La gita a Tindari*, where Montalbano intuits how to solve a case by looking at the branches of the tree and realising that,

---

[83] Similarly, in *La gita a Tindari*, Nenè Sanfilippo re-elaborates in a science-fiction novel the horrors of the trafficking of children connected to illegal organ trade in which he finds himself involved, and it is by reading this novel that Montalbano realises what happened.

[84] That the trope of 'scangiu' owes much to Pirandello clearly emerges from the title of Camilleri's (2000b) biographical fiction of the Sicilian playwright.

although seemingly independent, they actually stemmed from the same point. This observation makes him realise that the two cases he is following are actually interconnected:

> Durante tutta la parlata, Augello mantenne un'espressione sospettosa.
> «Tu lo sapevi già» disse. […]
> «Sì» ammise il commissario.
> «E chi te l'aveva detto?».
> «Un àrbolo, un ulivo saraceno» sarebbe stata la risposta giusta, ma a Montalbano mancò il coraggio. [GT 217]

The examples I considered in this section particularly reverberate throughout crime narratives also because this genre is traditionally regarded as 'an inherently self-reflexive form, which exposes simultaneously the constructedness of its narratives and the motives underlying their creation. […] that process of construction becomes the very subject of these works. […] the "case" becomes a story about making a story' (Thoms 1998: 1; cf. Hühn 1987, Scaggs 2005, Sweeney 1990, Pyrhönen 2005). As firstly highlighted by Todorov, crime narratives stage a double understanding process: of the mystery and of the narrative. In the next chapter on Calvino I shall further consider how self-reflexivity is another quality that may impact on the fruitfulness of a spatially-oriented approach to a certain narrative (4.3.1).

3.4.3. Three spaces

Camilleri's stories – partly because of the peculiarities of the author's writing, partly because of their affiliation with the crime genre – seem to be the site of a number of spaces that encourage one to navigate them rather than regarding them as inert bi-dimensional backgrounds (Schneider 2001).

The first space is that of the setting, understood in the traditional narratological sense. The complexity of the setting space is endorsed in two main ways. The first way consists in the long-standing attention to the social dimension of the environment, which contributes to problematise the setting and to endow it with socio-historical depth. It pertains to the genre as a whole and has been remarked in the first part of the chapter. Moreover, in this specific case it is likely that the fictional setting's proximity to the real landscape of Sicily may contribute to its cognitive perception as a verisimilar navigable topographical space.

Secondly, Camilleri's narrative style contributes to enrich the sense of setting as a space to be lived in and navigated. In this regard, Hayles' (2012) exhortation to conceive space as 'an emergent property constructed through interrelations and containing diverse

simultaneous trajectories' (2012: 183) rather than as an inert container, may be aptly in place. Hayles borrows from the geographer Massey (2005) the idea that a place is not a fixed site with stable boundaries (as suggested by a Cartesian view of space, infinitely extendable, with seamless transitions from one scale to the other, infinitely sub-divisible and homogeneous),[85] but rather a 'lively' space, a 'dynamic set of interrelations in constant interaction' (2012: 185). I believe that Camilleri's ample and regular use of phone calls plays precisely this role in the *Montalbano* series. Camilleri's decennial experience as screenwriter and director for theatre and television led him to master dialogue as a narrative device, on which he heavily relies in his novels (Capecchi 2000: 26). The phone call is a particularly suitable technique because it combines the mimesis of the dialogue with the possibility to streamline the narration, cutting down temporal gaps and diegetic parts needed to frame a new scene. In the case quoted below, the narrative voice is silenced for three pages and leaves room for three phone calls in a row: one to the colleague at the Immigration Office, one to the police commissioner, and one to Nicolò Zito, a journalist friend of Montalbano (of which I report beginnings and endings):

> «Pronto, Buscaìno! Montalbano sono. Ho saputo ora il nome intero di quella donna tunisina che abita a Villaseta, ti ricordi?».
> «[…] Il fatto che l'altro giorno siamo venuti a sapere l'indirizzo di questa Karima, appartiene alle cose miracolose, non a quelle di tutti i giorni».
> «Però tu prova lo stesso».
>
> «Montalbano? Cos'è questa storia che lei sarebbe andato a caccia di un ladro di merendine? Un maniaco?».
> «Ma no, signor Questore, si trattava di un bambino che, per fame, si era messo a rubare le merendine ad altri bambini. Tutto qua».
> «[…] Allora ci vediamo nel pomeriggio. Mi raccomando, non manchi. Mi fornisca una linea di difesa, c'è l'onorevole Pennacchio…».
> «Quello accusato d'associazione per delinquere di stampo mafioso?».
> «Quello. Sta preparando un'interrogazione al Ministro. Vuole la sua testa».
> E ti credo: era stato proprio lui, Montalbano, a svolgere le indagini contro l'onorevole.
>
> «Nicolò? Montalbano sono. Ti devo domandare un favore».
> «[…] Certo, t'aspetto». [LM 122-24]

Both isolated phone calls and longer telephonic threads abound in the *Montalbano* narratives. For the purposes of the current argument, my point is that the selection of telephony as favourite semiotic resource (Brown 2015) does contribute to convey a certain sense of the environment. By means of phone calls the space primed by the narrative (Emmott 1997) becomes much larger than that defined by the sole setting where

---

[85] This view is endorsed by current digital technologies such as GPS or Google maps.

Montalbano is located. Montalbano remains at the centre, but his world reaches out to different characters whose activities contribute to his investigation, coordinating and keeping track of them. That the same narrative strategy can have entirely different purposes can be appreciated by comparing the use of telephony made in crime narratives and in *City*. In the latter case, phone calls are mostly used to comply with the value of swiftness and to rhetorically play with conversational narrative; in *Il ladro*, instead, they serve to create a network between people and locations. Reverting to Hayles' words, phone calls activate distant spaces and make them present at the same time, thereby conveying that simultaneity and that dynamism of interrelation from which a more complex sense of fictional space shall emerge.[86]

The second space taking shape during the reading process is that of virtuality, brought about by possible-worlds theory and by the introduction of modal logic. This determines a fundamental shift in the way the storyworld is cognized, as the single-storyworld is multiplied into a system of private worlds mentally constructed by characters. This new perspective foregrounds how characters' factual actions stem from underlying systems of private beliefs, values, and wishes, only ultimately distilled into action. By doing so, it foregrounds the mind behind the action. Ryan's perspective encourages to consider each character as a potential hub for recentring and, at the same time, as a mind pursuing its own goals. The virtual dimension construed in the *Montalbano* stories turns into a three-dimensional space because its paradigmatic structure is constantly brought to the fore, in addition to its syntagmatic structure. When Singles posits that each counterfactual sets a deviation that constitutes an entirely separate world, she also reflects on how one should 'reason about the "distance" between worlds, or, in the case of alternate histories, what kind of "space" exists' between the narrative of the real past and the narrative of a fictional past' (2012: 101). In the case of crime fiction, counterfactuals do not set an irreversible path; on the contrary, they are created by the detective as potential courses of events to flexibly test the plausibility of different reconstructions of the crime. This means the ensuing narrative structure is not a rigid one. The investigation consists precisely in the detective/reader's contemplation and assessment of the 'dynamic "space" between multiple continuations' (2012: 121), that is between various possible configurations of events that

---

[86] I should specify that, although it is not uncommon in the scholarship on crime fiction to refer to de Certeau's (1980/1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (cf. among others Howell 1998 and Pezzotti 2012), a discussion of De Certeau's theories would have displaced the focus of my discussion and potentially created deep ambiguities: in fact, De Certeau examines concepts such as 'map', 'itinerary', and 'tour' in entirely different ways from how they are adopted in this work, as he applies them to a phenomenological and psychoanalytically-oriented analysis of the city as lived space. Integrating them in this examination could have been misleading in general and out of place in relation to crime fiction specifically, primarily because I do not focus here on the fictional representation and co-construction of lived mimetic spaces (in this respect, crime fiction has proven a productive case study, in particular in the field of cultural geography).

may or may not coincide with the (fictionally) real past in the narrative. It is at this level – or in this space – that the notion of trajectory can be first fruitfully applied.

The view of characters as responding to private systems of priorities, with subsequent projections and plans to be pursued in a (provisionally) coherent way, attributes a sort of 'intentional directionality' to them. This suggestion is surely not unprecedented. Fauconnier and Turner (2002; Fauconnier 1997) devote much attention to the way intentions and life-paths are almost invariably cognized in spatial terms, while Dannenberg (2008) refers to characters as trajectories and vectors from the very first page of her introduction, as if appealing to common intuitions. Trajectory is, in physics, the virtual line that a moving object follows through space. To replace 'objects' with 'characters' in the new semantic system means to include agency and intentionality into the picture. Movements, in turn, are no longer inert physical reactions following the exerting of a force but actions.   To argue that readers understand characters as trajectories means that while they read they strive to assess the type of force exerted on them – that is to say, their K-worlds and W-worlds, their intentions and plans – in order to foresee what they are going to do next, how they will interact with the detective and the investigation. Although the mathematical description of a trajectory, not including speed, cannot be used to predict the position of the object in space, its very definition theoretically implies the existence of a space. To understand the unfolding actions of characters as tracing trajectories fosters a perception of the storyworld along Hayles' lines, as an interactive space and not simply an inert setting for the narrated events.

Seemingly analogous concepts have been contemplated as epitomes of the present discussion and discarded in favour of that of trajectory: 'path' is undoubtedly related to movement and connects points in space but exists independently from its use, while 'route' is rather semantically focused on the frequency with which a path is used. Trajectory, instead, is supposed to be traced while the movement is performed – therefore retaining the connection with the idea of something in progress – and at the same time it includes a projection forward that mirrors the pivotal role of expectations. As such, it aptly accounts for an emerging three-dimensional virtual space prompted by the interactions among the private worlds of characters and related actual movements through the mimetic space. After outlining the third virtual space of the storyworld, in the following section I shall consider the shift from conceiving characters as trajectories to describing the plot as trajectory.

The third space I pinpoint is the space of the narrative experience. It is a virtual space defined by the arrangement and modifications of possible worlds (the virtual space just described) as made sense of from the perspective of the reader. Plot pertains to this

space precisely because the notion of plot inherently implies the presence of a reader, someone equally able to totally immerse herself in the storyworld and to remain aware that it is a fictional world created through a reading experience. Positing an additional space inclusive of but expanding beyond the virtual space of the storyworld is made necessary by the shift in perspective: as Edwin Abbott admirably suggests in *Flatland* (1884), taking a step out of a world entails the acquisition of an extra dimension. The inclusion of the reader marks a fundamental difference from the virtual space of private worlds, and somehow renders the difference between Ryan's (1991) theorisation and Dannenberg's (2008): although Ryan does not reject the reader, her examination closely focuses on the formal structure of the narrative world; Dannenberg's work, instead, considers the dynamics of plot from the perspective of their reception and the way they are made sense of, during reading and retrospectively.

The space of virtuality and the space of narrative experience are obviously connected in the tightest way. It might be suggested that, although this is true for any narrative, in crime fiction this link is even more accentuated by the conventionally strong alignment between the detective – centre of the system of private worlds of characters – and the reader – centre of the system that includes plot understanding (Hühn 1987; Marcus 2003; Pyrhönen 1999; Scaggs 2005; Thoms 1998). The two figures, detective and reader, work as connected pivots of two ontologically separate systems: as in a transmission gearbox, they function as gearwheels connected to different parts that move independently but indirectly affect each other as parts of the same mechanisms. Due to this interdependence, in the analysis of the management of counterfactual hypotheses these two spaces may sometimes overlap, following the overlapping of detective and reader. It should be born in mind though that they pertain to two (theoretically) different spaces.

3.4.4. Plot as trajectory

How do we shift from conceiving characters as trajectories to conceive plots as trajectories? It goes without saying that the latter would not be possible, nor reasonable, without the former. Plot is a macrodesign (Herman 2002) that emerges from microdesigns such as characters, events and situations, but also crucially depends on the cognitive activity of the reader, who is uniquely able to look at the storyworld from both an internal and external perspective.

Naturally, story-level elements (microdesigns) do inform the discursive structures (macrodesign) that emerge from them, according to the already mentioned spill-over effect posited by Caracciolo (2014b: 61; 3.2.1). An understanding of characters as trajectories, modelled by the competing underlying influences of K-worlds, O-worlds and W-worlds, is

achieved in the first place by the detective himself or herself, that is by an entity belonging to the storyworld. The detective, in other words, seeks to 'read' the people revolving around the crime in order to understand their intentions and thoughts in the same way the reader does. However, it is only the reader who holds expectations that come from knowing that the narrative is an artefact: for instance, it is only the reader who can assume that a seemingly random character might be significantly involved in the case, as well as it is only the reader who can guess that the closer they get to the ending of the book the more likely it is that the solution of the crime is approaching.

It follows that the process of plot understanding should not rely on completely different strategies, but critically entails one step higher in abstraction. It is marked by the inclusion of the reader's perspective and therefore the entrance to the space of narrative experience. Posited that understanding primarily means making meaningful connections, in the space of the storyworld the reader understands characters' actions by relating them to their private mental worlds and to fictional circumstances and context, thus outlining individual trajectories. At the same time, with an operation of recentring on to her own perspective as reader and by recursively applying the principles of modal logic, readers have to navigate through different counterfactual configurations of characters' trajectories endowed with their own directionality: from the competition among potential characters' trajectories the general trajectory of the plot progressively emerges. The trajectory of the plot is a macro-trajectory or, as Dannenberg suggests, the 'dynamic sum of the alternate possible worlds generated by the text' (2008: 63). Another viable variation is proposed by Ryan, who describes plot as 'the trace left by the movements of these worlds within the textual universe' (1991: 119).

Precisely by virtue of her ability to keep one foot inside and one outside of the storyworld, the reader is able to carry out this simultaneous understanding along two axes: on the one hand, focusing on the micromovements of individual entities of the storyworld; on the other, assessing how these micromovements may entail modifications of the space of narrative experience. The attempt to look for a consistent pattern, able to impose unity to a set of scattered and seemingly unrelated or incompatible events and narratives, is precisely the cognitive task that is required by crime fiction and that constitutes the main pleasure for the reader. The reduction represented by the image schema of trajectory is the clean solution sought for by the detective, and by the reader. To put the same concept another way, it could be suggested that the plot trajectory accounts for the temporal unfolding during reading of subsequent spatial configurations of possible worlds in the view of an expected final resolution.

It is important to specify that what matters in the process of plot understanding is not a final resolution in itself but rather the reader's expectation of it. This shift of focus from narrative comprehension achieved retrospectively to the process of comprehension itself marks an important step away from a rigidly structuralist framework and accounts instead for the dynamic nature of narrative understanding. As noted also by Dannenberg (2008; cf. Brooks 1984, Kermode 1967), final closure is a specific convention of a strongly teleological genre. Readers expect characters' trajectories to converge toward it as soon as they approach the end: the concept of trajectory aptly accounts for this tension. Again, it should be remarked that this does not exclude that some narratives may intentionally break these conventions and expectations: this, however, reinforces rather than undercutting their influence on readers while they are immersed in the process of understanding the story. The reader approaches crime fiction narratives with a pre-determined set of expectations, which makes plot understanding strongly directional, as much as characters' trajectories have a directionality expressing their personal goals and intentions. The concept of trajectory well captures the directionality typical of this narrative genre. My suggestion is that plot is not simply compared to a trajectory: building on the dynamics illustrated in this chapter, readers understand plot unfolding as a trajectory across the space of the narrative experience. This means that the image schema of trajectory works as a procedural strategy that guides readers' process of sense-making of the narrative as it proceeds.

* * *

In this chapter I built on the parameters identified in Chapter 2 to elaborate a second spatially-oriented plot type. This plot type arguably encourages a spatial understanding of the narrative, but it does so by stressing different cognitive strategies and therefore achieves an overall different narrative experience. The two image schemata of map and trajectory point to such dissimilarity. The first plot type, epitomised by the map, refers to narratives which could be regarded as static and whose point is primarily to understand the dynamic equilibrium behind a state of affairs or a situation. The second plot type is epitomised by the trajectory and includes narratives that are strongly teleological in nature, characterised by strong readerly expectations guiding the plot's unfolding.

Crime fiction narratives represent a category of stories – in this case, a genre – that conventionally fits this reception profile. Ryan often remarks that narrativity depends not only on narrative content or aesthetic considerations but also and crucially on the degree of conceptual and logical complexity of the storyworld (1986: 326). This is the case with

the structure of the virtual dimension usually exhibited in crime fiction, as the conventions related to this genre demand for a system of strongly competing private worlds, and for the management of a paradigmatic system of counterfactual possibilities. In order to understand them, readers ought to rely on sense-making strategies that are closer to spatial orientation practices rather than being based on the understanding of chronological causality only. Camilleri particularly exploits this conventional spatial quality of crime fiction understanding and further enhances it in his *Montalbano* novels by designing cases that are solved thanks to the combined integration of multiple inputs. In addition to the primary detection strand, narrativity in Camilleri's stories is typically ensured through parallel investigations that enrich the main one by analogy or juxtaposition (but hardly by direct cause-effects), and through small narratives in the form of dreams or theatre-like put-ons.

This chapter makes the case for an engaged virtual dimension as a potentially core criterion for prompting a spatially-oriented understanding of narrative. By adopting the crime fiction genre as broader case study, Chapter 3 stresses the importance of expectations and conventions when it comes to any theorisation about reception, thus reasserting the pragmatic rather than ontological nature of narrativity. Similarly, it is suggested that a spatial approach to plot understanding should be cued in readers by multiple interacting criteria: in this case, a strong pointer toward spatiality is represented by the central role it traditionally plays in crime fiction also at other levels – from the importance of setting in socio-historical terms to abstract geometric principles of order operating in conceptualising plots.

The next chapter will mark the third and last step of my examination. The selected case study is quite distinctive because Calvino's own activity as theorist and self-critic impacts dramatically on the analysis. Due to Calvino's literary sophistication and critical self-awareness in addition to his well-documented interest in formal constraints to be applied in his writings, the image of the fractal is employed in *Se una notte* with a greater degree of accuracy and complexity compared to the application of the image schemata of map and trajectory in *City* and crime fiction. My observations will be more specifically tailored to the text under consideration, and less likely to be easily applied to a larger category of narratives. Yet this specific focus does not undermine the theoretical value of my proposed reading, as it still asserts itself as a demonstrated case of spatial-oriented plot understanding. The image schema of fractal is advanced for this novel in particular, but the criteria that justify the adoption of a spatial approach are in line with those hypothesised in the previous two chapters: virtuality still plays a crucial role but, instead of counterfactuals, I shall focus on its other two main articulations of potentiality and void; marking a connection with my first case study, the fictionalisation of the reader's virtual body will

assume again a pre-eminent role; self-reflection and metanarrative features, only marginally mentioned so far, will be brought to the fore in my analysis.

Chapter Four

Plot as Fractal: Italo Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*

Choosing a single guiding image for representing plot understanding seems almost counterproductive if we face an author like Italo Calvino (1923–1985), who has always given voice to a profound diffidence for final definitions (Milanini 1994: xxvii; Santovetti 2007: 192). Yet, Calvino's passion for exactitude, geometric figures, and formal design is such that, once the constraints and features of the text had been isolated, it has not been impossible to justify their inner workings (SI 686). In a bid to find a balance between the temptation of a perfect image, able to fully epitomise a complex narrative such as *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979), and the awareness that there will always be other images that could better explain specific details or features of this work, I intend to analyse *Se una notte* through the image schema of the fractal.[87] The core of the chapter (4.3, 4.4) consists in a discussion of the hypothesis that the process of plot understanding in *Se una notte* is spatial in nature and, more specifically, functions according to the same principles of fractality, which is characterised by the repetition of a certain pattern at different scales (4.3.2). The storyworld construed in *Se una notte*, in fact, is complex and articulated enough to provide clear levels at which recurring elements are differently recombined from time to time, in a pattern of variation within repetition that bears close affinities with fractality (4.3.1). The notion of fractal captures the principle regulating the relationship between the narrative as a whole and its parts – chapters and intercalated novels; in doing so, fractality also describes the process of understanding arguably implemented by readers during reading.

Furthermore, Calvino's oeuvre exhibits features that preliminarily position it within the scope of my research. These include signals of a wide-spread influence of spatiality on Calvino's cognitive style (4.1); a keen metanarrative attitude, carried out through an exploration of virtuality in all its articulations, from counterfactuality (what cannot happen)

---

[87] Quotations from *Se una notte* refer to the Einaudi 1979 edition. For all the other works by Calvino, I refer to *Romanzi e racconti* or *Saggi*.

and potentiality (what might happen) to absence (what does not happen) (4.2); Calvino's deep interest in dynamics of reception and in the role of the reader,[88] which gain strong pre-eminence in *Se una notte* through the display of textual cues that positively prompt the engagement of the readers' virtual body (4.4). As to the metanarrative penchant, indeed, *Se una notte* is a rather late work usually associated with the so-called semiotic period of his career, a period that defines 'l'arco della produzione narrativa di Italo Calvino in cui l'elemento metaletterario, o meglio, la riflessione sulla letteratura come strumento di rappresentazione e di conoscenza, viene posto al centro dell'opera' (Bonsaver 1995: 55).[89] The metanarrative and self-reflective element is indeed a crucial reason why I selected *Se una notte* and Calvino because, by including the interpreter's perspective in the narrative representation, narrative levels are multiplied and the storyworld(s) gains in ontological complexity. As Waugh argues as she muses on Frank's (1945) study, 'self-reflexiveness […] generates "spatial form"' (1984: 23), hence the assumption that any narration that reflects on itself acquires a spatial dimension. A similar statement comes from Roubaud (2008: 175), poet and mathematician member of the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, who claims that '[i]n campo narrativo, l'Oulipo Semantico richiede la creazione di un "mondo possibile di narrazione", nel quale vengano moltiplicate le dimensioni dello spazio' (Lewis 1986).[90]

Critically approaching Calvino today is not an easy task. Quantitatively, the amount of critical work already published and the number of perspectives adopted are virtually impossible to process in their entirety, as scholars acknowledged already in the 1990s. Qualitatively, the degree of artistic self-awareness and self-reflection already demonstrated by Calvino himself – either explicitly expressed in his essayistic production or implicitly emerging from his fictional works – is such to induce in the critic an acute sense of humility. Not to mention the protean and prolific nature of Calvino's imagination and experimentation, in the first place. It is no accident that Milanini (1990) chose the essay-form for one of the first monographic works on Calvino, significantly entitled *L'utopia discontinua*:

---

[88] McLaughlin (1998) cites Zena il Lungo in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, and other short stories ('La stessa cosa del sangue', 'Il giardino incantato', 'Pranzo con un pastore', 'I figli poltroni', and 'Il gatto e il poliziotto') where readers do not feature metanarratively but as a detached or intellectualised figures in the story. Indubitably, a crucial moment is marked by *Le città invisibili*, where the character of Marco Polo observes that 'Chi comanda al racconto non è la voce: è l'orecchio' (RRII 473).

[89] Although semiotic works in the strict sense usually include only *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969/1973), *Le città invisibili* (1972), and *Se una notte* (1979), if we foreground the metanarrative and metaliterary propensity then we could find several connections also with previous works, starting from *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959) throughout several cosmicomical tales (*Le cosmicomiche*, 1965; *Ti con zero*, 1967; *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche*, 1968).

[90] Semantic Oulipo (OuSem) is a branch activity of the Oulipo, as opposed to the Syntactic Oulipo (OuSin). While this latter operates pre-eminently on syntactic constraints that indeterminately and unpredictably lead to semantic effects, the Semantic Oulipo (OuSem) aims at operating directly on semantic constraint. If any, *Se una notte* is closer to a Semantic-oulipien work, since it relies on constraints concerning the semantic relations among narrative entities.

> quanto più mi affannavo a individuare punti di svolta radicali o divaricazioni nette nell'intero *corpus* delle opere esaminate, tanto più queste ultime mi apparivano collegate a vicenda da innumerevoli fili, quasi caparbiamente fedeli ad alcune scelte tematiche e formali esibite fin dagli esordi; e quanto più miravo a sintesi unitarie e a semplificazioni espositive, tanto più mi scontravo con la compresenza di una molteplicità di motivi dissimulati, con l'impossibilità di ricondurre entro uno schema centripeto una gamma di soluzioni fabulatorie oltremodo diversificate, proteiformi. [1990: 7]

Despite admiring Milanini's insightful critical acumen, Bonsaver (1995) attempts to resist such a centrifugal approach and designs a study that examines the heterogeneity of Calvino's art and interests and yet provides a global reading of his oeuvre; in order to do this, Bonsaver arranges his volume in three parts focusing on three different perspectives – historic-literary, stylistic and structural, and deconstructionist – and grounds them in robust textual analysis. Along similar lines, McLaughlin's 1998 monograph, which is prompted by the publication in the series Meridiani Mondadori of letters and pieces of both fiction and non-fiction that gave access to new material and provided unprecedented insight in the diachronic development of Calvino's oeuvre.

The specific perspective adopted in the present work owes much to the argument developed by Hume (1992). Unlike Bonsaver or McLaughlin, who attempt to combine a chronological discussion of Calvino's works with their critical interpretation, Hume offers a precise hypothesis concerning Calvino's metaphysics and explores it synchronically through relevant texts.[91] She maintains that, despite the multifarious nature of Calvino's production, an unchanging core can be identified at the heart of his fictional and non-fictional writing, an underlying quest which could be formulated in terms of a recurrent relationship 'between an active consciousness [a Cartesian cogito] and a complicated, particulate cosmos', a 'confrontation between mind and matter' (1992: 16, 33). Hume models a remarkable overview of Calvino's poetics, of his vision of the cosmos and attitude towards the crucial relationship between the whole and its parts. Hume argues that Calvino elaborated a perception of reality as undifferentiated mass threatening the cogito, which is represented by the individual's mind and rationality (41). In doing so, she posits quite a polarised view, wherein Calvino supposedly oscillates between the two opposite principles of chaos and order: the former exemplified by the magma, flux and paste, and the latter epitomised by the crystal and, overall, a particulate vision of the world. Following Hume in her philosophical and interdisciplinary perspective is Pilz's (2005) work, which investigates Calvino's oeuvre in its interrelations with science and explores the critical and

---

[91] In fact, Hume does not fail to also give a global interpretation of Calvino's whole corpus in the light of her hypothesis, suggesting how specific ideas emerged and developed chronologically over the author's writing career.

methodological consequences of the inclusion of the notion of system in Calvino scholarship.

Equally fruitful to my project is the dialogue with Santovetti's (2007) work on digression, where she links Calvino's propensity for modelling and form to plot specifically, rather than to narrative structure generically. With a move that closely reminds what I seek to do in this thesis, Santovetti speaks of 'making plots as making models' (195). Drawing on views of 'model' advanced in *Palomar* (1983),[92] she reads *Se una notte* as an example of 'imperfect model' because it displays

> a plot that is able to contain, in spite of many interruptions and multiple interpolations, the centrifugal and disbanding element. This is a nonlinear plot which finds its meaning and vitality in the subversion and metamorphosis of its own structure. [2007: 193-4]

Santovetti's interprets digression as a strategy that, although disruptive in some sense, does not hinder the understanding of *Se una notte* but rather enriches it as it manages to instantiate multiplicity within the narrative. My own argument precisely intends to refine and further explore the patterns that readers could sense beneath this 'subversion and metamorphosis'. My only concern with Santovetti's theoretical argument might be that, by way of premise, she posits digression and plot as complementary yet juxtaposed elements, where digression is understood as a centrifugal force that brings variety and disorder into the linearity and order established by the plot (18). By contrast, I would rather suggest that digression can impart a different pace on certain plots, but that the notion of plot ought to be revised to become a more inclusive and flexible concept itself, able to potentially include digressive movements. In fact, Santovetti herself seems sometimes to go back on her own premises, blurring the definition of plot as counterpart of digression, and speaking instead of 'linear plot' and 'digressive plot' (194). Most importantly, irrespective of seeming contradictions between Santovetti's approach and mine, I prioritise the fact that she strives for an explanation that accounts for the continuity and the unity of the text – and she finds it in the notion of imperfect model, flexible and metamorphosing. In other words, even though *Se una notte* is a composite work made of ten different incipits technically linked by the frame only, Santovetti refuses to overlook the fact that, provided that *Se una notte* is presented to the reader as a novel, the mechanism that keeps its parts together must be one single, flexible mechanism, and not a series of different models – as, for instance, suggested by Ricci (1982: 96).

---

[92] The word 'model' is also often employed by Capoferro (2006) and by Calvino himself in *Lezioni americane*.

The innovative reading offered in the chapter provides an additional angle to look at *Se una notte*. At the same time, it constitutes a fascinating case study to advance my overall hypothesis that narrative understanding may be spatial in nature because, as Caracciolo remarks, 'given the structural resemblance between our virtual access to the real world and our virtual access to fictional worlds […], readers' reconstruction of narrative space is mediated by the same cognitive strategies they adopt to apprehend real space' (2014a: 162). However, in line with the approach adopted throughout the whole thesis, I do not focus much on mimetic space but rather on the underlying interrelations between spatiality and narration, exploring the ways in which spatialising strategies inform Calvino's ways to design his own narratives. If certain narratives are designed to cue readers into apprehending plot as if it were a space, prompting them to significantly rely on cognitive strategies phylogenetically developed to make sense of spatial phenomena, I claim that *Se una notte* displays several features that arguably encourage readers to do so.

4.1. Order as an expression of spatiality

The purpose of this section is to prepare the ground for the analysis of *Se una notte*'s plot as a fractal by emphasising those features of Calvino's oeuvre that justify a view of his cognitive style as decidedly spatial in nature. Starting from the early impact that the Ligurian landscape had on his perception of space and on the relationship between the whole and its parts, a brief overview of the interrelation between order and disorder will be outlined (4.1.1). This will be followed by some considerations on Calvino's interest in the genre of folktale and how it relates to his penchant for geometries and rationality in the arrangement of the narrative matter (4.1.2), and by a final mention of Calvino's figural imagination, which significantly works according to spatial rather than temporal principles (4.1.3).

4.1.1. Patterns of order and disorder

In the autobiographical short story 'La strada di San Giovanni', Calvino introduces the difference between his father and himself by drawing on their two distinctive ways to make sense of the world around them: 'Una spiegazione generale del mondo e della storia deve innanzi tutto tener conto di com'era situata casa nostra' (RRIII 7). While his father's life was orbiting around higher grounds, above the family house and towards the mountains, Calvino's personal world was rather looking toward the sea and the city. For Calvino, having different spatial systems of reference is a good enough reason to justify the diversity of lives and epistemological attitudes between father and son.

Another short piece, 'Dall'opaco' (RRIII 89-101), exhibits the same dynamic. This text epitomises in an exemplary way the starting assumption of this chapter that Calvino's cognitive style is decidedly spatial in nature, and shows how his conceptual elaborations – including making sense of an experience or a story – are often mediated by strategies usually employed to make sense of space:

> e così anche adesso se mi chiedono che forma ha il mondo, […] devo rispondere che il mondo è disposto su tanti balconi che irregolarmente s'affacciano su un unico grande balcone che s'apre sul vuoto dell'aria, sul davanzale che è la breve striscia del mare contro il grandissimo cielo, e a quel parapetto ancora s'affaccia il vero me stesso all'interno di me, all'interno del presunto abitante di forme del mondo più complesse o più semplici ma tutte derivate da questa, molto più complesse e nello stesso tempo molto più semplici in quanto tutte contenute o deducibili da quei primi strapiombi e declivi, da quel mondo di linee spezzate ed oblique tra cui l'orizzonte è l'unica retta continua [RRIII 89]

More specifically, it could be argued that the type of space that Calvino experienced in his formation years shaped the type of relations he learnt to individuate and apply when it comes to make sense of his own experience, be it individually (the form of his own thoughts) or interactively elaborated (the type of relations he may isolate in the world around him). In the description of plausible mental operations outlined in 'Dall'opaco' we can already find essential properties of fractality: discontinuity within continuity, slanting yet unavoidably relations between levels of (fictional) reality, all projected against the horizon of an overarching epistemological frame that embraces an irreducible heterogeneity. It will be sufficient to compare 'Dall'opaco' with a passage from *Se una notte* to realise how deeply this pattern of vertical and horizontal relations, further typified by internal irregularities, has impacted upon Calvino's way to order experience (cf. 4.5):

> le case anche loro che tagliano verticalmente la linea dei dislivelli, poggiate mezzo sul gradino di sotto e mezzo su quello di sopra, con due pianterreni uno sotto uno sopra, e così anche adesso che ordinariamente le case sono più alte di qualsiasi palma, e tracciano linee verticali ascendenti più lunghe in mezzo alle linee spezzate e oblique del livello del suolo [RRIII 90]
>
> Tutte queste linee oblique incrociandosi dovrebbero delimitare lo spazio dove ci muoviamo io e Valeriano e Irina, dove la nostra storia possa affiorare dal nulla, trovare un punto di partenza, una direzione, un disegno. [79]

It does not seem out of place to suggest that the kind of order Calvino tends to impart to his narratives may stem from spatialising cognitive strategies. Calvino himself claims that 'ogni orientamento comincia per me da quell'orientamento iniziale' (RRIII 91). It is

reasonable to assume that he should refer not only to orientation within physical space, but also to conceptual orientation.

I already considered in relation to crime fiction how order might be intrinsically bound to space (3.1.2). Interestingly, when Calvino refers to crime narratives, he does so by highlighting the geometry of their plots. In his 1979 article on *Alfabeta*, Calvino refers to the seventh incipit of *Se una notte* 'In una rete di linee che s'intersecano' as 'un esempio di narrazione che tende a costruirsi come un'operazione logica o una figura geometrica o una partita a scacchi', and observes that:

> Se vogliamo tentare anche noi l'approssimazione dei nomi propri, potremmo rintracciare il padre più illustre di questo modo di raccontare in Poe e il punto d'arrivo più compiuto e attuale in Borges. Tra questi due nomi pur distanti possiamo situare quanti autori tendono a filtrare le emozioni più romanzesche in un clima mentale di rarefatta astrazione, guarnito spesso di qualche preziosismo erudito. [RRII 1389]

Later on, Poe will be included among those authors who pursued a poetics of exactitude ('Esattezza', SI 685), and his name recurs again in 'Visibilità', when Calvino considers the elements that contribute to the visual component of literary imagination: among these, particularly worth mentioning for our discussion is the 'processo d'astrazione, condensazione e interiorizzazione dell'esperienza sensibile, d'importanza decisiva tanto nella visualizzazione quanto nella verbalizzazione del pensiero' (SI 710). Again, after establishing a strong connection between Poe and Dino Buzzati, Calvino admits the significant role that the form of Buzzati's short stories had on his own style: 'lo stampo del racconto buzzatiano, preciso come un meccanismo che si tende dal principio alla fine' (SI 1013). It may be telling that Calvino places Poe at the crossroads of multiple attitudes: ordering principle, mathematical or geometric ratiocination, visually-informed abstraction, fantastic, crime fiction. Moreover, the fact that the unfinished oulipienne work *L'incendie de la maison maudite* was meant to be published as *L'ordine nel delitto* (RRIII 1242) seems to suggest that Calvino associated the crime fiction genre with an underlying propensity to spatially conveyed order and, potentially, with combinatorics.[93] Also McLaughlin (1998) points at the strong influences of mathematical and geometric ordering principles on Calvino's narratives, in particular on those exhibiting thriller-like atmospheres: 'Il guidatore notturno' (*Ti con zero*, 1967), for instance, 'is innovative in its attempt to integrate the clarity of mathematics with the ambiguity of literature (one of the ideals of the OULIPO, Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) […]. The structure of the tale is also mathematically symmetrical' (89); another

---

[93] The project was presented in 1975, following an experiment carried out at the Centre Pompidou under the supervision of computer expert Paul Brafford, also member of the Oulipo (Pilz 2005: 127, 140).

short story of the same collection, 'L'inseguimento', is similarly informed by mathematical paradoxes and applies them to space.

Along these lines, Tonin (2005) aptly highlights that, for Calvino, space often becomes itself narration, meaning that some of his narratives are based less on images and words and more on the relations between elements. It is these mutual spatial relations that ensure the tellability of such stories. In 'Venezia, archetipo e utopia della città acquatica' (RRIII 2688-92) and in many other reportages and descriptions of places alike, space becomes a second narrative voice next to the (supposedly) human voice. *Le città invisibili* (1972) represents of course the highest implementation of this penchant for turning readings of spaces into storytelling (2005: 183), together with the already cited short stories from *Ti con zero*. Tonin speaks of 'magnetismo spaziale' to indicate the recurrence and extensive presence of this dimension underlying Calvino's production (2005: 188).[94]

I selected *Se una notte* instead of *Le città* as main case study because my chief concern lies in the impact of spatiality upon plot and upon the process of plot understanding. While *Le città* should definitely be included in a broader discussion of space in Calvino's oeuvre, in *Se una notte* spatialising strategies interact in the most original way with dynamics of global narrative comprehension. More specifically, I seek to demonstrate how the principles of fractality seem to be at work in *Se una notte*, affecting both the way in which the narrative is created and the way readers are invited to make sense of it. It is no accident that *Le città* as a unitary book has been composed by combining pieces and ideas that Calvino elaborated separately over many years. In 1983, he writes:

> Era diventato un po' come un diario che seguiva i miei umori e le mie riflessioni: tutto finiva per trasformarsi in immagini di città: i libri che leggevo, le esposizioni d'arte che visitavo, le discussioni con gli amici. [RRII 1361]

As expected, the cities do condense and crystallise experiences and ideas into a spatial image or in some type of order, which still makes a case for Calvino's spatially-informed cognitive style.[95] Yet, *Le città* is also Calvino's work that most distinctively lacks plot, in the sense that it offers no affordances to readers to create any kind of expectation about the unfolding of the narrative, and would have been therefore not as effective as a case study. My main interest lies in illustrating how spatiality is a principle actively impacting on readers' understanding also in narratives that are not seemingly as static and descriptive as *Le città*.

---

[94] Tonin recognises an increasing centrality of spatiality, with *Marcovaldo* (1963) as turning point preparing the ground for more inherently spatial works, such as the cosmicomical tales and *Le città invisibili* (from now on, *Le città*). He notes that, since *Marcovaldo*, 'Alla iniziale attenzione per i tipi umani […] si affianca sempre più spesso quella per l'uomo nel suo rapporto con lo spazio, magari con relazione con altri uomini ma per la quale si passa attraverso il filtro della collocazione spaziale' (2005: 191).

[95] Calvino himself admits that 'Un simbolo più complesso, che mi ha dato maggiori possibilità di esprimere la tensione tra razionalità geometrica e groviglio delle esistenze umane è quello della città' ('Esattezza', SI 689).

In this light, demonstrating how the plot of *Se una notte* is still governed by spatially-oriented strategies constitutes a more significant example of the far-reaching productiveness of the approach endorsed by this thesis.

An exhaustive examination of Calvino's reflections on the concept of order would overstep the scope of the present discussion. All monographic works consider it from a specific perspective, and of course it plays a central in role in Hume (1992) and Pilz (2005) as they discuss the relationship of Calvino's oeuvre with sciences. Once again, Calvino's own writing provides a useful insight in this regard. In 'Esattezza', Calvino muses on his personal intellectual journey and recognises his early attraction toward a principle of clarity and formal order, epitomised by the image of the crystal. Later on in the lecture, however, he readily admits as powerful a fascination toward the underlying disorder and changeable nature of reality: this has been subsequently conceptually elaborated in terms of complexity (Pilz 2005), chaos (Hume 1992), shapelessness (Guj 1988), or multiplicity.

It could be suggested that a turning point in Calvino's idea of order occurs around the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it is not undermined but certainly undergoes deep changes. Calvino writes about his 'predilezione per le forme geometriche, per le simmetrie, per le serie, per la combinatoria, per le proporzioni numeriche, […] fedeltà all'idea di limite, di misure' (SI 686; Varsava 1986); it could be argued that, at this early stage, order is intended as something juxtaposed to disorder. Indeed, commenting on the short story 'L'avventura di uno sciatore' (1959), Guj (1988) claims that the image of the line – evocative of the act of writing, too – expresses the ordering stance that one can detect beneath the chaotic mass of reality. In the cosmicomical stories, however, order and disorder are increasingly presented as a complementary binomial pair: an unresolved tension is at the heart of Qfwfq's dilemmatic choice between Xha and Wha, equally fascinating to him for different reasons ('I meteoriti'), and it is recurrent subject of debate between Qfwfq and Vug in 'I cristalli'. Pilz identifies in Calvino's 1973 re-examination of the concept of utopia (which he discussed before in relation to Fourier's utopian society project, grounded on fine-grained classifications and orderings) an important demonstration of his change of views with respect to pristine order and its advisability, as it proves that 'for him it is no longer the perfection of the model that counts, but its flaws and what remains hidden' (2005: 136). In his maturity, therefore, while Calvino's crystalline idea of order becomes irreducibly nuanced with symptoms of disorder, disorder ceases to be mere shapelessness and acquires properties (or it becomes carrier) of a different type of order (Capozzi 1988; Hayles 1991; Piacentini 2002). Calvino epitomises this new meaning in the image of the flame:

'immagine di costanza d'una forma globale esteriore, malgrado l'incessante agitazione interna' […] Cristallo e fiamma, due forme di bellezza perfetta da cui lo sguardo non sa staccarsi, due modi di crescita nel tempo, di spesa della materia circostante, due simboli morali, due assoluti […]. Io mi sono sempre considerato un partigiano dei cristalli, ma la pagina che ho citato m'insegna a non dimenticare il valore che la fiamma ha come modo d'essere, come forma d'esistenza. [SI 688-9]

When, in 'Molteplicità', Calvino praises the missing sixty-sixth chapter, a deliberate error within the otherwise geometrically perfect work of Georges Perec, *Le Vie mode d'emploi* (1978), he clearly sees it not as a defect but as something that, on the contrary, enhances the overall order (Pilz 2005: 139). By the early 1980s, it seems that order and disorder are so irreducibly intertwined that their co-existence becomes a desirable condition. Admittedly, though, it is impossible to trace an irreversible or definitive trajectory as far as Calvino's conception of order is concerned. The search for a balance between order and disorder, as well as between different modes of order, will always remain a burning issue for Calvino. In an interview with an Australian broadcaster in 1984, he states that 'writing is sometimes trying to put order into the disorder of experience, trying to find a pattern, sometimes a geometrical pattern inside life, inside that tangled forest which is life' (Kiernan 1984). Writing is an ordering practice that, however, should not deny the protean and disordered nature of reality. Calvino is well aware of this double-faced feature when he writes, again in the Norton lecture on 'Esattezza', that:

la mia scrittura si è trovata di fronte due strade divergenti che corrispondono a due diversi tipi di conoscenza: una che si muove nello spazio mentale di una realtà scorporata, dove si possono tracciare linee che congiungono punti, proiezioni, forme astratte, vettori di forze; l'altra che si muove in uno spazio gremito d'oggetti e cerca di creare un equivalente verbale di quello spazio riempiendo la pagina di parole, con uno sforzo di adeguamento minuzioso dello scritto al non scritto, alla totalità del dicibile e del non dicibile. [SI 691]

Another thing worth noticing in this passage, moreover, is Calvino's undeniable way to make sense of things, including types of understanding, in terms of spaces to be cognised.

This argument may also function to explain the appeal exerted on Calvino by the narrative device of the frame. The frame is firstly introduced, in a relatively loose version, in *Le cosmicomiche*, where each story is introduced by a short caption illustrating some (pseudo-)scientific principle that will be more or less ironically developed in the fictional narrative. Note that, as explained before, it is precisely with the cosmicomical tales that the stark juxtaposition between a positive view order and a negative view disorder begins to be undermined. Abandoned in *Ti con zero*, the frame returns instead in *Altre storie cosmicomiche* almost to never leave Calvino's horizon again: in fact, it increases its structural and semantic

relevance from *Le città* to *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969, 1973),[96] up to its highest point in *Se una notte*.[97] In this light, it does not seem out of place to suggest along with Bonsaver that the macrotext is a narrative mechanism appreciated and employed by Calvino to negotiate this tension between order and disorder, something working as 'contenitore rigido reso necessario dalla necessità di creare una struttura di supporto in grado di controllare, di dare ordine, alla multiformità della sostanza narrata' (1994: 182; Camps 2000).[98] In *Il castello*, the macrotext is perfectly exploited as to the first set of cards. With the second set, however, in *La taverna dei destini incrociati* the structure is not as perfect, and at the end it highlights the presence of a void at the centre of the structure: Bonsaver suggests that it is this imperfect application of the constraint that conveys the message that is most interesting, concerning the epistemological value of the void in the semiotic trilogy as a whole. In *Le città*, the macrotext provides an overarching structure that holds together fragments that have been composed separately and, at the same time, reminds the reader of the multiple possible interpretations of such a peculiar storyworld. In other words, Calvino does not use the macrotext to comfortingly normalise the disturbance of unordered reality: it is a mediating device that, on the contrary, gives the author the opportunity to foreground the issue of the relations among narrative components within a totality (4.3).

4.1.2. Geometric conceptualisations and the folktale

The quotation above aptly represents what has been usually referred to in scholarship as an *esprit géométrique* characterising Calvino's cognitive style. The expression was firstly proposed by Citati in his review of Calvino's short stories in 1959:

> Ma l'assurdità pura, spiegata, delle favole non può essere dominata da una razionalità assoluta, anche se capovolta? La fantasia delle fiabe discende molto più dall''esprit de géométrie' che da quello di 'finesse'. E soltanto un razionalista, forse, può sognare (come tutti i Perrault sognano) di costruire un racconto che sia fatto di puro ritmo: segni, indicazioni, rispondenze impeccabili [233]

---

[96] From now on, *Il castello*. The first version of *Il castello* was published in Samek Ludovici and Calvino (1969), as a narrative accompanying the analysis of the set of Tarot cards. In 1973, Einaudi published a revised and broadened version of Calvino's previous work, also accompanied by *La Taverna dei destini incrociati* and an afterword.

[97] In *Palomar* the narrative frame is less developed, but it remains crucial that all the stories revolve around the same character as well as the ordering effort explicated through the paratext.

[98] Hence Bonsaver's (1994: 182-3; 1995: 75-6; Musarra Schrøder 2012) suggestion that architecture – due to its combination of geometry and art – should be the best suited discipline to provide useful images and concepts to analyse Calvino's work, from that of 'container' to 'modularity'.

Citati draws here on Blaise Pascal's stark juxtaposition between 'esprit de géométrie' and 'de finesse', descriptive of an analytical versus a discursive way to cognise the world. If we were to rely on these terms, though, perhaps we should suggest that Calvino rather combines the two modes into a spirit of geometric finesse. By this, I mean that Calvino's use of his 'razionalità geometrizzante' (Bonsaver 1995: 165) aims at ordering reality without yet denying its complexity. The fantastic and often experimental ways in which mathematics, geometry, and sciences in general impact on his narratives – e.g. 'Il guidatore notturno', 'La forma dello spazio' among others – lead to artistic effects so fresh and estranging that they cannot but reveal a highly skilful finesse.

Both Bonsaver (1995) and McLaughlin (1998) individuate traces of Calvino's penchant for geometry and symmetry as early as in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947). It is, however, in later works that geometric conceptualisations will become dominant. The cosmicomical tales loosely rely on scientific principles and images to guide and structure the narrative. Indeed, Belpoliti (1996: 68) dates back to these years Calvino's strong interest in the perception of forms and shapes. Following the acquaintance with Oulipo in the late 1960s – Calvino joins the group as a honorary member in 1973[99] – the semiotic works reveal a more systematic and rigorous employment of combinatorics and geometric figures (Bonsaver 1995): one should think of the grid-like arrangement of Tarot cards in *Il castello*, the diamond-shaped structure of *Le città* (1972),[100] and – as I hypothesise in this thesis – the fractal-like organisation of *Se una notte*. Also attributing it to the Oulipian influence, Roubaud (2008: 173) interprets the shift from the cosmicomical tales to *Le città* and *Il castello* in terms of development from narratives based on an 'axiomatic principle' – i.e. narrative as the development of a basic statement or scientific principle – to narratives relying on a geometric model (i.e. city, map, architecture). Braffort, commenting on Calvino's application of Greimas' semiotic square, observes that 'Queste rappresentazioni sfociano spontaneamente verso forme geometriche semplici, ma talvolta a incastro, che formano lo scheletro invisibile di molti testi' (2008: 56). Calvino himself comes up with reference to Julio Cortàzar with a description that could be equally attached to *Se una notte*, too:

> Due anime si contendono il porta-anime di Julio Cortàzar. L'una butta fuori immagini a getto continuo mosse dal vortice dell'arbitrio e dell'improbabilità, l'altra innalza costruzioni geometriche ossessive che si reggono in equilibrio su un filo. [SI 1302]

---

[99] For an overview of the Oulipo see Baetens (2012) and the volume edited by Motte (1986); on Calvino's relationship with this group, see Aragona (2008), Barenghi (1991a), Bénabou (2008), Botta (1997), Cannon (1979), Motte (1986), Perroud (1981).
[100] Cf. Barenghi (RRII 1359-65), Milanini (1990: 130-1), Ossola (1987).

The awareness that 'è stato il bisogno di accentuare l'elemento razionale e volontario del racconto, l'ordine, la geometria, a spingermi verso la fiaba' is once again owed to Calvino's own critical practice (quoted in Bonsaver 1995: 53). As Bonsaver comments, 'Il fantastico, in sostanza, si propone come modello ideale di "razionalità applicata", luogo narrativo in cui lo scrittore può concretizzare quel modello ideale che avrebbe forse desiderato rintracciare nel mondo reale' (1995: 53).[101] Though it is not just the chance to set his own internal ontological rules that draws Calvino toward the form of the folktale. Even more attractive, for him, is the traditional simplicity and geometry of the patterns of its structural relations. In a contribution from 1959, Calvino clarifies: 'Mi interessa della fiaba il disegno lineare della narrazione, il ritmo, l'essenzialità, il modo in cui il senso d'una vita è contenuto in una sintesi di fatti, di prove da superare, di momenti supremi' (SI 74). Indeed, Calvino's in-depth work on the Italian folktale, culminated in the editing of the *Fiabe italiane* in 1956, played a critical role in the elaboration of his idea of narrative, in particular as far as its spatial features are concerned. Certainly meaningful for his reflections is Propp's formalist work on the Russian folktale: Calvino wrote on Propp's 1946 work, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, in 1949 (SII 1541-3), although he accessed the 1928 masterpiece, *Morfologia della fiaba*, only in the 1966 Italian translation (following the English one in 1958). As I shall explore in 4.3.1, it will be particularly relevant to Calvino's conceptualisation the Proppian understanding of the folktale in terms of functions and of a limited set of constants upon which certain variations can be operated (see also SII 1611-28). An analogous formalist attitude is retained and further explored through the anthropological work by Lévi-Strauss on myth and by Greimas (1966/1983) on structuralist semantics, which will be explicitly – if loosely – applied to *Se una notte*.[102]

From Calvino's praise of the intrinsic value of reduction and formalisation we should infer that, far from distancing from reality, his geometric abstractions address a core of truth that should be the point of departure for grasping the complexity of the world, rather than denying it (SII 1615). As Milanini beautifully puts it, 'La semplicità era, per Calvino, nient'altro che una tecnica atta a preservare la limpidezza dello sguardo' (1994: xxvi). Most importantly, this conceptual core is specified not by a certain content but by sets of relations: through the folktale, Calvino enucleates the lesson that the system of internal relationships among elements might be more meaningful than the elements themselves. One can appreciate, thus, how the study of this narrative genre might have impacted also upon Calvino's aforementioned attention to the relationship between the

---

[101] See Gioanola (1986) for a psychoanalytical reading of the relation between fantastic and rationality in Calvino.
[102] In the Meridiani edition, Barenghi cites of Lévi-Strauss' *Anthropologie structurale* (1958), the four volumes of the *Mythologique* (1964-71), and his work on Propp *La structure et la forme* (1960).

whole and its parts. To some extent, we could trace back to the folktale also Calvino's propensity for stressing both these aspects – whole and parts alike – by means of works which are often modular and yet kept together via framing narrative devices:

> non è soltanto un elenco di varianti che dobbiamo raccogliere, ma dobbiamo tenere presente (con Lévi-Strauss) che il valore di queste manifestazioni si può comprendere solo all'interno della fiaba come un tutto; il rapporto tra il lessico e la sequenza narrativa, tra il *paradigma* e il *sintagma* non è mai arbitrario. [SII 1617]

I find this link particularly meaningful because it is not a direct borrowing – since folktales do not necessarily or usually have a narrative frame – and yet is arguably a conceptual feature that Calvino internalises from the folktale and subsequently reformulates according to his specific needs. It could be suggested that in *Il castello* and *Se una notte*, for instance, Calvino reproduces within one single work the sense-making strategy inferred from a whole genre, a whole tradition.

4.1.3. 'Fantasia figurale'

While geometric conceptualisations reveal how spatiality impacted on Calvino's way to construct complex meanings by correlating multiple elements, the notion of 'fantasia figurale' points at another property of Calvino's imagination that is also arguably spatial. In the Norton lecture on 'Visibilità', where he also refers to visual imagination in terms of 'fantasia figurale' (SI 705), Calvino provides invaluable insights on the mental workings underlying his fictional production. Although it might vary from work to work, Calvino explains that usually:

> nell'ideazione di un racconto la prima cosa che mi viene alla mente è un'immagine che per qualche ragione mi si presenta come carica di significato, anche se non saprei formulare questo significato in termini discorsivi o concettuali. Appena l'immagine è diventata abbastanza netta nella mia mente, mi metto a svilupparla in una storia, o meglio, sono le immagini stesse che sviluppano le loro potenzialità implicite, il racconto che esse portano dentro di sé. [SI 704]

The aspect on which I would like to focus my attention is not much the relationship between visual imagination and verbal expression, but rather the potentiality contained in, and conveyed by, the image (4.2.1). A potentiality that refers both to a future, single, unfolding of events and to the multiplicity of possible plural unfoldings. Calvino also suggests here that figural imagination might be in fact an irreplaceable tool for both the poet and the scientist, inasmuch as it crystallises composite associations of ideas into something that can

be cognitively taken in as a whole (SI 707). It is no accident that this point should return again in the Norton lecture on 'Molteplicità', where Calvino observes that 'Il modello della rete dei possibili può dunque essere concentrato nelle poche pagine d'un racconto di Borges, come può fare da struttura portante a romanzi lunghi o lunghissimi, dove la densità di concentrazione si riproduce nelle singole parti' (SI 730). As we read in *Il castello*:

> quella del Sangiorgio-Sangirolamo non è una storia con un prima e un dopo: siamo al centro d'una stanza con figure che si offrono alla vista tutte insieme. Il personaggio in questione o riesce a essere il guerriero e il savio in ogni cosa che fa e pensa, o non sarà nessuno, e la stessa belva è nello stesso tempo drago nemico della carneficina quotidiana della città e leone custode nello spazio dei pensieri: e non si lascia fronteggiare se non nelle due forme insieme. [RRII 602]

For Calvino, in other words, spatial configurations – be they conceptual or properly visual – have the chief quality of potentially gathering together antinomies and juxtapositions. In space, opposites can co-exist. Images, in turn, have the capability to capture this property of space. Calvino has also explored this idea in narrative ways: chief examples are the Tarot cards in *Il castello*, where each image epitomises a whole story and at the same time has different functions according to its position in a new sequence, or *Le cosmicomiche*, where this condition is creatively turned into the narrative situation of the story 'Tutto in un punto'. Moreover, the utmost care devoted to the refinement of the graphical structure of *Il castello* and *Le città* shows how important it was for Calvino that readers could embrace in one single gaze the design of the work as a whole, so that they could also appreciate the set of constraints operating on it (Milanini 1990: 128).

4.2. Calvino's obsession for 'the path not taken'

The discourse on the virtual has constituted one of the main *fils rouges* of the present work. Virtuality, let us remind it ourselves, constitutes the domain to which belong all those narrative elements – characters, events, places – that are not fully granted the status of actual fact in the storyworld. The link with spatiality lies in the hypothesis that, since storyworlds are enriched by a complex virtual dimension, while making sense of the narrative as a whole readers may be prompted to rely on cognitive strategies usually adopted to make sense of a three-dimensional space, rather than simply consider the chronological linear unfolding of events. All the narratives explored so far variously engage with the dimension of narrative virtuality in order to keep their narrative machineries going.

Calvino articulates virtuality in three main ways. In the first place, he engages the virtual in terms of counterfactuality: as explored in relation to the genre of crime fiction (3.3.1), counterfactuals are events or states that are impossible because they lost their

chance to be actualised in the storyworld. The second category consists in the realm of potentiality, which includes events and states that may not be actualised in the storyworld, but are suggested as still possible. In any case, they are not automatically excluded by other elements otherwise actualised – as it happens, instead, in crime fiction: once one specific strand of events is designated as the actual one, other hypotheses consequently become counterfactual. This is the same type of virtuality often employed by Baricco and already detected in *City*. The third articulation of virtuality is represented by the void, the absence.

Throughout his production, Calvino frequently and passionately reflected on all of these articulations of virtuality, but it is suggested that a privileged role is reserved to potentiality and the void, in particular in *Se una notte*. Therefore, after a brief overview of counterfactuality in Calvino, most of 4.2.1 is devoted to a discussion of potentiality, while 4.2.2 examines the void. In 4.2.3, since I believe it is significantly linked to the discussion of virtuality, I shall consider the concept of hypernovel, how it is developed in Calvino and how it concerns *Se una notte* in particular.

4.2.1. Counterfactuality and potentiality

If counterfactual and potential events are technically unfulfilled possibilities, counterfactuals are impossible and shall remain unfulfilled, whereas potentials still retain the chance to be fulfilled at some point. Scarpa (1990) argues that, touched upon in *Le cosmicomiche*, counterfactuality gains a preeminent role in *Ti con zero*, where the scholar individuates 'un'ansia rivolta alle cose che potevano essere e non sono state e non saranno mai' (241). Such an anxiety may be variously interpreted. In order to consider what might be the sources of this anxiety, let us look ahead at *Le città*, whose very title hints at a dimension that struggles to be ascertained as objective:[103]

> Marco entra in una città; vede qualcuno in una piazza vivere una vita o un istante che potevano essere suoi; al posto di quell'uomo ora avrebbe potuto esserci lui se si fosse fermato nel tempo tanto tempo prima, oppure se tanto tempo prima a un crocevia invece di prendere una strada avesse preso quella opposta e dopo un lungo giro fosse venuto a trovarsi al posto di quell'uomo in quella piazza. Ormai, da quel suo passato vero o ipotetico, lui è escluso; non può fermarsi; deve proseguire fino a un'altra città dove lo aspetta un altro suo passato, o qualcosa che forse era stato un suo possibile futuro e ora è il presente di qualcun altro. I futuri non realizzati sono solo rami del passato: rami secchi.
> — *Viaggi per rivivere il tuo passato?* – era a questo punto la domanda del Kan, che poteva anche essere formulata così: – *Viaggi per ritrovare il tuo futuro?*
> E la risposta di Marco: – *L'altrove è uno specchio in negativo. Il viaggiatore riconosce il poco che è suo, scoprendo il molto che non ha avuto e non avrà.* [34-5]

---

[103] Varese suggests that *Le città*, through its form, attempts to make the invisible visible (1973: 125).

In this excerpt, the obsession with possibility is re-centred in the individual, who questions and becomes aware of the specificities of his/her own identity in relation to what one is *not*, what one has *not* become. From this explicit standpoint, Scarpa looks retrospectively and suggests that the issue of existence at an anthropological scale in *Le città* was already present in *Ti con zero* at a cosmological scale, where Calvino outlines a sort of 'morale della potenzialità' (2008: 95) and 'non smette di pensare che tutto quanto nell'universo ha affermato la propria supremazia lo deve al lungo sacrificio di forme che sono rimaste sommerse, estinte, interrotte o cieche; al fatto che ciò che esiste non può prescindere da ciò che "esiste male" o non esiste più' (1990: 241-2). Interestingly enough, it could be said that the studies on the folktale are casting their light on this issue, too: indeed, it was in that context that Calvino firstly clarified how any meaning depends on the syntagmatic relations with the other components of the whole as much as it depends on the paradigmatic relations with the variants which could have been and instead are not. Actualised events, therefore, acquire their specific status and value only against the backdrop of unfulfilled possibilities.[104]

The possibilities yearned for in the excerpt above are clearly counterfactuals, and Calvino ascribes them to the domain of the 'negative'. Far from implying a value judgment, this label rather resembles the concept of typographical matrix, that is a device that impresses the paper thanks to a pattern of full and empty spaces that create an intelligible meaning. As Calvino states with regard to *Se una notte*, the novel represents 'una specie d'autobiografia in negativo: i romanzi che avrei potuto scrivere e che avevo scartato' (RRII 1396). As McLaughlin notes, however, *Se una notte* is as significantly tied to the genres Calvino did not explore as it is to many works he did write (1998: 127-8): counterfactuality, in other words, is often nostalgically craved for by Calvino as it covers an array of potential possibilities. It follows that it is on the broader dimension of potentiality that one ought to focus.

Consider the following excerpt, taken from the fifth intercalated novel of *Se una notte*, 'Guarda in basso dove l'ombra s'addensa', representing a full display of the powers of potentiality: 'Sto tirando fuori troppe storie alla volta perché quello che voglio è che intorno al racconto si senta una saturazione d'altre storie che potrei raccontare e forse racconterò o chissà che non abbia già raccontato in altra occasione' (109). By making the narrator's intended outcome explicit, this metanarrative passage clarifies the difference between counterfactuals and potentials. Since these stories are simply hinted at by the

---

[104] The Ligurian topography seems to have impacted upon Calvino's cognitive style also in this respect: 'potrei definire l'«ubagu» come annuncio che il mondo che sto descrivendo ha un rovescio, una possibilità di trovarmi diversamente disposto e orientato, in un diverso rapporto col corso del sole e le dimensioni dello spazio infinito, segno che il mondo presuppone un resto del mondo' (RRIII 99).

narrator, they are not fully actualised; however, their lack of actualisation pertains the act of narration only, as they seem to report events that might be actually verified in the storyworld and are simply not known to the reader. They are not counterfactuals because they do not clash with actualised events yet they are not endowed with a full status either, in a way that reminds us of Baricco's use of virtuality in *City* – although the metanarrative intention in the two novels is arguably very different.

Discussing this practice in *Se una notte*, Santovetti associates the regular display of potentiality with the narrative technique of digression. She argues that what is important in the novel is indeed the feeling of saturation of stories, which depends on what it is said as much as on what is left out of the narration (2007: 223). Bonsaver notes 'come in Calvino ricorra spesso il desiderio di mantenere intatta ogni potenzialità narrativa, di realizzare quel tanto agognato iper-romanzo come "luogo della molteplicità delle cose possibili"' (1995: 78; 4.3.3). Bonsaver's comment offers the opportunity to stress an important aspect: although I introduced potentiality in relation to a discourse on virtuality, as far as Calvino is concerned it cannot be considered as separate from the issue of multiplicity. 'La fantasia dell'artista', Calvino writes, 'è un mondo di potenzialità che nessuna opera riuscirà a mettere in atto; […] o meglio, noi lo diremmo *indecidibile*, come il paradosso d'un insieme infinito che contiene altri insiemi infiniti' (SI 713). The two properties, virtuality and multiplicity, are distinct but irreducibly intertwined. Something potential is such because it has no actualised yet, but also something that, not being actualised, can still co-exist next to its alternatives prior to the specification that follows a choice (Usher 1996: 188). In her exploration of Calvino's lifelong quest, Hume (1992: 30) observes that:

> What the narrator does in this story is explore possibilities. He follows forking paths in various directions, seeing where an idea – taste – will lead. He tries to chart its ultimate exfoliations. At the same time, this Cartesian cogito is seeking ways to organise experience.

Although this reflection is prompted by the short story 'Sotto il sole giaguaro' (included in the eponymous collection, posthumously published in 1986), it may not be out of place to extend its validity also to *Se una notte*. Here, indeed, the intercalated novels offer the chance to all the participants to the narrative experience to try out various solutions. From a creative perspective, Calvino (SII 1874) admits that he deliberately selected the genres of the intercalated novels among those which he thought would have never approached as an author, thus exploring their stylistic potentiality (Beaudouin 2008: 65). As to readers, different genres and national traditions represent different ways of sense-making, as they involve their own sets of expectations and conventions and therefore different perspectives on storyworlds and consequently different ways to shape them into narratives. Multiplicity,

in other words, emerges as the most suitable scenario for ensuring that different approaches are not excluding each other – thus somehow circumscribing the problem of choice and benefitting from all of the possible options. Perhaps the most charming example of such a beautiful variety is represented in *Se una notte* by the final portrait of the seven types of readers and attitudes toward reading, which would deserve to be quoted in full (256-8). While this whole section explores the fragmented, multiple, and modular nature of the novel, section 4.3 focuses on how these parts are gathered together to form a whole, not only formally but in readers' understanding.

4.2.2. Strategies for potentiality

Strongly metanarrative in nature, *Se una notte* is designed to bring to the fore and expose the issues surrounding potentiality, both as virtuality and multiplicity. The novel is made of twelve numbered chapters alternated with ten titled incipits of potential novels. The twelve chapters compose the overarching frame that structures the narrative and refer to the same storyworld, within which the incipits are intercalated.[105] With a similar encompassing movement, the titles of the incipits (plus an additional final one) form together a question that could be itself the incipit of an eleventh novel still to be found:

> Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore, fuori dall'abitato di Malbork, sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa senza temere il vento e la vertigine, guarda in basso dove l'ombra s'addensa in una rete di linee che s'allacciano, in una rete di linee di s'intersecano sul tappeto di foglie illuminate dalla luna intorno a una fosse vuota, – Quale storia laggiù attende la fine? – chiede, ansioso d'ascoltare il racconto. [260]

The importance of the incipit for Calvino, both practically and theoretically, is demonstrated by his initial plan to devote one of the Norton Lectures to the topic of 'Cominciare e finire'.[106] In the manuscript, he claims as follows:

> [Cominciare è] un momento decisivo per lo scrittore: il distacco dalla potenzialità illimitata e multiforme per incontrare qualcosa che ancora non esiste ma che potrà esistere solo accettando dei limiti e delle regole. Fino al momento precedente a quello in cui cominciano a scrivere, abbiamo a nostra

---

[105] Considering the types of genres touched by the incipits and the Borgesian influence on Calvino, Segre spotted a short story that seems almost to anticipate *Se una notte*, 'Esame dell'opera di Herbert Quain' (in *La biblioteca di Babele*). Even more tellingly, not only Calvino was inspired by this story, but also he seems to have followed its advice: 'Quain […] si pentì dell'ordine ternario e auspicò che, tra i suoi futuri imitatori, gli uomini scegliessero il binario' (quoted in Segre 1979: 199). In fact, I advance the hypothesis that, at least in *Se una notte*, Calvino elaborates more a complex order than the binary, which is that informed by fractality. Nonetheless, the binary system surely impacted hugely on Calvino's argumentative style (Almansi 1971).
[106] Barenghi (SI 734) reports that we still have the completed manuscript of the intervention, even though Calvino ultimately decided to eliminate the lecture and to rearrange its material in the sixth unfinished lecture on 'Consistency' (dated 22nd February 1985).

> disposizione il mondo […] come memoria individuale e potenzialità implicita; e noi vogliamo estrarre da questo mondo un discorso, un racconto, un sentimento: o forse più esattamente vogliamo compiere un'operazione che ci permetta di situarci in questo mondo. [SI 734]

As to its implementation in *Se una notte*, most valuable to our discussion is Chapter Eight, which consists in the journal of the prolific writer Silas Flannery, a character that is very close to Calvino himself.[107] Through the technique of *mise en abyme* (4.3.2), the focus moves onto the strategy that chiefly serves potentiality: the experimental exploit of the incipit.

> La fascinazione romanzesca che si dà allo stato puro nelle prime fasi del primo capitolo di moltissimi romanzi non tarda a perdersi nel seguito della narrazione: è la promessa d'un tempo di lettura che si stende davanti a noi e che può accogliere tutti gli sviluppi possibili. Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un *incipit*, che mantenesse per tutta la sua durata la potenzialità dell'inizio, l'attesa ancora senza oggetto. Ma come potrebb'essere costruito, un libro simile? S'interromperebbe dopo il primo capoverso? Prolungherebbe infinitamente i preliminari? Incastrerebbe un inizio di narrazione nell'altro, come le Mille e una notte? [177]

To confirm the partial overlapping of Flannery's and Calvino's perspectives, Falcetto (1991) points out that in a partly unpublished piece written by Calvino in 1975 (note that he starts composing *Se una notte* in 1977)[108] we already find those concepts that will constitute the bulk of Silas Flannery's diary in *Se una notte*, in particular the view of the incipit as the epitome of potentiality and the technical difficulties of creating a novel all made of incipits. Two main reasons must be pinpointed here about why such a novel – and, indeed, *Se una notte* – would endorse the powers of potentiality. First, because of the specific nature of the incipit, that is of a beginning. Potentiality is inherent to its openness, which creates the premises for choice(s) but does not force one to its definitiveness (Barenghi 2007: 77-9; Kottman 1996). Secondly, because of the programmatic multiplication of stories: not only beginnings contain in potential an array of unfoldings all equally actualisable, but also the juxtaposition of several different beginnings concretely pursues the plurality that is inherent to potentiality in the first place.

At the end of the quotation above, we can find three ways in which Flannery/Calvino envisions potentiality could be implemented: interruption, prolongation, and embedment. In his response to Guglielmi's review on *Alfabeta*, Calvino reacts to Guglielmi's gentle insinuations about some effect perhaps *unconsciously* achieved (RRII 1391)

---

[107] Calvino admits his own proximity to Flannery: 'qui io parlo – o il mio personaggio Silas Flannery parla' (RRII 1393).

[108] This is the preface Calvino wrote to a volume on painter Giulio Paolini, entitled 'La squadratura'.

by displaying the full force of the awareness and mastery of his own tools and skills, and by explaining the system of binary alternatives that supposedly constitutes the underlying structure of *Se una notte*. I will revert later to this system offering a more dynamic version of it thanks to the contribution of fractality: now, I shall focus on how the structure of *Se una notte*, according to Calvino himself, is deeply related to the poetics of interruption, or of the 'finito interrotto' (1979b). Indeed, Calvino's poetics of interruption is not a poetics of the unfinished. Nor, as d'Eramo (1979) suggests, are the incipits actually concluded short stories.[109] Such a specification is telling because it reveals that the activation of potentiality is not a by-product but a purposely designed effect, a primary intended outcome of the narrative. Also, Santovetti (2007) acknowledges interruption as the core technique that, together with multiplicity, ensures the transformative power of the plot in *Se una notte*. Drawing on traditional uses (above all, in popular fiction, the *feuilleton*), Santovetti observes that interruption can consist in either a simple halt in the plot or a halt followed by an interpolation; since this latter is carried out by the narrator, it reveals the narrator's strong presence and power over the narrative (2007: 214). She argues that the principle of interruption constitutes not only a theme of *Se una notte*, but it is also a pivotal device with structuring purposes and impacting upon the reception of the text: on the one hand, it initiates the digression and ensures variety by changing perspective or enabling unexpected turns of events; on the other hand, although frustrating, interruption engages the reader as it teaches one to achieve a detachment from the text and encourages self-reflection (2007: 217, 219; Usher 1990).

Interestingly enough, the second solution that Calvino/Silas hypothesises for building a narrative entirely made of incipits is seemingly the opposite of interruption: namely prolonging one single continuous incipit. Indeed, demonstrating once again his pleasure for paradoxes, it could be said that in some sense Calvino implements them both: the solution of multiple interrupted incipits is pursued systematically and thoroughly, yet could not the fact that the titles of the ten intercalated novels all together form an eleventh incipit allow one to see the whole *Se una notte* as one long, prolonged and continuously deferred beginning? Less tentatively, it should be noted that the paradoxical co-validity of two solutions so different also harkens back to another dominant idea of Calvino's, and of Borges' before him, that is the oscillation between the desire to write all the possible books (or incipits) and write only one, infinite: 'o scrivere un libro che possa essere il libro unico, tale da esaurire il tutto nelle sue pagine; o scrivere tutti i libri, in modo da inseguire il tutto attraverso le sue immagini parziali' (181). As to the third solution, epitomised by the long-

---

[109] Ovan (2012: 416) draws in this respect a connection with Barthes' (1963/1989) concept of *jouissance* as the pleasure (distinctive of writerly texts) derived from a sense of interruption, a break or a gap, where something unexpected occurs.

standing technique of the frame and of embedded narratives, it is another fundamental feature of *Se una notte* which I shall discuss in greater detail in 4.3.

As far as the system of binary possibilities is concerned, despite its intriguing character and apart from a broader Borgesian influence (e.g. 'The garden of the forking paths'), one can hardly acknowledge it any substantial programmatic validity. Calvino admits that he himself came to see it as underlying scaffolding of *Se una notte* only after a 'knowledgeable friend' had made him notice it (RRII 1396).[110] Also Bonsaver (1994, 1995) is sceptical about both the a priori validity of this scheme and that Calvino designed a closed macrostructure to curb down the potentialities of narrative; if any, such a rigorous structure suggests the opposite conclusion, that is its own inability to limit the disorder of reality. Even if one wanted to maintain that this system of progressive exclusions really was one of the operating constraints at the moment of its composition, the pairs of binary options listed by Calvino are so arbitrary that one could reasonably question whether they actually impact in any way on the readers' understanding or that they significantly influence the elaboration of expectations during reading. In other words, their arbitrariness is such that the process of selection does not configure itself in the reader's eyes as a matter of actual exclusion of some possibilities over others.[111]

Arguably, this is one of the main differences between *Il castello* and *Se una notte*. Although Calvino said that they are animated by '[l]o stesso principio di campionatura della molteplicità potenziale del narrabile' (SI 730), I would suggest that they implement this principle in two rather different ways, with significant consequences on plot.[112] In *Il castello*, potentiality is expressed through the creative power of the tarot set of cards as 'macchina narrativa combinatoria' (RRII 1276). As McLaughlin (1998: 110) puts it, 'Calvino is also here exemplifying […] the fact that all narrative can be reduced to a finite number of units or functions which can then be put together in a combinatory process that yields infinite solutions'. The tarot cards provide a finite set of units that can produce a vertiginous yet virtually finite number of combinations; the selection is made by applying reason and thus through the indispensible intervention of the author, who chooses the sequences that are regarded as more likely to produce – or had produced over the centuries (e.g. the stories of Faust or Parsifal) – some particular meaning when they are processed by the reader's

---

[110] An alternative (and still a posteriori) scheme is based on the employment of Greimas' semiotic squares, illustrated in Calvino (1984).

[111] As a matter of fact, the same criticism has been advanced to Greimas' structural semantics as a whole. As to *Se una notte*, these are the pairs identified by Calvino for Guglielmi (each pair always stems from a bifurcation of the second term of the previous pair): 'il minimo vitale' vs. 'la ricerca della pienezza > 'nelle sensazioni' vs. 'nell'io' > 'rivolto verso il dentro' vs. 'rivolto verso il fuori' > 'la storia' vs. 'l'assurdo' > 'l'identificazione' vs. 'l'estraneità' > 'l'angoscia' vs. 'lo sguardo che scruta' > 'la trasparenza' vs. 'l'oscuro' > 'nell'uomo' vs. 'nel mondo' > 'le origini' vs. 'la fine del mondo' > 'il mondo finisce' vs. 'il mondo continua'. The last option, 'il mondo continua', is presumably meant to circularly close the structure.

[112] With the due distinctions, the difference is the same expressed by Barth's shift from literature of exhaustion (1967/1984) to literature of replenishment (1980/1984).

mind (SI 220-1). Infinite is indeed the amount of narratives that the individual can create by building on each sequence, but the number of combinations of cards is mathematically finite. Unlike *Il castello*, *Se una notte* is not technically limited to a definite number of combinations, because its stories are not generated by a finite number of units nor – referring to Calvino's binary structure – by mutually exclusive pairs. The aforementioned arbitrariness of the choices designed by Calvino is such that the novel could have either included half of them or added ten more, and both cases would have been equally viable: Calvino himself points out that 'potevo anche scegliere di scriverne dodici, o sette, o settantasette; quanto bastava per comunicare il senso della molteplicità' (RRII 1393). As I will explore in greater detail also in 4.3, my point is that, while *Il castello* has a closed structure and an almost purely instrumental frame, the narrative of *Se una notte* is not inherently finite and has therefore to set the limits of its 'campionatura della molteplicità potenziale' in some other way, namely by means of a more binding discursive frame narrative.

Potentiality can also be reformulated in terms of ways to achieve it, either through multiplication and/or through the indeterminate. Referring to the first two intercalated novels, Segre observes that 'il dialogo tra l'io protagonista e il lettore evoca la zona della potenzialità: del non deciso e del non definito' (1979: 191). In this case, Calvino emphasises the character *in fieri* of the narrative in a decidedly metanarrative way, on which I revert in the next subsection on the void. The decision to have the narrative hinging on the element of the incipit, instead, relies on the one hand on its traditional and inherent features; on the other it is a metanarrative operation inasmuch as what ought to be a portion of the structure of a narrative is unexpectedly refracted and multiplied. Through manipulation of the incipit, Calvino fosters potentiality in both ways: through interruption he leaves its unfolding undecided, while by presenting the reader with one beginning after the other, he multiplies such an effect.

However, excessive proliferation of potentials may eventually undermine the narrative itself by exerting too much pressure on its intelligibility. From a feeling of saturation, uncontrolled growth might provoke an 'explosion' of the narrative into an incohesive mass (or, to say it with Hume: magma, paste, flux) of narrative fragments, a risk dreaded but played with by Calvino. In commenting on the section of *Il castello*, 'Tutte le altre storie', Corti (1978: 177) acknowledges this when she writes:

> qualunque punto di una sequenza narrativa può essere e non essere l'inizio di un nuovo racconto; tutti gli accostamenti di segni essendo possibili, ne consegue che il non senso vale come il senso, produrrà una sequenza dell'irrazionale. Non solo, ma alle sequenze narrative attuate si affiancano quelle affacciatesi alla mente e scartate nel gioco delle combinazioni, cioè quelle che non ci sono, ma potrebbero esserci. Il che equivale a dire che dietro la

possibilità infinita di variazioni si cela il dramma a cui alludono alcuni scrittori, come per esempio Borges, per cui una scelta tematica comporta sempre il rifiuto del non scelto.

How burning the issue of choice – and, consequently, of discarding the non-chosen – must have been for Calvino emerges in 'La taverna', the second part of *Il castello*. Here, the tale 'Storia dell'indeciso' concludes as follows:

> Ma è davvero lui o non piuttosto un suo sosia, che appena restituito a se stesso s'è visto venire avanti per il bosco?
> – Chi sei?
> – Sono l'uomo che doveva sposare la ragazza che tu non avresti scelto, che doveva prendere l'altra strada del bivio, dissetarsi all'altro pozzo. Tu non scegliendo hai impedito la mia scelta.
> – Dove stai andando?
> – A un'altra locanda da quella che tu incontrerai.
> – Dove ti rivedrò?
> – Impiccato a un'altra forca da quella cui ti sarai impiccato. [RRII 558-9]

Interestingly enough, this situation reminds of the passage quoted earlier from *Le città*, where Marco Polo depicts, in a softer yet not less nostalgic atmosphere, the pain one is bound to feel when contemplating the absence of the discarded option. In 'La taverna' the problem appears not to have faded away, and Calvino still dreads an ultimate confrontation between two selves who might find themselves comparing the outcomes of their complementary sets of choices: 'ogni scelta ha un rovescio cioè una rinuncia, e così non c'è differenza tra l'atto di scegliere e l'atto di rinunciare' (552; Scarpa 1999: 244). To some extent, Calvino seems to have always felt an 'indeciso' himself. Serra (2006: 337) writes that 'Nel lontano 1946, quando ancora Calvino non aveva pubblicato nulla, e s'accingeva a cominciare la stesura del suo primo romanzo, scrive le seguenti parole: «Io ho idee per dieci romanzi in testa. Ma ogni idea io vedo già gli sbagli del romanzo che scriverei, perché io ho anche delle idee critiche in testa, ci ho tutta una *teoria sul perfetto romanzo*, e quella mi frega»'.[113] The strength of will that is required and the discomfort that follows any step out of the indeterminate domain of potentiality clearly emerge from 'Cominciare e finire'. With a reformulation of Gadda's belief that 'conoscere […] è deformare il reale' (quoted in SI 719), culminated in the character of Palomar, Calvino has demonstrated to be fully aware that also narration implies a fundamental deformation of reality: from complex and fluid and indeterminate in its potentiality, it has to be selected and crystallised in order to be narrated. *Se una notte*, with its metanarrative multiplication of incipits, offers the chance to reconcile the necessity of choice with that of exclusion. Such a renunciation to – or better,

---

[113] Quotation from a letter to Silvio Micheli, 8th November 1946 (*Lettere*, 68).

suspension of – choice as possible outcome of a proliferation of potentialities leads us to the third articulation of virtuality, that is the void.

4.2.3. The void

If virtuality entails the contemplation of alternative possibilities – some of which could be actualised, some of which are never to be – and their infinite multiplication, at the other side of the spectrum there is their annihilation, the void of possibilities. In the cosmicomical tale 'Il niente e il poco', the female character Nugkta turns from worshipping nothingness to the 'wholeness of things', as if the two things were, paradoxically, just one step away from each other, a *coincidentia oppositorum* (Capozzi 1988: 166). This subtle boundary is portrayed, and almost tragically overstepped, also in the tenth incipit of *Se una notte*, where the narrating-I suddenly realises not only that his seemingly only mental deletion of the world around him is indeed real, but also that, by doing so, he is actually endorsing the faction of those known for encouraging an addition of things to the world:

> – Ma, ditemi, voi non eravate quelli che parlavano sempre di incrementare, di potenziare, di moltiplicare…
> – Ebbene? Non c'è mica contraddizione… […] Tendenzialmente, quel che può figurare come un passivo sui tempi brevi, poi sui tempi lunghi si può trasformare in un'incentivazione… [252]

Bonsaver aptly observes that a certain penchant for paradox is not uncommon in Calvino, as demonstrated by the short stories of *Ti con zero* ('Ti con zero', 'L'inseguimento', 'Il conte di Montecristo') and by his admiration for the creator of the story of Achilles and the turtle, the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea, who becomes, by a witty intertextual twitch, the secret recognition password among the two agents in the first incipit of *Se una notte*. For Calvino, the value of paradox lies in the fact that it lays bare the limits of rationality and, consequently, denies the certainty of a definitive and univocal truth or stance on things: a 'messa in scacco della razionalità', to borrow Bonsaver's words (1994: 188). In this sense, the taste for paradox reasonably matches with what observed earlier on multiplicity as the solution to Calvino's restlessness on specific stances. According to Barenghi (2007: 63), Calvino is an author who proceeds less by discursive synthesis and more by antinomies:

> La legge interna della narrativa di Calvino – ma forse sarebbe più giusto dire: della sua immaginazione – è una sorta di dualismo euristico, non rigido, né manicheo o definitorio. Le antinomie calviniane non offrono spiegazioni ultimative, ma servono come strumenti di una ricerca.

Looking back at what suggested concerning Calvino's space-informed cognitive style (4.1), Barenghi's reference to antinomies could perhaps be read as a tendency to privilege synchronic relations among concepts, multiple possible configurations of ideas that can be geometrically visualised and easily manipulated, unlike discursive argumentations.

Building on Corti's reflection quoted above, void is a possible articulation of virtuality that may result from two distinct drives. First, from the inability to acknowledge viable hierarchies in the ascription of meaning: in other words, with *all* the options available, no meaning is as good as any meaning. Secondly, from the refusal to choose anything out of an equal fascination for all of the other potentials that would become counterfactuals if a definitive choice is made. In other words, it could be suggested that, facing the vastness of virtuality, the former sense is inspired by a retreat of the ordering principle, the latter sense by a fusion with and in the totality, where heterogeneity is so dense that it remains indeterminate to the subject's consciousness.[114] In *Il castello*, the close connection between the two opposites, nothing and everything, is explicitly uttered:

> Ma ogni volta che [Faust e Parsifal] si chinano sulle carte la loro storia si legge in un altro modo, […] oscilla tra due poli: il tutto e il nulla.
> – Il mondo non esiste, – Faust conclude quando il pendolo raggiunge l'altro estremo, – non c'è un tutto dato tutto in una volta: c'è un numero finito d'elementi le cui combinazioni si moltiplicano a miliardi di miliardi, e di queste solo poche trovano una forma e un senso e s'impongono in mezzo a un pulviscolo senza senso e senza forma; come le settantotto carte del mazzo di tarocchi nei cui accostamenti appaiono sequenze di storie che subito si disfano.
> Mentre questa sarebbe la conclusione (sempre provvisoria) di Parsifal: – Il nocciolo del mondo è vuoto, il principio di ciò che si muove nell'universo è lo spazio del niente, attorno all'assenza si costruisce ciò che c'è, in fondo al gral c'è il tao, – e indica il rettangolo vuoto circondato dai tarocchi. [RRII 589]

The empty rectangular corresponds to the space left at the intersection of the several sequences of tarot cards as arranged in 'La taverna'. Similarly, in *Le città*, emptiness and reversal not only appear as themes but also at a structural level. Staging a reversal of Thomas More's utopian project – where he describes only the capital, located at the centre of the island, epitome of all the other fifty-four great cities – Calvino describes instead fifty-four cities and reserves the central place of his collection to the empty city of Bauci. Milanini thus observes that '[n]el capovolgimento del modello moreano dobbiamo scorgere molto più dell'assunzione di un'ulteriore *contrainte*: c'è la denuncia di un'assenza e, insieme, una scelta di metodo. C'è, insomma, il rifiuto a prefigurare globalmente ciò che deve essere costruito giorno dopo giorno' (1990: 144; Ossola 1987).

---

[114] For a psychoanalytical reading of the theme of the void in *Se una notte* and *Le cosmicomiche*, see Spackman (2008).

In the semiotic trilogy, Bonsaver (1994: 188) acknowledges the void as a common semiotic and existential concern, a symbolic core and an absence which stands for what is un-rational ('non-razionalizzabile') and untellable ('indicibile').[115] On the one hand, he hints at a possible influence on Calvino's poetics of the void exerted by Derrida's (1967/1978) deconstructionism and his concept of *différance*. On the other, Bonsaver only cautiously endorses such a connection; in agreement with this last observation, I would suggest that, in the case of Calvino, void might not (univocally) symbolise a continual deferral of meaning but rather the impossibility to settle on a single one: less an impossible meaning, thus, and more a plurality of mutually incompatible meanings, where choice is the hardest part. Bonsaver seems to concur on a similar point when, speaking of *Le città*, he observes that '[a] un'osservazione attenta, anche il vuoto sembra contenere in sé le tracce di una nuova realtà materiale […] per quanto indicibile e sospesa nel nulla' (1995: 82). In fact, the scholar suggests that familiarising with absence could create a standpoint for a new encounter with the materiality of the world, a view that gains credibility if one thinks of Calvino's following works, *Palomar* and the unfinished *Sotto il sole giaguaro*.[116]

Moreover, bringing *Se una notte* too close with Derrida's post-structuralist theories might imply a risky attitude toward the autonomy of the text and its relationship with the extra-textual. No matter how convincingly Kottman might undermine the interpretation that wants Derrida positing the existence of the text only, designating Calvino's idea of void as an application of the concept of différance seems to be limiting at best, while at worst it puts one in an ambiguous position concerning the status of extra-textual reality. Against a view of Calvino as crediting only the text with reality (Watson 1988), it should be noted that already in 'Cibernetica e fantasmi' he addresses the duplicity of literature as both the result of a combinatorial process and, still, as something responding to forces that might not be knowable and might reside outside of the limits of language and literature (SI 217). An even more explicit position is expressed in a 1967 interview with Santschi:

> Io non sono tra coloro che credono che esista solo il linguaggio, o solo il pensiero umano. […] Io credo che esista una realtà e che ci sia un rapporto (seppure sempre parziale) tra la realtà e i segni con cui la rappresentiamo. […] Io credo che il mondo esista indipendentemente dall'uomo; il mondo esisteva prima dell'uomo ed esisterà anche dopo, e l'uomo è solo un'occasione che il mondo ha per organizzare alcune informazioni su se stesso. Quindi la letteratura è per me una serie di tentativi di conoscenza e di classificazione delle informazioni sul mondo, il tutto molto instabile e relativo ma in qualche modo non inutile. [SI 1347]

---

[115] Cannon defines *Se una notte* as 'poised between two voids, the absence of the subject and the absence of the object' (1989: 59).
[116] For a Derridean reading of *Se una notte*, see Belpoliti (1996), Kottman (1996), Markey (1999).

Finally, in *Se una notte* Silas Flannery admits: 'io non credo che la totalità sia contenibile nel linguaggio; il mio problema è ciò che resta fuori, il non-scritto' (181).

Moving our focus on to *Se una notte*, Segre (1979) was probably the first to spot how all the intercalated novels do revolve around the issues of void, nothingness, and absence. I shall discuss later how the creation of thematic patterns in general – including the pattern made of references to void and nothingness – affect the narrative and its understanding (4.3.2), and I shall now concentrate on the consequences following the use of these images specifically. Given the extent and frequency of these instances, I have included some of the main quotations in a designated appendix (Appendix [1]), to which I shall refer in my discussion.

In terms of distribution, it should be noted that, over twenty-two chapters (twelve chapters plus ten intercalated novels), precise references to the void ('vuoto') occur at least once in seventeen of them. Of the chapters where the word 'vuoto' is not included, the intercalated novel 'Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa' still revolves around issues such as the end of the world (53), dissolution (63), absence (55), and the predominance of the obscurity and the colour black (59); Chapter Six stages the Reader chasing the elusive Ermes Marana through the correspondence kept by the publishing house, and is dominated by a sense of dissolution beneath the interchange of masks put on by the translator in his game of falsifications. The first reference to void is made in the first incipit, where the character of Mrs Marne mentions the empty luggage of her mysterious client (22); afterwards, the term 'vuoto' appears in every intercalated novel and in almost every chapter of the frame (except for sixth and twelfth).

And yet what is void in *Se una notte*, what does it represent? Before trying to answer this question, we should briefly consider the role and meaning of the void in Calvino's overall production. Without assuming to give a thorough and definitive overview of such a complex concept, I advance a few observations and highlight the underlying tensions within Calvino's elaboration. The void is an articulation of virtuality in a twofold sense: on the one hand, because in Calvino's narratives absence and nothingness do impact upon what exist in the storyworld and therefore have to be appointed a status which, not being actuality, has to pertain to the virtual; on the other hand, the void can present itself as the paradoxical result of excessive plurality. In other words, while it may initially seem that void is something that *is not*, from a theoretical perspective it is better defined as *undifferentiated*.[117] It belongs to the realm of the virtual because it is undifferentiated potentiality, which, by a paradoxical leap, is configured as nothingness rather than infinite

---

[117] In *Il castello*, the same meaning is ascribed to the forest, 'regno dell'indifferenziato e del continuo' (Milanini 1990: 141).

multiplicity. Void as something that is not *yet*, something on which choice does not operate.[118]

Se una notte represents a perfect case study to explore this articulation of virtuality and discuss how Calvino's theoretical and nonfictional elaboration of the concept interacts with its fictional narrative counterpart. It has been recorded that the term 'vuoto' occurs for the first time in the first intercalated novel, where it is used to describe an empty luggage that, nonetheless, plays a central role. The fundamental link between importance and emptiness is here tacitly established and, in addition to making the situation even more ambiguous in the reader/Reader's eyes, in a way it reminds of a nonfictional piece dating back to a journey in Iran in 1975, later published in *Collezione di sabbia* (1984):

> Quello che m'attira è l'idea di una porta che fa di tutto per mettere in vista la sua funzione di porta ma che non s'apre su nulla; […] È come se il mihrab, suddividendo il proprio spazio limitato e raccolto in una molteplicità di mihrab sempre più piccoli, aprisse la sola via possibile per raggiungere l'illimitato. […] La sua sola qualità è quella di non esserci. Non gli si può nemmeno dare un nome. […] la cosa più importante al mondo sono gli spazi vuoti. [SI 611-3]

The atmosphere of the first incipit is also meaningful. The description of the physical environment, foggy and dark, together with the repeated statements of the narrating-I concerning his lack of understanding of his own circumstances, contribute to depict a blurred and obscure state of affairs, which is in turn associated with the idea of void, too. This connection is maintained throughout the whole novel by means of reiterated references to the semantic area of 'depth': among the quotations in Appendix [1], one can see 'precipizio', 'precipitare', 'baratro', 'là sotto', 'abisso', 'sotto ogni parola c'è il nulla', 'laggiù era ancora oscurità fitta', 'lottando contro qualcosa d'oscuro', 'corda sospesa sul vuoto', 'baratro'.

Throughout most of the novel, thus, void takes the fictional shape of a dark nothingness that exists all around and beneath the boundaries and the surface of the storyworld.[119] How such a depiction of the void is related to its ascription to virtuality is worth further clarification. Let us consider the first and the last intercalated novels, which adequately represent most of the other instances in the book but also prompt an additional consideration on these two cases specifically.

---

[118] Another meaning of the void, which should not be dismissed and yet shall not be investigated because it does not pertain virtuality, is linked to the principle of lightness. Calvino remarks that 'la mia operazione è stata il più delle volte una sottrazione di peso; ho cercato di togliere peso ora alle figure umane, ora ai corpi celesti, ora alle città; soprattutto ho cercato di togliere peso alla struttura del racconto e al linguaggio' (SI 631).

[119] An idea that does not seem limited to *Se una notte*: in *Il barone rampante*, for instance, one finds a similar expression: 'Quel frastaglio di rami e foglie […] era un ricamo fatto sul nulla che assomiglia a questo filo d'inchiostro' (RRI 776).

ogni volta il muro di buio mi ha ricacciato indietro in questa specie di limbo illuminato sospeso tra le due oscurità del fascio dei binari e della città nebbiosa. Uscire per andare dove? La città là fuori non ha ancora un nome, non sappiamo se resterà fuori del romanzo o se lo conterrà tutto nel suo nero d'inchiostro. [14]

Camminando per la grande Prospettiva della nostra città, cancello mentalmente gli elementi che ho deciso di non prendere in considerazione. [...] con la coda dell'occhio li vedo assottigliarsi e svanire in una leggera nebbia. [...] Basta che resti uno strato di crosta terrestre abbastanza solida sotto i piedi e il vuoto da tutte le altre parti. [247, 250]

In the first case, the term 'vuoto' is not directly employed, but the threat of an impending dissolution, a dark nothingness, surrounds the station where the scene takes place; in the second case, the narrating-I deliberately deletes – with his imagination but, it turns out, also actually – increasing chunks of reality around him. The two movements are somehow specular: first, a storyworld is being sketched, 'si presenta ancora *in fieri* nella mente del narratore' (Bonsaver 1995: 67) as it emerges from the void, while in the last incipit the storyworld is rapidly disintegrating, and it is only the encounter with the narrator's beloved girl that saves it from annihilation – their meeting like the single grain of sand that remains of the kingdom of Fantasia in *The Neverending Story*, and from which it will arise again.[120]

Calvino's description highlights the artificial nature of the storyworld(s) of *Se una notte*, which indeed fits the overt metanarrative intention of the work. It has been suggested earlier that the void consists in the undifferentiated; along the same lines, Hume argues that Calvino's quest revolves around the need of the intelligence (the cogito) to come to terms with the void,

be it as empty space, vacuum, nothingness, entropy, or the randomness with which particles collide. When the observer's systems of order are sufficiently powerful to keep particles separable and prevent their merging into a paste (though not so rigid to petrify them), then – in Calvino's words – the void poses no real threat. [1992: 38]

Since Calvino acknowledges narrative fiction as a fully-fledged form of knowledge (Stille 1985), it can be said that *Se una notte* does indeed constitute a complex system of order (4.3.1). Arguably, despite fundamentally relying on this principle, *Se una notte* also directly questions the possibility for narrative to impose order, and it does so by staging multiple ways to create narratives; but it has been already remarked that, for Calvino, the fact that more than one solution exists does not undermine the validity of either. *Se una notte* experiments with different ways to make sense of experience and therefore with different

---

[120] Interestingly, also Ende's *Die unendliche Geschichte*, with which *Se una notte* shares some fascinating features, is firstly published in Germany in 1979.

systems of order, epitomised by the ten incipits. To briefly continue the parallelism with *The Neverending Story*, as in this novel people's renunciation to their dreams and imagination in the (fictional) actual world directly feeds the destructive forces menacing Fantasia and hereby takes the much real form (in Fantasia) of the Nothing and the wolf Gmork, Calvino's concept of the void as a theoretical and metaphysical threat, once the threshold of fiction is overstepped, takes the shape of a dark abyss – or 'muro di buio' – that surrounds the storyworld. And by storyworld I mean anything that has assumed a narratively organised form.

It is worth noting that it is at the level of the intercalated novels – not in the chapters – that Calvino primarily questions the ontological status of storyworlds. The unwritten void surrounds the written *within* the broader fictional storyworld whose actual world is that of the frame. Chapter One of *Se una notte* implements an engaging metanarrative communication between the narrator and a narratee that has not got yet the features of the Reader. Yet we could argue that the real boundaries of *Se una notte* are established and maintained in quite a traditional manner. While they are not probed until the very end in Chapter Twelve, the boundaries between frame and embedded narratives are constantly pushed, and it is in the interstices between these storyworlds that the void operates. Referring to the issue of the finished vs. unfinished nature of the intercalated novels, Segre observes that '[l]'apparente non finitezza di questi romanzi non riguarda soltanto la *béance* terminale, ma anche una fitta e costante *béance* interna: più che come romanzi, questi testi sono presentati come abbozzi di romanzi, sommari di romanzi, romanzi in fieri' (1979: 186). I suggest that this remark may be extended to the whole *Se una notte*: as a novel, *Se una notte* is a finished novel, whose concluding *béance* could possibly be suggested by the circularity it gives to the whole narrative; but the major *béances* are the internal ones, within and between the various incipits. Calvino stages an incredible metanarrative scaffolding, but he firmly places it in the domain of fictional narrative (4.4).

In Chapter Nine, Calvino writes: 'Non stacchi lo sguardo dal libro da un aeroporto all'altro, perché al di là della pagina c'è il vuoto' (211). How are we supposed to take this statement? Calvino is very aware of the distinction between the two worlds, one written and one unwritten.[121] The written world is:

---

[121] It is in relation to these issues that a certain diffidence toward a view of void as Derridean *différance* arises. In *Se una notte* Calvino initiates a programmatically metanarrative discourse, and it might be imprudent to confuse this with declarations concerning the nature of reality. Calvino is perfectly aware of the distinct levels of reality that intervene in the literary system, as well as he acknowledges that 'il lettore è *acquirente*, che il libro è un oggetto che si vende sul mercato' (RRII 1391). In other words, one should be careful not to mistake literary reflections concerning the fictional nature of narrative for philosophical statements about the nature of reality.

> un mondo speciale, un mondo fatto di righe orizzontali dove le parole si susseguono una per volta, dove ogni frase e ogni capoverso occupano il loro posto stabilito: un mondo che può essere molto ricco, magari ancor più ricco di quello non scritto, ma che comunque richiede un aggiustamento speciale per situarsi al suo interno. [SII 1865]

Praised by Calvino for its minimum requirement of intelligibility, the written world is juxtaposed to the unwritten world, with whose interpretation Calvino does not seem equally comfortable. The unwritten world lays itself open to the risk of unintelligibility because it does not provide a fixed semiotic system to be adopted for processing it. The fact that the written world at least clearly employs language as a semiotic system already facilitates the task, and for this reason it exerts an unspeakable appeal on Calvino (SII 1866).

In fact, however, it is not Italo Calvino who pronounces the previous statement about the void lurking just beyond the page: it is the model author, a technical device, a set of textual instructions that mediates the delivery of the narrative (Eco 1994: 14); even if we wanted to anthropomorphise such a set and call it an 'entity', it does not change the fact that it still belongs to the fictional storyworld. The 'special adjustment' that determines the shift from unwritten to written world has already taken place, and it is from such a perspective, internal to the storyworld, that the model author is uttering *its statements.[122] The concept of void embodies for Calvino the indeterminate, that which has not been filtered through any (semiotic) system of order, but it is in the specific fictional storyworld of *Se una notte* that it assumes the shape of a dark abyssal void. Similarly, the statement above does not mean that everything is writing, but that *for a character within a narrative* – an entity whose existence is bound and limited to the written world – what is not told by the narrative itself falls (or remains) within the black void that surrounds the narrated storyworld. In this sense, Hume's observation that the author has power over readers and over the void (1992: 127) is quite convincing, because in the fictional universe it is the model author that is responsible for drawing material from the void, from the 'unwritten world', and turning it into (in this case, written) narrative.

It is perhaps meaningful that in *Se una notte* void does not appear to be directly connected to the issue of choice, except for in the first and in the last incipit. I have attempted to emphasise how Calvino designs a trajectory of progressive immersion – a sort of "plunging" of his speculations about the void into fictional hue – deep into the written world, and thus deep into the mechanisms of fictional narrative. From this perspective, it does perhaps make sense to suggest that also the ways void is portrayed slightly change throughout the novel. The first and the last incipits mark the entrance into and the exit

---

[122] As set of textual instruction that mediates the delivery of the narrative, Eco prefers to use the neutral pronoun in referring to the model author (1994: 14).

from the depths of the fictional emplotment, and as such they are the parts where influences from the unwritten world (i.e. from reality) are stronger. In the first incipit, darkness is pressing upon the storyworld because it mirrors the unusual uncertainty of the narrating-I about whether the storyworld should indeed exist; it is the uncertainty concerning a set of choices of the model author which is fictionally staged here. Drawing a parallel between the last incipit and the storyworld, the latter is on the verge of dissolution because the novel is approaching its ending; as the fictional storyworld gets closer to the level of reality (and the reader gets closer to the moment when s/he shall leave the written world and enter the unwritten world again), the nature of the void as connected to choice emerges again, in the narrating-I's act of deliberate deletion. What becomes actual fictional void, is the actual unwritten world, which is void from the 'written perspective' though utterly real. As Calvino specifies:

> oggi siamo in grado d'evitare molte confusioni tra ciò che è linguistico e ciò che non lo è, e così possiamo vedere chiaramente i rapporti che intercorrono tra i due mondi. […] il mondo esterno è sempre là e non dipende dalle parole, anzi è in qualche modo irriducibile alle parole, e non c'è linguaggio, non c'è scrittura che possano esaurirlo. [SI 1868]

To conclude, again in 'Cibernetica e fantasmi' (SI 218), Calvino speculates on the origins of narrativity, discussing the interrelations between myth and tale and narrativity. He writes that:

> Il mito è la parte nascosta d'ogni storia, la parte sotterranea, la zona non ancora esplorata perché ancora mancano le parole per arrivare fin là. […] Il mito vive di silenzio oltre che di parola; un mito taciuto fa sentire la sua presenza nel narrare profano, nelle parole quotidiane; è un vuoto di linguaggio che aspira le parole nel suo vortice e dà alla fiaba una forma.

If we cannot posit an affinity between the void and the myth, it is not out of place to suggest though that the two are surely closely related. It is not within the scope of the present discussion to analyse the issue of myth in depth, but, starting from the quotation above, I would like to stress three main points. The first comes as a corroboration of what said so far about the paradoxical overlapping of multiplicity and void: the source of infinite stories seems to lie for Calvino in a primeval silence, still undetermined and unapproachable, and the power of myth relies on what remains unsaid as much as on what it uttered. My other two points rather build a bridge with what follows in the core argument of this thesis, and I shall here simply briefly state them in order to broaden their discussion in the remainder of the chapter: first, the fact that already in 1967 Calvino associates the discourse on narrativity with the void and with the image of the vortex,

which will recur in *Se una notte* (256); secondly, the fact that the void can impact not only on the content but also on the structure of the narrative, on the shape of the tale. It is particularly to this point that I revert in the section 4.3 on fractality.

4.2.4. Se una notte as hypernovel

In the Norton Lecture on 'Molteplicità', Calvino advances some theoretical considerations on the concept of hypernovel and overtly associates it with *Se una notte*:

> [D]irei che oggi la regola dello «scrivere breve» viene confermata anche dai romanzi lunghi, che presentano una struttura accumulativa, modulare, combinatoria.
>
> Queste considerazioni sono alla base della mia proposta di quello che chiamo «l'iper-romanzo» e di cui ho cercato di dare un esempio con *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. Il mio intento era di dare l'essenza del romanzesco concentrandola in dieci inizi di romanzi, che sviluppano nei modi più diversi un nucleo comune, e che agiscono su una cornice che li determina e ne è determinata. [SI 730]

The term is actually employed for the first time in the short cosmicomical story 'Il conte di Montecristo', published in 1967. Later on, it appears again closely linked to metanarrative and in opposition to the novelistic form when Calvino describes Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* as a 'antiromanzo-metaromanzo-iperromanzo' (SI 844).[123] In this subsection, I shall attempt to disentangle this knot and to clarify what properties are emphasised of *Se una notte* when we call it a hypernovel. It is also my intention to illustrate how a critical discourse that foregrounds virtuality productively links Calvino's reflections on experimental narrative forms to his scientifically-oriented interests and to his overall view of reality.

Drawing on the passage above from 'Molteplicità' and on the view of 'Il conte di Montecristo' as hypernovel, it can be inferred that Calvino ascribes to the prefix 'hyper' the sense of an augmentation, which can be achieved by means of concentration on the one hand (increase of *density*) and multiplication on the other (increase in *quantity*). A hypernovel is therefore something that conveys both the *essence* and the *possible different articulations* of a novel, and it does so through a system of repetitions and variations (4.3). As to the core content of *Se una notte*, Calvino himself formulated it in his response to Gugliemi, where he explains that the underlying scheme – that is, the essence – of all the situations narrated in the intercalated novels and in the frame is the following:

> un personaggio maschile che narra in prima persona si trova a assumere un ruolo che non è il suo, in una situazione in cui l'attrazione esercitata da un

---

[123] See Bertoni (1993) for a discussion of Diderot's novel as one of the models of *Se una notte*.

personaggio femminile e l'incombere dell'oscura minaccia di una collettività di nemici lo coinvolgono senza scampo. [RR 1392]

The prefix 'hyper' does not only entail augmentation, but also possibly envisages the trespassing of a limit, an excess. It has been expounded in the previous subsections how excessive proliferation and void are two steps paradoxically close in Calvino's thought. This paradoxical proximity echoes in Serra's remark, which notes that *Se una notte* presents '[d]ietro all'iper-romanzo, la mancanza del vero romanzo, lo spettro della sua negazione: l'ipo-romanzo' (2006: 337). Serra's argument, though, seems to privilege the sense of a menacing threat beneath this potential reversal of perspective, which makes her ascribe a negative nuance to the prefix 'hyper' (2006: 294). It could be argued, however, that, while it is true that Calvino's hypernovels envision the ghost of narrative paralysis, as Barth says 'an artist doesn't merely exemplify an ultimacy; he employs it' (1967/1984: 68). Similarly, Bonsaver aptly observes that '[p]er un certo verso, le *Città* non parlano della difficoltà della comunicazione verbale, le *Città sono* questa difficoltà contrabbandata dall'apparente linearità della prova calviniana' (1995: 69). In this sense, *Se una notte* does indeed programmatically hint at a multiplicity, at a surplus of stories purposely not pursued, but it is precisely because Calvino pushes the limits of the novelistic form to the extreme, up to the very edge of dissolution, that he accomplishes something new, proving that these limits are actually more flexible than they were thought to be.

Se una notte tells a story but also aims at arguing something about narrative itself, about its nature and possibilities, which justifies the label of metanovel or metanarrative work (Bonsaver 1994; Segre 1979). Acknowledging this tendency, Milanini points out that, starting from the abstract short stories of *Ti con zero*, Calvino designs narratives where 'il racconto di un'avventura tende a trasformarsi nell'avventura di un racconto' (1990: 137). The interlinked labels of 'hypernovel', 'metanovel', and 'antinovel' prompts us to consider Calvino's relationship with the novelistic form. Bearing in mind the claim of an archetypal novelist such as Elsa Morante, according to whom 'il romanzo è un'opera poetica d'invenzione che attraverso vicende esemplari, dà intera una propria immagine dell'universo reale' (1988: 1500), Scarpa (1990) suggests that at the heart of Calvino's instinctive distrust lies precisely the aspiration of the novel to capture totality, to convey such a sense of wholeness in a coherent and overarching way. It follows that as *Se una notte* – and the hypernovel – aspires to convey a sense of totality through multiplicity, it is indeed somehow bound to negate the nature of the novel in its more traditional sense and therefore to be, at least to some extent, an 'anti-novel'.

Yet, if Calvino seems to poorly adapt to the novelistic form (SI 730), from other perspectives his narratives fully celebrate its powers;[124] what strongly intrigues him is, in fact, the 'romanzesco', whose centrality in *Se una notte* is explicitly acknowledged (177; cf. Barenghi 2007: 29, Berardinelli 1991, Spinazzola 1987: 512). Historically, the 'romanzesco' is associated to a type of popular narrative which heavily relies on the engagement and entertainment of the reader through the devices of suspense and surprise, and by stimulating their curiosity about what happens next (RRII 1390). It is indeed no accident that one of the key strategies to create these effects is precisely interruption. In illustrating the importance of digression in *Se una notte*, Santovetti links the rehabilitation of plot in its flexibility to the 'romanzesco' and its popular background (2007: 236). Along the same lines – embracing the 'romanzesco' while fundamentally distrusting the novel – Hume (1992: 3) builds on Scholes' distinction between *fabulator* and novelist, where the first is characterised by taking particular delight in design, and observes that the label fits Calvino perfectly. Most importantly, the natural target of the 'romanzesco' is the lay-reader, which is indeed the Reader of *Se una notte* (RRII 1391). This is to remark that in assessing the proximity of Calvino's work to the novelistic tradition it is important to clearly identify what features are accounted for in the process.

Does the concept of hypernovel add something to our understanding of *Se una notte* or of Calvino's poetics? Where does the concept of hypernovel itself come from? The short answer to the first question is yes; the second answer is to be more discursive and its unfolding will provide support for the previous one.

As mentioned, Calvino uses the term for the first time in 1967 in the short story 'Il conte di Montecristo':

> l'iper-romanzo *Montecristo* con le sue varianti e combinazioni di varianti nell'ordine di miliardi di miliardi ma pur sempre in numero finito. […]
> Disponendo una dopo l'altra tutte le continuazioni che permettono d'allungare la storia, probabili o improbabili che siano, si ottiene la linea a zigzag del *Montecristo* di Dumas; mentre collegando le circostanze che impediscono alla storia di continuare si disegna la spirale d'un romanzo in negativo, d'un *Montecristo* col segno meno. [RRII 355]

This short passage clearly shows how deeply the notion of hypernovel is intertwined with virtuality in all its forms: the hypernovel *Montecristo* comprises all the narrative possibilities, probable and improbable alike; the novel that Dumas indeed published represents the

---

[124] I am thinking here not only of the semiotic trilogy but also of earlier works: apart from the collections of short stories, the *Our Ancestors* trilogy barely fits the genre of the novel and rather straddles those of 'racconto lungo' and *conte philosophique* (Milanini 1991; Starobinski 1991).

(fictional) actuality; all the dead-end sequences that would be incompatible with the continuation of the story constitute the counterfactual realm, the novel in negative.

Another aspect emerging from this excerpt is the influence of Calvino's growing acquaintance with semiotics, combinatorics and information theory, together with his view of the world as particulate, modular, and increasingly decipherable in mathematical terms rather than through historicism and discursive means (Hume 1992). In the 1967 definition, 'hypernovel' seems to specifically designate a novel that gathers together multiple variants and in so doing embraces the full spectrum of (fictional) actuality and virtuality. Corti (1978) observes that card reading, for instance, functions as the symbol of Calvino's semiotic view of the narrative creation as a formally constrained process. It follows that deserving the label of hypernovels in this stricter sense are, above all, *Il castello*, with its combinatorial use of the Tarot cards, and *L'incendie de la maison maudite*, which was discussed in the *Atlas de Littérature Potentielle* (1981/1986; Pilz 2005: 127; RRIII 1239-45). Obviously, in moving from the hypothetical hypernovel of *Montecristo* to a concrete narrative elaboration such as *Il castello*, Calvino reasonably narrows down the range of infinite possibilities, inclusive of inconsequential and even contradictory ones, and actually selects among the combinatorial sequences a set of stories that somehow strike the reader's imagination and are therefore bestowed a richer poetic meaning: 'la letteratura è sì gioco combinatorio che segue le possibilità implicite nel proprio materiale, indipendentemente dalla personalità del poeta, ma è gioco che a un certo punto si trova investito d'un significato inatteso, […] tale da mettere in gioco qualcosa che su un altro piano sta a cuore all'autore o alla società a cui egli appartiene' (SI 221).

Stressing the impact of combinatorics on Calvino's poetics, the stronger relationship with the Parisian intelligentsia – with Barthes and in particular with the mathematicians and logicians of the Oulipo such as Perec and Queneau – influences and guides Calvino's interests from the late 1960s onwards (Ossola 1987). In 1967, Calvino moves to Paris with his family, and it is no accident that a ground-breaking essay such as 'Cibernetica e fantasmi' was published precisely in this year. Next to his interest in narrativity and in the deep structure of stories, Calvino develops a keen curiosity towards computing machines and their interrelations with narrative, from both the perspectives of production and reception – a double-edged fascination that indeed emerges from *Se una notte* (Usher 1995). It should be noticed, however, that Calvino mostly considers the computer less as a medium to convey the narrative and more as a technology supplementing it. In contrast to Pilz's (2005: 128) suggestion, I would argue that Calvino is more concerned with the limits of narrativity rather than of print-bound writing; in other words, the constraint on which Calvino focuses is not the sequentiality of exposition but

rather the combinatorial nature of stories. *Il castello*, for instance, capitalises on the specificities of the various permutations rather than on the connections prompted by the re-appearance of the same card (unlike what happens in *Se una notte*, as I shall illustrate). The fact that one story follows another does not depend on temporal-causal relations but stems from the random decision of the hypodiegetic narrator to approach the geometrical and spatial unfolding of the narrative possibilities from one starting point or the other. What matters is the combinatorial principle behind their creation, and therefore their potential simultaneous co-existence. Similarly, also *Le città* does not depend on a specific reading order and the very reason behind Calvino's selection is still a matter of debate. It is for this reason that a concept such as that of hypertext – which nonetheless has been addressed in scholarship on Calvino – is technically inapplicable to any of Calvino's narratives: while the notion of hypertext is inherently typified by cross-referentiality, Calvino's theoretical explorations rather focus on the issue of non-linearity (Christensson 2006; Gargiulo 2002; Pilz 2005: 126).[125]

My suggestion is that Calvino's notion of hypernovel, however, undergoes significant changes between *Le città* and *Se una notte*. Particularly meaningful in this respect is the idea of 'super-albero', elaborated following a journey in Mexico in 1976 (*Collezione di sabbia*). In 'La forma dell'albero', Calvino recounts his encounter with an almost unique specimen, ancient and enormous, the so-called Tule tree. At first, the tree seems the result of uncontrolled growth, devoid of form, overabundant and redundant in its parts: 'E la mia prima sensazione è quella d'un'assenza di forma: è un mostro che cresce – si direbbe – senz'alcun piano, il tronco è uno e molteplice' (SI 600). Despite the lack of design, Calvino realises though that in such vegetal chaos the viewer can still unmistakably detect the shape of the tree, distinguishing a super-trunk, super-branches, and a super-crown – hence the definition of 'super-albero'. The prefix 'super', in this case, does not merely point at the huge dimension, scaled up to an unusual size; it designates an augmentation achieved through multiplication and proliferation, a sort of reproduction of the original parts – trunk, branch, crown, tree itself. Contemplating the tree, Calvino elaborates the hypothesis that the best way to express one's nature might be through overabundance, the overstatement of the same message – an idea paradoxically opposed to concision, another quality highly valued by the author (cf. SI 61-75, 'Rapidità, and 'Esattezza'). He follows the same thread of thought in the following article on Mexico, 'Il tempo e i rami', where he reports his reflections while looking at a tree painted on the wall of a Dominican XVI-century church:

---

[125] Coined by Nelson in 1965 to designate forms of non-sequential writing, and non-linearity is therefore its primary feature, the term 'hypertext' describes 'a text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms *link*, *node*, *network*, *web* and *path*' (Landow 1997: 3).

> La profusione barocca delle fronde è una ridondanza apparente, perché il messaggio trasmesso sta proprio in questa profusione, e non si può omettere o aggiungere [...]. Ossia, chi siano e come si chiamino i personaggi del rilievo di stucco importa fino a un certo punto: quello che conta è ciò che attraverso di loro si compie. [SI 604]

Perhaps it is no accident that this observation is somehow reminiscent of *Se una notte*. Applying these considerations to the 1979 novel, it could be suggested that the characters appearing in the incipits are not necessarily meaningful per se, nor it is relevant to fully grasp the exact nature of their fictional affairs: while they are only sketched, sometimes aimed precisely at confusing the reader (e.g. 'In una rete di linee che s'intersecano'), what matters are the virtual stories that the characters and their vicissitudes prompt in the reader's imagination and, above all, the variations of the same core they represent. As Usher argues, 'super-albero' and hypernovel share the fact of being ready to 'sacrifice *parts* (including, of course, the continuation of the *incipits*) for the *whole*' (1996: 181). This means that Calvino deliberately decided to employ only incipits in order to ensure that redundancy would be privileged over variation, while at the same time conveying the sense of threat and creative power of an uncontrolled proliferation of its parts.[126] By identifying networks of recurrent proper names, locations and clusters of objects (e.g. 'bavero + alzato' or 'cancello + giardino + vasca', the kitchen, or the situation of the equivocal misunderstanding), Usher stresses the abundance of iterations throughout the whole novel, arguing that it constitutes a message in itself and, at the same time, it contributes to connect all the parts together, to create 'an essential narrative continuity between frame and intercalatory sequences' (1996: 195; Ovan 2012: 412).

The notion of hypernovel that Calvino arguably holds in mind as label for *Se una notte* bears witness of both these lines of thought. The major difference from non-hierarchical texts such as *Il castello* and *Le città* is that *Se una notte* is definitely designed to be read sequentially (Pilz 2005: 129). The incipits are interlocked in the frame according to a constraint that compels each intercalated story to implement the type of novel desired by Ludmilla in the frame (cf. Appendix [2]); moreover, as I pointed out earlier, the first two incipits and the last one display some features that seem to depend precisely on their opening and closing position, respectively. Thanks to the mediation of the notion of 'super-albero', Calvino's late version of hypernovel reconciles the values of multiplicity and

---

[126] The author admits having been shaken by the experience of the Tule tree, since it challenged his entrenched belief that only what is directed toward a purpose ('ciò che è concentrato verso un fine', SI 602) shall last and retain its message. For a discussion of redundancy in linguistics and literature, see among others Phelan (2001) and Suleiman (1980).

potentiality with discursive sequentiality, by re-evaluating redundancy.[127] On the other hand, if *Se una notte* inherits from the 'super-albero' the perception of redundancy as a value, it discards its absence of plan or form (Usher 1996).

Nonetheless, as Corti (1978: 174) has pointedly noted, the awareness of the virtual multiplicity of the narrative unfoldings lying beneath any specific story is fundamental, in all of the three semiotic works alike. During the linear in-take of *Se una notte* too, virtuality – either in the form of multiplicity or of void – is constantly brought to the fore, thus encouraging the reader to remain aware of the (virtual) presence of the unwritten, and of the fact that each intercalated story is simply one of the many possible permutations available – be it either the basic narrative core formulated by Calvino (1979b) or the potential eleventh incipit made of the titles of the incipits linked together. Reversing my previous statement, if it is true that the incipits are always cued by specific triggers in the frame (i.e. Ludmilla's desires), it is also true that the content of the intercalated novels does not directly impact on the frame, which is the only narrative that follows a chronological development and imposes a linear reading on the reader. It follows that – with the exceptions pinpointed above – the intercalated novels are still independent enough from the frame narrative to convey the sense of potentially infinite proliferation inherent to the original concept of hypernovel, because they still retain their 'sample-like' character: these are the stories being told, but it could have easily been any other.

The intercalated narratives make up a hyper-novel as if it were a super-tree, with the frame delineating its overarching border (remember the quotation above from 'Molteplicità': 'una cornice che li determina e ne è determinata') – and yet the patterns of metamorphosed repetitions individuated by Usher also retain something of the cross-referencing property which is typical of hypertexts. Interpreting iteration as a technique meant to promote redundancy on the one hand and cross-referentiality on the other, might indeed respond to some perplexities raised by Bonsaver (1995) in his stylistic analysis of Calvino's lexicon and syntax. In fact, while Bonsaver registers a steep rise in the use of iterations after *Le cosmicomiche* and initially ascribes it to the need to counterbalance the increasingly fragmented syntax, he also admits that there are instances in *Se una notte* where iteration seems too emphasised and too obsessive to simply serve a clarifying purpose. 'L'iterazione, insomma', Bonsaver concludes, 'si presenta come un fenomeno dalle molteplici valenze, linguistiche come semantiche' (130). Indeed, a thorough exploration of the concept of hypernovel, of its origins and development, may shed some new light on the function of iteration, too.

---

[127] This position is arguably different from Pilz's conclusion, as she proposes that hypertext 'is thus a medium that reconciles the discontinuous with the continuous as every independent text is potentially linked to the whole' (2005: 131).

It should be added that in *Se una notte* the labyrinthine cross-referencing, reminder of the early notion of hypertext, is achieved not only stylistically and through a structural use of virtuality, but also through content (Pilz 2003). The systematic interpolation and exchange, disguise and unmasked falsification and re-attribution of works to their rightful authors via translators contribute to convey an impression of the narrative matter as something magmatic and fluid, which can be arranged in various ways and moulded into various fashions. Yet, they are connected to one another as they ultimately stem from the same source, fictionalised in *Se una notte* by the figure an old man called 'Il Padre dei Racconti' (117).

In this subsection, I attempted to illustrate the full range of meanings behind the label of hypernovel applied to *Se una notte*, stressing how it is strongly linked to a discourse on virtuality. I showed that what lies behind the development of the concept of hypernovel and its definitional uncertainties is Calvino's mulled-over reflection on how what is not can still variably and significantly impact on what, instead, is there. *Se una notte* can be regarded as a hypernovel because it explores issues such as the combinatorial nature of narrative, the consequent multiplicity of narrative possibilities and the tension it creates because of the inherent linearity of the reading process, cross-referentiality, iteration and overabundance. I attempted to discern the theoretical reflections underlying these properties, and I provisionally re-connected them to two main trends, irreducibly intertwined: the research on combinatorics and the techno-scientific discourse on the one hand, and information theory and a revaluation of the continuum on the other. These are epitomised by Calvino's 1967 version of the concept of hypernovel and by the 1976 image of the 'super-albero', respectively. While the idea of hypernovel was mostly influenced by a combinatorial view of narrative and, by proximity, by the properties of non-linearity and cross-referencing (promoted by the kin-concept of hypertext), the 'super-albero' primarily focuses, instead, on redundancy and iteration. Looking at the hypernovel through the critical lens of virtuality served to clarify the development of the concept, but this concept in turn helped foreground the crucial interrelation between variation and repetition – a problem around which the two aforementioned trends both revolve. The hypernovel seems to foster the aspect of variation whereas the 'super-albero' privileges repetition: as I intend to further explore in the next section by introducing the notion of fractality, this aspect will play a critical role also in relation to *Se una notte*.

4.3. Plot as fractal

The notion of fractal, which gives the title to this chapter, is effective in two ways. Firstly, as an image able to aptly convey the nature of the relationship between the novel as a whole

and its parts. Secondly, because it thus expresses the organising principle that guides the reader's understanding of *Se una notte* while she reads.

Referring to Mandelbrot (1975/1977), the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the fractal as 'a mathematically conceived curve such that any small part of it, enlarged, has the same statistical character as the original'. More suitable to our needs, the term 'fractal' equally describes any object with fractal-like properties. It is on these properties and their conceptual counterparts that I will focus here, rather than on the mathematical discussion. Although the concept has been investigated since the seventeenth century, the term 'fractal' has been used for the first time in 1975 by the mathematician Mandelbrot (1975/1977). Derived from the Latin *fractus*, it is the past participle of the verb *frangere* and means 'broken', 'interrupted'. In a nutshell, the concept of fractal implies a pattern that repeats itself at different scales: the main properties we are dealing with, therefore, are scalability, self-similarity in repetition, a peculiar relationship between continuity and interruption, or, to say in the terms used in the previous section, between repetition and variation.

In what follows I discuss how these ideas are central to Calvino's reflections and, in particular, how they are typified in *Se una notte*.[128] In the reply to Guglielmi, Calvino reasserts his penchant for paradoxes by writing that *Se una notte* is a closed and calculated work ('opera *chiusa* e *calcolata*', SII 1389) that, while parading a seemingly reassuring shape, it actually conceals a vision of the world at its opposite, on the edge of dissolution and chaos. Understanding how this paradoxical message is implemented and conveyed has everything to do with the way plot is processed by the reader. In the first subsection, I expand on the idea that narrative texts can be regarded as complex systems and that they are therefore eligible for being looked at through frameworks usually applied to systems. With this purpose in mind, I shall pinpoint self-reflexivity and non-linearity as the critical properties of *Se una notte* that enable me to establish this theoretical analogy. In the second subsection I introduce the concept of fractal, which I use in the third subsection to attempt a close reading of Calvino's text. Finally, in the last two sections I build on what has been illustrated throughout the section and the chapter to discuss how a spatial-oriented approach serves foregrounding quite a peculiar instance of space of narrative experience: given the strong metanarrative nature of *Se una notte* and the fact that the perspective of the reader – crucial to the definition of the space of narrative experience – is included in the narrative itself, I suggest we can speak of a fictionalised space of narrative experience.

---

[128] For other uses in literary criticism see Harris (2015), who adopts the concept of fractal to describe the literary operations of the American novelist David Mitchell, characterised by a 'fractal imagination'.

4.3.1. The metanarrative text as complex system

As discussed in 4.2, *Se una notte* deals with potentiality, combinatorics, and the interplay of repetition and variation. It does so, however, in a way such that the metanarrative reflection is deeply integrated within the act of narration. Bonsaver (1995: 143) identifies *Le città* as Calvino's most experimental text in terms of use of narrative time, and says that subsequent works, *Se una notte* in primis, display a fairer compromise between experimentation and readability. However, I would point out that *Se una notte* has a structure that is all but traditional, and if it comes out as less daring an experimentation than *Le città* it is because Calvino achieves a remarkable integration – rather than a compromise – of technical experimentations with the cognitive processes prompted in the reader by a narrative. One of the signs of this integration, coming from *Il castello* and *Le città*, is the restoration of a sequential reading.[129] Linear reading, the interrupted and yet finished nature of the intercalated narratives (4.2.2), and the explicit closure of the narrative with its happy ending are arguably among the features that ensure closeness to this work. This section focuses instead on the other half of Calvino's answer to Guglielmi, referring to a vision of the world as something chaotic and on the edge of dissolution.

The concept of complexity is not new to Calvino scholarship, nor it is the connection with the notion of system: as Milanini writes, 'il senso della complessità è dunque un elemento fondante della poetica calviniana' and his works aim to outline 'un'immagine del mondo quale «sistema di sistemi»' (1994: xxvi). In this study, though, I intend to explore these concepts further and attempt a more technical application to the text. As advanced by Bunge (2004: 372), I suggest that a text can be understood as a semiotic system: it is a system because it displays properties that its components (words, sentences, periods, chapters) lack, such as cohesion, structure, and mechanisms; it is a semiotic one because it is a system of signs evoking mental processes. It follows that plot is an emergent property of the text as a system, since it is possessed by the system as a whole but not by its components (Bunge 2004: 377; Ryan A. 2007).

However, it could be argued that if texts are semiotic systems then narrative texts are *complex* semiotic systems – a concept resulting from the application of complexity theory to systems theory. According to Chettiparamb, 'complexity theory deals with the study of entities that reveal non-linear dynamics; entities that though having determinate properties, yield indeterminate results' (2014: 6). Complex systems, Chettiparamb continues, 'can exhibit properties not generally observed in linear systems such as self-

---

[129] I speak here of a re-integration because the re-evaluation of sequentiality, while still questioning it, fully ascribes *Se una notte* to Barth's (1980/1984) literature of replenishment. Literature of replenishment is opposed to the category of literature of exhaustion (1967/1984), with which perhaps *Il castello* could be associated.

organisation, leading to the emergence of patterns/order; the coexistence of order and chaos at the same time; resilience or adaptive behaviour in the face of shocks and so on' (2014: 5). It does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that this happens with narrative texts too, since they have objective formal properties that yet may yield indeterminate results in their readers. Chettiparamb observes that that complexity emerges from the fact that 'in a complex system, the system is ontologically tied to something other than its structure and the processes between structural components' (2014: 6). Framing this observation within the narrative context, I would suggest that this 'something other', external to and yet involved in the system, is indeed the reader, whose activity continuously changes the outcome of the textual system.

Even though the text as system is not a system of equations, and without disregarding Bunge's (2004: 378) warnings against the risks of too liberal an application of frameworks borrowed from mathematics to literature, I believe that similar infusions of new abstractions into literary theory and criticism might be quite profitable (Pilz 2005: 117; cf. Berressem 2015, Herman 2012, Ryan 1999, Walsh and Stepney forthcoming 2017). In the case of Calvino, the use of concepts from complexity and system theory is backed by Calvino's demonstrated acquaintance with mathematical discussions and complexity theories by Prigogine and Stangler (SII 2038-49), through his colleagues at the Oulipo and his activity as editor for Einaudi. In fact, Calvino himself not only muses on crucial concepts such as chaos, chance, or continuity vs. discontinuity, but he also explains some structural aspects of his works – and above all of his *modus operandi* – by resorting to pseudo-mathematical formulations. In a letter to his friend Boselli, he writes: 'Anche per questa struttura potrai trovare una serie di riferimenti in altre narrazioni mie che sono costruite così: con al centro una relazione *a x* data come esemplare, e intorno una raggera [sic] o casistica di relazioni *b x*, *c x*, *d x*, ecc.' (quoted in Bonsaver 1995: 164). I am aware that the non-linearity of the dynamics described by mathematical equations is not the non-linearity of *Se una notte*; that the 'shocks' a textual system bears are quite different from thermodynamic ones. And yet one may wonder whether the metaphor would be ultimately that misused, when one thinks of how a reader, presented with a story, attempts as much as possible to make sense of it as a whole, no matter how fragmented and disrupted or non-linear it might be. Posited that the story is offered to the reader as a unitary whole, the reader will process it as a non-linear complex system, attempting to derive a unitary plot from it, as one could attempt to mathematically draw its solution(s).

When Bunge refers to a text as a system, its components are presumably words, sentences, periods, chapters; its levels are the lexical, syntactical, rhetorical level. In the present case, in addition to a more traditional parsing and in line, instead, with the possible-

worlds framework adopted in the previous chapters, I claim that a narrative text is a system inasmuch as it is a storyworld made up of different storyworlds, of multiple possible worlds variously interrelated. Starting from this general statement, its components might be potentially defined in a different way from time to time according to the specific features of each narrative. In a work such as Camilleri's *Il ladro*, the textual actual world is the only existing actual world and the narrative relies on the interplay between the characters' private worlds (3.2). The characters' private worlds thus constitute the components of this narrative system, because it is their interactions that are brought to the fore.

Se una notte, on the other hand, displays a more complex ontological structure. Arguably, the frame constitutes the textual actual world, to which the various storyworlds instantiated in the intercalated novels are attached, and upon which they depend. In spite of their tendency to endless multiplication, the overarching boundary that enables one to recognise the interacting components of the system as something separated from the surrounding environment – a requirement stressed by Chettiparamb (2014) – is not ambiguous from a pragmatic perspective: it is the ultimate boundary between 'mondo scritto' and 'mondo non scritto'. The 'mondo scritto', more specifically, is the one contained within the inked pages and bindings of the object-book entitled *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Barenghi 2007: 202). More blurred and fluid, instead, are the boundaries between the various storyworlds within the textual universe (4.4).

One of the properties that *Se una notte* arguably shares with complex systems is non-linearity. Drawing on what said of the various storyworlds as components of this specific narrative, I suggest that, although it requires sequential reading, this narrative is non-linear because the reader has to regularly shift from the textual actual world (frame) to a series of storyworlds, each instantiated by a new incipit; these hypodiegetic storyworlds are not directly connected with each other, as the reader has to return to the frame to be able to access a new one. Yet, the reader is meant to draw connections between the intercalated novels, as they are indeed interacting with each other in other non-linear ways that I shall explore in section 4.3.2.

The second key property typical of complex system and also present in *Se una notte* is self-reflexivity. In his attempt to chart Calvino's multifarious production, Bonsaver (1995: 139) pinpoints *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959) as a significant turning point and the beginning of Calvino's overt experimentation with textual forms. By overtly referring to the materiality of writing, the narrator of *Il cavaliere* draws attention to its artificiality, marking the outset of a metaliterary and metanarrative investigation that will acquire increasing importance in Calvino's following works. Issues concerning the medium of language or narrative communication not only are explored through essayist writing, but also become narrative

topics themselves. According to Bonsaver, this constitutes a strong *fil rouge* connecting the first experimentations of *Ti con zero* and *Le città* with *Se una notte*:

> In altre parole, Calvino sembra dichiarare chiuso il periodo del romanzo naturalistico e con esso il costituirsi di una *storia* basata sull'ordine cronologico delle vicende narrate. In alternativa a questo, vi sarebbe la ricerca di sostituire i legami dell'intreccio con la precisa struttura modulare fornita dal macrotesto. [1995: 144]

Bonsaver suggests that, before *Ti con zero* in 1967 (with the early exception of *Il cavaliere*), Calvino had probably not aimed at exploring problems of narrativity, as narrative was perceived as a means to be understood in order to be used, rather than as an object of exploration per se. And yet, looking at some of the motifs that dominate the second half of Calvino's production, his semiotic period that in fact coincides with increasing metanarrative interests, we find that they were being pursued already in the 1950s. Van den Bossche (2002), for instance, argues that Calvino's combinatorial view of narrative has probably developed through his early exploration of the genre of the folktale (4.1.2). Particularly close to Propp and to Calvino's own later reflections is the idea of tale as the archetypal narrative form ('Cibernetica e fantasmi'), characterised by the paradoxical combination of 'infinite variety' and 'infinite repetition'. Again, it is the 'tentacular nature' of the tale (Van den Bossche 2002: 56) that Calvino arguably attempts to reproduce in *Se una notte*, by displaying ten narrative articulations of the same narrative core. The narrative core formulated by Calvino (4.2.4) is also quite archetypical in itself, since it features conflicting interests and the breaking of some sort of balance, both between individuals and between the individual and the society ('una collettività di nemici'; Barenghi 2007: 71). Finally and most overtly connected to the folktale structure are the quest of the Reader staged in the frame and its happy-ending, due less to consolatory intentions and more in obligingly compliance with tradition:

> Lei crede che ogni storia debba avere un principio e una fine? Anticamente un racconto aveva solo due modi per finire: passate tutte le prove, l'eroe e l'eroina si sposavano oppure morivano. Il senso ultimo a cui rimandano tutti i racconti ha due facce: la continuità della vita, l'inevitabilità della morte. [261]

Reconnecting metanarrative to the property of self-reflexivity, Stoicheff (1991) suggests that metafictional texts share some key characteristics with complex systems.[130] As he questions the role of language as a neutral carrier of meaning, Stoicheff claims that metafiction is self-reflective because it turns its attention to language itself and questions the validity of its

---

[130] In fact, Stoicheff speaks of metafictional texts, but I suggest that his argument equally holds for metanarrative texts.

own medium, hence constituting 'an investigation of the chaos of meaning's production' (1991: 87).

Stoicheff's essay raises two points which may be interesting in relation to *Se una notte*. He observes that – as it happens in complex systems – 'to "understand" a metafictional text, one must reject seeing it as a vertical organization of a text's components into a closed order that is interpreted as meaning. Rather, one replaces this view with the recognition of lateral patterns in which disorder becomes order' (93). Stoicheff's description closely reminds of an effect that is explicitly prompted by the narrator of *Se una notte* himself: 'Per leggere bene tu devi registrare tanto l'effetto brusio quanto l'effetto intenzione nascosta, che ancora non sei in grado (e io neppure) di cogliere' (19). This passage suggests that in *Se una notte* meaning is not only conveyed through the content of words (signified), but it may also reside in the form of their vehiculation, in the disturbance that this communication is subjected to. The difficulty of narration is not simply an unwanted side-effect to be filtered out, but something deliberately designed by the author to acknowledge its inevitability (Bonsaver 1995: 159).[131] In the second part of Stoicheff's excerpt, it is worth noticing the concepts of 'laterality' as opposed to 'verticality': not only they are linked to visually-based maps of narrative structures and to Calvino's spatial-informed cognitive style, but their use also reminds of Baricco's discussion of new (barbarian) as opposed to more traditional modes of sense-making (2.3.1).[132]

My second point concerns the concept of chaos, which might require some clarification. The central claim of Stoicheff's essay is that metafiction shares some properties with complex systems as *chaotic* systems; in fact, his contribution is collected in Hayles' volume on chaos and order, which provides a useful overview of the evolution of these two concepts in sciences and of how the notion of chaos has been borrowed in literary disciplines. As already observed about the employment of complexity theory in literary criticism, also the concept of chaos is a dangerous one to evoke. Notwithstanding, when it

---

[131] Probably derived from information theory, the concept of 'brusio' refers either to an unclear communication, because whispered or overlapping with other voices, or to the noise produced by something quietly moving; in both cases, clear understanding is hindered. Information theory is a discipline variously concerned, according to the field of application, with the transmission of information over a 'noisy' channel; it starts thus from the premise that information is not purely emitted and received, but has to pass through a medium that always interacts (and interferes) with it to some extent (Paulson 1991).

[132] The other two properties shared by metanarrative texts and complex systems are irreversibility and self-organisation. Technically, also these properties could be validly applied to *Se una notte*: irreversibility can be related to the sequential reading required to the reader; self-organisation, as the process through which patterns of order emerge from seemingly chaotic behaviours of components of the system, is in fact deeply concerned with our discussion. However, since a text is an artistic product designed by an author, when patterns of order emerge it cannot be actually called *self*-organisation; it is only in the mind of the reader that a system seemingly chaotic sometimes experiences leaps of sense-making, perhaps when two semantic elements, apparently unrelated, suddenly become significant in relation to each other. I suggest, though, that it would be more profitable to discuss these cases with regard to self-reflexivity.

comes to Calvino one might feel more entitled to do so because, again, it is Calvino who resorts to it in the first place (Hume 1992; Pilz 2005).

In conclusion, in this subsection I introduced the idea of text as a system and I discussed the adequacy of an analogy between *Se una notte* and a complex system. In particular, I focused on the properties of non-linearity and self-reflexivity, this latter justified by the strong metanarrative nature of *Se una notte*. In this novel, in fact, the act of narration – its production, commodification and reception (through reading), its multifariousness and difficulty – is at the heart of the narrative, of both its content and formal experimentation. Starting from these premises, in the next subsection I shall offer an hypothesis regarding how non-linearity and metanarrativity might be designed to be understood in the novel.

4.3.2. Fractals and recurrent symmetries

In mathematics, a system is solved once values are found for each of the unknowns that will satisfy every equation in the system. To 'solve' the complex system of a narrative in literature is, of course, quite a different matter. One point remains, though: in order to understand it, the reader has to be able to process it and to make sense of all of its components as constituents of a whole. In the present work, I have referred to this sense-making process of the narrative as plot understanding. The question I want to address now is whether *Se una notte*, which we have shown is a narrative influenced by combinatorics and displaying properties such as non-linearity and self-reflexivity, provides some further instructions as to how to combine together these parts (i.e. storyworlds) it is made of. In more literary terms, is the process of understanding *Se una notte*'s plot affected by the structural properties of the narrative? My answer would be yes, and I suggest that the concept of fractality provides a fruitful way of elucidating it.

It is not the first time that fractals are summoned in relation to Calvino. Pilz (2005: 128), for instance, associates them with the narrative technique of *mise en abyme* and recursivity, and argues that:

> While all of Calvino's mature works are explorations of the different forms of labyrinthine structures and are thus problematisations of narrative space, *Se una notte* constitutes a focused discussion of the very subject of narration. Through repeated use of the method of *mise en abyme* the narrative becomes a fractal space of infinite repetitions [128]

In order to further explain this passage, let us consider how the concept of fractal can be applied to non-mathematical contexts. Starting from the mathematical definition offered at the opening of this section – i.e. a curve or a geometrical figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole – fractals can be summoned as an effective mode of

explanation for systems that exhibit self-reflexivity, or self-similarity, across scales (Chettiparamb 2014). More specifically, fractality may provide a model for the process plot understanding, or, to say it with the terminology of complex and system theory, for the emergence of plot.[133]

In 4.3.1 it has been argued that the components of the 'system *Se una notte*' are the storyworlds instantiated by the frame and by the ten intercalated novels. To make this hypothesis work – i.e. that *Se una notte* is a complex system characterised by fractality – it should be clarified in what sense the storyworlds are typified by different scales, across which self-reflexivity is exhibited. The concept of scale is usually employed to represent the relation between elements belonging to different systems, and is defined by scope and resolution. While resolution indicates the higher (finer) or lower (coarser) degree of detail, scope is an observer-dependent parameter which defines 'the set of components within the boundary between the associated system and its environment' (Ryan A. 2007: 69). It follows that in the intercalated novels, when a different hypodiegetic narrator conveys the narrative, the focus is shifted from the whole system (*Se una notte*) to one of its components (incipit) and therefore this component becomes the system of interest as the scope as narrowed. This explains why it is possible to speak of both *Se una notte* and each of the intercalated novels as systems (although, technically, the intercalated novels are sub-systems of the main one).

Different scales arise from different narrative situations which are implemented in each incipit. Non-linearity, ensured by the fact that each (fictional) universe is potentially completely autonomous from the others, guarantees the possibility to adopt completely different scope and resolution each time. The properties of each storyworld are determined by the narrative voice and by the genre to which each intercalated narrative belongs. Yet, features and relations recur across storyworlds, and it is here where fractality may provide a good description, as it implies recursive repetitive scaling (Chettiparamb 2014: 9; 2005).

Interestingly enough, the property of recursivity seems to be attached to the hypernovel since its first appearance in Calvino. Already in the short story 'Il conte di Montecristo', the narrator admits that the fortress of If (whose structure mirrors the structure of the hypernovel itself) 'ripete nello spazio e nel tempo sempre la stessa combinazione di figure' (RRII 348). I shall draw once again on Chettiparamb application of

---

[133] While plot is an emergent property, emergence is the process of how emergent properties arise. Theoretically, emergence could arise through assembly, breakdown or restructuring of a system (Ryan A. 2007: 73); in the case of plot, I suggest it emerges through assembly, that is by adding interactions between the components of a system, thereby changing the cardinality of their set. This process of assembly consists in the reading process.

fractals to planning, in order to pinpoint a set of properties of fractals which can be recognised also in *Se una notte*.[134] She argues that:

> Four parameters in particular are advanced: the quality of self similarity; the iterating parameter and a vertical axis that forms from this iteration; the distance between consequent scales in the vertical axis; and a horizontal mechanism that allows the assimilation of scale specific information. [2014: 17]

Since the discussion of the first parameter – the specific type of self-similarity implemented in *Se una notte* – is the more demanding, let us briefly consider the other three parameters first. Unlike what happens in Chettiparamb's application of fractals to planning, given that iteration is to be appreciated as one proceeds with reading, I would suggest that the axis along which iteration is carried out should be conceived of as a horizontal axis rather than as a vertical axis. Horizontality, in fact, may better represent the temporal dimension of the process, which is necessary for the emergence of plot and the appreciation of self-similarity between the narrative components. Recursivity involves subsequent chapters, as storyworlds are instantiated in subsequent intercalated novels.

Conversely, the horizontal mechanism mentioned by Chettiparamb becomes a vertical mechanism in the present conceptualisation. In *Se una notte*, such a mechanism, which enables the assimilation of scale specific information, operates by means of the formulations of Ludmilla's desires and through the consequent identification of specific genres or national literary models for each incipit.[135] By prompting the reader to draw on the set of conventions that presumably operate within each intercalated novel, the author encourages the reader to pay attention to some features specifically, thus adjusting the scope and the resolution of each narrative. To quote from Chettiparamb, this "'[vertical]" mechanism assimilates contextual phenomena that are unique and meaningful to a particular scale. Furthermore, [it] allow[s] the emergent global to be sensitive to the details of the local: […] the global and the local can get defined simultaneously, and variety and order can coexist at the same time' (2014: 10, 11).

Finally, the regular 'distance' between storyworlds – and therefore between 'levels' of the fractal configuration – is ensured by the frame. Indeed, the paratext of the novel, neatly partitioned in numbered chapters composing the frame narrative and titled chapters for the intercalated novels, provides an underlying structure that keeps the system

---

[134] Chettiparamb's study offers a useful precedent for the present work, inasmuch as she does not include any mathematical representations in her application of the concept of fractal or of complexity and system theory.

[135] Also Santovetti (2007: 216) acknowledges Ludmilla's desires as one of the main links between frame and intercalated novels. This view of intercalated storyworlds as fractal configurations somehow corroborates McLaughlin's (1998: 82-3) and Bonsaver's (1996) argument of desire as key motive force of the (Calvinian) universe: Ludmilla's desires do express the parameters of variation for each new configuration, and variation is one of the two drives operating in fractality, together with repetition.

components in order and prevents them from collapsing into each other, which would hinder the exhibition of self-reflexivity by turning it into a chaotic mass. Each new storyworld is separated from the others by a narrative chapter belonging to the frame, and this also helps manage the ontological boundaries delimiting the parts of the system.

Let us now revert to the first point stressed by Chettiparamb in the definition above. What is iterated throughout *Se una notte*? A process, some referent, or a form? In other words, what does self-similarity concern? Following Calvino's indications, the primary and main instance of fractality involves a set of referents and their reciprocal relations that do recur throughout the ten incipits and the frame itself: a male character, displaced from its usual role, finds himself to face a hostile community because of the attraction exerted by a female character. Each time, this quest is re-elaborated through different scenarios and different power relations between the three entities (male character, female character, hostile element), and is finally epitomised by the story of the Reader who carries out the double-pursuit of the She-Reader Ludmilla and of the ever-changing novel, and finds himself constantly hindered and contrasted along both paths. Indeed, in at least one case the antagonistic force is embodied by the same character, Ermes Marana, who opposes the Reader by acting as both Ludmilla's ex-lover and literary forger. It is worth remarking that the representation of the 'literary system' as Spinazzola (2010) intends it, in its multifarious aspects – i.e. production, commercialisation, control and reception of narrative – does not represent an instance of recursivity-within-variation. Rather, all these references reveal the elaboration of an underlying theme.

The device of the *mise en abyme* presents some similarities with the concept of fractal – indeed, Pilz refers to both in the same passage quoted above):[136] one of its clearest implementations consists in Silas Flannery's project of writing a novel made of incipits only. Fractality, however, better represents what happens in *Se una notte* because not only does it account for these isolated uses but also it conveys the sense of a continual process taking place through reading. Fractality combines and explains within a purpose-oriented process occurrences of *mise en abyme* and embedded narratives on the one hand, and the network of interrelated cross-references already emphasised by Usher, on the other.[137]

Usher (1996: 191-2) observes that recurrent nouns acquire different meanings from time to time: the image of the curl, 'riccio', first appears in the shaving of paper produced by the Reader cutting open the pages of the newly bought book, then returns in the 'arricciaburro' (35), in the 'riccio di mare' drawn by Miss Zwida (58), in Lotaria's curly hair

---

[136] The concept of *mise en abyme* in literature was introduced by Gide (1982), who borrows it from heraldry (cf. SI 397).
[137] Furthermore, it could be pointed out that, according to Genette (1972/1980: 233), *mise en abyme* constitutes an extreme form within a relation of analogy: this would mean that the feature of repetition would be definitely predominant over the element of variation.

(72) and finally turns into the 'riccioluta crema di nuvole' which the Reader flies through by plane (118). The link is established but, considering the dramatic semantic shifts, it is unlikely that Calvino aimed for stressing one specific type of 'riccio' (as I suggest later, in this case it is rather the spiral-like form that is emphasised). Something similar happens with the interplay of proper names. As the Reader starts listening to the novel *Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa*, he realises that 'questo libro non ha niente a che fare con quello che avevi cominciato. Soltanto alcuni nomi propri sono identici, particolare certo molto strano, ma sul quale non ti soffermi a riflettere' (52). In this regard, Bonsaver (1995: 165) interestingly comments that:

> I nomi di persona nei racconti di Calvino rappresentano sempre di più semplici fattori testuali, dati strutturali, pedine della narrazione cui spesso viene concesso scarso spessore psicologico; la funzionalità dei rapporti *x a-y*, *x b-y*, *x c-y*, ecc appare con evidenza sulla superficie testuale, tanto che la stessa onomastica può essere ridotta a vere e proprie sigle matematico-scientifiche.

This remark seems quite in line with the use of some recurrent nouns, such as 'riccio' or the colour yellow: what counts is the web of connections they create, rather than the specific sign that concretely establishes the link.

Even more interesting from our perspective are the instances of an intriguing extradiegetic continuation between the intercalated novels and the frame, which, according to Usher, yield consequences for plot understanding (1996: 198). When I described *Se una notte* as system, I claimed that each intercalated story constitutes a storyworld that can be accessed only from the frame, as the hypodiegetic narrative that instantiates it is accessed by the Reader in the frame story. Boundaries between these storyworlds are therefore supposed to be relatively close because, from the perspective of the (fictional) actuality of the frame, they are construed in stories recounted in different books. And yet Usher's argument cautiously challenges this assumption. He pinpoints a series of details that should reveal a stronger connection among intercalated storyworlds and suggests that each of them somehow impacts on the following ones, thus exhibiting an irreversible process: the first incipit closes with the cryptic news that 'Hanno ammazzato Jan' (24) and in the second incipit Jan's widow is mentioned in passing (34); the spicy red pepper that was in Ugurd's kitchen ('Fuori dall'abitato di Malbork', 34) is ultimately used by Anacleta Higueras for the sauce of her meatballs ('Intorno a una fossa vuota', 227), and the meatballs themselves have been prepared by Brigd using so many eggs that only one has remained in Ludmilla's fridge (Chapter Seven, 144: 'nei palchetti portauova c'è rimasto un solo uovo'); similarly, it is hypothesised that the reason why it took Nacho sixteen years to find his way home (227) lies somehow in the sextodecimo size of a book (25).

Usher suggests that these reprises are meant to ensure cohesion in a novel with a fragmented structure, in search for a unifying principle (also Segre 1979: 187). I should back his suggestion and reinforce it by proposing that these elements may be interpreted as disguised hinge joints between modules of the narrative structure. The main connection points are provided by the entities that Calvino himself isolates – male character, female character and hostile element; however, through repetition and variation some elements are made critical and promote the alignment of storyworlds. As Chettiparamb notes, fractality relies on the alignment of the components of system so that 'change in one level can result in a change throughout the system, and the alignments can therefore be important mechanisms for co-evolution. The local and the global in fractal systems can then be co-constitutive' (2014: 9-10).

Segre's words reflect something of the dynamic I describe as fractal-like when he writes that 'Quasi tutti i romanzi inseriti hanno uno schema che si può definire a spirale, o a imbuto' (1979: 205). The spiral is indeed a fractal figure, a curve that progressively converges toward a point – or diverges from it – and creates a shifting movement across different scales that implies a variation in scope and/or resolution. It could be suggested that each storyworld is indeed defined by a different configuration of the core elements that are iterated and varied throughout the whole novel, and once this configuration is set and its conditions are designed (affiliation to a specific genre and national literary model) the narrative is run on these settings which uniquely bind the local narrative (the specific incipit) to its initial conditions. Each intercalated novel brings to light the effects of these initial conditions, setting the premises – and the premises only, being all interrupted – for their potential narrative unfolding. The image of the spiral, therefore, captures an aspect related to the aforementioned vertical axis of a fractal structure, the one that connects the details of the local to the global.[138] In a sense, what Segre has described as a spiral-like scheme characterising each incipit individually, Santovetti has explained by formalising Calvino's use of digression (2007: 221-28). According to Santovetti, every incipit constitutes a digression on its own: this departure from the main storyline of the frame may indeed remind of the funnel- or spiral-like convergence along different narrative lines recognised by Segre.

To put the same concept otherwise, each incipit dramatises the spiralling down of specific preliminary conditions, which are a variation of the narrative core formulated by Calvino, and each incipit is bound to them. And yet, the initial configuration is the result of fundamentally random variations of the narrative core. By designing a narrative structure of

---

[138] Arguably, the link with fractality is further corroborated by Segre's additional suggestion that the spiral-shaped scheme is epitomised by the seventh incipit, 'In una rete di linee che s'intersecano', 'in cui la catottrica diventa simbolo dei rapporti tra micro e macrocosmo' (205). Catoptrics is, indeed, the carrier of the other significant element I stress in the fractal, self-reflexivity.

this sort, Calvino manages to combine order and disorder, and, above all, he gets to reassess through narrative itself one of his key principles: as Scarpa aptly puts it, 'la cosa che Calvino ha detto per tutta la vita è che nella vita è impossibile dire una cosa sola' (1999: 93). Fractality is a mode of organisation (of narrative matter, in this case) that embodies this almost paradoxical idea, as it constitutionally relies on repetition and variation. As I remarked in this section, fractality accounts for isolated narrative phenomena within a broader sense-making *process*, and this is arguably as close as one can get to a representation of totality according to Calvino's beliefs; referring to *Se una notte*, Calvino affirms that it thanks to its circularity that the novel gets closer to the idea of totality (RRII 1396-7).

It should be interesting in this regard to follow Scarpa's suggestion (1999: 93) and to look at Poe's notion of consistency, which probably inspired Calvino's use for the sixth Norton Lecture:

> Per Poe, *consistency* è l'intuizione dell'universo come individualità: è la cognizione dell'unità del cosmo pensato come totalità e nello stesso tempo come articolazione e interdipendenza reciproca di ogni sua parte. *Consistency* è dunque una facoltà del pensiero che abbraccia simultaneamente l'uno e il molteplice, è un principio analogico universale, una nozione di trasmutabilità e metamorfosi di tutto ciò che esiste.

The ten intercalated novels represent an arbitrary selection of the narrative core's possible configurations: the added value introduced by fractality is that, by 'kaleidoscoping' points of view and simulating multiple alternatives (Segre 1979: 204), it also emphasises their interdependence and prompts one to appreciate their being 'facce d'un medesimo cristallo, giacché rimodulano un'unica situazione esistenziale' (Milanini 1990: 158; cf. D'Eramo 1979) without restraining them within a rigidly closed structure. Or better, the novel does find closure, thanks to the traditional happy ending and the fact that the Reader is depicted while finishing to read the novel itself. Both things, though, disguise a sort of anomaly. As to the happy ending, the swiftness of the final resolution inevitably stresses its artificiality and, consequently, the arbitrariness of the closure itself: 'Ti fermi un momento a riflettere su queste parole. Poi fulmineamente decidi che vuoi sposare Ludmilla' (261). This might even be a case of implicit authorial metalepsis (Genette 1972/1980: 234; cf. Cohn 2012, Pier 2016), namely when the author pretends to raffishly intervene into his characters' vicissitudes (4.5). As to the final lines of the novel, they bring about such a blatant collapse of storyworlds – a possibility that was often ambiguously hinted at but never unequivocally accomplished before – that closure becomes almost inevitable:

> Ludmilla chiude il libro, spegne la sua luce, abbandona il capo sul guanciale, dice: – Spegni anche tu. Non sei stanco di leggere?
>
> E tu: – Ancora un momento. Sto per finire *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* di Italo Calvino. [263]

Barth (1967/1984) identifies a similar short-circuit in Borges' invention of the 602nd night of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, when Sheherazade tells the story of the *One Thousands and One Nights* itself: the King, however, fortunately interrupts her, or there would be no 603rd night ever (cf. SI 395). Barth observes that these instances 'disturb us metaphysically [because] when the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they're in, we're reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence' (73). The strategies employed to prepare closure happen so quickly that one cannot avoid the impression that the author, here, has rapidly stitched up a potentially continuing narrative. Admittedly, this operation is anything but improvised. On the contrary, I suggest that both the rapid escalation toward the happy ending and the disturbance caused by the fuzziness of the ontological boundaries as performed in the final lines are operations designed to attract the reader's attention to the arbitrariness of the act of closure itself. The implicit suggestion is thus that the narrator artificially put an end to a narration that could have easily continued (Asor Rosa 2001: 146; De Toni 2007: 188).

Indeed, fractals have an ordered structure and yet admit potentially infinite continuity. The affinity of this hypothesis with the Calvinian idea that no position could ever be definitive but only an infinite approximation adds to the suitability of fractals as a profitable mode of explanation of the type of plot understanding designed in *Se una notte* (SI 229-37, SI 381-98). In this sense, infinite approximation is due to the infinite potential perspectives (in fractals: scales) that could be adopted in representing reality. However, close to the idea of infinite approximation by addition, there is also infinite divisibility, another concept fractal in nature: as soon as the scale changes and the resolution increases, one finds the same structures, reproduced. The same *regressus ad infinitum* is contemplated by another paradox dear to Calvino, the aforementioned example of Achilles and the Tortoise, by Zeno of Elea. A connecting line can therefore be traced between *Se una notte*, its fractal plot structure, and *The One Thousands and One Nights*, as they all explore potential continuity in this double sense: on the one hand, they are made of a finite – though, arbitrary – number of parts (variation); on the other, they potentially continue in a recurring self-mirroring and self-reproduction, *ad infinitum* (repetition).

4.3.3. Se una notte's plot as fractal

Fractality thus provides us with a profitable framework to account for narrative strategies such as embeddedness or *mise en abyme*, or the programmatic use of patterns of repetitions. Most importantly though, it affords us a suitable description of the underlying process connecting them together and, therefore, a description of the sense-making strategy that guides the reader in understanding the narrative as a whole. From chapter to intercalated novel to chapter again: the reader shall look for familiar elements (repetition) while at the same time searching for any direction that narrative may follow next (variation), in order to orient his/her expectations. Fractality as a mode of organisation may adequately represent the reader's strategy of sense-making of the narrative, building on returning and variable elements. In the analysis that follows, I sought to substantiate my hypothesis by pinpointing those elements and events that support a reading of plot understanding in *Se una notte* as modelled on fractality.

The novel opens with Chapter One. The first feature that arguably catches the reader's attention is the use of second-person narration, which not only is uncommon but also has the effect of stimulating quite a direct engagement with the reader (4.4.1). Expectations immediately enter the picture, confirming their crucial role in the relationship that is being established between narrator and readers. By mentioning them, the narrator arguably prompts readers to interrogate themselves about what their own expectations might indeed be: 'Non che t'aspetti qualcosa di particolare da questo libro in particolare' (4) and 'indipendentemente da quel che t'aspettavi dall'autore, è il libro in sé che t'incuriosisce, anzi a pensarci bene preferisci che sia così, trovarti di fronte a qualcosa che ancora non sai bene cos'è' (9). Furthermore, the reference to 'bisogni di nuovo e di non nuovo (del nuovo che cerchi nel non nuovo e del non nuovo che cerchi nel nuovo)' (6) neatly evokes the principle of reading dynamics as grounded in a balance between novelty and reassurance of one's expectations. Already in Chapter One, the narrator contemplates multiple counterfactual or potential possibilities, as if browsing them:

> Forse è già in libreria che hai cominciato a sfogliare il libro. O non hai potuto perché era avviluppato nel suo bozzolo di cellophane? Ora sei in autobus, in piedi […]
> O forse il librario non ha impacchettato il volume; te l'ha dato in un sacchetto. Questo semplifica le cose. Sei al volante della tua macchina, […].
> Sei al tuo tavolo di lavoro, tieni il libro posato come per caso tra le carte d'ufficio […]. [7]

As expressed by the disjunctive coordination, the first two paragraphs exhibit counterfactuals: the reader (not yet officially the Reader) has the book either wrapped or

not; is either on the bus or in his car. The third setting, the office, might follow any of the previous situations so is not, strictly speaking, a counterfactual. Some expressions used by the narrator ('Vediamo come comincia', 7; 'Vediamo', 9) cue the reader into thinking that the novel the narrator is talking about is still to begin, that it will begin the following chapter.

The following chapter abandons the numeric sequence and simply bears the title 'Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore'. At this point, some readers might even think that what they just finished reading was a catchy foreword authored by the person Italo Calvino, the individual, rather than the first chapter of a metanarratively complex work delivered by a model author (Eco 1994). Some signs contribute to ensure a sense of continuity between Chapter One and this new chapter. In other words, what are the instances of not-new in the new? First of all, the confirmation of what anticipated by the narrative voice: there, the narrator was inviting the reader (at that point, presumably the narratee – see later on) to begin the reading; here, such beginning is dramatised with the first line reading: 'Il romanzo comincia in una stazione ferroviaria' (11).[139] Secondly, the continuation of a metanarrative discourse maintains the narrator in a position to some degree external to the narrated matter: he* still metanarratively refers to chapters, paragraphs, pages recounting the unfolding story.[140]

On the other hand, new elements also emerge. Some of them are newly introduced, as the setting of the station and all the narrative details pertaining the specifics of 'Se una notte': Mr and Mrs Marne, the chief-inspector Gorin, the mysterious agents the narrating-I is supposed to meet and those he answers to, the missed luggage exchange. Other elements, instead, progressively reveal themselves to be variations of prior ones: the main instance of variation within continuity concerns metanarrativity. If it initially ensured continuity with Chapter One, as soon as the chapter proceeds it becomes clear that the narrating-I's lack of knowledge concerns not only the circumstances of a potential reader but also the very narrative he is a part of. The narrative entities of narrating-I and author overtly uncouple, as suggested by sentences such as, 'O forse l'autore è ancora indeciso' (13), 'Forse per questo l'autore accumula supposizioni su supposizioni in lunghi paragrafi senza dialoghi' (15), 'questo qualcosa d'altro che rende rischioso identificarsi con me, per te lettore e per lui autore' (16). Furthermore, the strategy of displaying counterfactual possibilities, already employed in Chapter One, aims here to highlight the gap between the reader's expectations and the narrative (fictional) actuality:

---

[139] Interestingly, it is precisely *the beginning of a narrative* that is dramatised: the narrator emphasises all the aspects that, according to a folk-phenomenology of reading, a reader should be paying attention to, in order to make sense of the story (e.g. 'Tutti questi segni convergono nell'informare che', 11).
[140] The male pronoun is used here not in reference to Calvino, but because the narrating-I of the first incipit turns out to be a homodiegetic male narrator.

> Tu lettore credevi che lì sotto la pensilina il mio sguardo si fosse appuntato sulle lancette traforate come alabarde d'un rotondo orologio di vecchia stazione […]. Ma chi ti dice che i numeri dell'orologio non s'affaccino da sportelli rettangolari e io veda ogni minuto cadermi addosso di scatto come la lama d'una ghigliottina? [13-4]

Arguably, these ambiguities signal that we are not simply facing a continuation of the narrative situation designed in Chapter One, and that the new one is re-employing the metanarrative device at a different narrative level, with different premises and agents. The first instance of fractal structure emerges, although it is not recognisable as such at this point.

Another passage should serve to demonstrate how frequently Calvino includes the issue of readerly expectations in his narrative machinery:

> La tua attenzione di lettore ora è tutta rivolta alla donna, è già da qualche pagina che le giri intorno, che io, no, che l'autore gira intorno a questa presenza femminile, è da qualche pagina che tu t'aspetti che questo fantasma femminile prenda forma nel modo in cui prendono forma i fantasmi femminili sulla pagina scritta, ed è la tua attesa di lettore che spinge l'autore verso di lei, e anch'io che ho tutt'altri pensieri per il capo ecco che mi lascio andare a parlarle […]. [20]

In this excerpt, too, the distinction between narrating-I and author* is confirmed. Together with the mysteriously attractive female figure, the dangerous and potentially hostile group makes its appearance: 'L'organizzazione è potente. Comanda alla polizia, alle ferrovie' (24). Immediately after this sudden escalation, the chapter ends.

The first anomaly in the following chapter is that it reprises the numbering as Chapter Two, while being technically the third chapter of the novel. The storyworld featuring (or 'priming', to use Emmott's (1997) contextual frame theory terminology, 2.2.1) the station and the luggage exchange is abandoned (or 'unprimed'), and arguably it does not take long to the reader to realise that the content of the chapter 'Se una notte d'inverno' constituted an embedded narrative conveyed via a damaged book. It becomes undeniable over the following few pages that the book 'Se una notte' is not the physically same book the actual reader is reading. An attentive analysis might have already spotted some signs (i.e. the fact that the narrating-I is referring to paragraphs and lines that the actual reader cannot actually access – 'è già un paio di pagine che', 13; 'ma invece solo pochi elementi affiorano dalla pagina scritta', 21). Yet, until page 26, the situation remains utterly ambiguous. Even though Chapter Two opens with the line 'Hai già letto una trentina di pagine' and the actual page is 25, the reader might well admit an approximation. It is at page

29 that the Reader as a character is named for the first time, concomitant with the appearance of the She-Reader ('Lettrice'): this marks the final disjunction between the 'reader who reads', namely the real reader, and the 'reader who is read', that is the character Reader (Segre 1979: 179). In his article on the role of the Reader in *Se una notte*, Rankin (1986: 125) argues that the Reader is a proper fictional character and takes issue with Waugh (1984) as she maintains, instead, that through the second person Calvino is addressing the real reader.[141] It is legitimate yet inconclusive to wonder whether either a shift (or a narrowing down) of addressees has occurred between Chapter One and Two – from reader to Reader – or the narratee of the Chapter One was already the Reader as a character (4.4.1). The following excerpt from Chapter Two seems to endorse the latter hypothesis, if any because it starts consistently employing the masculine form and the man who is now named 'the Reader' is the same man who was said to hold certain beliefs earlier:

> Puoi uscire dalla libreria contento, uomo che credevi finita l'epoca in cui ci si può aspettare qualcosa dalla vita. […] Ecco come sei già cambiato da ieri, tu che sostenevi di preferire un libro, cosa solida, che sta lì, ben definita, fruibile senza rischi, in confronto all'esperienza vissuta, sempre sfuggente, discontinua, controversa. [31, 32]

Without expecting to solve the ambiguity, I venture a second hypothesis: reverting to Chapter One, one can retrospectively detect a caesura, or a sort of double beginning. The novel opens by addressing the reader in their own room, prompting them to find a suitable posture, regulate the light and prepare anything they might need during reading so they do not have to interrupt it. After commenting on the reader's low expectations, the first contextual-frame shift is instantiated, introduced by a single word: 'Dunque' (5). With a partly exhortative partly summarising function, the word 'dunque' marks a shift in space and time to the moment and the place of the purchase of the book; the chapter ends with a circular return to the reader's room, finally facing the novel. I would suggest however that it is the 'dunque' that pragmatically triggers a shift through the ontological border of storyworld, and with it the passage from reader to Reader.[142]

The metanarrative discourse carried out by the narrator ensures a certain continuity throughout the first three chapters, even though it might be that at least two

---

[141] In fact, Rankin acknowledges instances when Calvino actually addresses the real reader (e.g. when he considers the risk of identification); however, he remarks that on those occasions Calvino does not use the second person. Rankin's conclusion is that 'Calvino lays bare the relationship between author and reader not to break down the barriers but rather to re-establish his own supremacy, […] substantiating the hold of the author *over* the reader' (129).

[142] It should be noted that this remains mostly a retrospective speculation, since pragmatically I would mainly rely on the paratext and the separation of chapters and intercalated novels to settle the boundaries among systems of the fractal-like structure.

distinct narrating entities intervened so far, the narrator of Chapter One and the narrator of 'Se una notte'. The reprise of the numbering in Chapter Two seems to vouch, at least provisionally, for the hypothesis that its narrator might be the same one of Chapter One. Another element of continuity is provided by a new female character entering the story, after Mrs Marne of 'Se una notte'. Her relevance is immediately emphasised:

> La signorina, ti ha indicato una signorina. È lì tra due scaffali […]. Ecco dunque la Lettrice fa il suo felice ingresso nel tuo campo visivo, Lettore, anzi del campo della tua attenzione, anzi sei tu entrato in un campo magnetico di cui non puoi sfuggire l'attrazione. [29]

What fades away in this chapter, instead, is the narrator's tendency to browse through counterfactuals, of which we find no instance in Chapter Two. Rather, the narrator explicitly leaves some details unspecified: 'Chi tu sia, Lettore, quale sia la tua età, lo stato civile, la professione, il reddito, sarebbe indiscreto chiederti. Fatti tuoi, veditela un po' tu' (31-2). As far as variation and novelty are concerned, Chapter Two takes a significant narrative turn by fully admitting the fictional nature of the Reader as character and recounting the events leading to the beginning of his quest. When the following chapter is introduced, the narrator makes immediately clear that a new storyworld is to be instantiated: 'Ecco che fin dalla prima pagina t'accorgi che il romanzo che hai in mano non ha niente a che fare con quello che stavi leggendo ieri' (32).

As it has been announced that the following novel has nothing to do with the previous one, the reader is expecting to find a new storyworld and the hierarchy of narrative levels should result clearer. The reader is aware that 'Fuori dall'abitato di Malbork' is a new embedded narrative and should be ready to grasp clues that could guide their understanding of it. The narrator is quite explicit in outlining the narrative atmosphere and the style: 'Qui è tutto molto concreto, corposo, designato con sicura competenza, o comunque l'impressione che dà a te, Lettore, è quella della competenza' (33). In fact, this style had been already anticipated by Ludmilla's opinion expressed in Chapter Two (29, see Appendix [2]), but it might well be that the regularity of such connection between the She-Reader's desires and the following intercalated novels is not intuited by the reader yet.

Storyworld and narrative style thus change, but the position of the narrative voice toward the narrative seems to initially remain the one exhibited in Chapter Two: there are still metanarrative comments ('Olio di colza, è specificato nel testo, dove tutto è molto preciso', 33; 'I personaggi prendono corpo a poco a poco nell'accumularsi di particolari minuziosi', 34) and the Reader is directly addressed, as if the narrative voice were recounting a reading experience, rather than reproducing it. However, from page 34 onwards, a second homodiegetic narrator emerges, and the two voices continue to

awkwardly converge and overlap throughout the chapter, as proved by the shift from third-to first-person narration within the same sentence: 'Ogni momento scopri che c'è un personaggio nuovo, non si sa in quanti *siano* in questa nostra immensa cucina, è inutile contar*ci*, *eravamo sempre* in tanti' (34, my emphases). This ambiguity will remain a constant feature throughout the whole novel. The smoothness with which shifts between narrative voices are constantly implemented is remarkable: in fact, it may be argued that by blurring the boundaries between narrators and by not making them exactly coincide with the paratextual boundaries of the chapters, fluidity and continuity are actually enhanced, rather than hindered.[143]

Along with this strategy concerning the narrative voice, the next point ensuring variation within continuity is given once again by the female figure and the relation between her and the male character. The narrative core is dramatised in this case through a double doubling: the homodiegetic narrator Gritzvi and his rival Ponko, and the blond Brigd and her dark-haired counterpart Zwida Ozkart; toward the end of the chapter, the hostile community takes the shape of an old and mysterious rivalry between the Ozkart family and the Kauderers. Calvino does not miss the opportunity to metanarratively foreground this mechanism: the homodiegetic narrator Gritzvi finds himself thinking of his pseudo-replacement with the new apprentice Ponko and reflects that 'un estraneo stava prendendo il mio posto, diventava me […] ossia erano i miei rapporti con le cose i luoghi le persone che diventavano suoi, così come io stavo per diventare lui, per prendere il suo posto tra le cose e le persone della sua vita' (36). This is exactly what happens more broadly in the fractal narrative structure of *Se una notte*, where different characters (carriers of full sets of local features, attached to the various storyworlds) become the nodes of a set of recurring relations.[144]

Once the reader approaches Chapter Three, she should arguably begin to sense the pattern between a returning narrative – the frame – and the embedded stories, if any thanks to the paratextual hints. The return of narrative focus onto the practical activity of cutting the pages, mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, presumably does not take the reader by surprise. It is probable that the systematic employment of interruption has not been detected at this point yet, but the iteration of a similar situation – that of the typographical mistake – does catch one's attention.

---

[143] From the second incipit onwards, the reader should arguably start to notice an increasingly overt pattern of recurrent nouns, already stressed and discussed in 4.3.2.

[144] Cf. also with another interesting statement, where the connection between the various female figures is emphasised: 'Ora poi le reazioni del professore al nome di Ludmilla, aggiungendosi alle confidenze d'Irnerio, gettano dei lampi misteriosi, creano intorno alla Lettrice una curiosità apprensiva non dissimile a quella che ti lega a Zwida Ozkart, nel romanzo di cui stai cercando il seguito, e anche alla signora Marne nel romanzo che avevi cominciato a leggere il giorno prima' (49).

From Chapter Three onwards, the frame progressively assumes its own narrative autonomy, keeping its focus on the quest of the Reader and the She-Reader against the array of obstacles that hinder them more or less intentionally. As the novel proceeds, the reader presumably learns to expect the regular alternation of embedded stories told in a number of manuscripts that the Reader conquers in various ways and which in various ways he invariably loses (here, too: variation and repetition), and reprises of the frame narrative in the numbered chapters. As anticipated, the frame enucleates the basic directions that shall guide the upcoming incipit, which are always dictated by Ludmilla's reading wishes. Interestingly enough, it can be noted retrospectively that in the first incipit, not yet guided by Ludmilla's predictive captions, the reader is indeed uncertain, 'anche tu lettore non sei ben sicuro di cosa ti farebbe più piacere leggere' (13). Starting from these brief descriptions, the reader is usually provided with the necessary interpretive tools to collocate the incipits and account for each distinctive atmosphere and style. Guglielmi (1979) summarises them as follows:

> In un romanzo la realtà è imprendibile come la nebbia; in un altro gli oggetti si presentano con caratteri sin troppo corposi e sensuali; in un terzo è vincente l'approccio introspettivo; in un altro agisce una forte tensione esistenziale proiettata versa la storia, la politica e l'azione; in un altro ancora esplode la violenza più brutale; e poi in un altro cresce un sentimento insostenibile di disagio e di angoscia. E poi c'è il romanzo erotico-perverso, quello tellurico-primordiale e infine il romanzo apocalittico. [RRII 1388][145]

Without going into the same degree of detail for the whole novel, I shall attempt to sketch the basic structure of variations and repetitions that arguably guides the reader through a fractal-like continuum, across the scales represented by each new storyworld. Chapter Three ends in a similar way to Chapter Two, anticipating that 'Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa' is no continuation of the previous story, 'Fuori dall'abitato di Malbork' ('Una cosa ti risulta subito chiara, ed è che questo libro non ha niente a che fare con quello che avevi cominciato', 52): awkwardly enough, only the proper names of characters do recur – which is a first overt and yet mysterious sign of continuation. Around a handful of signifiers, a completely different narrative unfolds: miss Zwida is an elegant young lady sojourning in the small seaside resort of Pëtkwo, who spends her days drawing inanimate objects; she attracts the attention of the narrator, a guest of the nearby Kudgiwa Pension (no longer a farm – 51), recovering from some illness (56). The main action revolves around the location of the meteorological observatory, usually directed by professor Kauderer (no longer a farmer) and temporarily passed on to the narrator's supervision. While the narrator and

---

[145] To be added is the geometric novel (seventh incipit), which Calvino notes to be missing in Guglielmi's overview.

miss Zwida are the recurring male and female characters, the hostile community is impersonated by the two mysterious men looking for Mr Kauderer (59) and by Kauderer himself (64-5). Through these specific characters, a few new elements are added to the fractal-like semantic continuum: the motif of obsessive sign-reading (e.g. 53, 59 – this builds on a similar feeling of paranoia experienced by the narrator of 'Se una notte') and the importance of form (56).

In Chapter Four, the character of Lotaria returns and with her a 'bearded man' (perhaps recalling the bearded fugitive appeared at the end of last incipit?), professor Galligani, who provides the alleged continuation of 'Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa', though under a different title. Continuity is ensured, paradoxically, by the first theoretical discussion of a poetics of interruption and of its positive aspects, advanced by Uzzi-Tuzii. It could be also suggested that the militarist attitude surrounding Lotaria's seminar and her cold and over-analytical interpretive grids aptly prepare the ground for the setting of the following intercalated novel (74).

The pseudo-Marxist critical paradigms listed at the end of Chapter Four are transposed into the fictional left-oriented revolution staged in 'Senza temere il vento e la vertigine'. The male-female pair and the Other that interposes between them is here exhibited by the threesome relationship between the narrator Alex Zinnober, his friend and love rival Valeriano, and Irina; the hostile element is represented by the anonymous and body-less entity of the Revolutionary Army, ultimately embodied with a dramatic turn of events by Valeriano himself, who is carrying a message ordering the narrator's death sentence. In addition to the tone, continuity is ensured by the return of the proper name Kauderer, now the owner of a munitions factory, while the meteorological observatory is indirectly resurrected through Irina's reference to the profession of the astronomer ('– Se ne intende di guardare il cielo? Perché? Fa l'astronomo? – No, un altro genere d'osservatorio –', 83). Like the replacement between Ponko and Gritzvi in the second incipit, here too Irina hopes for a change of roles between genders ('– […] Le donne armate per fare cosa? – Per prendere il vostro posto. Noi sopra e voi sotto', 86). In fact, along with their subversion, the story introduces the idea of a fluidity of roles, where even juxtaposed roles may overlap and co-exist ('Irina è insieme l'officiante e la divinità e la profanatrice e la vittima', 87).

Chapter Five recounts the Reader's arrival at the publishing house, where he meets the editor Dr Cavedagna and discovers the plagiarist activities of Ermes Marana. The frame story fully integrates the motifs of role replacement and of fluidity between – in this case – narratives, and exploits it to explain the messy relationships connecting the various incipits. Also the idea of receiving and interpreting messages, introduced in 'Sporgendosi', is

retrieved and applied to the discussion of the editing activity as something completely other from reading for pleasure ('eppure i veri libri per lui [Cavedagna] restano altri, quelli del tempo in cui erano per lui come messaggi d'altri mondi', 101).

The themes of disguise and reinvention introduced by Marana in the frame is dramatised in the fifth incipit through the consecutive transformations of Ruedi the Swiss ('cambiare mestiere, moglie, città, continente, – un continente dopo l'altro, fino a far tutto il giro, – consuetudini, amici, affari, clientela', 105). Instead of concerning plagiarism, though, the issue triggers a reflection on multiplicity in relation to interruption and renewed beginning – that is what the reader is experiencing in *Se una notte*. From the offence of plagiarism, the story expands toward the context of illegality and criminality by staging a murder. The relationship of complicity which the Reader seems to be developing with Ludmilla is distorted, into the intercalated novel, into a criminal connivance, and the She-Reader's intellectual independence, slightly resented by the Reader (93), takes the hypo-fictional shape of Bernadette's ambiguous pursuit of her own interests to Ruedi's expenses. In 'Guarda in basso', the idea is introduced that interrupting something (i.e. a narrative) does not at all guarantee that its consequences and effects will similarly cease to exist: far from simplification, new beginnings result into a multiplication of the consequences that are sought to be escaped.

> Perché a questa maniera non ho fatto altro che accumulare passati su passati dietro le mie spalle, moltiplicarli, i passati, e se una vita mi riusciva troppo fitta e ramificata e ingarbugliata per portarmela sempre dietro, figuriamoci tante vite, ognuna col suo passato e i passati delle altre vite che continuano ad annodarsi gli uni agli altri. [105-6]

Chapter Six marks an interesting turning point in *Se una notte*: the narrative levels begin to interact with one another. While so far the embedded stories were accessed only in the intercalated chapters, here the Reader directly accounts for Marana's correspondence with the publishing house, thus inserting further hypodiegetic narrative fragments within the frame chapters. These stories, moreover, exhibit several details linking them to previous intercalated novels (perhaps reasonably, since it looks like they might be acknowledged a shared paternity in the figure of Marana):[146] the motherland of Ruedi the Swiss returns as one of Marana's past addresses (118); the zinc canopy where Marana was held hostage (119) reminds of the canopy of the meteorological observatory in 'Sporgendosi' (53); the Sultan's wife is the Oriental queen mockingly evoked by Alex Zinnober in 'Senza temere' (85). The spy motif, also introduced in 'Senza temere', in Chapter Six becomes critical as the plagiaristic activity of Marana is placed within a broader

---

[146] And, perhaps, a shared maternity through Ludmilla's desires?

and even more entangled network of conflicting interests, where transformation and disguise cease to be creative forces and become signs of deception and mutual espionage.

It could be argued that Chapter Six aims at deliberately producing an effect of deep confusion. Syntactically, the fragmentary and disordered state of Marana's correspondence – and consequently the Reader's difficulties in making sense of it – is rendered through the frequent use of suspension dots, blank spaces in between excerpts, and sometimes paragraphs starting with lower case letters (126-7). Semantically, this claim seems justified by the way Dr Cavedagna introduces the whole situation, remarking that Marana's accounts are 'Storie che non stanno né in cielo né in terra… Non glie le sto a raccontare perché non saprei raccapezzarmici' (115). Metanarratively, I suggest that this state of confusion, displayed both at the level of mimesis and of narrative structure, has in fact been anticipated in the fourth intercalated novel. Although I will revert later (4.5) on the analogy established between characters' actions and the geometrical concept of line, in this respect I would like to point out what advanced in 'Senza temere':

> Avvicinandosi al centro della scena le linee tendono a contorcersi, a diventare sinuose come il fumo del braciere […], ad attorcigliarsi – sempre le linee – come la corda invisibile che ci tiene legati […]. […] una lenta danza in cui non è il ritmo che importa ma l'annodarsi e lo sciogliersi di linee serpentine. [87, 88]

The impression that the degree of confusion increases halfway through the novel, therefore, might not be accidental. It is worth to be reminded of an observation from the first incipit and already quoted, which exhorts the reader to 'registrare tanto l'effetto brusio quanto l'effetto intenzione nascosta, che ancora non sei in grado (e io neppure) di cogliere' (19). Both this sentence and the passage quoted above seem to encourage the reader to take into account the overall effect, somehow leaving aside its exact components (i.e. the precise agendas and allegiances among the several groups described in Chapter Six, even more in Chapter Nine). The exponential absurdity of the circumstances of the Reader's quest follows an increasing degree of asymmetry in the structure of the frame chapters. All the chapters from Two to Five had regularly ended by anticipating that the upcoming narrative would not be the expected one, thus building the reader's expectations and clarifying that the storyworlds instantiated were going to be different hypodiegetic worlds (32, 52, 75, 102). Chapter Six breaks this pattern of repetition, and the fact that 'In una rete di line che s'allacciano' is an altogether different novel from the previous one is confirmed a posteriori in Chapter Seven (141); the pattern is then restored in Chapter Seven (160), partly in Chapter Eight (where the information is given not at the end but at p. 196), and changed again in Chapter Nine, where the protean female character of Corinna-

Gertrude-Ingrid gives the Reader a book in exchange for the one he has been confiscated, but readily admits soon afterwards that it is an apocryphal too (213). As to Chapter Ten, Arkadian Porphyritch passes on to the Reader 'Quale storia laggiù attende la fine?' as an Ircanian adaptation of Bandera's novel (244).

Yet, despite the internal escalation of disorder undeniably characterising the second part of the novel (e.g. 218-19), the fractal structure still holds. Let us revert to the outline of the fractal structure of repetitions and variation that arguably underpins the reader's understanding of *Se una notte*. I already pointed out a few elements of continuation that appear in Chapter Six from the previous incipit. There is still the character of Marana, but the threat represented by his plagiaristic compulsion extends to wider and shadier entities and institutions, such as OEPHLW and APO. A new character, Silas Flannery is introduced.

The title of the following intercalated novel, 'In una rete di linee che s'allacciano', retrieves almost literally the image offered in 'Senza temere'. From this perspective, these last three incipits – 'Senza temere', 'Guarda in basso', and 'In una rete' – build on each other in an interesting way: 'Senza temere' introduces the conceptualisation of sequences of events or individual actions as intersecting lines (79); 'Guarda in basso' does not explicitly use the image of the line but stresses the multiplication of Ruedi's entangled alternative lives; 'In una rete' combines the two images: the telephones around the narrator are connected into a web of interrelated lines that tightens around him, thus also prolonging the atmosphere of impending conspiracy triggered in Chapter Six. As to the female component of the recurring narrative core, the duplicity of the character of Bernadette – helper of the narrator who might, though, change allegiances in the end (114) – returns in the twofold view of Marjorie, abducted victim and yet temptress in the narrator's eyes (138-9).

In Chapter Seven, Ludmilla's involvement in Marana's plagiaristic scheme is revealed, as it is ascertained that its first motive lies in Marana's jealousy of the authorial ghost behind every novel that used to absorb Ludmilla's attention. The following incipit, 'In una rete di linee che s'intersecano', still foregrounds the taste for geometry via the narrator's fascination for mirrors and catoptrics. An element of variation, instead, is represented by the shift of role of the narrator, who in the previous novel played the part of a sort of unaware instigator whereas here he is a proudly over-controlling business-man, busy deflecting his many enemies' threats and, in turn, constantly plotting against them:

> Se la mia figura parte in tutte le direzioni e si sdoppia su tutti gli spigoli è per scoraggiare quelli che vogliono inseguirmi. [...] In un mondo catoptrico anche i nemici possono credere che mi stanno accerchiando da ogni lato, ma io solo conosco la disposizione degli specchi, e posso rendermi inafferrabile, mentre loro finiscono per urtarsi e abbrancarsi a vicenda. [163]

Although the narrator exhibits a degree of self-control that his predecessor lacked, he finds himself in a similar situation when he is put in the same cell with Lorna (here, an actual lover rather than a failed flirt), who believes to have been abducted by the narrator himself. Unlike in the previous incipit, in this case the likely actual responsible is the narrator's wife, Elfrida.

Chapter Eight is a further proof of the deepening interaction between narrative planes outlined above, as it wholly consists of an excerpt from Silas Flannery's diary, written in the first person. The central chapter of the frame is the one that most closely shares the fictional nature of the intercalated novels and has been recognised as an overt *mise en abyme* of the whole novel (Everman 1988; Milanini 1990), where Calvino gives voice to some of the core ideas that firstly prompted it (4.2.2). I would suggest that the last passage of the chapter has an interesting double function. The first part is a proper *mise an abyme* of the narrative strategy implemented at the beginning of the novel:

> M'è venuta l'idea di scrivere un romanzo fatto solo d'inizi di romanzo. Il protagonista potrebb'essere un Lettore che viene continuamente interrotto. Il Lettore acquista il nuovo romanzo A dell'autore Z. Ma è una copia difettosa, e non riesce ad andare oltre l'inizio… Torna in libreria per farsi cambiare il volume…
> Potrei scriverlo tutto in seconda persona: tu Lettore… [197]

In the following paragraph, however, the perspective of Silas Flannery the character becomes predominant as he imagines to arrange his hypothetical narrative in a way that is meant to favour the character of the writer over the Reader.[147] Even though in this novel such a plan will turn out to be unsuccessful, with this strategy Calvino provides the reader with a useful interpretive key and a horizon of expectations to guide the remainder of the reading:

> Ma non vorrei che per sfuggire al Falsario la Lettrice finisse tra le braccia del Lettore. Farò in modo che il Lettore parta sulle tracce del Falsario […], in modo che lo Scrittore possa restare solo con la Lettrice.
> Certo, senza un personaggio femminile, il viaggio del Lettore perderebbe vivacità: bisogna che incontri qualche altra donna sul suo percorso. La Lettrice potrebbe avere una sorella… [198]

'Sul tappeto di foglie illuminate dalla luna' offers a further re-elaboration (possibly, a preview) of this possibility: the male protagonist is attracted to the young daughter of his mentor Okeda, but is ultimately involved in a physical intercourse with the girl's mother.

---

[147] Admittedly, this can be fully realised retrospectively, when the reader discovers that, in fact, the writer's plan fails and the Reader does manage to ultimately conquer the She-Reader.

This happens under the disturbing acquiescence of Mr Okeda himself, who uses his knowledge and the protagonist's sense of guilt to further bound him to his will ('Era un segreto che legava me a lui ma non lui a me', 208). Moreover, as to other iterations harking back to the previous incipit, the Japanese name of Kawasaki (motor-bike brand in 'In una rete', surname of a rival professor here, 203) and the motif of the female rivalry (lover vs. wife and mother vs. daughter) are worth mentioning.

The sketch outlined by Silas Flannery guides the reader through the series of forgeries, replacements, and disguises staged in Chapter Nine: the degree of confusion achieves its apex. The fact that the Reader's initial recognition of Lotaria does match with Silas' hypothetical story arguably contributes to confirm it to the reader, who skims through the vertiginous number of roles and counter-roles of the woman. In the end, the Reader gets involved in an equivocal situation similar to that of the male protagonist of 'Sul tappeto', as he is unexpectedly seduced by the combative hyper-spy.

After the turmoil concluding Chapter Nine, the beginning of 'Intorno a una fossa vuota' marks an abrupt change of narrative tone. The scene shifts from computers and cables to starry dawns, vultures, and horses; together with a more paced syntax, this reminds of a more traditional form and topic of storytelling. The motif of the search for the unknown mother somehow draws back toward the origins, both existential and narrative. Yet, in line with the dominant dynamic of the novel, replacements still dominate the story, albeit framed within a more conventional and familiar pattern of swopped mothers and sisters (instead of spies and counter-spies and counter-counter-spies in a *regressus ad infinitum*). As ventured by Flannery, sisterhood retains its problematic nuance in the protagonist's eyes: attracted to both Amaranta and Jacinta, he lays himself open to the risk of incest. The element of mystery that is usually embodied by a hostile community, carrier of a power unknown to and escaping the control of the male protagonist, is represented here by the unnatural return of a young Faustino Higueras. He may or may not be the same Faustino that was allegedly killed by Nacho's father; as he might as well be Faustino's son, bearing the same name like don Anastasio was going by Nacho in his youth.

Chapter Ten illuminates the delicate equilibrium behind the system of global literary censorship, filtered through the clarity of vision of the General Chief of the National Police Archives, Arkadian Porphyritch. The Reader's dream of the travellers reading all the books he did not manage to finish, together with Ludmilla's reading wish referring to the end of the world, work as omens of the upcoming conclusion of the Reader's adventure and of the novel itself. As usual, Ludmilla's desire also paves the way for the following incipit: 'Quale storia laggiù attende la fine?'. A progressive deliberate deletion dominates the intercalated novel. A passage at its outset could refer to both the hypodiegetic storyworld of this

embedded story and to the novel as a whole, crammed with the multiple storyworlds and storylines accumulated so far: 'Il mondo è così complicato, aggrovigliato e sovraccarico che per vederci un po' chiaro è necessario sfoltire, sfoltire' (247). Arguably, such a statement fits into a trajectory toward a restoration of order – or better, an alleviation of confusion – following the few chapters and incipits of increasing disorder that achieves its highest degree in Chapter Nine. In 'Quale storia', not only the physical storyworld but also the core interrelations animating it are winnowed down to their barest structure: the male protagonist and the anonymous relentless officials of Section D meet on 'una distesa piatta e grigia di ghiaccio compatto come il basalto' (250); although their actions might seem similar, their purposes are clearly juxtaposed and their relationship overtly antagonistic; the attraction to the female character, Franziska, is the narrator's only firm point and it is only by reaching her that the final dissolution of the storyworld is escaped.

As explicitly admitted by the narrator, Chapter Eleven is an arrival point: 'Lettore, è tempo che la tua sballottata navigazione trovi un approdo' (252). After browsing several storyworlds instantiated by the ten intercalated novels, the reader is likely to expect some sort of closure for the Reader's quest staged in the frame. The pattern of variations and repetitions is emphasised once again through a series of alternative views on reading, its modes and purposes (256-9). In this regard, it is worth remarking that the thesis elaborated in the present work does not deny a variable phenomenology of reading. Rather, it attempts to outline how the text is designed to prompt a certain interaction with the reader. If the underlying assumption is that storyworlds are produced and co-constructed by readers, we can therefore infer that the text has to include tools and instructions to carry out such a co-construction. The fractal-like narrative structure I have illustrated in this section, with its patterns of variations and repetitions, its horizontal axis running through the frame and vertical axes guiding the understanding of each embedded narrative, is arguably the main strategy implemented by the author via the text to guide the reader's understanding of the narrative in its parts and as a whole. I already suggested that the type of closure provided by the novel is a satisfactory and yet arbitrary one (4.3.2). This does not contradict the potentially infinite fractal structure of the narrative, as its conclusion in this case amounts more to a summary of its parts, followed by its sudden conclusion brought about by an overt authorial interference, and less to the inescapable exhaustion of the possibilities offered by its mechanism.[148]

---

[148] By suggesting that *Se una notte* outlines a way out of the dead end represented by postmodernist fiction, Malmgren (1986: 106) seems to agree on this position; Beaudouin (2008: 68) argues instead that in *Se una notte* Calvino exhausts the narrative possibilities offered by its structure.

4.4. *Se una notte*: the space of narrative experience, fictionalised

In Chapter 3, I posited a higher-order dimension called space of narrative experience. I suggested that plot understanding pertains to this higher-level space, which should draw on the virtual space made up of the characters' private worlds and their interrelations on the one hand, and include the perspective of the reader on the other. In Calvino's *Se una notte*, however, the perspective of the reader is programmatically included in the narrative itself in a decidedly metanarrative way. Given that the concept of *space of narrative experience* is inherently informed by the reader's experience and given that, in this case, the reader's experience is directly called upon and itself turned into a story, I suggest that *Se una notte* presents an instance of fictionalisation of the space of narrative experience.

4.4.1. The narrative You

When I discussed how Baricco's *City* taps into the reader's virtual body (2.2.3), I argued that embodiment of contextual-frame shifts leverages a view of storylines as something to be almost (virtually) physically entered, and that, in doing so, their spatial nature was strongly emphasised. Moreover, I noted that the large number of contextual-frame shifts highlights the overarching power of the narrator, and hence the deliberateness of the act of narration. Comparing *City* with a novel so deeply metanarrative as *Se una notte*, however, prompts us to look at the differences between the strategies of sense-making implemented by Baricco and Calvino respectively.

Following Caracciolo's terminology, it has been said that in *City* the reader is prompted 'to take on, in [her] imaginative engagement with the story, the fictional body of a character' (2014a: 158). The passage thereby analysed featuring Diesel and Poomerang, is placed at the high-level end of Caracciolo's scale of fictionalisation of the reader's virtual body, because the reader's virtual body is aligned with the fictional body of two characters.[149] As I remarked, all the ontological doubts raised throughout the reading of *City* are ultimately resolved, and the reader is not left facing an ontologically subverted storyworld.

Se una notte does not present a situation as straightforward. The main reason for such increased complexity is the employment of the second-person narration. If we briefly look at its uses in the tradition which are surely present to Calvino, one should consider how, in the 1979 foreword to the *Metamorphoses*, Calvino points at Ovid's use of the apostrophe to the narratee (SI 904-16), dating it back to the earlier Greek novel (Reardon 1969). Overall, occasional address to the narratee is a well-established device in the

---

[149] This is irrespective of the peculiar situation designed by Baricco, where Diesel and Poomerang are later revealed to be fictional even within *City*'s TAW.

novelistic tradition: it has been widely discussed by the extant scholarship, and multiple examples have been identified in the English (e.g. Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 1749), French (e.g. Michel Butor's *La modification*, 1956) and Italian tradition (e.g. Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*, 1923).[150] As an interesting case in point for our discussion, when Butor's use of 'narrative you' was (wrongly) welcomed as an unprecedented novelty, American professor W. M. Frohock (1959) observed that it produced a 'novel narrational dimension' (quoted in Morrissette 1965: 2). Even though the device is by no means new, I agree that it can impinge on narrative comprehension, by promoting the visibility of what I define, in fact, the space of narrative experience.

In his postclassical reformulation, Herman rethinks the concept of narratee within his discussion of contextual anchoring, that is the 'process whereby a narrative, in a more or less explicit and reflexive way, asks its interpreters to search for analogies' between the narrative storyworlds prompted by the text and the readers' mental models of the world they live in and from which they try to make sense of the narrative (2002: 331). In our attempt to define the ontological status of the 'you' in *Se una notte*, Herman's and Caracciolo's theories can supplement one another. The relevance of investigating the ontological status of the entity referred to as 'you' becomes clear adopting Herman's (2002: 338) observation that the 'narrative *you* produces an ontological hesitation between what is actual and what is virtual within the storyworld', which perfectly describes what happens in *Se una notte*. Caracciolo's concept of readers' virtual body, then, helps illuminate the cognitive operations triggered by the specific formal designs adopted by Calvino to guide the readers of *Se una notte* through this fuzzy situation.[151] In other words, Herman's study of contextual anchoring clarifies why and how the text manages to achieve this ontological ambiguity; Caracciolo's contribution serves to explain how Calvino manipulates this ambiguity throughout *Se una notte*, and how he enables readers to make sense of shifts across this ontological continuum and to get to plausible (though not definitive) solutions which ultimately allow narrative comprehension.

Accounts of second-person narrative basically posit two possible situations, either an intradiegetic or an extradiegetic narratee. Herman's study takes Fludernik's (1993) reformulation as point of departure for a restructuration of the whole issue, enriching it through recent research on deixis (Margolin 1984; Zubin and Hewitt 1995). Herman diversifies the possible uses of the pronoun *you*, by isolating its grammatical form and deictic

---

[150] For a theoretical discussion of the narratee, see Genette (1972/1980), Prince (1982: 57; 1985), Richardson B. (2006). For research with specific focus on second-person narration see Fludernik (1993), Herman (2002), Morrissette (1965). As to a discussion of the second-person narration in Calvino, see Bonsaver (1995: 160 ff.), Habermas (1988), Lavagetto (1980).

[151] The concept of fuzzy logic, programmatically employed by Herman to introduce multivalence as opposed to bivalence (e.g. 2002: 212), is originally proposed by Black (1937) and Zadeh (1965).

profile. If these two functions are uncoupled, then we have either cases where the pronoun *you* actually entails a deictic transfer from the *I*, or a pseudo-deictic *you* (Furrow 1988: 372), that is an impersonal or generalised *you*. Otherwise, if grammatical form and deictic profile converge, then the address function of the pronoun is highlighted, and we have two types of address:

> *fictionalised* address, which entails address to or by members of some fictional world and thus constitutes "horizontal" address; and *actualised* address or apostrophe, which […] entails address that exceeds the frame (or ontological threshold) of a fiction to reach the audience, thus constituting a "vertical" address. [Herman 2002: 341]

Narrative situations, however, are rarely that clear-cut. Margolin (1984) addresses the problem and points out that textual indicators can be deliberately used in a way such to stretch or blur the scope of the address functions attached to textual *you*. More specifically, a certain use of *you* may cue the superimposition of the two deictic roles, one internal and one external to the storyworld, thus prompting the situation called of 'double deixis' (in Herman 2002: 342). Double deixis is therefore a hybrid case, characterised by 'a merely partial (dis)agreement between form and functions of *you*' (2002: 352-3).

Surely any schematisation of the meanings and uses of the textual *you* ought to be arranged into a scalar taxonomy, rather than a binary one or rigidly divided into types. Potentially, each and every occurrence of *you* could bear differently on contextual anchoring, and therefore cue readers to slightly adjust their self-positioning toward the storyworld. Although it might produce interesting results, a punctual analysis of *Se una notte* in the light of theories of deixis lies beyond the scope of this study. With reference to the frame, my suggestion is that three main uses of narrative *you* can be identified: preceding the appearance of the Reader, referring to the Reader (main body of the novel), and a hybrid version in the last chapter. Overall, the fluidity of functions of the textual *you* should be acknowledged, and with it the fact that these different functions can operate at a higher or lower degree in various moments throughout the narrative. In particular, by impacting on deictic dimensions, different configurations of functions underlying the narrative *you* at some specific moments can be responsible for situations where the boundary between textual and extra-textual is particularly porous.

In the first two chapters and half of *Se una notte*, up to the point where the Reader is officially introduced, Calvino designs textual features to cue an apostrophic address, which prompts readers 'not to virtualize, but rather to actualize the entity references by *you*' (2002: 359; Habermas 1988; Kacandes 1993). It is a case of "vertical address" because it is meant to directly address the real reader. The apostrophic address designed by

Calvino, though, constitutes quite a limit-case, in a way such that, referring to Herman's model, it straddles apostrophic address and double deixis, whereas, if we look instead at Kacandes' (1993) study, it falls under the rubric of 'literary performatives'.

The official introduction of the Reader marks a watershed in readers' comprehension of the pronoun *you*. As I will discuss later, readers' confidence in attributing a clear extradiegetic deictic referent was already undermined by the reading experience of the first incipit. In Chapter Two, then, it is made explicit that what had been allegedly understood as an apostrophic address is in fact a fictionalised address, his target being the intradiegetic Reader. Throughout the narrative, the Reader's profile is increasingly specified as his status as fully-fledged character internal to the storyworld is reinforced.

Albeit this change of perspective surely casts a retrospective ambiguity upon the prior status of the discourse model, it is my belief that this is not enough to classify the narrative *you* of Chapter One as a case of double deixis. Arguing that the textual *you* produces a doubly deictic context fundamentally bears on the ontological structure of the storyworld, in that it makes it hard to neatly distinguish between what is internal and what is external to the storyworld. However, although we could register an 'interference pattern between two or more competing deictic fields' (Herman 2002: 364), as soon as the Reader appears it is no longer true that there is no ultimate reference point to orient the deictic transfers: to the best of my knowledge, until Chapter Twelve the vast majority of the occurrences of narrative *you* in the frame deictically refer to the Reader as a character. What I would rather argue, and I expand on this in 4.4.2, is that the projection relations between readers and the character are made denser not by the compromised boundary between virtual fictional protagonist (the Reader who is read) and the actual reader (the reader who reads), but thanks to a reinforced alignment with the reader's virtual body, as explained by Caracciolo's framework. Further, additional ambiguity is produced, if any, by the insertion of embedded narratives which also employ the narrative *you*. By doing so, they severely hinder, at least at the beginning, the reader's comprehension of their hypodiegetic nature and may interfere with the function of the Reader as deictic centre.

As I anticipated, one last significant shift occurs at the very end of *Se una notte*, in Chapter Twelve. Here, the narrator describes the Reader and the She-Reader, happily married, reading in bed before going to sleep. While in the first lines the narrative *you* still clearly refers to the fully-specified and intradiegetic Reader ('Ora siete marito e moglie, Lettore e Lettrice', 263), the last instance causes an unexpected reversal: 'E tu: – Ancora un momento. Sto per finire *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore di Italo Calvino*' (263). One of the first adjustments required at the outset of Chapter Two, and concomitant with the appearance of the Reader, had concerned precisely the fact that, within the fictional

storyworld to which the Reader belongs, 'Se una notte d'inverno' is not the same novel the real reader is reading, but only the first incipit started by the Reader and never completed. Representing the Reader as he finishes reading *Se una notte* not only denies that prior re-adjustment but also suddenly restores a relation of identity – now perceived as incompatible – between reader and Reader. In this sense, I suggest that, for this instance only, textual *you* serves as a proper double deixis, as it determines an 'ontological interference pattern' 'produced by two or more interacting spatiotemporal frames – none of which can be called primary or basic relative to the other(s)' (Herman 2002: 345).

To recapitulate, it should be remembered that readers interpret the deictic function of *you,* (dis)agreement with its grammatical form, and the modal status (actuality vs. virtuality) of its referents in a gradient and ever-adjusting way, along a continuum where the pronoun *you* takes on at one end 'strictly referential functions, and at the other strictly the function of address' (2002: 350). At the outset of the narrative, the textual *you* most probably serves an apostrophic function, addressing the extradiegetic actual reader; the fact that the narrator diversifies the potential context from which real readers might be making sense of the storyworld seems to endorse the apostrophic function, as an attempt to maximise its chances to meet analogous profiles among them. As soon as the Reader enters the storyworld, the narrative *you* is re-inflected as a fictionalised address: the range of probable actual profiles is narrowed down to one intradiegetic profile, which is progressively specified. Only at the very end of the novel, with a swift subversion of the storyworld ontological boundaries, the deictic force of narrative *you* is suddenly doubled, as it evokes at the same time the fictional Reader (as he responds to the question of another intradiegetic character, Ludmilla) and the real reader. Even more strikingly, the profile of real reader referred to in this last line arguably matches with each and every real reader, something which could not been guaranteed for all real readers of Chapter One: here, the text encodes a profile specified uniquely by the fact of being reading the ending of *Se una notte*, and the very fact of getting to read that line means that the reader is indeed reading the end of the novel. Also amongst second-person narratives *Se una notte* presents a technically interesting case study because, whereas it initially seems to be the virtual body of the narratee that reaches out in order to align itself with the stance of actual readers, as soon as the Reader is identified the perspective turns inside-out. While assuming to be pulling something out from the diegetic context, the actual reader has actually been "pulled into" the storyworld.

The self-reflective character of *Se una notte* is further reinforced by the use of narrative *you*, as it transforms the monitoring process of the ways in which the storyworld matches the context in which it is reconstructed, 'from an automatic into a conscious

interpretive activity' (Herman 2002: 350). After all, *Se una notte* as a whole exhibits a strong metanarrative commitment. It would thus not seem out of place to suggest that Calvino might have taken up second-person narration to further explore, as Herman hopes, through 'an irreducibly plural *you*' the potentialities and issues of narrative itself.

4.4.2. The R/reader's virtual body

Apart from passages of stronger ambiguity at the beginning and at the end of the novel, in the frame of *Se una notte* the narrative *you* encodes a fictionalised address to the intradiegetic character of the Reader. I claimed that, despite the sometimes fuzzy distinction between what is external and what is internal to the storyworld, I would resist to class it as double deixis because, in the frame, the textual *you* remains anchored to an increasingly specified character.

Nevertheless, the (overall) absence of ambiguities concerning the function of the second-person narration does not mean ambiguity is effaced in general. The brief analysis carried out in the previous section simply considered the grammatical form and deictic function of textual *you*, and excluded that these specific textual aspects should be carriers of further ambiguities. Yet we cannot ignore that this intradiegetic and characterised entity is called the Reader, and since real readers are readers too, this profile analogy does encourage a certain superimposition.

In order to analyse the mechanisms employed by the text to cue this superimposition of fictional Reader's and reader's deictic fields, I draw again on Caracciolo's concept of readers' virtual body. My suggestion is that, even when the second-person pronoun refers grammatically and functionally to the Reader, an expansion of the scope of *you* is promoted via the bodily-perceptual capabilities of the virtual body attached to it. As far as *Se una notte* is concerned, I believe that the concept of readers' virtual body enables one to account for the ways in which such an ambiguous and powerful engagement of the reader can be achieved through the text. In the previous section I discussed how, with the appearance of the Reader, readers experience a shift in the narratee's identity: from a generic and underspecified reference to real readers, to the fictionally actual character of the Reader. This re-assessment, I suggest, is also followed by a change of allegiances of the readers' virtual body.

Before the Reader officially enters the storyworld, the virtual body of the reader is aligned with the narratee. Referring to Caracciolo's scale of fictionalisation, the narratee initially addressed by the narrator is closer to a 'deputy focalizor', that is a persona that can access the fictional world without being a character (2014a: 163). Unlike E. M. Foster's 'anonymous visitor' in *A Passage to India* (which Caracciolo employs to explain this concept),

though, the narratee of *Se una notte* is directly addressed in the second-person, which prompts a deeper and more immediate engagement of the actual reader. In fact, it is the narrating-I who seems willing to adapt the narratee's profile to any potential real reader, rather than the other way round. The variety of physical actions the narratee performs while getting ready for the reading experience and the description of the number of attitudes one might take on entering a bookstore, increase the chances for actual readers to project models of their own current background onto the narratee's position. The attention paid by Calvino to the intellectual (i.e. the taxonomy of book types in a bookstore, 5-6) and physical (i.e. the range of bodily positions and material preparations that surround the reading activity, 3-4) phenomenology of reading emphasises the embodied nature of the reader's virtual body and favours its alignment with that of the narratee. As Segre points out, however, the major novelty of *Se una notte* is less the second-person narration per se and more the overlapping of 'you-narratee' and 'you-protagonist' (1979: 203). To say it with Herman's terminology, we witness a shift in the deictic function of the textual *you*, moving from an apostrophic address to a fictionalised address. When the character of the Reader is introduced in Chapter Two, the reader's virtual body is expected to reassess its allegiance: from an alignment with the deputy focalizor to an alignment with the fictionally actual body of the Reader. Although I would not label the narrative *you* used in the frame as a double deixis, yet I agree with Segre (1979: 203) when he argues that:

> Calvino ha strappato il Lettore dalla sua posizione terminale nella catena comunicativa, e l'ha portato a immediato contatto con il Narratore; ha simulato all'interno dell'atto narrativo quel rapporto emittente-destinatario di cui l'atto narrativo è tramite. Portare entro il quadro ciò che sta al di fuori di esso; perciò eliminare, non di fatto, perché è impossibile, ma con una volizione suggestiva, il limite tra esterno e interno, tra vissuto o vivibile o esperibile e scrittura, letteratura.

Segre's comment on how the discourse situation designed in *Se una notte* 'brings inside the frame what is outside of it' closely reminds of what I previously suggested about the reader's virtual body being "pulled into" the storyworld.

Let us look more closely at the dynamics of fictionalisation of readers' virtual body in *Se una notte*. Both situations implemented in Calvino's novel – alignment with a deputy focalizor and with a fully-fledged character – imply that the narrating-I provides the reader with a perspective highly encoded in the text, as chiefly demonstrated by the use of second-person narration. In other words, the text prepares a position for the readers' virtual body to accommodate into, which is so overtly formalised that the narrating-I even addresses it directly with the textual *you* (irrespective of the change in the type of entities specified by

the pronoun). In his theorisation, Caracciolo ascribes the highest degree of fictionalisation to the deputy focalizor, even though characters are endowed with fully-fledged fictional bodies, and should therefore be expected to allow for the easiest option for the reader to re-position her virtual body. By proposing this hierarchy, instead, Caracciolo concurs with Herman that 'the projection relations between reader and narratee are likely to be denser in the case of extradiegetic narratees than in the case of intradiegetic ones', as the former type is less specified (2002: 333). It follows that the type of alignment required to readers in *Se una notte* would shift down along Caracciolo's scale of fictionalisation, from a higher degree of fictionalisation of the virtual body to a slightly lower degree, described as 'strict focalisation' (Jahn 1999) because it identifies with the body of a specific character in the narrative. Technically, therefore, this represents a risk of decreased engagement, since readers' bodily-perceptual identification with fully-fledged characters could be hindered by the interference of the characters' consciousness-attribution (2014a: 166). I suggest however that this is not the case in *Se una notte* because other strategies intervene as counterbalance.

First of all, the use of second-person narration and of the present tense still exerts a strong invitation to readers to blend their virtual body with the Reader's fictionally actual one.[152] Secondly, constant reference to the bodily-perceptual experience of the reading activity, both in general and as the Reader lives it at present, creates a strong connection with the physical sensations of readers who are (probably) holding in their hands the physical object of the book. Thirdly, to address the character as 'Reader' has a twofold effect: the lack of proper name deprives the character of an essential property, which makes it easier for readers to accommodate their virtual bodies in its place; moreover, to critically emphasise his function over his identity calls for an immediate and blatant superimposition of his role and that of real readers. The naming choice has significant impact on the way readers manage to maintain a deep engagement with the narrative when it comes to intercalated novels. Whenever a new storyworld is instantiated, the readers' engagement is continuous but the storyworld's organisational principle and specifics change. Being bound to an entity whose function is (partly) privileged over his individuality highlights the Reader's role as mediator and ensures a better alignment between real readers and characters of the intercalated novels.

As it is, the Reader works as both a filter and a vessel for readers to access the hypodiegetic narratives, and the text is designed to co-construct the ideal connection to enable a full narrative experience. At the outset of *Se una notte*, real readers are cued a) to identify the deictic field of the narratee with their own via the apostrophic use of *you*, and

---

[152] Among Genette's (1972/1980: 212-62) four possible temporal positions of the narrative voice with respect to the narrated matter, *Se una notte* represents a case of simultaneous narrating (218 ff.).

b) to align their virtual body with the extradiegetic narratee. Then, the extradiegetic narratee turns into (or turns out to be) the intradiegetic character of the Reader; due to the reasons discussed above, the alignment with the readers' virtual body is not broken but re-assessed, maintaining robust but flexible projection relations between interpreters and the storyworld. Real readers find themselves prompted to strongly identify with a fictionally actual body which is replicating their own position at a different level (note again the fractal-like pattern), using the storyworld of the frame as point of departure to access several hypodiegetic storyworlds. Every time a new intercalated novel begins, a deictic shift is required (Duchan et al. (eds.) 1995; Herman 2002: 271-74). I argue, however, that the entity that projects its virtual body into the hypodiegetic storyworld is not the real reader, but rather the Reader, who thus becomes an unavoidable experiential filter. It functions as a hinge joint that connects the real reader with the hypodiegetic storyworlds. It could be argued that actual readers do not access the intercalated storyworld directly (or, at least, not always in an unmediated way), but they rather access the Reader's experience of his own imaginative projection into that storyworld. For instance, when in 'Se una notte' the narrator remarks that 'tu lettore non hai potuto fare a meno di distinguermi tra la gente che scendeva dal treno' (15), the reference does not exactly match with any narrative passage the actual reader has directly read about the man leaving the train, since we "find" him at the café of the station. This means that real readers have accessed only the Reader's filtered understanding of the embedded narrative. Analogous passages are scattered throughout all of the incipits, in the form of metanarrative comments delivered by the narrating-I:

> I personaggi prendono corpo a poco a poco dall'accumularsi di particolari minuziosi e di gesti precisi, ma anche di battute, brandelli di conversazione […]. [34]

> La prima sensazione che dovrebbe trasmettere questo libro è ciò che io provo quando sento lo squillo d'un telefono, dico dovrebbe perché dubito che le parole scritte possano darne un'idea anche parziale: […]. [133]

Inasmuch as he is a fictional character eagerly compliant to the needs of the story (even too compliant: the narrating-I itself exhorts him not to passively accept what is expected of him, and indeed also his final desire to marry Ludmilla is ultimately dictated by the conventions of narrative), the Reader serves as a receptive antenna, perfectly and flexibly synchronised to adjust to each hypodiegetic narrative – he is, in other words, an ideal reader. It is thanks to the Reader's alignment to the hypodiegetic narrator of each story that real readers manage to align also their virtual body in turn. *Se una notte* could be regarded as a novel that capitalises on the various ways in which readers can experience storyworlds, and the

novel pays its homage to the array of experiences the same reader can have thanks to reading, thus making a point of the enriching power of reading.

A certain continuity of readers' engagement is also promoted by the peculiar position of the narrator (De Toni 2007; Ricci 1982). While the frame arguably maintains the same one, different narrating-Is are produced for each intercalated novel. Yet, Calvino ensures a stable connection – both among narrating-Is and between narrating-stance and recipients – by always employing the first-person narration and by ascribing to all narrating-Is the same peculiar metanarrative position. As Waugh notes, the narrating-I of *Se una notte* 'is also an "I" who talks to the characters *in* the novel, and therefore exists at the level of the story *and at* the level of discourse' (1984: 134).[153]

The irreducible ambiguity of contextual anchoring in *Se una notte* is a designed outcome, not a by-product. Furthermore, the constant re-assessment it demands of real readers forces them to question the reasons behind this ambiguity. *Se una notte*, I suggest, provides a very good case for endorsing Herman's hypothesis that 'stories not only assume a relation between text and context but sometimes work to reshape it' (2002: 336). In this light, this narrative also makes a point of how plot understanding is a moment-by-moment process that is constantly impinged by features of the text.

4.5. The space of narrative experience

In a draft for a conference presentation at Columbia University in 1983, Calvino writes:

> Un libro (io credo) è qualcosa con un principio e una fine (anche se non è un romanzo in senso stretto), è uno spazio in cui il lettore deve entrare, girare, magari perdersi, ma a un certo punto trovare un'uscita, o magari parecchie uscite, la possibilità d'aprirsi una strada per venirne fuori. [RRII 1361]

Apart from registering the striking resemblance of the excerpt with Baricco's description of the writing and reading of *City* as a joint exploration for himself and his readers ('Ci ho viaggiato per tre anni, in *City*. Il lettore, se vorrà, potrà rifare la mia strada'), one thing that comes to mind is an affinity of what expressed here with the way Calvino designs *Se una notte*'s closure. As I discussed earlier, the ending of this fractal novel comes abruptly, thanks to a fairly overt intervention of an authorial entity that suddenly takes control of the unfolding of events. What emerges is an idea of closure as something that does not ensue

---

[153] For Waugh, the purpose of confusing ontological levels and blurring the boundaries author/narrator and implied reader/reader is to break the alleged separation between an 'inventing' author and a passive reader, therefore stressing the necessary collaboration and interrelation between the two entities through the text (1984: 47). Although I concur with Waugh's analysis, I am not sure I agree with her interpretation, which is that in this way Calvino is suggesting that 'the language in this sense refers ultimately to itself' (47). In fact, Calvino stated on multiple occasions his belief in the existence of a world outside, connected to – although not perfectly representable through – language.

directly and necessarily from the narrated matter, from the content, but rather as a formal need imposed by the dynamic of narrative itself, functional to the success of the narrative experience.

The second point worth emphasising is the concept of the narrative as a space for readers to navigate and to move through. It should not take us by surprise by now, but it is still significant to pinpoint the overt references Calvino made in this direction. I would like to expand on this idea, building on the concept of readers' virtual body and on the evidence of its evocation in *Se una notte*, with the purpose of reconnecting this reflection also to the hypothesis of fractal plot. My suggestion is that making sense of *Se una notte*'s plot as fractal not only stems from the analytic elaboration of patterns of variation and repetition, but also it is reinforced by a supplementary response elicited by leveraging readers' bodily-perceptual experience. The possibility that memories of bodily-perceptual experience may impact upon higher-order meanings – i.e. plot as higher-order macrodesign (1.3) – is explicitly entertained by Caracciolo (2014a: 158). In this light, it could be argued that, starting from the assumption that fractals are primarily characterised by self-reflexivity across scales, by aligning their virtual body with the fictionalised body of the Reader's and consequently with different elements of the narrative core, by trying out different angles on similar situations, readers arguably experience such a self-reflexivity. This alignment alone would not probably justify an interpretation of the process of plot sense-making as fractal; yet, when concomitant with other elements, the overlapping of readers' virtual body and the Reader's fictionally actual body does promote such a reading.

Overall, acknowledging the importance of readers' bodily engagement allows for a deeper appreciation of the full array of narrative strategies implemented by Calvino in *Se una notte*. Moreover, it might add a point to the debate around the view that sees Calvino's as an emphatically "mind-centred" author (e.g. Hume's reading of Calvino's thought as cogito vs. cosmos). In fact, many research strands sparked from Calvino's oeuvre – i.e. the salience of desire (Bonsaver 1995) – already grant relevance to issues that are not purely mental. Rather than challenging an interpretation of Calvino as an author pre-eminently interested in the mind's workings, my contribution adds a further perspective and aims to emphasise the complexity of Calvino's reflection, which brings to the fore precisely the nature of the mind as embodied. On the one hand this study re-asserts the overarching power of Calvino's space-informed cognitive style; on the other it also shows how embodiment still crucially affects the narrative enterprise as a means to enable a shared experience between Calvino's mind and the readers' minds.

As already remarked, the space of narrative experience designates the dimension where plot emerges and it equally depends on the virtual worlds included in the storyworld

and on the reader's perspective. Whenever one of these aspects is somewhat leveraged by the narrative design, there might be interesting consequences for the space of narrative experience itself. Following the analysis carried out in the previous two subsections, I suggest that in *Se una notte* the reader's perspective exhibits complex and ambiguous features that impact on this additional virtual space. More specifically, the readers' perspective is programmatically included in the narrative via manipulations of the deictic function of *you* and engagement of readers' virtual body, which leads me to hypothesise that we could speak of fictionalisation of the space of narrative experience.

In 'Cibernetica e fantasmi', Calvino observes that in contemporary narrative writing is less a matter of telling and more a matter of telling that one is telling. If this statement is not per se unprecedented, it is instead interesting that he describes the resulting metanarrative effect with a spatial image, in terms of *literature squared* or *cubed* (SI 208). Refining the analogy, I suggest we could actually distinguish between literature squared, that is 'conventional' metanarration, and literature cubed, which defines instances of narrative such as *Se una notte* or the cosmicomical short story 'L'origine degli Uccelli'. In other words, narratives that not merely stage acts of storytelling, but specifically reach out from the written world and toward the real reader. Literature cubed, we could say, amounts to the breaking of the fourth wall in theatre, and implies the inclusion of an additional dimension. Also Santovetti (2007: 190) refers to Calvino's all experimental texts – *Le città* and *Il castello*, in addition to *Se una notte* – as 'three-dimensional mazes' (190), although she does not explain it further. It could be suggested that, in relation to *Se una notte*, the label of hypernovel conveys a sense of augmentation, not necessarily of plot ramifications, but rather of 'levels of reality' that, by being crossed and interpenetrated, gain an extra dimension and become a sort of three-dimensional space. A sense of three-dimensionality – as opposed to a simpler system of concentrically embedded narratives – is promoted by the cross-referencing practice between different levels discussed in Usher's (1990) study.[154]

What is more interesting in *Se una notte* is that the creation of an additional dimension able to accommodate readers' perspective is not simply a theoretical condition accounting for a peculiar narrative design. I describe it as 'fictionalised' because Calvino turns this emerging dimension into a subject for narration itself:

> Tutte queste linee oblique incrociandosi dovrebbero delimitare lo spazio dove ci muoviamo io e Valeriano e Irina, dove la nostra storia possa affiorare dal nulla, trovare un punto di partenza, una direzione, un disegno. [79]

---

[154] See also Calvino's 1959 definition of a novel: 'Il romanzo è *un'opera narrativa e fruibile e significante su molti piani che s'intersecano*' (SI 1525).

> Sto tirando fuori troppe storie alla volta perché quello che voglio è che intorno al racconto si senta una saturazione d'altre storie che potrei raccontare e forse racconterò o chissà che non abbia già raccontato in altra occasione, uno spazio pieno di storie che forse non è altro che il tempo della mia vita, in cui ci si può muovere in tutte le direzioni come nello spazio trovando sempre storie che per raccontarle bisognerebbe prima raccontarne delle altre, cosicché partendo da qualsiasi momento o luogo s'incontra la stessa densità di materiale da raccontare. [109]

> L'ideale sarebbe che il libro cominciasse dando il senso d'uno spazio occupato interamente dalla mia presenza, perché intorno non ci sono che oggetti inerti, compreso il telefono, uno spazio che sembra non possa contenere altro che me, isolato nel mio tempo interiore, e poi l'interrompersi della continuità del tempo, lo spazio che non è più quello di prima perché è occupato dallo squillo, e la mia presenza che non è più quella di prima perché è condizionata dalla volontà di questo oggetto che chiama. [133-4]

The spaces the narrating-I(s) directly looks at are not mimetic spaces in the proper sense of the word. Rather, they are spaces created by the movement of the narrative, co-constructed on the basis of conditions, which are fixed at the outset of each incipit according to a pattern of variation and repetition. 'Lo scrivere è un'operazione di movimento' (SII 2693), and these spaces are fictionalised renderings of the space of the narrative experience.[155] In the first quotation, for instance, there are no oblique lines physically circumscribing an actual fictional space where the characters are confined: the lines represent geometric stylisations of actions and objects (parading tanks, banners, workers demonstrating in the streets) occurring at different times. They define a standard type of setting for the multiple interactions of the protagonists, and, at the same time, they symbolise how historical and social and private events converge toward a state of affairs that should produce some crucial conditions for the life of the characters (i.e. Irina's power over Valeriano and Alex, and Alex's possible death sentence for treason). Calvino describes the proximity to the crucial events or moments as proximity to a space, and the actions or events leading toward it as trajectories, lines, that by existing create a geometric virtual space. The second quotation conveys the sense of a seething virtual multiplicity of stories pressing against the single storyline that constitutes the narrating-'s actual present. It epitomises the way in which virtuality, when foregrounded, is likely to prompt the cognitive elaboration of an additional dimension to the narrative storyworld.

Se una notte exhibits a particularly high degree of fictionalisation of the space of narrative experience. Referring to Le città, Noé (1982) argues that the images of the city, the Khan's garden, or the chessboard are in fact metaphoric representations of a 'spazio

---

[155] My hypothesis might be not too different from the point advanced by Santovetti when she argues that in *Se una notte* 'what is important is the space […] full of stories where the reader can move in all directions' (2007: 223). My chapter aims to give further credit to this analogy and to outline a theoretical framework able to justify the cognitive and fictionally virtual existence of such a space.

della mente nella cui calma ordinata tutto confluisce e si sintetizza' (92; Hume 1992: 183). I suggest though that *Se una notte* represents a step further because this space is no longer crystallised in a static image that functions as ordering grid for modular pieces of narrative; rather, the operation of narrative integration and fictionalisation is such that the space becomes a dimension which one can interact with and move through. By cuing readers to align their virtual body with the Reader's, the novel invites use for the cognitive strategy of body tour (Herman 2002: 280-1), not through the mimetic storyworld but through the space of narrative experience itself, through the space of the plot of each specific intercalated novel. As Tversky claims, 'Switching perspectives carries cognitive costs, at least for comprehension' (1996: 469): there is no doubt that the constant renewal of perspectives brought about by new incipits does initially disorient readers; yet the alignment with the Reader's virtual body (as the Reader himself accesses the embedded narratives with his own virtual body) ensures that this link – and comprehension – is never truly undermined. The fictionalisation of the virtual body contributes to ensure interpretive coherence to the overall storyworld.

It should be clear by now that spatialisation of the narrative experience and self-reflexivity do enhance each other: while self-reflexivity often brings about an additional virtual dimension, instances of spatialisation like in *City* are likely to highlight the artificiality of narrative. In this self-reflexive act, though, narrative may focus both on the storytelling process and on its own materiality. At the outset of the first incipit, the reader seems to participate in a storyworld that is a work in progress, which is construed in front of, and around, the R/reader (Segre 1979):

> sarebbe ora che ti si dicesse chiaramente se questa stazione a cui io sono sceso da un treno in ritardo è una stazione d'una volta o una stazione d'adesso; invece le frasi continuano a muoversi nell'indeterminato, nel grigio, in una specie di terra di nessuno [...]. O forse l'autore è ancora indeciso, come d'altronde anche tu lettore non sei ben sicuro di cosa ti farebbe più piacere leggere [...]. La città là fuori non ha ancora un nome, non sappiamo se resterà fuori del romanzo [...]. [13, 14]

As observed earlier (4.2.3), it is no accident that the first and the last incipit instantiate storyworlds in construction and under impeding dissolution, respectively. In other incipits, however, it is not the storyworld itself that is presented in an *in fieri* status, but it is rather the Reader who is placed below the ideal knowledge threshold – in other words, it is made clear that he should always know more than he actually does, about the storyworld in which he is immersed.

I suggest that this narrative strategy should be classified under the rubric of metalepsis, which according to Genette designates the act of 'taking hold of (telling) by

changing level' (1972/1980: 235). Indeed, the narrating-I, here, is not narrating directly the storyworld but rather the process of its co-construction operated by the reader as they read. Arguably, this metanarrative operation causes an ontological uncoupling between the reader and the storyworld s/he is immersed into: on the one hand, s/he is part of the diegesis (i.e. s/he is directly addressed by the narrating-I and their expectations and false assumptions become themselves narrative matter), on the other s/he is aware of its artificial nature in a way that is not shared by the other components of the storyworld. By putting some ontological distance between reader and storyworld, the narrative is positing a larger space that should accommodate at least these two ontologically different entities.

Another feature of this process of metaleptic construction concerns the awareness of its materiality, that is the fact that the narrator does not conceal that the storyworld is firstly construed through an act of writing (nor that it is then re-constructed via an act of reading – Bonsaver 1995: 160):

> uno sfiatare di stantuffo copre l'apertura del capitolo, una nuvola di fumo nasconde parte del primo capoverso. […]
>   Un fischio come di locomotiva e un getto di vapore si levano dalla macchina del caffè che il vecchio barista mette sotto pressione come se lanciasse un segnale, o almeno così sembra dalla successione delle frasi del secondo capoverso […]. [11]

Similar instances are regularly scattered all over the intercalated novels (e.g. 'Un odore di fritto aleggia ad apertura di pagina', 33; 'Anche il racconto deve sforzarsi di tenerci dietro, di riferire un dialogo costruito sul vuoto', 83; 'il mondo è ridotto a un foglio di carta dove non si riescono a scrivere altro che parole astratte, come se tutti i nomi concreti fossero finiti', 254). Usher (1996: 192) describes this as an 'interpenetration of plot and page', which is quite an original feature if one considers that it is carried out throughout the whole novel. As an isolated device, though, it is not totally new for Calvino, who adopts it already in the cosmicomical tale 'Il conte di Montecristo' and 'L'origine degli Uccelli' (both in *Ti con zero*, 1967). Bonsaver (1995: 65) notes that 'il tessuto "vero", tipografico, della scrittura' is emphasised for the first time in *Il barone*: 'Quel frastaglio di rami e foglie […] era un ricamo fatto sul nulla che assomiglia a questo filo d'inchiostro, come l'ho lasciato correre per pagine e pagine, zeppo di cancellature, di rimandi, di sgorbi nervosi, di macchie, di lacune' (RRI 776-7). The significant turning point though is marked by *Il cavaliere*, which presents some authentically metanarrative parts: here, not only the theme of writing is central, but through the character of Suor Teodora/Bradamante the suspension of disbelief is fully (if temporarily) broken.

In *Se una notte* the situation is slightly more complex, and not just because the strategy is spread over a longer narrative. Calvino does not merely refer to writing as linguistic and material vessel that cues the co-construction of the mental model of the storyworld; the two levels – that of material signs and that of the mental images they prompt – interact with each other. The hypothesis advanced earlier might thus provide a plausible explanation to this phenomenon, too: arguably, real readers access the hypodiegetic narratives not in an unmediated way, but via the narrative experience of the Reader.[156] Material features of the narrative are presented to real readers as themselves mental images of the page, with its ink and written words ('uno spessore di piombo fitto e opaco', 15), and as such they can interact – and interfere – with the mental images of the storyworld as they are re-constructed by the Reader.

In this fundamental ambiguity, perhaps, is grounded the illusionistic element identified by Segre (1979: 203). I already quoted in full the passage where the scholar points at the interrelations between frame and intercalated novel, describing Calvino's attempt to seemingly erase discontinuities between what is internal and what is external to the storyworlds. I would like to link this effect and its 'illusionistic' properties with a particular spatial image of the Moebius strip, that is a 'one sided, one edged, nonorientable surface with boundary' (A. Ryan 2007: 71). Even though the Moebius strip is evoked by Calvo Montoro (2008) to study the structure of *Le città*, I believe the image could be interesting also in relation to *Se una notte*. Building on a suggestion by Varese (1973), Calvo Montoro attempts to arrange 'la loro [delle città] serialità sulla superficie di un nastro di Moebius come figura utile a spiegare la formula «immanente e discontinua» e «gli altri discorsi convergenti e divergenti» usati da Calvino per veicolare dal primo momento la ricezione del libro' (2008: 73). It is likely that Calvino was acquainted with the Moebius figure: he was a reader of *Scientific American* and probably met the model via Martin Gardner's first introduction of the concept in 1968 (e.g. *Mathematical Puzzles and Diversions*) or in the 'Mathematical Games' section of the journal; moreover, in April 1972 the Oulipian author Luc Ètienne presented in Paris some 'models of moebiusation'. Calvo Montoro claims that the features of a Moebius strip which may bear on the conceptual structuring of *Se una notte* (even more than *Le città*) are 'la paradossale bipolarità, il valore di sterminatezza nel tempo e nello spazio, nonché il carattere topologico, la sua necessaria visualizzazione', and circularity (2008: 75, 77). Although Calvino's re-adaptations of mathematical models and processes – from the Moebius strip to fractals – might not serve as rigidly inescapable

---

[156] This would be the case also in the first incipit, even though the character of the Reader has not been introduced yet by that point. This is why the first incipit is more disorientating and presents a bigger cognitive challenge to real readers.

structuring principles, it is still meaningful to assess the doubtless analogies between these models and processes and his narratives.

$$* * *$$

In this chapter I investigated Calvino 1979 novel *Se una notte*, claiming that its plot is designed and may be apprehended as a fractal. Or better, I suggest that the concept of fractality effectively renders the way interpreters are invited to make sense of the novel's plot as they read it. I am not arguing that the fractal was the image Calvino intentionally and univocally had in mind in designing *Se una notte*: rather, that the fractal seems to meet most of the constraints and underlying values that Calvino attempted to comply with in the novel. Among other properties, for instance, the fractal adequately expresses the Calvinian principle that complexity should be conveyed through multiplicity, as a constellation of infinite approximations (Milanini 1994); it endorses heterogeneity as a value, provided that it is also framed within an ordered (if provisional) consistent unity; further, fractality constitutionally includes a dynamics of repetition and variation, which is typifying of Calvino's whole oeuvre and which any scholar working on the author's text has to confront. If *Se una notte* lends itself as a suitable case study for an investigation of plot as bearing spatial properties, the elements I foreground are not isolated instances. In fact, they often are either the result of a life-long technical and critical research on Calvino's part, or traits that actually recur – perhaps under different vests – also in previous works. My argumentative effort, thus, aims to illustrate that they usually stem from Calvino's specifically cognitive style, sometimes as indirect consequences of his critical or philosophical stances.

Conclusions

This study was sparked by a dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of current definitions of plot. Mostly action-based as they are, extant plot theories offer few parsing instruments to grasp the peculiarity of narratives that do not predominantly rely on the principles of causality and temporality to ensure coherence. With the purpose of addressing this significant lacuna, the case studies I explored make a case for spatiality as a potential alternative organising principle for narrative. On the one hand, spatiality can impact on the narrative structure and on the mimetic content at a semantic level. On the other hand – and more interestingly for my thesis – spatiality plays a crucial role in relation to the types of knowledge and the sense-making strategies that readers are prompted to call for, as part of the process of narrative understanding during reading. In other words, some narratives are designed in a way such that readers are encouraged to comprehend them by drawing on strategies originally developed through their experience of space.

In fact, the case studies hereby illustrated are particularly effective because they rely on spatiality to such an extent that they cue readers into conceiving the narratives' plots as spaces themselves. The image schemata of map, trajectory, and fractal capture the specific ways in which readers are invited to organise the narrative information as they take it in. My underlying claim, therefore, is that spatiality critically impacts on the form and processes of abstract thought – like plot understanding –, rather than being limited to issues concerning mimetic setting. The novel *City* by Baricco has been explored an as example of narrative that invites readers to understand its plot as a (dynamically) static space, to be made sense of in the same way individuals set out to explore a given territory. Conventional crime fiction narratives and Camilleri's *Montalbano* series are characterised by plots which ought to be explored as a means to reach a goal, and therefore, compared to the first type of narratives, they are more target-oriented and forward-driven: the goal to which crime plots tend is the outcome of the investigation, which consists in a specific configuration of states of affairs and agents' intentions. Again, one should be reminded that whether the achievement of this goal is successful or not does not impinge on the expectations and comprehension strategies implemented by readers, who still strive toward it as they make sense of the plot in its unfolding. Finally, Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* stands out as a narrative whose material is arranged according to an

order that is expressed by the figure of the fractal as epitome of complex patterns of repetition and variation.

In this study, I demonstrated how a focus on spatiality serves to illuminate aspects of these narratives that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. The new features that this approach helped emphasise have been subsequently built on in each chapter to elaborate new interpretations of the text (as in the case of Baricco); to highlight the specificities of an author's narrative style as well as to better describe the conventional comprehension procedures prompted by a particular genre (as in the case of Camilleri and crime fiction respectively); to draw innovative connections between works by the same author and to hypothesise unprecedented patterns operating below the surface of some narratives (as in the case of Calvino). Moreover, this work showed how the focus on reception and the view of narrative as production and co-construction of storyworlds may unveil new textual patterns, in addition to offering alternative interpretations.

The purpose of this study was to open up a path in narrative theory by providing evidence in support of a still-to-be outlined approach to narrative understanding crucially hinging upon spatiality. In order to do so, I explored three case studies and demonstrated how the focus on spatiality and on the process of narrative understanding added on the scholarship on each author or text. At the same time, I suggested alternative frameworks and concepts for narrative analysis, made available by a perspective that foregrounds the embodied mind and the activity of narrative understanding as a mental process textually encoded and yet not necessarily propositional in nature. Although the use of these theoretical and analytical tools (e.g. contextual-frame shift theory, possible-worlds theory, concepts such as storyworlds and readers' virtual body) has been initially tailored on the specificities of my case studies, the study of their theoretical groundings and reasons for applicability not only sought to justify their employment with regard to these case studies specifically, but also to show how these frameworks and concepts constitute the scaffoldings of a coherent and integrated approach to narrative understanding that could be potentially used to explore other works.

This thesis, therefore, built on the three case studies along two main and interrelated directions. First, I intended to preliminarily isolate a set of narrative features that are likely to endorse a spatial narrative understanding and can thus function as signs of or criteria for assessing the productive applicability of an approach focused on spatiality. The criteria that emerged from my analysis include: (a) the engagement of virtuality; (b) the semantic references to spatiality; (c) the embodiment of comprehension strategies; (d) self-reflexivity; (e) the fictionalisation of the reader's virtual body. Baricco's, Camilleri's and Calvino's works all exhibit and implement these characteristics at various degrees and in various ways. As they are differently combined and framed within a variety of authorial contexts, the same features can

lead to quite different reading effects – as epitomised by the three image schemata. Although these might not be sufficient criteria for applying a spatially-oriented approach, it seems reasonable to argue that, if a text presents several of these features combined, this could be taken as an indicator of a pre-eminent role played by spatiality, and encourage the critic to further investigate it under this new light.

Secondly and in relation to the task of isolating applicability criteria, this study sought to pave the way for the design of a flexible yet better defined spatially-oriented approach to narrative understanding. This would primarily entail the outline of the theoretical principles and premises on which such an approach ought to be based; in a second phase, it would require a more in-depth and systematic discussion of the frameworks and models that enable the shift from a theoretical exploration to the elaboration of effective analytical tools to be employed in the interpretive practice of narrative works. As to the bases of a spatially-oriented approach, the present thesis clarifies that it ought to be rooted in a non-propositional view of thought and in a notion of the mind as embodied. These two principles represent the theoretical pillars of such an approach because, on the one hand, they usher in a way of working on narrative understanding that is textually and verbally encoded yet also crucially factors in the reader's world knowledge; on the other, they bring the embodied nature of human thought to the forefront and therefore prepare the ground for a cognitive study of human strategies of plot understanding that are also influenced by the strategies that the body has developed to make sense of the space around it. As far as a systematic outline of the frameworks involved in a spatially-oriented approach is concerned, this work, albeit not exhaustive nor definitive, still takes some initial productive steps. From the research carried out so far, it emerges that possible-worlds theory and an enactivist view of narrative understanding are rather fruitful models on which a spatially-oriented approach could rely. They provide the necessary conceptual and analytical instruments, together with a philosophically well-grounded theoretical background, to explore two crucial ways in which spatiality impacts on the narrative: the involvement of virtuality in all its various forms (counterfactuality, potentiality, absence), and the active engagement of the reader and her virtual body during the process of co-construction of the storyworld.

Narrative theory cannot be developed in a void, outside of a dialogue with actual narrative works. Yet, attempts toward a systematisation of comprehension practices and their underlying dynamics sometimes give illuminating insights into innovative patterns that may emerge from a specific text or link together previously unrelated works. This study makes a contribution to narrative studies and literary criticism alike. By offering a fresh perspective on the narrative works of Baricco, Camilleri, and Calvino, it also aims to explore the hypothesis of a new spatially-oriented theoretical approach to narrative understanding, thus opening up a

fascinating path for future research in both fields. Indeed, there is much scope for further work to be carried out in both directions. The investigation of additional case studies would ascertain the applicability of the set of analytical features pinpointed in this study, thus confirming and/or refining their representativeness and effectiveness in the individuation of spatially-oriented plots. Moreover, although this work aimed to individuate plot types in order to draw more general critical guiding lines to be applied to other narratives, as far as literary criticism is concerned it is my impression that a spatially-oriented approach would have the most innovative outcomes in the elaboration of new readings of specific works and authors' oeuvres – rather than in the definition of literary or narrative macro-categories. At the same time, it would be interesting to proceed with the theoretical articulation of the spatially-oriented approach advanced in this thesis, by expanding and organising a comprehensive range of models and frameworks to be applied in a flexible way to different narratives. Such an approach would include a set of analytical and conceptual tools that scholars could consult and employ whenever they wish to adopt a spatially-oriented critical perspective. In addition to endowing literary critics with new analytical power, this theoretical model would also interestingly contribute to the exploration of our cognitive practices as readers, and provide scientific scholarship with invaluable insights into the thinking strategies and processes prompted by artefacts as chronologically and culturally ubiquitous as narratives.

Appendices

[1] <u>Occurrences of images of void</u> ('vuoto', 'nulla'):

Andava alla stazione, partiva. Con la valigia vuota, appena comprata. [22 (incipit)]

[…] questo senso di concretezza che tu hai colto dalle prime righe porta in sé anche il senso della perdita, la vertigine della dissoluzione; e anche questo ti rendi conto di averlo avvertito, […] che a dir la verità tutto ti sfuggiva tra le dita […]. [35 (incipit)]

  […] Gli occhi senza ciglia del signor Kauderer restavano fissi nel vuoto; [39 (incipit)]

[…] occhi di chi si prepara a saltare al di là d'un precipizio e si proietta mentalmente sull'altra sponda fissando davanti a sé ed evitando di guardare in basso e ai lati. [48 (frame)]

Ho provato un senso di vertigine, come non facessi che precipitare da un mondo all'altro [55 (incipit)]

[…] forse inghiottito dal baratro vuoto della brusca interruzione del romanzo. [69 (frame)]

– Il vuoto, il vuoto, là sotto, – diceva, – aiuto, la vertigine…
[…] In un turbamento che dura un istante, mi pare di stare sentendo quel che lei sente: che ogni vuoto continua nel vuoto, ogni strapiombo anche minimo dà su un altro strapiombo, ogni voragine sbocca nell'abisso infinito. […] Forse è questo racconto che è un ponte sul vuoto […]. Mi faccio largo nella profusione di dettagli che coprono il vuoto di cui non voglio accorgermi e avanzo di slancio […]. Anche il racconto deve sforzarsi di tenerci dietro, di riferire un dialogo costruito sul vuoto, sotto ogni parola c'è il nulla. [81, 82, 83 (incipit)]

– Una casa editrice è un organismo fragile, caro signore, – dice, – basta che in un punto qualsiasi qualcosa vada fuori posto e il disordine s'estende, il caos s'apre sotto i nostri piedi. Scusi, sa?, quando ci penso mi vengono le vertigini –. [98 (frame)]

[…] ma laggiù era ancora oscurità fitta e potevo distinguere appena quella macchia irregolare che era diventato Jojo dopo aver ruotato nel vuoto coi lembi della giacca rovesciati come ali […].
  – Cosa porti in quel sacco? Fa' vedere, – dice il più grosso dei tre.
  – Guarda. È vuoto, – dico, calmo. [114 (incipit)]

Tutto sembra deserto, vuoto. [136 (incipit)]

Le cornici sono una diversa dall'altra, forme dell'Ottocento floreale, in argento, rame, smalto, tartaruga, pelle, legno intagliato: potrebbero rispondere all'intenzione di valorizzare quei frammenti di vita vissuta ma potrebbero essere anche una collezione di cornici e le foto stare lì solo per riempirle, tant'è vero che alcune cornici sono occupate da figure ritagliate da giornali, una inquadra un foglio d'una vecchia lettera illeggibile, un'altra è vuota.

Sul resto della parete non è appeso nulla né vi è appoggiato alcun mobile. Così è un po' tutta la casa: pareti qua nude e là stracariche, come per un bisogno di concentrare i segni in una specie di fitta scrittura e intorno il vuoto dove ritrovare riposo e respiro. [145 (frame)]

[…] Ci dovrebbe essere anche Irnerio ma la sua poltrona è vuota. [153 (frame)]

Le società da me presiedute consistono in sigle senza nulla dietro e le loro sedi in saloni vuoti intercambiabili; [164 (incipit)]

Forse la donna che osservo col cannocchiale *sa* quello che dovrei scrivere; ossia *non lo sa*, perché appunto aspetta da me che io scriva quel che *non sa*; ma ciò che lei sa con certezza è la sua attesa, quel vuoto che le mie parole dovrebbero riempire. [171 (frame)]

[…] Ma ora che lo guarda scrivere, sente che quest'uomo sta lottando contro qualcosa d'oscuro, un groviglio, una strada da scavare che non si sa dove porta; alle volte gli sembra di vederlo camminare su una corda sospesa sul vuoto e si sente preso da un sentimento d'ammirazione. [173-4 (frame)]

[…] La facilità dell'entrata in un altro mondo è un'illusione: ci si slancia a scrivere precorrendo la felicità d'una futura lettura e il vuoto s'apre sulla carta bianca. [176-7 (frame)]

[…] nella contemplazione della pioggia di foglie il fatto fondamentale non era tanto la percezione d'ognuna delle foglie quanto la distanza tra una foglia e l'altra, l'aria vuota che le separava. Ciò che mi sembrava d'aver capito era questo: l'assenza di sensazioni su una larga parte del campo percettivo è la condizione necessaria perché la sensibilità di concentri localmente e temporalmente, così come nella musica il silenzio di fondo è necessario perché su di esso di distacchino le note. [202 (incipit)]

Volare è il contrario del viaggio: attraversi una discontinuità dello spazio, sparisci nel vuoto, accetti di non essere in nessun luogo per una durata che è anch'essa una specie di vuoto nel tempo; […] Intanto cosa fai? Come occupi quest'assenza tua dal mondo e del mondo da te? Leggi; non stacchi l'occhio dal libro da un aeroporto all'altro, perché al di là della pagina c'è il vuoto, l'anonimato degli scali aerei, […]. [211 (frame)]

[Incipit's title: *Intorno a una fossa vuota*] Il racconto dovrebbe dare il senso di spaesamento dei luoghi che vedo per la prima volta ma anche di luoghi che hanno lasciato nella memoria non un ricordo ma un vuoto. Ora le immagini tentano di rioccupare questi vuoti ma non ottengono altro che di tingersi anch'esse del colore dei sogni dimenticati nell'istante in cui appaiono. [226-7 (incipit)]

[…] Ma Faustino non c'era, la sua tomba era vuota. [234 (incipit)]

Quanto a lui, invece, voleva dimostrarle che dietro la pagina scritta c'è il nulla; il mondo esiste solo come artificio, finzione, malinteso, menzogna. [242 (frame)]

Basta che resti uno strato di crosta terrestre abbastanza solida sotto i piedi e il vuoto da tutte le altre parti. […] Eccomi dunque a percorrere questa superficie vuota che è il mondo. [250-1 (incipit)]

[…] intorno è il vuoto è sempre più vuoto, […] il mondo che io credevo cancellato da una decisione della mia mente che potevo revocare in qualsiasi momento, era finito davvero. [252 (incipit)]

[…] Sul suolo che mi separa da Franziska vedo aprirsi delle fessure, dei solchi, dei crepacci; […] questi interstizi si allargano, presto tra me e Franziska si frapporrà un burrone, un abisso! Salto da una sponda all'altra, e in basso non vedo alcun fondo ma solo il nulla che continua giù all'infinito; corro su pezzi di mondo sparpagliati nel vuoto; il mondo si sta sgretolando… [254 (incipit)]

O meglio: l'oggetto della lettura è una materia puntiforme e pulviscolare. […] Sono come le particelle elementari che compongono il nucleo dell'opera, attorno al quale ruota tutto il resto. Oppure come il vuoto al fondo d'un vortice, che aspira e inghiotte le correnti. [256 (frame)]

[2] Ludmilla's desires:

– Un po' troppo sfocato come modo di raccontare, per i miei gusti. A me il senso di smarrimento che dà un romanzo quando si comincia a leggerlo non dispiace affatto, ma se il primo effetto è quello della nebbia, temo che appena la nebbia si dirada anche il mio piacere di leggere si perda. [ch. 2, 29 – referring retrospectively to 'Se una notte']

– Preferisco i romanzi, – aggiunge lei, – che mi fanno entrare subito in un mondo dove ogni cosa è precisa, concreta, ben specificata. Mi dà una soddisfazione speciale sapere che le cose sono fatte in quel determinato modo e non altrimenti, anche le cose qualsiasi che nella vita mi sembrano indifferenti. [ch. 2, 29-30]

Però io vorrei che le cose che leggo non fossero tutte lì, massicce da portele toccare, ma ci si senta intorno la presenza di qualcos'altro che ancora non si sa cos'è, il segno di non so cosa… [ch. 3, 45]

Il libro che ora avrei voglia di leggere è un romanzo in cui si senta la storia che arriva, come un tuono ancora confuso, la storia quella storica insieme al destino delle persone, un romanzo che dia il senso di stare vivendo uno sconvolgimento che ancora non ha un nome, non ha preso forma… [ch. 4, 71-2]

– Il romanzo che più vorrei leggere in questo momento, – spiega Ludmilla, – dovrebbe avere come forza motrice solo la voglia di raccontare, d'accumulare storie su storie, senza pretendere d'importi una visione del mondo, ma solo di farti assistere alla propria crescita, come una pianta, un aggrovigliarsi come di rami e di foglie… [ch. 5, 92]

– I romanzi che preferisco, – dice, – sono quelli che comunicano un senso di disagio fin dalla prima pagina… [ch. 6, 126]

– A me, – dice, – piacciono i libri in cui tutti i misteri e le angosce passano attraverso la mente esatta e fredda e senza ombre come quella d'un giocatore di scacchi. [ch. 7, 157]

– I romanzi che m'attirano di più, – ha detto Ludmilla, – sono quelli che creano un'illusione di trasparenza intorno a un nodo di rapporti umani che è quanto di più oscuro, crudele e perverso. [ch. 8, 192]

([…] – Mia sorella dice sempre che ama i romanzi in cui si sente una forza elementare, primordiale, tellurica. Dice proprio così: tellurica). [ch. 9, 217]

– Il libro che cerco, – dice la figura sfumata che protende anche lei un volume simile al tuo, – è quello che dà un senso del mondo dopo la fine del mondo, il senso che il mondo è la fine di tutto ciò che c'è al mondo, che la sola cosa che ci sia al mondo è la fine del mondo. [ch. 10, 245]

Bibliography

Primary bibliography

Baricco Alessandro (2006) Cari critici, ho diritto a una vera stroncatura. *La Repubblica*, 1st March
_____ (2006/2008) *I barbari. Saggio sulla mutazione*. Roma: Fandango. New ed. Milano:
Feltrinelli (originally published as a series of articles in the newspaper *La Repubblica* between
12th May and 21st October 2006)
_____ (1999) *City*. Milano: Rizzoli
_____ (1993) *Oceano mare*. Milano: Rizzoli
_____ (1991) *Castelli di rabbia*. Milano: Feltrinelli
Calvino Italo (2000) *Lettere. 1940-1985*. Barenelli Luca (ed.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori
_____ (1995) *Saggi. 1945-1985*. Barenghi Mario (ed.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, 2 voll.
_____ (1991) *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani
Mondadori, 3 voll.
_____ (1984) Comment j'ai écrit un de mes livres. *Actes sémiotique – Documents* vi (51). (1987)
Nuova Corrente 34 (99): 10-28
_____ (1981/1986) Prose and Anticombinatorics. In Motte Warren F. Jr (ed.) *Oulipo. A Primer
of Potential Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 143-52 [(1981) Prose et
anticombinatoire. In *Atlas de littérature potentielle*. Paris: Gallimard, 319-31]
_____ (1979a) *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. Torino: Einaudi
_____ (1979b) Se una notte d'inverno un narratore. *Alfabeta* 1 (8): 4-5
Camilleri Andrea (2016) *L'altro capo del filo*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2015) *La giostra degli scambi*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2012) *Una lama di luce*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2010) *Il gioco degli specchi*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2009) Montalbano. Strategia seriale. In *Ancora tre indagini per il commissario Montalbano*.
Palermo: Sellerio, http://www.vigata.org/bibliografia/ancora3.shtml [viewed on 15th January
2016]
_____ (2007) *La pista di sabbia*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2002) *La paura di Montalbano*. Milano: Mondadori
_____ (2000a) *La gita a Tindari*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (2000b) *Biografia del figlio cambiato*. Milano: Rizzoli
_____ (1999) *Gli arancini di Montalbano*. Milano: Mondadori
_____ (1998) *Un mese con Montalbano*. Milano: Mondadori
_____ (1997) *La voce del violino*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (1996a) *Il ladro di merendine*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (1996b) *Il cane di terracotta*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (1995) *Il gioco della mosca*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (1994) *La forma dell'acqua*. Palermo: Sellerio
_____ (1980) *Un filo di fumo*. Milano: Garzanti

Secondary bibliography

Abbott Edwin A. (1884) *Flatland*. London: Seeley & Co.

Abbott H. Porter (2011) Narrativity. In Hühn Peter et al. (eds.) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.unihamburg.de/article/narrativity [viewed on 23rd April 2015]

_____ (2007) Story, Plot, and Narration. In Herman David (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 39-51

Adler Hans, Gross Sabine (2002) Adjusting the Frame: Comments on Cognitivism and Literature. *Poetics Today* 23 (2): 195-220

Alber Jan, Fludernik Monica (2010) *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press

Allen Walter (1954) *The English Novel*. New York: Dutton

Almansi Guido (1971) Il mondo binario di Italo Calvino. *Paragone* 22 (258): 95-110

Amendola Giandomenico (1997) *La città postmoderna. Magie e paure della metropolis contemporanea*. Bari: Laterza

Antonello Pierpaolo (2004) The Myth of Science or the Science of Myth? Italo Calvino and the 'Hard Core of Being'. *Italian Culture* 22 (1): 71-91

Aragona Raffaele (2008) Calvino e il potenziale. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 11-7

Asor Rosa Alberto (2001) *Stile Calvino*. Torino: Einaudi

Augé Marc (2000) *Disneyland e altri nonluoghi*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri

_____ (1995) *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Transl. Howe John, London: Verso

Baetens Jan (2012) Oulipo and Proceduralism. In Bray Joe, Gibbons Alison, McHale Brian (2012) *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Abington Oxon: Routledge, 115-27

Bakhtin Mikhail Mikhailovic (1937/1981) *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Transl. Holquist Michael, Emerson Carl (1981) Austin: University of Texas Press

Bal Mieke (1997) *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

_____ (1981) Notes on Narrative Embedding. *Poetics Today* 2 (2): 41-61

Barenghi Mario (2007) *Italo Calvino, le linee e i margini*. Bologna: Il Mulino

_____ (1995) Introduzione. In *Saggi. 1945-1985*. Barenghi Mario (ed.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. I, ix-lxxiii

_____ (1991a) Poesie e invenzioni oulipiennes. Note e notizie sui testi. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. III, 1239-1245

_____ (1991b) Il castello dei destini incrociati. Note e notizie sui testi. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. II, 1366-80

Baroni Raphaël (2011) Tellability. In Hühn Peter et al. (eds.) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.unihamburg.de/article/narrativity [viewed on 5th October 2016]

Barry Jackson G. (1990) Narratology's Centrifugal Force: A Literary Perspective on the Extensions of Narrative Theory. *Poetics Today* 11 (2): 295-307

Barth John (1980/1984) The Literature of Replenishment. In *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 193-206

_____ (1967/1984) The Literature of Exhaustion. In *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 62-76

Barthes Roland (1966/1975) Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits. *Communication* 8. Transl. Duisit Lionel (1975). An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative. *New Literary History* 6: 237-62

_____ (1966/1989) *Le Plaisir du Texte*. Paris: Seuil. Transl. Miller Richard (1989) *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Noonday Press

Bartlett Frederick (1932) *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Beaudouin Valérie (2008) Incontro tra due iper-romanzi: *Se una notte d'inverno* e i *Voyage d'hiver*. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 63-71

Beckwith Marc (1987) Italo Calvino and the Nature of Italian Folktales. *Italica* 64 (2): 244-62

Bell Ian A. (2003) Eighteenth-century Crime Writing. In Priestman Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7-18

Bellavia Elisa (2001) La lingua di Alessandro Baricco. *Otto-Novecento* 25: 135-168

Belpoliti Marco (1996) *L'occhio di Calvino*. Torino: Einaudi

Bénabou Marcel (2008) L'Oulipo tra Francia e Italia: l'esempio Calvino. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 19-31

Berardinelli Alfonso (1991) Calvino moralista. Ovvero restare sani dopo la fine del mondo. *Diario* vii (9)

Berardinelli Alfonso, Ferroni Giulio, La Porta Filippo, Onofri Massimo (2006) *Sul banco dei cattivi. A proposito di Baricco e di altri scrittori alla moda*. Roma: Donzelli Editore

Bernaerts Lars, De Geest Dirk, Herman Luc, Vervaeck Bart (2013) *Stories and Minds: Cognitive Approaches to Literary Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

Berselli Edmondo (2006) Il caso Baricco, i libri e la critica come nasce un best seller. *La Repubblica*, 3rd March

Berressem Hanjo (2015) 'Secret Integrations': Leibniz, Mathematics, and Literature. *Anglia* 133 (1): 105-24

Bertoni Clotilde (1998) Ritorno all'intreccio. *Inchiesta letteratura* xxviii (119)

Bertoni Roberto (1993) *Int'abrigu int'ubagu. Discorso su alcuni aspetti dell'opera di Italo Calvino*. Torino: Tirrenia

Bjornson Richard (1981) Cognitive Mapping and the Understanding of Narrative. *SubStance* 10 (1): 51-52

Black Max (1937) Vagueness: An Exercise in Logical Analysis. *Philosophy of Science* 4: 427-55

Blackmore Susan, Brelstaff Gavin, Nelson Kay, Troscianko Tom (1995) Is the richness of our visual world an illusion? Transsaccadic memory for complex scenes. *Perception* 24 (9): 1075-81

Bonina Gianni (2007) *Il carico da undici*. Siena: Barbera Editore

Bonsaver Guido (2001) La carne, la morte, il chewing gum nella narrativa di Baricco. *Nuova Prosa* 28: 121-29

_____ (1995) *Il mondo scritto: forme e ideologia nella narrativa di Italo Calvino*. Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori

_____ (1994) Il Calvino 'semiotico': dalla crisi del romanzo naturalistico all'opera come macrotesto. *The Italianist* 14 (1): 160-9

Bordwell David (1985) *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: University of Winsconsin Press

Borsellino Nino (2004) Teatri siciliani della storia. Da Sciascia a Camilleri. In Buttitta Antonino (ed.) *Il caso Camilleri. Letteratura e storia*. Palermo: Sellerio, 48-53

_____ (2002) Camilleri gran tragediatore. In Novelli Mauro (ed.) *Storie di Montalbano*. Milan: Mondadori, x-lvii

Boselli Mario (1979) Italo Calvino: l'immaginazione logica. *Nuova corrente* 26 (78): 137-50

Botta Anna (1997) Calvino and the Oulipo: An Italian Ghost in the Combinatory Machine? *MLN* 112 (1): 81-9

Braffort Paul (2008) Italo Calvino o il guerriero rigoroso. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 55-61

Bremond Claude (1973) *Logique du récit*. Paris: Seuil

_____ (1966/1980) La Logique des possible narratifs. *Communications* 8: 60-76. Transl. Cancalon D. Elaine (1980) The Logic of Narrative Possibilities. *New Literary History* 11 (3): 387-411

Brooks Peter (1984) *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Brown Alistair (2015) Communication Technology and Narrative: Letters, Instant Messaging, and Mobile Phones in Three Romantic Novels. *Poetics Today* 36 (1-2): 33-58

Brown Gillian, Yule George (1983) *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bruner Jerome (1991) The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1): 1-21

Bucciantini Massimo (2006) *Italo Calvino e la scienza. Gli alfabeti del mondo*. Roma: Donzelli editore

Bunge Mario (2004) Clarifying some Misunderstandings About Social Systems and their Mechanisms. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34 (3): 371-81

Buttitta Antonino (ed. 2004) *Il caso Camilleri. Letteratura e storia*. Palermo: Sellerio

Butor Michel (1957) *La modification*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit

Cairns Helen Smith, Cowart Wayne, Jablon Ann D. (1981) Effects of prior context upon the integration of lexical information during sentence processing. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 20: 445-53

Calabrese Stefano (2013) Neurogenesi del controfattuale. *Enthymema* 8: 96-109

Calabrò Antonio (2004) L'identità siciliana e la lezione di Camilleri. In Buttitta Antonino (ed.) *Il caso Camilleri. Letteratura e storia*. Palermo: Sellerio, 31-41

Calvo Montoro Marìa J. (2008) *Le città invisibili*: prosa con metamorfosi per il nastro di Möbius. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 73-87

Camps Assumpta (2000) Principio senza fine: l'iper-romanzo di Italo Calvino. *Annali d'Italianistica* 18: 309-26

Candel Bormann Daniel (2016) Possible Worlds in the History of the Novel. *Poetics Today* 37 (1): 107-36

Cannon JoAnn (1989) *Postmodern Italian Fiction: The Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Eco, Sciascia, Malerba*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press

⎯⎯⎯⎯ (1979) Literature as Combinatory Game: Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 21 (1): 83-92

Capecchi Giovanni (2000) *Andrea Camilleri*. Fiesole: Cadmo

Capozzi Rocco (1988) Mitopoiesi come ripetizione e differenza: *Cosmicomiche vecchie* e *nuove*. *Studi novecenteschi* 15 (35): 155-71

Capoferro Riccardo (2006) *Le città invisibili*. Lo spazio urbano come modello di conoscenza. *Fictions* 5: 41-48

Caracciolo Marco (2014a) *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Berlin: De Gruyter

⎯⎯⎯⎯ (2014b) Tell-Tale Rhythms: Embodiment and Narrative Discourse. *StoryWorlds. A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6 (2): 49-73

⎯⎯⎯⎯ (2011) The Reader's Virtual Body: Narrative Space and its Reconstruction. *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 3: 117-38

Carloni Massimo (1994) *L'Italia in giallo. Geografia e storia del giallo italiano contemporaneo*. Reggio Emilia: Diabasis

Casadei Alberto (2007) *Stile e tradizione nel romanzo italiano contemporaneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino

⎯⎯⎯⎯ (2002) 1994: i destini incrociati del romanzo italiano. *Italianistica* 2/3: 269-76

Cavallaro Dani (2010) *The Mind of Italo Calvino*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co.

Cawelti John G. (1976) *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Chambers Ross (1984) *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Chatman Seymour (1978) *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Chettiparamb Angelique (2014) Complexity Theory and Planning: Examining 'Fractals' for Organising Policy Domains in Planning Pratice. *Planning Theory* 13 (1): 5-25

⎯⎯⎯⎯ (2005) Fractal Spaces in Planning and Governance. *Town Planning Review* 76 (3): 317-40

Chilton Paul (2014) *Language, Space and Mind: The Conceptual Geometry of Linguistic Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Christensson Per (2006) Hypertext definition. http://techterms.com [viewed on 16th October 2016]

Citati Pietro (1959) I racconti di Calvino. *Il punto*, 7th February

Clark Andy (2001) *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*. Cambridge: MIT Press

Clark Andy, Chalmers David (1998) The Extended Mind. *Analysis* 58 (1): 7-19

Clausi Maurizio, Leone Davide, Lo Bocchiaro Giuseppe, Pancucci Amarù Alice, Ragusa Daniela (2007) *I luoghi di Montalbano. Una guida*. Palermo: Sellerio

Coccia Andrea (2014) É tornato Alessandro Baricco, re del Midcult. *Linkiesta*, http://www.linkiesta.it/it/article/2014/ 11/07/e-tornato-alessandro-baricco-re-del-midcult/23432/ [viewed on 23rd January 2015]

Cohn Dorrit (2012) Metalepsis and Mise En Abyme. *Narrative* 20 (1): 105-14

_____ (1990) Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective. *Poetics Today* 11 (4): 775-804

Corti Maria (1978) Trittico per Calvino. In *Il viaggio testuale*. Torino: Einaudi – Including: Il gioco dei tarocchi come creazione di intrecci, 169-84; Testi o macrotesti? I racconti di Marcovaldo, 185-200; Un modello per tre testi: le tre «Panchine» di Italo Calvino, 201-20

Cremante Renzo, Rambelli Loris (1980) *Teoria e analisi del racconto poliziesco*. Parma: Pratiche editrici

Culler Jonathan (1975) Defining Narrative Units. In Fowler (ed.) *Style and Structure in Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 123-42

D'Eramo Luce (1979) *Il Manifesto*, 16 September

Dannenberg Hilary (2008) *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press

_____ (2005a) Plot. In Herman David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge, 435-39

_____ (2005b) Plot Types. In Herman David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge, 439-40

Davis Nick (2012) Rethinking Narrativity: A Return to Aristotle and Some Consequences. *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 4: 1-24

de Certeau Michel (1980/1984) *Arts de faire*. Paris: Gallimard. Transl. Rendall Steven F. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press

De Toni Maria (2007) Cornice narrativa e dissoluzione del *récit* in Italo Calvino. *Studi novecenteschi* 34 (73): 169-94

Demontis Simona (2001) *I colori della letteratura. Un'indagine sul caso Camilleri*. Milano: Rizzoli

Dennett Daniel C. (1991) *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little, Brown

Derrida Jacques (1967/1978) *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil (*Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

Di Bari Isabella (2008) *L'idea di letteratura in Alessandro Baricco. Il rapporto con la critica, la narrativa, l'esperienza cinematografica*. Patti: Casa Editrice Kimerik

Di Grado Antonio (2001) L'insostenibile leggerezza di Andrea Camilleri. In Pagliaro Antonio (ed.) 'Il giallo'. *Spunti e Ricerche* 16, http://www.vigata.org/bibliografia/leggerezza.shtml [viewed on 15th March 2016]

Dijk Teun van (1979) Cognitive Processing of Literary Discourse. *Poetics Today* 1 (1): 143-59

Doležel Lubomir (1998) *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

_____ (1976) Narrative Modalities. *Journal of Literary Semantics* 5 (1): 5-14

Dorfles Piero (2004) Montalbano e altri poliziotti anti-istituzionali. In Buttitta Antonino (ed.) *Il caso Camilleri. Letteratura e storia*. Palermo: Sellerio, 54-60

Dorfman Marcy H. (1996) Evaluating the Interpretive Community: Evidence From Expert and Novice Readers. *Poetics* 23 (6): 453-70

Downs Roger M., Stea David (1977) *Maps in Minds. Reflections on Cognitive Mapping*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers

Duchan Judith, Bruder Gail, Hewitt Lynne E. (eds. 1995) *Deixis in Narrative: A Cognitive Science Perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Eckert Elgin (2008) Murder in Sicily: Commissario Montalbano Talks About his Author's Literary Traditions. In Cicioni Mirna, Di Ciolla Nicoletta (eds.) *Differences, Deceits, and Desires*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 67-79

Eco Umberto (1994) *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

_____ (1980) *Il nome della rosa*. Milano: Bompiani

_____ (1979) *Lector in fabula*. Milano: Bompiani

_____ (1962) *Opera aperta*. Milano: Bompiani

Eder Jens (2003) Narratology and Cognitive Reception Studies. In Kindt Tom, Müller Hans-Harald (eds.) *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 277-302

Emmott Catherine (1997) *Narrative Comprehension. A Discourse Perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Ende Michael (1979) *Die unendliche Geschichte*. Stuttgart: Thienemann Verlag

Entrikin Nicholas J. (1991) *The Betweeness of Place*. Baltimone: Johns Hopkins University Press

Everman Welch D. (1988) The Reader Who Reads and the Reader Who Is Read: A Reading of Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. In Everman Welch D. *Who Says This? The Authority of the Author, the Discourse, and the Reader*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 111-27

Falcetto Bruno (1991) Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore. Note e notizie sui testi. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. II, 1381-1401

Farrell Joseph (2011) Literature and the *Giallo*: Gadda, Eco, Tabucchi and Sciascia. In Pieri Giuliana (ed.) *Italian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 48-72

Fauconnier Gilles (1997) *Mappings in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Fauconnier Gilles, Turner Mark (2008) *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 53-66

_____ (2002) *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*.

_____ (1998) Conceptual Integration Networks. Expanded version of the article published on *Cognitive Science* 22 (2): 133-87

Ferlita Salvatore, Nifosi Paolo (2004) *La Sicilia di Andrea Camilleri. Tra Vigàta e Montelusa*. Palermo: Kalòs

Ferroni Giulio (2006a) Caro Baricco, io la recensisco ma lei non mi legge. *La Repubblica*, 2nd March

_____ (2006b) L'insostenibile leggerezza di Baricco. *La Stampa* 6th September

_____ (2005) *I confini della critica*. Napoli: Alfredo Guido Editore

Ferstl Evelyn C., Kintsch Walter (1999) Learning From Text: Structural Knowledge Assessment in the Study of Discourse Comprehension. In van Oostendorp Herre, Goldman Susan R. (eds) *The Construction of Mental Representations During Reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 247-78

Fielding Henry (1749) *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. London: Millar

Fludernik Monika (2003) Natural Narratology and the Cognitive Parameters. In Herman David (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 243-67

_____ (1996) *Towards a Natural Narratology*. London/New York: Routledge

_____ (1993) Second Person Fiction: Narrative 'You' as Addressee And/Or Protagonist. *AAA Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 18 (2): 217-47

Forster Edward Morgan (1927/2005) *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Edward Arnold. New ed. New York: Penguin Book

Foucault Michel (1984/1986) Of Other Spaces. Transl. Miskowiec Jan, *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22-7

Frank Joseph (1945) Spatial Form in Modern Literature. *Sewanee Review* 53 (2): 221-40; (3): 433-56; (4): 643-53

Frazier Lyn, Rayner Keith (1982) Making and correcting errors during sentence comprehension: eye movements in the analysis of structurally ambiguous sentences. *Cognitive Psychology* 14: 178-210

Frémont Armand (1976) *La Règion, espace vécu*. Paris: Flammarion

Frohock Wilbur Merrill (1959) Introduction to Butor. *Yale French Studies* 24: 54-61

Furrow Melissa (1988) Listening Reader and Impotent Speaker: The Role of Deixis in Literature. *Language and Style* 21: 365-78

Gadda Carlo Emilio (1957) *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. Milano: Garzanti

Gallese Vittorio (2009) Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation, and the Neural Basis of Social Identification. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 19: 519-36

Gallese Vittorio, Lakoff George (2005) The Brain's Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-Motor System in Conceptual Knowledge. *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22 (3): 455-79

Gargiulo Gius (2002) Ra-dio, la "Theory Fiction" ipertestuale di Lorenzo Miglioli. In Rorato Laura, Storchi Simona (eds.) *Da Calvino agli ipertesti. Prospettive della postmodernità nella letteratura italiana*. Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 221-32

Garrod Simon, Sanford Anthony (1999) Incrementality in Discourse Understanding. In van Oostendorp Herre, Goldman Susan R. (eds) *The Construction of Mental Representations During Reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 3-28

_____ (1982) Bridging inferences in the extended domain of reference. In Baddeley Alan David, Long John B. (eds.) *Attention and performance IX*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 331-46

Gavins Joanna (2005) Scripts and Schemata. In Herman David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge, 520-1

Genette Gérard (1972/1980) *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Gerrig Richard (1993) *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. London: Yale University Press

Gerrig Richard, Egidi Giovanna (2003) Cognitive Psychological Foundations of Narrative Experience. In Herman David (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 33-55

Giannetto Nella (2002) Oceano mare *di Baricco: molteplicità, emozioni, confini tra Calvino e Conrad*. Milano: Arcipelago Edizioni

Gide André (1982) *Journal 1889-1939*. Paris: Gallimard

Gioanola Elio (1986) Modalità del fantastico nell'opera di Italo Calvino. In Bertone Giorgio (ed.) *Italo Calvino: la letteratura, la scienza, la città*. Genova: Marietti, 20-35

Goffman Erving (1974) *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper Colophon

Goldman Alvin (2006) *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Green Geoffrey (1986) Ghosts and Shadows: Reading and Writing in Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. In *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 6 (2): 101-5

Greimas Algirdas Julien (1977) Elements of a Narrative Grammar. *Diacritics* 7 (1): 23-40

_____ (1966/1983) *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*. Licoln: Nebraska University Press

Guglielmi Angelo (1979) Domande per Italo Calvino. *Alfabeta* 6, 12-13

Guglielmi Guido (2002-2017) Il romanzo poliziesco. In Pedriali Federica & EJGS (eds.) *A Pocket Gadda Encyclopedia*, http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/walks/pge/poliziescguglielm.php [viewed on 14th December 2016]

Guj Luisa (1988) The Shapeless and the Well-Designed: An Unresolved Dichotomy in Calvino's Narrative? *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 24 (3): 206-17

Gutt Ernst-August (1991) *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. Oxford: Blackwell

Habermas Jürgen (1988) *Nachmetaphysischen Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag

Harris Paul A. (2015) David Mitchell's Fractal Imagination: *The Bone Clocks*. *SubStance* 44 (1): 148-53

Hart Elizabeth (2004) Embodied Literature: A Cognitive-Poststructuralist Approach to Genre. In Richardson Alan, Spolsky Ellen (eds.) *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture and Complexity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 85-106

_____ (2001) The Epistemology of Cognitive Literary Studies. *Philosophy and Literature* 25 (2): 314-34

Hayles Katherine N. (2012) *How We Think. Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

_____ (1991) Introduction: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science. In Hayles Katherine N. (ed.) *Chaos and Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1-33

Herman David (2013) *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

_____ (2012) Formal Models in Narrative Analysis. In Doxiadis Apostolos, Mazur Barry (eds.) *Circles Disturbed: The Interplay of Mathematics and Narrative*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 447-80

_____ (2011) Introduction. In Herman David (ed.) *The Emergence of Mind. Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1-40

_____ (2010) Narrative Theory after the Second Cognitive Revolution. In Zunshine Lisa (ed.) *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 155-75

_____ (2009a) *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

_____ (2009b) Cognitive Narratology. In Hühn Peter (ed.) *Handbook of Narratology*. New York: De Gruyter, 30-44

_____ (2003) Stories as a Tool for Thinking. In Herman David (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 163-92

_____ (2002) *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

_____ (1997) Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology. *PMLA* 112 (5): 1046-59

Herman David, Phelan James, Rabinowitz Peter J., Richardson Brian, Warhol Robyn (2012) *Narrative Theories. Core Concepts and Critical Debates*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press

Hogan Patrick Colm (2004) Stories and Morals: Emotion, Cognitive Exempla, and the Arabic Aristotelians. In Richardson Alan, Spolsky Ellen (eds.) *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture and Complexity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 31-50

Howell Philip (1998) Crime and the City Solution: Crime Fiction, Urban Knowledge, and Radical Geography. *Antipode* 30 (4): 357-78

Hrushovski Benjamin (1984) Fictionality and Fields of Reference: Remarks on a Theoretical Framework. *Poetics Today* 5 (2): 227-51

Hühn Peter (1987) The Detective As Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction. *Modern Fiction Studies* 33 (3): 451-66

Hume Kathryn (1992) *Calvino's Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

_____ (1986) Calvino's Framed Narrations: Writers, Readers, and Reality. *The Review of Contemporary Italian Fiction* 6 (2): 71-80

Hutcheon Linda (1988) *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York/London: Routledge

Jaén Isabel, Simon Julien J. (eds. 2012) *Cognitive Literary Studies*. Austin: University of Texas Press

Jahn Manfred (1999) More Aspects of Focalisation: Refinements and Applications. *GRAAT* 21: 85-110, http://www.uni-koeln.de/%7Eame02/jahn99b.htm [viewed on 10th October 2016]

_____ (1997) Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third Person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology. *Poetics Today* 18 (4): 442-68

Jameson Fredric (1991) *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. New York: Duke University Press [early version published (1984) *New Left Review* 146 (1): 53-92]

Johnson Hollyn M., Seifert Colleen M. (1999) Modifying Mental Representations: Comprehending Corrections. In van Oostendorp Herre, Goldman Susan R. (eds) *The Construction of Mental Representations During Reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 303-18

Johnson Mark (2008) What Makes a Body? *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 22 (3): 159-69

_____ (1987) *The Body In the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Johnson-Laird Philip (1993) *Human and Machine Thinking*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

_____ (1983) *Mental Models: Towards a Cognitive Science of Language, Inference, and Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

_____ (1981) Mental Models of Meaning. In Aravind Joshi, Webber Bonnie, Sag Ivan (eds.) *Elements of Discourse Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 106-26

Just Marcel Adam, Carpenter Patricia A. (1985) Cognitive coordinate systems: accounts of mental rotation and individual differences in spatial ability. *Psychological Review* 92: 134-46

Kacandes Irene (1993) Are You in the Text? The 'Literary Performative' in Postmodernist Fiction. *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13: 139-53

Kadonaga Lisa (1998) Strange Countries and Secret Worlds in Ruth Rendell's Crime Novels. *Geographical Review* 88 (3): 413-28

Kafalenos Emma (2006) *Narrative Causalities*. Columbus: Ohio University State Press

Kahneman Daniel, Miller Dale T. (1986) Norm Theory: Comparing Reality to Its Alternatives. *Psychological Review* 93 (2): 136-53

Kanizsa Gaetano (1955) Margini 'quasi-percettivi' in campi con stimolazione omogenea. *Rivista di psicologia* 49 (1): 7-30

Kermode Frank (1967) *The Sense of an Ending*. London: Oxford University Press

Kiernan Suzanne (1984) An Illusion of Meaning. Radio Interview with Italo Calvino. Broadcasted in Australia, 13th February

Kimmel Michael (2008) Analyzing Image Schemas in Literature. *Cognitive Semiotics* 5: 159-88

Kitchin Rob, Blades Mark (2002) *The Cognition of Geographic Space*. London: I.B.Tauris

Knight Stephen (1980) *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Knoespel Kenneth J. (1991) The Emplotment of Chaos: Instability and Narrative Order. In Hayles Katherine N. (ed.) *Chaos and Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 100-22

Knox Ronald A. (1929/1992) Detective Story Decalogue. In Haycraft Howard (ed.) *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Carrol & Graf, 194-6

Kosslyn Stephen M., Ganis Giorgio, Thompson William S. (2001) Neural Foundations of Imagery. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 2 (9): 635-42

Kottman Paul (1996) *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*: L'apertura della chiusura. *Forum Italicum* 30 (1): 55-64

Kukkonen Karin (2014) Plot. In Hühn Peter et al. (eds.) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.unihamburg.de/article/plot [viewed on 26th April 2015]

La Fauci Nunzio (2001) L'italiano perenne e Andrea Camilleri. *Prometeo* 19 (75), http://www.vigata.org/bibliografia /italianoperenne.shtml [viewed on 20th October 2016]

La Porta Filippo (1999) *La nuova narrativa italiana*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri

Labov William (1972) *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Labov William, Waletzky Joshua (1967) Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience. In Helm June (ed.) *Essays on Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 12-44

Lakoff George, Johnson Mark (1999) *Philosophy In The Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books

Lando Fabio (1996) Fact and Fiction: Geography and Literature: A Bibliographic Survey. *GeoJournal* 38 (1): 3-18

Landow George P. (1997) *Hypertext 2.0 The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

Lavagetto Mario (1980) Per l'identità di uno scrittore di apocrifi. *Paragone* 31 (366): 71-81

Lévi-Strauss Claude (1964-71) *Mythologique*. Paris: Plon, 5 voll.

_____ (1960) *La structure et la forme*. Paris: Plon

_____ (1958) *Anthropologie structurale*. Paris: Plon

Lewis David (1986) *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell

Logan Michael (1992) Detective Fiction and Urban Critique: Changing Perspectives of a Genre. *Journal of American Culture* 15 (3): 89-94

Lotman Jurij (1973/1979) The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology. Transl. Graffy Julian (1979) *Poetics Today* 1 (1): 161-84

Lutwack Leonard (1984) *The Role of Place in Literature*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press

Macdonald Dwight (1963) *Against the American Grain*. London: Gollancz

Magliano James P., Zwaan Rolf A., Graesser Art (1999) The Role of Situational Continuity in Narrative Understanding. In van Oostendorp Herre, Goldman Susan R. (eds) *The Construction of Mental Representations During Reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 219-46

Malmgren Carl D. (1986) Romancing the Reader: Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. In In *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 6 (2): 106-15

Mandelbrot Benoit (1975/1977) *Les objets fractals: forme, hasard et dimension*. Paris: Flammarion (Transl. and revised, *Fractals: Form, Chance, and Dimension*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Company, 1977)

Marcus Laura (2003) Detection and Literary Fiction. In Priestman Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 245-68

Margolin Uri (2007) Character. In Herman David (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 66-79

_____ (2003) Cognitive Science, the Thinking Mind, and Literary Narrative. In Herman David (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 271-94

_____ (1990) Individuals in Narrative Worlds: An Ontological Perspective. *Poetic Today* 11 (4): 843-71

_____ (1984) Narrative and Indexicality: A Tentative Framework. *Journal of Literary Semantics* 13: 181-204

Margolis Joseph (1983) The Logic and Structures of Fictional Narrative. *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (2): 162-81

Markey Constance (1999) *Italo Calvino: A Journey Towards Postmodernism*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida

Marras Margherita (2005) Leonardo Sciascia e l'affermazione del giallo nazional-regionale. *Symposium* 59 (2): 100-15

Marrone Gianfranco (2006) Montalbano, eroe fra i testi. In Ruta Maria Teresa (ed.) *Le parole dei giorni. Scritti per Nino Buttitta*. Palermo: Sellerio

_____ (2003) *Montalbano: affermazioni e trasformazioni di un eroe mediatico*. Roma: RAI/ERI

Massey Doreen (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage

McHale Brian (1987) *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen

McLaughlin Martin (1998) *Italo Calvino*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

McMullen Matthew, Markman Keith, Gavanski Igor (1995) Living in neither in the best nor worst of all possible worlds: Antecedents and consequences of upward and downward counterfactual thinking. In Roese Neal, Olson James (1995) *What Might Have Been: The Social Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 133-68

Menary Richard (2010) Introduction To the Special Issue on 4E Cognition. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 9 (4): 459-63

Mercadal Dennis (1990) *A Dictionary of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold

Milanini Claudio (1994) Introduzione. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. III: xi-xxxiii

_____ (1991) Introduzione. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. I, xxxvii-lix

_____ (1990) *L'utopia discontinua. Saggio su Italo Calvino*. Milano: Garzanti

Mink Louis O. (1978) Narrative Form as Cognitive Instrument. In Canary Robert H., Kozicki Henry (eds.) *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 129-49

Minsky Marvin (1975) A framework for representing knowledge. In Winston Patrick Henry (ed.) *The Psychology of Computer Vision*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 211-277

Mitchell W. J. T. (1980) Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory. *Critical Inquiry* 6 (3): 539-67

Moore Gary T., Golledge Reginald George (1976) Environmental knowing: concepts and teorie. In Moore Gary T., Golledge Reginald George (eds.) *Environmental Knowing*. Stroutsberg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 3-24

Morante Elsa (1988) *Opere*. Cecchi Carlo, Garboli Cesare (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, 2 voll.

Morrissette Bruce (1965) Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature. *Comparative Literature Studies* 2 (1): 1-24

Most Glenn W. (2006) Urban Blues: Detective Fiction and the Metropolitan Sublime. *The Yale Review* 94 (1): 56-72

Motte Warren Jr. (ed. 1986) *Oulipo. A Primer of Potential Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

_____ (1986) Calvino Combinatorics. In *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 6 (2): 81-7

Muehrcke Phillip C., Muehrcke Juliana O. (1974) Maps in Literature. *Geographical Review* 64 (3): 317-38

Musarra Schrøder Ulla (2012) Immagini d'architettura in Italo Calvino. *Italies* 16: 387-410

_____ (2011) *Il labirinto e la rete: percorsi moderni e postmoderni nell'opera di Italo Calvino*. Roma: Bulzoni

Nicewicz Ewa (2011) Il caso Baricco. Lo scrittore e il panorama della super-offerta attuale. *Romanica.doc* 2 (3): 59-65. www.romdoc.amu.edu.pl [viewed on 15th December 2011]

_____ (2009) Nei labirinti dello spazio cittadino: *City* di Alessandro Baricco. *Etudes Romanes de Brno* 30 (1): 159-69

Nicolson Marjorie (1946) The Professor and the Detective. In Haycraft Howard (ed.) *The Art of the Mystery Story*. New York: Simon

Nelson Ted (1965) A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing, and the Indeterminate. Paper delivered at XX conference of the Association for Computing Machineries, New York, http://csis.pace.edu/ ~marchese/CS835/Lec3/nelson.pdf [viewed on 14th September 2016]

Noë Alva (2004) *Action in Perception*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Noé Simonetta (1982) La parola ordinatrice: Italo Calvino da *Le cosmicomiche* a *Le città invisibili*. *Il cristallo* 24 (3): 79-98

Novelli Mauro (2002) L'isola delle voci. In Novelli Mauro (ed.) *Storie di Montalbano*. Milan: Mondadori, lx-cii

Nünning Ansgar (2003) Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stocks on Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposal for Future Usages of the Term. In Kindt Tom, Müller Hans-Harald (eds.) *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 239-76

O'Brien Edward J., Myers Jerome L. (1985) When comprehension difficulty improves memory for text. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 11: 12-21

O'Regan Kevin J. (1992) Solving the 'real' mysteries of visual perception: the world as an outside memory. *Canadian Journal of Psychology* 46 (3): 461-88

O'Toole Lawrence (1980) Dimensions of Semiotic Space in Narrative. *Poetics Today* 1 (4): 135-49

Ochs Elinor, Capps Lisa (2001) *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Olson Greta (ed. 2011) *Current Trends in Narratology*. New York: De Gruyter

Orr Marilyn (1985) Beginning in the Middle: The Story of Reading in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. *Papers on language and literature* 21 (2): 210-19

Ossola Carlo (1987) L'invisibile e il suo 'dove': «geografia interiore» di Italo Calvino. *Lettere italiane* 39 (2): 220-51

Ovan Sabrina (2012) Names, Travelers, Transindividuality: Italo Calvino in the 1970s. *Enthymema* 7: 409-24

Padrón Ricardo (2007) Mapping Imaginary Worlds. In Akerman Jamer R., Karrow Robert Jr. (eds.) *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 255-87

Palmer Alan (2004) *Fictional Minds*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

_____ (2003) The Mind Beyond the Skin. In Herman David (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 322-48

Paulson William (1991) Literature, Complexity, Interdisciplinarity. In Hayles Katherine N. (ed.) *Chaos and Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 37-54

Pavel Thomas (1980) Narrative Domains. *Poetics Today* 1 (4): 105-14

_____ (1975) Possible Worlds in Literary Semantics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34 (2): 165-76

Perroud Robert (1981) 'Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore' d'Italo Calvino: Combinatoire et Confession. *Revue des etudes italiennes* 27 (2/3): 237-50

Perry Menakhem (1979) Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meaning (With an Analysis of Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*). *Poetics Today* 1/2: 35-64, 311-61

Pezzin Claudio (2001) *Alessandro Baricco*. Verona: Cierre Edizioni

Pezzotti Barbara (2012) *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*. Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press

Phelan James (2001) Redundant Telling, Preserving the Mimetic, and the Functions of Character Narration. *Narrative* 9 (2): 210-6

Piacentini Adriano (2002) *Tra il cristallo e la fiamma: le Lezioni americane di Italo Calvino*. Firenze: Atheneum

Piazza Giovanni (2007) *Naufraghi del nulla*. Napoli: Guida

Pier John (2016) Metalepsis. In Hühn Peter et al. (eds.) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.unihamburg.de/article/narrativity [viewed on 14th October 2016]

Pieri Giuliana (2011) Introduction. In Pieri Giuliana (ed.) *Italian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1-5

Pilz Kerstin (2005) *Mapping Complexity. Literature and Science in the Works of Italo Calvino*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing

_____ (2003) Reconceptualizing Thought and Space: Labyrinths and Cities in Calvino's Fiction. *Italica* 80 (2): 229-42

Pirandello Luigi (2015) *Novelle per un anno*. Torino: Einaudi

Pistelli Maurizio (2003) *Montalbano sono. Sulle tracce del più famoso commissario di polizia italiano*. Florence: Le Càriti Editore

Polacco Marina (1999) Andrea Camilleri, la re-invenzione del romanzo giallo. *Il Ponte* lv (3), http://www.vigata.org/ bibliografia/reinvenzione.shtml [viewed on 23rd March 2016]

Polanyi Livia (1979) So What's the Point? *Semiotica* 25: 207: 41

Porter Dennis (2003) The Private Eye. In Priestman Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 95-114

_____ (1981) *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Priestman Martin (2003) Introduction. In Priestman Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-6

_____ (1998) *Crime Fiction from Poe to Present*. Plymouth: Northcote House

Prince Gerald (2008) Narratology. In Selden Raman (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 8: From Structuralism to Poststructuralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 110-30

_____ (1988) The Disnarrated. *Style* 22 (1): 1-8

_____ (1985) The Narratee Revisited. *Style* 19: 299-302

_____ (1987/2003) *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, ed. 2003

_____ (1982) *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. New York: Mouton

Propp Vladimir (1928/1958) *Morphology of the Folktale*. Bloomington, Ind.: Research Centre, Indiana University

Pykett Lynn (2003) The Newgate Novel and Sensation Fiction. In Priestman Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19-40

Pyrhönen Heta (2005) Detective fiction. In Herman David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge, 103-4

_____ (1999) *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Rabinowitz Peter (2008) Other Reader-Oriented Theories. In Selden Raman (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 8: From Structuralism to Poststructuralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 375-403

———— (1987) *Before Reading. Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press

Rankin Ian (1986) The Role of the Reader in Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. In *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 6 (2): 124-9

Rall Jamie, Harris Paul L. (2000) In Cinderella's Slippers? Story Comprehension From the Protagonist's Point of View. *Developmental Psychology* 36: 202-8

Rambelli Loris (1979) *Storia del giallo italiano*. Milan: Garzanti

Reardon B. P. (1969) The Greek Novel. *Phoenix* 23 (3): 291-309

Relph Edward (1976) *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion

Ricci Franco (1982) The Readers in Italo Calvino's Latest *Fabula*. *Forum italicum* 16 (1/2): 82-102

Richardson Alan (2012) Facial Expression Theory from Romanticism to Present. In Zunshine Lisa (ed.) *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 65-83

———— (2004) Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map. In Richardson Alan, Spolsky Ellen (eds.) *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture and Complexity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1-29

Richardson Alan, Steen Francis F. (2002) Literature and the Cognitive Revolution: An Introduction. *Poetics Today* 23 (1): 1-8

Richardson Brian (2006) *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press

———— (1997) *Unlikely Stories: Causality and the Nature of Modern Narrative*. Newark: University of Delaware Press

Ricoeur Paul (1982) *Temps et Récit*. Paris: Seuil. Transl. McLaughlin Kathleen, Pellauer David (1984) *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Riddle Harding Jennifer (2011) 'He Had Never Written A Word of That': Regret and Counterfactuals in Hemingway's 'The Snows of the Kilimanjaro'. *The Hemingway Review* 30 (2): 21-35

———— (2007) Evaluative Stance and Counterfactuals in Language and Literature. *Language and Literature* 16 (3): 263-80

Rimmon-Kenan Shlomith (1983) *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*. London: Methuen

Rinaldi Lucia (2012) *Andrea Camilleri. A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*. Jefferson (US): McFarland & Co.

———— (2011) Annotated bibliography. In Pieri Giuliana (ed.) *Italian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 151-4

Ronen Ruth (1994) *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

———— (1990) Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology. *Poetics Today* 11 (4): 817-42

———— (1986) Space in Fiction. *Poetics Today* 7 (3): 421-38

Rorato Laura (2001) La realtà metropolitana del duemila. *Ambaraba* di Culicchia e *City* di Baricco: due opere a confronto. *Narrativa* 20 (1): 243-61

Rorato Laura, Storchi Simona (2004) Città versus City: the Globalised Habitat of Alessandro Baricco. *Romance Studies* 22 (3): 251-62

Roubaud Jacques (2008) Calvino e la ricerca dell'Oulipo semantico. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 171-6

Rumelhart David E. (1976) Understanding and Summarizing Brief Stories. In LaBerge David, Samuels Jay S. (eds.) *Basic Processes in Reading: Perception and Comprehension*. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 265-304

Rushing Robert (1997) Il cristallo e il mare: L'enumeración caótica e l'epistemologia in Calvino e Gadda. *Forum Italicum* 31 (2): 423-37

Ryan Alex (2007) Emergence is Coupled To Scope, Not Level. *InterScience* 13 (2): 67-77

Ryan Marie-Laure (2016) *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* by Marco Caracciolo (Review). *Style* 50 (3): 377-83

＿＿＿＿＿ (2014) Space. In Hühn Peter et al. (eds.) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.unihamburg.de/article/narrativity [viewed on 23rd April 2015]

＿＿＿＿＿ (2010) Narratology and Cognitive Science. *Style* 44 (4): 469-95

＿＿＿＿＿ (2003) Narrative Cartography: Towards a Visual Narratology. In Kindt Tom, Müller Hans-Harald (eds.) *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 303-64

＿＿＿＿＿ (2001) *Narrative As Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

＿＿＿＿＿ (1999) Cyberage Narratology: Computers, Metaphor, and Narrative. In Herman David (ed.) *Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 113-41

＿＿＿＿＿ (1991) *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

＿＿＿＿＿ (1986) Embedded Narratives and Tellability. *Style* 20 (3): 319-40

＿＿＿＿＿ (1985) The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes. *Poetics Today* 6 (4): 717-55

Samek Ludovici Sergio, Calvino Italo (1969) *Tarocchi. Il mazzo visconteo di Bergamo e New York*. Parma: Franco Maria Ricci

Sanford Anthony, Garrod Simon (2009) The Role of Scenario Mapping in Text Comprehension. *Discourse Processes* 26 (2/3): 159-90

Santschi Madeleine (1967) Italo Calvino. Je ne suis pas satisfait de la littérature actuelle en Italie. *Gazette de Lausanne* 127, 2-4 June

Santovetti Olivia (2007) *Digression. A Narrative Strategy in the Italian Novel*. Bern: Peter Lang

Santulli Francesca (2010) *Montalbano linguista. La riflessione metalinguistica nelle storie del commissario*. Milano: Archipelago Edizioni

Scaggs John (2005) *Crime Fiction*. London: Routledge

Scarpa Domenico (2008) Potenza e coerenza: profitti e perdite. In Aragona Raffaele (ed.) *Italo Calvino. Percorsi potenziali*. Lecce: Manni, 89-101

＿＿＿＿＿ (1999) *Italo Calvino*. Milano: Mondadori

Scarpetti Roberto, Strano Annalisa (2004) *Commissario Montalbano. Indagine su un successo*. Arezzo: Editrice ZONA

Scarsella Alessandro (2003) *Alessandro Baricco*. Firenze: Cadmo

Schank Roger (1986) *Explanation Patterns. Understanding Mechanically and Creatively*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates

Schank Roger, Abelson Robert (1977) *Script Plans Goals and Understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates

Schneider Ralf (2001) Toward a Cognitive Theory of Literary Character: The Dynamics of Mental Model Construction. *Style* 35 (4): 607-39

Segre Cesare (1979) Se una notte d'inverno uno scrittore sognasse un aleph di dieci colori. *Strumenti critici* 30-40: 177-214

Serra Francesca (2006) *Calvino*. Roma: Salerno editrice

Shen Yeshayahu (1985) On Importance Hierarchies and Evaluation Devices in Narrative Texts. *Poetics Today* 6 (4): 681-98

Shklovsky Victor (1965) Art and Technique. In Lemon Lee T., Reis Marion J. (eds.) *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 3-24

Singles Kathleen (2012) *Alternate History. Playing with Contingency and Necessity*. Berlin: De Gruyter

Somigli Luca (2005) Form and Ideology in Italian Detective Fiction. *Symposium* 59 (2): 67-9

Sorgi Marcello (2000) *La testa ci fa dire. Dialogo con Andrea Camilleri*. Palermo: Sellerio

Spackman Barbara (2008) Calvino's Non-Knowledge. *Romance Studies* 26 (1): 7-19

Spedo Giampaolo (2009) *The Plot Against the Past: An Exploration of Alternate History in British and American Fiction*. Dissertation, University of Padova

Sperber Dan, Wilson Dierdre (1986) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell

Spinazzola Vittorio (2010) *L'esperienza della lettura*. Milano: Unicopli

＿＿＿＿＿ (1987) L'io diviso di Italo Calvino. *Belfagor* 42: 509-31

Spolsky Ellen (2004) Women's Work is Chastity: Lucretia, *Cymbeline*, and Cognitive Impenetrability. In Richardson Alan, Spolsky Ellen (eds.) *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture and Complexity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 51-84

       (2003) Cognitive Literary Historicism: A Response to Adler and Gross. *Poetics Today* 24 (2): 161-183

Starobinski Jean (1991) Prefazione. In *Romanzi e racconti*. Barenghi Mario, Falcetto Bruno (eds.) Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, vol. I, xi-xxxiii

Sternberg Meir (2010) Narrativity: From Objectivist to Functional Paradigm. *Poetics Today* 31 (3): 507-659

Stille Alexander (1985) An Interview with Italo Calvino. *Saturday Review* April: 36-39

Stockwell Peter (2009) Situating Cognitive Approaches to Narrative Analysis. In Brône Geert, Vandaele Jeroen (eds.) *Cognitive Poetics: Goals, Gains and Gaps*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 119-23

Stoicheff Peter (1991) The Chaos of Metafiction. In Hayles Katherine N. (ed.) *Chaos and Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 85-99

Sturgess Philip J.M. (1992) *Narrativity: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Suleiman Susan Rubin (1980) Redundancy and the "Readable" Text. *Poetics Today* 1 (3): 119-42

Svevo Italo (1923) *La coscienza di Zeno*. Bologna: Licinio Cappelli Editore

Sweeney S. E. (1990) Locked Rooms: Detective Fiction, Narrative Theory, and Self-Reflexivity. In Walker Ronald, Frazer June (eds.) *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*. Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1–14

Symons Julian (1972) *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to Crime Novel. A History*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Tabucchi Antonio, Gaglianone Paola, Cassini Marco, Scrivano Riccardo (1995) *Conversazione con Antonio Tabucchi. Dova va il romanzo?* Roma: Omicron

Tapiero Isabelle, Otero Jose (1999) Distinguishing Between Textbase and Situation Model in the Processing of Inconsistent Information: Elaboration Versus Tagging. In van Oostendorp Herre, Goldman Susan R. (eds) *The Construction of Mental Representations During Reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 341-66

Tarantino Elisabetta (2006) *City* e *Good Will Hunting*. *Contemporanea* 4: 149-54

Thoms Peter (1998) *Detection and Its Designs*. Athens: Ohio University Press

Todorov Tzvetan (1990) *Genres in Discourse*. Transl. Porter Catherine, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

       (1969) Structural Analysis of Narrative. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 3 (1): 70-76

       (1966/1977) The typology of detective fiction. In *The Poetics of Prose*. Oxford: Blackwell (*La Poétique de la prose*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), 42-52

Tomashevsky Boris (1965) Thematics. In Lemon Lee T., Reis Marion J. (eds.) *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 61-95

Tonin Simone (2005) Sulle necessità spaziali del narrare calviniano. *Studi novecenteschi* 32 (70): 181-96

Tuan Yi-Fu (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

       (1975) Images and Mental Maps. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65 (2): 205-13

Turner Mark (1996) *The Literary Mind. The Origins of Thought and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

       (1994) Cognitive Science and Literary Criticism. *Stanford Humanities Review* 4 (1) [viewed on 24th June 2014 at http://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/41/text/turner.commentary.html]

Tversky Barbara (1996) Spatial Perspective in Descriptions. In Bloom Paul, Peterson Mary A., Nadel Lynn, Merrill Garreth F. (eds.) *Language and Space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 463-91

Usher Jonathan (1996) From 'Super-albero' to 'Iper-romanzo': Lexical Continuity and Constraints in Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. *Italian Studies* 51: 181-203

_____ (1995) Calvino and the Computer as Writer/Reader. *Modern Language Review* 90 (1): 41-54

_____ (1990) Interruptory Mechanisms in Calvino's *Se una notte... Italian Studies* 45: 81-102

Vaina Lucia (1977) Les Mondes possibles du texte. *Versus* 17: 3-13

Van den Bossche Bart (2002) Italo Calvino e la fiaba tra moderno e postmoderno. In Rorato Laura, Storchi Simona (eds.) *Da Calvino agli ipertesti. Prospettive della postmodernità nella letteratura italiana*. Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 53-63

Van Dine S. S. (1928/1992) Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories. In Haycraft Howard (ed.) *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Carrol & Graf, 189-93

Varela Francisco, Thompson Evan, Rosch Eleanor (1993) *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Varese Claudio, Calvino Italo (1973) Dialogo sulle «Città invisibili». *Studi novecenteschi* 2 (4): 123-27

Varsava Jerry (1986) Calvino's Combinative Aesthetics: Theory and Practice. *The Review of Contemporary Italian Fiction* 6 (2): 11-18

Veel Kristin (2003) The Irreducibility of Space: Labyrinths, Cities, Cyberspace. *Diacritics* 33 (3): 151-72

Vitale Armando (2001) *Il mondo del commissario Montalbano*. Caltanissetta: Terzo Millennio

Vizmuller-Zocco Jana (2010) I gialli di Andrea Camilleri come occasione metalinguistica. *Italica* 87 (1): 115-30

_____ (2001) Gli intrecci delle lingue ne *L'odore della notte* di Andrea Camilleri. *Spunti e Ricerche: Rivista d'Italianistica* 16: 38-44

Walsh Richard, Stepney Susan (eds. forthcoming 2017) *Narrating Complexity*. New York: Springer [https://www.york. ac.uk/narrative-studies/research-themes/complex-systems/narrating-complexity/narrating-complexity-toc/]

Watson David S. (1988) Calvino and the problem of textual referentiality. *The Italianist* 8: 66-78

Waugh Patricia (1984) *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen

White Hayden (1981) The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of History. In Mitchell William J. T. *On Narrative*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1-23

Wilensky Robert (1983) Story Grammar Versus Story Points. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 6 (4): 579-623

Wilson Robert A., Foglia Lucia (2011) Embodied Cognition. In Zalta Edward N. (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/embodied-cognition/ [viewed on 15th July 2015]

Young Katharine (2005) Frame Theory. In Herman David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge, 185-6

_____ (1986) *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative*. Dordrecht (Netherlands): Martinus Nijhoff

Zadeh Lofti (1965) Fuzzy Sets. *Information and Control* 8: 338-53

Zangirolami Daniele (2008) *Alessandro Baricco. Il destino e le sue traiettorie*. Venezia: Cafoscarina

Zoran Gabriel (1984) Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative. *Poetics Today* 5 (2): 309-35

Zubin David, Hewitt Lynne E. (1995) The Deictic Center: A Theory of Deixis in Narrative. In Duchan Judith, Bruder Gail, Hewitt Lynne E. (eds.) *Deixis in Narrative: A Cognitive Science Perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Zunshine Lisa (2008) Theory of Mind and Fictions of Embodied Transparency. *Narrative* 16 (1): 65-92

_____ (2006) *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Columbus: The Ohio State Press University

Zwaan Rolf (2004) The Immersed Experiencer: Toward an Embodied Theory of Language Comprehension. In Ross Brian D. (ed.) *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*. San Diego and London: Elsevier Academic Press, 44: 35-63